

The Arab Springs and the “Walk to Work” Movement in Uganda: Contest for Political Space and Freedom.

Robert Ojambo
Kyambogo University, Uganda
Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences
Department of History and Political Science
bobojambo@yahoo.com

Abstract

This paper presents an overview of how the Arab Springs influenced events in the Walk-to Work Protests in Uganda during the period after the 2011 election. It builds on the previous analysis of the nexus between the Arab Spring and other conflicts that sprung in different parts of Africa to provide an overview of in the fight for political space in the sub-Saharan Africa with a specific focus on Uganda. The main argument is that the recent Arab uprising have led to significant changes that call for rethinking of critical issues in the study of social movement which has in turn led to enormous implication in the theories of revolution especially in the Arab world. This study employed a qualitative methodology using historical approach to investigate the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests in Uganda in the larger study of impact of the Arab Springs in the Arab North. Employing the Resource Mobilisation, Political Opportunity Structural and Framing Theories, the study establishes that the Arab Springs influenced a lot of events in the ‘Walk-to-Work’ Protests in Uganda. Our argument here is also that despite the fact that the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests did not lead to change of Government, they were not mere protests but instead a manifestation of a peaceful struggle for political space in Uganda that has made a big paradigm shift in the politics of this country.

Key Words: Arab Spring, Walk-to-Work, Revolution, Protest and Political Space

INTRODUCTION

The recent Arab uprisings have led to significant changes that call for rethinking of critical issues in the study of social movement in Africa. This situation has also led to enormous implication in the theories of revolution especially in the Arab world. The term ‘Arab Spring’ according to Danjibo (2013:16-34), is a name used to designate popular revolutions that took place in Arab world to liberate and liberalise the states, ensure change of autocratic governments and institute socio-economic and political reforms in their respective countries. The Arab Springs that started in Tunisia and quickly spread to other Arab countries, is one of the greatest contemporary surprises of global development, especially in the Arab world between 2010- 2011. In no time a lot of changes especially in politics had taken place in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Thus it is without any doubt that the Arab Spring in North Africa had a lot of political influence in Sub-Saharan African countries like Uganda. This was mainly due to the fact that leaders like Gaddafi who used to be, if not admired by many, was at least feared not only in his country, but in most of the Sub-Saharan Africa were swept by the Arab Spring.(Boka, 2011) This was immediately followed by a number of uprisings coming up in different countries such as in Senegal where youth organisations and rapper organised themselves into the Y’e n a Marre (we are fed up) movements that followed the Egyptian model of the Kefaya. The same thing happened in Uganda after the election of February 2011, when the opposition –led protesters marched to demand the resignation of President Museveni. These protests were later to be named as ‘Walk-to-Walk’ demonstrations. After the February 2011 Presidential Election in Uganda, Kizza Besigye, initiated the ‘Walk-to-work’ demonstrations to protest rising food and fuel prices as well as government corruption and waste in government as majority of the masses live in abject poverty. (Besigye, 2013) The ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests began on April 11 when a group calling itself Activists for Change (A4C) and opposition politicians organised demonstrations in Kampala and other towns of Uganda.(Onyango-Obbo, 2013) No one knows exactly what the underlying motivations to these protests were; the ordinary participants had different motivation such as economic frustration and other disillusionment with the National Resistance Movement Government. But it is equally important to recognise that the campaign resonated well with a majority of Ugandans’ feelings: the suffering they were enduring, and the government’s indifference to their inability to meet the basic of human needs at that time.

The main argument in this paper is that the Arab Spring Movements in North Africa and in the Middle East played a big role in the developments that later came to be known as ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests

in Uganda. However, there are a number of questions that remain lingering in our mind; should the 'Walk to Work' be looked at as mere protest for an immediate change or a long time contest for political space between those who are in power and those who in opposition, was it a failure or success in Uganda? There has been an attempt to answer these questions in this paper by looking at the impact of this unique social movement in the politics of Uganda. It is now four years since the former president of the Forum for Democratic Change, RTD Colonel Kiza Bisigye was put on 24 hour surveillance by the Uganda Police. This has made it very difficult for him to freely to move from his home in Kasangati- a sub urban town to the main business centres in Kampala. Such restriction of Bisigye is mainly due to the leadership that he gave during the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in 2011. Matters became serious to a level that those who played an active role in this movement have been arrested and charged several times in courts of law. The Lord Mayor of Kampala City Mr. Elias Lukwago has been locked out of his office in very unclear terms partially because he also actively participated in these protests. All these show that the 'Walk-to-Work' protests are an important development when analysing the relationship between the government and opposition in Uganda. Some scholars have attributed these protests to the movements that had earlier started in the Arab world which came to be referred to as the Arab Spring, while Robins called it the Uganda Spring'. (Robins, op.cit) All these call for an investigation to find out whether the Arab Springs had a bearing in the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda and if so, why the 'Walk-to-Work' did not enlist similar results as the Arab Springs did in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The unanimity of action and the spread in most regions of the country in a short period of time gave the 'Walk to Work' protests a unique and homogeneous identity characterised by oneness that was demonstrated against the government in a peaceful way that calls for a deeper analysis to understand the motive of the participants and why it happened at that material time. We also need to find out why unlike the Arab Springs in North Africa, the 'Walk to Work protest was not able to bring about change of government in Uganda.

