Legal Identification Documents: Threats and Opportunities for the Ghetto Youths in Kampala Slums

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Abstract: This paper explores how a new hierarchy of legal Identification Documents (IDs) in Uganda, topped by the National Identification Document (NID), interchangeably referred to as the national identity card, *Endanga-Muntu*, or a national ID in this paper, has diminished the value of a wider range of forms of recognition. It also examines how this new hierarchy has generated structural discrimination and escalated selective inequalities among differentiated citizens, leading to disenfranchisement. Using a case of the ghetto youths in Kampala slums of Kamwokya and Bwaise, this paper argues that the range of legal IDs within Uganda's overall national registration ecosystem over time have included multiple and overlapping identification mechanisms, such as birth registration cards, local council village cards, residence IDs, baptism cards, voter's card, tax payment slip, driver's license, citizens' passport, written A4 paper letters, marriage certificates, and others, acceptable in various formal and informal spaces until the recent introduction of a NID which manifests both as a threat and an opportunity to the ghetto youths.

Key Words: National Identification Document (NID) also called *Endanga-Muntu*; Ghetto Youths; Disenfranchisement.

Résumé: *Cet article explore comment une nouvelle hiérarchie de documents d'identification légaux (IDs) en Ouganda, surmontée par le Document d'Identification National (NID), aussi appelée de manière interchangeable carte d'identité nationale ou Endanga-Muntu dans cet article, a diminué la valeur d'un éventail plus large de formes de reconnaissance. De plus, il examine également comment cette nouvelle hiérarchie a généré une discrimination structurelle et aggravé les inégalités sélectives entre des citoyens différenciés, conduisant à la privation de droits. En utilisant le cas des jeunes du ghetto des bidonvilles de Kamwokya et Bwaise à Kampala, cet article soutient que la gamme de cartes d'identité légales au sein de l'écosystème global d'enregistrement national de l'Ouganda a inclus, au fil du temps, des mécanismes d'identification multiples et qui se chevauchent, tels que les cartes d'enregistrement de naissance, les cartes de village du conseil local, cartes d'identité de résidence, cartes de baptême, carte d'électeur, ticket de paiement d'impôts, permis de conduire, passeport citoyen, lettres écrites en papier A4, certificats de mariage et autres acceptables dans divers espaces formels et informels jusqu'à l'introduction récente d'une carte d'identité nationale qui se manifeste à la fois comme une menace et une opportunité pour les jeunes du ghetto.*

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Mots clés: Document d'Identification National (NID), également appelé ‹Endanga-Muntu›; Les Jeunes du Ghetto; Privation du Droit de Vote

Introduction

The advent of legal identification documents in Uganda is less written about. What is commonly captured both in contemporary scholarly writing and public discourse is the National Identification Document (NID) also referred to as *Endanga-Muntu* by the majority of Ugandans. The NID refers to an official identity card with attributes (both static and mutable) that individuals can use to identify themselves when interacting with formal institutions, such as government, banks, and formal employers (Gelb and Clark 2013a). It is a seemingly *sine qua non* document, without which life becomes unbearable, especially for the vulnerable groups of people at the society margins such as the ghetto youths who are prone to exclusions (Van der Straaten 2022). The ghetto youths include young men and women (aged 18 to 30), who find a home within Kamwokya and Bwaise slums either by physically residing there or identifying themselves as belonging to the 'ghetto'. They represent 'differentiated citizens'[2] who experience structural social-economic inequalities and exclusions especially on legal citizenship basis.

The slums are marked by distinct features: the social-economic un-wellness of individuals; congestion and population explosion; informal businesses; and the low flooding landscape in contrast to the adjacent hilltop rich residences of Bukoto, Naguru and Kololo. There is a total look of despair and impoverishment for the majority of dwellers. This positions Kamwokya and Bwaise clearly as marginal places within the Greater Kampala Metropolitan Area and offers marginalised space to the 'ghetto life' for the youths. The current insistence on legal identification documents by countries such as Uganda is rooted in the global agenda of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG target 16.9 which advocates "legal identity for all" as a basis for development (Gelb and Metz 2018; Manby 2020). With funding support from world renowned entities such as the World Bank to boost civil registrations through projects such as the NID project in Uganda, the rest of formerly recognized documents for citizen identification have been relegated to positions of less importance while others rendered useless. Therefore, what does this mean in a practical sense and how does the hierarchization of legal identification documents affect the everyday realities of differentiated citizens?

