

MODERN UGANDAN HISTORY

A History of Modern Uganda.

By Richard J. Reid.

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Key Words: Uganda, historiography, politics, economics, society.

“*When is Uganda?*” (7). Richard J. Reid poses this intriguing question in the opening pages of his latest book, *A History of Modern Uganda*. In this meticulously researched study, Reid considers the possibility (and potential) of national history within a country riddled by violence and division. When does one begin the narrative? When does Uganda as a larger collectivity start to make sense? Like earlier historians of Uganda, Reid traces a number of shared histories of engagement that predate colonial rule by several centuries (such as warfare, trade, and religion). Although Uganda is an artificial and relatively recent construction, its peoples have been interacting for generations. Reid also demonstrates how the production of Uganda’s history was (and remains) highly politicized, in large part because those with vital stakes in its interpretation are the ones who have been producing it.

Reid’s *History* is comprised of five substantive chapters, as well as a prologue and an epilogue. Although the narrative is not strictly linear — he effortlessly moves from past to present in order to illustrate continuities and disjunctures — the book makes analytic sense. In the first chapter, Reid focuses on how historians, as well as artists, poets, and journalists, among others, have known and represented Uganda. He maintains that ‘representation and expression — whether spoken, sung, performed, written, or sculpted — have been absolutely critical, from the precolonial to the modern eras, in enabling people to think about the past and its relationship to the present; to imagine the future; and to seek solace in that imagination’ (52). Chapter Two begins with the 1986 coup that brought to power Yoweri Museveni and his National Resistance Movement, thus marking a fresh start, a break from the violence that had characterized most of the postcolonial era. In an effort to create national cohesion, Museveni removed the past from politics (by creating no-party politics that would prevent sectarian violence) and politics from the past (by restoring the kingdoms but stripping them of political authority). However, by so doing, Museveni ultimately created even greater violence and division in many parts of the country. As Reid argues, the war and militarism that characterized postcolonial Uganda was part of a much longer pattern of violent state capture and subsequent political reinvention.

In Chapter Three, Reid recounts the rise and fall of *Mukama* Kabalega and *Kabaka* Mwanga, royal leaders of nineteenth century Bunyoro and Buganda respectively, as a way of introducing the reader to larger historical dynamics. The chapter also explores the significance of migration to the larger history of the nation, in part because it takes emphasis off of the southern kingdoms and considers the contributions of northern political actors. In addition, it examines military entrepreneurialism and its key role in centralizing political authority. The chapter concludes with a discussion of religion and

spirituality in the late nineteenth century. Chapter Four focuses on economic histories of the region that surround, in particular, the trade in slaves and ivory. Reid argues that trade was tightly linked to larger political and military systems, each influencing the other. ‘Commerce forged the nation’, he maintains, ‘but in violently competitive and unequal ways’ (206). In other words, trade brought greater violence and regional division. This violence and inequity was a precolonial creation, and not, as many might assume, a colonial one. The rest of the chapter considers colonial and postcolonial economic history, including processes of urbanization and social development (such as the education and healthcare sectors). The final chapter tries to reconcile, or at least explain, some of the tensions between the past and the present. Here Reid outlines some of the most significant ‘history wars’ that affected Ugandan politics and spiritual beliefs in the twentieth century (311, 337). He concludes with a brief epilogue that reiterates why history is so important in spite of President Museveni’s belief that historical knowledge is sectarian and divisive.

A History of Modern Uganda is a dense read, but one that is filled with many important insights about the past’s relationships to the present. While I would have appreciated shorter chapters that are a bit easier to ‘digest’, there is no doubt that I will be referring to this book for years to come. Reid is a master of historiography who seems to have read every article, book, and manuscript ever written about Uganda. Readers will surely enjoy mining his extensive footnotes and bibliography for hidden gems. I highly recommend this book to all scholars of Uganda, as well as to graduate students of African history more generally.

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MAPPING COMMUNITY IN COLONIAL KENYA

Cartography and the Political Imagination: Mapping Community in Colonial Kenya.

By Julie MacArthur.

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Up until 1948, the Luyia remained a broadly unfamiliar ethnonym. Yet, in that year, the Luyia appeared on Kenya’s first official census with more than half a million constituents. The question driving Julie MacArthur’s *Cartography and the Political Imagination* is how a group that ‘defied ethnic categorization and crossed environmental, linguistic, and colonial boundaries’ first formed, and then remained intact (4). Her answer to this question is, at once, conventional and distinctive: the Luyia drew on both ‘nativism’ and ‘cosmopolitan pluralism’ for their ethnic projects grounded in territoriality (6).

The Africanist historiography includes a substantial number of ethnic histories. Within this literature, the focus on Kenya is particularly robust. Yet MacArthur has written the