Therefore, the analysis of the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in this paper makes a paradigm shift in the study of politics in Uganda. At the same time, it also shows that big shifts in social and political life require an act of imagination; they require a break from routine; a departure from conventional thinking. That is why social sciences which are focussed on the study of routine of institutional and repetitive behaviour are unable to forecast big events in the study of human life. No matter how small was the number that participated in the 'Walk-to-Work', whether it achieved its objective, or whether the movement was anarchist or not, the 'Walk-to-Work' phenomenon created a new paradigm of politics in Uganda. This created a dire need for analysis of why the 'Walk-to-Work' protests spontaneously broke out in different parts of the country, and what motivated the participants to actively protest despite the threats by the police and government agencies. Its ability to enable those opposing the government to communicate their views through mere walking on streets of Kampala and other towns in Uganda was in itself brilliant innovation that was packaged by the opposition politicians in Uganda. The ability of the population to use peaceful walking as a means of saying no to government and at the same time demanding for equal political space in the country, calls for a thorough investigation, in order to understand the theoretical and practical underpinnings in this social movement in Uganda. This study is therefore an entry point into a larger analysis of looking at protests as an avenue to enter into the political space by the opposition in Uganda. Thus drawing insights from the Resource Mobilisation, the Political Opportunity Structural and the Framing theories, we show how social media played a part in the emergence of the 'Walk-to-Work' protests by providing a basis for mobilising large groups and reporting events which raised perception of success. In this endeavour we also show that despite the failure to change government in Uganda, the 'Walk-to-Work' movements were more than just protests, but also manifested a contest for political space between the ruling government and the opposition.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

There are several theories that have been put forward by different scholars to explain why citizens opt for protests as a way to show their dissatisfaction with the sitting governments; in what ways their decisions may be shaped and the end result of such protests. This particular study, raises the question of how can we make sense out of the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda in relation to the Arab Spring Movement in the Arab world in 2011. This question is answered by exploring some of the theories that have been postulated by social movement scholars in order to illuminate the current knowledge gap in the history of protest and conflict. The study draws a dichotomy between the ideological differences between the Arab Springs in North Africa and the 'Walk to Work' protests in Uganda. It thus tries to give a theoretical base to analyse

how the Arab Springs influenced outbreak of what came to be known as ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests in Uganda; why there were different outcome and in end placing the ‘Walk-to-Work as a unique political paradigm in the study of social movements, by showing that it was not just mere protest but a struggle for political space in Uganda which has continued as ‘work in progress for the opposition politician in Uganda in their struggle to be heard by the sitting government. The study adopts a three theory model to analyse the question at hand because it is our view that, there cannot be a general theory of revolution applicable to all different forms and stages of revolution therein looking at the causes, revolutionary process and outcomes.(Akder, 2013:85-110) Despite the fact that each of this theories offers an explanation for the causes and impact of social movements, none of them can ably explain the relationship between the Arab Spring and the ‘Walk –to-Work’ protests in Uganda and its later impact in the politics of Uganda. In this we therefore show that the three theories can be used simultaneously so that each of them can complete the weaknesses in the other as explained below;

1. The Resource Mobilisation Theory

The Resource Mobilisation Theory (RMT) hypothesises that, protests are likely to occur when there is an organisation in place that has resources for bringing people together to form collective action.(McAdam, 1986: 64-90) This theory was a product of the various collective movements that occurred in the 1960s and only become very popular in the period 1970 and 1980. Proponents of this theory argue that resources such as time, money, organisational skills, media access and certain social or political opportunities are critical in the success of any social movement. The RMT mainly look at social movements as being normal, rational and depend on institutionally rooted activities that are structured and pertained. Since individual participation in social movements is explained only by a cost/benefit analysis of resources, cultural things such as grievances and mechanisms for social cohesion of groups are not the deciding factors for why and when social movements will arise. (McCarthy and Zald, 1997:149-172) These resources vary from one movement to another and therefore the success of the movement depends on the ability to use the resources at hand effectively. The RMT has been used by most scholars who try to analyse social movement in which many of them emphasis the organisational characteristics within such movements. Such scholars maintain that success of any movement is unlikely until the movement leaders build a functioning organisation to mobilise resources to run the activities of the movement. (Brill, 1971)Therefore, this theory is relevant in the study of ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests by looking at how institutions mobilise the supporters to participate in the protest. With Resource Mobilisation Theory, it believed that the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests were due to the availability of resources that made possible the mobilisation of individual participants in these movements. Particularly that the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests in Kampala were due to the ability by social media that played a role in mobilising large groups and reporting events in the Arab Spring which raised a perception of success among the ‘Walk-to Work’ protesters who then believed that their protest would succeed like the Arab Spring had done in North Africa.

