REFUGEES AND PATRONAGE:
A POLITICAL HISTORY OF UGANDA'S "PROGRESSIVE" REFUGEE POLICIES

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Abstract

Uganda's self-reliance policy for refugees has been recognized as among the most progressive refugee policies in the world. In contrast to many refugee-hosting countries, it allows refugees the right to work and freedom of movement. It has been widely praised as a model for other countries to emulate. However, there has been little research on the politics that underlie Uganda's approach. Why has Uganda maintained these policies despite hosting more refugees than any country in Africa? Based on archival research and elite interviews, this article provides a political history of Uganda's self-reliance policies from independence to the present. It unveils significant continuity in both the policies and the underlying politics. Refugee policy has been used by Ugandan leaders to strengthen patronage and assert political authority within strategically important refugee-hosting hinterlands. International donors have abetted domestic illiberalism in order to sustain a liberal internationalist success story. The politics of patronage and refugee policy have worked hand-in-hand. Patronage has, in the Ugandan case, been integral to the functioning of the international refugee system. Rather than being an inevitably "African" phenomenon or the unavoidable legacy of colonialism, patronage politics has been enabled by, and essential to, liberal internationalism.

Introduction

Uganda is widely regarded as having an exceptionalist refugee policy. It currently hosts more refugees than any other country in Africa, around 1.4 million.[2] Yet, it has adopted a very different set of refugee policies compared to other countries in the region. While its major refugee hosting neighbours, such as Kenya and Tanzania, compel refugees to live in closed camps and deny them the right to work, Uganda has adopted a different approach. It provides refugees with the right to work and significant freedom of movement. It has incorporated these rights within its national legislation,[3] and its rural settlements provide refugees with plots of land to cultivate.[4] This approach has become known as the Ugandan self-reliance

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2 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'Uganda comprehensive refugee response portal', 31 January 2021, <https://data2.unhcr.org/en/country/uga> (13 March 2021)

3 Parliament of Uganda, 'The Ugandan refugees act (of 2006)', <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b7baba52.pdf> (12 January 2021).

4 For an analysis of the impact of the model on refugees and proximate host communities, see: Alexander Betts, Imane Chaara, Naohiko Omata, and Olivier Sterck, 'Refugee economies in Uganda: What difference does the self-reliance model make?' (Working Paper, Refugee Studies Centre, University of Oxford, 2019). Available at: <https://www.refugee-economies.org/publications/refugee-economies-in-uganda-what-difference-does-the-self-reliance-model-make>

model. Uganda has recently received widespread praise for this approach.[5] In 2016, for example, the BBC proclaimed that 'Uganda is one of the best places to be a refugee'.[6] UNDP[7] and the World Bank[8] published subsequent reports describing Uganda's refugee policy as 'progressive'.

This leads to a largely unanswered research question: what explains Ugandan exceptionalism when it comes to refugees? Why have successive governments since independence been willing to provide socio-economic rights to refugees, when so few other host countries in Africa do similarly? In order to answer this question, this article provides a political history of Uganda's self-reliance model for refugees, examining and explaining continuity and change within the approach from Ugandan independence in 1962 until the present day. The question matters both because it may offer insight into the replicability of the model at a time when the Ugandan approach has become a template for global refugee policy, and because historicising the politics behind the model offers an opportunity to critically interrogate ahistorical assumptions about the "progressive" provenance of the policy framework.

5 For example, the *New York Times* described Uganda as 'a global model for how it treats refugees', the *Washington Post* proclaimed 'Uganda treats refugees better than the United States', and the *Economist* declared 'Uganda is a model for dealing with refugees'. These sources are available at: *New York Times, 'As rich nations close the door on refugees, Uganda welcomes them',* 28 October 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/28/world/africa/uganda-refugees.html> (21 February 2021); Jeanne Beare, 'Opinion: Uganda treats refugees better than the United States', *Washington Post*, 5 July 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/uganda-treats-refugees-better-than-the-united-states-does/2019/07/03/1a246300-9c27-11e9-83e3-45fded8e8d2e_story.html> (21 February 2021). *The Economist*, 'Why Uganda is a model for dealing with refugees', 26 October 2016, <https://www.economist.com/the-economist-explains/2016/10/25/why-uganda-is-a-model-for-dealing-with-refugees> (21 February 2021).

6 BBC, 'Uganda: One of the best places to be a refugee', 13 May 2016,<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/36286472> (21 February 2021).

7 UNDP. 'Uganda's Contribution to Refugee Protection and Management', 27 June 2017, <https://www.ug.undp.org/content/uganda/en/home/library/SustainableInclusiveEconomicDevelopmentProgramme/UgandascontributiontoRefugeeProtectionandManagement.html> (21 February 2021).

8 World Bank, 'An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management', 1 July 2016, <http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/259711469593058429/An-assessment-of-Ugandas-progressive-approach-to-refugee-management> (21 February 2021).

Although there is literature on Ugandan refugee policy, it is mainly contemporary.[9] While a number of historical works on Uganda touch on refugee policy, few make it their central focus.[10] Consequently, there is gap in the literature in terms of a political history of Ugandan refugee policy,[11] and in particular an account of the evolution and provenance of Uganda's self-reliance model. In order to address this gap, this article draws upon a combination of archival research undertaken in the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR)'s archives in Geneva and semi-structured interviews conducted mainly in Kampala.[12]

At the time of my research, the UNHCR archives relating to Uganda were publicly available for the period of 1962 to 1994. They provide primary documents, including reports, internal and external correspondence, newspaper articles, and relevant papers collected by UNHCR staff. Although extensive, the collection is not necessarily comprehensive: access is limited to exclude a 25-year period prior to the present day, and the documents were acquired based on institutional relevance to UNHCR. To complete a historical review, I conducted around twenty interviews during 2019 with policy-makers in Geneva and Kampala, from government, NGOs, and international organisations, with professional experience of working on Ugandan refugee policy that date back to the 1990s. Inevitably, the evidence I elicited through these interviews and my own interpretation of the archival research will have been shaped by both the highly politicised research context and by own positionality as a European academic.[13] Indeed, the relationship between refugee policy and patronage is sensitive for

9 Tania Kaiser, 'Participating in development? Refugee protection, politics and developmental approaches to refugee management in Uganda', *Third World Quarterly* 26, 2 (2006), pp.351-367; Tania Kaiser, T, 'Between a camp and a hard place: Rights, livelihood and experiences of the local settlement system for long-term refugees in Uganda', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, 4 (2006), pp.597-621; Sarah Meyer, *The refugee did and development approach in Uganda: Empowerment and self-reliance of refugees in practice'* (Working Paper, UNHCR, Geneva, 2006); Lucy Hovil, 'Self-settled refugees in Uganda: An alternative approach to displacement?' *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, 4 (2007), pp.599-620; Sarah Dryden-Peterson and Lucy Hovil, 'A remaining hope for durable solutions: Local integration of refugees and their hosts in the case of Uganda', *Refuge: Canada's Journal on Refugees*, 22, 1 (2004), pp.26-38; Jozef Merkx. *Refugee identities and relief in an African borderland: A study of northern Uganda and southern Sudan* (UNHCR, Geneva, 2000)

10 Chris Dolan, *Social torture: The case of northern Uganda, 1986-2006* (Vol. 4) (Berghahn Books, Oxford, 2009); Sverker Finnström, *Living with bad surroundings: War, history, and everyday moments in northern Uganda* (Duke University Press, Durham NC, 2008); Samwiri Karugire, *A political history of Uganda* (Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2010).

11 One rare exception to this is Emmanuel Nabuguzi, 'Refugees and Politics in Uganda', lecture presented at Makerere University, 20 December 1993, <https://opendocs.ids.ac.uk/opendocs/handle/20.500.12413/5497> (15 October 2019).

12 UNHCR's archives have a 25-year cut-off, meaning that, at the time of the research, they covered the period of 1962-1994, after which the article relies upon interviews and informally sourced policy documents.

13 See, for example, Gillian Rose, 'Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics'. *Progress in Human Geography 21*, 3, (1997), pp. 305-320; Roni Berger, 'Now I see it, now I don't: Researcher's position and reflexivity in qualitative research', *Qualitative Research* 15, 2 (2015), pp. 219-234.

donor governments, UN agencies, and the Ugandan government alike, my own position as a white, male, British citizen offers privileged access but also shapes how I am likely to be perceived and responded to by interviewees in Kampala and my own interpretation of archival material.

The article makes three empirical contributions. First, it shows that Uganda's self-reliance policy towards refugees is not a recent creation. Many of the key features of the self-reliance policies that have been celebrated in the twenty-first century have been present since the 1960s. Second, it reveals that several aspects of the country's ostensibly progressive approach have illiberal political origins. For example, Idi Amin, the oppressive and despotic President of Uganda from 1971 to 1979, played an important and neglected role in the historical development of the Ugandan self-reliance model. Third, and most importantly, it demonstrates that Ugandan refugee policy has served a common political function. For successive Ugandan Presidents it has served to strengthen patronage and assert authority over strategically important refugee-hosting hinterlands. For the international donor community, it has offered a means to achieve a range of foreign policy goals, including preserving an exemplar "success story" of progressive refugee policy.

Ugandan politics has been shaped by its historical division into a series of disaggregated kingdoms, entrenched through British colonial rule. The legacy of this fragmentation has been a challenging relationship between the largest of those kingdoms, Buganda, which includes the capital Kampala, and the rest of the country. In this context, core-periphery relations have been a particular feature of Ugandan politics, with successive post-colonial regimes seeking to build authority, control, and governance to remote hinterland regions, whether to counter-balance Bugandan influence or to reinforce Bugandan primacy.[14] Given that most refugees in Uganda have been historically concentrated within strategic hinterlands such as West Nile and the South West due to their proximity to conflict-afflicted neighbouring states, the adoption of progressive refugee policies within those regions has provided an opportunity to attract and redistribute international resources to sustain sub-national political authority.

14 See, for example: Christopher Wrigley, *Kingship and state: The Buganda dynasty* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002); Richard Reid, *Political power in pre-colonial Buganda: Economy, society and warfare in the nineteenth century* (James Currey, London, 2002).

