

Colonization Legacies in Uganda: A Critical Analysis of the Political, Cultural, Social, and Economic Dimensions

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Abstract: This review critically examines the political, cultural, social, and economic legacies of colonization in Uganda. The central discussion is on the enduring impacts of British colonial rule from the late 19th century to independence in 1962. We applied a qualitative approach. Only 28 sources from Google scholar database were used for our systematic reviews. With the help of thematic and content analysis, we analysed and interpreted the various themes and subthemes that emerged throughout the dataset and corpus selected for analysis. This study findings shows that the complexities of colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary Ugandan society. The findings further reveal that colonial policies breed's ethnic divisions, disrupt traditional governance structures, perpetuate social stratification and economic dependency. Arguably, understanding these legacies is crucial for addressing current challenges in governance, cultural identity, and socio-economic development. Going forward, we recommend policymakers to promote inclusivity, cultural revitalization and sustainable economic practices. Lastly, the contributions of this paper hinge on the wider discourse on post-colonial studies. Also, offers insights for policymakers and scholars who seek to navigate Uganda's post-colonial realities.

Keywords: Colonization, Uganda, Political Legacies, Cultural Legacies, Social Legacies, Economic Legacies, Ethnic Tensions, Post-Colonial Studies.

INTRODUCTION

The colonization footprints in Uganda to date are indelible marks. This is not only in Uganda but in many nations in Africa. The legacies of colonial rule are interwoven into the way the political, cultural, social, and economic system of Uganda is today (Robinson, 2019). Since the 19th century, Uganda experienced British colonization until its independence in 1962. The impact has a deep cut in the society politically, culturally, socially and economically. Khan, Salim, Baluch, Mehreen and Kaleem (2021) tells us that the implementation of different policies by the British colonial administration not only changed governance structures but also dismantled the cultural identities, social hierarchies, and economic practices in Uganda. Specifically, the British declared Uganda a formal British protectorate in 1894 with administrative control initially on Buganda kingdom before being extended to the western kingdoms of Ankore, Toro, and Bunyoro by 1896 (History world, 2024). The administrative responsibility over Uganda was later transferred from the British foreign office to the colonial office in 1906, signaling Uganda's increasing strategic importance to the British empire (History rise, 2025).

The footprint of colonization in Uganda by the British can be mapped from the late 19th century. It was just after the Berlin Conference of 1884-

1885 that European claims to African regions were formalized (Rwigema, 2025). We were told that the British established a protectorate over Uganda in 1894. Indirect rule was their strategic tool which relied on local leaders to oversee colonial policies (Rubongoya, 2025). British control was maintained while minimizing direct administrative costs. Notably this came at a significant financial cost to Britain: Between 1897 and 1898, Britain spent approximately £89,000 administering Uganda, a figure that escalated dramatically to £397,000 between 1899 and 1900, compelling the colonial government to explore new ways of cutting costs through economic exploitation of the territory (Kawa, 2024).

According Jørgensen (2023) colonial administration mainly caused distortion of the political backdrop of Uganda. A system of ethnic favoritism was created and divisions erupted in the different ethnicities that are within Uganda. The result is seen in age-long-lasting ethnic divisions that continue to ravage Ugandan politics today. For instance, Young (2024) attests that the Buganda Kingdom was the key ally of the British. They gained momentous power which exerted so much influence on others. It also created resentment among other ethnic groups such as the Banyankole and Basoga. The Buganda agreement of 1900, signed on March 10, 1900 between Sir

Hurry Johnstone on behalf of the British and the three regents primarily the Kattikiro Sir Apollo Kagwa, along with Stanslas Mugwanya and Zakaria Kisingiri on behalf of the young Kabaka Daudi Chwa II, formalized this privileged relationship and served as the foundational document governing British-Buganda relations for more than fifty years. (Kawa, 2024)

This narrative is important in this discussion because it is a pillar that houses political legacies that has persisted in Uganda today. According to Jørgensen (2023) British colonial policies left the footing for future conflicts. This created the fragmented political environment that Uganda is still battling up to date. For Rubongoya (2025) the arbitrary borders established during colonial rule neglected the various factions of the complex ethnic and cultural realities in Uganda. In turn, created a tension which has manifested into post-colonial governance challenges.