The focus of this paper contextually is to extricate from the global, and make clear the empirical local distinction between the ghetto youths and other slum dweller youths in Uganda. While the former live their everyday life in and earn from within the ghetto space(s), disenfranchised and deprived (though both could), the latter exude positive energy and can easily fit in the mainstream life outside the slums without judgment (only use the ghetto as a transit zone). Their only shared commonality is the slums, a place where they both live or rather find a place to call 'home'. Although all slums are perceived as ghettos, not all ghettos are slums. The slums are identified by the physical features of impoverished structures while the ghetto is identified as both 'a physical, social and mental construct' with distinct features, among them: identity and belonging, exuded by the strong sense of attachment to both the physical and social networks. Therefore, this article begins by contextualizing who the ghetto youths are within the legal identification framing as the point of departure.

The author creates an understanding of the ghetto youths by depicting their marginality and relaying the distinction between 'them and other' slum dweller youths. This is followed by a discussion on legal identification documents – threats and opportunities – as a contemporary discourse in Ugandan society with far-reaching historical underpinnings. Focusing on how systematic hierarchies of ID documents are built and recognized over time, entrenching inequalities and exclusions while ignoring the overlaps in

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[2] Differentiated citizens along the divide of: age, gender, social-economic status, political involvement, and citizenship status.

identification processes. The author argues that the strict adherence to a NID as the only legitimate official identification document leads to eminent suffering of the undocumented and non-recognized individuals, hence, disenfranchisement[3]. Beyond legal identification document requirements, there is total disenfranchisement.

The discussion concludes by showing that legal identification is undeniably fundamental in organizing all modern societies but the hierarchization of legal IDs is a wrong approach towards an inclusive identification system by the state, leading to more threats than opportunities for the vulnerable members of the community. That hierarchization has created multiple identities accompanied by new forms of identification unrecognized by the state, resulting in new political subjectivities, suffering, and disenfranchisement. Political subjectivity is used to refer to "how people relate to power and authority and the role played by power structures in forming subjective experiences" (Adebanwi 2022: 185).

Methodology

An ethnographic study on 'Intimacies of identification and lived citizenship among the ghetto youths in Kampala, Uganda' was conducted between February 2022 and April 2024. The field was constructed both as a physical place (the ghetto) and a social construct (social space) where the ghetto youths co-create lived citizenship experiences. The fieldwork was strategically approached as a multi-sited ethnography, in the Kampala slums of Kamwokya and Bwaise which constituted the primary physical field site.

Kamwokya is one of the poorest residential neighborhoods within Kampala Central Division, the largest of the five divisions that make up Kampala City. It is split into two parishes of Kamwokya I and Kamwokya II. However, this research mostly focused on the 10 administrative units (zones) of Kamwokya II Parish: Mawanda, Market Area, Central, Kifumbira I, Konta Africa, Kisenyi I, Kifumbira II, Kisenyi II, Green Valley, and Church Area. This is the part of Kamwokya commonly referred to as 'the ghetto' both by the residents and non-residents. On the other hand, Bwaise, an equally impoverished slum that immediately neighbors Kamwokya on the northern part of Kampala City, falls under Kawempe Division. In Bwaise, the study particularly looked at the stretch of the valley area that neighbors Kamwokya II where the ghetto youths crisscross both the physical and social boundaries. The two slums are separated by the Northern Bypass fly over, a swamp, and huge water trenches by the roadside, as physical demarcating features.

The research covered a total of 50 respondents, through: 23 semi-structured one-on-one in-depth interviews, 4 focus group discussions, 3 life stories, 12 informal casual conversations, and 5 go-along conversations. These were supplemented by other data collection methods which broadly encompass: participant observation (PO) in the areas where the ghetto youths live, work, and move daily; archival search for the history of the ghetto; field notes taken while conducting fieldwork in Kamwokya and Bwaise physical space; and informal random conversations both with individuals and in groups. The participants constituted differentiated citizens, categorized as: citizens (documented and undocumented ghetto youths), non-citizens (both documented and undocumented), and key informants (people deemed to have sufficient knowledge on the ghetto youths and legal identification documents).

Findings and Discussion

The findings reveal a clear connection between the ghetto youths' marginalized position and contemporary legal identification systems in Uganda. Formal legal identification results in one accessing common goods. Most often, however, access to national identity cards, passports, and other documents of recognition by the marginalized urban dwellers is a problem. In order to access public services and fully enjoy their citizenship rights, one has to have legal identification. Thus, a tiered citizenship is created where there are those who access public goods because they have legal identification and those that are denied because they lack them. In the end, the marginalized urban spaces become a source of insecurity

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[3] The term 'disenfranchisement' is used to mean the withholding or deprivation of rights as a citizen in general (not in the usual sense of depriving a person only of the franchise or voting rights to which he or she may be entitled).