Specifically, refugee policy in Uganda has served as a means for successive presidents – Milton Obote, Idi Amin, and Yoweri Museveni – to channel resources into the strategically important West Nile and South West regions, preserving patronage networks and political authority. For Obote, across his two periods of rule (1966-71 and 1980-85), these hinterlands were important as a potential source of threat to his Buganda-centric rule. For Amin (1971-79) and Museveni (1986-), these hinterlands represented key alliances in order to balance against rival Bugandan power. As I will show throughout the article, both refugees themselves and the local political authorities could be mobilised *qua* allies or governed *qua* enemies through mobilising the resources offered by the international refugee regime.[15]

However, the interplay between patronage politics and refugee policy should not be viewed only as an inevitable outcome of the way "the African state" functions nor even as an inescapable legacy of colonialism.[16] It has also been made possible by the role of the international refugee system. Patronage politics has been possible because international donors have been willing to finance and abet patronage as the price for preserving Uganda's role as a globally salient exemplar of progressive policy. However, rather than being an avoidable dysfunction of refugee diplomacy, patronage has, in the Ugandan case, been integral to the *functioning* of the international refugee system. Without patronage, there would have been no Ugandan model. Paradoxically, as I will explain, illiberal politics have been essential to achieving ostensibly liberal internationalist goals.

15 On a structural level, the mandate for refugee affairs has usually been held by the government ministry which also has responsibility for local and regional government. Under Milton Obote and Idi Amin, this was the Ministry of Culture and Community Development (MCCD). And under Yoweri Museveni it was the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM). In terms of alliance-building, numerous examples stand out of Rwandan and South Sudanese refugees or exiles and members of the host community from West Nile and the South-West being appointed to political or military office (e.g. the longstanding influence of Lieutenant-General Moses Ali in Ugandan politics), and of international donor funding being channelled (whether as aid or corruption) to benefit the host community and local authorities in these regions (e.g. the November 2018 UN Office of Internal Oversight report on the use of donor funding to support patronage in West Nile). In terms of controlling enemies, numerous examples also stand out of central government attempts to control refugee populations in these regions, including through using internationally-funded settlements as forms of containment or through occasional attempts to round-up and repatriate refugees perceived to be enemies of the central government (e.g. Obote's round-up of Rwandan refugees in 1982, and their subsequent relocation into new, internationally-funded settlements).

16 There are hints of seeing patronage as a post-colonial characteristic of the African state in, for example, Christopher Clapham (ed.), *Private* patronage *and public power: Political clientalism in the modern state* (Frances Pinter, London, 1982); Bruce Berman, 'Ethnicity, patronage and the African state: The politics of uncivil nationalism', *African Affairs*, 97, 388 (1998), pp. 305-341; Olivier De Sardan, 'A moral economy of corruption in Africa?', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 37, 1 (1999), pp. 25-52.

By making this argument, the article makes a broader theoretical contribution to the literature on patronage politics. It shows that patronage politics is not only the result of the post-colonial character of African states, but is also enabled by the role of external actors ostensibly seeking to achieve liberal internationalist goals. Furthermore, rather than being the result of dysfunction in liberal internationalism, patronage is sometimes integral to its success. After outlining the theoretical contribution in more detail, the article's account of refugee politics in Uganda unfolds chronologically, before exploring the comparative application of the argument to other refugee-hosting countries within the region.

Patronage politics and refugee policy

In addition to its empirical contribution, this article also aims to make a theoretical contribution to two broad literatures, which have rarely been brought together: on patronage and refugee politics. The former mainly emerges from African Studies and the latter from Refugee Studies, which, surprisingly, have rarely interacted.[17] Here I outline how the subsequent empirical story critically engages with both bodies of research.

The literature on patronage politics in Africa defines patronage as 'the disbursal of government-committed resources…to select groups whose support they wish to secure'.[18] One set of accounts focus mainly on the "internal" characteristics of the state. Much of the early patronage research focuses on the post-colonial African state, including the legacy of indirect rule in shaping relations between the central government and more localized forms of authority. The work of Bruce Berman, for example, sheds light on the ways in which local "Big Men" were legitimated through the social construction of "ethnicity", and patronage

17 Notable exceptions to this include the several articles on refugees published in *African Affairs,* such as: Jeff Crisp, 'Ugandan refugees in Sudan and Zaire: The problem of repatriation', *African Affairs 85*, 339 (1986), pp. 163-180; Johan Pottier, 'Relief and repatriation: Views by Rwandan refugees; lessons for humanitarian aid workers', *African Affairs* 95, 380 (1996), pp. 403-429; Simon Turner, 'Under the gaze of the 'big nations': Refugees, rumours and the international community in Tanzania', *African Affairs* 103, 411 (2004), pp. 227-247; Aderanti Adepoju, 'The dimension of the refugee problem in Africa', *African Affairs* 81, 322 (1982), pp. 21-35. Fred Ikanda, 'Somali refugees in Kenya and social resilience: Resettlement imaginings and the longing for Minnesota', *African Affairs* 117, 469 (2018), pp. 569-591.

18Andrew Mwenda and Roger Tangri, 'Patronage politics, donor reforms, and regime consolidation in Uganda', *African Affairs* 104*,* 416 (2005) p. 449.

became an important mechanism for maintaining centralised authority.[19] Subsequent research has tended to focus comparatively on the interaction of national institutions and patronage, highlighting the role of weak democratic institutions with limited multi-party competition and accountability mechanisms. It has emphasised a litany of factors that shape patronage, including civil-military relations, political parties, presidential systems, decentralization, and private enterprise.[20]

Another set of accounts emphasize the role of "external" actors. For example, Jean-Francois Bayart and Stephen Ellis' concept of 'extraversion' draws attention to the way in which African regimes, faced with weak authority domestically, are sometimes able to use their external legitimacy to attract international funding and resources as a means to strengthen domestic political authority, including through patronage.[21] While extraversion places the focus on the strategies of incumbent central governments, other accounts focus more on the role of the "international community" itself. For example, Andrew Mwenda and Roger Tangri's research on patronage politics in Uganda shows how donor-driven structural adjustment programmes during the 1990s expanded opportunities for Museveni's National Resistance Movement (NRM) to engage in patronage.[22] They show that 'Western donors… have backed a quasi-authoritarian government with cascades of cash…yet they have subjected these officials to only limited scrutiny and control'.[23] The resources have been 'a key mechanism for purchasing allegiance and maintaining support'.[24] Mwenda and Tangri allude to how these resources have facilitated authority at the local level.[25] They demonstrate how structural adjustment's requirement for decentralization enabled more money to be

19 Berman, 'Ethnicity, patronage and the African state'.

20 Alexander Beresford, 'Power, patronage, and gatekeeper politics in South Africa', *African Affairs* 114, 455 (2015), pp. 226-248; Booker Magure, 'Foreign investment, black economic empowerment and militarised patronage politics in Zimbabwe', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies* 30, 1 (2012), pp. 67-82; Petr Kopecký, 'Political competition and party patronage: Public appointments in Ghana and South Africa', *Political Studies* 59, 3 (2011), pp.713-732; Emmanuel Gyimah-Boadi, 'Africa's waning democratic commitment', *Journal of Democracy* 26, 1 (2015), pp. 101-113; Nicholas Van de Walle, 'Presidentialism and clientelism in Africa's emerging party systems', *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 41, 2, (2003), pp. 297-321.

21 Jean-François Bayart and Stephen Ellis, 'Africa in the world: A history of extraversion', *African Affairs* 99, 395 (2000), pp. 217-267.

22 Roger Tangri and Andrew Mwenda, 'Politics, donors and the ineffectiveness of anti-corruption institutions in Uganda', *Journal of Modern African Studies* 44, 1 (2006) pp. 101-124; Mwenda and Tangri 'Patronage politics, donor reforms, and regime consolidation in Uganda'; See also Elliot Green, 'Patronage, district creation, and reform in Uganda', *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *45*, 1, 2010, pp. 83-103.

23 Mwenda and Tangri, 'Patronage politics, donor reforms, and regime consolidation in Uganda', p. 452.

24 Ibid, p. 450.

25 Ibid, p. 457.

devolved to the district level: 'locally-elected representatives, mostly belonging to the NRM, have recruited their supporters into the expanding district government bureaucracy.'[26]

This article's focus on Ugandan refugee politics reveals that both internal and external sources of patronage matter and interact. But the interesting question is, how? Ugandan refugee politics has been partly shaped by the post-colonial character of the state. Uganda was a protectorate of the British Empire between 1894 and 1962, during which the Empire governed several quasi-autonomous kingdoms through a series of agreements with client-chiefs, frequently privileging central Buganda over the other kingdoms (e.g. Toro, Ankole, Banyoro, and Busoga). At independence, political authority for the newly formed state was mainly placed in the hands of Buganda.[27] The historical relationship between Buganda and the other kingdoms has created a necessity for successive Ugandan regimes to create alliances or control enemies in remote hinterlands. The international community, broadly conceived, has also played an important enabling role by making resources available to sustain patronage networks in these refugee-hosting border regions.

Contra Mwenda and Tangri's account, however, patronage has not simply been an avoidable dysfunction of liberal internationalism; it has been integral to its functioning.[28] Patronage politics has been essential to the "success" of refugee policy in Uganda. This is because refugee policy has been based on strategic interdependence across international, national, and local levels of governance. Donors seek compliance with refugee norms in order to achieve foreign policy objectives that change over time.[29] The central government seeks resources, partly to sustain authority in refugee-hosting hinterlands. Local authorities in refugee-hosting areas seek resources, both to benefit constituents and as patronage. None of these three sets of actors has been inherently interested in refugee protection *per se*; they have been primarily interested in the benefits it offers in relation to these wider objectives. However, each of these outcomes, for each of the relevant sets of actors, has been strategically interdependent upon

26 Ibid.

27 For a colonial history of Uganda, see: Anthony Low, *Fabrication of Empire: The British and the Uganda kingdoms, 1890-1902*. (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2009). For an example of work on its legacy, see for example, Mahmoud Mamdani, 'Karamoja: Colonial roots of famine in North-East Uganda', *Review of African Political Economy* 9, 25, (1982), pp. 66-73.

28 Mwenda and Tangri 'Patronage politics, donor reforms, and regime consolidation in Uganda'

29 For an analysis of the relationship between refugee policy and broader foreign policy goals, see for example, Kelly Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2010).

one another. Without these side-payments (i.e. benefits in adjacent areas) accruing to all of the relevant sets of actors, there could not have been a Ugandan model. [30]

In addition to contributing to literature on patronage politics, these findings have particular implications for refugee policy. Research in Refugee Studies lacks an account of patronage in refugee policy; however, there is a range of literature exploring the 'instrumentalisation' of refugees by governments, including in the African context.[31] Gerasimos Tsourapas examines how refugee policies have been used for 'rent-seeking' purposes by North African and Middle Eastern states.[32] Emanuela Paoletti shows how Libya has extracted development and trade benefits by using asylum and migration within horse-trading with Italy and the European Union.[33] However, most of this work focuses on international-national level interaction. Instead, to fully understand the role of patronage within refugee politics, it is necessary to explore the three-level interaction across global, national, and local levels. James Milner's research on the politics of asylum in sub-Saharan Africa highlights the importance of local actors as gatekeepers to national level refugee policy.[34] He discusses the importance of core-periphery relations within the African state, and shows how the Tanzanian central government's more progressive refugee policies have sometimes been subject to veto by District and Regional Commissioners.[35] Lacking from the literature, however, has been an exploration of how patronage politics functions across levels of analysis, and how it is constituted through their interaction. It is a feature of refugee politics not just because of the character of the states that host refugees, but also because of the strategic interdependence between donors, host governments, and local actors, which necessitates side-payments to each of these actors as a necessary condition for "successful" outcomes.

