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Constructing the Tyrant: A Filmic Analysis of Idi Amin in *the Film the Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*

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Abstract

This study examines the filmic portrayal of Idi Amin in the film The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin (1981) to understand how cinema constructs political autocracy and postcolonial African leadership. The justification for this inquiry lies in the critical need to explore how African leaders, particularly autocrats, are represented in film, an underexplored area in African cinema studies. This study was anchored in postcolonial theory. Furthermore, the study aimed to explore how the film navigates ideological tensions between historical authenticity and Western cinematic representations of African figures. The study employed a qualitative approach, utilizing close textual analysis of the film, supplemented by thematic analysis to identify recurrent motifs and representational patterns. The findings revealed that the film simultaneously reinforces and critiques dominant political myths surrounding postcolonial African states, using the figure of Amin as a symbolic site for contesting narratives of power, violence, and identity. This study contributes to scholarship in African film studies, political representation, and postcolonial critique, offering nuanced insights into the role of cinema as a cultural medium for shaping and contesting political memory.

Keywords: *Big Man; Filmic; Postcolonial; Autocracy*

Introduction

Idi Amin, the former president of Uganda (1971–1979), has emerged in both historical and artistic discourse as a symbol of postcolonial authoritarianism, violence, and hyper-masculinity. His brutal regime and eccentric personality have made him a frequent subject of academic and creative representation. Megah (2016) explores Idi Amin's oppressive rule, emphasizing his use of fear, militarism, and personalistic leadership to dominate political and social life in Uganda. This aligns with broader discourses of authoritarian control in post-independence Africa and lays the groundwork for understanding how such a figure is dramatized in cinematic narratives.

Okero, Obara, and Kebaya (2019) specifically analyze *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (1981) as a cultural text that typifies the "Big Man" typology, as a postcolonial archetype defined by absolute power, political theatre, and the embodiment of state authority within a single masculine figure. Their study highlights how the film portrays Amin as both a historical and mythological character, raising important questions about representation, distortion, and political memory. Similarly, Bhagat (1983) offers a contemporaneous account of Amin's rule, documenting the real-life events that inform the film's narrative construction.

Leopold (2020) presents a critical biography of Amin that navigates between fact and fiction, examining how global media shaped the image of Amin as "Africa's icon of evil." His work underscores the West's complicity in constructing exaggerated depictions of African dictators, an insight that problematizes the cinematic portrayal in *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*. Kiyimba (1998) further argues that the spectral presence of Amin in Ugandan literature functions as a metaphor for unresolved trauma and a legacy of violence, suggesting that fictional portrayals may serve as both catharsis and cultural critique.

Prince (2024), through a psychodynamic lens, examines Amin's personality using the Schahriar Syndrome Model, which analyzes primitive psychic mechanisms such as paranoia, sadism, and narcissistic delusion. This psychological framing of Amin as a pathological leader contributes to understanding how cinematic tools such as close-up shots, lighting, and performance emphasize his unstable persona. The anthology *Masquerade, Postcolonial Masculinity* (2015) similarly discusses Amin through the lens of gender and power, focusing on the intersections of sex, violence, and postcolonial male identity. This work is crucial in interpreting how filmic representation ties masculinity to tyranny within the postcolonial African state.

Collectively, these studies underscore the complexity of representing Idi Amin on screen, not merely as a historical figure, but as a constructed persona shaped by narrative, ideology, and cultural memory. This study draws from the postcolonial theory which provides a critical framework for interrogating how such representations reflect and reinforce broader discourses of African despotism, masculinity, and Western spectatorship. Thus, the background reveals the necessity of analyzing *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* both as a cinematic text and as a postcolonial artifact that reimagines power through performance and image.

Statement of the Problem

Despite extensive scholarly attention to the "Big Man" phenomenon in African political discourse, particularly within the fields of history, political science, and governance studies, there remains a significant gap in examining how this typology is represented in artistic forms such as film. Post-independence African leadership has often been marked by authoritarianism, where leaders subvert democratic ideals and entrench personal rule through fear and patronage. While the Big Man archetype has been widely theorized as a symbol of postcolonial tyranny, its cinematic construction has not been sufficiently explored. This study addresses this gap by analyzing how *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* employs characterization to represent the Big Man in the African context.

Theoretical Framework

This study adopts Frantz Fanon's postcolonial theory as its primary analytical framework, drawing from his pivotal texts *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). Fanon's thought provides critical tools for unpacking the psychological and sociopolitical effects of colonialism, particularly how these legacies manifest in the structures and figures of post-independence

governance. His work highlights how colonial rule leaves behind a deeply fractured sense of self, which continues to influence identity formation, political behavior, and cultural expression in formerly colonized societies.

In examining *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, Fanon's theory allows for a critical exploration of how Amin is depicted not merely as a historical character, but as a symbolic product of colonial trauma. According to Fanon, the postcolonial subject often reproduces the violence and authoritarian tendencies of the colonizer in an attempt to assert autonomy and restore control. The film's portrayal of Amin, marked by his erratic behavior, obsession with control, and theatrical displays of power, exemplifies this transformation, where colonial violence is internalized and redirected through the state apparatus and personal tyranny.