(perceived and real). This shapes the general perception and narrative of 'a ghetto' in Uganda, as a 'dangerous place',[4] attracting all possible negative connotations. Ultimately, the documented, just as their undocumented counterparts, are disadvantaged through relegation to the society margins.

Understanding the Ghetto Youths

Empirically, the term 'ghetto' and the youths that dwell within the ghetto, known as the 'ghetto youths' is enmeshed. One cannot talk of the former without mentioning the latter (Frankland 2016). The notion of ghetto youths is linked to the historical trajectories of Kampala City planning during colonial times which reinforced racial segregation and class-based population separation, thereby spatially dividing the city into two (Omolo-Okalebo et al. 2010). Although there are other theories about the birth of the 'ghetto' in Uganda, this remains the most pronounced. The planning was later maintained during post-colonial era. What used to be African quarters and the *kibuga* [5]were later occupied by the low-class people, which forms the modern-day slums (Omolo-Okalebo et al. 2010; Young 2019). Presently, it is the ghetto youths' place of dwelling, *omunzigote* loosely translated for a 'ghetto' and sometimes a 'slum' as one respondent remarked. [6]

In a more practical sense, the ghetto youths have carved out peculiar ghetto spaces from within the slums called *Dipos* [7]for exclusive ghetto activities, since not all slum dweller youths are ghetto youths. Both Kamwokya and Bwaise where this research was conducted are known as the epicenter of *bayaye*, a derogatory term meaning hooligans or wayward youth, commonly used to refer to the ghetto youths (Frankland 2016; Staples 2016; Pier 2021). The *bayaye* share a unifying identity of a demonized generation, the 'other' who survive on the city margins (Frankland 2016). Staples (2016), too, explains that the *bayaye* is a disparaging term used to describe young men "who survive on the social boundaries of Uganda's capital city, Kampala" (p. 22). This positions them as the 'other' in relation to the positive Ugandan identities of the mainstream society. This constitutes a part of the external social construct of the ghetto youths that creates an 'invisible wall' (social-economic) between the ghetto space and the society outside the slums, rendering them marginal beings.

On a global scale, the term ghetto has its own cultural contingencies in relation to the Jewish history, the Ottoman millet system, the American ghettos and considering African ghettos as first established in South Africa in the early 19th century during the Apartheid system (Browning 1986; Christopher 2005; Liyi 2016; Sönksen 2021). According to Wacquant (1998), the term ghetto encompasses cultural and cognitive constellations (values, mindset, or mentality) related to social and moral isolation of a stigmatized category of people, a systematic truncation of physical space and life chances of its members. Relatedly, Ward (1989) looks at the ghetto in relation to ethnicity and poverty in the city, although in recent times this has expanded to include lifestyles and political activities of the slum dwellers. The term ghetto, therefore, has multiple definitions, but they all agree on some common features: a part of the city in which members of a particular marginalized group or race usually live in poor conditions. Empirically, a 'ghetto' in Uganda is a site of social-economic and political engagements on an everyday basis, which accommodates identity overlaps that oscillate between self-identity (a social-cultural construct) and legal

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[4] Informal group conversation, 25th July 2023-Kamwokya, Kyamuka Street. Field notes, 14th June 2022-Kamwokya and Bwaise.

[5] The term *kibuga* means the capital (city) in the local language (Luganda) which originates from the place closest to the Buganda King's palace where the chiefs and other ranked subjects built residences to remain in close proximity with the king (Archival information/ Doc/ 967.61062U3J).

[6] Interview on 10th March 2023, Kamwokya.

[7] *Dipos* are described by the ghetto youths as 'places where life happens.' They are characterized as 'free zones' where the youths gather to 'exchange ideas', transact in drug business, smoke marijuana, drink alcohol, dance to their favorite music and indulge in all other social activities (Field notes, 4th December 2022).

identity (in terms of state-centric, legal identification of citizens through issuing of IDs). It is a place where the ghetto youths' prospects are brewed for 'those who dare to dream'[8].

