

Neo-Colonialism and Patterns of Migration: The Indian Diaspora in Uganda

Ariana Virani

Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, USA



Abstract

Despite the collapse of the imperial world system in the 19th and early 20th centuries, colonialism still plays a major role in dictating international relations and the exploitative relationship between the Global North and Global South. Neocolonialism operates as the silent continuation of colonialism, influencing the development of global policy with the intent to maintain the colonial world order, prioritizing the economic and political prowess of former imperial powers, namely the United Kingdom and its Western offshoots, and perpetuating the exploitation of former colonies and disenfranchised global communities. Patterns of diasporic migration reveal the machinations of neocolonialism under the present world system. This paper aims to reveal how neocolonialism influences patterns of diasporic migration, creating push factors that structurally disenfranchise marginalized communities that were often colonized under the imperial system. Through an analysis of the Indian community in Uganda, this paper will evaluate the conditions of the initial Indian migration to Uganda, the escalation of racial tensions prior to Ugandan independence, the formation of independent Ugandan citizenship policy, and the resettlement of the community after Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion order to explain the mechanisms by which neocolonialism pervades the patterns of diasporic migration. By examining the complex case of the Indian diaspora in Uganda across colonial and post-colonial periods, this research illustrates how neocolonial forces continue to shape migration patterns, citizenship, and belonging for formerly colonized populations, revealing the persistent legacy of imperial structures.

Literature Review

This paper explores the relationship between British colonial policies and Idi Amin's eventual expulsion of South Asians from Uganda in 1972. South Asian migration to East Africa began in the late 19th century, with various push and pull factors resulting from the British colonial occupation of India. The late 1800s would usher in a period of colonial migration to Uganda, with laborers from Western British India seeking

employment opportunities beyond the scope of their colonized homeland.

This literature review focuses on defining refugee diasporic migration as a mechanism for neo-colonialism, centering the South Asian narrative when exploring the fate of Uganda after achieving independence. Highlighting the origins of the South Asian diaspora in East Africa, this paper centers on colonial push factors behind Indian migration to Uganda. The economic, political, and militaristic interconnection

between Britain and its former colony culminated in the rise of Idi Amin, the authoritarian leader responsible for the deaths of an estimated 500,000¹ Ugandans, as well as the eviction of Uganda's South Asian population in 1972. Thus, neo-colonialism is responsible for the forced migration of South Asians from East Africa, exemplifying the hold former imperial powers exploit over their former African colonies and demonstrating how neo-colonialism influences diasporic migration patterns.

Neo-Colonialism and Post-Colonial African Independence

Colonialism continued to foster worsening conditions in former imperial colonies, even following the independence of most African states in the 20th century. Neo-colonialism operates as colonialism's legacy, influencing the creation of modern countries through subversive forces aimed at maintaining the colonial world order.

Kwame Nkrumah, a scholar of international development and the former president of Ghana, is heralded as a leading contributor to the field of neocolonial studies. As president of Ghana, he navigated the country towards liberation from the British Empire and preached the ideology of Pan-Africanism, a collective sense of African identity centered around unity and independence from Western influence. Nkrumah is hailed as the Leninist Czar of Africa, a term coined by Ali Mazrui for his socialist and communist ideologies concerning the future of African institutions.² Future African leaders,

including Uganda's Apollo Milton Obote, cite Nkrumah as the source of their desire to consolidate power back into the hands of African natives after the dissolution of the British Empire.

As Kwame Nkrumah describes:

"Neo-colonialism is based upon the principle of breaking up former large united colonial territories into a number of small non-viable States which are incapable of independent development and must rely upon the former imperial power for defence and even internal security."³

With formerly occupied African territories moving towards independence at the end of the 19th century into the early 20th, neo-colonialism replaced direct imperialism as the primary means of controlling subordinate partners in trade and politics. Neo-colonialism, as a modern colonial modality, relies on the inherent power dynamic that exists between European colonial forces and their newly liberated colonies. Nkrumah asserts that the objective of neo-colonialism is to achieve colonialism while preaching independence, emphasizing the importance of dividing previously colonized regions into unstable independent states.⁴ Independent African states were born of a power vacuum that imperial forces created upon their exits, often poorly executed, leaving the native population ill-prepared to establish functional governments. Uganda's sole higher education institution was Makerere University, founded

¹Monitor, "How many people did Idi Amin really kill"

² Mazrui, *Nkrumah: The Leninist Czar*, 8

³ Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, 7

⁴ Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, 28

in 1922, and only 1,500 college graduates.⁵ Thus, African states were born on unstable foundations, undermined by European economic, political, and militaristic pursuits.

Nkrumah further expands on the use of local people as an “instrument” in entwining colonial military interests into the fabric of the new governments, thereby undermining their state sovereignty.⁶ In Uganda, the lasting impact of the British Empire was observed through the colonially established hierarchy that existed between the local racial groups. Post-imperial Britain used the racial tension it created to foster social division on a regional level and prevent Uganda from advancing as a stable, independent country. Britain used this instability to reestablish its dominance over Uganda, maintaining its asymmetrical power over trade and politics.

The reasoning behind anti-Indian rhetoric in independent Ugandan policies is rooted in this hierarchical structure of colonial Uganda and its inhabitants. On October 9, 1962, Uganda declared independence from the British Empire. Apollo Milton Obote, who served as the country's second Prime Minister from 1962 to 1966, quickly consolidated control over the new government. Obote ran on a platform of African nationalism, citing Nkrumah and emphasizing the role of native Africans in recapturing the wealth of Uganda for Ugandans. Asimwe Godfrey states that “Milton Obote’s first UPC [Uganda People’s Congress] government prioritised ‘Africanisation/Ugandanisation’ in reversing

the colonially instituted asymmetries that favoured the ‘alien’ Indians.”⁷ These policies would only gain traction under Idi Amin’s administration, which began after his violent coup against Obote’s administration. British colonialism created the push and pull factors that led to Indian migration to Uganda and the social hierarchy the country endured after declaring independence, creating conditions for Britain to reestablish post-colonial dominance over Uganda.

The Colonial Context of South Asian Migration

Traditional British colonialism played an instrumental role in spurring the migration of Indians to numerous countries worldwide. The abolition of slavery in British colonies in 1834 created a high demand for cheap labor, leading the British to draw on alternative sources of human labor from its other colonies: “Indian Indentured Trade came to replace the lost black indentured labour.”⁸ With the Imperial British East Africa Company, or IBEAC, lobbying the British Empire to retain Uganda as a colony, sentiments of the region as a viable economic opportunity grew, requiring additional infrastructural investment.⁹ Samuel Ruchman contends that the Ugandan Railway project, initiated in 1893, created the first impetus for Indian migration to East Africa. Stephen Morris corroborates this claim, stating that:

“The conditions for a large immigration were supplied...when the British Government in the late nineteenth

⁵ Monitor, “Wanted”

⁶ Nkrumah, *Neo-Colonialism*, 191

⁷ Godfrey, *Decolonising Identity and Citizenship*, 280

⁸ Vohra and Law, *Beyond the ‘Lunatic Line’*

⁹ Ruchman, *Colonial Construction*, 253

century took over the administration of Uganda, and for strategic and other purposes began to build a railway from the coast to Lake Victoria in 1896.”¹⁰

