

UCLA

UCLA Historical Journal

Title

Ramkrishna Mukherjee. Uganda: An Historical Accident?: Class, Natona, State Formation. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1985 281pp.

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1w58x4vg>

Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 9(0)

Author

Isabirye, Stephen B.

Publication Date

1989

Copyright Information

Copyright 1989 by the author(s). All rights reserved unless otherwise indicated. Contact the author(s) for any necessary permissions. Learn more at <https://escholarship.org/terms>

Peer reviewed

Stephen Haber's first book, a product of his dissertation at UCLA, is a valuable contribution to the study of industrialization in Mexico. The field awaits similar work from Haber on Argentina and Brazil.

Kevin Terraciano
University of California, Los Angeles

Ramkrishna Mukherjee. *Uganda: An Historical Accident?: Class, Nation, State Formation*. Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1985. 281 pp.

Cole P. Dodge and Magne Raundelen, eds. *War, Violence and Children in Uganda*. Oslo: Norwegian University Press, 1987. xvi + 159 pp.

Holger B. Hansen and Michael Twaddle, eds. *Uganda Now: Between Decay and Development*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 1988. 376 pp.

These three works analyze events that have taken place in Uganda over the past century. In *Uganda: An Historical Accident*, Mukherjee analyzes the "political developments" during the Colonial era. He looks at Lugard's Dual Mandate policy which he, like many other analysis sees as a Divide-and-Rule strategy. This policy enabled people to look at the Colonial-imposed district and regional headquarters as their primary source of legitimate authority. Therefore, indigenous kings and superimposed kings and superimposed chiefs were used as surrogate leaders to safeguard Colonial interests throughout the country. In the long run, this policy inhibited any form of national unity amongst the people.

The author looks at the incorporation of Uganda into the world economy. This meant that since the country was growing and exporting low-cash paying crops, it was inevitable that the economy would continue to "perpetually" and peripherally be weak; a legacy that continues to this day.

The author looks at regional bias in the economic development of the country. Most economic infrastructures were located in the South, while the Northern region was primarily a source of cheap labor. This

policy exacerbated the North-South polarization which also manifests itself to this day.

In chapter 5, the awkward historical position of the Asians (Asians with ethnic origins from the Indian Sub-Continent) is analyzed. The Asian community acted as a comprador class, in that it had an economic foothold in the country plus its international links with Metropolitan Britain. The Asian bourgeoisie also acted as a buffer zone between Africans and the Colonial authorities, in that if Africans rebelled, the Asian community would act as a shock absorber of this frustration as it was demonstrated by the anti-Asian boycott of 1959.

Needless to say, some flaws in Mukherjee's analysis exist. For example, he sees the kabaka (king) crisis of 1953 as a "political victory" for the Africans. During this crisis, the kabaka of Buganda was exiled to England for having defied the Colonial authorities. While this event could be seen as a "political victory," it enabled the Colonial government to recruit a class of "responsible leaders" to take over the reins of power at Independence. This has often been called the Post-Colonial or rather the Neo-Colonial ruling elite.

The author's excessive faith in the Westminster parliamentary model as a panacea for Uganda's political ills at the conclusion of the Colonial era is another shortcoming. Political events in the country and elsewhere since Independence have discredited this model.

Nevertheless, Mukherjee is commended for having analyzed the "developmental" crisis that confronted Third World countries; Uganda being a case study. After reading the book, the reader will see that Uganda's current politico-economic problems are not an "historical accident."

War, Violence and Children in Uganda and *Uganda Now* mostly deal with issues and problems that have arisen during the Post-Amin era. *War, Violence, and Children in Uganda* is a collection of essays on the plight of children in the Uganda of the 1980s. Children born since 1970 constituted half of the country's population in 1985. (Grant, p. #3.) Therefore, children are a force to reckon with in the country. Like Mukherjee; Gran, Dodge and Ssentenza-Kajubi give the reader a socio-historical analysis of the country's problems.

