



# Youth, Social Heritage, Political Manipulation and Pluralism in Kibaale District, Uganda

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**Abstract:** *Considerable research has been done about ethnic conflict in Kibaale. However, in spite of their active role in the conflict, the youth as a category hardly feature in the studies so far done. Such omission leaves a knowledge gap that would cripple any analysis on the possibilities of co-existence in the area. This paper tries to explore the ethnic intricacy that the youth of Kibaale District are faced with and to discuss some of their views on the causes of the existing tension and possibilities for pluralism. The study is based on a single-site case in order to allow for in-depth analysis, basing on the researched people's own accounts, and it is qualitative in approach. Data was collected on youths both in and out of school through triangulating one-to-one interviews, observation and focus group discussions. In the youth's perception of the causes of ethnic tension in the area, political manipulation featured as one of the key factors, thus explaining why tension often escalates around election time. Other causes include memories of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of the Banyoro by the British and the Baganda. Some elders use these painful memories to mobilise the youths 'to claim their time' and not allow history to re-occur. The non-Banyoro, on the other hand, fear that they could be evicted from Kibaale, yet it is their new home. In this maze-like situation, the youths' agency is seen in claiming their space in dealing with issues that concern them.*

**Keywords:** *Social Heritage; Political Manipulation; Pluralism*

## 1 Introduction

Extracted from a wider PhD research<sup>1</sup>, this paper is motivated by the observation that peace initiatives often fail because of a failure to engage with the multi-dimensional

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nature of conflicts/tension. The other significant observation is that even where peace initiatives are put in place, they often fail because of their limited participatory compass. Some groups only come on board as implementers of what has already been decided without their input, thus often leading to detachment from the peace initiatives due to failure or refusal to own the initiatives. Among such often excluded groups are the youths yet this is the group that is known to be actively involved (often used by others) in times of violence.

The youths must be in a position to understand the dynamics and evolution of the conflict that they are faced with. But this is not to say that they should only be on a listening end as audiences for lectures from elders who often make an exclusive claim to community memory. They should be part and parcel of the peace initiatives, with their voices and aspirations brought on board. They should be participants in shaping the future. This paper, therefore, tries to bring forth and engage with some of these voices within the context of the entangled ethnic realities in Kibaale District.

Kibaale District, which is part of Bunyoro Kingdom, is located in western Uganda. As shall be highlighted in the background of this study, the phenomenon of ethnic tension in Kibaale District is an intricate one. It is entangled within a conglomeration of ethnically polarised histories, the agency of both painful and victorious collective/individual memories, politicised ethnicity, and ethicised politics. The historical dimension of the tension apparently exacerbates the problem by occasioning a tendency to sideline the youths (especially the Banyoro) in peace initiatives since they ‘do not have the memory of the evolution of the problem’.

The tension is further complicated by a drastic immigrant population growth plus the rise in economic and political strength amidst a native population still nursing memories and other effects of subjugation by ‘foreigners’ (the British and the Baganda). For the youths, the possibility of pluralism within such an environment remains a big question (but not of the kind that cannot be answered). It is a question of a complexity stretching beyond mere possibility to the interrogation of what such pluralism would entail. The spirit of the interrogation is based upon the acknowledgement that pluralism itself, though with some universal benchmarks (Plaw 2005), is, to an extent, contextual.

## **2 Context of the Study**

Humanity is grappling with a number of social issues that have seemed to elude solutions up to today. One of the key problems facing contemporary society is that of managing the various forms of difference. “Difference animates key conflicts of our time. Claims about *difference* breathe life into cultural, ethnic, religious and values conflict” (Brigg 2008, 6). Among the most notably sensitive differences in the African context is ethnicity

which has led to social tension and exclusion of some groups from their full rights as citizens (Ratcliffe 2004). Youths have equally been victims (and perpetrators) to this, but rarely active frontline agents. Unfortunately, as reported by Kurtenbach (2008), mainstream peace-building literature and peace-building initiatives have only begun to include youth as important actors.

In its Vision 2025, where it commits itself to the task of carefully managing ethnic diversity in the country, the Uganda government acknowledges that although the country is very beautiful in almost all ways, “Uganda has been, regrettably, really rotten from within in terms of ethnic conflicts” (Republic of Uganda 1998, 303). To substantiate the above strong statement, among others, it highlights the following violent ethnic confrontations in Uganda’s history:

The uprising of the Bamba and Bakonzo against the Batooro and the Central Government in 1962; the 1966 confrontation between the Baganda ethnic group and the Central Government [in which the latter deposed the former’s king by military force] which was deemed to be Northern [in inclination]; the wanton and brutal massacres of members of the Acholi and Langi ethnic groups during the Amin regime; the equally wanton and brutal retribution by these latter groups against ethnic groups from the West Nile region – Idi Amin’s home region – after the fall of Idi Amin; the war in the Luwero Triangle; and ... the ... civil war in the north (Republic of Uganda 1998, p.303).

The above testimony serves to illustrate the urgency of coming up with sustainable solutions, especially by youths as they try to shape a better society for their future.

It should, however, be emphasised that the execution of reconciliation and/or peace-fostering measures is often (or ought to be) a contextualised exercise. This means paying attention to all the tiny details with regard to the conflict/tension at hand. It may not be possible to disentangle without a careful scrutiny of the knots and dynamics in a given entanglement.

Kibaale District was one of the vivid hotspots of ethnic tension at the start of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, like with most forms of socio-political organisation and relations in Africa (Mamdani 2001; 2004), the roots of this tension can be traced back to colonial times, and this helps us to contextualise the complexity of its resolution.

In the 1890s, the British colonialists faced much resistance in establishing their rule in Bunyoro Kingdom. Hence, they resorted to collaborating with Buganda Kingdom (who had pre-colonial rivalry with the Banyoro over territory and might) to fight the Banyoro. This move marked the defeat of Bunyoro towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and, in appreciation of the support from Buganda and/or for strategic reasons<sup>2</sup>, the British ‘donated’ a big and very culturally significant fraction of Bunyoro land (six counties<sup>3</sup> – later to be known as the ‘lost counties’) to Buganda (Schelnberger 2005; Espeland

2006). This chunk of land was geographically larger than the original size of Buganda – too large to be ignored by Bunyoro. In humiliation of the Banyoro, through the authority of the British colonisers, Buganda effectively sent chiefs to administrate and embark on ‘Bugandanising’ Bunyoro by entrenching Baganda language and culture and thereby acculturating the Banyoro (Kihumuro 1994). By legal means, Runyoro (the language of the Banyoro) was effectively banned from official communication and all the Banyoro had to adopt Baganda names. Many Banyoro elders still nurse these memories as they still bear Baganda names such as Musoke, Lwanga, and others. This is a memory that some Banyoro youths know about but are relatively less attached to in comparison to their elders, some of whom experienced it and still do through their Luganda names. Sometimes youths are sidelined from peace-related decision-making on account of this memory gap and relegated to a position of instruments to be mobilised and used during conflict.