The initial migration of Indians to East Africa consisted of “coolies”, a pejorative term used to describe unskilled laborers, typically from South India, who were enlisted to construct the railway.¹¹ Britain initially imported around 32,000 laborers to work on the railway project, creating the first Indian community in Uganda.¹² The presence of this temporary community perpetuated British control, “allowing the British Empire to retain control over their enslaved labour-led enterprises.”¹³ Many East Africans posit that this migration created the Indian diaspora in East Africa, with railway laborers settling into the new territory and establishing a lucrative life based on physical labor.¹⁴ However, these workers often faced extremely poor labor conditions and suffered intense bodily harm, including “disease and heat exhaustion due to insufficient protection and the unrelenting desire of colonial officials to minimise labour expenses.”¹⁵ These harsh labor conditions motivated workers to return to India instead of settling in East Africa and forming Indian diasporic communities. Morris states that more than 90% of the laborers returned to India after the work on the railway was completed, arguing that this value contradicts the widely held belief

among European and African audiences that the Indian population of Uganda is made up of descendants of railway laborers.¹⁶ Indians remaining in Uganda after the railway numbered around 6,724, further disputing the claim that the pre-1972 Indian diaspora was primarily comprised of indentured laborers.¹⁷ As Sophie Vohra and William Law state:

“By March 1901, the number of Asian ‘coolies’ employed to build the railway reached a peak of nearly 20,000. Of the total 32,000 or so workers who migrated from India over the course of the railway’s construction, 2,493 are reported to have died in East Africa and 6,454 were severely injured.”¹⁸

Instead, the lasting Indian diaspora prior to 1972 consisted primarily of traders and shop owners, or *dukawallas*.¹⁹ Morris argues that enterprising traders “saw their opportunity when European technical skill opened a way into the interior, and extended their activities inland.”²⁰ The World Economic Forum states that:

“The railway opened up East Africa for trade, and large numbers of ‘free’ emigrants, both Hindu and Muslim, mainly from Gujarat, followed in the years after the Sikh labourers had left. They set up trading

¹⁰ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195

¹¹ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195; Vohra and Law, *Beyond the ‘Lunatic Line’*

¹² Vohra and Law, *Beyond the ‘Lunatic Line’*

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Leggett, *Economic Development*, 212; The World Economic Forum, *15 Facts about the Indian Diaspora*; Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195

¹⁷ Vohra and Law, *Beyond the ‘Lunatic Line’*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Mamdani, *The Asian Question*

²⁰ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195

posts deep in the interior, and became the traders and merchants of East Africa.”²¹

The integration of Indians into the trading economy of Uganda resulted from three waves of immigration, including the migration of the “coolies” at the end of the 19th century.²² Mahmood Mamdani, a professor at Columbia University, is a leading contributor to the study of South Asians in Uganda, having experienced the 1972 exodus himself. Mamdani states:

“It was already possible to identify three groups of Indians in Uganda by the time the Punjabi regiments were withdrawn in the 1930s. The first were those who arrived to run a string of *dukas* (shops) set up by Indian merchant financiers on the initiative of Allidina Visram. Visram had made his fortune in Zanzibar and Mombasa and encouraged small and medium-size commerce deep in the hinterland, including Uganda and eastern Congo. The second group was drafted from India by the British after 1895 to build the Ugandan railway: 35,000 Indian labourers, mostly from Punjab, were recruited to work on the project; after its completion in 1901, about seven thousand of them stayed on in British East Africa. The third group was brought from India to serve in the British colonial administration.”²³

The promise of economic opportunities in East Africa creates the impression that colonial pull factors singularly motivated Indian migration to Uganda. However, the British occupation of

India created push factors that made Uganda an attractive resettlement option for Indians. Mukesh Kumar highlights that India in the 19th century was fraught with economic struggles after the British Empire decimated Indian domestic agricultural low-skill labor industries and created intense pressure on the Indian rural economy. He states that “Indians were thus compelled to emigrate to ameliorate their economic conditions. Events such as the uprising of rural Indian peasants in 1957 created unfavorable conditions to make a living in colonial India, with wealth rapidly shifting into the hands of British moneylenders due to changes in policy regarding land ownership.”²⁴ As a result of these push factors, Indians immigrated to Uganda, not to serve as low-skilled labor, but to engage in trading and commercial practices.²⁵ Colonial influences on India forced many traders and merchants to consider international revenue opportunities with less British oversight and involvement, merging colonial push and pull factors to explain the Indian motivation to migrate to Uganda.

British settlers were inclined to accept Indian immigration due to their existing prejudices against the native African population. The captain of the IBEAC, Frederick Lugard, claimed that “If the laziness of the [African] natives should make it impossible for us to reap advantage, we must find means to do so in spite of them,” encouraging the migration of Indians to Uganda as colonists and settlers, not indentured labor.²⁶ Furthermore, the

²¹ The World Economic Forum, *15 Facts about the Indian Diaspora*

²² Mamdani, *The Asian Question*

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Metcalf, *Rural Society and British Rule*, 112

²⁵ Kumar, *Indian Immigration in Uganda*, 938

²⁶ Nair, *Shops and Stations*, 77

President of the IBEAC, William Mackinnon, “emphasized the need for Indian settlement and recruited Indian personnel for its economic, administrative and defence purposes.”²⁷ According to Mamdani, the majority of Indian traders and colonial workers migrated following the success of the first wave of *dukawallas* and the completion of work on the railway, creating the third wave of migration.²⁸ These assertions positioned Indians as closer equivalents to Europeans than Africans, allowing them increased economic freedom and social liberty in Uganda, though they still lacked the rights that European settlers possessed.²⁹

The racial divisions within Uganda prior to Ugandan independence are comparable to the social stratification observed in South Africa. The caste system perpetuated under the British Empire did not persist in Africa as it did in India, relying instead on a shared Indian nationalism to consolidate hierarchical groups within the Indian community. However, stratification became much more reliant on racial divisions:

“Back in South Africa, it is true that the 20th century Indian generation did not discuss or engage with the issue of caste as much as they did with race. This is due to the racial profiling imposed by the white authority. Gandhi brought a sense of nationalism to every Indian in India; such nationalism overlooked unequal social realities... Gandhi was the leader of the well-to-do bourgeois Indians in South Africa.”³⁰

The social reality of South Africa began to grow in Uganda, as more Indians acquired wealth and established a solid position among the European settlers. The rapidly growing Indian population created a stratified and pluralized society in which Indians occupied a middle-class position. Native Africans still occupied a majority in the newly colonized society, with Indians making up a growing population and Europeans comprising the minority.³¹ The British intended the Indian population to subsidize labor in “housing, retail, manufacturing, medical, and other professional services” where African natives could not perform to imperial standards, creating an inherent superiority of an Indian trader to an African laborer.³² The hierarchy therefore positioned the European population as the social elite, the Indian population as the trading middle class, and the Africans as an underdeveloped peasant class, seldom interacting with one another unless for economic reasons.³³

This colonially imposed hierarchy created profound socioeconomic divides between South Asians, Africans, and Europeans, setting the stage for tensions following Ugandan independence from the British Empire. Savita Nair posits that “In a general climate where power was up for grabs and who controlled what was continually contested, East Africa in the late teens and 1920s represents a hotbed of struggle, segregation, and dissatisfaction.”³⁴ The British community in Uganda saw Indians in a “precariously liminal category between

²⁷ Kumar, *Indian Immigration in Uganda*, 937

²⁸ Mamdani, *The Asian Question*

²⁹ Nair, *Shops and Stations*, 85

³⁰ Yengde, *Caste Among the Indian Diaspora*, 66

³¹ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 194

³² Yengde, *Caste Among the Indian Diaspora*, 66

³³ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 195

³⁴ Nair, *Shops and Stations*, 79

colonized and colonizer,” serving as a middle-man between the Empire and the native Ugandans it presided over.³⁵

The Indian community began to accrue substantial wealth in the late early 20th century, expanding their geographic reach and economic strength relative to non-elite Europeans and African communities. As Indian-owned businesses across the private sector began to grow, power became consolidated into the hands of a few large-scale Indian entrepreneurs, namely the Madhvani and Mehta groups. These groups and others like them served to monopolize ownership over industries like sugar production, with the Madhvani group alone “producing 83,000 tons of sugar and contributing to 10% of the country’s Gross Domestic Product.”³⁶ Indian executives rose to power and began to occupy comparable positions in society to European business magnates, as shown in the table below.