Based on the above understanding, this study is very important because it contributes to the current debate about national identity, governance, and socio-economic development in Uganda. It is important to dissect the relationship between colonial legacies and contemporary challenges for policymakers, scholars, and civil society actors in order to help them on the path towards a more equitable and just society. For this reason, an assessment of the political, cultural, social, and economic legacies of colonialism brings to light the costs of colonization and its consequences in contemporary Uganda. This study may aid a deeper engagement with the post-colonial realities of Uganda.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In this section, we have employed a qualitative research approach to support gathering data from various secondary data sources. Our review covers academic articles, books, and reports from various disciplines such as history, political science, sociology, and economics. Primarily, Google Scholar searches from 28 articles were only used for analysis out of the 36 papers collected before analysis. We only made use of the 28 because it offered the major areas of our study interest which is the legacies of colonization in Uganda.

In addition, the data gathered from the literature review, case studies, and interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis and content analysis. We arrived at these results by identifying key themes and categorizing the patterns related to the

political, cultural, social, and economic legacies of colonization as it is detailed below on the finding section. Each theme was further sub-divided into subthemes to help unpack the connections that exist between these themes.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Political Legacies

Our first theme of discussion is on the political legacies of colonization in Uganda. We found out that it is a fragmented political landscape. Also, it is filled with ethnic tensions and a lot of governance challenges. Ethnic favoritism was confirmed through overreliance on indirect rule. So, the results are clearly spelt in the ongoing political instability and clash of power interest experience currently in Uganda. In the same vein, Rubongoya (2025) conjectured that the imposition of arbitrary borders and the prioritization of certain ethnic groups in governance contributed more to a fragmented political climate leading to the unending battle and clash of power across Uganda.

Indirect Rule and Ethnic Favoritism

It is also evident that the British used indirect rule as a means of governance. This was masked under the co-leadership of local leaders in order to maintain control over the population (Laing, 2024). With Buganda being most favored over other ethnic groups, it became a breeding apparatus for resentment, distrust among the Banyankole, Basoga, and other communities. In line with this study, Ngabirano (2022) opined that this favoritism trapped Uganda into ethnic divisions. For this reason, it has made it difficult for post-colonial governments to build national unity. Concretely, the British strategy of governing ethnic groups as separate administrative units each under a distinct traditional authority systematically deepened regional divisions by institutionalizing ethnic differences as a basis for local administration (History rise, 2024). For example, northern Uganda communities were disproportionately conscripted into the colonial army, a role widely regarded as a position for the uneducated, while Baganda elites were elevated into administrative positions, reinforcing stratified hierarchies (Weebly, 2024).

As one of the consequences of this political favoritism, ethnic identities often take primacy over national identity. The findings revealed a pervasive sense of distrust among different ethnic groups. This was/is the footprint of colonial administration's favoritism towards the Buganda kingdom. To this effect, Gutkind (2021) confirms

that lack of collaboration among political factions only raises tensions and hinders effective governance.

Nationalism and Independence Movements

The advent of nationalism in Uganda can only be viewed through the mirror of the colonial era. As local leaders and intellectuals began to mobilize against colonial oppression, political parties such as the Uganda National Congress (UNC) and the Democratic Party (DP) arose, all matching and canvassing for independence (Nystrand & Yawe, 2024). Concretely, Rubongoya (2025) placed a great emphasis on the struggle for independence being engineered by the desire to dismantle the inequities created by colonial rule in Uganda. The 1940s and 1950s witnessed a marked intensification of political activism, fueled by growing discontent with colonial rule and broader demands for self-determination (Katiba Heritage, 2024). A pivotal flashpoint in the independence narrative was the British deportation of Kabaka Muteesa II in 1953 to London by order of Governor Sir Andrew Cohen following the Kabaka's refusal to cooperate with the British plans for an integrated Uganda, an act that instantly transformed him into a nationalist martyr and galvanized anti colonial sentiment across Buganda (Protectorate of Uganda Wikipedia, 2024).

