
Makerere the University is Born

Ever since it opened its doors with 14 boys and 5 instructors in 1922, Makerere, as seat of higher learning in East and Central Africa, has been in constant change. It started as a simple Technical School established by the Department of Education under the British Protectorate Government; appropriately located on a hill with a name which, according to legend, connotes daybreak. According to one version of the tale (and there could be several other versions), the hill we now know as Makerere was once a scene where history involving love and royalty was made. Some traditionalists believe the incident occurred during the reign of King Jjuuko in the late seventeenth Century.

Legend has it that King Jjuuko had an eye for beautiful women and when he was told of a dazzlingly beautiful girl, Nalunga, living on the other side of the hill now called Makerere, he decided to go and look for her alone on foot. Traditionally, kings were not supposed to be seen walking around on foot in public. They had to be carried on the backs of special court servants. King Jjuuko had to sneak out of the palace in the dark of the night. Unfortunately, dawn found him on top of the hill now known as Makerere. In frustration the king exclaimed, "Oh, it is dawn". Henceforth, the hill took on the name Makerere – the dawn of King Jjuuko.

By coincidence, the British Protectorate Government chose to build an institution of higher learning on the same hill, in preference to Bombo, which signalled the dawn of new knowledge for Uganda and Africa. However, throughout its many transformations, first as a technical school then a college, a university college of Eastern Africa and constituent college of the University of East Africa, Makerere never acquired the status of a full-fledged university. That had to wait until 1970 – almost 50 years later.

The first major institutional transformation was a change from a narrowly focused national technical school into a regional college of higher education for East and Central Africa in 1940, following the recommendation of the De la Warr Report of 1937. At the same time, under the inspiration of Governor Sir

Philip Mitchell, the college acquired more land and an endowment to expand. In spite of the then ongoing Second World War, the Government found money and began to construct new buildings for the young college. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gloucester, laid the foundation stone for the present main building and the twin chapels behind it. They were completed and commissioned in 1941.

The Asquith Commission of 1945 recommended further changes, asking the British Government to prepare the college to become the centre of university studies in East Africa. However, the colonial administration was not quite ready to turn the college into a full-fledged university. Nevertheless, following the Asquith recommendations, a scheme of special relationship with the University of London was entered into in November 1949, which gave the college a new title of Makerere College, the University College of East Africa. But it was at the beginning of 1950, over a quarter of a century after its founding, that the college started offering courses leading to the general degrees of the University of London. When the relationship with the University of London ended in 1963, it became Makerere University College, under the federal University of East Africa. It acquired the long-awaited status of a full-fledged national university in July 1970, which was celebrated on October 8, 1970. The occasion marked the end of the University of East Africa, which was replaced by three national universities; Makerere University for Uganda, the University of Dar es Salaam for Tanzania and the University of Nairobi for Kenya. In 1970, these three universities were the only public universities in existence in the whole of East Africa.

As part of the East African Community, which collapsed in 1977, the University of East Africa was created with a broad aim of minimising duplication of academic programmes, particularly the professional programmes of engineering, law, medicine, veterinary medicine and commerce. From the beginning, each constituent college within the federal university was assigned a mandate to produce graduates in one or more professional courses for the whole of East Africa, which then comprised Kenya, Tanganyika, Uganda and Zanzibar. Later, Tanganyika and Zanzibar formed a single political union with a new name, Tanzania. Nairobi trained the engineers, accountants, architects, veterinary doctors and land and quantity surveyors. Dar es Salaam trained the lawyers while Makerere trained all the doctors (physicians and surgeons), agriculturalists and teachers. However, the sciences, arts and humanities were the duplicated courses offered at each college. This arrangement was seen as the most efficient way of utilising scarce resources. It was also viewed as a way of cementing the East African spirit, because the University of East Africa was part of the common services of the old East African Community. Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere, then President of the United Republic of Tanzania, as the most senior of the three Presidents in terms of length of incumbency at the time (the others being Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and Apollo Milton Obote of Uganda), was nominated by his colleagues as the first Chancellor of the new University of East Africa.

However, in 1968, the three East African heads of state made a historic decision which required each country to train its own lawyers. At the time, majority of the lawyers trained at Dar es Salaam ended up as state attorneys in the chambers of the Attorneys-General of their respective countries. Some believe that the decision which led to the break-up of the federal university was prompted by the more flamboyant Jomo Kenyatta who had his own misgivings about lawyers trained at Dar es Salaam. However, the official explanation given for the change was that each country wanted to evolve its own unique legal system, which required home-trained lawyers. Secondly, the capacity of the Faculty of Law at Dar es Salaam was small, and therefore, could not satisfy the growing demand for lawyers. But there was also the unofficial version about the growing uneasiness and concern centred on the way law was being taught at Dar es Salaam.

Many had come to the conclusion that the law professors at Dar es Salaam were putting too much emphasis on Marxism and other radical political philosophies at the expense of the law disciplines. The dose of these left-wing political philosophies, fuelled at the time by the liberation movements in Africa and elsewhere, and by the rivalry between the two super powers, was becoming unacceptably high and had started worrying the more western-oriented Jomo Kenyatta and, to a lesser extent, Uganda's Milton Obote. Unlike Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, who was a confessed socialist, Jomo Kenyatta and Milton Obote were politically moderate. In fact, some political observers have described Jomo Kenyatta as right-wing and Obote as middle-of-the-road. From a personal point of view, I am tempted to believe that in the heart of their hearts, Jomo Kenyatta and Milton Obote were concerned about the influence of the many radical leftist lawyers filling up the chambers of their Attorneys-General. At the time, we did not realise the far-reaching consequences of this decision on the future of the East African community. The writing was clearly on the wall that all was not well. Cracks were slowly developing, threatening to break it up. It is argued that the abolition of the single currency – the East African Shilling in 1966, together with the East African Currency Board that regulated it, and the dissolution of the federal University of East Africa in 1970, were the precursors to the demise of the East African Community. Idi Amin's coup of 1971 was the last nail in the coffin.

