


However, this was not the case. Despite this concern, *To Speak and Be Heard* is a compelling study that makes important contributions to the various bodies of literature; I highly recommend it to anyone interested in understanding power, authority, and governance in Africa. My wish is that this book gets to Ugandan politicians, particularly some of today's parliamentarians who participated in bringing down Amin's regime in the late 1970s, so that they can better understand their actions back then and their current electorates — who continue to assemble in public spaces and make demands of their leaders — from a historian's perspective.

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## Confinement and Politics in Uganda

### *Carceral Afterlives: Prisons, Detention, and Punishment in Postcolonial Uganda*

By Katherine Bruce-Lockhart. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2022. Pp. 280. \$80.00, hardcover (ISBN: 9780821424773); \$36.95, paperback (ISBN: 9780821424780); ebook (ISBN: 9780821447741).

Alicia C. Decker 

The Pennsylvania State University

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To write of prisons is to write of politics. This is a point made abundantly clear in the opening lines of Katherine Bruce-Lockhart's compelling new monograph, *Carceral Afterlives*, which considers the complicated history of imprisonment in postcolonial Uganda. She begins the book with an epigraph from Rajat Neogy, a famous Ugandan political prisoner who described his experiences of detention in an essay for *The New York Times* in October 1969. 'Imprisonment politicizes everyone', he wrote shortly after his release. 'Arbitrary arrests and imprisonment without trial provide a new pattern and insight for him [the detainee] into the true nature and the insecurities of the governments that use it'.<sup>1</sup> Bruce-Lockhart uses insights gleaned from former detainees such as Neogy, as well as a host of other written and oral sources, to analyze the 'true nature' and 'insecurities' of the Ugandan post-colonial state. She argues that confinement — both as a form of punishment and as a 'vehicle' for other types of punishment (corporal or capital punishment, deportation, forced labor, and so on) — was central to state power and an important locus of dissent among those who opposed the government's frequent use of incarceration and detention (4). She demonstrates that imprisonment is deeply rooted in Uganda. It functioned as an important 'technology of empire' throughout colonial rule and has remained a central part of colonialism's afterlife (6).

This book is the product of meticulous research and careful analysis. Bruce-Lockhart uses annual reports, personnel files, photographs, rule books, and other 'archival remnants' from the Uganda Prisons Service (UPS) to provide the empirical scaffolding (18). These materials signaled the institution's professionalism to both internal and external audiences, serving bureaucratic and

<sup>1</sup>R. Neogy, 'Topics: how it feels to be a political prisoner', *New York Times*, 25 Oct. 1969, 32.



performative functions. To understand the broader context of carceral politics, the author consulted parliamentary records, police files, court cases, and government records, as well as privately held personal collections. She conducted extensive interviews with current and former prison officers, military personnel, police officers, government officials, formerly incarcerated persons, and their families, not to ‘fill archival gaps’ as she explains, but instead to understand how individuals think about and represent their experiences of the past (20). She compares these archival and oral sources with media sources, memoirs, and reports from various human rights investigations. Her ability to tease out new and important insights about incarceration, politics, and power in post-colonial Uganda, and to write up her findings in such an accessible and engaging manner is impressive, even for those used to working with similar sources.

*Carceral Afterlives* is organized into six main chapters, as well as an introduction and conclusion that place the book in conversation with other theoretical and empirical works on prisons and punishment from global perspectives. The first chapter traces the imposition and expansion of the Uganda prison system during the colonial period. Bruce-Lockhart notes that although prisons were framed as sites of rehabilitation and reform — as well as drivers of economic development vis-à-vis prison farms and industries — they ultimately served as places of repression. Carceral spaces were also sites of resistance, both by prison staff who occasionally pushed back through labor strikes and by inmates who found ways to revolt and/or escape. Chapter Two focuses on how the state connected the UPS to larger nation-building efforts by positioning the prison as a symbol of modern governance and a source of economic development. Much of this work was performative as illustrated by the large-scale prisoner releases that were orchestrated by the Obote and Amin governments to demonstrate the ‘benevolence and legitimacy’ of the postcolonial state (65). In Chapter Three, the author uses oral histories to examine prison officers’ professional identities and experiences during the 1960s–80s. She suggests that their positive portrayals of service during this era must be read alongside the more critical accounts of prisoners and external observers.

The last three chapters strike a markedly different tone, focusing more explicitly on the violence and repression that was associated with imprisonment between 1962 and 1986. Chapter Four looks at the widespread use of detention without trial during Obote’s first regime. Not surprisingly, the state’s arbitrary use of violence and coercion was heavily contested. As Bruce-Lockhart argues, ‘the government’s use of confinement was thus not only a key method for managing dissent but also a driving force for dissent’ (135). In Chapter Five, using a variety of first-person accounts, she analyzes detention, incarceration, and other forms of punishment during Amin’s military regime. In addition to mapping the state’s clandestine network of carceral facilities, she demonstrates how the violence of military rule affected the formal prison system. Finally, in Chapter Six, she considers the impact of civil war on the UPS during Obote’s second term, as well as the state’s continued use of detention without trial. It includes a brief discussion of the 1985 military coup and the Okello regime’s continued use of detention and torture. The book’s conclusion brings the narrative up to the present, considering not just the situation in Uganda, but also global efforts to abolish mass incarceration.

Smart, thoughtful, and bold: *Carceral Afterlives* is arguably one of the year’s most important books, one that will appeal to historians of Uganda, as well as anyone interested in carceral politics more generally. It is written in an accessible manner and could easily be assigned in graduate seminars or for use with advanced undergraduates. It is a text that will undoubtedly be referenced and revisited for years to come.