Unfortunately, the legacy of colonialism made the movement for independence trapped in complications. The divisions sown during the colonial era resurfaced in the post-colonial period. Its effects are the conflicts among different political factions up to date. The rise of authoritarian regimes notably Idi Amin's rule can be traced back to the unresolved issues of governance and national identity rising from the colonial period (Mehadudia & Rastogi, 2024). This further defines the long age impact of colonial legacies on Uganda's political landscape.

Governance Challenges

The last subtheme under political legacy is the issues of governance. Our findings shows that Uganda post-independence still struggles with governance challenges such as military and civil wars. The arbitrary borders and divided loyalties as one of the colonial legacies contributed to ongoing conflicts. Kyohairwe, Karyeija and Nduhura (2024) study demonstrates that corruption and lack of accountability are linked back to colonial administrative practices that prioritized control over local governance. The political period

spanning approximately sixty eight years from 1894- 1962 left governance structure that were designed primarily for extraction and control rather than inclusive administration, a structured deficiency that persisted long after independence (History rise 2025). Furthermore, the colonial legal system which introduced English common law and established courts operating under colonial authority, was often biased in favor of British interests, creating a foundational disconnect between formal law and indigenous notions of justice that continues to complicate governance.

Generally, our findings show that the political legacies of colonization shapes Uganda's governance structures and political climate. Political instability and conflict have been going on for a long time because of the reliance on indirect rule and the ethnic favouritism. We contend that creating a national identity is difficult because there is already an implant of political identity division based on ethnicity in Uganda. Our findings begs for reforms that promote collaboration among diverse ethnic groups most especially incorporating mechanisms that guarantee equitable representation within governance frameworks. It should be a structure of governance that leaves no one behind.

Cultural Legacies

Our second major theme of discussion is on the cultural legacies of colonization. We found out that it has changed Uganda's culture in a manner that has a huge impact on its social connections. It is a diversion instead of a convergent cultural stance. The birth of Western education and Christianity was a complete overturn in the people's ways of living with our various communities. Monroe (2022) sheds more light on how colonial education changed traditional Ugandan cultures. Civilization was the major intention of the colonial government. They taught and converted people into Christianity. Based on this theme, language and identity, religion vs cultural transformation, education and cultural identity emerged as subthemes that guided our further discussion on this very subject.

Language and Identity

Our results show that when English was made the official language, our local languages and cultures were thrown into the mud. This brought about loss of our cultural heritage as people assimilated into the identities posed to them by the colonial rulers. Scholars like Lubogo (2023) made us understand that the supremacy of English has clogged cultural

expression and, in a way, hampered indigenous languages and the traditions of our people. Such identity loss is seen in the national appearance of Uganda and social cohesion ravaging Uganda in a bid to create equilibrium between traditional values and modern practices.

Furthermore, our results painted a complete dislodge of our cultural heritage due to the domination power of English language in the education sector which governs public lifestyle meanwhile intimidating and downplaying our true identity. As a way of minimizing the effect of cultural legacies of colonialism on our language and identity, Edyangu (2021) offers us a path that requires stepping back into the past to reshape the future by creating programs that support cultural preservation. Also, create programs that restore our thorough identity. By doing so, the concern about fading local languages and the corrosion of our customs will be realigned.