In 1964, as had been recommended by the colonialists upon their departure in 1962, a referendum was held in two of the six ‘lost counties’, Buyaga and Bugangaizi. The vote was in favour of returning the territories to Bunyoro. Schelnberger (2005) reports that, consequently, the Baganda chiefs and their agents were chased away from Bunyoro with spears and machetes. But they left without giving up their legal ownership of the land and kept their official land titles for more than 2,995 square miles (Republic of Uganda, 2006). These are known as ‘absentee landlords’. This situation left the Banyoro effectively as squatters in their native land, and had to pay feudal dues (land rent) to the absentee Baganda landlords. This caused bitterness, thus fuelling negative memories of domination. Even though a Land Fund was later established by government in 2002 to redress the historical injustices and inequities in the ownership by buying out the absentee landlords from the area, much land still remains in the latter’s hands. It is this land that the youth are told was fought for by their fathers and grandfathers and, therefore, that it is their turn to fight for it as their heritage. As we shall see later, their heed to this elders’ call has not been without consequences.

In addition to this historic presence of the Baganda and the Banyoro people in the area, a number of other ethnic groups have been settling in Kibaale over time. Most of these settlers are from south-western and western Uganda. Some have settled through official state resettlement schemes. The Commission of Inquiry into Bunyoro Issues (2006) indicates that about 300 Bakiga families were resettled in Ruteete – Kagadi in 1973 by the government under an arrangement initiated by Kigezi leaders in consultation with the *Omukama* of Bunyoro (Sir Tito Winyi). Another official resettlement scheme was the Bugangaizi resettlement scheme of 3,600 Bakiga families in Nalweyo – Kisiita in 1993 who were previously evicted from Mpokya Forest Reserve. Due to the above

resettlement schemes and other factors, the largest population of the Bakiga (126,312) in Bunyoro Kingdom is found in Kibaale District (Republic of Uganda 2006, 38). The upsurge in numbers of migrants has to some extent brought about fear among the indigenous Banyoro youths as the former are seen to be occupying a lot of land and taking up political positions that would otherwise be a reserve of the Banyoro.

In observation of these series of resettlements, the Mubende Banyoro Committee, an ethnic pressure group formed in 1918 to 'fight' for Banyoro rights, feels that, by resettling groups of people there, government has turned their region into "a dumping ground of refugees and migrants" (Mubende Banyoro Committee Memorandum – MBC – 2005, in Republic of Uganda 2006, 213). It can be read from MBC's memorandum that this feeling is not helped by the fact that the Banyoro did not consent to government's resettlement schemes. This group was later to mobilise the Banyoro, especially the youth into violent confrontation with the non-Banyoro.

However, some of the new settlers were invited by the native Banyoro and were given land along forests in order to shield the Banyoro's gardens against vermin and wild animals (Nsamba-Gayiiya 2003). Some were given land by local chiefs for token payments while others bought it from the native Banyoro. Many more people have migrated to the area in search of land and/or following their relatives. Bunyoro has been a convenient place for resettling other Ugandans who were overpopulated in their areas (especially Kabale and Kisoro districts) because the war between the British government and the kingdom, from 1893 to 1899, and the diseases that broke out thereafter left the area with virtually no population (Kihumuro 1994; Republic of Uganda 2006).

Initially, the settlers were quite well received in the then sparsely populated area and they mainly served as labourers for the indigenous Banyoro. But with the increase in numbers of settlers and the attendant cut-throat competition for resources and power, inter-ethnic conflicts started to emerge in the wake of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Green 2006). Large scale open violence took place between February and May 2002 when a Mukiga was elected as the District Chairman<sup>4</sup>. The incumbent Munyoro Chairman refused to hand over power to someone they considered to be a 'foreigner' and clashes ensued between Banyoro and the settlers. The Banyoro started to claim back land from non-Banyoro. Violence again emerged in April 2003 when news spread that land that belonged to Bakiga was being allocated to the Banyoro by the District Land Board (Espeland 2007). The violence that followed left three people dead, several others injured, huts burnt, and livestock killed (Schelnberger 2005). In 2005, Schelnberger observed that the situation was calm but the conflict has remained at a stage of high alert where it could easily break out into open violence again. The tense situation is not helped by the worsening

youth unemployment in the district that is creating an atmosphere of hopelessness and frustration.

With a tendency of escalating during elections, tension remains to date. In the analysis of the Committee of Inquiry into Bunyoro Issues, “the Banyoro think that they are being re-colonised while the other tribes think that their survival in the region will be guaranteed only if they are in charge” (2006, 45). Such feelings seem to put the two sides on a conflicting path. To further complicate the case, government intervention has at times only served to aggravate the tension. This is partly because it is viewed in terms of the side government would be believed to support in the Banyoro–*Bafuruki* polar equation. After the *Mufuruki* (immigrant) LC V Chairman had been forced to step down for a compromise replacement in 2002, government felt that there was a need to come up with a policy to prevent such a scenario from recurring. In a letter titled *Guidance on the Banyoro/Bafuruki Question* (July 2009), the president, who apparently justified the Banyoro’s rejection of non-indigenous leaders, asks:

1. If the *Bafuruki* dominate political space in the area to which they migrated, where do the indigenous people of the area find another political space?
2. If the *Bafuruki* were more nationalistic, why could they not find some persons among the indigenous people and vote for them?
3. Can some people from indigenous groups successfully compete, politically in the areas of origin of the *Bafuruki*? If not, is this not an unequal relationship?
5. Suppose we were to infuse 100,000 *Bafuruki* into Acholi or Karamoja [other Ugandan ethnic communities], what would be the reaction? If the Acholis and Karamojong were to react violently, would it mean that they are not Ugandan enough or would it be that the policy was wrong?

In an apparent condemnation of the migration of the Bakiga [the dominant immigrant group] into Kibaale, “an already enfeebled population [of the indigenous Banyoro] on account of history”, he argued that “horizontal rural migration by peasants after they have exhausted land in one area is not a progressive way of creating national integration. The more correct way is vertical migration, from the farm to the factory”. On account of the above contentions, as one of the possible solutions, the president proposed as 20-year affirmative action:

1. Ring-fencing the LC V positions in the whole of Bunyoro region for the indigenous people; and also ring-fencing the sub-county leadership except for the sub-counties around the Kisiita and Luteete areas [the resettlement schemes];
2. Ring-fencing the positions of members of parliament in the whole of Bunyoro region for the indigenous people, except for the special constituencies created around Luteete [sic] and Kisiita resettlement schemes.

The president's suggestion was considerably lauded by the Banyoro. In a rebuttal, Mirima (2009) argues:

The Banyoro, understandably, fully support the president's position. They say that they have been victims of colonial suppression for generations, a marginalised minority, purposely kept backward to satisfy colonialists policies, which polices [sic, policies] were unfortunately inherited by independent Uganda's successive governments even after the country attained independence. ... Banyoro's prayer is that these proposals reach cabinet, then go to parliament and are given the force of law so that they can be implemented.

However, some Banyoro, represented by the LC V Chairman of Masindi District (also within Bunyoro Kingdom), felt that the suggested 'affirmative action' was an insufficient concession. Instead, they suggested that: "For anybody to contest for any leadership position from parish level to member of parliament, that person's paternal grandparent should have lived in Bunyoro by 1926" (cited in Gyezaho 2009). This requirement would certainly disqualify most of the *Bafuruki*.