Despite the above, the Resource Mobilisation Theory cannot fully explain the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests that took place in Uganda. The first weakness of this theory is found in its assumption of the constancy of discount and collective interest overtime. (Eltantawy and Wiest, 2011:1207-1224) Contrary to this, evidence on ground shows that collective interests played a vital role in the ‘Walk-to Work’ protests. This can be seen in fact that most of the participants are found to have been mobilised by Action for Change pressure group which had leadership of mainly politician from the opposition. This theory has also been found to over emphasis the significance of the outside resources and its inability to adequately address social movements that begin substantial resources or those influenced by minority groups. The RMT does not consider other potential opportunities like the presence of charismatic leaders or opportunities from state activities like elections as it was the case in the Walk to Work protests. It does not also explain the initial demonstrators who typically began the protests without looking at the risks that are over emphasised by the promoters of this theory. For instance, Kiiza Besigye and other leader in these protests were arrested and charged several times but this did not stop more people from joining the protests. (The Daily Monitor, 11th July 2012) Below is a picture of Kiizza Besigye detained in Nagalama Police cell after having been arrested during one of the protests in Kampala.



Dr. Besigye detained at Nagalama police in Bugerere (about 40Kms from Kampala). Source: The Daily Monitor

Due to such gaps, other theories have been explored to locate key tenets in them that explain what the RTM does not vividly deal with to analyse the 'Walk-to Work' protests in Uganda.

2. The Political Opportunity Structure Theory

The other theory that is useful in analysing the 'Walk-to-Work Protests in Uganda is the Political Opportunity Structural Theory (POST). This theory focuses on a window of opportunity in which the demonstrators can organise for collective action and engage in protests. In this case, it is believed that it is the political figures that consciously or unconsciously create the opportunity for social movement. (Kitschelt, 1986: 57-85) This window of opportunity opens an avenue through activities such as election especially in situation where the government has authoritarian tendencies. In most cases such elections do not present enough political space for the citizens and the people to ably speak out their wishes. (Cotton and McFail, 2003) This resonates well with the 'Walk to Work' protests in Uganda in which the opportunity was created by Besigye and other opposition leaders who managed to connect the alleged rigged elections and the high prices of consumer commodities as being a result of the government failures. Despite the fact that there was no clear evidence to prove the allegation by the opposition, they managed to convince some people that Museveni had maintained his office through fraudulent means. This made many people to join the 'Walk-to Work' protest without much questions.

This theory tries to explain a situation when the individual fails to participate in social movement for the fear of individual costs as emphasised by the Resource Mobilisation Theory. Here it is believed that the limited supply of information under authoritarian conditions means that the individual pays high personal costs. Such costs are reduced in the Political Opportunity Structural Paradigm which considers the causes of collective action as rooted outside the individual, and strongly influenced by structural proximity and network connections. (Friedman and McAdams, 1972:156-172) Thus unlike in the RMT, the essential element of mobilisation process is the potential protesters are targeted by recruitment agents who inform others of the upcoming protest events and encourage their participation. In addition, the Political Opportunity Structural Theory brings out another important function of social networks which in turn help to build a collective identity supportive of protest action, which is achieved through interpersonal conversations with other network members. Therefore, it is the collective identity that motivates

participation in protests by providing the potential participants with the sense of group solidarity and an opposition consciousness of 'us' versus 'them'.

The main weakness of the POST lies in its failure to explain why some successful social movements occur when there is no opportunity window for movements. This calls for another explanation to fill in this gap.