30 Following the broader political science literature, I use the term "side-payments" to indicate some kind of pay-off or advantage not directly related to particular policy field within which a bargain takes place (in this case refugee policy). I intend it to be a broader concept than patronage, but one that may -- and in this case frequently does -- include patronage.

31 Stephen Stedman and Fred Tanner (eds), *Refugee manipulation: War, politics, and the abuse of human suffering* (Brookings Institution Press, Washington DC, 2004); Kelly Greenhill, *Weapons of mass migration: Forced displacement, coercion, and foreign policy* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 2010).

32 Gerasimos Tsourapas, *The politics of migration in modern Egypt: Strategies for regime survival in autocracies* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2018).

33 Emanuela Paoletti, *The migration of power and north-south inequalities: The case of Italy and Libya* (Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2010).

34 James Milner, *Refugees, the state and the politics of asylum in Africa* (Palgrave MacMillan, London, 2009).

35 Ibid.

Recognising that "progressive" refugee policies (such as those relating to the right to work and freedom of movement) may be driven by illiberal politics (and patronage) leads to a significant dilemma. The Ugandan case, and the others comparatively discussed in this article, imply that patronage politics sometimes leads to counterfactually better outcomes for refugees. Within the ambiguous politics of refugee protection, pay-offs (and even side-payments) may be needed at national and local levels in order to secure commitments. This implies a normative trade-off: liberal norms of governance may be in tension with liberal outcomes for refugees. Resolving this normative dilemma is beyond the scope of this article. However, acknowledging it analytically, at least, provides a starting point for meaningfully engaging with the sometimes disingenuous political realities of refugee protection.

Post-independence: the origins of self-reliance

Remarkably, some aspects of Uganda's current self-reliance model are more than sixty years old. At independence in 1962, Uganda retained its colonial refugee legislation in the form of the 1960 Uganda Control of Alien Refugee Act, as well as the protectorate's embryonic settlement model. The Ugandan Protectorate had hosted white European -- mainly Polish -- refugees in the aftermath of the Second World War.[36] The Nakivale settlement, now Africa's oldest refugee camp and an example of the country's rural settlement model, had already opened in 1958, providing access to plots of arable land to Rwandans Tutsis fleeing conflict and persecution.[37] By retaining a model of tolerance towards self-settlement rural refugees, the government inherited the basis of what is today recognized as the country's "self-reliance model".[38]

During the 1960s, refugee numbers grew rapidly. Amid colonial liberation wars in Sudan, Congo, and Rwanda, Uganda found itself in a challenging neighbourhood. By 1967, Uganda hosted over 160,000 refugees, nearly a quarter of Africa's total refugee population,[39] and the

36 Jochen Lingelbach, *On the Edges of Whiteness: Polish refugees in British colonial Africa during and after the second world war* (Berghahn Books, New York, NY, 2020).

37 Katy Long, 'Rwanda's first refugees: Tutsi exile and international response 1959–64', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 6, 2 (2012), pp. 211-229.

38 The term 'Self-Reliance Strategy' emerged in 1999. See, for example, Lucy Hovil, 'Self-settled refugees in Uganda: An alternative approach to displacement?', *Journal of Refugee Studies* 20, 4, (2007), pp. 599-620.

39 UNHCR Archives, 1968, *The People*, 'Triumph for Uganda's refugee policy', 26 September 1968.

country accounted for about half of UNHCR's US$5 million Africa programme budget.[40] The government nevertheless viewed the presence of refugees as an opportunity, almost immediately dispatching key government ministers to relevant UN meetings in Geneva.[41]

Uganda's model was also celebrated by UNHCR as an exemplar of a development-based approach to refugees, in very similar language to that used six decades later. For example, at UNHCR's 1964 Executive Committee meeting, for example, it convened a 'Discussion of UNHCR's Role in Economic and Social Development Projects'. The meeting 'discussed at length the extent to which UNHCR should participate in…development projects of benefit to refugees and the local population, particularly in Africa', and ways in which UNHCR could collaborate with other UN agencies 'to raise the economic level of these regions for the benefit of refugees and the local population alike.[42] Uganda's Foreign Minister was present, and the country was identified as an important illustration of this development-based approach. The meeting showcased projects 'aimed at making the [Southern Sudanese in West Nile] refugees self-supporting' through the provision of seeds and tools.[43]

By 1968, UNHCR openly praised Uganda for its 'very progressive' approach to allowing refugees to work and move beyond the settlements. Following a meeting between UNHCR and the Ugandan delegation to Geneva, UNHCR noted that, despite restrictions, Uganda was tolerant of 'free-livers', including those living and working in cities:

> [The Ugandan Foreign Minister]…pointed out that even in the case of refugees who were found to have left a settlement penalties provided by the law were not enforced. Of the "free-livers" he said quite a large number were working in the Medical Department and some others had found employment as teachers...No permits were required…and refugees were free to obtain employment wherever available. This is indeed a very progressive attitude.[44]

Uganda was increasingly rewarded for this approach, just as it has been ever since. In 1967, it was made only the sixth African state member of UNHCR's Executive Committee. [45] In

40 UNHCR Archives, 1967, 10C/Box 4/ARC 2B4, 'HC welcomes Uganda as 31st member of Excom'; 'Background paper for president's meeting with HC, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, 8 November 1967.

41 UNHCR Archives, 1964, 10c Box-4 ARC 2B4, '12th session of ExCom', 22-30/10/64 (Rome), 30 October 1964.

42 UNHCR Archives, 1964, 10c Box-4 ARC 2B4, 12th session of ExCom, 22-30/10/64 (Rome), 30 October 1964.

43 Ibid.

44 UNHCR Archives, 1968, 11/1/Box 324 (21/UGA/RWA), 'A Meeting with the Uganda Delegates to the Executive Committee', 28 October 1968.

45 UNHCR Archives, 1967, 10C/Box 4/ARC 2B4, 'HC Welcomes Uganda as 31st Member of Excom', 'Background Paper for President's Meeting with HC, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, 8 November 1967.

1969, UNHCR opened a branch office in Uganda.[46] Uganda was already the highest African recipient of UNHCR coordinated refugee assistance. And throughout the decade, UNHCR increasingly sought development assistance through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in order to support and 'compensate' Uganda for the 'burden' of hosting large numbers of refugees.[47]

The international community's motivation for adopting a development-based approach was not entirely altruistic. Faced with an Africa Programme budget that was only 60% funded and had doubled to $10 million between 1967 and 1968, the High Commissioner for Refugees noted in his address to UNDP:

> Our aim has always been that once refugees have reached the stage of being self-supporting, the settlements which we have helped to establish should be incorporated in a regional development plan carried out under the aegis of the United Nations Development Programme or some other instance concerned with development per se…It is the logical means of ensuring that refugee programmes go beyond the stage of being alien islands of population and achieve true integration within the scope of plans geared to the well-being of an entire area to the benefit of all its residents. Such a handover is in keeping with the catalytic role of my office.

From a Ugandan Government perspective, the presence of refugees created few costs. Nakivale and Kyangwali, opened in 1967 in the South West, were in sparsely populated areas with an abundance of arable land. Meanwhile, in both West Nile and the South West, there were strong ethnic similarities between hosts and refugees. Although the Government still discussed repatriation as an option, there was an acceptance that local integration was a viable long-term solution. The Ministry of Culture and Community Development (MCCD) was given responsibility for both the refugee portfolio and local development.[48] In 1969, its Assistant Director for Refugees, acknowledged the openness to permanent local integration: 'When they get here they find the life so comfortable that few of them ever dream of going back'.[49]

46 UNHCR Archives, 1969, 11/1/Box 76: 'Agreement between the government of the Republic of Uganda and UNHCR concerning the establishment of a branch office of UNHCR in Uganda', 7 February 1969.

47 UNHCR Archives, 1967 10C/Box 4/ARC 2B4, 'HC Welcomes Uganda as 31st Member of Excom'; 'Background Paper for President's Meeting with HC, Prince Sadruddin Aga Khan, 8 November 1967.

48 UNHCR Archives, 1969, 'Agreement Between the Government of the Republic of Uganda and UNHCR Concerning the Establishment of a Branch Office of UNHCR in Uganda', 7 February 1969.

49 Ibid.

And promoting the 'self-supporting' agenda conferred two benefits upon the newly independent government.[50] First, it brought development aid to the country in ways that could enhance the Obote Government's legitimacy. Second, this played into a nation-building agenda by bringing resources to peripheral regions of the country. As Obote and his successors would discover, ruling Uganda effectively relied upon maintaining the backing of both the Buganda elite, so strongly privileged by the British, and that of the communities -- at the time referred to as "tribes" -- in Uganda's other regions. It mattered particularly to Milton Obote, first as Prime Minister until 1965 and then as President, to channel resources to the Northern Ugandan heartland of Uganda People's Congress Support (UPC). Given its geographical distribution, the refugee portfolio played well within this delicate federal patronage structure, offering opportunities for aid to be channelled through the central government to the North and the South West.

Idi Amin (1971-79): refugees as allies for political survival

One of the most striking insights from my archival research is that key aspects of Uganda's ostensibly "liberal" self-reliance strategy were actually created under Idi Amin's oppressive regime of the 1970s. Amin is generally associated with oppressive refugee policies; he made initial threats to expel all refugees from the country and is well-known for his persecution and expulsion of the Ugandan Asians.[51] However, a lesser known part of the history of Amin is the selectively progressive refugee policies he adopted for refugees from neighbouring countries.

Amin viewed refugees as an opportunity to strengthen his regime. He sought to control and manage the refugee populations, and he recruited large numbers of soldiers, including at senior rank, from the Sudanese, Rwandan, and Congolese communities. He even created some of the settlements that endure today in West Nile and the South West, and established a strong working relationship with UNHCR, receiving acclaim for signing the Refugee Convention in 1976. But his ongoing legacy was to frame refugees as potential allies (or enemies) of the central government within the country's delicate core-periphery politics.