Fanon's ideas concerning the internal conflict of the colonized elite, who struggle to reconcile Western-imposed structures with indigenous identity which also illuminate the filmic construction of Amin's character. His performative leadership style, hyper-masculinity, and brutal tactics reflect a distorted attempt to reclaim power and legitimacy in a postcolonial world still shaped by colonial frameworks. From this perspective, the film functions as a cultural artifact that both reveals and complicates global and local understandings of African leadership.

In focusing on Fanon's contributions, this study positions the film not just as entertainment or biography but as a site where deep-seated colonial dynamics continue to be negotiated. It investigates how the visual and narrative elements of the film echo Fanon's argument that the postcolonial state often mirrors the colonial regime it replaces. Through this lens, Amin's image on screen becomes both a spectacle and a critique, exposing the lingering psychological wounds of colonization and the challenges of forging a truly liberated postcolonial identity. Fanon's postcolonial theory enables a nuanced reading of the film's ideological undertones, highlighting how cinematic representations can both perpetuate and question inherited systems of domination and cultural perception.

Literature Review

Prince (2024) offers a psychodynamic psychobiography of Idi Amin, applying the Schahriar Syndrome Model (SSM) to explain Amin's behavior through primitive psychic mechanisms such as sadism and narcissism. While this perspective provides a deep psychological understanding of Amin's persona, it focuses primarily on clinical diagnosis rather than representational or artistic construction. The absence of cinematic engagement in Prince's work creates a gap that this study seeks to fill by examining how film constructs such psychological traits through visual and narrative techniques.

Nyandoro and Bichang'a (2019) analyze the Big Man typology as presented in *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, exploring how Amin's character fits the mold of postcolonial authoritarianism. Their work is directly relevant as it deals with the same film and theme. However, their analysis is largely thematic and textual, with limited emphasis on formal cinematic elements such as cinematography, mise-en-scène, and sound design. This study builds upon their findings by incorporating a formalist analysis to uncover how stylistic devices reinforce the Big Man representation.

Guthrie (2012) examines the mythologization of Amin in The Last King of Scotland, drawing parallels with Conrad's Heart of Darkness to critique how African leaders are portrayed through Western cinematic tropes. Though focused on a different film, Guthrie's argument about the mythic and exoticized portrayal of African dictators is relevant to this study's postcolonial lens. However, his analysis remains limited to Western-authored narratives. This study provides a corrective by examining a more regionally grounded film that speaks from within the African postcolonial context.

Orlando (2014) critiques portrayals of Africa in mainstream global cinema, arguing that such representations often recycle reductive and stereotypical imagery. Her analysis provides a broader context for understanding how African figures like Amin are framed in film. Yet, Orlando's work concentrates on Western cinema and does not consider films like *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, which occupy a middle space between African and international production. This study contributes by analyzing a film that bridges both spaces, thereby expanding the conversation around African agency in cinematic representation.

Kiyimba (1998) examines the metaphorical and psychological afterlife of Idi Amin in Ugandan literature, emphasizing how writers deal with the trauma of his rule. His insights are crucial for understanding the cultural weight Amin holds in Uganda's imagination. However, his work does not extend to cinematic representations. This study fills that gap by examining how such psychological and symbolic dimensions are visualized through filmic techniques.

Leopold (2020) presents a comprehensive biography of Idi Amin, tracing the evolution of his global image and how it has been shaped by media narratives. Leopold's work underscores the importance of representation in constructing political personas. However, his approach is journalistic and historical, not cinematic. This study applies those insights to film, showing how visual media participate in that myth-making process.

Rasmussen (2010) provides a useful survey of Uganda's national cinema, mapping its development and thematic trends. His work situates *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* within the broader context of Ugandan filmmaking. Nonetheless, Rasmussen's treatment of specific films remains brief and lacks detailed analysis. This study addresses this gap by offering a focused case study of one film through formalist and postcolonial lenses.

Kembabazi (2020) discusses moral regulation under Amin's regime, particularly relating to sexuality, fashion, and reproductive politics. Her study is important for understanding the socio-political climate of Amin's rule. However, it does not engage with artistic or visual media. This study translates those themes into film analysis, exploring how morality, power, and control are cinematically depicted.

Vokes (2020) analyzes the afterlife of official photography from Amin's Uganda, exploring how visual archives shape memory and identity. His work is valuable for considering the power of image in postcolonial contexts. Yet, his focus on still photography leaves a gap in understanding how moving images, particularly film, extend or transform those representations. This study responds to that gap by examining cinematic movement, sound, and performance in constructing visual memory.