3. Framing Theories

This is a more recent theory that has been adopted in psychological studies while explaining factors that lead people to engage in contentious politics. (Fendrich and Kraus, 1978:232-255) According to the proponents of this theories, framing come from the discourse of protesting itself so much so that the participants are able to connect with the movement. This theory mainly depends on how the public understands the events that influence the protests such as social media. (Benford and D. Snow, 2000:611-639) Whether the framing is from the protest discourse or other sources, media provides a mental map for the demonstrators and the participant depends on how successful the movement is framed. Basically, the framing is connected with the shared grievances of the group.(Tarrow, 2011) According to Gurr people protest as a result of a feeling of 'relative deprivation' defined in terms of a perceived entitlement or expectation which results from either inter- personal or inter- group comparisons. Unfulfilled material expectations cause frustration and resentment which manifest themselves in an individual propensity to engage in protest. (Breuer, et.al) However, like the other two theories expounded on above, framing theories have a number of weaknesses. For instance, there is no clear process that links the framing to protest. Consequently, there is a challenge in determining how the social movement began when there are multiple framings of the argument or grievances.

Therefore, analysis above theories shows that it is not easy to rely on one theory to explain social political movements that have occurred in different parts of the world. The 'Walk to Work in Uganda' is one of such movements. It is on such a background that this study adopts a tripartite theoretical paradigm where the RMT is used to articulate the ability of resources to bring people together for collective by analysing the evaluating the opportunity cost of every individual in this struggle. The POST shows how political leaders and organisations create an opportunity for protest. The framing theory is useful in explaining how shared grievances among a group of people which is not handled by the two other theories contributed to the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative methodology using a historical approach has been employed to investigate the 'Walk-to-Work' Protests in Uganda. It is our belief that through the use of qualitative research tools, techniques, methods and approaches, this study enhanced the probe into the casual trajectories in the Arab Springs in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and the 'Walk to Work' protests that took place in Uganda during the period 2011- 2012. Qualitative methods have also enabled this study to identify the dynamics and dimensions that explain the causes, features and impact of this social movement in Uganda. These methods entailed discovery, interpretation and detailed explanation of the relationship between Arab Springs in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and the 'Walk to Work' protests in Uganda. This particular research employed several tools such as oral interview and documentary review to gather information useful in writing this paper. Therefore, this work is a product of a thorough review of literature as well as analysis of information from primary sources such as news papers and other periodicals on Ugandan politics.

Like other case study projects, this study examines both common and unique features of a case, with an emphasis on its defining features. (Stake, 2005:443-466) In addition, researchers must acknowledge and be knowledgeable of comparable cases, insofar as learning about a particular case is related to how the case is similar to, and different from, other cases. Keeping these imperatives in mind, we established general areas of inquiry organised around our research questions and shaped by Resource mobilization, Political Opportunity Structural and Framing theories to guide our case study of the 'Walk-to-Work' Protest in Uganda. Because of limited space, and in order to most adequately address our research questions, the following section focuses on major findings, especially as they emphasise historical, social, and political contexts and the influence of Arab Springs in the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda.

A thematic analysis strategy has been employed. Thus the information gathered has been sorted and categorised into various themes in accordance with the research questions. This has been done by highlighting key insights, quotations and interpretations. All the material relevant to particular themes has been placed together to form the various sections of the paper. This will go a long way in placing this study into a wide debate on protest movements in the African continent and other parts of the world

THE ARAB SPRING AND THE ‘WALK TO WORK PROTESTS IN UGANDA

Despite the distance and the different context in which these two movements occurred, the events in Arab Spring left an indelible mark on the minds of many people in Uganda in particular and Africa at large. Some Ugandans started watching closely what was happening in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya and began to imagine that they too could change things in their own country using the same method. Both the opposition that took to ‘Walking to Work’ and the government that was then determined to stopping the protestors from walking were driven by some memories that had experienced in the Arab Spring Movements especially in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. According to Mamdani;

The memory of Tahrir Square feeds opposition hopes and fuels government fears. For many in the opposition, Egypt has come to signify the ‘promised land’ around the proverbial corner. For many in government, Egypt spells a fundamental challenge to power, one that must be resisted, whatever the cost. (Mamdani, 2011)

Therefore, the events in the Tahrir Square, Taksim Gezi Park and Peel Roundabout that had acquired global status influenced political participants and the on lookers in Uganda differently. As opposition and those agitating for change looked at these areas as centres of revolutionary hope for change, the government took them as venues that promoted disorder and insecurity in their countries. Despite these different perceptions, there are areas in Uganda that were viewed as the Tahrir, Taksim or Pearl roundabout. These included the Constitutional Square, Kiseka Market, and St Balikudembe Market which the opposition had turned into assembly grounds as the police and other government machinery made sure that they are not accessed by those who were ‘Walking to Work’. In all this cases, the protesters demonstrated their political views by walking to the city centre of Kampala, which is not only the political capital but also the business centre of the country. Therefore, for some time to come the above mentioned areas will continue being looked at as symbolic revolutionary centres where those disgruntled assemble to express their dissenting views. They have since then become areas where those agitating for political space struggle to access such areas amidst strong force from the state machinery led by the police not to allow such assemblies.