50 The term 'self-supporting' was widely used at the time. See, for example, UNHCR Archives, 1964, 10c Box-4 ARC 2B4, '12th session of ExCom', 22–30 October (Rome), 30 October 1964.

51 For an account of the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians, see for example: Mahmoud Mamdani, 'The Ugandan Asian expulsion: twenty years after', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 6, 3 (1993), pp. 265-273.

In January 1971, Amin had been leader of the army under Obote. When his President travelled to Singapore for a Commonwealth conference, Amin seized power.[52] Amin purged the Obote-loyalist Lango and Acholi from the army, including through a series of massacres. He instead recruited people from his own Kakwa ethnic group in their place, and also a significant number of Sudanese, and later Rwandans and Congolese. His recruitment of solders from neighbouring countries, enabled him to survive several attempted coups, and also shaped his policies towards refugees in Uganda.[53] Put simply, supporting refugees from neighbouring countries was a key part of his strategy for retaining power.

Early in his rule, Amin appeared intolerant of refugees. Early speeches suggested he would expel them all. At a ceremony at which Moses Ali was sworn in as Minister, Amin suggested he would launch an operation to 'see that all refugees in Uganda go back to their countries as soon as possible and their camps are used by Ugandans who have no homes and those now roaming about in towns without jobs'.[54] Meanwhile, his Minister of Foreign Affairs would occasionally seek to 'clarify' such remarks in order to reassure the international community. In one correspondence with the Secretary-General of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), he wrote: 'The policy of the Ugandan Government of providing refuge for people who have been displaced by social upheavals in countries neighbouring to Uganda and elsewhere, has not changed at all. Remarks that my President, General Idi Amin Dada, has made in the recent past relating to this matter have been misrepresented, distorted and misunderstood.' [55]

Certainly, between 1971 and 1975, there were few signs of anything liberal in Amin's refugee policies. He worked collaboratively with the governments of Rwanda and Sudan to encourage refugee repatriation, in order to support his regional allies, President Kayabanda of Rwanda and President Nimeiry of Sudan.[56] Then, most infamously, Amin began to persecute and expel Ugandan Asians from 1975.[57] However, from 1976, there was a notable -- and historically forgotten -- shift in Amin's refugee policies, and a striking embrace of what has

52 UNHCR Archives, 1971, *Washington Post*, 'Uganda Army Faction Ousts President Obote', 26 January 1971.
53 For accounts of the importance of South Sudanese and Congolese soldiers for the Amin regime, see: Stefan Lindemann, 'The ethnic politics of coup avoidance: Evidence from Zambia and Uganda', *Africa Spectrum*, *46*, 2 (2011), pp. 3-41; Andrew Mambo and Julian Schofield, 'Military diversion in the 1978 Uganda-Tanzania war', *Journal of political and Military Sociology*, *35*, 2 (2009), p. 299-321.
54 UNHCR Archives, 1973, Fonds 11/2 Box 203, *Daily Nation*, 'Amin Says Refugees Must leave Uganda'. 21 June 1973.
55 UNHCR Archives, 1972, 'HC Aga Khan letter to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Wanume Kibedi', 20 August 1972.
56 Ibid.

subsequently become the self-reliance model. With rumbling rebellion and mutiny by predominantly Christian Acholi and Lango, agitating for a return to power of Obote, Amin came to rely increasingly upon Sudanese and Rwandan soldiers to ensure loyalty and professionalism.[58] And he further recognized that working collaboratively with UNHCR could bring much needed legitimacy and resources, both of which had been dwindling amid criticism of the regime's abusive treatment of Ugandan Asians.

In June 1976, Amin oversaw Uganda's accession to the 1951 Refugee Convention, and created the Determination of Refugee Status Committee. A year later, at a meeting at Cape Town View between Amin and the UNHCR Representative to Uganda, at which UNHCR lavished praise on Amin's refugee policies. The Voice of Uganda newspaper photographed the Representative shaking hands with Amin, and reported that '[The UNHCR Representative] said Uganda's contributions to refugee settlement is more than all the African countries put together. He thanked the Uganda Government under Life President Idi Amin for the most generous contributions not only to refugees there but to those of the other parts of the world'.[59] UNHCR took the opportunity to request that Amin abolish the colonial Refugee Act because of the formal restrictions it places on free movement.[60]

From that point onwards, UNHCR's relationship with Amin was collaborative and pragmatic. In March 1978, for example, UNHCR's Representative met with the Head of Refugees Affairs in Kampala, and described Uganda's refugee policy as undergoing 'a phase of consolidation'.[61] In 1979 UNHCR noted that the Amin government had committed to work on a new Refugee Act as requested, and that the rights to work and freedom of movement were largely being provided to refugees: 'Refugees do not need work permits except when they are going to work for the Government…Although movement of refugees is restricted by the present Alien Refugee Control Act, in actual fact refugees are free to move in and out of the Settlements. If the journey exceeds a certain period of time and/or distance, permits are issued by the Settlement Commandant'.[62]

57 UNHCR Archives, 1975, 'Situation of Ugandans of Mixed Racial Background', R. Seeger (Regional Protection Officer to the Representative in Kenya)', 15 April 1975.
58 UNHCR Archives, 1977 *New York Times*, 'Amin Acknowledges Mutiny in His Army', 24 February 1977.
59 UNHCR Archives, 1977, *Voice of Uganda*, 'UNHCR Rep and Amin meet at Cape Town View', 30 June 1977.
60 Ibid.
61 UNHCR Archives, 1978, 'Report on a Meeting with Officials from The Ministry of Culture and Community Development', 7 March 1978.
62 UNHCR Archives, 1979, 'Uganda Report on UNHCR Activities 1979'.

By that stage, Uganda hosted 130,000 refugees from Rwanda, Sudan, and Zaire. Amin's government worked closely with UNHCR to create and consolidate the rural settlement model on which much of Uganda's contemporary settlement model is based. Settlements established in the 1960s were upgraded with new facilities, and new area were gazetted as settlements, allowing refugees to live there. UNHCR worked collaboratively with Amin's government to fund infrastructure and services in the settlements, particularly in the South-West of the country,[63] which hosted Rwandan refugees, and to provide basic assistance to Southern Sudanese refugees in the then conflict-affected West Nile region. He built new settlements for Zaireans in Ibuga in the West and for Sudanese in Karamoja in the East.

Amin's support for refugees, and his expansion of the settlement model, was not motivated by regard for refugees' welfare per se, but by politics. With very little support from Ugandans in Kampala, he relied upon Rwandans, Sudanese, and Congolese – including refugees – as the basis of his army and his government. For example, in the South-West, home to several of the settlements that endure today, he benefited from the backing of both Rwandans and local Banyarwanda, as a means to balance against opposition ethnic groups at the national level. Amin filled his cabinet and military leadership with Banyarwanda.[64] The Banyarwanda within Amin's regime were especially keen to ensure resources flowed into their constituencies and backing for refugee hosting areas offered a means to achieve that. Amin encouraged the flow of UNHCR resources to the Rwandan settlements and allowed Rwandans to live freely in the cities.

Amin's support also related to regional geopolitics. He opposed President Habyarimana's mainly Hutu post-1973 regime in Rwanda, and viewed support for Rwandan Tutsis in exile as a means to destabilize Rwanda. Meanwhile, he saw his support for Sudanese refugees as a key part of his amicable relationship with Sudanese President Nimeiry, and their joint commitment to fight the destabilizing influence of rebel groups operating on both sides of the Sudan-Uganda border.

63 UNHCR Archives, 1978, 'Report on a Meeting with Officials from The Ministry of Culture and Community Development', 7 March 1978.

64 For example, he appointed Justus Byagagire and Raphael Nshekanablo to Ministerial positions, and John Bunyenyezi to a military leadership position. Nigaahe, 'Kigezi Ethnicity', 19 May 2017, <http://www.medium.com> (2 June 2000).

The key takeaway from this period is that many of foundations of Uganda's self-reliance model, far from being recent or liberal creations, were developed under Idi Amin. While refugee policy during the Amin era is inevitably associated with the expulsion of the Ugandan Asians, his reliance upon support in his West Nile heartland, his alliance with Banyarwanda leaders, and his inclusion of significant numbers of Rwandan and Sudanese refugees in the army, contributed towards the increasing socio-economic integration of refugees, particularly during the latter period of his rule.

Milton Obote II (1980-85): the settlements as population control

Milton Obote's second period as President was practically the inverse of Amin's insofar as most of Amin's allies were Obote's enemies, and vice versa. And this had significant implications for refugees. However, in common with the Amin era, Obote's regime saw a strengthening of the now famous Ugandan settlement model. But, far from being a means to enhance the autonomy of refugees, it was used by Obote as a method of population control.

The Uganda-Tanzania War of 1979, in which Obote's UNLA seized power with Tanzanian support, had long-term implications for refugees and refugee policy. First, it triggered the so-called Ugandan Bush War, in which Amin loyalists in West Nile fought the government and its allies, leading the large scale internal displacement, and the flight of Ugandan refugees into Sudan. Second, Obote's arrival led to an immediate backlash against both Sudanese in West Nile and Rwandans in the South-West, partly as retribution for their association with the Amin regime.[65] As I will explain, both the new displacement and the backlash mattered because they would reinforce the political importance of refugee policy in the South-West and West Nile once Museveni came to power in the mid-1980s.

In late 1980, revenge killings were carried out in West Nile by Acholi soldiers of the UNLA. The attacks were in retribution for the killing of thousands of Acholi under Amin.[66] In November, *The Guardian* reported 'barely a living person in sight in central and north-west Nile provinces, heaps of rotting bodies…clouds of vultures visible from miles away, and

65 There is relatively little secondary period literature on this period, although the backlash is discussed by George Roberts, 'The Uganda–Tanzania War, the fall of Idi Amin, and the failure of African diplomacy, 1978–1979', *Journal of Eastern African Studies*, *8*, 4 (2014), pp. 692-709, and Holger Hansen, 'Uganda in the 1970s: a decade of paradoxes and ambiguities', *Journal of Eastern African Studies* 7, 1 (2013), pp. 83–103.