Soon, the argument about limited capacity extended to other professional courses offered at Makerere and Nairobi. The University of East Africa was being seen as incapable of producing graduates in the numbers that were required. This was seen as a hindrance to national development. It is now believed that these arguments, at least in part, paved the way for the final break-up of the University of East Africa and the creation of three separate national universities in its place. Unfortunately, the break-up of the university left the islands of Zanzibar without a university of their own and therefore dependent on the University of Dar es Salaam, situated on the main land of Tanzania. Each national Parliament enacted an Act that established

each university as a national institution. In effect, the Act constituted the Charter or Bill for each national university. The 1970 Makerere University, Kampala, Act had a lot in common with that of the University of Nairobi and the University of Dar es Salaam. The position of Chancellor was a prominent feature in each Act. The Head of State became the automatic Chancellor of the university, which had dire consequences for Makerere. Apollo Milton Obote became the first Chancellor of Makerere University, Uganda; Jomo Kenyatta became the first Chancellor of the University of Nairobi, Kenya; and Julius Nyerere became the first Chancellor of the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. As soon as he assumed the role of Chancellor, Milton Obote dropped Yusuf Kironde Lule, the first African Principal of Makerere University College, and in his stead appointed Frank Kalimuzo as Vice Chancellor. Although Frank Kalimuzo was a seasoned civil servant, he was not an academic. At the time of his appointment, he was Permanent Secretary, Secretary to Cabinet and Head of Civil Service. Therefore, to most people within and outside Makerere, Lule was the obvious candidate for the job; however, from Milton Obote's political point of view, he was unacceptable.

For some curious and unexplained reason, Obote retained Bernard Onyango as Academic Registrar of the university, a position Onyango held until his retirement in 1992. By nature, and perhaps unlike Lule, Bernard Onyango always steered clear of controversy and, as much as possible, tried to keep a low profile. I believe in a way, this trait helped him survive the misfortunes that befell many of his contemporaries. One prominent Makerere political scientist, Apolo Nsibambi, attributed Onyango's ability to survive where others perished to the fact that he knew how to sense danger and how to avoid it. Although he was a known supporter of the Democratic Party, I do not recall an occasion when I heard him express his political views openly. The first and only time I ever saw him adorn the Democratic Party colours was during the 1980 election campaigns. Again, according to Nsibambi, one of the survival tactics he relied on was "withdrawing from public engagement".

Beyond his role as Academic Registrar, Onyango rarely participated in high profile public functions, either as a speaker or as a chief guest. Nevertheless, among his peers, he was one of the most sociable and down-to-earth persons. One found it hard to dislike him or to annoy him. I am tempted to believe that Obote kept Bernard Onyango as Academic Registrar because he considered him as politically benign or mild. He did not perceive him as politically dangerous unlike the many he locked up. Another equally plausible explanation could have been the very office Onyango held within the university hierarchy. It is also probable that the well-positioned people who might have had ambition for some high office at Makerere did not see the office of Academic Registrar as glamorous and significant as that of Vice Chancellor and, therefore, were not attracted to it.

Onyango's presence during those difficult years was a blessing to the university. He used his wealth of experience and administrative skills to keep the university

afloat, academically. While Vice Chancellors were dismissed as soon as they were appointed, some disappearing without a trace, Onyango was always there to maintain some semblance of order and continuity. It was through his efforts that the university put in place a strong staff development programme. This scheme has served Makerere University well and enabled it to continue offering academic programmes of reasonable quality after an almost mass exodus of its senior academic staff during the long years of turmoil. Indeed, Makerere's recovery from the academic ashes is largely due to this scheme. Onyango had the knack of spotting talent. I am one of those he recruited as Special Assistants in 1973, soon after my graduation, although up to that point I had never considered an academic career. My interest as a chemist was in industry. Onyango was a strong believer in the university's motto, "We Build for the Future".

The launching of Makerere University as a national university and the installation of its first Chancellor and Vice Chancellor on October 8, 1970 was an occasion to remember. I had not witnessed such an occasion marked with so much paraphernalia and pomp since the independence celebrations of October 1962. Among the important dignitaries who attended the ceremony were several Heads of State, notably among whom were Julius Nyerere, Jomo Kenyatta and Kenneth Kaunda of Zambia. Before Dr Milton Obote and Frank Kalimuzo, dressed in their new academic robes were officially enthroned as Chancellor and Vice Chancellor, Bernard Onyango, who had been the Registrar at Makerere University College under the University of East Africa, and was now the Academic Registrar of Makerere University Kampala, cited the relevant sections of the 1970 University Act from which both the Chancellor and Vice Chancellor derived their authority. It seemed the Government had not spared any expense to make the occasion one of the most memorable in the annals of the university. This was also the time the Army Commander, General Idi Amin, had fallen out of favour with his Commander-in-Chief, Milton Obote. Rumour was rife that the General was under house arrest but to our surprise, Amin turned up for the ceremony, though late. Clad in military attire, the General came driving himself in an open Jeep. He had neither bodyguard nor the usual escort. As expected, the students cheered and applauded when they saw him, probably because they looked at him as a man who had the guts to defy authority. He must have enjoyed what he saw. It was as if he was making a point that come March 1971, he would be the one in the Chancellor's seat, receiving all the ululations and accolades which Milton Obote was enjoying at this particular occasion.

After waiting for almost half a century to transform into a university, Makerere's honeymoon as a full-fledged national university was short lived, rudely interrupted by Idi Amin's coup d'état of January 25, 1971. I was then a first-year undergraduate in the Faculty of Science and, by fate, a witness to the events that were unfolding in Uganda and at Makerere. What follows is a simple

account written in non-professional language, much of it based on my personal experience. It is a simple account of how Makerere has grappled with the myriad of problems through the years of its existence and its glorious days when it was described as the “Harvard of Africa”. It is also about the misfortunes that befell it immediately after it became a national and the first public university in Uganda in 1970, and the revival of its fortunes up to 2004, when I left. Furthermore, the account is also, in some ways, a recollection of some of the events that have shaped Makerere as an institution of higher learning in Africa, since its beginning in 1922, and the personalities that have been behind the several transformations it has gone through over the years. It is intended to show, from a personal point of view, how this once great institution in some very innovative ways, survived and moved on.