Religion and Cultural Transformation

Our second subtheme gave birth to the religious and cultural transformation that took toll on Uganda's spiritual climate through colonial expansion of Christianity. Through the religious practices of the missionaries that came to Uganda our indigenous belief systems were completely destroyed and westernized. In the study of Ouma (2025) we are meant to understand that the cultural crises that Ugandans face today is as a result of clampdown on our traditional religion. It is Historically notable that by the mid-1880s, the kingdom of Buganda was already divided between four competing religious factions, adherents of Uganda's native religion, Catholics, Protestants and Moslems each vying for political control, illustrating how deeply the collision between indigenous beliefs and external religious forces had already fractured the Ugandan society even before full colonial rule was established (Protectorate of Uganda, Wikipedia, 2024). The Church Missionary Society in particular took a prominent role in the new administration following the 1900 Buganda Agreement, consolidating the entanglement of Christian Missionary activity with colonial governance (Monitor, 2020)

Religious intolerance becomes a prevailing trend which affects the public life of diverse religions in the country, each struggling to answer the question of which is the true religion and most of the time leading to clashes within the various belief systems. In line with these results, Sekiwu (2025) made it clearer that marginalization of traditions

and customs has set a stage for worries and to address this concern we need to respect and acknowledge diverse cultures within our nation and harmonically blend to cherish them.

Education and Cultural Identity

The third subtheme of our discussion under cultural legacies of colonialism is education and cultural identity. We found out that priorities were accorded only to western values and knowledge. As such our indigenous education was trashed by embracing the formal educational systems laid down for us by the colonial masters. In the work of Ouma (2025) diversion was born as a result of class struggles between the elites and the general public. This means that colonial education has a lasting impact on the cultural identity of our people as many Ugandans struggle to create a balance between the two, "*western taught ideologies vs traditional beliefs*." The colonial government's decision to rapidly expand secondary education from 1952 onwards, while simultaneously enacting legislation to incorporate Africans into trade, reflects a deliberate policy of selective cultural integration that prioritized Western Knowledge systems while sidelining indigenous modes of education and knowledge transmission (Britannica, 2024).

In the same spirit, Oroma (2022) suggested that it is vital to incorporate regional knowledge and cultural customs into our education system in order to create a kind of harmonious environment for both western taught ideals and traditional beliefs thrive as these will Ugandans to develop a sense of belonging and feeling of pride of their identities thus closing the gap between traditional values and contemporary influences.

Social Legacies

We further looked into the third major theme of our discussion which is social legacies of colonization. This is well portrayed in gender inequality, ethnic conflict, and stratification that is visible in modern day Uganda. Jørgensen's (2023) results draw our attention to the social differences that advanced during the colonial era and its costs for Ugandan society today.

Ethnic Stratification and Tensions

Our results show a favoritism approach on certain ethnic groups. Unequal access to opportunities and recourse were preferential treatment adopted by the colonial policy. According to Wamala (2022) this poison in the form of VIP treatment of colonial favouritism only caused a disintegrated

society which prioritized ethnic identities over national unity. As such, socioeconomic stratification was born. The British divide and rule strategy deliberately kept kingdoms intact, consolidating and elevated ruling elites, while accentuating differences between the different polities and ethnic identities (Land Portal, 2023). A stark illustration of this is seen in the conflict between Buganda and Bunyoro: the British enrolled the support of Buganda against Bunyoro's resistance, and as reward two Bunyoro counties Buyaga and Bugangaize were ceded to Buganda after Bunyoro leaders were defeated and Omukama Kabalega was exiled to the Seychelles, breeding lasting inter-ethnic grievances (Land Portal, 2023). As we speak today, ethnic conflicts still have a lot of influence on our day-to-day life especially in our social connections and political set ups showcasing the legacy of historical division championed by colonialism.

For Wamala (2022), the grudges that our people hold amongst themselves as a result of past injustices that continue to propel ethnic conflicts can be addressed through discussion and reconciliation such that we can promote social cohesiveness and overcome the effect of colonialism.