66 An account of the violent backlash in West Nile can be found in Crisp, 'Ugandan refugees in Sudan and Zaire', p. 164.

every building from houses to cathedrals burned down'.[67] *The Times* reported 'tribal vengeance carried out by the Ugandan Army and Tanzanian troops after a recent incursion from Sudan by forces loyal to former President Idi Amin…The soldiers had murdered and plundered the West Nile district and had systematically destroyed Arua, the region's capital'.[68]

As a result of the West Nile massacres, hundreds of thousands of Ugandan refugees fled to makeshift camps in southern Sudan or were left internally displaced across West Nile, where they faced food shortages and violence.[69] With government roadblocks, it took time to establish a humanitarian operation across the region. Conflict left widespread damage to buildings, property, and livestock and farming opportunities were devastated. There was little surviving government infrastructure in the main districts of West Nile, and most people in local government had fled the region.[70] To compound this, civil war broke out in southern Sudan in 1983, and both Ugandan returnees and Sudanese refugees entered West Nile in need of assistance. The experience of West Nilers seeking sanctuary in Sudan had nurtured solidarity between them and their southern Sudanese hosts, which endured when both groups began to cross back into West Nile. From that point onwards, West Nile would remain an important host to southern Sudanese refugees and retain political and strategic importance to Kampala.

Meanwhile, in the South-West, the transition to Obote's rule brought a violent backlash in both the cities and the settlements.[71] Tanzanian invasion from the South had already affected the settlements. Refugees were evacuated from the Nakivale and Oruchinga settlements other nearby settlements.[72] UNHCR noted that '[the] two refugee settlements…were on the verge of complete self-sufficiency…[but] most of the infrastructure that had been built up over the years of integration efforts was destroyed in revengeful action by the invading army'.[73]

67 UNHCR Archives, 1980, *Guardian*, 26 November 1980.

68 UNHCR Archives, 1980, *The Times*, 9 December, 1980.

69 UNHCR Archives, 1983, 11/3 Series 2 Box-730, 'Guy Prim (RBA) to Paul Shears (Oxfam)', 22 February 1983.

70 UNHCR Archives, 1983, 11:3 Series 2 Box 333, 110.UGA – Programming Uganda Vol. 13 1983-4, 'Submission for Funding of the Special Programme for the Relief and Rehabilitation of Returnees and the Reconstruction of Public Infrastructure in the West Nile Province of Uganda' – 1983.

71 UNHCR Archives, 1979, 'mission to Kyaka, Kahunge, and Rwamwanja', 'From Lundgren to HC'; 'Meetings on the Security Situation of Refugees in Uganda Living in the Area of the Tanzanian/Ugandan Border', box 100.UGA.RWA.624.UGA, 22 February 1979.

72 UNHCR Archives, 1979, Meetings on the Security Situation of Refugees in Uganda Living in the Area of the Tanzanian/Ugandan Border' (100.UGA.RWA.624.UGA, 22 February 1979.

73 UNHCR Archives, 1981, 'Note for the File: Rwandese in Uganda, Michael Moller', 26 March 1981.

Across the South-West, Rwandans were viewed as Amin loyalists, and self-reliance was called into question. UNHCR's Representative noted in May 1979 that 'In many parts of the country, xenophobia sentiments are mounting and are taking unfortunate expression'. In his note to UNHCR headquarters he attached press clippings which claimed 'that Rwandese refugees in Uganda had reached a standard equal or higher than the citizens themselves and that no more help was necessary'.[74]

The backlash was exacerbated by the fall-out between Obote's UNLA and Museveni's NRA, who had fought alongside one another to overthrow Amin. 1981 saw insurgent attacks by the NRA in Kampala, with Rwandan support. This led Obote to push harder for Rwandan repatriation, which Habyarimana resisted, not wanting the Tutsi refugees to return.[75] The fact that Ankole, where Oruchinga is situated, is Museveni's home territory, meant Obote's army placed even greater restrictions on the Rwandan settlements. From April 1981, senior government Ministers publicly requested Rwandans to leave the country or face recriminations, after reporting the seizure of catchments of arms from the settlements.[76]

Prevented by Rwanda from enforcing large-scale repatriation, Obote's government pushed for Uganda's settlement model to be strengthened as a mechanisms of population control. Under Amin, the majority of Rwandan refugees in Uganda had been living in secondary cities in the South-West or integrated among the rural host communities, and by 1981, only 35-40% actually lived in the settlements. Obote used a major international event held in Geneva, the International Conference on Refugees in Africa (ICARA) of 1981, to request funding for seven settlements in the South-West, which hosted 41,000 Rwandans.[77] The requests were for boreholes, roads, vehicles, maize hammer-mills, and health services, for example. The government also asked for subsidization of government officials in both the

74 UNHCR Archives, 1979, 'Re: Statement by Rwandese Refugee Student Association' (100, UGA-RWA – 79/AP/UGA/ED/1) –M.H. Lundgren to HC, 5 July 1979.

75 UNHCR Archives, 1981, 11/2/Box 205, 'T.M Unwin (Rep) to R. Kalberger (RBA), Meeting with Min Muwanga', 6 May 1981.

76 UNHCR Archives, 1981, 'The Report on the Visit of the Hon. Patrick Mwondha, Deputy Min of Local Administration, to Bundibugyo District, (prepared by Peter Matovu, UNHCR Snr Counselling Officer)', 15 April 1981.

77 Across 7 settlements, hosting around 41,000 of Uganda's 113,000 refugees – Oruchinga (11,000), Nakivale (16,000), Ibuga (4500), Kyaka (5000), Rwamwanja (4320), Kyangwali (6100), and Kahunge (7050) – Uganda submitted requests totalling $144,000. In addition, much larger requests were submitted to 'support the government's comprehensive rehabilitation and development programme' and address 'wear and tear, deterioration by war, and economic collapse since 1971'. These requests included 'repair of boreholes for provision of water to enable integration of refugees' for $971,000 and 'infrastructure support around settlement, especially roads' for $1.3 million.

settlements and government buildings.[78] Around 43% of the requested $2.3 million funding was actually for the settlements; most was for the benefit of the surrounding host community.[79]

Within a year, the government began rounding up Rwandan refugees and forcing them into the settlements. In September 1982, the Mbarara District Council passed legislation and launched a campaign to forcibly round-up all Rwandans from their homes and transfer them to organized settlements.[80] In October, enforcement of the ruling began. UNHCR staff noted, 'Local chiefs and youth wingers of the [government] had ordered the Rwandans out of their homes, in some cases at five or six o'clock in the morning, and many had had their cattle and other property seized and their homes destroyed'. They also received confirmation for a local government administrator that 'his instructions were to expel all Banyarwanda… and if they refused, armed force was to be used to hasten their evacuation.'[81] Special forces subsequently seized property and evicted nearly all Rwandans from Mbarara town, with some fleeing back to Rwanda and others relocating to the settlements.[82]

In November 1982, the Chairman of Mbarara District Council explained the motivation for rounding up Rwandans in cities and incorporating then within settlements:

> [It is] fitting to make Mbarara a springboard to spark off the spontaneous movement of…the Rwandese refugees into designated settlements for proper and easy administration…Mbarara District did spontaneous…re-grouping Rwandese Refugees back to their settlement Camps for the sake of peace and stability in our District...It is difficult to keep a snake in the bed and you feel peaceful in your sleep…For the last twenty years, we have been generous enough to accommodate the Rwandese refugees…not knowing that we were nourishing a viper in our chest until recently we realized they were dangerous criminals, killers, smugglers, and saboteurs…When Amin took over the Government in 1971, Rwandese Refugees were recruited into the National Army...Those who did not join the army deserted their settlement Camps and because they had full confidence in the Amin regime, claimed land, owned estates through dubious names".

78 UNHCR Archives, 1982, 'Discussion with Amis Bireke-Kaggwa, D-Dir, Refugees MCCD (T.M Unwin – Rep)'.
79 Ibid.
80 UNHCR Archives, 1983, Fonds 11: 2 Box 333 110. UGA Programming Uganda Vol. 11 1982-3.
81 UNHCR Archives, 1982, 'Mission to Mbarara District, 21-22 October, Patrick de Sousa, Amdin, Programme Officer 26 October 1982.
82 Those Banyarwanda forced to flee included the family of the Speaker of the National Assembly, Francis Butagira and the Bishop of Ankole, Bishop Shalita. Uganda Pilot, 'Habyarimana Appeals for Aid', 21/10/82.

Following these events, UNHCR worked pragmatically with the Ugandan government to establish new settlements to absorb the rounded-up - and hitherto largely integrated - Rwandan refugee population. For example, in November 1983 it used Dutch government money to establish the new Kyaka II refugee settlement, which continues to exist today.[83] The documents establishing the new settlement plans noted its origins in the October 1982 'events' in Mbarara District.[84]

The key legacies from this period are twofold. First, the Ugandan settlements model, already in existence since the colonial era, was scaled up from the early 1980s, not as a progressive step, but based on Obote's concern to exert control over Rwandan refugees, who could not be returned but were seen as a threat to the regime. Second, from 1983 West Nile emerged as strategically significant within Ugandan politics. Its indelible association with being Amin's support base, the site of ethnic cleansing by Obote showed that any subsequent head of state would need to retain authority within a potentially volatile region. Furthermore, the creation of a large-scale humanitarian operation focused on both returnees and refugees in West Nile offered a renewed opportunity to attract resources from the international community.

Early Museveni (1986-1996): self-reliance and patronage

Museveni's allies are comparable to Amin's, in so far as Museveni has historically lacked support from the Buganda heartland of the country that includes the capital, Kampala, and has instead depended upon backing from hinterlands such as the South-West and West Nile region. Throughout his time as President, he has used the presence of refugees in those regions as a means to attract international money and legitimacy, while also channelling money to the refugee-hosting regions on which he depends for support. To achieve this, Museveni made refugees a development issue.

Upon assuming power in 1986, Museveni lacked support in Buganda, and so relied upon NRM support from a number of peripheral areas of the country. Few regions were more important than the South-West and West Nile. The former was relatively straightforward; Museveni is from a Banyankole background and has long enjoyed backing from the Rwandan

83 UNHCR Archives, 1983, 'Netherlands to UNHCR', 'UNHCR: Establishment of Kyaka II Settlement in Uganda', 28 November 1983.
84 Ibid.

community. That latter was more challenging; Museveni had few personal links to the North but recognized that it was strategically important. Contested authority in the North had contributed to undermining both Obote and Amin. Furthermore, Museveni faced the prospect of cross-border Sudanese support for rebellion in the North. Ensuring loyalty in the North would be of enduring importance to Museveni. The presence of refugees offered a means to bring patronage and much-needed resources to the region.