However, the story would be incomplete without rolling the time back a little, to the very beginning of the institution in 1922. Much of this experience is captured in Professor Margaret MacPherson’s book, *They Built for the Future*, published in 1964. In it, Margaret MacPherson ably describes in detail Makerere’s development from its beginning in 1922 up to 1962, the year Uganda gained independence from Britain. While this account will attempt to fill in the gaps for the period 1963 – 1992, the thrust is on the period 1993 – 2004, the time I was there as Vice Chancellor. The inspiration to write this account came from the many informal discussions I had with colleagues, particularly Cole Dodge who used to fly in from Nairobi to facilitate the I@mak.com meetings, Dr Nakanyike Musisi, the I@m ak.com’s Executive Secretary and Dr Joyce Mook, Associate Vice President of the Rockefeller Foundation. As the volume of I@mak.com work grew, I soon realised that, contrary to the critics and popular belief that Makerere University was an ivory tower and as such had little to offer to society beyond churning out graduates whose pre-occupation were white-collar jobs, Makerere’s academic and administrative staff actually had a lot to offer to the community. The problem was that few people knew or cared to know about Makerere’s contribution to the development of our country. The fact that the university too had no well-developed outreach programme, which could have served as a direct link with society, compounded the problem further.

As we shall see in some detail later, the I@mak.com experiment was a revelation that – indeed – Makerere had a lot of untapped capacity to transform itself and the wider society as well for the better. The university had no shortage of powerful innovative ideas coming from the rank and file of its staff; all that was needed were resources and an inspiring and visionary leadership. I also realised that much of what we were doing in I@mak.com and much of the recent experiences the university had gone through were largely undocumented. Even, the little that had been written about Makerere’s harrowing period since 1971, its dramatic recovery from the brink, was fragmented, with much of it written by

outsiders. I conceived the idea that I should do something about it as soon as I stepped down as Vice Chancellor. The big advantage I had over my predecessors was that, unlike most of them, I had been Vice Chancellor for the longest period. Secondly, I was not forced out of office against my will. If anything, I was the one agitating for my retirement. From that point of view, I believed I was best placed to write about my experience as a member of staff and Vice Chancellor of Makerere, as well as about the short spell I spent at Kyambogo as Principal of the Institute of Teacher Education (ITEK) affiliated to the university. Subsequently, I submitted a small funding proposal to the Rockefeller Foundation through Dr Joyce Mooko to support this idea. The Foundation kindly approved the funding, which enabled me to write the manuscript.

From about the beginning of the 1950s when its status changed from that of a College of Higher Education to the University College of Eastern Africa, (a status which in effect turned it into a constituent college of the University of London under a special relationship, as one of what some historians call the Asquith colleges), through the glorious 1960s up to the time it broke away from the University of East Africa in 1970, Makerere had built a solid reputation as an intellectual and academic centre of excellence, in and outside Africa, in teaching and research. Its internationally recognised high academic excellence and intellectual prowess earned Makerere the nickname, “Harvard of Africa”. At the time, the college was attracting high calibre scholars from every part of the world and had some of the best professors on its staff, though I should hasten to add that the majority these professors were expatriates, with just a handful of Africans.

Cambridge and Oxford Universities supplied a sizeable number of staff to the college. Makerere Medical School had become Makerere’s flagship. The clinical disciplines had acquired a new teaching hospital, appropriately called New Mulago, opened by the Duke of Kent on October 9, 1962 as part of the Independence Day celebrations. The school and old Mulago Hospital had also made significant breakthroughs in cancer research, which led, for the first time, to the discovery that certain types of cancers were caused by external agents such as viruses. This discovery came out of Dr Denis Parsons Burkett’s study on the ‘cancer of the angles of the jaws’, which commonly attacks children. Dr Burkett published the discovery in the *British Journal of Surgery* in 1958. This type of cancer is now internationally known as Burkett’s lymphoma. Meanwhile, the young Dr Sultan Karim of the Department of Pharmacology and Therapeutics and his co-workers were making big breakthroughs with their pioneering research on the naturally occurring prostaglandins, known to induce labour in pregnant women and publishing their findings in such prestigious journals such as *Lancet*. This was also the period the Medical School was pioneering the new concept of primary health care in the medical profession.

Meanwhile, Professor Kibuuka Musoke of the Department of Medicine was busy establishing a nephrology/renal unit in the new Mulago Hospital, which would have given many Ugandans with malfunctioning kidneys access to dialysis facilities.

The Department of Literature and English under the stewardship of Professor David Cook, was cranking out literary works of outstanding quality in the form of the novel, poetry and prose. James Ngugi, a Kenyan student who later changed his name to Ngugi wa Thiong'o, is among the celebrated African writers to have come out of Makerere at this time. He published his first play, *The Black Hermit*, while still a student at Makerere. It was performed as part of the festivities that marked Uganda's independence in October 1962. The Department of Political Science and Public Administration had Ali Mazrui and Yash Tandon, among others, as its intellectual gurus. Philosophy and Religious Studies had among its ranks the controversial Kenyan Professor Mbiti who published a lot on African religions. The Margaret Trowell School of Fine Art had Lord Todd, Kingdon, and Gregory Maloba – who designed Uganda's independence statue, which stands in the gardens of the Kampala Sheraton Hotel, Kakooza and Ntiro, among others. Professor Boschhoff of the Department of Agricultural Engineering and his colleagues were busy designing and testing prototypes of a mini-tractor, Kabanyolo Mark I and Kabanyolo Mark II, which was suited to the local soils. At the Physics Department, Professor David Thomson, a product of the Cavendish Laboratory at Cambridge, and his colleagues were busy tracking neutrons, one of nature's elusive nuclear particles, within the equatorial belt. In the Zoology and Chemistry Departments, Professors Biddle, Crawford and Dr Alan Dandy were churning out PhDs and publishing research results of outstanding quality on local problems in reputable international journals like *The Transactions of the Faraday Society*.