On the other hand, the president's suggestion was met with resistance and contempt from a wide section of the non-Banyoro within and outside Bunyoro. Commenting on the president's proposal in the *Abu Mayanja Memorial Lecture – August 7, 2009*, Mamdani felt that in such a suggestion:

The real shift is in the definition of citizenship. Nationalists defined citizenship as Ugandan, regardless of origin; Amin defined it as black Ugandan. But, today, it is proposed that the core rights of citizenship - the right to political representation - be defined on a tribal basis. The NRM47 is the first government in the history of independent Uganda to propose a dilution of national citizenship in favour of a tribal citizenship. My argument is that if we adopt this proposal, we shall be returning to an arrangement resembling colonial rule.

In re-emphasis of his thesis of contemporary African politics as more of a colonial legacy, Mamdani interprets the president's proposal as the usual reference to the colonial book in 'times of crisis'.

In another move to resolve the tension, in 2010, the president passed a directive to the Attorney General and Minister of Local Government to create two new counties/constituencies. He said: "we need to split Buyaga with a new constituency centred around the former Lutete [Ruteete] refugee camp to cater for the Bafuruki, and also to split Bugangaizi, to create a county/constituency around Kisiita [resettlement scheme] to cater for the *Bafuruki* there" (Lumu 2010). Although the move was rejected by Bunyoro

Kingdom, it was ultimately implemented. The idea seems to have been that of making sure that each group gets representation at parliamentary and other local government levels<sup>6</sup>. Whether this can help in bringing about short- and long-term harmony remains a lingering question. More to this question is the anxiety about the place of the youth in this solution. Does it merely guarantee ethnic balance or also try to accommodate the generational concerns between the youths and their elders?

Still in a bid to sort Bunyoro's issues and in display of their significance, in 2011 a fully fledged Ministry for Bunyoro Affairs was announced. The minister appointed to head the above ministry (Saleh Kamba) was neither from the area nor a Munyoro. In response to this development, the Prime Minister of Bunyoro Kingdom (Yabeezi Kiiza) said: "We thank the president for creating a ministry for us but the appointment of a minister who is not a Munyoro is a big concern for us. We have several people from Bunyoro who qualify to head it (the ministry)" (quoted in Mugerwa 2011).

The above response together with the rejection of a non-Munyoro LC V Chairman in Kibaale in 2002 seem to point to a nativist feeling among the Banyoro that issues of Bunyoro ought to be, first and foremost, their business to determine. But this is contested by some non-Banyoro and it raises questions on its implications to wider society if, after official endorsement, it spills into other areas in Uganda. It also raises concern over the possibility of pluralism amidst such ethnic differences in Kibaale, especially, in this case, as projected by the youth.

This study reveals that the Banyoro are not happy with what they call the arrogance of the Bakiga and their refusal to adopt Banyoro culture, respect their king (Omukama) and learn their language (Runyoro). MBC also claimed that "due to arrogance, the settlers have failed to be assimilated or learn the ways of the people who hosted them" (Republic of Uganda 2006, 192). It is not well-received among a wide section of the Banyoro that a number of Bakiga still practise their culture and speak their languages and have even re-named some of the places in Kibaale with Rukiga<sup>7</sup> names. There is a simmering fear among both old and young Banyoro that their culture could give way to that of the immigrants.

On the other hand, in an open memo to the president authored by 36 "leaders from the non-Banyoro community living in Kibaale District", it is argued that "we believe that non-Banyoro living in Bunyoro do not have to deny their culture and identity in order to be considered respectful. We also believe that respect for one community's culture cannot be a one-way street" (The Observer 2009). In the same communiqué, the immigrants also feel that it is their constitutional right to stand for any electoral position in the area, practise their culture, and legally settle where they wish.



With regard to pluralism and for the concern of the youths, the demands and aspirations of the two groups as presented above cannot be met simultaneously. Since “goals and activities become incompatible when one’s own interests are threatened by the actions of another [and] ... tensions essentially emerge due to the pursuit of different outcomes or disagreement on the means to attain the same end” (Jeong 2008, 5). The trends and events in Kibaale District raise anxiety about the possibility of pluralism in Kibaale. The above background serves to highlight that the complexity of the Kibaale equation is in its entanglement in history, political manipulation, influx of immigrants and mutual fears between the indigenous population and migrants. It is important to establish and analyse what the youth make of this entanglement, especially in view of the possibilities for co-existence. The next sub-section explains the methodology that was used in this study.

### **3 Research Methodology**

The study was designed around a single-site case that is mainly aimed at an in-depth analysis and understanding of the selected case. As argued by Stark and Torrance (2005), under such a design, it would be possible to engage with and report the complexity of social activity in an ethnic setting in order to represent the meanings that individual social actors bring to the setting and manufacture in it.

The design adopted here raises a serious epistemological question: “What can be learned about the single case” (Stake 2005, 443)? This being a qualitative study, the focus was on ‘typicality rather than generalisability’ (Henn et al. 2006). However, as contended by Bechhofer and Paterson (2000) and Henn et al. (2006), whereas representativeness and generalisability may not be key concerns in qualitative studies, the typicality of the selected cases can allow for some degree of analytic generalisation/wider resonance. Analytically, the findings from this study may be generalised to other communities of ethnic tension which, for theoretical reasons, may behave in a similar way.

The adoption of a qualitative approach is because of the assumed value of the specific local context and in order to foreground local people’s own lived experiences (Marshall and Rossman 1995).

In a study on the human experience, it is essential to know how people define and explain their situations and give meaning to their daily lives (Berg, 2001). Accordingly, a situational ethno-methodological perspective is specifically adopted here. Situational ethno-methodology studies a wide range of social activity in order to “... understand the ways in which people negotiate the social contexts in which they find themselves” (Cohen *et al.* 2007, 24), specifically in this case, how they (youth) negotiate a context of ethnic tension.

Data was collected by triangulating observation, one-to-one interviews and focus group discussions in order to come up with a comprehensive picture and cross-validate findings. Archival data was also used to benefit from prior studies and other relevant records.

<sup>43</sup> Although some relevant data from categories other than the youth is presented and discussed in this study, the targeted population is specifically the youths. The rationale for selecting the youths was that they do not only feature a lot as active agents in ethnic violence/tension but they are also a category often sidelined in decision-making, in conflict resolution, and *difference* negotiation mechanisms. This happens in spite of the fact that any engagement in exclusion of youths, who are a vital category, may not be sustainable.