Like the protest movement of 2011 which was an expression of deep-seated resentment at ageing Arab dictatorship, the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests were mainly as a result of alleged rigged elections of 2011 in Uganda. This anger was fuelled by the rising prices of fuel and foodstuffs amidst high levels of unemployment, corruption and among the government officials and brutality of the security apparatus against dissenting voices on government. While these movements are recent enough that little scholarly has been published on them, one can still examine the movements in depth in order to create a better understanding of how participants sought and organised information, and how they leverage technologies to increase the impact of protest activities. Like we have already mentioned above, the protests stem from many of the same complaints: government corruption, lack of jobs and opportunity, and an increasing disparity in the distribution of resources as it was in the Arab Spring. (Skinner, 2011:3)

One of the areas in which we can analyse the influence of the Arab Spring in the ‘Walk-to-Work’ Protests in Uganda is how social media played a role in both of them. Here we particularly interrogate the role of social media as a tool of revolution. This is done through answering the questions of; what role did social media play in organising protests during the ‘Walk to Work’ in Uganda? Or why was government determined to reduce accessibility of protestor to social media? Thus by way of answering these questions, it is important to analyse and understand how revolution and technology interact because we live in a time where political upheaval and social change are common. Understanding the role of social media plays in shaping revolution as key to discovering how future movements might best learn from today’s protester, and the role and perception of individual and groups within the protests. Therefore, in the case of the ‘Walk-to-Work’ protests in Uganda, social media played a vital role in spreading information about what was

happening in the Arab Spring among the activists in Uganda. For instance, in Uganda during the February 2011 elections, people sent to each other captivating messages like 'Mubarak is going', 'Ben Ali is not more in Tunisia', 'People power and say no tear gas'. (Biryaberema, 2011) Such words in addition to information about the success stories in Arab Spring like the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia, Mubarak in Egypt and Gadaffi in Libya encouraged many people in Uganda to join and actively participate in the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda. Most importantly, social media facilitated quick organisation and mobilisation of people to join and participate in the 'Walk to Work' protests. To be more specific, social media helped in coordinating action, building networks among the different protest groups and getting updates on several activities that were happening in different areas. Just like during the Tahrir Square Protests of 25th January and 15th July 2011 in which Twitter was a key means of relaying information, Facebook and Twitter were also used to publicise the 'Walk-to-Work' protests, call for demonstrations and win support from broader sectors of the population especially the youth.

Part of the success of the movements comes not only from organising via social media, but sharing insights with other protesters and learning from their experiences, such as what to do to reduce the effects of tear gas. Social media also created a community in which people could share news, sympathy and support. Learning from the experience of others and adopting this in real time is likely to have been a great contribution to activist success. (Burch, 2011) The protestors through watching television and listening to other media sources came to see and learn means by which the activists in Arab Spring were dealing with the police and security agents which they immediately adopted. Bearing in mind that mobilising effect of new information and social media networks as a catalyst of broad social political protest varied significantly from region to another and from one political context to another. (Steponova, 2011) Thus influence of social media in the 'Walk-to-Work' Protests in Uganda was not at the same wave length as it did in the Arab Spring.

WAS 'WALK-TO-WORK' IN UGANDA A FAILURE OR SUCCESS?

In Sub-Saharan Africa, Uganda inclusive, a question was asked whether the Arab Spring would spread south of the Sahara. To many especially in the media, the answer was no. These mainly argued that Sub-Saharan societies are so divided by ethnicity characterised by tribal groups and as such could not unite to confront the strong state machinery in these countries. Technically, such people did not understand that unity has never been a natural phenomenon. Nowhere in the history of successful struggle will you find a people united in advance of a movement, instead unity is forged overtime through struggle. (Mamdani, op.cit) To many in government of Uganda and opposition alike, the 'walk-to-work' protests were seen as a shortcut to state house power. This can be read from the approaches that were adopted by the state machinery to stop these protests in Kampala and other different parts of the country and agitation that was put forward by the masses who participated in these protests.

The real significance of the 'Walk-to-Work' Protests is found in the new approach that it introduced in the politics of Uganda. This established the power of peaceful demonstration as a strong message of discontent in contemporary history. The whole process of the 'walk to work' in Uganda makes us to rethink the practice of democracy in the country; the meaning and importance of some key areas in the city which have acquired political significance in the city of Kampala. From here we learn that elections ought to only taken serious if the population is given a chance to make meaningful choices. Thus the results of such elections should be able to be viewed as the total sum results of those of have voted not just a picture that there is some voting that have taken place. A few years before the Egyptian revolution, President Mubarak had 90% of Egyptians having voted for him in a general election. It was interesting to find that a few years down the road, the same masses were demanding for his down fall. The same thing happened in Uganda, when president Museveni who had garnered a big percentage of votes in the 2011 election was being threatened by the 'walk to work' demonstrators.