Kampala, a cosmopolitan city, is grossly stratified along the lines of class. The rich live in the upscale residences; the middle class live in relatively improved residential places; while the poor are relegated to the slums with deplorable living conditions (Omolo-Okalebo 2011; Omolo-Okalebo et al. 2010). From the physical outlook, Kamwokya and Bwaise slums, situated almost at the city center, are depicted by sights of impoverishment: poor drainage system, open trenches and oozing sewers, scattered garbage, shanty houses, overcrowding and a general appalling stench from the gutters that pollutes the atmosphere. This physical place makes a home for many ghetto youths. [9]

Such living conditions create anger, bitterness, but also resentment towards the state by the residents who feel neglected and forgotten. Here, the state represents a unified nation, a country marked by borders and a system of governance, but there is no guarantee that that people living within those borders will identify as a unified polity (Kingston 2019). This is exacerbated by the constant demands by state authorities for legal identification documents from the ghetto youths in their everyday maneuvers for survival and livelihood. The only way that these youths know how to survive is through 'hustling'[10]. Thieme (2016: 4) describes the hustlers' skill and livelihood strategy as "survivalism … through diversifying sources of opportunity to mitigate risk, and contestations of authority" which depicts a tenuous balance between feeding themselves and renegotiating their place within the city. Therefore, the pressing demands from the state for legal identification documents from such a group of youths is perceived not only as a threat to their livelihoods but also a threat to their 'right to the city' (Bickford 2000; Van Deusen Jr. 2002; Brenner and Elden 2009). For instance, one is "denied a job for lack of a national ID"; "denied entry access to crucial government offices"; is "arrested and imprisoned on fabricated cases" and other related scenarios.[11] This condition portrays further entrenchment of the glaring inequalities but also serves as a reminder of the ghetto youths' marginalized position in society.

The Legal Identification Infrastructure: A Contemporary Discourse

Practices of citizen identification are not new and even predate modern times. Identification processes are deeply rooted in practices of civil registration (Breckenridge 2014). The story of civil registrations in Uganda dates back to 1904, when birth registrations were first recorded (World Bank 2018). Even with birth registrations in place, there remained a vacuum in citizen identification which relied largely on informal, semi-formal, personal knowledge, and social means of identification of persons. Until recently in 2014 when the NID was successfully launched by the president of Uganda, there had not been official identity cards issued by the government to legally identify its citizens, except passports which existed only as travel documents – mostly acquired by the top-class of the Ugandan society who could travel by air. Such people included: the business people, the clergy, students and other people in academia, politicians, diplomats, labor expatriates and the like.[12] Discussions had earlier ensued in the parliament over a requirement for the government to issue a unifying identification document for all citizens. However, the idea died prematurely in 2003 and stalled in 2010 due to accusations of "malpractice, corruption and bribery" in the procurement process (Clark 2013: 36).

Therefore, in the absence of state-issued official identity cards, other documents issued by different mandated authorities continued to serve as formal proof of identity in practice. These documents included: the passport issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs under Immigration Department, the

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[8] Field notes, 26th January 2023 – Kamwokya II and Bwaise, Kisenyi.

[9] Field notes, 25th February, 2023 – Kamwokya and Bwaise.

[10] Focus group discussion, 14th June 2022; semi-structured one-on-one interviews, 17th July 2022, 25th July 2022, and 30th April 2023.

[11] Informal conversations, 2nd July 2023; 19th July 2023.

[12] Informal conversation, 19th July 2023; Focus group discussion with informal ghetto leaders, 19th July 2023; informal conversation, 26th July 2023; focus group discussion with LC1 chairpersons, 26th August 20223.

graduated tax ticket issued by different local authorities as acknowledgement of payment of tax, the voter cards issued by the Electoral Commission, the birth certificate formerly issued by the Uganda Registration Services Bureau and currently by NIRA-National Identification and Registrations Authority, the birth notification issued by the hospital, the driving permits issued by the local councils but administered by the Uganda Police Force (currently issued under Ministry of Transport and Works), and the resident permits issued by the local councils. This was supplemented by other identification documents, such as identity cards issued by workplaces and education institutions, simple A4 letters of introduction issued to residents by the LC1 chairperson, certificate of amnesty issued to ex-combatants by the Amnesty Commission, a government institution, the baptism and confirmation cards issued by the church leaders where one is baptized, and cards issued by humanitarian relief agencies in case of refugees. [13]

The motivation for acquisition of IDs was tagged to a specific purpose. Some of the reasons included security while traveling away from home but within the country during adulthood to prove that one is not a rebel, traveling abroad, to stand surety in courts of law, to vote, open a bank account, to take up a formal job such as teaching, to register for national exams in case of students and prove parenthood in case of legal dispute over a child. These remain valid reasons today for which individuals obtain identification documents (Clark 2013; World Bank 2018; Neema 2021). The procedure for obtaining most of these documents was hectic and strenuous, expensive, and deterring sometimes, which made many halt the process until adulthood when it would be convenient to navigate the process. Other people, especially the vulnerable groups, mostly the poor, refugees, the elderly, women, and children were excluded due to the related cost of documents. But also some people were deemed as undeserving for certain forms of identification documents such as a passport strictly issued to Ugandan citizens. This made locally issued resident permits and a simple A4 letter from the LC chairperson a popular identification document afforded by many. The lack of proper identification documents has remained a problem for the vulnerable groups in society even today[14].