Another brilliant Kenyan, David Wasawo, had returned from Oxford and joined the Department of Zoology, while William Banage was also doing well as an agricultural zoologist in the Faculty of Agriculture, later becoming the first African Professor of Zoology at Makerere, having obtained his DPhil from the University of Durham in the UK. Like Banage, John Ilukor had also scored a first by becoming the first African Professor of Physics at Makerere, after returning from the University of Rochester in USA with a PhD in Solid State Physics. The East African Institute of Social Research, now Makerere Institute of Social Research (MISR), was a busy hive of local and international scholars researching on all aspects of African social issues. The governments of the three countries that made up the then East African Community were meeting their funding obligations to the college. It was during this period that Makerere saw an unprecedented infrastructure expansion, which included the construction of several new buildings. And although some politicians and a handful of African academics on the staff of the college had started voicing concern that the Africanisation process at the college was unacceptably slow, this and other important issues were being seriously addressed by both the college

administration and the Government, after all Yusuf Kironde Lule – the first African Ugandan Principal, was now in charge of the college's affairs. One could safely say that by all accounts, Makerere was doing exceptionally well and developing at a satisfactory pace. It is therefore little wonder that the 1950s and 60s are fondly remembered by many as Makerere's golden years. Unfortunately, all this came to an abrupt and tragic end during the years of Idi Amin, which witnessed a horrendous military rule that lasted for almost eight years – from 1971 to 1978. I have little doubt that had it not been for this interruption, Makerere would have been one of the topmost and finest universities in Africa and beyond. Life then was good and Makerere was the place to be.

Idi Amin came to power on January 25, 1971 through what many naively thought was a bloodless coup but which, in a relatively short time, became one of the bloodiest and brutal regimes in modern African history. At the beginning of his rule, Amin enjoyed unprecedented popularity, which probably had never been seen in Uganda. Amin overthrew a Government and a President that had become increasingly dictatorial, ruthless and unpopular, particularly in Buganda. The abolition of the century-old Buganda Kingdom and other equally old kingdoms of Bunyoro, Ankole and Toro; the involuntary exile of the king of Buganda, Sir Edward Muteesa, in London did not go down well with most people. The subsequent arrest and imprisonment of prominent opposition leaders and politicians such as Benedicto Kiwanuka, Abubakar Kakyama Mayanja without trial; the imposition of a state of emergency in Buganda in 1966, which was later extended to the rest of the country after an attempt on Obote's life at Lugogo in December 1969, also angered many Ugandans. All this provided Idi Amin with an ideal environment to stage a coup. As one of the means he used to legitimise his coup, as soon as he came to power in 1971, Idi Amin freed all political prisoners, including Obote's five ministers, and also lifted the state of emergency, which had lasted for almost five years.

Since, by the 1970 Act, the Head of State of Uganda was the automatic Chancellor of Makerere University, it was General Idi Amin Dada's turn to take up his predecessor's mantle in 1971. His installation at the Freedom Square in March that year was more or less a replica of Obote's a year earlier. The pomp and fanfare that went with the ceremony was also the last for the then Vice Chancellor, Frank Kalimuzo. Many students and graduands, particularly those who were staunch supporters of the deposed president, stayed away. On the subsequent graduation ceremonies over which Amin presided, this had become more or less the norm, a practice which did not go down well with the General. To ensure that every graduand attended the ceremony in person, he instructed the university authorities to rescind the degrees of graduands who absented themselves from the graduation ceremony. I am not sure whether the university ever enforced this rule because, despite this threat, many students still continued to graduate in absentia.

Amin's installation ceremony as Chancellor was also, in a way, a test of things to come. At the beginning of his rule, Amin's command of the English language was not up to scratch. He had difficulty pronouncing some academic jargons like the word "surgery" which he kept pronouncing "sugary" and "agriculture" which he pronounced, "kagirikacha". Typical of students, when they heard him say, "*I confer apponi you the degree of Bachelor of Kagirikacha,*" they burst out in a bout of uncontrollable laughter and those who were outside the marquee started mimicking what the Chancellor had said. However, unknown to the students, Amin had his secret service agents disguised as students and strategically placed in the audience. As if requesting to share in the joke, some of the agents asked students who appeared most bemused by the Chancellor's unusual pronunciation of otherwise common words in the academia, to repeat what they had heard the Chancellor say. There was no shortage of volunteers and most of those who obliged were quietly told to board a truck parked nearby. They ended up in the Military Police Barracks at Makindye, headed by a notorious Sudanese Colonel, Hussein Malera. Under him, Makindye had started earning a reputation in some sort for ruthlessness and cold blood murder. It took the intervention of the University Administration and a few other people to have the students released. I am not so sure whether Idi Amin, as the newly installed Chancellor of the university, had a say in their release. Many of them came back with shaven heads. That was the worst way of humiliating a person. Unlike today, in the 1970s, no self-respecting person, and for that matter a university student, would go around in a clean-shaven scalp. It was unthinkable and did not happen. This was the era of the Afro hair-do and the like. My old friend and room-mate at Namilyango, Ochan Omwoya, was one of the victims who tasted what it was like at Makindye in those early days of Idi Amin's rule. Hailing from Acholi, he was lucky to have come out alive.

The graduation in 1972, over which Amin presided for the second time as Chancellor, was an anti-climax for the university. Rumours had started circulating that the Vice Chancellor had disappeared under mysterious circumstances; and indeed, Frank Kalimuzo had not been seen on the campus for some days. His appointment had been resented by some at the university, mainly on the account that he did not come from the academia, but was rather a government functionary. However, over time, as a result of his astute administrative skills, he had won over the hearts of both staff and students.