*Figure 1: Table of Senior Executives in Industry and Banking in Uganda 1968*³⁷

Table 2. Senior Executives in Industry and Banking in Uganda 1968

Name of	No. of Senior Executives	Africans	Non-Africans
A. EUROPEAN-CONTROLLED			
Nyanza Textiles	20	3	17
Barclays Bank	38	3	35
Uganda Company	15	1	14
Kilembe Mines	72	4	68
Standard Bank	8	—	8
Uganda Breweries	13	4	9
Uganda Cement Industry	11	1	10
Uganda Shell	11	3	8
Tororo chemicals	8	—	8
Gailey and Roberts	35	8	27
B. ASIAN-CONTROLLED			
Mwico Textiles	21	3	18
Steel Corporation of E.A.	16	2	14
Other Madhvani Group of Industries	66	3	63
Mehta Group	50	1	49
Sikh saw mills	12	1	11
Songo Bay Estates	8	—	8
Bank of Baroda	6	—	6
Damodar Jinabhai	6	—	6
Dayalbai Madanji	10	—	10

The exponential growth of Indian wealth created a shared concern between the Europeans and Africans: the Indians were growing financially powerful rapidly and constituted a growing threat. In response, the British Empire imposed strict land right policies that prevented Indians from holding extensive land titles, stifling the role of land acquisition in the building of Indian wealth.³⁸ Furthermore, discontent among the Black African population began to grow as Indian traders outperformed domestic industries. As Thomas Sowell states:

“Nevertheless, such antagonism grew, as the passing years saw the emergence of small native African businessmen and some educated Africans in Uganda, both of whom aspired to positions in the economy and in the civil service already held by Indians...As of 1952, there were more than twice as many African traders as Indian traders in Uganda, but non-African traders (mostly Indians) did an estimated three times as much business as the Africans. This was despite governmental regulations which hampered non-Africans from setting up shops in some locations...The numerical predominance of African traders may have had little economic significance, but it provided political force of anti-Indian feelings.”³⁹

As a result of the British imposed constraints, Indian economic growth slowed but the community remained well-situated to maintain its wealth following Uganda’s independence.

³⁵ Nair, *Shops and Stations*, 85

³⁶ Methil, *The Madhvanis*

³⁷ Mugaju, *Development Planning versus Economic Performance*, 103

³⁸ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 197

³⁹ Sowell, *Migration and Cultures*, 319-320

The Rise of Idi Amin

Understanding the 1972 Ugandan exodus requires a comprehension of the events culminating in Idi Amin's capture of the Ugandan government. As described in a 1977 news column exploring the relationship between Britain and Uganda:

"Britain cannot have forgotten that Idi Amin could not have captured power without Britain's active, though covert support; nor can Britain and the other Western countries be unaware of the fact that the regime of Idi Amin has been sustained not a little by the continued trade support extended to it by these countries."⁴⁰

As Nkrumah described, Britain's trade interests in Uganda premeditated Amin's sudden seizure of power through direct and indirect means, acting as a neo-colonial mechanism to maintain Britain's grip over its former colony. These same neo-colonial forces would remain present throughout Amin's violent tenure as Uganda's leader, culminating in forces that would reshape the Indian global diaspora.

The stratified racial hierarchy prior to independence in Uganda precipitated Idi Amin's rapid rise to power in 1966. When Britain still served as Uganda's imperial overlord, the local government heavily favored the economic exploits of their own settlements to the detriment of native Ugandans: "Government in the colony from the point of view of Africans, was as a dictatorship designed to restrict their entrepreneurial activities and maximize rents accruing to the metropolitan economies."⁴¹

⁴⁰ *Britain and Idi Amin*

⁴¹ Mbaku, *Political Dictatorship in Africa*, 448

Systemically, African communities were held under the thumb of the empire, unable to achieve economic success. One of the only available professions within British colonies was as a British militant, serving within the British army in an effort to settle local uprisings. For Africans with limited access to higher education, this profession was widely popular, with Idi Amin serving as a British militant prior to his violent seizure of power.

As demonstrated by the wealth of the Madhvani and Mehta Groups, Indians were not subjected to equally suppressive treatment under British Uganda. Proven apt in the trading industry, Indians were able to participate in the market more openly and with fewer restrictions. This difference in treatment inevitably planted seeds of tension between the two cultural groups lacking in institutional power. "Since Asians controlled most retail trading and manufacturing, they were very essential to the functioning of the Ugandan economy. Control of such lucrative monopoly positions, however, resulted in their being resented by Africans, most of whom were unable to fully participate in the economy."⁴²

These pervasive racial tensions persisted after Uganda declared independence, cultivating a nationalist African ideology concerning the large Asian population, which held a dominant share of Ugandan wealth under the first prime minister, Apollo Milton Obote. Obote made some efforts to suppress the growing strength of the Indian population, such as introducing the "grandfather clause" to the Ugandan constitution in 1967, "under which even native-born people could become citizens

⁴² Mbaku, *Political Dictatorship in Africa*, 457

only if one of their parents or grandparents had been citizen—clearly an obstacle created to block Indians from achieving citizenship.⁴³ This lack of governmental protection left the Indian population susceptible to Idi Amin's violent expulsion in 1972.

Idi Amin began as a member of the British militia, similar to many Ugandans at the time. Having grown up in British-controlled Koboko, a rural province bordered by South Sudan, Amin had little access to formal education.⁴⁴ Peter Nayenga contends that "Amin's lack of a formal education resulted from the way Islam was introduced into Uganda rather than from British neglect of the so-called 'remote areas.' Amin's 'misfortune' is that he is both a northerner and a Muslim."⁴⁵ However, Britain's role in bringing Amin to power is indisputable.