## 4 Youth, Ethnic Tension, and Pluralism in the Literature

### 4.1 The Concept of *Youth*

The definition of *youth* varies from one culture to another and, in some cases, from one individual or organisation to another. The UN General Assembly defines *youth* as population that falls in the age bracket of 15-24 (cited in World Bank 2006). According to Kurtenbach (2008), in some societies, the upper age limit for *youth* goes as high as 34. The Uganda National Youth Policy<sup>8</sup> (2001) places *youth* between 12 and 30 years, three years below the UN General Assembly lower limit and six years above its upper limit. Ironically it identifies itself as being ‘in harmony’ with the UN definition! The policy vindicates its definition as an attempt to capture a period of time where an individual’s potential, vigour, adventurism, experimentation with increased risks and vulnerabilities show in a socially meaningful pattern. It further argues that it is around the age of 12 that family and extended kinship ties loosen and children start assuming adult responsibilities. It is also normative in the sense that it is at this age that preparing young people for adult responsibility should start.

Arguing that definitions of *youth* are highly dependent on history and culture, Kurtenbach (2008) observes that the concept of *youth* only became an important category in the process of industrialisation and urbanisation when the unity of work and life was dissolving. *Youth* as a social category was non-existent in traditional societies. In Kurtenbach’s view, therefore, in the traditional setting, *youth* came in as a transitional stage in the process of growth from childhood to adulthood. Otherwise, traditionally one was either a child or an adult. However, Kurtenbach’s view may not apply to all traditional societies. Among the Baganda, the youth category has existed as *abavubuka* (youths). Whereas *youths* are excluded from the *adult* category, depending on circumstances, they may sometimes be referred to as children. Before elders, they remain children; whereas in contrast to children, they are *abavubuka*.

From another point of view, *youth* may be referred to as the period of life between primary education and work. Such a period is characterised by a number of stages involving: the end of compulsory education, entry into marriage, and/or economic independence from the parents (World Bank 2006). This signifies that the *youth* concept is highly dependent on context. It should be noted that even when we choose to consider transition from compulsory education, the educational stages and corresponding age may differ from one society to another. The baseline in our definition of *youth*, therefore, needs to be established within the context/case at hand without necessarily operating within rigid age brackets that may exclude historical and cultural realities of some societies.

## 4.2 Understanding Ethnicity

The term *ethnicity* and its derivative *ethnic* cannot be taken for granted. Apart from the fact that it is a contested category, ethnicity comes along with a variety of connotations. It has been used as a metaphor for a variety of things which could be understood differently (Muhereza and Otim 1998). It is, therefore, important that we explore its use in the literature and discuss it for conceptual and operational clarity.

Bates (2005) takes ethnicity to connote group identification based on a common name, descent and culture, and common language and territory. To him, it is mainly perceived as a psychological aspect and an attitude of mind and practice. On top of its socio-anthropological leaning, ethnicity can thus be understood better through studies in group psychology. Chazan et al. (1992) think that ethnicity has its foundations in combined remembrances of past experience and in common inspirations, values, norms, and expectations. In line with Bates' view, Chazan et al. contend that in ethnicity's capacity to stimulate awareness and a sense of belonging among the potential membership of a group, the psychological dimension of ethnicity complements and buttresses the political dimension of interest-oriented social action. Bates also notes that ethnicity is often used to mean collectivities that share a myth of origin. His definition is close to an earlier one by Weber (1968). Weber emphasises the importance of ancestry and history, and, most often, migration and settlement or political passage, be it escape from oppression or the colonisation of new territory.

Barth (1969), on the other hand views ethnicity as a form of social organisation in which the participants themselves play a primary role in determining and maintaining their identity. The sense of attachment to an ethnic group is normally voluntary. But Barth's definition falls short of clarifying forms of social organisation that can be considered ethnic and those that are not. Not every social organisation where the participants themselves play a primary role in determining and maintaining their identity is ethnic.

Although insufficient in explanation, his relating of ethnicity with identity maintenance (or boundary marking) is an important dimension.

Brink, cited in Okuku (2002, 8), summarises the concept of *ethnicity* as “a sense of ... identity consisting of the subjective, symbolic or emblematic use by a group of people of any aspect of culture in order to create internal cohesion and differentiate themselves from other groups”. This definition subtly suggests that ethnic groups are only concerned about internal and not external cohesion (coexistence with other ethnic groups). But in a society growing more cosmopolitan and globalised by the day, ethnic groups are taking on a dynamic path where cohesion with others outside the group is sometimes strategically put into the picture, especially in the context of the rational choice theory<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, in certain instances, internal cohesion may necessitate external cohesion. For example, internal cohesion would be affected if an ethnic group was not at peace with the surrounding ethnic groups or those with whom they live.

In this study, and drawing from the above review, *ethnicity* is considered to denote relationships between groups of people who consider themselves to be culturally<sup>10</sup> distinct from others.

#### **4.3 Youths in Ethnic Tension**

Felice & Wisler (2007) and Kurtenbach (2008) observe that youths are generally perceived either as victims or as perpetrators of violence in discussions of youth in conflict. It is only recently that they started appearing in literature as autonomous actors. It is, however, largely the case that youths feature actively in many instances of tension and violence. A number of explanations have been given as to why youths tend to be active players in conflict and/or circumstances under which they become violent.

One such explanation has been provided by Huntington in his book, *The Clash of Civilisations* (1996). It has come to be popularly known as the ‘youth bulge thesis’. Huntington argues that societies with a large age group of young males that lack perspectives for the future are more conflict-prone than others. Whereas the youth bulge thesis could bear some truth, it is reductionist in stance. It does not put into consideration the other social changes that may come with demographic shifts and, by extension, their polarising effect. It also fails to consider cases where youths are simply mobilised into violence even where there may not be any youth bulge. But one important aspect to pick from the thesis is that youths act violently out of frustration or lack of perspectives for the future. We shall see that this is a big factor in the Kibaale ethnic tension.

We also need to critically look at the phenomenon of youth manipulation and mobilisation by elites and/or elders with their own agenda or agenda that may genuinely concern the youths. The World Youth Report (2003, 375) observes that “leaders use

emotional appeals – placed within religious, cultural, [ethnic], and political contexts – to mobilise people; youth are targeted, in particular, as they are more susceptible to ideological messages”. Youths often become a gullible target in situations where they harbour frustrations, which the manipulators can take advantage of to mobilise them. According to Adossi (2009), adults in such scenarios take advantage of the fact that the youth’s faculty of analysis is not fully developed for drawing the right conclusion from what is proposed to them.

In Adossi’s view, it is important that we consider that the age category of youth is the biological period for adolescence and post-adolescence. This period is prone to idiosyncratic conflict characteristics such as envy, jealousy, prejudice, physical aggression, teasing, gossiping, bullying and conflict of identity. It is interesting to note that these characteristics coincide with a moment of physical energy and determination to overcome obstacles. It should be added here that the above characteristics do not as such indicate that youth will always tend towards conflict, but that the characteristics make them vulnerable to manipulation and mobilisation towards conflict especially where the mobilisation is built upon their own anxieties and frustrations.

One of the sources of frustration is the fact that:

Youth ... are often marginalised in decision-making processes. At the local and national levels, they are expected to obey political and religious community leaders [and elders]. At the international level, they have little say in the formulation and implementation of policies that are meant to protect their interests and well-being during peacetime and wartime. Nonetheless, they must endure the sometimes brutal socioeconomic effects of these decisions, and their long-term needs are left unmet (World Youth Report 2003, 378).