Tayeebwa, Ntulume, and Mbaine (2024) investigate how the 1972 Asian expulsion was framed in Uganda's postcolonial press, offering a media-centered view of racial and political discourse during Amin's rule. Their insights are relevant to this study's postcolonial framework, especially in examining how Amin's regime navigated identity politics. However, their analysis is confined to journalistic texts. This study applies similar interpretive concerns to the cinematic medium.

Abudul (2025) explores how Idi Amin used his regime to consolidate power among the Nubi ethnic community, providing a rich account of the ethnic and political dynamics of the time. While this work enhances historical understanding of Amin's rule, it does not explore how such dynamics are reimagined in film. This study bridges that gap by analyzing how ethnicity, leadership, and symbolic power are portrayed through cinematic characterization.

The reviewed literature demonstrates that while Idi Amin's regime and persona have been examined from psychological, historical, political, and literary perspectives, there is limited scholarship that rigorously analyzes how film constructs his image using cinematic form and ideological framing.

Very few works apply both formalist and postcolonial theories to his portrayal in film. This study addresses that critical gap by offering a detailed analysis of *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin*, focusing on how formal cinematic techniques and postcolonial ideology collaborate to construct the figure of the Big Man in African cinema.

Methodology

This study adopted a **qualitative research approach**, guided by the principles of **textual and visual analysis**. The primary text under investigation is the film *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (1981), which served as the central case study for exploring the cinematic construction of the Big Man archetype in postcolonial Africa. The qualitative nature of this study allowed for an in-depth, interpretive examination of how meaning is generated through film form and ideological framing. Before stating the study, the researcher obtained a research license from NARCOSTI. The research employed **close reading techniques**, informed by **postcolonial theory**, to analyze the film's characterization of Idi Amin. Specific attention was given to character development, scene composition, and performance, to understand how these elements function aesthetically to portray tyranny and power.

The **postcolonial theory** situates the film within the broader socio-political and historical context of post-independence Africa. This perspective allowed the study to interrogate how the representation of Idi Amin reflects or challenges postcolonial discourses of leadership, masculinity, Western spectatorship, and African identity. The film was analyzed not merely as entertainment or historical recount, but as a cultural text embedded with ideological significance. Data collection involved **repeated viewing** of the film to ensure a thorough understanding of its cinematic language and thematic concerns. Scenes were **selected purposively** based on their relevance to the portrayal of the Big Man archetype. Key moments were transcribed, described, and categorized thematically to aid interpretation. The findings were presented in a descriptive-analytical format, synthesizing both formal elements and contextual insights to develop a coherent understanding of how the film constructs Idi Amin as a postcolonial tyrant.

Results and Discussion

The Big Man's Appropriation of Political Power

This study explores the filmic portrayal of Idi Amin in *The Rise and Fall of Idi Amin* (1981) as an embodiment of the "Big Man" archetype in postcolonial African leadership. Drawing from Moss (2007), the analysis identifies key features of the Big Man, such as pervasive patronage and predation on national resources, which are central to understanding Amin's representation. The film is approached as a postcolonial text, positioning Amin as a character shaped by the tensions between imperial and indigenous cultural systems. His actions are interpreted as either resistance to, or internalization of, colonial ideologies, reflecting the complexities of postcolonial identity. As Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin (1985) argue, imperial culture was often subverted through localized, hybrid practices of self-determination, a framework that helps unpack Amin's contradictions in the film. The study therefore suggests that Amin's depiction is not merely of a dictator, but of a conflicted postcolonial subject, shaped by historical and cultural legacies.

Power Concentration

As earlier mentioned, power concentration refers to a situation where the Big Man dominates political systems. As a result, he operates informally, disregarding inconvenient laws and subverting chains of authority; he has vast legal powers and cracks down on opponents (Moss, 2007), the

consequences of which are that dissenting voices mount a coup or its equivalent to seize control of the country from its failed leadership.

Disregard of the Law and Subversion of Chains of Authority

Amin exercises absolute power by making arbitrary appointments that disregard professional qualifications and legal procedures. He appoints Dr. Oroya, a surgeon, as his physician after Dr. Ebine is murdered, despite Oroya's protests about being unqualified for the role. Amin dismisses the concern, insisting, "Aren't you a doctor?" demonstrating his ignorance or deliberate subversion of medical standards. The appointment is made at the State House, and Oroya is immediately ordered to tend to Amin's sick wife, clearly under duress. Amin uses intimidation, shouting at Oroya to suppress any inquiry about Ebine's fate, which the doctor suspects but dares not pursue. The filmmaker highlights Amin's intolerance to dissent through a close-up of his displeasure at Oroya's hesitation. Similarly, Amin undermines judicial independence by "selecting" Ben Okiwanuka as Chief Justice, a word that suggests control rather than lawful appointment. Though Amin publicly praises Okiwanuka and vows to prevent political interference, the selection hints at an expectation of loyalty over legal autonomy. This manipulation becomes evident when Amin tries to influence judicial proceedings in the case involving a British journalist. When the time comes for him to deliver a ruling on the case, the president intervenes in a call he makes when the ruling is about to be made and orders Okiwanuka to rule that the journalist be convicted and hanged. He says, "I want this man convicted and hanged...He must be declared guilty, but he must first be tried in our courts so that the world knows that Amin is fair and right. I also want to teach a lesson to imperialists who only give lip service when it comes to helping us."