On January 25, 1971, Obote was in Singapore at the British Commonwealth Leaders' Conference. Idi Amin and his unmaned group of soldiers stormed the Ugandan government and claimed the presidency. Over a national radio station, "It has been necessary to take action to save a bad situation from getting worse', formed the opening sentence of the proclamation which announced that Major-General Idi Amin had seized power."⁴⁶ Amin represented an opportunity for Uganda to advance beyond the confines of the Obote government, aiming to address the outlying Ugandan concerns about Obote's failure to

"Africanize" the country effectively.⁴⁷ Leopold posits that "The overthrow of Obote either represented shifting class forces, specifically a fascist victory of the petit bourgeoisie and reactionary peasants against a nascent working class, or else it was covertly organised by Western intelligence agencies (sometimes it was seen as both at the same time)."⁴⁸

Idi Amin held a long-standing grudge against the non-African populations that had accrued the majority of Ugandan wealth as of 1971. By 1972, Indians numbered over 50,000, but still "owned 90% of the country's businesses and accounted for 90% of Ugandan tax revenues."⁴⁹ Amin proclaimed that "God had instructed him to expel the Asians," ordering the majority of the population to leave the country within three months.⁵⁰ Amin may have been motivated by overtracism or the growing African nationalism in Uganda, which reflected the racial tensions that preceded Uganda's independence and Amin's rule. Thus, lacking the rights of citizenship, the Indian population, was subject to exile and forced to evacuate the country with limited resources. Amin continued to rule as the "butcher of Uganda," engaging in country-wide genocides that eradicated minority populations and decimated the Ugandan economy, leaving the country in a state of dissaray until his eventual overthrow in 1979.⁵¹

Methodology

⁴³ Sowell, *Migration and Cultures*, 320

⁴⁴ Leopold, *The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil*, 208

⁴⁵ Nayenga, *Myths and Realities*, 128

⁴⁶ Short, *Amin's Uganda*, 48

⁴⁷ Nayenga, *Myths and Realities*, 128

⁴⁸ Leopold, *The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil*, 163

⁴⁹ Dawood, *Ugandan Asians Dominate Economy*

⁵⁰ Nayenga, *Myths and Realities*, 128

⁵¹ Leopold, *The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil*, 163

This paper aims to explain that Ugandan Indian population's pattern of migration was motivated by neocolonial forces through subversive mechanisms. Neo-colonialism influences the global political and economic spheres with an invisible hand, with diasporic migration patterns reflecting the underlying power discrepancies between the Western world and their former colonies. By unpacking the racial tensions prior to Ugandan independence, this paper addresses the central question: how did neo-colonial factors contribute to the eventual expulsion of Asians from Uganda in 1972?

This analysis utilizes case study methodology to support the claim that neocolonial factors motivated the migration of the Ugandan Asian diaspora. This paper postulates that neo-colonial influences created the conditions for an established racial hierarchy in colonial Uganda, setting the stage for racial strife and tension leading up to Ugandan independence. The use of modern race-relations frameworks aids in contextualizing the repeated patterns of intercultural interaction in post-colonial communities, using the Asian condition in the United States as an apt comparison for the societal conditions in pre-independent Uganda. After unpacking pre-independent Uganda, the analysis progresses into independent Uganda's executive administrations, revealing racially disparate policy execution rooted in neocolonial policy-making. The eventual expulsion of Ugandan Indians demonstrates the neocolonial politics of asylum provision, highlighting the reinforcement of the expropriative relationship between the colonizer and the colonized.

A Precursor to Model Minority: the Indian Middleman

Settler-native relations and their resulting social hierarchies form the cornerstone of a colonizer's control over their populace. However, key sociological literature exploring the relations between the colonizers and the colonized fails to account for an intermediary position between the two parties. These societal roles do not exist as two isolated identities, but instead form a spectrum upon which other racial groups fall. Accounting for this intermediary position will allow for a comprehensive analysis of the conflict between non-dominant racial groups, unpacking how neo-colonial influences form social hierarchies that systematically disenfranchise minority groups through different means.

This section will propose an amended version of Frantz Fanon's conception of settler-native relations by incorporating aspects of the 'model minority framework' of modern race relations to expand the scope of the social hierarchy observed in pre-independent Uganda. In this amended model, the Indian community operates as a middle-ground between colonizer and colonized and between settler and native. From this model, the discrepancies in treatment between Indians and native Africans can be evaluated and criticized, explaining the underlying racial tensions between Europeans, Indians, and Africans preceding the Ugandan independence movement. As a mechanism of neo-colonialism, the model minority myth can be used to explain the initial success of the Indian population and their subsequent suppression under independent Uganda.

Settler-Native Relations Prior to Indian Immigration

Frantz Fanon's 1963 book *Wretched of the Earth* serves as fundamental literature for understanding race relations in colonial regimes. As Fanon outlines, the conditions of a colony include the colonizers and the colonized on a binary scale, positioning white, European settlers as those of the highest social regard and the colonized Indigenous population as the lesser, conquered population.⁵² He describes the conditions of such communities as follows:

"The settlers' town is a town of white people, of foreigners. The town belonging to the colonized people, or at least the native town, the Negro village, the medina, the reservation, is a place of ill fame, peopled by men of evil repute... When you examine at close quarters the colonial context, it is evident that what parcels out the world is to begin with the fact of belonging to or not belonging to a given race, a given species."⁵³

Fanon's positioning of the settler as the dominant population directly applies to the social structure of pre-independent Uganda. The white European settlers occupied the top tier of the social hierarchy, possessing overarching property ownership rights and dominating the economy throughout the 18th century. After commandeering the arable land to fuel cash crop production, European settlers had captured the majority of Ugandan wealth, exploiting coercive labor practices, such as low wages, monopolistic trade practices, and forced labor, to increase their profits.⁵⁴ As such, the wealth of the European population relied on the inherent exploitation of the native population, creating a harsh divide

between the colonizer and the colonized in the social hierarchy.⁵⁵

Prior to the arrival of Allidina Visram and the construction of the Uganda Railway, which brought the first and second waves of Indian immigrants to East Africa, European settlers existed alongside African natives in the stratified, binary society that Fanon discussed. There existed a clear delineation between the wealth of the foreigners and the plight of the natives, who were unable to advance beyond the structural inequities of the colonial British Empire. However, the arrival of Indian immigrants would usher in a period Fanon did not predict, as now settlers would not only represent white Europeans, but colored Asians as well.

Application of the Model Minority Framework to Pre-Independence Uganda

The modern conception of the model minority myth is crucial to evaluating the position of the new Indian immigrants in colonial Uganda's social hierarchy. The Indian identity occupied a role in Ugandan society that had not been observed thus far, as the Indian immigrants, though people of color, occupied the same niche as the Europeans in that they were both settlers and foreigners in Ugandan territory. Furthermore, the economic dominance of the Indian community begged the essential question of why African natives were unable to achieve the same levels of success under the rule of the British Empire.

This question and racial paradigm are omnipresent in modern American racial relations, where Asian Americans occupy a

⁵² Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, 39

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Tadaï, *Income Inequality in Colonial Africa*, 3

⁵⁵ Ibid.

similar role in society as the Indians of pre-independent Uganda. The model minority myth relies heavily on the exaltation of cherry-picked, positive traits assigned to a minority group, shaping the expectations and realities of various ethnic groups and their performance as a collective. Asian Americans often occupy the role of the 'model minority,' as a non-dominant group that was able to achieve parallel economic growth to white Americans. However, this myth has lent itself to the systemic oppression of other minority groups, such as Black and Latino Americans, throughout its presence in defining American race relations. Pew Research Center indicates the subsequent impacts of the model minority myth on the formation of racial hierarchies in the United States:

"The model minority stereotype has characterized the nation's Asian population as high-achieving economically and educationally...Additionally, the model minority myth positions Asian Americans in comparison with other non-White...especially Black Americans. Some argue that the myth has been used to minimize racial discrimination and justify policies that overlook the historical circumstances and impacts of colonialism, slavery and segregation on other non-White racial and ethnic groups."⁵⁶

The model minority myth fails to account for the circumstances underlying Asian arrival in the United States, which differentiate the Asian immigrant population from Black Americans. Where Black Americans are frequently descendants of enslaved people, with 57% of the Black

American population citing having enslaved ancestors,⁵⁷ Asian Americans arrived in the United States through regimented immigration.