Therefore, the 'Walk-to-Work' movement was a failure only if one expected that decades of a peri-military regime could be reversed and replaced by a few days of protests. It is also a disappointment to those who hoped that the demonstrations would remove corrupt leaders which eventually translated into improved living standards. But rather than a single event, it is probably more useful to define the 'Walk-to-Work' protests as a catalyst for long-term change whose outcome is yet to be seen. Secondly, the 'Walk-to-Work' changed the notion of struggle that had been taken to mean armed confrontation to one where people peacefully marched on roads towards some popular places in the city to express their dissatisfaction

with government. To further emphasise this point Mamdan argues that, it stopped the thinking of struggle as something waged by professional fighters, guerrillas, with the people cheering from the stands, but as a movement with ordinary people as its key participants. The potential of popular struggle lay in sheer numbers, guided by a new imagination and new methods of struggle. This new political imaginations in themselves form a new paradigm of popular struggle which had only been witnessed in the struggle against apartheid in South Africa notably through movements like the Soweto uprising of 1976. Like the Soweto uprisings, the 'Walk-to-Work' protests give us two political lessons. One is that the power of arms was replaced by the power of greater masses pulled together by a shared experience of oppression. Second, these protests brought about a new form of unity not characterised by tribe or religion; the Baganda, Bakiga, Acholi, or Christians and Muslims walked together to express their disapproval of how the government was running affairs in Uganda.

Recent studies have showed that dictators and their relationship with the people they rule differ from one country to another; some are excessively violent while others to some extent care for their citizens needs. However, what they all share is the lack of political space for dissenting voices; they do not tolerate discussion of anything that threatens their power. To deal with such dictators, it is our submission in this paper that the opposition must be innovative enough to avoid being declared rebel or terrorists and finally being outlawed. Through the 'Walk-to-Work', the opposition leaders in Uganda came up with original initiative to face them effectively. The 'Walk-to-Work' movement was unique in its nature and impact. The real significance of 'Walk-to-Work' is that it has broken the hold of routine of fighting government through military means as we have already mentioned above. In doing so, it presents us with a challenge in the scholarship of politics in Uganda. The 'Walk-to-Work' protests in the towns of Uganda brought with them a new language of politics, a new mode of organisation, and a new mode of opposition. Its innovators can be considered as social innovators who for once tried speaking a different language in the politics of Uganda to deal with the dictatorship at hand. No matter how small the numbers involved in the developments we know as 'Walk-to-Work', it may not be easy to deny its sheer intellectual brilliance. That brilliance lies in its simplicity, in its ability to confer on the simplest of human activities, walking, a major political significance; the capacity to say no oppression in that peaceful way under normal circumstances, no government could have accused its citizens for choosing to walk to their work places. Instead, in some countries, the leaders encourage their people to walk to their work places for health reasons or as a way of reducing traffic in town. In this case however, the 'Walk-to-Work' was not a normal activity were people were just walking for the sake of it, was instead a political protest against government for political space and change in the welfare of the people. As these protestors walked to their work places and town generally, the government was being sent a message that every time they walked they were not happy for being forced to use this rather trivial non violent means of protest because they were not allowed any other space to raise their grievances peacefully.

There was clear sign that government was losing the coherence and unity that it displayed during the February 2011 elections while the opposition was beginning to find at least a semblance of unity and vision that had evaded it during election season. The remarkable thing about the events we know as 'Walk-to-Work' is that they followed on the heels of a national election whose results were convincing to many in the opposition. Whatever its outcome, 'Walk-to-Work' Protests in Uganda must make us rethink the practice of democracy in Uganda. Most of these demonstrators walked towards the Constitutional Square; an open space in Kampala City where masses used to gather to share views on different topical issues in the country. (GOU) The memory of Tahrir Square fed opposition with hopes and fuelled government with a lot fears. For many in the opposition, 'Walk-to-Work' protests came to signify the 'promised land' around the proverbial corner. For many in government, Egypt meant a fundamental challenge to power, one that had to be resisted at whatever cost. Security forces cracked down hard on these protesters and the opposition. (Washington Post, 2011) The government through the Uganda Communication Commission allegedly ordered Uganda IPS to block Face book and Twitter for 24 hours. The sites were apparently unavoidable for a short time period with only Uganda Telecom succeeding to do so. (The Observer, 2011) The Uganda government also ordered Nation Television not to broadcast the major 'Walk-to-Work' protests live on Television. These efforts were largely unsuccessful but characterised by a violent and brutal police arrest of opposition leaders. For instance, on April 20 2011, the military fired rubber bullets and teargas to disperse protesters who were demonstrating the arrest of Besigye in Kampala. What is intriguing about all these is not that the government tried to control the twitter, Face Book and other communication channels but that such attempts failed to control information flow. In addition instead of these scaring away

the protestors, it made matters worse as the attack on Besigye went viral on Youtube and resulted in an enormous number of political tweets against Museveni in Uganda. Therefore, like it had earlier happened in Egypt and Libya, the government of Uganda failed to silence the internet for even just 24 hours

