

Book Review:

Decolonising State and Society in Uganda: The Politics of Knowledge and Public Life

*eds. Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, Jonathan L. Earle, Nakanyike B. Musisi, and Edgar C. Taylor. Cambridge: James Currey, 2022.
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This edited collection brings together the work of nineteen scholars. The editors, Katherine Bruce-Lockhart, Jonathan L. Earle, Nakanyike B. Musisi, and Edgar C. Taylor, split the book into three sections: ‘Framing Knowledge,’ ‘Imagining Institutions,’ and ‘Making Publics.’

Decolonising State and Society in Uganda is a fascinating book with an interdisciplinary approach offering a fresh perspective on decolonization, governance, and local agency. It elucidates how colonial legacies shape Uganda’s social structures, cultural institutions, and everyday interactions. The book further unravels histories beyond coloniality. The volume acknowledges that decolonization debates have long preoccupied the Ugandan elite. As several chapters show, the elites have always challenged Western knowledge and authority. For instance, Obote once called for a change in history education because the colonial narrative was corrupting the minds of African youth. Amin and Museveni, on the other hand, used the power of names and memory to project their nationalistic credentials while presenting themselves as correctors and healers of the wounded national spirit (Chapters Five and Fourteen respectively). Chapter One shows a gradual epistemological shift of names and naming among the Bakiga. Because of this shift, indigenous names no longer carry indigenous meaning, nor familial or community histories.

The book elucidates the resilience of the humanities as a discipline and the faculty despite the challenges posed by the neoliberal ecology within which they operate (Chapter Two). The other chapters touch on the different humanities disciplines offered at the university and their contribution to society, their challenges, and how they have transformed through the years.

The authors offer interesting insights about the colonizers as active erasers of local identities—the colonized continually endured subjugated histories because they could not assert themselves in meaningful ways for fear of being misinterpreted. Specifically, post-colonial regimes in Uganda have, in their systems, perpetuated

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coloniality despite their assumption of being independent leaders. These manifest in all sectors of the country.

By transcending colonial epistemologies, this book contributes to African studies as well as the decolonial and post-colonial theories. It thus expands the historiographical debate that has been full of histories of political elites. This scholarship is a crucial step towards fostering decolonial educational practices in Uganda, which is simply a form of justice.

Throughout the chapters, the authors demonstrate the value of humanities education for it offers an interpretation, appreciation, and criticism of knowledge production within and across civilizations but also empowers society to make meaning of the human experience through fostering critical thought, social justice, equity, and democratic practice. Besides, humanities contribute to tolerance and understanding between citizens, promote social cohesion, and challenge established positions and social norms through critical thinking. In the process they preserve heritage, cultural memory, and identity.

The book acknowledges the need to reorient the humanities and humanistic social sciences by integrating theoretical and methodological approaches in order to be positioned to ably address human challenges in dynamic and multi-dimensional local, regional, and global contexts.

The conclusion (Chapter Sixteen) restates the role of the book in rethinking, reshaping, and repositioning the role of humanities at Makerere University, given that they are vital in comprehending humanity and society as the primary subject for development interventions. I note that the book misses out on two key disciplines, namely Development Studies and Social Work and Social Administration which are not only taught at Makerere University but are also make a significant contribution to human well-being and society. It equally does not contextualize Uganda's experience in the broader regional or continental framework. Finally, its dense academic tone may not be easily accessible to non-academic audiences.

I applaud all the authors and editors for this timely and thought-provoking contribution to the scholarship on decolonization in post-colonial Uganda. I recommend this reading to scholars, policymakers, historians, and political scientists, among others interested in Uganda's past and its influence on present-day politics. It challenges readers to reflect on their complicity in perpetuating colonial legacies. This will empower them to engage in transformative practices that promote genuine decolonization and social justice.