Their exclusion from decision-making exercises often results into their concerns being side-lined and/or a feeling of being marginalised and not being appreciated. This is not to say that adults will always side-line them maliciously. Sometimes they are not involved on the paternalistic assumption that they cannot make wise decisions and, therefore, need to be thought for. Whereas the above assumption may hold to some extent, it is not enough reason for their exclusion. They ought to be listened to and, as much as possible, participate in making decisions that impact on their well-being and aspirations.

#### **4.4 Youth and Pluralism**

In the sense in which the term pluralism is used in this paper, it is a relatively new concept. In some writings, pluralistic society is one that is diverse (Okuku 2002). According to Eck (2006), pluralism is not diversity alone, rather, it connotes the energetic engagement with diversity. In the words of Marty (2007, 16), “speak of ‘pluralism’ and you venture to a

terrain in which people have thought about what to do about diversity”. Pluralism is thus viewed as a stance that embraces the fact of plurality and gives it a positive interpretation (Pratt 2005). Whereas diversity tends to be a given, pluralism is not; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies (Eck 2006). As such, in Uganda’s context (and Kibaale in particular), the peaceful accommodation of ethnic differences remains key to successful democratic development (Berman et al. 2004). More specifically, how youth feature in this encounter is of paramount significance that calls for due study and emphasis.

Bellamy (2001) further clarifies that pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active* [but sometimes spontaneous] *seeking of understanding across lines of difference* (Eck 2006, emphasis mine). Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it does not require people of different ethnic groups to know anything about one another. It is thus seen as too thin a foundation for a world of ethnic difference and proximity. In Eck’s view, tolerance does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the costly stereotype, the half-truth, and the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence.

In further contrast of pluralism with relativism, Connolly (2005) argues that pluralism is not ‘absolute tolerance’, which is the stance of relativism. In his view, pluralism sets limits to tolerance. Connolly contends that pluralists are not relativists because “... our image of culture encourages us to embrace certain things in this particular place; to be indifferent to some; to be wary of others; and fight militantly against the continuation of yet others” (p.42). He grants that pluralism tries not to set limits to diversity. It will allow a wide diversity of religious faiths, sensual habits, ethnic traditions, gender practices, and several other forms of diversity. However, a ‘democratic pluralist’ will not allow the state to torture prisoners; parents to deprive their children of education; wealthy citizens to evade taxes; or narrow utilitarians to get into positions of public authority.

In this pluralistic sense, Connolly (2005, 43) adds, “a diverse culture is one in which pluralistic virtues of public accountability, self-discipline, receptive listening, gritted-teeth tolerance of some things you hate, and a commitment to justice are widespread”. Connolly, therefore, believes that pluralism ought to operate within the bounds of civic virtues. Among such virtues, Parekh (2000) highlights recognition of human worth and dignity, promotion of human well-being or of fundamental human interests, and equality. But enlisting and abiding by these civic virtues does not necessarily resolve issues of value conflict. Parekh himself admits that such values deal with the most basic aspects of human life about which there is generally little serious disagreement, and fail to guide us once we go beyond such aspects.

Unlike absolute tolerance, pluralism invites diverse people to come as they are and be themselves, with all their differences, pledged only to the common civic demands of

citizenship. It is yet to be established whether Ugandan society is ethnically pluralistic. For example, Gaju (2005) has already shown that, contrary to popular belief, to a large extent people are egoistically tolerant since entrants have to adapt to the natives' cultures in order to be accepted. But such a practice could as well be a marker of intolerance to difference. The principle seems to be: 'you either become like us or we do not accept you'. 'We can tolerate you if you become like us'. Put differently, "if they [you] insist on retaining their separate cultures, they [you] should not complain if they [you] are viewed as outsiders and subjected to discriminatory treatment" (Parekh 2000, 197). That cannot be tolerance. Moreover, there is always no guarantee that when one assimilates they will be fully accepted. They could still be excluded on account of their past identity or even an aspect of their identity such as physiological features, which they cannot put aside.

Forster *et al.* (2000) insist that pluralism should not be confused with assimilation. To them, assimilation involves the merging of minority and majority groups into one, with a common culture and identity. As such, under assimilative circumstances, much is not on terms of equality. Much power is wielded by the majority group especially in the presence of an immigrant minority group. This scenario could as well occur in favour of a minority group that has the advantage of force, such as in colonial encounter. In both cases, for its survival, the minority group has almost no option but to adopt the norms and traditions of the dominant group. Assimilation is thus seen as an ethnocentric, superiority-oriented and patronising imposition on minority peoples struggling to retain their cultural and ethnic integrity (Alba and Nee 2003). It inconsiderably narrows room for difference by projecting majority culture as the ideal whose adoption is the gate-pass to acceptability. I would agree with Parekh (2000) that there is nothing wrong with assimilation if it comes as a deliberate choice of minorities but that it should not be a necessary precondition for citizenship. Minorities also have a right to retain and promote or transmit their ways of life whose denial would not only be unjust but could also lead to resistance.

Apart from the consideration that youths are often side-lined in decision-making and in engaging with ethnic differences in communities, it is important to investigate how youths actually engage with differences and why they feature in those particular ways. Among other reasons explained in this paper that make the youth a crucial category with regard to pluralism is because "that is the age of acquiring experience and learning how to live and coexist with other people who do not have the same background and standard of life" (Adossi 2009, 25).

We expect social interaction between groups and individuals with competing interests and interests to reveal basic incompatibility. How such 'incompatibility' (real or perceived) is allowed to be managed, actually managed or/and thought about by the

youth is important to understand in order to ascertain the possibilities for pluralism in a given context and, in this case, within a case as entangled as Kibaale.

## **5 Voices of Kibaale Youths**

One of the aims of this study was to investigate the youth's perceptions of the causes of ethnic tension in Kibaale. Basing on these perceptions, the study sought to establish the youth's imaginations of the possibilities for engagement with ethnic differences in the area especially with their active participation in shaping a society of coexistence. With no disregard for the other factors that account for ethnic tension in the area, key emphasis will be put on manipulation and instrumentalisation of the youth. This is mainly because, from the findings, the youth's role in the tension mainly gravitates around these factors. An attempt is also made to discuss the reasons for their situational prominence.

### **5.1 Manipulation and *Instrumentalisation* of Youth in Kibaale Conflict**

The World Youth Report (2003, 375) reveals that "leaders use emotional appeals – placed within religious, cultural, [ethnic], and political contexts – to mobilise people; youths are targeted in particular, as they are more susceptible to ideological messages". This observation is attested to by the findings from Kibaale.

In one of the interviews, a young man narrated how he came to participate in the conflict that ensued after the election of a non-Munyoro LC V Chairman in 2002. He recalled that a number of young people were approached by agents of the MBC. The youths, including the interviewee were given money before they boarded cars to go to attack the *Bafuruki* who were 'stealing their land'.