Professor Asavia Wandira, who was then the Dean of Education, was acting as Vice Chancellor. Staff and students wanted to know where their Vice Chancellor was. The university community was anxiously waiting for an explanation about the whereabouts of the Vice Chancellor but no explanation was forthcoming. Therefore, everybody expected either the acting Vice Chancellor or the Chancellor himself to offer an explanation at the graduation ceremony; after all a Vice Chancellor was an important person and when he went missing without explanation, it becomes everyone's concern, not least the Chancellor. To the

disappointment of everyone, no explanation was offered, and not even a mention of his name was made in any of the speeches. The ceremony proceeded with the usual pomp as if everything was normal. Kalimuzo's disappearance sent shock waves throughout the University community. It also marked the beginning of the university's "dark" period during which its academic activities literally nose-dived and from which it would take decades to recover. The exodus of its high calibre and seasoned academic staff, painstakingly built up, had begun in earnest and with this its reputation and glorious days.

After the military coup, it had become common knowledge that Kalimuzo's days as Vice Chancellor were numbered; it was just a matter of time. Nevertheless, no one expected him to go the way he did. Although he was an excellent technocrat, many considered him Obote's confidant and naturally his continued presence at Makerere in such a high position must have made Idi Amin uneasy. Amin must have looked at him with a lot of suspicion and at some point considered him Obote's mole. The absence of an official explanation fuelled speculation of his disappearance. Those who claimed to be in the know said that Amin's intelligence boys had picked up Kalimuzo from the Vice Chancellor's Lodge on a Sunday. They took him to an unknown location, but most probably Macintyre Military Barracks, for questioning about his alleged constant contacts with Milton Obote in Tanzania. The deposed President had taken refuge in Tanzania, and in 1972 launched an unsuccessful invasion of Uganda in a bid to come back, which ended in disaster. It was further alleged that Frank Kalimuzo had issued Makerere University identity cards to suspected saboteurs who wanted to overthrow the Government. Unconfirmed reports said that after the interrogations at Macintyre, he was summarily executed and his body disposed of in an unmarked grave at a secret location. Whatever the truth, that was the last time Frank Kalimuzo was seen alive. Up till today, no one knows where his remains are. Kalimuzo was the first among the many casualties the university was to suffer in the hands of Idi Amin and his terror machine.

Makerere's woes were further compounded by Amin's decision to expel all Asians, even those with Ugandan citizenship. He gave them only ninety days to leave Uganda. As they started leaving *en masse*, the university lost all its Asian staff and students, including the renowned Pharmacologist, Professor Karim. Majority of the expelled Asians were of Indian origin. As soon as the Asians had left, Amin issued another directive requiring all British citizens to vacate Uganda by December 31, 1972. Although there were caucasians of other nationalities such as Americans, Norwegians and Canadians on the teaching staff of the university, there was no exception. As far as he was concerned, all whites were either British or Jews and all had to go. He could not tolerate imperialists and economic saboteurs in the midst of Ugandans any longer. Such people could easily subvert his recently declared "Economic War". According to him, Uganda was an independent country and, therefore, it was high time the indigenous Ugandans took charge of

their affairs, including the management of their economy. Whether some of the Ugandans who had become quite vocal, agitating for rapid Africanisation had an influence on Amin's decision, we will probably never know. But, for Makerere, what followed was the beginning of a real nightmare.

Although efforts were underway to phase out the white expatriate staff and replace them with well-qualified Ugandans and other Africans, the process was taking its pace. This was partly on the account that, at the time, the country did not have a big pool of Ugandans who possessed the higher degrees – Masters and PhDs, which were the preferred qualifications for appointment to academic posts in the university. Other Africans, in particular the Kenyans and Tanzanians from whom the university could recruit, were in high demand in their own countries to join the teaching staff of their national universities, Nairobi and Dar es Salaam. Even the few who were already on the Makerere staff were leaving. The university was least prepared for the sudden mass departure of its expatriate staff who made up the majority of the teaching staff. Unfortunately, that was what happened. Although some of the expatriate staff affected by the President's order stayed on up to March 1973, which was the end of the academic year and others stubbornly refused to comply with the directive, there were many who could not wait for the unpleasant consequences of their unwanted stay in Uganda. They had seen and recognised the warning signs and what they saw written on the wall was not good news for them. Professor Ian McAdam of the Department of Surgery in the Faculty of Medicine at Mulago was a case in point and was still fresh in the minds of many. Ian, later Sir Ian William James McAdam, a Scottish man, was one of the distinguished professors of Surgery at Makerere. In December 1969, he was the surgeon who performed an emergency surgery on President Milton Obote after he was shot at Lugogo. He was also responsible for the establishment of the blood transfusion services in the country and had pioneered the setting up of the Polio Treatment Centre at Mulago. He had also played a critical role in ensuring the recognition of Makerere's Master of Medicine in Surgery by the various Royal Surgical Colleges in the UK. In 1972, Amin gave him and two of his colleagues 72 hours to leave Uganda or else face the consequences. The damage was done. Perhaps for those who were calling for faster Africanisation at the university, this might be a good step taken by Amin. However, I doubt whether this was the way they wanted to see it happen. I am sure they had expected an orderly Africanisation process. To say the least, this was far from being orderly; it was simply Africanisation in chaos, and in later years Makerere would find it painfully hard to recover from this chaos.

All of a sudden, the academic departments were facing acute staff shortages or left with just a skeletal staff, many of them junior lecturers. What Bernard Onyango and his colleagues did was to persuade as many of the graduating students who had obtained either first class or second class upper-division honours in the February-March 1973 examinations to stay on and join those who had been recruited in the past few years under the new Special Assistant grade – a

training grade. Even graduates who had obtained degrees of similar quality from other universities, like the graduate engineers from the University of Nairobi were quickly recruited into the scheme. One of the attractions attached to this position was a tax-free stipend of Sh1,666.66 per month, which at that time was much higher than the Sh1,300.00 the Civil Service was paying a fresh graduate and which attracted a tax then known as Pay As You Earn (PAYE). There was also the promise of a scholarship for postgraduate training and accommodation in the new postgraduate hostel, Daghamarsjold Hall. Those who had lower degrees were also kept on but under the old grades of Tutorial Fellow, Graduate Assistant and Demonstrator, which at that time were part of the regular University Establishment.