In chapter 3 and 4, Raundalen et al. use the socio-psychological analysis to look at the psychological impact of terror on a sample of children who participated in the author's questionnaire interviews. The

results are illuminating, though predictable, given the existing circumstances in the country.

The most interesting essay in the book is by Andama in chapter 2, where she brings out a parent's dilemma in raising children in an environment that has long been prone to violence. The violence is also accompanied by an economy that is in shambles, corruption at every social ladder and political apathy everywhere. Andama sees the country's only way out of its political and economic impasse as nothing short of a social revolt among the youth.

The book's conclusion is rather simplistic and lacks a rigorous socio-analytical framework, because it only highlights rather than give possible solutions to the country's problems. Maybe, given the country's intricate past and present, it is very difficult to come up with immediate viable solutions. Nevertheless, the book is commended for giving an "on the scene" account of life in Uganda.

In *Uganda Now*, as in *War, Violence*, the essays deal with Uganda's problems in the 1980s. The major difference between the two books is that the issues raised in *Uganda Now* are notably broader and more academic than those in *War, Violence*. Although there is a certain overlap in certain topics in the two books. The most important essays in *Uganda Now* deal with the fate of agriculture in Uganda. For example, O'Connor looks at the geographical factors affecting the country's agricultural produce. Edmonds looks at the country's troubled economy during the second Obote regime, while Belshaw tries to look at the "root causes" of the Post-Amin agricultural strategies as possible remedies. Whyte, Nsibambi and Kasfir offer rather an optimistic picture about the country's agriculture in the future. According to Whyte's analysis of the Banyole and Nsibambi's investigations into the food problem conclude that decentralization of the agricultural sector may yield better participation on the part of the populace in revamping the country's economy. Kasfir looks at the controversial Land Reform decree of 1975 taking Bushenyi and Mbarara districts as case studies. He argues that there is a latent land shortage among the peasants in the area that is likely to get worse in the coming years.

As far as political analysis is concerned, Obbo's essay is the most insightful. Like Andama's "The Parent's Dilemma" in *War, Violence*, Obbo empirically looks at the centrifugal forces that continue to plague the country, such as economic mismanagement, corruption, opportunism

etc. However, unlike Andama, Obbo does not seem to have any viable suggestions or solutions to the country's throes. While *Uganda Now* has the advantage of being analytical, *War, Violence's* "on-the-spot" investigative research is equally, if not more useful in looking at the country's contemporary woes.

Stephen B. Isabirye

Northern Arizona University, Flagstaff

Elaine Pagels. *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent*. New York: Random House, 1988.

Imagine the thrill. Walking into a literary bookshop in the emporium, you spot a handsomely illustrated volume by a respected scholar in your field. Aha! This book may be a nook in the marketplace and is exciting because your specialized field certainly contributes to the larger educated audience. Alas, Pagels' book has value as an explanation of individual gnostic psychology but does not contribute to the world of scholarship. The work fails to explain how gnostics lived *within* the world of late antiquity.

Elaine Pagels—known for *The Gnostic Gospels*—affirms here that the Western *ideas* concerning sexuality, moral freedom, and human values definitively form during the first four centuries of the common era. This is hardly controversial: however, she claims that the form these ideas took—interpreting the Genesis creation stories, Adam, Eve, and the serpent—are a departure from Christian, Jewish, and even "pagan" tradition. Thus, in the form of this departure they became inseparable from the heritage of the West; except, she hints, some revealers of the truth sit with equanimity because they do not suffer the vicissitudes of life.

Her argument is aesthetically appealing but misleading. Although the simplified approach here is based on Pagels' more technical and scholarly published work, it stands by itself and may properly be judged as such.

An important premise for her, of course, is the misleading notion that Christianity uniquely advocates "freedom." Christianity, according to Pagels, is characterized by its sense of freedom and the infinite value of