In the South-West, Museveni inherited an aggrieved Rwandan population. He immediately tried to improve their predicament by focusing on developing the settlements. However, he faced a political juggling act. On one hand, he felt indebted to Rwandans who had supported the NRA and wanted to push for naturalization. On the other hand, he recognized that many other groups were opposed to full integration. As the summary note from UNHCR explained:

> The Rwandese refugees, located in 8 settlements in the Southwest have prospered or suffered depending on the regime in power…The NRA was supported by the Rwandese during the Bush War and many young males are indeed serving in the army. The President feels he owes these refugees a debt of gratitude and is known to be favourable to naturalization. On the other hand, other ethnic groups in Uganda are not as well-disposed and, indeed, it has only been since February 1989 that the President of Rwanda has been willing to accept the principle of voluntary repatriation". [85]

Museveni initially tried to strike a balance, exploring options for repatriation and naturalization, while also seeking international funding to support 'an integrated approach towards development both in and around the refugee settlements'.[86] He instructed his Ministry of Local Government, which led on refugee affairs, to work closely with UNHCR on a series of development plans, promoting forestry, dairy farming, roads, schools, and infrastructural development in settlements such as Oruchinga and Nakivale, to be funded by European governments.[87]

Museveni worked collaboratively with UNHCR on a coherent plan for durable solutions, and he personally met with the UN Deputy High Commissioner for Refugees, Arthur Dewey, on 18 May 1989.[88] A key part of the plan was to transfer responsibility of the eight settlements

85 UNHCR Archives, 1989, Chipman (RBA) to Kpenou (RBA), 'DHC's Mission to Uganda, 18-19 May '89', 20 May 1989.

86 UNHCR Archives, 1987, 'the areas Deforestation of land in and around Oruchinga and Nakivale (UNHCR Study 1987 w/local government and Swedish funding)'.

87 Ibid.

88 UNHCR Archives, 1989 'DHC Visits Uganda: DS for Rwandese; plans for West Nile',

back from UNHCR to the government. At the meeting, Dewey lavished praise on Museveni's refugee policies, explaining that 'Uganda, since 1986, has had a demonstrably generous policy towards refugees. This applies not only to the 75,000 Rwandese, most of whom have been resident since the early sixties, but also to 50,000 newly arrived Sudanese'.

But UNHCR also had an ulterior motive for pressing for durable solutions and handover of the settlements. It faced a looming funding crisis, with donor states questioning its ongoing relevance as the Cold War drew to a close.[89] The organisation tried to justify the handover by reasoning that Rwandans should, for the most part, no longer be in need of international protection. Instead of being a humanitarian issue, the challenge should, UNHCR argued, be one of national development:

> With regards to the handing over of the administration of the refugee settlements in South West Uganda, I wish to reiterate that this is neither an abrogation of UNHCR's responsibility to refugees now an attempt to burden the Ugandan Government with additional financial responsibilities. The facts are that the Rwandese refugees have been in Uganda for over 25 years and their present needs are of a developmental nature. UNHCR's funding situation at the moment is at a critical stage and the funds available are earmarked for recent influxes. It is difficult to convince donors to provide additional funds to solve problems that are 25 years old. The solution to the problem may be found through funding agencies for national development."[90]

UNHCR pointed to the availability of alternative resources to support an integrated development approach. Suggested funding sources included European Community and UNDP money aimed at trying to 'link refugee aid and development'. Both UNHCR and the Government of Uganda recognized the value of shifting from a humanitarian to a development logic: 'The presence of your Minister of Planning and Economic Development at this meeting reflects your willingness to consider refugee aid as an important component of national development. This, I am pleased to say, supports UNHCR's Executive Committee's Recommendation on the Linking of Refugee Aid with Development During its 39th Session.'[91] For Uganda, a development approach offered an opportunity for money to be channelled directly through Kampala – to the benefit of both Ugandan citizens and

Chipman (RBA) to Kpenou (RBA) 'DHC's Mission to Uganda, 18-19 May '89', 20 May 1989.

89 Gil Loescher, *The UNHCR and world politics: A perilous path* (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2001), pp. 247-270.

90 UNHCR Archives, 1989, 'Mr W. Young Rep to Arthur Dewey, DHC' on meeting with Museveni, Fonds 11/3 ARC-2F3, 6 June 1989.

91 Ibid.

government officials. Based on this understanding, a mid-1990 date was agreed to the ceremonial handover of the settlements to the government.

Gradually, the same self-reliance approach was also expanded by Museveni to the North. In West Nile, he faced the challenge of how to reintegrate 320,000 Ugandan returnees, mainly from Sudan, while supporting Sudanese refugees.[92] Much of this involved emergency relief programmes and food assistance, again European donors.[93] In addition to humanitarian aid, however, Museveni increasingly made requests for development-based support for West Nile. In his meeting with Arthur Dewey, he proposed that more assistance go directly to the Districts to provide, for example, 'tippers, grinders, a ferry (i.e. capital goods for construction)'.[94]

However, the situation in West Nile was complicated by cross-border conflict. Southern Sudanese rebels, the SPLA's war against Khartoum led to 54,000 Sudanese refugees arriving in Northern Uganda by 1990. This in turn led to SPLA incursions into the area, rebels seeking sanctuary in refugee camps, and Sudanese bombing of assumed SPLA targets across West Nile. The government and UNHCR therefore made a plan to relocate all Sudanese refugees away from the North.[95]

The plan was to create new settlements and to move from 'care and maintenance' towards a development-based approach, similar to that already applied in the South-West. UNHCR's goal was to phase out humanitarian assistance from 1992 and the quid pro quo for the government was to be development in marginalized areas of the country that would host the new settlements. New permanent settlements were planned elsewhere in the country such as the Kiryandongo settlement in the remote Masindi District, and interim, transit camps – such as Rhino camps-- were established in Adjumani District. UNHCR committed to help raise additional funds for agricultural activity, livelihoods activities, the construction of schools and health facilities, and roads.[96]

92 UNHCR Archives, 1989, DHC Visits Uganda, Chipman (RBA) to Kpenou (RBA), 'DHC's Mission to Uganda, 18-19 May '89, 'Detailed Briefing Notes'. 20 May 1989.
93 UNHCR Archives, 1986, 768.ITA, 13 September 1986.
94 UNHCR Archives, 1989, DHC Visits Uganda, Chipman (RBA) to Kpenou (RBA), 'DHC's Mission to Uganda, 18-19 May '89' 'Detailed Briefing Notes': Dewey Meeting with Museveni, 18 May 1989.
95 UNHCR Archives, 1990, Phelps (RBA) to Chipman (Head RBA), 'Relocation of 54,000 Sudanese Refugees Currently in N.Uganda', 14 March 1990.
96 Ibid.

In practice, land disputes in Kiryandongo delayed construction of the new settlement.[97] In the meanwhile, the government instead transferred 60,000 Sudanese to the old Kyangwali settlement in the South-West in 1994.[98] The move was seen as a development opportunity by the Hoima District authorities, especially given that at that point only 4700 Rwandans remained in the settlement, occupying just one eighth of the available arable land, and the local population was just 12,000. Moving Sudanese refugees to the South-West was greeted as an important development opportunity for a District that was part of Museveni's Banyankole support-base.[99]

During 1994, violence in southern Sudan worsened, and the number of refugees arriving in West Nile grew rapidly. By the end of the year, close to 300,000 Sudanese were in Uganda, and most were in West Nile.[100] As numbers rose, it became more important to consider possibilities for self-reliance within West Nile. A significant part of the motivation for settlements in West Nile was to support the SPLA's rear bases in the war against the Sudanese Government. Indeed, the timing of new land allocations for Sudanese refugees across West Nile coincided with the strengthening of NRA alignment with the SPLA and the parallel alignment of the Government of Sudan with the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA) (and the remnants of Obote's UNLA)[101] as a means to destabilize Museveni's regime.[102] Ensuring covert sanctuary and support for the SPLA through offering sanctuary to mainly ethnic Kakwa refugees offered a means to fight against the destabilising influence of Sudan, the LRA, and the remnants of the Obote regime.[103]

In contrast, the number of Rwandan refugees in Uganda fell dramatically (from 84,000 in February 1994 to just a few thousand) in the immediate aftermath of the April 1994 Rwandan Genocide. Uganda had for decades offered refuge to mainly Tutsi refugees, and the settlements in the South-West were an important source of recruitment for the Rwandan

97 UNHCR Archives, 1991, 'Farah to Head Desk RBA, 'Note to the File: Mission to Southwestern Uganda'. Mission: 21-23 November 1991, Purpose: monitor situation at Rwanda/Zairean borders 4 December 1991.
98 UNHCR Archives, 1994, 11/3 001.UGA, 1994, A.S. Farah (Rep) to P. Meijer, Desk RBO, 'Transfer of Koboko Caseload: Kyangwali Mission Report', 24 January 1994.
99 Ibid.
100 148,000 refugees were in Pakelle, 94,000 in Koboko, 11,000 in Ifake, 3100 in Palorinya, and 5000 in Rhino Camp.
101 UNHCR Archives, 1994, *New Vision*, 'Uganda-Sudan Relations: Long History of Hostility'. 22 August 1994.
102 UNHCR Archives, 1994, Sitrep August.
103 UNHCR Archives, 1994, *New Vision* 2 September 1994.

Patriotic Front (RPF) in exile.[104] Museveni backed numerous RPF plans to overthrow Rwandan President Habyarimana during the early 1990s. [105] In April 1994, following the start of the genocide, the RPF invasion took place and, six months later, the majority of the 1959, 1973, and 1990 refugees caseloads had voluntarily returned to Rwanda. However, a new cohort of Rwandan refugees arrived in their stead: mainly Hutu refugees associated with the Habyarimana regime, some implicated in the genocide, others fearing reprisals from the new regime.[106] The irony was that they would occupy the same settlements in which their Tutsi counterparts had lived for the previous 35 years. However, while these refugees inherited the settlement infrastructure of their predecessors, they would not enjoy the same privileged relationship with Museveni's NRM, whose loyalties remained largely with the RPF. Henceforth, Nakivale and the other South-Western settlements would no longer just be for Rwandans but, from late 1994, the government began to relocate even Somalis from Kampala to Nakivale.[107]

Late Museveni (1999-): old wine in new bottles

By the late 1990s, West Nile had become strategically important to Museveni. Because it had been Amin's hinterland, Obote had forced most of the native population into exile in southern Sudan from 1979. But when they returned from around 1983, they came back with many southern Sudanese refugees, many of whom were also Kakwa, and had a shared cultural with the returnees. Museveni worked with the SPLA to ensure southern Sudan did not become a rebel base for his opponents. For pragmatic reasons, Museveni's NRM aligned with the remnants of Amin's support base. For example, General Moses Ali, a southern Sudanese and a member of Amin's cabinet, fought for Museveni's NRA in the Bush Wars. He was rewarded with the role of both Deputy Prime Minister, and -– crucially – Minister for Refugees and Disaster Relief, allowing him to use the refugee portfolio to bring money into West Nile. This precarious configuration of alliances created an imperative for Museveni to bring resources into West Nile, and the refugee presence offered such an opportunity. Politically, supporting the integration of refugees in West Nile was not especially challenging. When returnees and refugees came back from Sudan to Uganda they shared a

104 UNHCR Archives, 1994, Weekly Topic, 'Rwandese Refugee Army Overruns Garrisons', 12 October 1994.
105 UNHCR Archives, 1991, *New Vision*, 'Rwanda Alleges Attack', 3 October 1991.
106 UNHCR Archives, 1994, 0.25 UGA, Sitrep Sept. 1994.
107 UNHCR Archives, 1994, 0.25 UGA, Sitrep 25 Nov-2 Dec 1994.

common experience of living side-by-side in southern Sudan. And, given population scarcity in West Nile, there was a need for people to cultivate the land and build the economy, as a means to facilitate state-building in the region.