Amin's use of imperatives like 'want' and 'must' here brings him out as a dictator whose word is final and would not entertain an alternative view from his junior. Indeed, this is what happens when Okiwanuka goes against the directive. Convinced that he ought to give an independent ruling, Okiwanuka stands his ground and gives a contradictory ruling, declaring that the journalist is not guilty and acquits him, hence defying the president's directive. When the Big Man learns of the acquittal, he becomes so infuriated that he orders his men to 'get him, ' a signal for them to kill Okiwanuka for opposing his directive. Since they cannot dare to oppose their boss, the soldiers go for Okiwanuka, who they drag out of his office, kill, and frame as having been killed in a road accident. Amin later goes for his preserved body and eats part of his flesh in the morgue. Justice Okiwanuka's contrary opinion symbolizes what is supposed to be an independent judiciary. Indeed, he questions Amin's directive when he asks: "What is the point of my rendering the decision on the journalist if you say he is already guilty?" Amin's directive to eliminate the journalist, a voice of dissent, on the other hand, represents intolerance and subversion of procedures in an autocratic rule meant to silence the voices of the voiceless. This subversion of the law corroborates Hyden's (2006) assertion that African leaders who come to power through Coup de Tats accuse their predecessors of misusing power only to turn out to subvert the law as well. This is meant to remove any road blocks to their rule. For this reason, Amin who fears a possible coup against his rule is hell-bent to scare opponents.

The Big Man hires and fires at will. When the Central Bank Governor refuses to print more money because Ugandan currency has lost value in the international market, he is dismissed and dragged off stage. His attempts to explain himself fall on the deaf ears of the president who tells his men to show him "what we do to shit" accusing the governor of calling Ugandan money "shit" when he says the Ugandan shilling is worthless than toilet paper. In his place, John Ogel, visibly intimidated by the president to accept to print more money, is appointed on the spot.

Ogel's appointment is irregular since president Amin merely picks him from the crowd. His only qualification is that he is willing to print more money, even when such an act leads to further crumbling of the economy.

Annoyed that he has been betrayed by his wives who he accuses of infidelity, he disowns them publicly saying "I publicly disowns my three wives- Kay,Norah and Mama." His use of "disowns" instead of "disown" is a grammatical subversion. This symbolizes his incapability of leading the country. His fall is therefore imminent. Since he wields a lot of power, this power corrupts him to the extent of viewing his wives as objects that can be discarded at will. He accuses them of infidelity but ironically openly engages in it himself. He openly flirts with women at the swimming pool and loves and marries a 17-year-old girl during the safari rally. He not only disowns them but also chops the arms of one of them on her deathbed, and asks children to come and see "what happens to bad mummies."

Amin shows children the body of one of his wives whose hands have been chopped off following his directive

So arrogant has the absolute power made the Big Man that upon giving an order that Asians leave Uganda, he brags, "I am the biggest African leader. Everybody is calling me the greatest black power of the African continent. Is that not true? I'm the conqueror of the British Empire. My dreams become right…." Elsewhere, he calls himself the greatest lover of Africa and says all women "want Amin". This demonstrates that the Big Man would want to control all spheres of human life, an extension of their rule. Indeed, Amin proves that he can go any length to have the woman he wants. When he admires a woman with her fiancé in a dancing party he orders for the killing of the boyfriend as he takes the woman to bed. His attempts to rape her are thwarted as the lady stabs herself to death. This refusal is, however, rare given that the president is treated with reverence elsewhere. The defiance of this woman symbolizes fidelity. She would rather die than betray her fiancé. She is to be contrasted to the 17 year old girl who submissively enters the president's Safari Rally car, dislodging his son, makes love with him in the same car and weds him shortly later. She also contrasts with the two women make love with Amin in the same bed.

Too much concentration of power in the Big Man makes him insensitive and inhuman. After taking stock of the impact of the Entebbe raid in which the Israel hostages are freed and learning from Mariamungu that there is a surviving old woman, Dolla Block, in hospital, Amin orders for her killing. He orders, "That old woman must die. That will teach them not to attack Uganda." Mrs. Block is then seized from her hospital bed and hounded away. Attempts by Dr Oroya to plead with Amin to stop the killing do not bear fruit. Instead, he asks Oroya to forget about her and instead lie that she has been released, to which Oroya wonders, "But she's a sick old woman and she hasn't been discharged." Oroya stresses the words 'sick', 'old', and 'woman', an indication that he sympathizes with her. Apart from being sick and old, this is a woman. In most African communities, women are spared; they are not killed. Whereas Oroya sympathizes with her, Amin does not. Indeed, later, Oroya, who has fallen short of telling the president that he is inhuman, says so when he tells Luhum, "…The sheer brutality of it all. What's happening to humanity?" This lamentation by Oroya implies that Amin is hell-bent on killing. His compassion for the old lady is juxtaposed with Amin's contempt for her. And as if to foreshadow Luhum's own death, Oroya adds, "We're worried about you your grace." Indeed shortly later Amin