They came in organising the youth (who did not know anything about the [Mubende] Banyoro Committee) that we should block those people who have come into our district – that they are going to take our land. So they come in with an idea that they are protecting the things of Bunyoro and what they are feeding is the past. That in the past they used to cut people's property, kill people, and burn their houses... Because they had got some money, some people boarded [lorries] without knowing what they were going to do! (Interview held on September 19, 2012)

This testimony shows that the youths are rendered gullible by their desperation due to lack of money or means for survival. It came up in several interviews and casual conversations that there are many youths in the area without any meaningful employment. In such desperation, they can easily heed the war calls especially as the targeted 'enemy' is painted as part of their problem. The 'ethnic others' are enemies who have come 'to take away our land, our ancestral land'.



The youths would also feel that this is their time and that they have a duty to carry on the fight against a marginalisation that is weaved in history and retold by the mobilising elders that narrate how they fought selflessly against colonial British and Baganda domination. In this discourse, one figure that one will hardly miss in the story of Bunyoro, in general, and Kibaale, in particular, is the late Joseph Mujoobe Kazairwe. Among the Banyoro, he is credited for reinforcing Banyoro patriotism by introducing the militant approach in the MBC in the 1950s as they fought against Baganda rule and agitated for the restoration of the lost counties to Bunyoro. He was also the front figure in the revival of the MBC in 2001 – to rise against the *Bafuruki* threat.

In this study, Kazairwe's name featured so often in accounts of youth mobilisation during the times of ethnic tension. In his biography of his father (Kazairwe), Mirima (2004) narrates that youths from the farthest corner of Bunyoro-Kitara made daily visits to Kazairwe's home to bring political mobilisation reports and to be briefed on political mobilisation developments. It is told how, through the popular Kibaale-Kagadi Community Radio (KKCR), he would emotionally tell stories of the heroism of their days that the youth were told to learn from, in order to claim their time. The non-Banyoro respondents also severally pointed out Kazairwe's messages not only as a cause for their fear and insecurity at the time but also as a shaper of their preparedness to fight for their stay.

The youth recounted that "what they are feeding us [with] is the past". The narratives of the bravery of their forefathers in fighting the oppressors of their time and the historical losses are then supposed to spirit up the youth today in fighting the *Bafuruki* threat. The emotive impact of the relayed 'sense of victimhood that stems from unacknowledged [or acknowledged but] and unreconciled historic losses' should not be underestimated (Montville, cited in Cairns and Roe 2003, 4).

The motive of the elders in using this history as a mobilising instrument may be innocent since the pain in the Banyoro story is conspicuous. It is, however, clear that, regardless of the genuineness of the cause, appealing to such a memory in times of tension turns youths into lethal agents against their targets. And that is what they precisely became at the time. They adopted *Kabalega leega* (Kabalega stretch – as with a bow and arrow) as a war cry (Mirima 2004). It strategically appeals to the memory of Kabalega as a great Munnyoro patriot who fought against the British in defence of his kingdom.

This is not to mean that the youth are only manipulated into but not affected by Bunyoro's past, especially in a direct way. The question of land is still a sensitive one. Although some would argue that the issue of land titles being owned by 'absentee landlords' is epiphenomenal, it came up in a focus group discussion with youths as a critical factor. One participant said:

We do not know which land we are going to inherit. Our fathers and grandfathers do not own land here, they are mere squatters! Can you believe that most land here is owned by Baganda, some of whom do not even know that they have land here? We have no securities for acquiring loans to start-up businesses, no land to call our own! (Focus Group Discussion held on September 18, 2011)

This view was also echoed by the youth representative in the Bunyoro Kingdom parliament (*Rukurato*). Pointing at the bush outside where we were seated at Birembo War Memorial Institute, he said: "... all those lands you see, it is for absentees! The landlords are in Buganda; they are in the UK!" Although he did not support violence against non-Bunyoro, his remark brings forth a jittery feeling of dispossession whose eventual character is hard to precisely imagine but could border on tension. The fact that land is still in the hands of absentee landlords is corroborated by the Presidential Advisor on lands<sup>11</sup> revelation that of 3,636 absentee landlords in Kibaale, since 2003 only 360 landlords had been cleared through the Land Fund<sup>12</sup>.

The non-Bunyoro youths would say that they also work hard to acquire their land. It should be noted, however, that in the two resettlement schemes in Kibaale (Ruteete and Kisiita), each family was given land of about 10 to 12 hectares. The Bunyoro youths argued that they find it unfair for an in-coming group to be given land of their own while the indigenous people are still squatting on their ancestral land. This was highlighted as one of the causes of the tension. It may not be a strong factor in itself, but when it is inflamed by manipulative politicians and dressed in polarising tones – it is blown out of proportion. One youth who unsuccessfully contested for a member of parliament position in 2011 argued that "the conflict is always attributed to land... But the real issue is at times of politics". In more emphasis of the role of politics in the tension, another non-Munyoro youth explained:

... if it is not an election period, the word *Omufuruki* is not existent amongst the people of Kibaale. We cooperate well, you find a Munyoro drinking with a *Mufuruki* and a *Mufuruki* drinking with a Munyoro. We eat together! Even in times of difficulty; at times you may have failed financially, you call and ask: 'Do you have 100,000/= there?' We even do business together.

It was, therefore, important to interrogate the views of youths on politics in connection to ethnic relations in the area. It should be recalled that the spark of full-blown conflict in Kibaale was around politics. This was with the election of a non-Munyoro as the LC V Chairman, which is the highest political position in the district. Politicians from both sides were very active in mobilising for 'their own'. According to one non-Munyoro

respondent, who was a youth leader at the time of the 2001-2003 conflict, said that “it was every goat on its peg<sup>13</sup>”. Another youth added that for the young non-Banyoro, tension starts at this point. “We knew little about the history and the Baganda–Banyoro conflicts of old. They came reminding us how they carried out [sic] the conflicts. They inculcated in us the *Mufuruki*–Munyoro differences”.

It is a common accusation in Kibaale that the *Bafuruki* are arrogant. The ‘arrogance’ is partly attributed to their insistence on taking up leadership positions in Kibaale where ‘they have been hospitably hosted’. They came as farmers and are expected to stick to farming and leave leadership alone. In a way, this is projected as a gesture of gratefulness and respect for their hosts. In the same vein, Kasiriivu Atwooki, the member of parliament for Bugangaizi West argued at the Bwanswa Peace Dialogue that when you go to an area:

... you must know the area; you must know the people; you must know their history. After knowing, then you understand. It is not enough to know, you must understand; and after understanding you appreciate. If you do the three things: you know, you understand and after understanding you appreciate, you go a long way.

However, some non-Banyoro youths argue that they were born and bred in Kibaale and should not be excluded in an attempt to show appreciation for the memory of pain and injustice of the Banyoro. As such, the non-Banyoro’s attempt to claim political space, which is their constitutional right, sometimes innocently opens up the wounds of the Banyoro history. This scenario projects the ethnic tension in Kibaale as a maze so difficult for the youths to trace their way out for coexistence. The section that follows highlights and discusses the Kibaale youth’s engagement with their maze-like ethnic realities in shaping the society that they want.

## 5.2 The Role of Youth in Pluralism

It is important to establish the youth’s role in engaging with ethnic difference. This includes establishing whether the youth actually participate in drafting measures for coexistence and implementation. Where they participate, we try to interrogate the form of participation and to think through the youth’s views on pluralism in their area.