After the passing of the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act, highly skilled workers residing in Asia began to migrate to the United States, contrasting the low-skilled Asian labor force migration prior to the 1960s.⁵⁸ Presently, Asian immigrants are estimated to be "more likely than the overall U.S.-born and immigrant populations to earn higher incomes, to work in management occupations, and to be highly educated."⁵⁹ As such, the Asian position in the United States is uniquely privileged when compared to Black Americans, who largely arrived in the United States by force and have been systematically and structurally oppressed since.

The glorification of Asian success in the United States is not perpetuated to uplift the Asian community, but to suppress the voices of Black and brown Americans, attributing their failure to achieve parallel economic success with white Americans to character flaws described as inherent to the racial group. Asian Americans continue to be systemically oppressed and prejudiced against but are conveniently positioned as the "successful minority" when convenient to American power-brokers. On the other hand, Black Americans are not only oppressed but presented as a "problem minority." This dichotomy creates strife between these two oppressed groups in American society, further dividing minority racial groups and allowing the dominant

⁵⁶ Ruiz et al., *Asian Americans and 'Model Minority'*, 49

⁵⁷ Cox & Tamir, "Black Americans' Family History"

⁵⁸ Hiebert, Hannah, & Batalova, *Immigrants from Asia in the United States*

⁵⁹ Ibid.

white class to continue reaping the benefits of the existing social hierarchy. The following serves as an example of the model minority myth being weaponized against Black Americans:

“The conservative commentator Bill O'Reilly seized on the statistic that the median household income for Asian Americans is higher than the overall national median income as an argument against the idea that there is any such thing as white privilege, and that systemic racism against Black and brown people simply does not exist.”⁶⁰

The model minority myth appears as though it would benefit the Asian community at large. However, this myth can be applied and rescinded at the will of the dominant racial group. Gary Duong of NPR describes the Asian American group as “privilege-adjacent” in that “society labels us [Asians] the ‘model minority’ when it is convenient. Sometimes we're models to be emulated — when we're not on the receiving end of people's fear, anger and suspicion.”⁶¹ The model minority myth operates on the conditionality that the exalted status Asian Americans hold can be rescinded at any given moment. Whether American politicians want to praise the median household income of Asians or change the script and sow concerns about foreign-held American wealth, Asian Americans will be subject to the whims of the white population. This conditionality ensures the enduring dominance of white Americans over various minority racial groups, as the power given to Asian Americans can easily be taken away when their success becomes inconvenient for the ruling racial class. For this reason, Asians

exist as “privilege-adjacent” and not inherently privileged, creating a middle-ground between white Americans and people of color.

Indians as the Middleman in Pre-Independent Uganda

Applying the model minority framework to pre-independent Ugandan racial relations reveals that Indians occupied a similar position in 19th-century Ugandan society as Asian Americans in the modern United States. Through this framework, Indians in Uganda exhibit structural advantages over native Africans but were still identified as members of a colonized group, having immigrated from another British colony as subordinates to the empire. As such, the Indian community occupies a distinctive position between the colonizers and the colonized, operating as a colonial middleman in Ugandan society.

The economic strength and prowess of the Indian community constitutes an additional departure from Fanon's initial theories regarding the position of the colonized group in a colonial society.

“The psychology of the national bourgeoisie is that of the businessman, not that of a captain of industry; and it is only too true that the greed of the settlers and the system of embargoes set up by colonialism have hardly left them any other choice. Under the colonial system, a middle class which accumulates capital is an impossible phenomenon.”

As the Indian community still were a colonized people, they should not have been

⁶⁰ Duong, “You're Called a Model Minority”

⁶¹ Duong, “You're Called a Model Minority”

able to attain the drastic economic wealth under Fanon's assumptions. However, the Indian community's success serves as an antithesis to the performance of the native African community, creating convenient conditions for the British to attribute African failures to flaws inherent to the native population. The British perception of the native African population is evident in Frederick Lugard's *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*:

"Let it be admitted at the outset that European brains, capital, and energy have not been, and never will be, expended in developing the resources of Africa from motives of pure philanthropy; that Europe is in Africa for the mutual benefit of her own industrial classes, and of the native races in their progress to a higher plane; that the benefit can be made reciprocal, and that it is the aim and desire of civilized administration to fulfill this dual mandate...we are repaying the debt, and bringing to the dark places of earth, the abode of barbarism and cruelty, the torch of culture and progress, while ministering to the material needs of our own civilization...We hold these countries because it is the genius of our race to colonise, to trade, and to govern."⁶²

Thus, the neocolonial power structure shifted to accommodate this rare position, with Indians serving as the midpoint between the perceived primitive nature of the African natives and the advancement and sophistication of white European settlers. While they were subject to oppressive and discriminatory practices, such as limitations on property ownership and obtaining of full citizenship rights, they were cleverly situated

as the success story of British colonizers. In their quest to expand the Empire, the British successfully uplifted Indians out of their plight into the glory of European economic wealth.

The stereotyping of racial groups did not end with the African natives. Lugard, having been born in India, raised concerns about colonizing East Africa, citing behavioral differences between Indians and Africans as reason to restrict access to higher education in African colonies. He coined the term "the Indian Disease," described as "the emergence of an educated middle class, which was seen as a potential carrier of nationalist sentiments. Lugard desired to prevent the 'Indian disease' from spreading in Africa."⁶³ Lugard perceived the Indian population as able to organize around self-determination and serve as a potential threat to the British Empire's global footholds. For this reason, British colonies in East Africa de-emphasized the role of education, restricting Africans' ability to obtain marketable skills and organize for liberation.⁶⁴ Furthermore, social strife between the African population and the Indian population, the two non-dominant societal groups, benefitted the British, as internal struggle limited the pursuit of a broader Ugandan nationalist agenda, restricting the self-determination of the native population.

The differences in Lugard's perception regarding the Indian and African populations, both having experienced the impacts of European colonialism, further solidify the claim that Britain handled its

⁶² Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa*, 616-618

⁶³ Rao, *Africa's Colonial Governor*, 2117

⁶⁴ Rao, *Africa's Colonial Governor*, 2115

subjugated groups differently. Furthermore, Lugard states:

“No kind of men I have ever met with--including British soldiers, Afghans, Burmese, and many other tribes of India--are more amenable to discipline, more ready to fall into the prescribed groove willingly and quickly, more easy to handle, or require so little compulsion as the African.”⁶⁵

Believing that Africans were easily manipulated and influenced, Britain was more willing to prevent African natives from attaining higher levels of education, a mistake Lugard criticizes regarding Britain’s provision of higher-level education to its colonies in India. This school of thought led to the systemic suppression of East Africa’s educational development, leaving African colonial subjects without the critical resources needed to succeed on the open market. The permanent Indian settlement, by contrast, came to Africa as a well-educated group, able to participate on the open market at a high profit margin, leading to further stereotyping of the Indian as an entrepreneurial visionary. The history of India’s trade with the British Empire also influenced how Indians were perceived as a collective; William Mackinnon was predisposed to successful trading with India and thus emphasized the need to move Indians to Uganda to capitalize on its natural wealth.⁶⁶ Kumar states, “this place [Uganda] was marked by the unconditional official support and encouragement to the Indian emigration which widened Indian trading avenues in the interiors.”⁶⁷

It comes as no surprise, then, that the third wave of Indian migrants was greeted by

their successful brethren, the *dukhwallas*, and was set up to succeed on the open Ugandan market at the start of the 20th century. Harnessing the existing relationship between the British Empire and India and their formal education, Indian merchants were able to expand their operations at an exponential rate, outpacing the African community it sold to. The circumstances of their arrival predisposed the Indian community to financial success, though the European perspective attributed this success to character traits inherent to the ethnic group. Therefore, the Indian community was inherently situated as a group superior to the Africans, creating a racial division between the two non-dominant racial parties in Uganda. The institution of Indian businesses led to the adoption of the Indian rupee on the Ugandan market, confirming the Indian community’s dominance over traded goods prior to Ugandan independence.⁶⁸

The Indians became the equivalent of the modern model minority in Uganda. Acquiring the majority of wealth under British Uganda, the Indian community became the middle class, siding with the European settlers by wielding financial power over the African natives. The upliftment of the Indian community made the British Empire’s hold over Uganda even stronger, as the Indian community favored British rule in protecting their profitable businesses.

