

Memories of Golden Years

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I came to Makerere in 1961 as a young man of 25. I was working on my doctorate in economics at Yale University when I decided that I had been away too long and needed to get back home to play my part in nation-building. East African countries were then on the verge of independence. There was a desperate shortage of educated persons to take over from the departing expatriate staff. In fact I was in such a hurry to rush home that I did not even take up my fellowship to enable me to finish my doctorate. I had to earn my doctorate the hard way burning midnight oil while struggling with my teaching and parental responsibilities!

Makerere University College was at that time the only university level institution in East Africa. In fact it trained students not only from the three East African countries but also further down from Nyasaland and Northern and Southern Rhodesia-then members of the Central African Federation controlled largely by European settlers. The Lectureship in Economics that I had applied for had become vacant when the incumbent Mwai Kibaki resigned to take up the post of the Executive Officer of Kenya African National Union. In subsequent years, I used to boast that in my first job, I succeeded the President of Kenya!

This was my first visit to Kampala. I was astonished by the lushness and beauty of the countryside. Nestled amidst hills and valleys, Kampala was a highly picturesque city. The Makerere campus was spread out on a hill amidst rolling lawns and groves of trees and bushes. Apart from the central administration, the campus had halls of residence, several faculties, science laboratories and sports facilities including tennis and squash courts and a swimming pool.

As an academic institution, Makerere boasted of high standards. Entry to Makerere was fiercely competitive. The faculty was largely expatriate, with most staff members drawn from British universities. The graduating students were awarded London University degrees, which also reviewed the course content and examination papers and student grades. Its medical and agricultural schools enjoyed international reputation while the East African Institute of Social Research was a leader in Africa on anthropological and sociological research. It also boasted an excellent School of Fine Arts.

The four years I spent at Makerere were truly its golden period. The College attracted outstanding scholars to its faculty. A considerable amount of money poured in to strengthen its medical, agriculture and social science faculties. Many gifted graduate students came from abroad to work on their doctorates for prestigious universities. Numerous seminars and conferences held at the campus added to its vibrant intellectual environment. The social life at Makerere was enjoyable and easy going.

Many of our students subsequently became well-known names. I recall Benjamin Mpaka, active as a student journalist, who was twice elected as the President of Tanzania. Apollo Nsibambi, my student in Economics, went on to become Uganda's Prime Minister. Another of my students, the late Philip Ndegwa from Kenya, held most of the top civil service jobs, was Governor of the Central Bank and a leading businessman, while also writing several books and articles on African development problems. James Ngugi, as he was then, became a famous novelist while still an undergraduate with his book *Weep Not Child*. John Nagenda occupied high positions in journalism ending up as a Presidential spokesman. There were many others who later became permanent secretaries, central bank governors, ministers and prominent businessmen.

Among the foreign graduate students, some friends in the social sciences come to mind. Joseph Nye, who did his doctoral dissertation for Oxford on East African Integration, subsequently became Dean of the Kennedy School of Government at Harvard. Richard Jolly, my colleague at Yale, went on to become Director of the Institute for Development Studies at Sussex and Deputy Director of UNICEF. Michael Todaro won great distinction as the creator of a new model of rural-urban migration and became the author of a best selling text on economic development. Charles Frank went on to become a prominent Washington policy advisor and Chief

Economist, European Development Bank. Brian van Arkadie and Reginald Green became prominent development economists and advisors to African governments and international agencies.

When I joined Makerere, I was among a handful of East African members of the academic staff. Among them were famous artists Gregory Maloba and Elimu Njau; the biologist David Wasawo who subsequently became Deputy Vice-Chancellor, University of Nairobi; the geographer Simeon Ominde, later Professor of Geography and Director, Centre for Population Studies, also at Nairobi; and Senteza Kajubi, a prominent educationist. In subsequent years, the East African contingent was much reinforced by the addition of the eminent historian Alan Ogot, the world famous Ali Mazrui and Yash Tandon, now Executive Director, South Centre. The Ugandan poet, Bitek Okot, the author of *The Song of Lawino*, was a major literary figure at the campus. Among the economists, I recall Semei Nyanzi and Yoeri Kyesimira who went on to become respectively the Director of the Uganda Development Corporation and a senior advisor at UNEP.