Gender Inequalities

The next subtheme of our discussion is the very present debate of gender discourse. Issues of gender roles in Uganda are also significantly impacted by colonialism. Women are seen as the major group that has been marginalized in making contributions to society as a result of patriarchal norms (Morrison, 2025). This shows that colonial laws marginalized women especially on the aspect of having access to economic and educational opportunities. Contemporary underscores the persistence of the colonial legacy: Ugandan women control approximately 39 percent of Ugandan firms, yet receive only 9 percent of commercial loans, and are 40 percent less likely than men to hold a bank account (Women in Uganda 2024). Although there has been a great advocacy in modern Uganda to enhance women participation in politics and other positions by empowering women to rise to the same status like men in decision making in state affairs, there is still a lag on implementation of specific policies that tackle the issues of gender inequality and enhancement of women to participate in decision-making.

Health and Social Services

Health and social services are the last subtheme that emerged under the social legacy of colonialism showing that public health in Uganda suffers a long impact from colonial neglect of social services and health care. Mulumba, Ruano, Perehudoff and Ooms (2021) confirm to us that the discrepancies in access to healthcare occurred as a result of the British colonial administration's preference for the health of European settlers and soldiers over that of the local population. The colonial era's prioritization of health infrastructure for European settlers created a two-tiered healthcare system whose inequalities were never fully dismantled after independence.

It is about class and the differences in health outcomes amongst various populations in Uganda today still shows us how deeply colonial legacy impacted our health and social services. To mitigate this impact, Boyd (2022) calls for reforms that address historical injustices and promote fair access to healthcare for all. This critical path of striving for an improved health and social service systems will help to curtail challenges of insufficient financing and infrastructure.

Economic Legacies

In this paper, economic legacies are the last major theme that guided our debate. Economic concern is the engine of every state and Uganda has suffocated under extractive practices, land dispossession, and persistent dependency as a result of colonization. Similarly, Mwanika, State, Atekyereza, and Österberg's (2021) findings give us a clear background about the grave economic effects of colonial rule on contemporary Uganda.

Extractive Economic Practices

Our first subtheme falls under extractive economic practices which connotes exporting raw materials at the expense of our local development. This was Uganda's colonial economy. According to Kagorora, Kansiime, Owuor, and Tumwine (2021), exporting cash crops led to the development of dependencies which exist today in our economy. The British colonial administration systematically engineered Uganda into a Cashcrop economy, distributing cotton seeds to farmers in Buganda, Busoga, and Ankore from 1905 onwards (Monitor, 2020). The scale of this extraction was dramatic, cotton exports rose from just 10 metric tonnes worth 236 pounds between 1905-1905 to 4786 metric tonnes worth approximately 245,426 pounds by 1914-1915, making Uganda one of the most productive cotton producing territories in the entire British Empire outside of India (Monitor,

2020). According to Kagorora, Kansime, Owour, and Tumwine (2021), exporting Cashcrops led to the development of dependencies which exist today in our economy. Notably, by independence in 1962, Uganda's productive structure remained entirely dominated by what the British colonial administration had mandated Ugandans to produce, with coffee overtaking Cotton as the country's most valuable export by 1957 (Britannica, 2024: Nation's Encyclopedia, 2024).

What challenges Uganda's sustainable economic development is over reliance on agriculture, poor infrastructure, and restricted market access. This implies that a greater number of rural populations depend on cash crops as the only means of livelihood, struggling to access resources and markets. For this reason, it is important to create diversified economic activities to boost agricultural resilience and productivity.

Land Dispossession and Inequality

Land dispossession and inequality forms our second subtheme showing that land ownership is in the hands of a small number of people and this has denied local communities the chance to possess their land. Asad, Anshari, and Mulabbi (2024) juxtaposed social tensions and conflicts in contemporary Uganda as an impact brought about by the legacy of land inequality.