However, this period of fortune and prosperity was not to last, as the British Empire would soon decide that Indian wealth was no longer of convenience to its broader geopolitical goals. The British government placed dampeners on the wealth

⁶⁵ Lugard, *The Rise of Our East African Empire*, 473

⁶⁶ Fry, *Maritime Enterprise and Empire*, 293

⁶⁷ Kumar, *Indian Immigration in Uganda*, 937

⁶⁸ Sowell, *Migration and Cultures*, 317

of Indians, limiting Indians' ability to acquire extensive land rights beyond 49 and 99-year leaseholds, preventing the expansion of Indian real estate holders.⁶⁹ This policy demonstrates the convenience of the model minority myth, as the British Empire was able to capitalize on Indian profitability when it suited their goals but could reverse the paradigm just as easily, suppressing Indians as it did the African natives.

The result of this prescriptive and descriptive stereotyping was intense racial tension preceding the Ugandan independence movement. A period of racial strife began in the 1950s, as more Africans began to enter the free market as merchants and traders. This period was characterized by race riots, anti-Indian boycotts, and a general undercurrent of anti-Indian sentiment amongst Africans and Europeans alike.⁷⁰ This racial hierarchy precipitated the anti-Indian policies put into place by Obote and Amin, underscoring racial divisions as a mechanism for perpetuating Britain's neo-colonial interests. As such, neo-colonialism exacerbated poor relations between Indians and Ugandans, helping to explain the motivations behind the 1972 exodus.

Neocolonialism in Independent Uganda: The Obote and Amin Administrations

The Obote Administration from 1962 to 1966: Regulation of Citizenship

The Obote administration between the years of 1962 to 1966 illustrates the

shifting social hierarchy in Uganda after the country declared independence. Without the dominating presence of the British, Ugandans had the unique opportunity to reorganize their government to best support the needs of the native population. Born in the Ugandan village of Akokoro and educated at Makerere University in Kampala,⁷¹ Milton Obote represented the vision of Uganda for Ugandans, leading to drastic policy shifts that reorganized the power imbalances between racial groups prior to independence.

A central aspect of Obote's administration was his desire to unite the Ugandan country into a centrally governed body. Obote ran for Prime Minister as a member of the Ugandan People's Congress (UPC), a branch of the Ugandan National Congress driven by socialist sentiments favoring Pan-African Nationalism.⁷² Obote was motivated by leaders like Nkrumah, sympathizing with the vision of an Africa united against colonial forces and driving him to create the UPC.⁷³ Throughout his administration, Obote made attempts to unite the various tribes and kingdoms throughout Uganda, briefly allying the UPC with the feudal Kabaka Yekka party, the monarchist faction advocating for the supremacy of the sub-national kingdom of Buganda and the Baganda ethnic group it hosted.⁷⁴ However, intergroup conflict persisted, and Obote dissolved all kingships in Uganda, uniting the Ugandan people under one central republic.⁷⁵ Obote's decision to unite the Ugandan people and dissolve the

⁶⁹ Morris, *Indians in East Africa*, 197

⁷⁰ Sowell, *Migration and Cultures*, 319-320

⁷¹ State House Uganda, "President Apollo Milton Obote"

⁷² Komala, "Milton Obote"

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Mazrui, *Leadership in Africa*, 542

⁷⁵ Mazrui, *Leadership in Africa*, 552

domineering power of the Baganda kingdom reflected his desire for the Ugandan people to coalesce around a common national identity.

A confounding factor in Obote's plans was the substantial and powerful Indian population, who represented neither the British Empire nor the newly unified Ugandan state. For this reason, Obote sought to diminish the wealth of the minority group. Through the establishment of the new Ugandan constitution, Obote was able to institute policies with disproportionate impacts on the Indian community. The most effectual and discriminatory of these policies were the extensive citizenship restrictions placed on Asian people, limiting their ability to secure Ugandan citizenship and assure their permanence as residents of the country.

Obote's initial administration in 1962 afforded various options to Indian residents of the country. Upon declaring independence, Uganda agreed to a British request to issue a citizenship provision for all former British subjects, as Britain rescinded the existing citizenship issued to residents of a British colony or protectorate. The express language of the 1962 Constitution Article 7(1) states:

"Every person who, having been born in Uganda, is on 8th October 1962 a citizen of the United Kingdom and Colonies or a British protected person shall become a citizen of Uganda on 9th October 1962: Provided that a person shall not become a citizen of Uganda by virtue of this subsection

of neither of his parents were both in Uganda."⁷⁶

Of the 80,000 estimated Asians living in the country, an estimated 12,000 to 15,000 were thought to have obtained citizenship through this amendment.⁷⁷ The language of this constitution disparately impacted the Asian population, of which the majority had no ancestors who were Ugandan citizens, as they were immigrants to the country. However, the 1962 constitution provided avenues toward citizenship for such residents through Article 8(1), leading over 30,000 Indians to apply for Ugandan citizenship.⁷⁸ Of these applications, only around half were processed by Ugandan administrators and the rest were left pending. The language of the article stated that:

"Any person who, but for the proviso to section 7(1) of this Constitution would be a citizen of Uganda by virtue of that subsection, shall be entitled, upon making application before the specified date... to be registered as a citizen of Uganda."⁷⁹

The failure of the Ugandan government to assure citizenship to these applicants, who by their own law held the right to citizenship, illustrates the Ugandan government's true attitude toward the Indian community. Though the constitution protected these residents' right to apply for citizenship, no measures were stated regarding the timeline for the government's processing and acceptance of the application.⁸⁰ Due to this operational inefficiency, Indian residents were unable to

⁷⁶ The Constitution of Uganda (1962), Art. 7, Sec. 1

⁷⁷ Kotecha, "The Shortchanged," 5

⁷⁸ Sowell, *Migration and Cultures*, 320

⁷⁹ The Constitution of Uganda (1962), Art. 8, Sec. 1

⁸⁰ Kotecha, "The Shortchanged," 6

claim the same citizenship rights, becoming subject to disparate treatment under the law.⁸¹ Applicants faced restricted mobility due to their inability to hold a British or Ugandan passport, as Britain had rescinded the only citizenship they held, and several discriminatory measures issued in 1969.⁸²