A passport continues to enjoy a privileged status among other documents but is considered a travel document and can only be acquired if one has a valid national identity card. Similarly, the acquisition of a driver's license, previously known as a driving permit, depends on the possession of a national identity card and serves to validate a person's driving skills. The birth certificate which requires a national identity card of a parent or a guardian to process has equally remained low in uptake due to constraints related to national identity card acquisition. However, due to less promotion and sensitization of the populace, people still do not find it relevant to their everyday immediate needs. This leaves the national identity card as an exclusive document used for legal identification of citizens on an everyday basis in Uganda. It is a multi-purpose document which serves a range of civil, political, and economic functions for an individual, well aligned to Marshall's (1950) formulation of citizenship rights in a legal sense. This is confined in the traditional notions of the state as the only authority that bestows status(es) and gives rights to individual citizens (Marshall 1950; Carens 2000). In a way, the state is assumed as the "legitimate source of citizenship rights, meanings and practices" (McEwan 2005: 201). This is restrictive and problematic.

Presently, some identification documents have increasingly been devalued, rendering partial recognition or no recognition at all to the individuals who own them. This is attributed to the different regimes of legal identification that have evolved over time and the changing forms and materiality of the identification documents themselves (Gordillo 2006). However, this has been exasperated by the recent

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[13] Focus group discussion with undocumented ghetto youths, 15th March 2023 – Kamwokya.

[14] Focus group discussion with informal ghetto youth leaders, 29th October 2022, Mawanda Road, Kamwokya.

but strict emphasis on the use of the biometric led NID in Uganda as the most important, the most trusted, and a unique identifier of citizens, thereby relegating other documents.

In recent years, there is a revolutionary turn in identification documents, a widespread global move towards the adoption of digital biometric technologies in creating new identification systems (Lyon 2009; World Bank 2018; Thiel 2020; Dalberto and Banégas 2021). Yet, the biometric technology-based identification system demands that all citizens be registered and certified to engage in the social, economic, and political processes of the state. This has hierarchically positioned the NID in Uganda far above all other forms of legal identification. But does the mere possession of a national identity card accord adequate recognition and access to all related privileges? Do all citizens, especially in differentiated groups, have equal access to identification documents and thus a NID as a certificate of recognition? What are the threats and opportunities of such a monolithic view of legal identification by the state?

According to Van der Straaten (2022), the NID in Uganda is a *sine qua non* document which makes life cumbersome to live without it; yet, many including some ghetto youths have failed to acquire it due to obstacles that limit successful enrolment. Such barriers include lack of evidence of Ugandan identity, problems with fingerprints and photos, a hectic and time-consuming process, a costly process involving transport and undoing errors in the system machines, and the opportunity cost of having to forego a daily income especially for the poor who survive on daily income. Such limitations, coupled with unfavorable citizenship laws built on the doctrine of indigeneity, have ensured overt discrimination, exclusions and denial of access to the national identity card to many vulnerable people in Uganda (Zakaryan 2020). This is tantamount to deprivation of citizenship rights in practice.

Moreover, some formerly recognized forms of identification have been rendered useless while others are irrelevant in the country's legal identification process. Documents, such as the graduated tax tickets, baptism cards and voter cards which previously helped in identification of individuals for different purposes have only remained memorial for the poor and marginalized. Without the NID, the ghetto youths continue to be deprived of their legitimate citizenship rights and are faced with a shrinking space in which to lay claim to such rights. Although this is not to claim that all ghetto youths lack a national identity card, what is evident is the precarious daily struggles that both the documented and undocumented youths are faced with.