The roots of this crisis trace directly to the Buganda Agreement of 1900, which concentrated most of Buganda's fertile land in the hands of approximately 3000 landowners who were henceforth empowered to extract considerable taxes in produce, labour, and currency from their tenants (Oxford Academic, 2022). In practical terms, the 1900 Buganda Agreement allowed an estimated 300 families of chiefs and other notables to take over more than half of Buganda's productive land overnight, leaving hundreds of thousands of peasants known as "Bakopi" effectively landless and vulnerable to eviction (Monitor, 2020). This land stalemate, in which people own land they do not use while others use land they do not own, was so entrenched that subsequent laws from Idi Amin's decrees in the 1970s to the current land act have attempted without success to resolve it (Monitor, 2020).

These findings imply that past injustices on land dispossession continue to be a major problem. Land reforms which support equal distribution and protection of land rights for individuals impacted by colonial land practices is urgently required.

Economic Dependencies and Vulnerabilities

In the journey towards economic sustainability, Uganda is challenged due to economic dependencies brought about by the colonial economic extractive nature. The results show that the dependency on agriculture and lack of diversification affects the economy of Uganda to date. Hope (2025) suggested that it is pertinent to promote economic diversification and deploy economic sustainable tactics to overcome this obstacle. In the same vein, another study by Nabweteme, Bostedt, and Turinawe (2025) also supports the claim for economic diversification and added that smallholder farmers should be supported to reduce economic breakdown and raise an equitable and sustainable economy.

Recommendations for Policy Action

It is important to put procedures that allow participation of marginalized ethnic groups in political decision-making. This paper advocates for an inclusive governance framework in all Ugandan institutions. This can be actualized through decentralised government arrangements or constitutional amendments that support federalism.

More so, the study showed the need to support cultural revitalization. It recommends that the Ministry of Education and Sports should encourage the continuous implementation of educational policies that incorporate local languages and cultural practices into the curriculum. Also, support community-led initiatives that promote the preservation of indigenous knowledge and traditions.

Again, through the ministry of gender, labor and social development, this paper recommends that social inequalities should be addressed by developing targeted social programs that address disparities in access to resources, particularly for marginalized communities. Also, to implement gender-sensitive policies that empower women and promote their participation in economic and political spheres.

Furthermore, it is an overarching concern raised from the findings of this study to foster economic diversification so as to unpack the economic dependency caused by the colonial footprint. Therefore, we recommend through the ministry of foreign affairs and the ministry of trade and industries to encourage investment in diverse sectors beyond agriculture, such as manufacturing and services. Also, financial institutions through the Ministry of Agriculture, Animal Industry and

fisheries support smallholder farmers through access to credit, training, and markets to enhance agricultural productivity in Uganda as this contributes to the food security of the nation.

Lastly, through the ministry of Lands and Surveyor, to review and reform land tenure systems to promote equitable land distribution and secure land rights for marginalized communities. This would reduce the number of land grabbing lawsuits in Uganda and make it easier for people impacted by colonial land policies to get their land back.

Contribution of the Paper

This paper adds new knowledge to literature regarding colonization effects in Uganda through the lens of political, cultural, social, and economic atmosphere. It also shows the nexus between these concepts and what it means for Uganda contemporary society bringing to light the discourse on post-colonial studies which is beneficial for both academics and policymakers.

CONCLUSION

Colonization legacies under the spectrum of political, cultural, social and economic stand of Uganda was the core purpose of this study. The findings showed that it is a complex phenomenon that has led to class struggle, clash of power, ethnic tensions, social disconnection and economic instability in Uganda. A critical analysis of these legacies reveals the costs of colonization on the national identity. Navigating this post-colonial era terrain requires acknowledgment of the historical injustices and making efforts to establish discussion and effective reconciliation paths that promote a just and inclusive society for all Ugandans. Future research should focus on strategies for reconciliation, cultural preservation, and sustainable economic development to build a more equitable and prosperous society.

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