Developing a 'Self-Reliance Strategy for West Nile', based on the country's prior experience with Rwandans in the South West, offered a mutually beneficial opportunity for refugees, hosts, and the Government of Uganda. Meanwhile, with emerging political concern about the onward migration of refugees from Africa to Europe, the Self-Reliance Strategy could be packaged by UNHCR as a means to also meet European donor concerns relating to both irregular migration and the desire to reduce long-term humanitarian assistance to northern Uganda.[108]

The 'Self-Reliance Strategy for Refugee Hosting Areas' (SRS) began in 1999 with a focus on the main refugee-hosting districts in West Nile, home to 56 percent of the country's Sudanese refugees, who in turn made up 80 percent of Uganda's 200,000 refugees by the end of the millennium. The strategy was jointly designed by UNHCR and the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM), given responsibility for refugee affairs by Museveni. The SRS had two stated objectives: 'i) to empower refugees and nationals in the area to the extent that they will be able to support themselves; and (ii) to establish mechanisms that will ensure integration of services for the refugees with those of the nationals'.[109] The SRS built upon Uganda's historical experience of self-reliance within settlements. But it also aligned with emerging themes within international refugee policy, such as the 'humanitarian-to-development nexus' and offered an exit strategy for international humanitarian organisations.

The basis of the deal was that refugees would be allocated plots of land is designated settlements, for homestead and agricultural purposes. Refugees would be able to access government education, health, and other services on the same basis as nationals. And the

108 For an analysis of the relationship between European donor funding of the SRS and European government concern with onward migration in the late 1990s and early 2000s, see, for example, Alexander Betts and Jean-Francois Durieux, 'Convention plus as a norm-setting exercise', *Journal of Refugee Studies*, 20, 3 (2004), pp. 509-535.

109 Government of Uganda and UNHCR, 'Self-reliance strategy (1999-2003) for refugee hosting areas in Moyo, Arua and Adjumani districts, Uganda: Report of the mid-term review', (April 2004).Available at: <https://www.unhcr.org/41c6a4fc4.pdf> (13 March 2021).

government would work towards the long-anticipated new Refugee Bill, which would provide the right to work and freedom of movement.[110] In exchange, UNHCR would mobilize international donors to provide development assistance in support of both the settlements, infrastructure, and public services in ways that were mutually beneficial to refugees and the host community.[111]

One donor government in particular stepped forward to offer support. Denmark provided funding directly to OPM, with limited accountability or oversight. In 2001, Denmark had elected Anders Fogh Rasmussen as Prime Minister partly on the basis of an immigration control mandate, and the country immediately began to prioritize financing refugee assistance in East Africa, ostensibly as a means to reduce the number of refugees migrating onwards to Europe. A senior UNHCR staff member at the time explained 'Uganda came looking for legitimacy from the international community by repackaging something they were already doing', and 'Denmark was the driving force. They were already far to the Right [on their refugee and migration policies]'.[112] A senior Danish official involved at the time explained Denmark's role:

> Denmark was a forerunner because we were first in the xenophobia-aid bias [using development aid as an instrument of migration control]. We wanted to solve refugee issues in the region. The Brits tried but we formalized it early. UNHCR smelled the air, so UNHCR saw that there were additional funds to be had. We had to be practical and we had a budget that had to be invested in a short time.

By 2003, UNHCR had developed an initiative called 'Convention Plus', funded by the EU, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the UK, which aimed to offer development assistance to countries like Uganda as a means to reduce the secondary movement of refugees to Europe.[113] The key concept was Development Assistance for Refugees (DAR), used to support refugee self-reliance, and Uganda's SRS was the international community's proof of concept. Based on the recommendation of the SRS Mid-Term review, Uganda was adopted as *the* 'DAR pilot of global interest'.[114] By 2005, though, the international bargain relating to the SRS had

110 The Ugandan Refugee Bill became the Ugandan Refugee Act (of 2006). Available at: <https://www.refworld.org/pdfid/4b7baba52.pdf> (17 March 2021).

111 UNHCR (2003), *Self-Reliance Strategy Mid-Term Review* (Geneva: UNHCR).

112 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Geneva, 20 February 2019.

113 Betts and Durieux, 'Convention plus as a norm-setting exercise'; Marjoleine Zieck, 'Doomed to fail from the outset? UNHCR's Convention Plus initiative revisited', *International Journal of Refugee Law* 21,3 (2009), pp. 387-420.

114 Ibid.

largely broken down for a number of reasons. Uganda felt that the international community had failed to provide the promised support, and that DAR had failed to bring 'additionality' in terms of development resources.[115] This had a knock-on effect at District Level, where the Districts did not see the anticipated returns in resources or infrastructure. In Moyo, one of the Districts in West Nile for example, at handover, UNHCR listed schools and boreholes for example as 'completed' that did not actually exist, contributing to 'a very serious breakdown in trust'.[116]

Nevertheless in 2006, Uganda finally passed its Refugee Act, formally providing refugees with the right to work and freedom of movement. And, as numbers fell from 200,000 refugees in 2005 to around 75,000 two years later, Uganda continued to provide a manageable number of refugees with access to land within its settlements, access to public services, and the possibility to work in cities, all the time being praised by the international community for doing so. The SRS ticked along as Uganda's default model.

But from 2015 two things changed. First, refugee numbers in Uganda increased dramatically because of violence in South Sudan and the DRC, reaching a peak of over 1.2 million.[117] Second, Europe faced the 2015-16 "refugee crisis",[118] leading to an upsurge in donor interest in Uganda's model for hosting refugees.[119] These events led to the revival and rebranding of the Ugandan self-reliance model – first under the acronym of ReHope (the Refugee and Host Community Empowerment Strategy) in 2015 and then under the acronym of the CRRF (the Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework) in 2019.

ReHope, launched in 2015, by UNHCR and the World Bank was explicitly described as 'a follow-up initiative to the Self-Reliance Strategy'.[120] It promised to bring in an estimated $350 million over five years to support the government's national development plans. For

115 Interview, UNHCR member, Geneva, 20 February 2019.

116 Interview, embassy staff member, Kampala, 17 February 2019.

117 In 2013, Uganda hosted 244,000 refugees; by 2015 it was 512,000. And by 2017 it was 1,250,000 (including 900,000 South Sudanese refugees). UNDP estimated that the annual cost of hosting that many refugees was around $323 million.

118 On the framing of the "European refugee crisis", see Seth Holmes and Heide Castañeda, 'Representing the "European refugee crisis" in Germany and beyond: deservingness and difference, life and death', *American Ethnologist* 43,1 (2016), pp. 12-24.

119 See, for example, Zygimantas Juška, 'The Significance of the EU Trust Fund for Africa on the Ugandan Refugee-Hosting Model', *The African Review*, 47, 1: pp. 247-266.

120 The World Bank, 'An Assessment of Uganda's Progressive Approach to Refugee Management', (Washington DC: World Bank Group, 2016), p. 25.

European donors, the initiative was, in the words of one administrator, a way for donors to 'save face on Uganda', showing that there was a sustainable alternative to mass influx in Europe.[121] Meanwhile, amid the 2016 General Elections, Museveni needed to demonstrate that he had a clear-sited plan for managing rising numbers of refugees arriving from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of Congo. ReHope, though, was short-lived. UNHCR convened a Solidarity Summit for Refugees in Uganda, held in Kampala on 21-22 June 2017. However, it raised only $1.5 million (from India and China) of its $2 billion target.[122] The failure of the Summit severely damaged trust between the United Nations, Kampala, and the host districts. Soon afterwards, a massive corruption scandal was revealed in early 2018, in which, it became clear that the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) and UNHCR Kampala were riddled with corruption and incompetence. The subsequent UN Office of Internal Oversight Services' audit report claimed, 'The UN's refugee agency wasted tens of millions of dollars in Uganda in 2017, overpaying for goods and services, awarding major contracts improperly, and failing to avoid fraud, corruption, and waste, according to a damning internal probe.'[123] Examples of misconduct included a $7.9 million contract for road repairs awarded to a contractor with no experience in road construction.

The head of a national NGO explained to me that these dynamics of corruption and patronage were a longstanding feature of refugee policy in Uganda. He claimed:

> Money goes to the north and comes back to Kampala. The UN is so intimidated, they allow the government to function as it wants. The international NGOs endorse corruption because they will open a borehole and they will charter a plane for a government official or pay a high per diem and spend $5000 on a Minister for a borehole that costs less than $5000. Money goes back to OPM for 'oversight' or 'budget support', sometimes up to 40%, and you have to have OPM permission to be here… the central government gives small tokens to the North to shut them up, and because Uganda is a key ally of the international community, the UN has given the government the mandate and the power to take their own people hostage".[124]

Nevertheless, the Ugandan model was again repackaged as the 'Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework' (CRRF) for Uganda. The CRRF essentially offered a means to facilitate development-based responses to refugees in order to enable them to access self-

121 Interview, embassy staff member, Kampala, 15 February 2019.

122 Interview, Comprehensive Refugee Response Framework secretariat staff, Kampala, 13 February 2019.

123 UN Internal Audit Division, 'Audit of the Operations in Uganda for the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees', OIOS Report No. 2018/097, available at <https://oios.un.org/audit-reports> (13 March 2021).

124 Interview, head of a Ugandan NGO, Kampala, 12 February 2019.

reliance, including through access to labour markets, not just for Uganda but elsewhere too. In the words of one UNHCR official, 'CRRF is the Uganda model, gone global'. However, rather than providing direct budgetary support through the central government, it instead envisaged direct funding to support the Districts.