shoots him claiming he lost his temper when Luhum refuses to admit that he knows about a coup attempt to overthrow him. The murder of Luhum, an innocent preacher who has been preaching and even praying for Amin and his government, evokes sympathy for him from the viewer and contempt towards Amin. Amin is hated the more when he threatens to kill Oroya for refusing to write a report to frame Luhum as having died of a car accident. Luhum and Oroya are the epitome of peace, love and compassion and do not therefore deserve to die.

Most of these murders are, however, followed by cover-ups so as to conceal the intentions and perpetrators. Before he kills Luhum, for example, he asks journalists to take photos of him and Luhum. After he shoots him, Amin consults with Bob and Mariamungu, with whom they device ' a car accident' which is later executed according to script. These cover-ups, however, come to naught as the perpetrators are finally dethroned. At the end of the film, Amin and his henchmen run out of Uganda fearing they might be killed by irate citizens following the Tanzania-Uganda war.

Amin is a man full of fear. He wants to retain his power by all means necessary including eliminating his perceived opponents. He fits what Hyden (2006) describes as tyrants. Tyranny, he opines is marked by impulsive, oppressive and brutal rule that lacks respect for rights of persons and property and that tyrants rule through fear. Since he fears that Obote's perceived sympathizers might seize power from him, he orders for their killing. This is how Dr. Ebine meets his death. After the reception in which he gives his maiden speech we see the bombing of Dr. Ebine's residence and a photograph bearing his image being collected from the rubble and handed to Amin who simply says, "Dr. Ebine. He is an Obote Man." We then see the SRB agents accost Ebine as he enters a lift and stab him to death. His car is left abandoned at the parking lot as his head is kept in a fridge at statehouse amongst a few others. When Dr. Oroya shows his shock at finding Ebine's head in the fridge Amin's reaction is to justify the killing of the likes of Ebine. He says, "every time there's a change of guard in Africa a few heads must roll."This explains his resolve to kill his perceived opponents to continue ruling in Uganda.

The Big Man treats his subjects on the basis of their loyalty to him. This loyalty is sometimes dictated by ethnic relationships. Members of the ethnic group of the President are favored as those who hail from rival ethnicity are punished because they are perceived to be in support of opponents. Amin orders Mariamungu, one of his cronies, to clear soldiers from the Langi and Acholi tribes. Since they are Obote's tribesmen, he considers them to be his (Obote's) sympathizers. Obote happens to be the man that Amin overthrew in a coup. Since he fears a counter-coup, Amin has to eliminate potential supporters of his rival. Dr. Ebine is targeted and killed on orders from Amin since he is an 'Obote man'. Mariamungu takes the order without question and later organizes for their identification in the camp. They are forty two of them out of seven thousand two hundred and sixteen in the camp and they are killed in open air. After their shooting, Mariamungu announces to the spectators: "This is what happens to Obote's men."This announcement serves to scare away potential opponents to the Big Man's rule.

Lang'i and Acholi men are lined up in readiness for their shooting

Amin sides with his sympathizers and punishes perceived opponents. When he is informed of an incident where Ofumbi and group "attempt to overthrow" him, he rushes to the scene where the captives are made to kneel and asks, "who was the cause of the trouble?" Ofumbi is then pointed at but his attempts to explain that it was not an attempted coup but a scuffle between him and Mariamungu who wanted to rape his (Ofumbi's) cousin are dismissed by Amin. Amin sides with the accuser from his tribe and instead orders that Ofumbi and group be given "VIP" treatment. "VIP" treatment is coded language for execution and torture to perceived opponents. They are tied to poles in an open ground before being shot at in the full glare of the public. Others are subjected to hard labour and used to load and offload bodies meant to be buried in mass graves or thrown to big rivers to be eaten by aquatic creatures. This is what happens to Dr. Oroya's brother, Philip, who is killed and buried in a mass grave in Imperial Forest.

A perceived Obote supporter, Dr. Ebine also meets his death this way. Dr. Oroya foreshadows the killing of Dr. Ebine when he asks him. "Are you alright Dr. Ebine? Following his disappearance, Oroya and Archbishop Luhum share about it after the church service in which Luhum prays for the new leader, Amin. During the service, Oroya appears worried, obviously following the mysterious disappearance of his colleague, Dr. Ebine.

Dr. Oroya and Luhum are not spared either. Dr. Oroya, a level–headed character that seems to be the voice of reason and always shows compassion to both his patients and friends, is targeted when he refuses to write a report to show that Luhum died in a car accident. Upon this refusal and having been warned earlier by Ofumbi to be careful, he escapes in an aircraft. This is a case of poetic justice where good people like Oroya are left to survive such tragedies.