According to Gelb and Clark (2013b: 65), "a national ID card is a basic necessity and gateway to services". Therefore, the ghetto youths in trying to raise a livelihood under difficult circumstances in their relegated space, turn to other easily accessible semi-formal identification documents, such as the LC1 residence card or a simple A4 letter of introduction from LC1 with a stamp which is not sufficient to grant access to public services, such as education, health care, and others. This depicts entrenched systematic exclusions and the negative impact of hierarchization of legal identification documents at an individual and community level. This creates a situation characterized by inequalities that render some documents more important than others in identification and recognition of citizens. Auyero (2012: 40) describes a relegated space as a "place inhabited by masses of informal workers and unemployed individuals who barely make ends meet and characterized by a crumbling infrastructure, by dysfunctional institutions, by all sorts of environmental hazards" that the different levels of the state are unwilling or incapable of preventing or reducing. The plight of the undocumented and unrecognized ghetto youths stems from the government's failure to embrace a multifaceted approach towards legal identification that embodies the social-economic, relational, and legal mechanisms with the ability to foster inclusion. The youths are thrown into oblivion and continue to wonder why and how they got into a condition of 'non-existence' in the face of the state. One of the respondents, Mr Z-X (Rasta) expressed his frustration thus:

> I don't understand why the government is tying each and every person to one form of legal identification, *Endanga-Muntu.* It is as if they are looking for an excuse to torture, imprison and even kill us all with ease (…) I can't remember how many times I have

been to prison without a case. I do not see anything special in this ID card apart from biometrics which are not possible for all anyways. They are taking this whole thing the wrong way. I feel frustrated that I cannot even register a SIM card. I don't have an ID; most of my *chalis* [buddies] don't have; and even my mother's thumbprint failed. So, we rely on community in everything. You know, in a space of the rich, the poor cannot belong.[15]

According to this respondent, the national identity card has created a rift in the relationship between state and citizens. It has created social-economic inequalities. While some ghetto youths may have benefited from the NID project, others have not. Failure to acquire a national identity card for this ghetto youth has reduced him to a suspect hunted by the state and prone to imprisonment, torture and possibly death anytime. He is left at the mercy of the community.

As Gordillo (2006: 167) observes that the identity card can destabilize "the view of the state as a homogenous and all-encompassing entity". Those excluded feel marginalized and disenfranchised by the state that should protect them. Legal identification in practice is perceived as a social and interactive process which deliberately happens in everyday life. The identity card itself is a relational and spatial object, traveling over space and time that the current legal identification system seems blind about. For instance, individual identification among the ghetto youths constitutes things, such as language, lifestyle, dress code, body marks (tattoos), nicknames, art, music, and drama.

This is used to assert personhood for those who seem forgotten, lacking in all forms of legal identification. The social identification phenomena are used by the ghetto youths as the means to self-identify in multiple and limitless ways beyond the state. It embodies overlaps: self-identification as well as cultural and legal forms of identification at a community level. For instance, the NID issued by NIRA is used to strengthen friendship ties by the ghetto youths through lending and borrowing of the cards especially when registering a telephone SIM card and bailing out friends once arrested. [16]

However, it is equally uncontested that the recognition and enforcement of the NID as the most important legal identification document in Uganda has presented many opportunities to the bearers even among the ghetto youths themselves. Such opportunities encompass things, such as: authenticating citizenships, confirming one's existence (whether dead or alive – personhood), granting security in some places, uplifting job prospects, mobility access to certain places, access to service delivery points, access to other important documents, such as the passport and a drivers' license, financial inclusion and fostering of social relations at an individual level (Clark 2013; Cooper 2016; Neema 2021; Van der Straaten 2022).

Yet, the realities of these opportunities need to be contextualized; they are varied and person-specific. The ghetto youths' major drive to enroll for registration to acquire a national identity card mostly hinges on the need for survival and livelihood. While other youths in the slums, for example, interpret financial inclusion as the ability to open a bank account and apply for loans to boost their businesses, the ghetto youths see financial inclusion as a possibility to visit a shylock on a bad day (without food); tender in the national identity card itself as security which can be retrieved once 'the money is found'. There are chances of failure to get the money 'in time' and losing the national identity card to the shylock for good.

Acquiring a NID is out of the need to survive but it is attributed to 'luck', considering a big number that has tried and failed. For those excluded and undocumented, the lack of *Endanga-Muntu* has caused untold suffering. It has escalated inequalities; raised tensions and created insecurity; projected some youths as less humans; encouraged avenues for illicit activities even when they are criminalized by the state; caused political unrest, suspicion, and anarchy from state agents towards the ghetto youths and vice versa;

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[15] One-on-one interview with Mr Z-X (Rasta) on 10th November 2022 – Kamwokya.
[16] Field notes on 6th, 8th, and 10th December 2022, Bwaise, Katanga.

created an identity crisis whereby legitimate citizens are wrongly identified and omitted; and caused disenfranchisement through exclusions from citizenship rights.[17]