The other significance and success of the 'Walk-to-Work' Protests can be seen in the reaction by the international community against the government of Uganda on how it was dealing with the 'Walk-to-Work' protests. There was public outrage on the government's high-handedness in most western countries especially in Kampala. To many, the images of children choking in teargas, one brutally slain and several pushed behind bars just for 'Walking-to-Work' was a deadly crackdown on unarmed people. (Murumba, 3rd March 2013) Such sentiments were expressed by the United States through their officials. A case in point is the Assistant Secretary for African Affairs, Johnnie Carson who described the government's action against the 'Walk-to-Work' protesters as harassment of opposition. (Kaufman, 28th April 2011) This was emphasised by the State Department in a Statement through the deputy department Acting Deputy Spokesman, Mark Toner who reported that;

Obama administration is troubled by the tragic loss of life and injuries at the hands of Uganda's security forces in their response to the 'Walk-to-Work' protests as well as their detention of the opposition leader.

Such reaction by the western governments depicted a fundamental change in what America and her allies had once considered Yoweri Museveni as one of the "new breed of leaders in Africa." Many of them got to know that the government of Uganda like others in the developing world did not respect the opposition's right to express their view point and the citizen rights to peacefully let government understand their discontent. What is even more important is that is that the 'Walk-to-Work' exposed the double standards by the western governments in Africa. While they were very active in countries like Libya during the Arab Springs, in Uganda, the best they did was just to condemn without giving any other support. This rather cagy response has recently been showed in Obama's reaction to the Anti homosexuality and Gay Act of 2014. The American Government and her allies in the western world immediately threatened to cut on aid that their respective governments have been giving the government of Uganda. Despite, some condemnations here and there, such strong positions were not seen during the 'Walk-to-Work' protests, especially when security operatives harassed the protestors in Kampala. This a clear sign that America and her allies are not committed to promoting democracy per se in the third world. They are more aggressive when their interests are being jeopardised.

WHY THE 'WALK-TO-WORK' IN UGANDA DID NOT ACHIEVE AS MUCH AS THE ARAB SPRING IN TUNISIA, EGYPT AND LIBYA?

Despite the fact that sub-Saharan Africa possesses a perfect conditions for an 'Arab Spring'-like wave of revolutions, with repressive regimes and frustrated lower classes, such a revolution has failed to materialise on quite the same scale as it did in the Arab world. Taking a closer look at the conditions that allowed the Arab Spring to take place it becomes clear, that the social environment that gave power to popular support of the revolutions in the Maghreb and Middle East, are not present in most of sub-Saharan Africa including Uganda. Even is the fact that some scholars such as Mamdani do not buy this view, is important to note that unlike the conducive environment in the Arab world that powered and accelerated the Arab Spring to quickly achieve in changing the sitting governments in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, the conditions in Uganda and most of the sub-Saharan African countries are different socially, politically and economically.

One of the main social differences between the Arab world and Uganda is the existence of a large middle class in the former. The Arab Spring revolutions were not instigated by the lower classes of society; it was a disgruntled middle class that carried the wave of protests. (Tack, 9th March 2012) The fact that fewer Ugandans have a middle-class existence means that the power divide between the ruling elite and the protesting lower class is sufficiently large enough to withstand the effective suppression of protests. In addition, there is a difference between the countries that experienced the Arab Spring and Uganda. The poverty levels are quit high Uganda than for instance in Egypt. Therefore, with high poverty rates in a country like Uganda, one would first need to look for some food before he thinks about higher needs such political freedom. This therefore limited the 'Walk-to-Work' protests to few elitist groups in town and a

few youth who are in the proxy of the middle class in Kampala and other towns in Uganda that could not much what was achieved in the Arab North.