Earlier, Oroya expresses his sympathy towards Luhum when he tells him, "we are worried about you, Luhum." This is another case of foreboding as Luhum is later shot by Amin following his refusal to admit that he knows about the coup attempt to overthrow him (Amin). A man of God, Luhum, has been preaching peace and would not accept to lie that he knows about a coup to depose Amin. Instead, he says "I don't fear death". He is a contrast of Amin who pretends to be a friend of the archbishop when he poses for photos to be taken of him and Luhum. This is so that nobody suspects him to have killed the man of the cloth. Indeed after he kills him, he consults with his cronies who agree with him that a car accident be framed. Later, Luhum's body is made to sit behind a wheel of a car following the 'accident.'

Amin consults a sorcerer to establish whether he has cleared his enemies. Convinced by the socerer that he is yet to clear Obote's men, he swears to "destroy their homes, villages and all." Images of massive destruction and killings then follow. He does not stop at Obote's men. Even his wives are victims. He kills some of them and even goes ahead to chop the arms and legs of one of them – Kay – in her deathbed. One of the surviving wives, depressed by this turn of events, captures Amin's killing spree when she says, "What can this coward do more than what he has done? He killed his ministers, his friends, his wives… why doesn't he now kill himself?"

Another victim of Amin's personal rule is Dennis Hills, a British journalist who calls Amin a village tyrant in his book. Mariamungu, accompanied by soldiers, go for him at his typing pool and accuses him of "writing bad things about the President" and swears to stop him from writing dirty things. He then orders his soldiers to take him away. This is a crackdown on real and potential opponents because of fear and wanting to maintain power (Moss, 2007). Mariamungu acts at the behest of the President. Since he shares the privileges of power with Amin, he also cracks down real and potential opponents because of fear and wanting to maintain power. Indeed he and Bob dine with Amin and run his diary. Unshaken by his arrest, Hills tells his fellow Britons who have come to advise him to denounce his statements, "Amin must be shown for what he is: monster, tyrant."In the cells he is the voice of reason. He advises the black convicts not to fight. His resolve to portray Amin as he does is representative of dissenting voices working to expose the tyrant and ultimately to remove him from office. Hills therefore

agitates for transparency and frankness. As Ogbazghi(2011) puts it, a personal rule is a world of uncertainty, suspicion, rumor, agitation, intrigue, fear, stratagem, diplomacy, conspiracy, dependency, reward and threat.

Individualized Decision Making

The persistence of Big Men in power often leads to the circumvention of institutional rules that may obstruct their personal agendas. Leonard and Straus (2003) argue that this tendency is rooted in colonial legacies, where personal authority overshadows institutional governance due to blurred lines between the ruler and the state. Ogbazghi (2011) supports this by emphasizing that survival and regime longevity are central to the motives of personalist rulers, leading to highly individualized decision-making. Such decisions are typically made either solely by the Big Man or in selective consultation with loyal cronies who rarely influence the final outcome. Idi Amin exemplifies this pattern by limiting consultations to Bob and Mariamungu, whose presence symbolically reflects both foreign and local political interests in Uganda. When Bob recommends acquiring arms to confront neighboring states, Amin accepts the advice without the involvement of a formal security committee, revealing his aversion to opposition and institutional processes. Amin's assertion that foreign nations would comply when confronted "face to face" demonstrates his overreliance on personal influence rather than diplomatic or institutional protocol. The informal power of Amin's associates is equally potent; in his absence, they execute decisions that align with his regime's interests, as shown by Ali's arrest of a British journalist. The journalist is tried not by due legal process but under presidential coercion, further undermining judicial independence. The ultimate consequence of such authoritarian overreach is dramatized when the Chief Justice is murdered for defying Amin's directive, confirming the extreme vulnerability of formal institutions under personalist rule.

The President, together with Bob and Ali, plots how to feign an attack on Uganda from the Tanzania boarder to provoke a retaliation by Uganda. He says:

> I want you to take some few men, have them dressed in Tanzania uniforms and go to the boarder and do a bit of damage, you know. Just kill a few of our people. Then we will say that Tanzania attacked US first. Then Nyerere will have no choice but to fight me in the boxing ring….

Indeed the scheme works as Tanzanian President, Nyerere, in a press conference admits that it is Tanzania fighting Uganda later and declares war on Amin. Ironically, this is the war that leads to the ouster of Amin and his cronies from power. Consequently, Bob runs away on a boat, blaming Amin for not listening to him. Amin is later seen boarding an already started aeroplane promising to revenge. The ouster of the Big Man is a result of failures of his government. Effectively, personal rule degenerates into political instability, chaos, corruption and abuse of power hence incompetent leadership (ogbazghi, 2011).

Personalization of Relationships

Personal rulers value their relations with individual members of the populace at the expense of institutions. It is for this reason that they do not draw limits between the office of the ruler and one on one relations. Ogbazghi (2011) contends that personal rule promotes personalized state-society relationships rather than institution based governance. *The Rise and fall of Idi Amin* has a few of such instances.