There was a field scenario that provides an important glimpse of youth participation in managing ethnic differences in Kibaale and exemplifies their demand for more space beyond momentary agency determined for them by others.

There is a feeling among the youth that they are marginalised at the planning stage as expressed by one youth at a peace dialogue:

“But *Mzee* why don’t you involve us the youth in these stages of planning and strategising? You only call upon us when you want us to execute your resolutions in times of conflict”.

This is, however, refuted by those involved in the planning – mainly the elderly (in the youth's views) as expressed by an 'elderly' planner:

“We always invite everyone on radio. Do you people want a special invitation? We invite everyone and you do not turn up, then you complain! What do you want us to do for you?”

The youth attach their exclusion from the planning processes to the financial greed of the 'elderly' in organisations such as the MBC:

“When they are given money [by government] they keep quiet and eat it alone. When it is finished they come and mobilise us to attack the *Bafuruki!*”

The above revelation indicates the frustration of the youth with the way they are reduced to mere instruments because they are excluded from higher forms of participation in envisioning the society they want.

After the tension in 2002-2003, there were a number of delegations to the president for dialogue. Looking through the records and from the accounts of some of the delegates, it is conspicuous that on both sides (Banyoro and non-Banyoro), the youths were not represented. The groups were exclusively constituted by elders! This exclusionary practice is partly rooted in the anachronistic<sup>14</sup> cultural belief prevalent in most Ugandan societies that wisdom comes with age. In a number of cultures in Uganda, elders ought to be looked at by the young as fountains of honour and wisdom whose assumedly experienced voice tends to count more than that of the young. This belief is, for example, exemplified in the adage that 'old age is wisdom'. Such an approach is not sustainable as it breeds a feeling of exclusion and lack of ownership of the peace initiatives. It also negatively impacts on the youth's self-worth and ambition.

Secondly, the elders (at least of MBC) possess a considerably vital triumphant memory of dealing with differences in the past which is considered relevant in addressing the current tension. Respecting and listening to elders on the above account may not be wrong in itself but it poses the danger of building a condescending and patronising attitude by which youths could be stripped of their voice.

The third revelation from the above encounter is that the youth are demanding for space in dealing with the tension in Kibaale. This also emerged in other interviews and focus group discussions. They are claiming/agitating for space in civil society, in local government, in pressure groups, and the various forms of dialogue going on in the district. It is indeed a good sign that at the peace dialogue at Bwanswa the majority of the participants were the youth; and they were very active in the discussion. They

unequivocally insisted on their involvement in peace initiatives and reminded every participant that they equally had a stake in the affairs of Kibaale. As argued by Adossi (2009), the youth stage is a stage of energy and aspirations. It is a stage of anxiety about the future. Therefore, their desire to be included in decision-making is an attempt to be active shapers of their future and for their agency to be acknowledged and appreciated. For example, one youth wondered, "... if it is our future that they are fighting for, why would they be reluctant to see us participate in making decisions about it but instead only want to tell us what to do!"

But, despite the limitations, are there any youth initiatives towards ethnic pluralism which could be an indicator that their agency can be meaningful? This is an important question and for which answers abound.

The study found out that in Kagadi Secondary School<sup>15</sup>, pupils form clubs that are ethnically mixed. In such clubs they learn more about each other and this helps to tone down ethnic stereotypes. Of course stereotypes still exist. For example, it is common that when one does something outlandish, they are told that they behave 'like Bakiga'. The Bakiga students said that they are countering this stereotype by proving in their clubs that they can be good performers as well. Banyoro are also stereotyped as lazy and jealous of their hardworking Bakiga classmates. And to the Banyoro, too, this poses a task to prove that they can also work hard and excel. Although stereotypes do not die away easily, in such mutual engagement, the students of different ethnic groups have been able to show each other that many of the divisive stereotypes are based on falsehoods.

Generally, they revealed that the school environment is helping a lot in ironing out ethnic differences and in fostering mutual appreciation. The pluralistic strength in this school was also attested to by some older respondents who said that they had come to appreciate the ethnic otherness through school interactions where they learnt each other's languages and made friends. However, such interactions may not necessarily guarantee coexistence since what brings about tension is not always lack of knowledge about and appreciation of the other. For example, when ethnic tension is motivated by economic competition, knowledge of each other may not necessarily count as a conflict deterrent.

Some youths held a view widely acclaimed in Kibaale that intermarriage would create and strengthen the bonds between people of ethnic identities. Citing his own marriage, one youth said:

"... now that I have a wife from the Banyoro, they are my in-laws. Even if [ethnic] chaos was to break out now, they will not treat me as a *Mufuruki*. I have their blood in my family! So they will have to treat me as their own".

The idea is that from the intermarriage they will bring forth children who will attract identification from both the Banyoro and non-Banyoro thus toning down the ethnic polarities against political manipulation.

Attractive as this form of pluralism sounds, it may suggest, on the other hand, that it is impossible for the members of different ethnic groups to appreciate and accept each other in their differences. In a way, it comes forth as forced coexistence. However, it could be argued that being ready to consider each other for marriage is a sign of mutual appreciation. Such marriages could have strategic advantages in the long run. They are based on love of one another albeit with consciousness that the partners come along with different ethnic affiliations. Such marriages are also viewed as a way of exemplifying the possibility of ethnic cohesion that could be projected in other sectors like politics and business.

When we look at other cases of ethnic tension, however, we ought to put a caveat to the pluralistic potential through intermarriage. The 1994 genocide of Rwanda serves a relatively recent example. Mamdani (2001) observes that there had been intermarriages between the Hutu and Tutsis for centuries but that did not seem to be any loss in identity as to fuse the ethnic divide. Being a patriarchal society, the wife would take on the identity of the husband.

The social identity is passed on through patrilineal descent. If the father is a Tutsi, then the child will be socially identified as Tutsi; and if the father is a Hutu, the child will be identified as Hutu. As the child takes on a one-dimensional identity, that of the father, the identity of the mother - whether Hutu or Tutsi - is systematically erased. So it happens that the child of generations of intermarriage and cohabitation between Hutu and Tutsi comes into this world unequivocally Hutu or Tutsi (2001, 53).

During the genocide, it is reported that, in some cases, wife would go against husband, and vice versa. Where one's father was Tutsi, such a person was regarded as a Tutsi despite having 'Hutu blood'! Intermarriage, therefore, failed to serve as an insulating force. In terms of ethnic identity in inter-ethnic marriages, the patriarchal setting of the tribes in Kibaale is not any different from that of the Hutu and Tutsi. Even here, the child will take on the ethnic identity of the father and will socially be identified as so. Where a Munyoro man marries a Mukiga woman, the children will be Banyoro.