The sudden staff shortage the university was experiencing called for some radical thinking. The choice was either to close down some departments or abandon some programmes altogether, or do what at the that time was considered unthinkable: allow the newly recruited fresh graduates, the Special Assistants in particular, teach full-time loads which under normal circumstances would be handled by a senior member of staff like a professor. However, these were not normal circumstances. This was how my university teaching career was launched. The experience we went through can best be summed up this way: “Today you are a final year undergraduate student with badly written notes, possibly full of inaccuracies, but you managed to pass well in the just ended final examinations. The next day, the Head of Department calls you and tells you that as a Special Assistant, you have been assigned to teach the final year undergraduate class but hardly gives you time to prepare because the time is simply not there. Students are waiting to be taught. The subject you are asked to teach is the one you avoided in the examination because you thought it was too hard or you did not like that British professor who taught it. You thought his English accent was odd. The professor who used to teach it left yesterday after marking the last examination script. Sorry young man, there are no senior members of staff to guide you. He was the only expert the department had in that field. You are totally on your own. Do the best you can and good luck”. Inevitably, in such a situation, you found yourself lost. Moreover, instinctively, you found yourself relying heavily on your badly-written undergraduate notes and on the few textbooks that were there and you hoped what you said would make sense to the students. You also prayed that the students would not be too smart to notice your mistakes. Many of us faced that scenario in July 1973. That is what happened to us and there I was teaching final BSc students some of the subjects I had not been too comfortable with during my final year. Nevertheless, when I look back at the number of students my classmate and colleague, Dr Wilfred Ddamba, now at the University of Botswana, and I taught soon after we completed our BSc in 1973, I cannot help but to giggle with delight for the simple reason that many of the students we taught have succeeded beyond our expectations. The pack includes Dr James Ntambi who is now a full

Professor of Biochemistry at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, USA and Dr Florence Isabirye Muranga, who obtained a patent for her research on banana starch. Whenever I meet them, I get some sense of satisfaction that although it was tough to teach such bright students, it was rescue work well done.

In spite of Makerere's good intentions to retain some of the best students graduating each year, the situation was becoming increasingly difficult, so much so that even the young Special Assistants were now having a tough time coping with the heavy teaching loads. At the same time, the purchasing power of our meagre teaching allowance was rapidly decreasing. Almost overnight, Amin's economic war had created an unprecedented scarcity of most of the basic necessities of life. Making ends meet became a tough struggle, which necessitating taking on more than one job if you had to survive the economic hardship. This was the beginning of "moonlighting" as a way of life for most Makerere dons as well as such practices as "chasing lines" and *kusammula*, which literally meant buying an item on high demand such as sugar, salt or soap and reselling it at an inflated price. Besides the economic hardship and the heavy teaching loads, opportunities for postgraduate training were also dwindling. There were many of us who had registered for higher degrees (Masters and PhD) at Makerere but found ourselves without supervisors who for reasons of personal safety, had to leave the country in haste. Then all postgraduate degrees at Makerere were by research and thesis. Even the few members of staff who had promised to continue supervising their students through correspondence found it impossible to continue, partly because the postal services between Uganda and the rest of the world had become unreliable and partly on the account that the Government of Uganda had made it a policy to read all outgoing and incoming mail. Communicating with the outside world had become risky business.

Frustrated, many Special Assistants started leaving the university and those who stayed had a rough time finishing their degrees. An unfortunate case in point is late Dr Sam Mukasa in the Chemistry Department who in 1969 graduated with a first class honours degree in Chemistry. As was the practice, he had registered for the MSc in Organic Chemistry and was being supervised by the Head of Department, Professor Stephen Landor. However, a year later, he had made such an impressive progress that his supervisor decided to upgrade his MSc to a PhD, a rare occurrence then, and even today, at Makerere.

Professor Landor who had been Head of the Department of Chemistry since 1970, left Uganda abruptly in the middle of 1973. Rumours had it that Professor Landor was Jewish and if that was indeed true, we could understand his sudden and unceremonious departure. For a Jew in Uganda at that time, it was doubly dangerous. We figured the Landors did not want to play dice with their lives. In spite of his training as a paratrooper in Israel, Amin had developed an obsessive hatred for Jews, thanks in part to the influence of his Arab friends. Over time, Sam Mukasa lost touch with his supervisor. It took him almost 15 years to complete his PhD.

There were many other examples of postgraduate students, particularly in the Faculty of Science, who suffered similar fates. I know of another colleague who spent 11 years on his MSc in Physical Chemistry. Many just gave up and left before completing their postgraduate degrees because they were hardly making any progress. The lucky few who were able to complete theirs in reasonable time had either Ugandan supervisors or foolhardy expatriates like the famous geographer, the late Professor Langlands in the Faculty of Arts and Dr Peter Childs in the Department of Chemistry. But they too were forced to leave Uganda against their wishes. At that time, the Faculty of Agriculture was the best staffed with Ugandan PhD holders, many of them America trained – the late John S. Mugerwa, J. J. Oloya, Julius Kitungulu Zaake, Gabriel Kiwuwa, Joseph Mukiibi, Patrick Rubayihayo and John Ddungu – thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation, which had sponsored the Special Lecturer Scheme under which they were recruited. These “daredevil” Ugandans became the faculty’s pillars of survival in those turbulent times. They never abandoned the university. They stayed and weathered the storm, although later JJ Oloya who had been doubling as Deputy Vice Chancellor had to flee.