While the state logics for legal identification offer foundational knowledge on the ideal purpose of certification of citizens and issuance of legal identification documents broadly, the question of differentiated citizens on society margins such as the ghetto youths that have remained undocumented and seemingly forgotten remains to ponder. This triggers more questions of: Who qualifies the qualifying individuals for legal identification and documentation? Who disqualifies the qualifying citizens? How can one form of identification be suitable for all people? These and many more rhetoric questions surround legal identification discourse among the ghetto youths in Uganda today. A group of individuals has been represented as the 'other' who is a suspect, a foreigner – different from the rest. Those are the ones who do not fit within the category of a "good citizen" and, therefore, do not deserve or qualify for "legal and social status within the state" (Kingston 2019: 22–23).

Beyond the NID: A Deprived Generation and Total Disenfranchisement

How do the externally constructed social-spatial imaginaries of the ghetto intersect with the ghetto youths' daily experiences of individual identification and their quality of life as citizens? During interviews, it was repeatedly echoed how "the ghetto is misrepresented" and "wrongly imagined" by the "people outside" as a place that breeds criminals who transgress the national laws and obliterate all set formal boundaries. Therefore, this attitude provides a justifiable reason to be "hated", "hunted", "tossed around" and "mistreated" [18]whenever they come face to face with the state authorities, such as the police, military, army, government officials and some politicians. This is in addition to restrictions on space and deprivation of their well-deserved citizen rights due to legal identification challenges. One police officer interviewed expressed how "the only problem that this government has are those ghetto youths. It is a bunch of criminals (…) Bobi Wine followers who move without any ID".[19] This mirrors how even other state authorities perceive and identify the ghetto youth, an imagined social group linked to the ghetto space – a criminal hub. Therefore, the NID is a tool for vindication. The ghetto youths are even accused of deliberately hiding their national identity cards not to be clearly identified since they are "criminals".[20]

According to Tshabalala (2017: 92), IDs "first appeared in the lives of many Africans as tools of exploitation and circumscription through politics," which make IDs political tools. Such documents are grounds for exclusions and wield bureaucratic power from "the position of marginality" to empower but also to disempower both symbolically and materially (Tshabalala 2017: 99). The struggle by the state to craft a Ugandan citizenship as a practical identity, to make and define a national identity has continually put personhood under threat. As legal IDs are hierarchized, so are citizens that the IDs legitimize.

The kind of an ID that an individual hold often depicts their status and class in society. The vulnerable and poor mostly rely on the locally, cheap or free, and easily accessible identification documents, such as the village cards, local council letters of introduction, and a national identity card for a few lucky ones that were able to obtain them at the roll-out of the project when everything was free. On the other hand, documents, such as the citizen's passport, a birth certificate and, most recently, the national identity card are perceived as documents of the affluent eligible 'uptown guys' who 'have been to school', are 'well-traveled' and 'have some cash' to bypass the bureaucratic processes and, in some instances, to pay for the real document itself. Like in the case of a passport, an ordinary citizen's passport goes for UGX 250,000 which is not affordable by many in Uganda, including those in the ghettos. More encumbrances come due to the hierarchization of these documents where one document is needed in order to secure another

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[17] Interviews on: 29th September 2022, 7th August 2022, and 6th December 2022, in Bwaise and Kamwokya.
[18] Semi-structured one-on-one interviews on: 17th July 2022 and 30th April 2023. Informal conversation on 3rd July 2023. Focused group discussion with LC1 Chairpersons on 26th August 2023.
[19] Semi-structured one-on-one interview, 30th April 2023.
[20] Interviews on: 24th June 2022, 25th July 2022, 3rd July 2023, 19th July 2023, 23rd March 2023, and 18th August 2023.

document. This has resulted in entrenched inequalities and laid the foundation for new forms of exclusion. It has deprived citizens of their legitimate rights and caused untold suffering, leading to the marginalization of many.

Lyon (2009) alludes to this by postulating identification documents as a "reminder of demeaning, destructive and dignity destroying raptors" which work for many reasons and carry several social meanings. The issuance of such documents ought to help in distinguishing between "legitimate citizens, subjects, residents of the nation-state and non-residents" (p. 35). Relatedly, Manby (2018) postulates a link between state-driven inequalities and exclusions to the legal identification systems prevalent in many African states today. She argues that there exists "state-imposed identity" also termed as "ethnic identity" which has excluded many vulnerable citizens and leaves many undocumented, with undetermined nationalities, and not fitting neatly into "citizen or non-citizen" binaries (p. 312). This has deprived many excluded categories from citizenship rights and stripped them of a right to fully belong to the national community. Whereas the police may be right in alleging that the ghetto youths are criminals and "the only way to weed them out is through *Endanga-Muntu*", [21]the police lack mechanism to ascertain who truly has a NID and who has wrongfully been left out in the identification process.