The campus also hosted many well-known expatriate academics. Colin Leys, a former Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford, was Professor of Political Science, and Raymond Apthorpe of the Sociology Department, later to become Professor at the Institute of Social Studies at the Hague. Paul Clarke, who headed the newly created Economic Development Research Project (EDRP), Philip Bell, Professor of Economics and Ian Livingstone, who subsequently became Professor at the University of Essex, were all prominent economists.

Makerere also attracted expatriate literary figures. Paul Theroux, now a famous novelist, was then teaching English in the Department of Extra-Mural Studies. In 1965/1966, Makerere was honoured to have as a Visiting Professor no less a figure than VS Naipaul, the controversial writer, who subsequently won the Nobel Prize for Literature. Makerere also hosted the first ever conference of African writers that brought together leading novelists and poets from all over Africa.

Let me end this brief memoir with some personal remarks. My PhD thesis for Yale, completed in 1964, dealt with the tax system in Uganda. I criticized several aspects of the then tax system and proposed a number of reforms. I was astonished when so many of my ideas were picked up by the Ministry of Finance and incorporated into new taxes. Never before or since in my life have my recommendations been adopted so fully or as swiftly as on this occasion! My dissertation was later published as a monograph under the title, *Taxation for Development: A Case Study of Uganda*. My research was integrated into the EDRP headed by Paul Clarke. This was a major initiative supported by the Rockefeller Foundation to boost economic policy research and enhance national capabilities in this field. This successful model was later replicated in Kenya and Tanzania with immensely beneficial results.

It was also during this period that I conceived the project of a book to be written by East African Asian scholars on the history and social, political and economic life of the East African Asian community. On my arrival at Makerere, I was astonished to find that despite their presence in East Africa for going on to three quarters of a century, not one book had been written on the subject by a member of the community, in sharp contrast to a plethora of volumes on the European and African communities. This initiative resulted in the publication by the Oxford University Press of my first edited book entitled, *Portrait of a Minority: Asians in East Africa*.

I can hardly end this memoir without mentioning that among the ties that bind me to Kampala are that I met my wife Neela Korde there, who was among the first Ugandan women lawyers, and that our first daughter Kamini was born there.

Much of my professional and social life revolved around the campus. Yet I was not totally cut off from the Kampala society. To begin with, my membership of the Korde family ensured that I was invited to quite a few dinners and gatherings of the Asian community in Kampala. There were family picnics in the magnificent Entebbe gardens. I often had lunch with friends and relatives at the venerable Lake Victoria Hotel in Entebbe. With other Makerere staff members, I went occasionally to Susana night club for the music - and curvaceous dancers!

I was a guest at the homes of many of the leading Asian personalities of those times - Sir Amar Maini, Dr M M Patel, Mahendra Mehta, Jayant Madhvani. Although not a political activist, I counted several politicians among my friends. I met Shafiq Arain, Gurdial Singh and Narendra Patel quite often. I got to know several ministers including John Kakonge and Grace Ibingira. The Prime Minister of the Buganda Government, Mr. Mayanja-Nkangi was a friend from my Oxford days. In fact, at his request, I chaired a very sensitive Commission of Inquiry into the Public Expenditure of the Buganda Government in 1964-65. I interacted frequently with young Ugandan professionals and civil service technocrats and served as a member of a Working Party on the Preparation of the first Development Plan for Uganda.

I left Makerere in 1965 for the United States where I was a Visiting Fellow at the Economic Growth Centre, Yale University and returned the following year to take up a research post at the Institute for Development Studies, University of Nairobi. Makerere was not spared the violence and upheaval that overwhelmed the unfortunate country in later years. Makerere was never the same but fortunately, the only memories I retain of the place are those of its most glorious years.

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