I left Makerere at the end of September 1974 when the Queen’s University of Belfast offered me a full visiting studentship through the efforts of my supervisor. In July 1973, I registered for the MSc in Coordination Chemistry at Makerere under the supervision of Dr R. J. Morrison, a graduate of Queen’s University, Belfast. He was one of the few expatriates of British nationality who had defied Amin’s order and stayed on, but as the situation rapidly deteriorated, he had to leave Uganda in a hurry in 1974 for his and his family’s safety. Suddenly, I found myself without a supervisor. I started thinking about the jobs I had been offered immediately after graduation. Uganda Development Corporation had offered me one, and so had the Department of Geological Surveys and Mines at Entebbe. Tororo Cement had made me a similar offer but I had turned all of them down in favour of the Special Assistantship at Makerere. Before the turbulent times, it was glamorous to teach at Makerere. In essence, it meant that your grey matter was a little thicker than that of an average folk walking on some streets in Kampala. Now I was not so sure if that was true anymore. I wondered if I had not made a serious mistake by accepting the appointment at Makerere. It seemed to me that, contrary to our egos that we were the smartest, the folks in town were demonstrating that they were actually smarter than the lot of us at Makerere. They appeared to have learnt quickly how to survive in the Uganda of Idi Amin, and had actually mastered the art of beating the odds much better than us. The thought was too depressing. I even thought of quitting the academia all together. At that time, I strongly believed that the jobs I had turned down offered better prospects than Makerere. I had come to the conclusion that, by sticking to Makerere longer than was necessary, I was wasting time and prolonging the inevitable. Like my friends who had quit before me, I saw no future at Makerere.

Therefore, the Queen's University scholarship came in the nick of time. Because of it, I changed my mind and decided to stay in the academia. I guess that is how fate works.

As the exodus of staff continued unabated, the university realised it could not sustain its academic programmes by relying more and more on young and inexperienced staff like Special Assistants, and keeping departments perpetually understaffed. The decision was to look for more experienced and qualified staff wherever they could be found. The big question was where to find them. Could anybody in his or her right senses dare to come to Uganda? The solution came from the most unexpected quarters. Cunning Idi Amin had successfully convinced his Moslem fraternity that Uganda was a Moslem country. Indeed, Uganda was offered membership of the World Islamic Conference on that basis. The Government advised the university to look to countries like Pakistan and India for staff. Apparently, Amin had forgotten that most of the Asians he had expelled in 1972 came from the Indian subcontinent, or was it a question of short memory or perhaps there was nobody willing to tell the emperor he was naked?

On the advice of the Chancellor, the University started sending missions to the two Asian countries to recruit staff in various disciplines and, indeed, there were many enthusiastic candidates from the two countries. However, as the newly recruited staff started arriving in the country and taking up their appointments at the university, nasty rumours started circulating, alleging that most of those who finally came to Uganda were not the ones who had been interviewed by the Makerere team. The students too started complaining about the quality of their new professors. For a start, their command of the English language was an issue. Ugandans were more used to the Queen's English accent, and not the Indian subcontinent accent. Nevertheless, given the serious staff shortages at the time and the fact that the professors from India and Pakistan were at Makerere at the invitation of the President, there was no way the university could afford to be picky or even to be seen to be entertaining imperialist-inspired complaints. To be fair, a good many of them were quite competent academics and did an excellent job. Their presence helped Makerere University to weather the storm of the most difficult period in its history. Of course, there were a few question marks about the competence and qualifications of some of them. For instance, an Economics professor who ended up doubling as an Economic Advisor to the President was alleged to have told Amin that as a well-trained economist, he would help him fix the economy in a very short time. It never happened. I am almost certain that had Idi Amin not been overthrown in 1978, this man would have been labelled a 'Bogus Professor' and even expelled from the country for failing the President. He was lucky to have gotten away with it. By the time I returned to Makerere in July 1979, more than half of the academic staff in the Chemistry Department came from Pakistan and India.

In order to attract the nationals of India and Pakistan to a country that had kicked out their cousins and acquired for itself a worldwide notorious reputation and negative publicity, the incentives had to be sufficiently attractive. Adi Amin made sure his new expatriates were well paid. Their salaries were paid in US dollars, and it was said that for a lecturer, the starting pay was about \$1,100 per month. Where the dollars came from, I am unable to hazard a guess, but given the huge volume of applications and bio-data the University was receiving from India and Pakistan before the scheme was abolished, I am tempted to believe what they were earning at Makerere was much better than what many of them would earn in their respective countries. Another incentive the new expatriates enjoyed was easy access to the so-called essential commodities like sugar and rice. Amin made sure his new guests were not subjected to the same indignity of queuing for foodstuffs, sugar, salt or simple beverages like soft drinks, which he had subjected the Ugandans to without remorse. Instead, they were to buy whatever they wanted from special outlets like the diplomatic shop on Kampala Road or direct from Foods and Beverage, a government company Amin had set up to provide Ugandans with essential commodities that were in scarcity. Unlike Ugandans, expatriates were even free to import these commodities into the country for their own consumption. They were also free to repatriate their earnings in foreign currency to their home countries. Apparently, an illusion was being created to convince them that, even in the absence of the imperialists, economic parasites and other saboteurs, Uganda was doing fine.

Egypt was one of the countries that assisted Makerere alleviate staff shortage. The Government of Egypt, under the late President Anwar Sadat and his successor, entered into a technical cooperation agreement with Uganda, under which Egypt would provide Uganda with professionals like doctors. I remember one sad incident at Mulago in 1974 which involved an Egyptian doctor. Dr Mbaalu, a Consultant Haematologist and by the special relationship which existed between Mulago Hospital and Makerere University Medical School, a *de facto* member of staff of Makerere University, had been admitted to Ward 6 in a critical condition. At the time, I was visiting my cousin, late Mrs Florence Nannono Lutwama, who had a sick child in the same ward. Dr Mbaalu was dying from a large overdose of sleeping pills. He had also administered the same pills to his wife and children. They were also in serious condition. The medical officer on duty when Dr Mbaalu was wheeled in happened to be an Egyptian doctor. I remember him trying hard to fix an oxygen mask on Dr Mbaalu but apparently with little success. He seemed to have been overwhelmed and shocked by the experience. He simply gave up and walked out of the room, never to return. A Ugandan intern, Dr Maweje, who many years later became the Chairman of Mubende District Local Council V, had to take over. In the end, none of them was able to save Dr Mbaalu's life but his wife and children survived. It was said that Dr Mbaalu committed suicide. Apparently, he had stretched his luck a little too far