Despite the track record of corruption and patronage, international donors were willing to continue funding the Ugandan model. Donors were buying a "success story", Museveni was accessing resources to strengthen his legitimacy in refugee-hosting Districts. One donor ambassador to Kampala explained European donor motivation for backing the model:

> We need a good example…It is really good for the debate. It is good for humanitarians; it is good for xenophobes. The Syrian refugee crisis in Europe required us to need this. We all know how development aid will never mitigate migration. But we maintain the narrative otherwise we have no other narrative… There are many agendas and unholy alliances.[125]

Uganda's experience in comparative perspective

To what extent does this account of refugee politics in Uganda apply comparatively to other refugee-hosting countries across the region? The use of progressive refugee policies as a means to attract international resources for patronage at national and local levels is especially pronounced in Uganda. However, similar dynamics can also be found in other major refugee-hosting countries in East Africa.

Kenya, wich hosts more than 400,000 refugees, is not renowned for its progressive refugee policies; the national government operates a strict encampment policy and denies refugees the right to work.[126] Since 2015, however, Turkana Country, which hosts the Kakuma refugee camps, has adopted a series of progressive policies. In particular, the Governor of Turkana Country, Josphat Nanok, committed to 15-year strategy called the Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDP).[127] The strategy included creating a

125 Interview with embassy staff member, Kampala, 17 February 2019.

126 *The Refugees Act, 2006* [Kenya], No. 13 of 2006, 30 December 2006, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/467654c52.html> (21 February 2021).

127 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), 'The Kalobeyei Integrated Settlement Socio-Economic Development Plan (KISEDP)', 2018, <https://www.unhcr.org/ke/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2018/12/KISEDP_Kalobeyei-Integrated-Socio-Econ-Dev-Programme.pdf> (22 March 2021).

new integrated settlement for both refugees and the host community, within which refugees would be allowed to work. Alongside this it has begun to tolerate many refugees moving freely around the County for purposes of work or entrepreneurship.

For Nanok and his county government, KISEDP represents a political opportunity. Nanok has proclaimed, 'We have only two major resources in Turkana: oil and refugees'.[128] The scale of investment in the KISEDP is significant, with $500 million budgeted for all stakeholders for the first five years of the programme. Even if not all that money comes through the country budget, a significant proportion will. Part of Nanok's reward is that he can justifiably claim to have brought resources to the community. And the benefits accrue directly to particular line ministries within the Country Government. Furthermore, there is some evidence that many of the resources that go into local budget may support patronage. The auditors' report on Turkana County budget for 2017-18, for example, showed that only $144 million was accounted for out of a total tax revenue of $250 million.[129] And, although there is no available evidence to support the claims. Nanok has been linked to allegations of corruption in the national media.[130]

The international recognition Nanok has received for his refugee policies has also helped him to get a seat at the table in Nairobi. For example, in 2017, he was elected as Chairperson of the Council of Governors, and he served as Deputy Leader of the main opposition party, the Orange Democratic Movement (ODM) until June 2019. One Kenyan commentator explained, 'There is competition between counties and governors. For example, Kakamega County is now well-known county for maternal health performance; Governor Nanok wants to be known for making a success of Turkana's refugee policy'.[131] Indeed, it is clear that while patronage may have played a part in Turkana County's progressive refugee policies, the greatest benefits to local politicians have been the reputational benefits of improving citizens' access to public services.

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128 Interview, UNHCR staff member, Kakuma Refugee Camp, 3 August 2018.

129 The auditors' reports are publicly available documents. See, for example: <https://www.turkana.go.ke/index.php/documents/turkana-ce-audit-report-2017_18-pdf> (25 August 2019).

130 See, for example, newspaper reports relating to the Ethics and Anti-Corruption Commission (EACC)'s investigation of claims made against the Governor. The Standard, 'Governor Put to Task Over Tenders', 24 May 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nairobi/article/2001372407/governors-put-to-task-over-tenders> (15 January 2021); The Star, 'Nanok Dismisses Claims of Graft Investigation', 1 March 2020, <https://www.standardmedia.co.ke/nairobi/article/2001372407/governors-put-to-task-over-tenders> (15 January 2021).

131 Interview, Kenyan NGO worker, Kakuma, Kenya, 1 August 2019.

In Ethiopia, which hosts over 900,000 refugees, the government had a longstanding encampment policy, with clear restrictions on refugees' right to work and freedom of movement. In 2019, however, its parliament passed a new Refugee Proclamation (No. 1011/2019), giving refugees the right to work and other socio-economic rights.[132] This *volte-face* on refugee policy can be explained almost entirely by international conditionality. As part of a deal known as 'the Jobs Compact', the government of Hailemariam Desalegn was offered around $600 million by the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), the European Union, and the World Bank in the context of the European refugee crisis in order to create 30,000 jobs for refugees within its existing industrial parks.[133] As part of the deal, Ethiopia committed to change its legislation to let refugees work. One Ethiopian negotiator on the deal explained:

> For us, the primary interest is not to accommodate refugees; the key priority for us was the broader agenda of industrialisation, job creation, and the expansion of industrial parks because we also need investment. From DFID's point of view, it was motivated by migration from the perspective of the UK, and also from Europe; it was a broader political agenda.[134]

Indeed, nearly all Addis-based commentators agree that it was the Jobs Compact which enabled the Proclamation to come into existence. Without the incentive structure created by a more than half-billion a dollar carrot, the new legislation would not have emerged. As one government representative said:

> The triggering point was Jobs Compact. Without this, this issue would not have been raised…and we would not have had the discussion about the Proclamation. An inducement has come from the Jobs Compact.[135]

However, even this deal has faced push-back at the local level, preventing local implementation. For example, in Gambella, with the largest number of South Sudanese refugees, there were strong local protests immediately after the passage of the Proclamation, with local people and the regional government feeling that they were not consulted on a deal

132 *Ethiopia: Proclamation No. 1110/2019*, 27 February 2019, available at: <https://www.refworld.org/docid/44e04ed14.html> (21 February 2021).

133 Jennifer Gordon, 'Investing in low-wage jobs is the wrong way to reduce migration', *Foreign Policy*, 28 January 2019, https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/01/28/investing-in-low-wage-jobs-is-the-wrong-way-to-reduce-migration (21 February 2021).

134 Interview, government employee working with both the Ethiopian Investment Commission on the Jobs Compact, and involved in drafting the Refugee Proclamation, Addis Ababa, 25 March 2019.

135 Interview, Advisor to the Ethiopian Prime Minister, 29 March 2019.

brokered in Addis.[136] Even in the Somali Region, which generally welcomes Somali refugees, legislative change in Addis was greeted with indifference, amid tension between the central and regional governments.[137]

When Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed came to power in 2018, he changed the sites for the three new industrial parks to be financed by the deal. His alternative selection of the industrial park sites was intended to 'buy-off' priority regions -- in which Abiy needed greater support and credibility within Ethiopia's model of ethnic federalism.[138] Specifically, he changed sites in and close to Tigray and Oromia (Alage, Me'kelle, and Dire Dawa) that had been privileged by Hailemariam to new sites in other marginalized regions that Abiy believed needed to share in the benefits of 'equitable growth' (in Afar, Somali Region, and Benshangi). The Prime Minister's advisor explained, 'it was because of the "equitable growth agenda". It was a political decision'.[139] Indeed, a defining feature of Abiy's government was the attempt to engage in a more inclusive and balanced approach to ethnic federalism compared to previous regimes, and the decision to alter the selection of the industrial park sites should be understood in that context.

These two brief examples are especially salient because they examine the process by which one local government (Turkana County) and one national government (Ethiopia) came to adopt aspects of the Ugandan model: the right to work and freedom of movement for refugees. In the former case, these policies were adopted *de facto* (in practice) but not *de jure* (in law); in the latter case, they were adopted *de jure* but not *de facto*. Nevertheless, the two cases reveal that the seemingly progressive refugee policies that have emerged in Kenya and Ethiopia are the result of at least some aspects of the patronage politics that have characterized the history of Ugandan refugee policy. In each case, that patronage politics has been shaped by the three-level interaction of international, national, and local actors.

Conclusion

Uganda's refugee policies are widely viewed as exceptional. However, there has until now

136 Interview, staff member at Danish Refugee Council, Addis Ababa, 26 March 2019.
137 Ibid.
138 Interview, government representative, ARRA, Addis Ababa, 26 March 2019.
139 Interview, Advisor to the Ethiopian Prime Minister, 29 March 2019.

been very little analysis of the politics underlying the approach, or attempt to situate it in historical context. This article has therefore drawn upon archival research to offer a political history of Ugandan refugee policy. In doing so, it has made three empirical claims. First, Uganda's self-reliance model is not new: its origins can be traced back to the colonial era and its immediate aftermath. Second, many of the supposedly liberal innovations of the model are in fact the result of illiberal politics and motives: Idi Amin, for example, played a historically neglected role in promoting and developing the model. Third, and most importantly, the self-reliance model for refugees has played a consistent political function in Ugandan politics: in addition to enabling successive Presidents to attract international legitimacy and resources, it has also played a key role in enabling them to strengthen patronage and assert authority over strategically important refugee-hosting hinterlands.

By bringing together the literatures on refugee policy and patronage, the article also engages with theoretical debates on patronage politics within African Studies. It recognizes that the post-colonial structure of the Ugandan state, and the relationship between Buganda and the country's other historical kingdoms, partly explain the importance of patronage for building political authority within key strategic hinterlands. However, it further demonstrates the role of liberal internationalism within patronage politics. The international refugee system has not only reinforced and abetted patronage, but has actually depended upon it as the basis for its most progressive examples of African state compliance with liberal internationalist ideals.

In many ways, these findings are consistent with Mwenda and Tangri's account of how donor-led structural adjustment during the 1990s facilitated corruption at both the central government and district levels of Ugandan politics[140] However, the refugee context reveals patronage as not simply a dysfunctional outcome of large amounts of money and limited accountability, but as the outcome of strategic interdependence between international, national, and local level actors. Patronage has, in the Ugandan case, been integral and essential to the *functioning* of the international refugee system. Without pay-offs to elites at every level of governance, there would have been no commitment to refugee self-reliance. Comparative analysis suggests that these findings are not unique to the Ugandan context.

Overall, the analysis highlights the need to see refugee policies, especially those viewed as progressive, in political and historical context. The Ugandan case reveals the interplay and

140 Mwenda and Tangri 'Patronage politics, donor reforms, and regime consolidation in Uganda'.

interdependence between patronage politics and refugee policy. Without side-payments at every level of governance, including patronage, there would have been no Ugandan model. Recognizing that progressive refugee policies have depended upon patronage, illiberalism, and authoritarianism presents a significant normative challenge to refugee policy-makers and practitioners. It requires that they recognize, understand, and engage with the ambiguous political context within which ostensibly progressive refugee policies are sometimes forged.