The initial requirement that a Ugandan must have either parents or grandparents with Ugandan citizenship creates a disparate impact against the Indian population, mirroring techniques used in colonial and post-colonial governments that intentionally disenfranchised the rights of non-dominant identity groups. A striking comparison to the 1962 Constitution are the unofficial grandfather clauses leveled against Black Americans in the South during the 19th century. Under the 15th Amendment to the United States Constitution, Black Americans were given the right to vote, but many southern states instituted harsh regulations under the Jim Crow Laws, such as literacy tests, which restricted Black voters' ability to exercise their new right.⁸³ However, literacy tests tended to disenfranchise poor white voters as well. Grandfather clauses were introduced as a caveat, allowing citizens who had voting-eligible grandparents to exercise their voting right.⁸⁴ White Americans were able to utilize this exemption and vote, assuring politicians and legislators that the white vote was being protected from discriminatory voting regulations. However, these policies disparately impacted Black Americans, who had only been given the right to vote as of 1865. Significantly few

Black Americans were able to vote until the Voting Rights Act of 1965, when racial discrimination was expressly prohibited under Lyndon B. Johnson.⁸⁵

Policies with disparate impact have long been weaponized against non-dominant communities in colonial or post-colonial governmental structures, serving as a neo-colonial mechanism to continue suppressing marginalized groups. As demonstrated by the United States, neo-colonial regimes have the tendency to harness colonial tactics, not to advance a broader colonial goal, but to reinforce the existing social hierarchies constructed during colonial times.

In the case of Obote, these neo-colonial policies were used to reverse the social hierarchy, institutionally stripping the Indian community of the powers and privileges it held under British rule. Obote used such policies to advance his goal of Uganda for Ugandans, issuing government protections for the native population of the country while disenfranchising the wealthy Asian population. Obote's administration and its failures to grant citizenship to Asian residents served as the precursor for Amin's exodus of 1972, as the majority of the Indian population did not hold state-recognized protections to prevent their expulsion.

The Amin Administration: Targeted Expulsion

Idi Amin rose to power through a violent coup in 1971, overthrowing Obote out of his second presidential administration.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Greenblatt, "Racial History of the Grandfather Clause"

⁸⁴ Greenblatt, "Racial History of the Grandfather Clause"

⁸⁵ United States Constitution, Amend. 15, Sec. 4(a)

Scholars will attest to the neocolonial undertones of his rise to power, attributing his training as a British militant as a precursor to the violence of his tactics during his reign and citing the CIA as a major contributor to the success of Amin's coup.⁸⁶ However, this section will focus heavily on the global response to the refugee crisis generated by Amin's most divisive actions as President. When considering the United Kingdom and Canada, the two largest recipients of asylum seekers fleeing Uganda, neocolonial tendencies in immigration policy can be noted and criticized as a perpetuator of the exploitative relationship between former colonizers and their newly independent colonies.

On August 5, 1972, the newly asserted President of Uganda, Idi Amin, issued an announcement that would shift the trajectory of the Ugandan Asian population. After an incendiary speech declaring there was no place in Uganda for the 80,000 Asians living there, Amin announced that all Asians had ninety days to wrap up their affairs and leave the country.⁸⁷ The codified law was described as follows:

"The oral declarations were incorporated into the domestic legal order on August 9, with the promulgation of a decree cancelling, arbitrarily and effective forthwith, all entry permits and certificates of residence issued to 'any person who is of Asian origin, extraction or descent, and who is a subject or citizen of the United Kingdom, India, Pakistan, or Bangladesh.'"

The law was later expanded to include all residents of any national origin with ethnic

ties to any of the above countries.⁸⁸ This order effectively served to remove all South Asian presence in Uganda, with Amin promising to extract Asians regardless of their citizenship standing, though verified citizens were eventually issued identity cards and were forced to engage in subsistence farming in rural Ugandan areas.⁸⁹ No Asian was protected from the complete uprooting of their lives, as citizens were made to abandon their existing businesses and migrate to the countryside to engage in poorly subsidized farmwork.

The areas in which Ugandan Asian asylum seekers were resettled were largely dictated by neo-colonial decision making. Canada and the United Kingdom were two of the top providers of asylum for this population, but the reasoning behind why these countries opened their doors to this population remain contested. While politicians holding office at this time touted their unshakeable commitment to humanitarianism, the potential economic contributions of the incoming Ugandan Indian population played a major role in their ability to be resettled in powerful Western countries.

Britain began to accept Indian immigrants as a demonstration of its commitment to morality, as the asylum seekers had been citizens of the British Empire until only ten years before. However, the floodgates were hardly thrown open, as Britain had been seeking to limit the number of East African Asians settling in the country

⁸⁶ Leopold, *The Story of Africa's Icon of Evil*

⁸⁷ Kotecha, "The Shortchanged," 2

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Kotecha, "The Shortchanged," 13

prior to the exodus.⁹⁰ Britain accepted around 28,000 individuals from Uganda, making the Ugandan Asian population of Britain one of the largest groups of displaced people to ever enter the country.⁹¹

Britain's willingness to accept these immigrants was not purely out of charity. At the onset of the expulsion order, Britain sought to limit the number of migrants it would accept into the country, even hesitating to provide asylum to registered British citizens.⁹² The government already faced massive pressure to restrict the number of Black and brown immigrants, so the prospect of providing asylum to over 50,000 potential South Asian immigrants daunted the British public.⁹³ Britain needed to sanitize the image of this immigrant population in order to fit broader economic goals, as the government knew of the wealth of Ugandan Asians, with the image of the industrious, marketable Indian dominating the memory of a colonial Uganda. These immigrants were rebranded as an "educated, worthy group of refugees" by the British government, who touted their financial prowess, entrepreneurial spirit, and demonstrated success on the Ugandan market as reason to accept them as a contributing refugee population.⁹⁴ Eventually, the Indian population found its footholds in British society, and was able to rise to paralleled economic accomplishments to those it reached in Uganda.

Canada followed suit with the United Kingdom, but positioned itself as an ally to

the Ugandan Asian community from the onset of the crisis. The former Prime Minister Pierre Elliot Trudeau had famous connections with the Aga Khan, the religious leader of a large Shia Muslim sect, the Ismailis, who dominated a large share of the Ugandan Indian population. Trudeau stated:

"For our part we are prepared to offer an honorable place in Canadian life to those Ugandan Asians who come to Canada...Asian immigrants have already added to the cultural richness and variety of our country, and I am sure that those from Uganda will, by their abilities and industry, make an equally important contribution to Canadian society."⁹⁵

Following this declaration, Canada began to prepare for the incoming wave of immigrants, evaluating the thresholds of their resources and deciding on the some 6,000 eventual immigrants to allow into the country.⁹⁶ The British High Commission had appealed to western countries for assistance in the resettlement, and Canada responded by sending a team of medical professionals to Kampala to hand select the immigrants on an application basis. On September 6, 1972, the Canadian office opened its doors to applicants, using the Order-in-Council P.C. 1967-1616, or the 1967 Points System, to categorize the viability of each immigrant's resettlement

⁹⁰ Kotecha, "The Shortchanged," 14

⁹¹ The National Archives, "Marking the 50th Anniversary"

⁹² Nasar, "When Uganda Expelled Its Asian Population"

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Nasar, "When Uganda Expelled Its Asian Population"

⁹⁵ Basha, "Connecting Flights"

⁹⁶ Raska, "Canada's Oppressed Minority Policy"

into Canada.⁹⁷ The provisions of the 1967 Points System follow:

“A points system was established in which potential immigrants were given a score up to a set maximum in the following nine categories: education and training; personal character; occupational demand; occupational skill; age; pre-arranged employment; knowledge of French and English; the presence of a relative in Canada; and employment opportunities in their area of destination. Individuals receiving 50 points or more out of a possible 100 would be admitted as independent immigrants.”⁹⁸

The 1967 Points System illustrates the critical aspect of the provision of humanitarian assistance during a refugee crisis. Canadian officials felt confident that the majority of applicants seeking asylum would meet the Point System requirements as the collective refugee group was seen as highly educated and multilingual.⁹⁹ However, not every applicant would meet these qualifications, leading officials in Ottawa to urge the medical team in Kampala to use “humanitarian considerations” when granting visas to “desirable candidates who might not otherwise be admitted into Canada.”¹⁰⁰

The Canadian Points System granted 6,175 visas to 2,116 families arriving in the country from Uganda on November 6, 1972, the established deadline for the complete exit of the Asian population.¹⁰¹ The use of this

system demonstrates the neo-colonial undertones behind the provision of asylum to Ugandan Asians. Characteristics such as education and training, occupational demand and skill, and prearranged employment constitute an evaluation of an asylum seeker’s potential economic contributions to their new country. The 1967 Points System has been widely criticized, with scholars citing that the requirements disparately favor European immigrants that are more likely to reach the standards for acceptance than applicants for asylum from the Global South.¹⁰² Furthermore, the expropriation of skilled labor from the Global South for economic contributions in the Global North mirrors the neocolonial world order and making the Points System a mechanism of perpetuating neocolonialism. The case of the Ugandan Asians was unique, in that this non-European population was able meet the Point System’s stringent requirements. For this reason, the resettlement of Ugandan Asians into Canada would form the country’s first major resettlement of non-European immigrants, numbering around 8,000 at the end of the exodus.¹⁰³

The United Kingdom and Canada constituted the largest providers of asylum to Ugandan Asians fleeing Amin’s 1972 expulsion order. However, the reasons why these countries chose to provide this population with asylum carry deeply neocolonial undertones, influencing the migration pattern of the Indian diaspora through indirect means. While the provision

⁹⁷ Raska, “Canada’s Oppressed Minority Policy”

⁹⁸ Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21, “Immigration Regulations”

⁹⁹ Raska, “Canada’s Oppressed Minority Policy”

¹⁰⁰ Raska, “Canada’s Oppressed Minority Policy”

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Khan, “Canada’s Immigration System is a Moral Failure”

¹⁰³ Zaidi, “Ugandan Asians”

of aid was claimed to be for humanitarian reasons, both British and Canadian officials cited the economic viability of accepting well-endowed, British-educated individuals to their countries. The neocolonial principle of resource extraction applies to the emphasis on skilled labor and economic contribution when evaluating whether an applicant deserves asylum.

While Obote's administration and the subsequent provision of asylum aid did not reflect the pursuit of a broader colonial goal, neocolonial patterns and policies are evident when considering the resettlement of the Indian diaspora. Obote was able to use neocolonial policies to reverse the social order in Uganda and return Ugandan wealth to the native citizens of the country. After the 1972 expulsion order, the countries in which refugees could seek asylum were motivated in large part by the potential of their economic and social contributions, perpetuating neocolonial systems of model minority thinking and human labor resource extraction. As such, it can be postulated that the migration of the Indian diaspora was motivated by neocolonialism through mechanisms such as policy setting with intentional disparate impact and selective asylum provision to non-European immigrants.

Conclusion

The case of Ugandan Indians reveals how the use of neocolonial tactics can motivate the migration patterns of ethnic diasporas. The neocolonial influence on this diaspora's migration began with the establishment of clear racial hierarchies in pre-independent Uganda, enforcing a strict racial hierarchy that prioritized the needs of the Empire and the subjugated non-European members of the Ugandan colony.

The first independent Ugandan administration demonstrated Obote's use of neocolonialism as a mechanism to advance his broader socio-political goal to reverse the racial hierarchy and return power to the hands of native Ugandans. The patterns of resettlement observed after Idi Amin's 1972 expulsion order underscore neocolonial motivations behind accepting asylum seekers into a Global North country, emphasizing the inherent expropriation of skilled labor from the Global South to fuel the economies of the Global North.

Neocolonialism lies beneath the surface of the world system, reinforcing the colonial order and providing means for the Global North to continue its exploitative relationship with the Global South. While colonialism perpetuated the racial, social, and economic hierarchies witnessed among the world order currently, neo-colonialism serves as its offshoot, using subversive tactics and mechanisms to maintain the standing subjugation of former colonies. The pervasive presence of neocolonialism when considering the migration of Ugandan Asians demonstrates the ease by which politicians and governments can harness neocolonial tactics to support the world order and continue expropriating non-Western assets for Western consumption.

The case study analysis of the model minority myth in the United States indicates the burgeoning position of the Indian community as an effective middle class in pre-independence Uganda. The racial hierarchy enforced by the British Empire touted the economic prowess of the Indian community while simultaneously stymying the strength of the Indian population through checks on real estate ownership and limitations on full citizenship. The Indian community became the model minority of Uganda, illustrating the strength of neocolonial attempts to preserve the racial

power structure that existed under the British Empire. The desire to preserve this hierarchy is rooted in the neocolonial pursuit to maintain the global world order, maintaining the United Kingdom's position as a major economic superpower through its continual exploitation of its fragile former colonies after independence.

Independent Uganda also implemented neocolonial practices, but to advance contrarian political goals. Obote's administration used the Ugandan constitution to limit access to Ugandan citizenship, leaving over half of the Indian population without British nor Ugandan citizenship upon independence. The administration proceeded to use operational inefficiency as a means to restrict the number of Indians who ultimately obtained Ugandan citizenship, reversing the racial hierarchy of independent Uganda and restoring power to the African community. However, the tactics Obote used advanced the broader neocolonial goal of destabilizing the foundations of Uganda's democracy, priming the country to continue being exploited by the United Kingdom and other Western forces.

Idi Amin's expulsion order pulled back the curtain on the subversive methods the United Kingdom had used to instill racial tension in Uganda. Shining a light on the United Kingdom and Canada's response to the refugee crisis reveals clandestine economic motivations behind providing asylum to refugee migrants. The United Kingdom's positioning of the Indian community as an enterprising and profitable populace indicates its true motivation to accept Indian immigrants: the country expected to reap financial benefits from the expropriation of skilled Indian labor. Canada's 1967 Point System within its immigration policy paints a similar picture,

ranking the viability of refugee resettlement based on factors including the refugee's occupational skill and potential economic contribution to Canada. The covert economic intentions underlying the United Kingdom and Canada's provision of asylum to this population illustrates broader neocolonial goals in immigration policy making. Both Western countries sought to exploit the skilled labor leaving Uganda, leading the United Kingdom and Canada to experience some of their largest refugee resettlements in history.

This analysis has revealed the depth to which neocolonialism has entrenched itself in the economic and political operations of the modern world, influencing how powerful Western countries continue to exploit former colonies under an imperial world order. Understanding the silent machinations of neo-colonialism is critical to preventing the use of such tactics against non-European populations in future administrations. Recognizing these patterns underscores the need for policies that empower rather than exploit displaced populations. Future research must further explore the intersections of neocolonialism, forced migration, and global labor distribution to dismantle enduring neocolonial inequalities and forge the path to a more equitable world system.

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