with one of Amin's wives, Kay Amin. Kay Amin was pregnant. Fearing that her unpredictable husband would soon find out, she decided to have an abortion. In the process, things went terribly wrong and, as a result, Kay Amin died. Dr Mbaalu tried to dispose of Kay's dismembered body but failed. In the end, he convinced his wife and children to take a large dose of sleeping pills under the pretext that they had to go on a long journey the next day so they needed plenty of sleep. In desperation, he nearly wiped out his entire family. I have narrated this experience to illustrate how grave the situation was in the Uganda of Idi Amin. Both Kay Amin and Dr Mbaalu knew very well the wrath that awaited them had Amin found out about his wife's 'unexplainable' pregnancy.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was at the time assisting the University to re-start the Faculty of Engineering, which later became the Faculty of Technology and Veterinary Medicine respectively. The UNDP was also requested to extend its support to other departments in the Faculty of Science which were in dire need of staff. One of the departments which benefited from the extended UNDP support was the Chemistry Department, with the appointment of Professor W. Popiel, a British Physical Chemist of Polish decent. After the overthrow of Idi Amin in 1979, Makerere University refused to renew Professor Popiel's contract. I never figured out why. While preparing for his departure back to Britain, unknown gunmen broke into his residence in Bugolobi and shot him dead.

Professor Popiel's cold blood murder sent shock waves throughout the University, which was reeling from almost a decade of chaos and wanton killings. The motive for his murder was never established but some speculated that it might have been a revenge murder. His assailant was thought to be one of his former students the University had dismissed on grounds of poor academic performance. Apparently, the young man blamed his dismissal squarely on Professor Popiel. The disgruntled ex-student who bore a grudge against the Professor had joined the "liberation" forces in Tanzania and when a chance presented itself, he used it to settle an old score. However, the truth may never be known although, indeed, Professor Popiel was known to be a very strict man who insisted on upholding high academic standards and had little mercy for mediocre students. In him, the Department of Chemistry had an asset. He used his good offices as a UNDP expert to ensure that his students had enough chemicals and other supplies for their practical work. When the University water system broke down, he improvised a means of gathering rain water by installing a few aluminium tanks behind the main building of the department. Besides collecting the rainwater from the roof of the building, the tanks could be filled from a water tanker. When he realised that he had neither the staff nor the equipment and supplies required for the more specialised single-honours course – the 3.1.1 option, he decided to discontinue it. Dr Olwa Odyek, the first African head of the Chemistry

Department at Makerere, succeeded him. I took over from him in 1987, thus becoming the second Ugandan to head the department.

Throughout the '70s, staff shortage continued to dog the University, in spite of concerted efforts to recruit expatriate staff. To ameliorate the situation, even people like graduate assistants, tutorial fellows and demonstrators who did not possess either a first class or a second class-upper division honours degree were mobilised and recruited as full-time lecturers, as long as they had Masters degrees. Time to be choosy about the quality of staff appointed had sadly long gone! Before this crisis, Makerere University could not appoint such people as lecturers unless they had a doctoral degree. Several members of staff were promoted as a way of inducing them to stay. Unfortunately, such promotions did not find favour with many returning Ugandan academics after the fall of Idi Amin in 1978, who rightly or wrongly, believed that most of the people who had been promoted during Amin's time did not measure up academically and, therefore, did not merit the promotions. Phrases like "academic war professors" and "dead wood" were commonplace, coined to refer to the members of staff who stayed and braved the full brunt of Idi Amin's regime which led to some inevitable antagonism between those who stayed – the "stayees" and those returning from exile – the "returnees". It was an unfortunate situation based on the misunderstanding of the horrific times the University had endured and its efforts to remain afloat. There is no denial that some people might have peddled influence to get promoted but there were also many accomplished Ugandan academics who chose to stay and keep the University going and who, therefore, rightly deserved their promotions. Indeed, it was through them that Makerere was able to retain some semblance of a respectable university. Fortunately, as the University faced the new and even more formidable challenges of the 1980s, that talk was soon forgotten.

That was the environment in which Makerere, as a newly launched full-fledged national university, started its academic life. One is tempted to speculate that the transformation of Makerere University College of East Africa into Makerere University, Kampala in 1970, which Amin's Amendment Decree of 1975 changed to Makerere University, was near a still birth. The 1970s which had been predicted to be a decade of rapid all-round development for the country, and for the university, turned out to be a decade of shuttered dreams, stunted growth and bitter memories. The "Harvard of Africa" almost became a laughing stock in the eyes of the international academic community. Many people who did not know how the Makerere University, Kampala Act of 1970 worked wondered why a self-respecting institution could have chosen a semi-literate man for a Chancellor. Little did they know that the University had no say whatsoever in the choice of its Chancellor. The award of a honorary degree of Doctor of Laws, LLD, to him in 1976; the admission of his son who some say was not qualified to enter university; the murder of the pregnant Warden of Africa Hall, Teresa

Nanziri; the unexplained disappearance of a Kenyan female student at Entebbe Airport; the brutal suppression of the students revolt of 1976 in which some students were killed, and other wanton killings which were being perpetrated by State operatives with impunity, did not help matters either. Although, Makerere came out of Idi Amin's era somewhat bruised and its reputation somehow dented, it had demonstrated resilience and its ability to resist all bad practices at variance with good academic traditions. Whatever it failed to do right was beyond its control. In my view, some of Makerere's woes of that era could be attributed to a bad law, the 1970 Act. I doubt whether it ever occurred to Milton Obote and his colleagues, as they drafted the Makerere University, Kampala of 1970 that one day, Uganda would have a person of the calibre of Idi Amin as its President who would go all lengths to become the Chancellor of Makerere, Uganda's premier university.

As we have seen before, the practice of a Head of State being the Chancellor of all public universities by law has been the norm throughout East Africa since 1970. At the time these laws were written and put on the statutes, no one could have foreseen the serious consequences of such legislation. No doubt, Makerere was the first causality of the Government wanting to have excessive control. A significant change during my tenure as Vice Chancellor was the repeal of the 1970 Act in 2001 and its replacement with new Universities and other Tertiary Institutions Act, which reduced Government control over public universities and did away with the Head of State being the Chancellor of every public university in the country. Under the new Act, the appointment of Chancellors became the prerogative of the universities themselves.