

BOOK REVIEW

Jonathon L. Earle and J. J. Carney. *Contesting Catholics: Benedicto Kiwanuka and the Birth of Postcolonial Uganda*. Woodbridge: James Currey, 2023. 242 pp. Photos. Maps. Bibliography. Index. \$36.95. Paper. ISBN: 9781847013651.

Benedicto Kiwanuka (born in 1922) played a big role in contemporary Ugandan history. But his terms of public office kept on being cut short—as was his life. In 1961, he was appointed chief minister of the transitional self-government; in 1962, he served just two months as prime minister of the country's newly founded National Assembly, before being ousted by his rival Milton Obote. Nearly a decade later, in June 1971, Idi Amin appointed him as chief justice (the first Ugandan to hold this office); on September 21 the following year, gunmen burst into his chambers and bundled him into the back of a Peugeot. He was never seen alive again.

As Jonathon Earle and Jay Carney demonstrate in this well-documented book, Kiwanuka's real legacy was in opposition roles: as the driving force behind the Democratic Party (DP) and as the voice for the historically marginalized Catholic population. And these are the three guiding threads of the book: part biography of this overlooked individual, part historical account of a political party trying to find its footing between Christian democracy and African nationalism, and part ecclesial account of the implantation and growth of Roman Catholicism in this nation, home to Africa's first modern canonized saints.


At the start of *Contesting Catholics*, the authors advance a compelling argument for this narrative: that the story of Kiwanuka reveals a more inspiring account of African politics than the dominant narrative of *la politique du ventre*. Of course, one of the qualities of political martyrs is that they are struck down before the effects of time expose them too much to the corrosive effects of power. Earle and Carney note that Kiwanuka's admirers sought to have him beatified by the Catholic Church—and many elements of this book could be appended to the petition submitted to Rome. Drawing on numerous archives, back issues of newspapers, and several interviews (all detailed in the bibliography), the authors depict Kiwanuka as a deeply devout man, principled and pacific, seeking to reach beyond sectarian and ethnic divides through the DP and committed to the democratic rule of law. Like another secular saint of the anti-imperial struggle, Mahatma Gandhi, Kiwanuka studied law at University College London.

For the reader interested in the broader arc of African Catholic history, this book offers many original insights; reading about Kiwanuka's annotations in his copy of J. H. Newman's *Apologia Pro Vita* offers a fascinating glimpse into the man's mind and faith. It is also interesting to read an account of Ugandan Catholicism that is not principally focused on the clergy or the institutional

Church, but rather on how Catholic culture seeps through society and orients the lives of the laity. In this respect, *Contesting Catholics* complements other recent works such as Elizabeth's Foster's *African Catholic*, in which Kiwanuka does not make an appearance. And for the reader interested in Uganda, this book succeeds in retrieving the contribution of Kiwanuka and the DP in the shaping of the modern independent nation.

However, there are elements which frustrated this reviewer. Chief amongst these is the awkward structure of the book, the chapters of which move from one region of the country to another. This is interesting insofar as it allows for local detail and connects regional electoral dynamics to national politics, but it comes at the expense of narrative direction. Although we start with Kiwanuka's birth and end with the aftermath of his assassination, the chronology often shifts abruptly back and forth between distinct episodes and scales of analysis. For example, on pages 54–55, the narrative swings from an analysis of the DP's manifesto, to an exchange of letters between Kiwanuka and the Archbishop of Canterbury, to the religious symbolism behind the DP's logo, when suddenly Kiwanuka is seen being held aloft by supporters at Entebbe airport having been “named Chief Minister on 1 July 1961 and Prime Minister on 1 March 1962.” How did we get here?

The detailed process of national independence and subsequent elections is only vaguely alluded to. People and parties slip in and out of the shadows: on page 59 we read of “UPC rivals,” but no mention had been made of the Uganda People's Congress since page 25. Later on, Idi Amin appears on the scene at the head of the 1971 *coup* (188), but no context is given as to where he came from. The expulsion of Asians is announced (190), but no background to this policy is offered; indeed, no mention had been made of Asians or Indians over the 100 previous pages. Readers already familiar with Ugandan history will be able to fill in the gaps, but such omissions distract from what is otherwise a well-researched and informative volume.

Artaud de la Ferrière 

Royal Holloway College, University of London,
London, UK

Alexis.ArtauddelaFerriere@rhul.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/asr.2024.201