

TOPIC: Intimacies of identification and Lived Citizenship among the Ghetto Youths in Kampala-Uganda.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis investigates how Uganda's national ID system shapes notions of citizenship, belonging, and personhood among marginalized 'ghetto youths' in Kamwokya and Bwaise slums of Kampala. It addresses the dissonance between the promise of legal citizenship-primarily through official ID documents and, the lived realities of vulnerable urban populations. While IDs are intended to authenticate citizenship, improve governance, and facilitate service access, they inadvertently reinforce social inequalities and entrench exclusions by creating hierarchical categories of citizens: deserving, less deserving, and undeserving. The study highlights how the introduction of a National ID in Uganda in 2014 intensified marginalization for the vulnerable urban youths, who often navigate (contest and negotiate) or even bypass legal processes to assert their identity. Employing ethnographic methods: participant observation, interviews, focus groups, and life stories, the research reveals that possessing a legal ID grants access to public and private services, whereas those without IDs face systemic barriers and exclusions. This results in a duality of a privileged segment enjoying full rights, and others marginalized, compelled to seek alternative means of asserting their personhood. Some youths reject or are unable to obtain IDs, rendering them invisible within formal frameworks. The hierarchical structure reinforced by IDs underscores how legal recognition both enables and constrains citizenship experiences, shaping individuals' sense of belonging and agency. Theoretically, the thesis draws on frameworks of differentiated and lived citizenship to demonstrate how legal documents stratify citizens, highlighting the social and political processes that categorize deserving from non-deserving individuals. The overall objective was to explore how citizen certification and identification influence individuals' sense of belonging, the nature and quality of citizenship in terms of citizen-state relationship, and personhood. The findings illustrate that the Legal IDs accentuate the different layers of value of citizens, impacting marginalized youths' perceptions of their personhood, belonging, and citizenship within Uganda's urban landscape.