

**Book Review:**

## **(Mis)Management of Sub-Nationalism and Diversity in “Nations”: The Case of Buganda in Uganda (1897-1980)**

*Godfrey B. Asimwe. Kampala: Makerere University Press, 2022. Paperback ISBN 9789913603010, 50,000 UGX*

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The book lays out a chronological sequence of events to reveal a comprehensive understanding of Uganda’s sub-nationalism. It is also an exploration of Uganda’s journey of nation-building, which was characterized by colonial and post-colonial hegemony manifested in coercion, oppression, and suppression. The author, Godfrey Asimwe, uses Buganda’s case to show how a challenge to hegemony led to systematic contestation between Buganda and the colonial and post-colonial political entities, which in turn impacted nation-building.

Asimwe argues that the British used Buganda as an ‘agent state’ for coercion and repression of other ‘nations’ in a bid to protect its independence. Chapter One delves into the foundational aspects of Uganda as a nation, shedding light on the collaborative dynamics that played a crucial role. Here, Buganda emerges as a central figure, enjoying special favour and prominence yet simultaneously becoming a divisive tool used to punish other cultural establishments. This complex interplay created a fragile foundation for unity, marked by tension and imbalance. Such a struggle not only shaped the political landscape but also contributed to the challenges faced by the nascent nation in establishing a cohesive identity.

Chapter Two deals with the intricate details surrounding the 1900 Agreement and the events that transformed Buganda. Within this historical context, power dynamics underwent a significant shift, transitioning from the traditional authority vested in the king to a consortium of collaborators, including regents and the *Lukiiko*. A compelling narrative unfolds within the chapter, shedding light on the colonialists’ strategic move to establish Sir Apollo Kaggwa, an intellectual, a politician, and a leader of the Protestant faction who had demonstrated his loyalty to British rule, as *katikiro*, prime minister, of the Buganda Kingdom. This move represented a deliberate effort to create a parallel government that contested the leadership of the king. The intricate web of political manoeuvring and the clash of power structures is presented with clarity, offering readers a comprehensive understanding of this pivotal period in

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Buganda's history. The logical progression of the chapter culminates in the inclusion of African representatives in the *Legco*, or Legislative Council. The narrative, however, introduces a query about the leadership transition during young Muteesa's study leave. The absence of information regarding who assumed his royal responsibilities reveals an element of uncertainty in the storyline.

Chapter Three articulates a pivotal moment in the colonial era in which the political contestation between Buganda and the British reached its peak resulting in the deportation of Kabaka Muteesa II, the king of Buganda, hence culminating in the first Buganda crisis. The narrative presents a detailed and well-articulated account of this event, shedding light on the intricacies that marked this significant crisis. By delving into historical details, the chapter underscores the gravity of the first Buganda crisis and its lasting impact on the region. Furthermore, the chapter delves into the complex interplay between religion and politics toward nation-building. This exploration provides valuable insights into the multifaceted factors that shaped political landscapes during this period and offers a nuanced perspective on the intersection of religion and nation-building.

Chapter Four casts light on how Apollo Milton Obote, Uganda's second prime minister (from 1962 to 1966) and later president, failed to accede to the demands emanating from Mengo, the seat of Buganda's power. Despite the intricate dance of political manoeuvring, Obote found himself unable to navigate the complex web of negotiations and compromises essential for harmonious nation-building that had been agreed upon between himself and Muteesa, the first post-independence president of Uganda from 1962-1966. One of the chapter's striking observations revolves around the stark contrast between the treatment of Muteesa, a highly respected royal monarch, and Obote, who was often perceived as a commoner. One cannot help but ponder the implications when a prime minister takes the unprecedented step of deploying soldiers to apprehend a figure as significant as a president and a king. This uncertainty surrounding command dynamics introduces an additional layer of complexity to an already convoluted crisis, leaving observers to grapple with the implications of such actions on the political landscape.

Chapter Five summarizes the assertive measures taken toward the nation-building process in Uganda. It highlights the coercive strategies employed by different political actors during the post-independence era to forge a unified national identity, emphasizing the significance of a cohesive and resilient nation. The comprehensive overview encapsulates the multifaceted nature of the responses and initiatives undertaken to shape the trajectory of Uganda's development during this transformative period. The inclusion of well-researched empirical evidence throughout all the chapters instills a sense of trust and accuracy in the narrative depicting the evolving historical events toward the struggle for nation-building.

Finally, in the realm of the history of Uganda, Asimwe's work emerges as a pivotal resource, shedding light on nuanced aspects that contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of Uganda's past struggles toward nation-building using Buganda as a case study. The body of the text is particularly commendable for its coherence and impressive structure, with each chapter seamlessly connected to the next. The logical flow is further enhanced by the richness of relevant citations dotted

throughout the chapters, adding depth and context to the narrative. Overall, the book emerges as a reliable and invaluable resource for historians, researchers, academicians, political actors, and independent readers.