One can also rightly argue that a very large role in the Arab Spring was played by technology-dependent media such as *Twitter* and *Facebook*, which enabled the Arab youths to spread information, organise protests and coordinate these basic protests into a revolutionary concept. The technology to effectively apply these social media on the same scale as happened in the Arab World, while available, is spread much thinner in Uganda especially in rural areas, which limits the ability of such technology to be efficiently used to mobilise a population. Lower levels of literacy amongst those with a low socio-economic status in the country side also hindered the spread of information and awareness about political developments and human rights standards in the world. This again plays to the advantage of urban elites who do enjoy the benefits of literacy and access to technology, allowing the information-based side of the African Spring to be dominated by these elites. For instance, the question of who owns computers in Uganda can ably explain why the 'Walk-to-Work' Protests did not enlist the Arab Spring-like results here. In Uganda computers are a preserve of the few educated people mainly from a small middle class in towns. Young people who account for more than 60% of the population in Uganda, can only access internet services in Cafes rather than at their homes. This made it difficult for such people to organise and promote the political cause in the 'Walk-to-Work' protests in Uganda. In comparison, a country that experienced the Arab Springs like Tunisia has 90% of its people owning phones while Egypt is at 72%. (CIA Fact Book on Tunisia and Egypt) However, other scholars argue that as much as technologies were helpful in speeding communications and frustrating censorship, the extent of civil organization may be more important in determining the success of any movement. "The most significant political movements in Africa and in other places have occurred independently of social media - the struggles for independence, the struggles against apartheid and racism in Southern Africa." (Nyabola) The proponents of this view believe that where people need or desire to be organized they will do [so] independently of the technology around them. Whereas this view holds water it does not appropriately fit in the discourse on the 'Walk-to-work which as we have already seen fits in the new paradigm of politics that does not follow a number of conventional ideologies of political studies in the modern times. No region, state or form of government can remain immune to the impact of new information and communication technologies on social and political movement. (Steponova, op.cit.) It only the impact that varies from one area or situation to another as we have already seen above

The difference in the character of the state in Uganda also made it difficult for the Walk –to Work to change government. In Uganda, the state is fused to the government with the president exercising a lot of hegemonic powers. He directly controls the army and other organs of the state. In Tunisia on 12th January, General Rachid Ammer stepped down rather than shooting the rioters. He told Ben Ali that the army does not shoot people. The same thing happened in Egypt, where after 17 days of expanding unrest, the army –which had been holding power since the Egyptian revolution of 1952, also felt that the time had come for Mubarak to go. For the case of Uganda, the army is directly controlled by the president Museveni that makes it to be very loyal to him. This was even strengthened when Museveni promoted his son to the rank of Brigadier and placed him to head the Special Unit of the presidential Guard with his brother Caleb Akandwanaho heading the reserve forces. In addition, the police which is headed by another army general Kale Kaihura is was another reason why the "Walk – to –Work protests could not achieve what the Arab Spring had managed to change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The army and the police employed brutal means to quash and crack down the "Walk-to-Work protesters who were clearly viewed as a force that threaten the regime in Kampala. Thus unlike in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya where the army decided to back the people, in Uganda army chose to protect the government at all costs.

Further, a lack of identification with each other due to religious divisions within many societies limits sub-Saharan populations' abilities to rise against their governments as a united force. Whereas during the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, Islam was been a unifying factor against government, in Uganda religious differences which proves to be a barrier to unity for a similar cause. This is made worse by the ethnic divide which is common in Uganda. There was also an issue of language which is important source of identity for any community. Whereas the protesters in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya spoke one language, in Uganda the case was different as in Uganda there is no unifying indigenous language. To make matters worse, the close link between ethnic identity and language has dominated the recent political colonial history of Uganda. For instance, there is great difference between the Bantu languages spoken in

the southern part the country and their counterparts the Nilotics of the North. (Hitchen and Kasoma, 2013:512-521)

CONCLUSION

Despite the failure of the 'Walk-to-Work, protests to achieve what the Arab Spring had managed to change in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya in North Africa, it brought in a new chapter in the politics of Uganda. It remains to be considered as a fight for political space for the opposition and those who feel that all is not well in how the country is being governed by the Museveni regime. A quick look through the political spectrum of Uganda since 2012 shows growing vibrancy of those who oppose government which strongly argue that started with the 'Walk-to-Work protests in Kampala. The group that pioneered in these protest has transformed into many forms. At first, it started as the Action for Change (A4C) group, then to For God and My Country. The same people have now teamed up with some nongovernmental organisation to demand for political reform through their rallies throughout the country. It is our belief that this political metamorphosis in Uganda remains as work-in progress whose end result is difficult to predict now. Therefore as seen in the analysis above, The Arab Springs had large bearing on the Walk to Work protests in Uganda. There were a number of events that the Walk to Work shared with the Arab Spring in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. The people peacefully walked on the streets of Kampala and other town in Uganda to show their discontent with the sitting government without shading any blood.

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