The relationship of the President and his cronies-Bob and Mariamungu – is so casual that one would mistake them for equals. Amin hears none of Ofumbi's claims that he and Mariamungu were fighting over Mariamungu's attempt to rape his cousin. He instead takes seriously the accusation by Mariamungu that Ofumbi and the others were plotting to overthrow his government. We come to realize that the President's refusal to listen to Ofumbi's defense is deliberate because he does not want to antagonize Mariamungu when they later share about the incident in the bar, thus:

Amin: By the way, how was that girl who was the cause of trouble in the bar?

Marimungu: she was very sweet your excellence.

This conversation is by all means casual talk between two very close people. It also exemplifies lack of hierarchical difference between the president and his henchmen. In the conversation, Amin seems to acknowledge that the spat in the bar was so small a scuffle between Ofumbi and Mariamungu that it did not need his attention and therefore he falls short of telling Mariamungu so. His treatment of Ofumbi whom he considers an opponent (Obote's man) is therefore unwarranted.

The informal treatment of the duo is further exemplified when they share meals. First of all they sit close to one another, Amin in the middle. The two, therefore protect the president against any impending danger. They then share a meal during which snake food is served. This is symbolic since a snake is dangerous animal. Indeed, the President encourages Mariamungu to eat it when he says "eat Mariamungu, snake will make you strong." The choice of the snake and not the hen earlier (the two are seen in the same cage) is also telling. Their propensity to kill later is therefore to be associated with the eating of the snake that has made them "strong" this explains the killings of the Langi and Acholi soldiers, the plotting of the Tanzania–Uganda boarder war and the framed accidents among many other killings that the trio mastermind.

Amin has personalized the government so much so that he and his family dominate public events. The pavilion at the reception where he makes his maiden speech after taking over power is occupied by his wives and cronies. During the safari rally event he chooses his son, Moses, to be his co-driver and later honors him with a medal of valor.

Privatization of Public Wealth

In a personalized rule, little distinction is made between public resources and private wealth. In other words, state resources are also those of the president and those around him. Following the Entebbe raid during which time Israelis are released from carjackers, Amin is seen taking stock of the damage caused on the Uganda airport and he quips, "They destroyed *my* jets, damaged *my* airport, killed *my* men, and got away with everybody." The use of the possessive pronoun 'my' by the President in his remarks is testimony of personalization of the country's resources, by the President. Because he is the 'biggest' man in the country, he treats everything and even the soldiers as his own. One would therefore mistake the destruction to be affecting only the president. Had he used 'our' in the place of 'my' perception would be different. The use of "our" would endear him to the audience and the citizenry at large. Instead, because he personalizes public resources, he is eventually chased by the very citizens who, ironically, celebrated when he ousted Obote, expecting him to be different. Personal rule still remains valid in explaining the political system of many Sub–Saharan African regimes (Ogbazghi, 2011).It is characterized by the selective application of the law, individuals rather than bureaucracies making decisions and little distinction between public resources and personal wealth, as discussed above.

Amin lives in opulence as the rest of the populace wallows in poverty. In the safari rally event for example, he drives a new Mercedes-Benz Benz whereas the other drivers have old ramshackle cars. The roads on which the event takes place are rugged and full of potholes. The state of affairs in the countryside is to be contrasted with the extravagance and opulence witnessed in state house where Amin enjoys life in an executive abode. His residence has a lounge, a swimming pool and a well-furnished house for instance.

His extravagance is further epitomized by his extravagant use of titles that he gives himself upon embracing his Muslim friends. He tells Dennis from Canadian embassy to start calling him

"Al Haji Idi Amin Dada, Field Marshal, MC, DSO, CBE, the conqueror of the British Empire." In the event that he honours his son, Mwanga, he is introduced by these titles by Mariamungu.

The president's life in opulence is short-lived since irate citizens regroup to dethrone him. This is seen when a group of men train in a camp swearing to overthrow Amin.

He goes further to advise that for the dictator to be overthrown, intelligence networks on him must be expanded, and sabotage of key military points to create disunity amongst Amin's men be considered as the best strategy. This camp therefore symbolizes resistance to Amin's dictatorial regime and his fall does not come as a surprise.

Pervasive Patronage

Patronage politics involves the distribution of goods, money and favors in exchange for support (Moss, 2007). Since the agenda of personal rulers is to stay long in office in hostile political systems (Ogbazghi, 2011), they use all means necessary to buy support from citizens. One such a way is to provide favours to coercive institutions, the police and secretive services. State funds, opportunities and other resources are rewarded to clients in return for preservation of the Big Man system of rule. Opponents to the rule, on the other hand are punished. This leads to a kleptocracy, a state where the government is run for the benefit of the individual or a small group who use their power to transfer large amounts of resources of the society to themselves (Acemoglu, Robinson &Verdier, 2003). A predatory leadership acts as a parasite, draining resources for itself and involves itself in activities where its leaders can siphon off resources for themselves, including manipulating arms of the government for own gain.