Therefore, the ghetto youths' situation is not a simple question of inclusion and exclusion based on possession or lack of a NID but rather an intricate interweaving of social, economic and political strands of relegation through a systematic process of certification, using *Endanga-Muntu* as a tool. Certification refers to a "multidimensional space in which various acts of classification (constructing typologies of difference) and of categorization (allocating hierarchical value related to difference) manufacture the terms and technologies of recognition, verification, and validation that govern lived citizenship" (Hammar 2018: 3). According to Hammar (2018), certification process encompasses a wide range of inter-related practices (identity, classification, categorization, registration, validation) which offer an opportunity to understand how differentiated citizens "engage with both the meaning and materiality" of identification documents (p. 1). The ghetto youths' own interpretation and understanding of *Endanga-Muntu* is indeed built on the shared haunting experiences of the certification process and the related subsequent experiences with the tangible document itself for both the documented and undocumented individuals.

A subjective word, *Endanga-Muntu*, is popular to all residents of Kamwokya and Bwaise slums as a national identity card but with many negative connotations. At the mention of it, feelings of immense "pain and suffering", "neglect" and "torture" [22]are evoked which the ghetto youths are so keen to relate it to the historical "massacre of the Tutsi during Rwanda genocide" (Dalberto and Banégas 2021: 144–156). Although this is sometimes dotted with the anticipated and actual opportunities that the IDs have yielded to those that have them, many youths believe that *Endanga-Muntu* is a "government project and a tool to fight political opponents" [23]which makes some, especially from opposition, hesitant to enroll. Meanwhile, others claim not to see any difference in the social-economic status between "those with *Endanga-Muntu* and those without it in the ghetto" since the majority depend on informal jobs and live by "hustle". The youths dread acquiring *Endanga-Muntu* which, according to them, is meant for "uptown guys with many opportunities to use it"[24]. Either way, the ghetto youths remain systematically excluded from most avenues for legal identification which ultimately restrict their access to citizenship rights – what the current author calls *total disenfranchisement*. And as Agamben (2009) notes, to exclude human beings from humanity does not erase their humanness; and, indeed, may even confirm it further.

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[21] An informal conversation with police officers on 23rd March 2023.
[22]Focused group discussion with LC1 chairpersons on 26th August 2023. Informal conversations with the ghetto youths on 15th March 2023.
[23] Focus group discussion with LC1 chairpersons on 26th August 2023.
[24] Focus group discussion on 14th June 2022; informal conversation on 3rd July 2022; informal conversation on 25th July 2022; one-on-one interview on 1st July 2023.

Conclusion

The efforts to have a NID hierarchized as an 'all-in-one' legal identification document is imbued in the strict certification process which ignores the overlapping identification systems, thereby distorting the true meaning of legal identification among the ghetto youths. The state's eagerness to realize a unitary form of identification for all through the NID is a positive step toward an organized society based on the opportunities accrued. However, this has generated complex intricacies to what legal identification means for the marginalized in practice, who continue to face entrenched exclusions and inequalities that threaten their survival and livelihoods. The shifting forms of identification have only served to increase suspicion and mistrust between the state and its citizens. While the state emphasizes one form of identification using a national identity card, citizens insist on multiple forms of identification which are broadly encompassing. The state identification systems are perceived as brutal and exclusionary that precede, shape, and measure survival, by creating documentary uncertainties in the process. Ultimately, the seemingly 'stand-alone' legal identification document at the apex of Uganda's citizen identification ladder lacks validity in the face of the vulnerable such as the ghetto youths and can only be perceived as a new site to the beginning of a multiplicity of identities.

Recommendation

The author would like to propose that the role of citizens' legal identification and certification should not rest solely on the shoulders of the state in a monolithic manner but rather be construed as a two-way process (allowing citizens to self-identify and still be identified by others). This approach will help avert human suffering that arises from identification errors and the accompanying threats.

Endanga-Muntu should not be the only document required to access social rights such as the ongoing government revolving fund of Youths Livelihood Program (YLP) where many youths are ineligible due to lack of a NID. This calls for the creation of a broad spectrum of legally recognized possibilities for the implementation of alternative forms of identification.

Acknowledgements

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