

Research Africa Reviews Vol. 2 No. 3, December 2018

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Christopher D Gore. *Electricity in Africa: The Politics of Transformation in Uganda*. London.: James Curry. Year: 2017, 186 pp. ISBN: 978-84701-168-8.

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On 9th June 1979, cabinet ministers in the transitional government of Prof. Yusuf Kironde Lule were summoned to a lunch meeting organized in Mwanza, Tanzania. The purpose of the meeting, according to its host - President Julius Nyerere - was to demarcate a concrete plan to reform the political “crisis” following the deposition of President Idi Amin Dada of Uganda. Upon arrival in Mwanza, the delegates were astonished to see toiletries indicating they had been booked into the state lodge for the night. Prof. G.W. Kanyeihamba had been appointed Attorney General and Minister of Justice. President Nyerere requested the delegates to voice their opinions on the cause of the political crisis in Uganda. The turn came for Kanyeihamba to speak and as he remember later: “I was next asked to comment. I identified the main problem as being structural and constitutional...Nyerere listened attentively. Most Ugandans heard me in silence but nods of approval here and there. Nyerere must have thought I was diverting the audience from his mission. He stopped me in midsentence and asked, “Are you not a lawyer?”, when I said yes, he continued, “These problems are *political* not *legal*’, Next”? As talks progressed, it became increasingly clear that the Tanzanians had no intention of releasing us until we had agreed to *all* their terms” (Kanyeihamba, 2002: 187-8, emphasis added).

I summon the above historical event to illuminate the relevance of Christopher Gore’s *Electricity in Africa: The Politics of Transformation in Uganda*. Gore sketches the historical contours of the politics of electricity and infrastructural development in Sub-Saharan Africa by taking a specific focus on the politics of electricity transmission and transformation in Uganda. In engaging debates that stride political economy, Gore looks to a very historical theoretical anchor: Albert O. Hirschman in order to question the choice of particular “pathways”. In mobilizing Hirschman’s conceptual frame, Gore seeks to answer why particular pathways were chosen as opposed to others in addition to learning about what actors and institutions govern transformations.

The book delves into responses to these core questions and gives critical credit to the World Bank and institutions of the Uganda state. Due to the author’s conviction that his questions are “fundamental to energy justice”, who has access to electricity and what form of electricity households get are important. In the general analysis of stakeholders, Gore considers those that make “decisions about access” and the criteria they use to decide access. Gore’s shortest answer to questions surrounding decision-making is that consumers are missing in the action. The World Bank, the government of Uganda and non-state actors (including NGOs and Civil Society groups) are the

dominant actors in the process. Here lies the relevance of Nyerere's rebuke of Kanyeihamba in the event of 1979.

While it is true as Gore mentions that the real and "planned expansion of the electricity network prior to 1960 was that it evolved in general isolation from national, indigenous pre-independent politics", it is not true that this was discontinued after independence. Gore provides a valid reason to explain why this isolation occurred. The documents of Uganda Electricity Board were *technical* (my emphasis) because electricity generation and distribution were seen as *technical* undertakings (my emphasis). The book's key question ties the debate between power political issues, on the one hand, and power technical matters, on the other.

To a society hitherto ignorant of light generated from water, dam building in Uganda gave the government a new kind of knowledge that successfully divorced it from society. It is naïve to say that dam building in Uganda did not evolve on par with the transition in the political context; in reality, this very evolution of political contexts transformed amidst a development in various meanings embedded in power. While political change occurred at the local and national levels, state power also embraced technical knowledge as a medium of development to ensure government relevance and continuity. In this transformation, political actors begun to articulate a claim to technical knowledge and power that was starkly dissonant with the social base they claimed to represent under general politics. This confirms Nyerere's rebuke of Kanyeihamba: as a seasoned politician, he was convinced that political propriety was a matter that negated the juridical.

The book deals with the politics of energy reform in Uganda and places the World Bank at the fulcrum of these reforms. The key concern, however, is that national debate of these reforms rarely took place in a democratic platform because the World Bank and its technical agencies were at the center of these changes. Gore summons the support cast of civil society groups, NGOs and international consultants, who possess the technical knowledge of what is to be done. This is "governance", which he described as a framework in which "state and non-state interests interact". But consumers are missing in the explanation as individuals; they are bundled together as a category of civil society. But since when did Civil Society, representative of elite power and privilege, cater to the interests of the masses? (is this an innovative argument or nuanced? Give some evaluation of why Gore's point here is either noteworthy or not)

As Gore summons the historical debate in Uganda whether electricity would be for industries or the people, the question was clearly settled to favor the former and the rich elites than the latter. It was elite power that jostled to avoid building a dam at Murchison Falls to Bujagali sighting tourist concerns. As Gore reminds us, the politics of electricity before independence considered industries as well as the elite groups as a priority. Supply to the indigenous poor was not initially considered because they did not factor into the economic calculus of the time. The lack of ethnographic work undertaken by the author among consumers is a shortcoming of Gore's book. Focused group discussions with consumers would have enriched the book and Gore's analysis on the complexity of energy accessibility.

Even reforms orchestrated by the technical power of the World Bank in advancing financial loans and managerial advice made electricity reform so difficult because, Gore says, policy managers failed to identify how stakeholders were to participate in the processes; because including the public on a large scale was “messy.” It was difficult to identify the goals, rationale and character of participation during the decision making process. The circumscription of various forms of power and their attendant knowledge bases is the greatest marker of treachery from those who claimed to reform electricity. I say treachery because the substance of reform could not be divorced from the procedural guarantees that could allow transparency and ultimate accountability. The failure of energy reform agents to consider wider social inclusion in decision-making reflects beyond the energy reform to the scholar that studied it. Consumers are missing. The exclusion of consumers from critical decision-making begins at the processes of planning, and takes a critical juncture at the phase of financial negotiation. Consumers are isolated because the quest for financial accountability can “spoil” deals of crooked public technocrats.

Gore’s work helps us understand the ways in which a particular kind of politics developed in Uganda, one that enabled technocrats to attain overwhelming technical power beyond any democratic control and accountability. One of the greatest contributions of this book is its demonstration of how technocracy has always been the conduit of the locus of formidable power. If the receding hegemony of the World Bank is under challenge from unbridled Chinese banks like Exim, it merely illuminates how the fetters of the former have been rebranded in the latter. The author provides a unique perspective that highlights how Uganda has become a laboratory to experiment with various kinds of reforms in the realm of electricity, family planning, and genetically modified organisms.

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