Amin stops at nothing in his search for more funds to sustain his patronage interests. He is in urgent need of one million dollars from central Bank, therefore, and when he realizes that it is not forthcoming, he becomes so enraged that he orders for the killing of the governor who is opposed to overseeing the printing of more money. The governor's attempt to explain why it is imprudent to print foreign currency is received with ire from the president. The governor says:

Your excellence, it's not quite that simple. We cannot print foreign currency. I'm having a lot of difficulty these days in persuading our foreign suppliers to accept late payments. The Ugandan shilling is worthless in the foreign market. In fact, worthless than toilet paper.

The president's response to the governor's explanations is laughable as he says, "Toilet paper? You call Ugandan money shit money? Take governor here outside and show him what we do to shit. Imperialists will not run Uganda's banks." The mention of imperialists invokes a perception that Amin is reacting to foreign interference on Uganda's affairs, a form of resistance to neocolonialism. As Sharpe argues in Ashcroft, Graffitis and Tiffin (1995), the colonial subject's reaction back to the colonizer is a result of the ideological machinery that silences the subaltern. The implications of printing more money in a failing economy are clear: inflation and more inflation. Amin does not care what the repercussions of what he suggests to the governor are so long as he gets money to give to his supporters for intelligence following the instability in the country. He would rather have a falling economy than his term of office come to an end. He therefore does not have the interest of the country at heart but his own.

In a case of using ideological state apparatuses, the Big Man invokes the name of God for social and political control. For instance when he tells the Asians to leave the country claiming he does so out of the dream he had from God, saying Uganda must be for Ugandans only, thus:

I had a dream sent last night from God. He has instructed me to throw out all Asians from the country. Uganda must be for Ugandans only. The Asians were brought here by the colonialists to build railway. The railway is now finished. Let the British have their Asians and Amin soldiers

have their *dukas* (shops). They have exploited Uganda people. I give the Asians 90 days to park up and go.

The beneficiaries of Asian property are, however, not all Ugandans but selected supporters of Amin. Already he has mentioned that the *dukas* will go to the soldiers. The mention of soldiers is quite telling since he needs to please them so as to be guaranteed of their service: security. He also uses the soldiers to arrest dissidents like Dennis Hills.That his other supporters will benefit from the Asian property is further captured in the dialogue between an Asian shopkeeper and American Journalists interviewing him, thus:

Journalist: Who is going to take over your shop?

Asian Shopkeeper: Good question. I'm sure it will be one of Amin's cronies or relatives. But you think they can run it? Why? Most can hardly write their own names. They will just loot everything and that's the end of it. This country will be raped by Amin until it is left barren.

Indeed we later see Amin distribute the loot to his cronies and relatives-the shop to Mohammed, the grocery to Abdul for loving food "so much" and to his wife he gives the textile shop.

To further prolong his stay in office, Amin honors his six year old son, Mwanga, with prestigious medal of valor and claims it is an award for standing with him during times of crisis, thus: "I give this prestigious honor to my six year old boy for having worked so untiringly with me during the numerous crises under which most men would have cracked". One wonders what a six-year-old boy can do alongside the president that most men could not do.

Patronage in the text is juxtaposed with the punishment of rivals as discussed earlier. This is divide –and-rule, a method used by kleptocrats to maintain power in weakly institutionalized politics (Acegmolu, Robinson & Verdier, 2003). This in turn leads to predation on the resources of the country which is costly to society.

Amin intimidates his international friends, including America, Canada and Britain when he realizes that little aid is forthcoming from them and gives them notices to leave Uganda. On learning that the intimidation is not bearing any fruit, he turns East and befriends Muslims who promise him financial aid to fight his enemies whereas he swears to use every penny to build up Uganda. He further goes ahead to say that he is changing the "worthless church into a fine mosque". This symbolizes his change of allegiance from the West to the East. Amin is seen to live in opulence as the rest of the populace wallows in poverty. In the safari rally event for example, he drives a new Mercedes Benz whereas the other drivers have old ramshackle cars. The roads on which the event takes place are rugged and full of potholes. The state of affairs in the countryside is to be contrasted with the extravagance and opulence witnessed in state house where Amin enjoys life in an executive abode. His residence has a lounge, a swimming pool and a well-furnished house for instance.

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The president's life in opulence is short-lived since irate citizens regroup to dethrone him.

Conclusion

The concept of the "Big Man" in postcolonial African politics refers to a leader who embodies authoritarian rule, centralizes power, and often operates above the law. Such a leader dominates political systems and weakens democratic institutions to maintain personal control. The "Big Man" often blurs the line between public and private wealth, using state resources for personal enrichment. This creates disillusionment among the citizens, especially when initial hopes of reform are betrayed. Ultimately, the leader's unchecked excesses lead to widespread dissatisfaction, culminating in his removal from power.

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