The patriarchal one-dimensional identification in itself is not a problem for pluralism, just as we would argue that ethnicity in itself is not a hindrance towards coexistence. Findings from Kibaale reveal that despite the patrilineal influence on the ethnic identity of the children born in intermarriages, there is often a cultural mix. Where a Mukiga marries a Munyoro, due to the fact that mothers interact more with the children, the children are very likely to speak the language of the mother at home. Even where the

father's culture is dominant, there will also be bits of each of other's culture in the home. In effect, this is expected to check on ethnic radicalism on either side. It will take strong manipulation and mobilisation for people raised in such an environment to be convinced that members of the other ethnic group are enemies that have to be fought. Therefore, whereas Rwanda's case reminds us that intermarriage may not always work in ensuring inter-ethnic coexistence, it should not be used to argue that intermarriages do not have a pacifying effect.

Language also came out as an important ground in working out social cohesion among the youth. There was an apparent attempt by all respondents (Banyoro and non-Banyoro) in learning the dominant languages in the area (mainly Runyoro and Rukiga). At the minimum, each was able to greet and say thank you in both languages. However, effort was seen to be more from the non-Banyoro to learn Runyoro. This is attributed to the fact that, even with the increased number of non-Banyoro in the area, Runyoro still remains the language of wider communication. It was also said to be a way of identifying with the Banyoro natives for acceptability and harmony. This echoes Fasold's view cited in Chriosti (2003, 13) that:

When people use language, they do more than just try to get another person to understand the speaker's thoughts and feelings. At the same time, both people are using language in subtle ways to define their relationship with each other, to identify themselves as part of a social group...

It should be recalled that one of the Banyoro issues in the tension is that migrants, especially the Bakiga, arrogantly stuck to their languages. This is interpreted by the Banyoro as disrespect and abuse towards the hosts. The lingual practice is not helped by the memory that the Banyoro were once forced to speak Luganda by the Baganda sub-colonialists. Language is an important and considerably sensitive issue in engaging with the ethnic diversity in the area.

Most non-Banyoro youths in this study insisted that they only speak their languages among themselves but use Runyoro when speaking to Banyoro. As such, with a few spatial exceptions, Runyoro is the unofficial public language<sup>16</sup>. Having to learn a people's language in order to be accepted is an assimilative move. Forster et al. (2000) do not contend assimilation as a mark of pluralism. They dismiss it on account of its tendency towards wielding more power for the majority or dominant group (in this case the Banyoro). In refuting it, Alba and Nee (2003) add that it is not only an ethnocentric tendency but also superiority-oriented in its attempt to patronise 'others'. Linguistic assimilation would, therefore, be seen as suffocation and narrowing of room for difference.

However, as earlier argued in the review of literature, whereas assimilation ought not to be a necessary pre-condition for citizenship, I would agree with Parekh (2000) that there is nothing wrong with assimilation if it comes as a deliberate choice of incoming groups. It might be hard to precisely tell when it is a deliberate choice and when it is coerced (directly or indirectly) but where it is truly one's choice to learn another's language on account of its wider reach, then that is not a choice to condemn. What should be condemned, on the other hand, is the tendency towards deliberately killing of another's culture in an attempt to reinforce it because it is regarded as superior or simply dominant. Some cultures or cultural aspects might surely have to die off, but this should only occur where, with time, they are rendered anachronistic or irrelevant without any imposition in their replacement.

The adoption of Runyoro by non-Banyoro youths should be appreciated in the above light. It should also be appreciated in consideration of the reciprocal appreciation and respect of non-Banyoro cultural aspects by Banyoro youths. Youth respondents indicated that the fact that everyone is allowed to hold their cultural functions and rituals indicates that there is respect for difference. For example, the Banyoro attend introduction ceremonies of non-Banyoro and they abide by the procedural norms of the hosts; and vice versa. One Mukiga youth accordingly remarked:

“when the Banyoro are going to pay tribute to *Omukama* [Bunyoro King], we accompany them. The king also takes us as his subjects”.

Such multi-cultural mutual respect cannot be underestimated in its potential for trust-building and social cohesion.

In analysing youth involvement in pluralism measures, it is very important to consider the gender issues within. It is insensitive to bundle youths together as of homogenous agency in ethnic issues only varying by ethnic affiliation. This study has revealed that young women feature far less than young men in public peace initiatives such as dialogues. Culture is certainly a key player in this phenomenon. In most cultures of the people in Kibaale District, women belong to the private sphere. The public sphere is widely a preserve for men. This discriminative gender landscape is changing but rather very slowly. It will not be enough to have young men participating in peace initiatives and then claim that youths are on board. Such participation should be disaggregated by gender.

The findings of this study indicate that young women need to be empowered further for meaningful involvement in the affairs of the area. The Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme (URDT), a civil society organisation at Kagadi – Kibaale, has tried to bridge the gender gap by initiating the African women's university and a girls'



secondary school. URDT also offers vocational training programmes for both men and women through which some youths have been empowered with self-sustaining skills that reduce idling and violence proneness. As we shall emphasise in the recommendations, more of such initiatives are needed in the area.

Certainly, as with any maze, there is a complex system of paths where it is very easy to get lost. The different ways in which youths are engaging with the entangled ethnic realities in Kibaale should be seen as possibilities among several others through which coexistence could be worked out. As presented and discussed here, they certainly have their limitations but also bear marks of promise that should be reinforced and streamlined with initiatives of wider society.

## **6 Conclusion and Recommendations**

### **6.1 Conclusion**

This paper aimed at analytically exploring youth engagement with the complex ethnic realities in Kibaale for coexistence. The complexity is seen in the entanglement of the present ethnic relations in memories of the antecedent relations in the area; in mutual fears of the Banyoro and non-Banyoro; and political manipulation.

In the youth's perception of the causes of ethnic tension in the area, political manipulation featured as one of the key factors. Politicians play the ethnic card, especially during elections, in order to achieve their political gains while pitting one side against the other. It is largely for this reason that tension and, sometimes, violence tends to build up during election time. The youths' views further indicated that although political manipulation is important in the tension, there are other factors that fuel it. Such factors include memories of oppression, exploitation and marginalisation of the Banyoro by the British and the Baganda. These memories, the ensuing pain and the partially triumphant battles of the past are used by the elders to mobilise the youths 'to claim their time' and not allow history to re-occur. Moreover, there are some injustices of the past that are relayed into the present – as such affecting youths today. One of such injustices highlighted in the study is that of land insecurity due to vast land being owned by absentee landlords. Migrants are thus looked at with the fear that they are only going to aggravate land scarcity. On the other hand, due to threats from some Banyoro, the migrants also have a fear that they could be evicted from Kibaale yet it is their new home. When politics comes in, it picks these memories and fears, blows them out of proportion and *instrumentalises* them for political scores.

Youths are engaging with these intricacies first by claiming their space in dealing with issues that concern them. They are questioning exclusionary tendencies such as

those of elders of the Mubende Banyoro Committee. They seek to be part and parcel of decision-making, and not only to be seen and used as agents of violence. Not only do they do this through agitation but also by taking their own initiatives for coexistence in a bid to prove the possibility and power of their agency. Their agency has been shown through civil society initiatives such as participation in peace dialogues, formation of school clubs across lines of ethnic difference, learning each other's languages, intermarriage by some youths, and so on. The viability of these pluralism initiatives for existence has also been discussed in this paper.

It would suffice to infer here that, although there are limitations, the youth are making meaningful strides in working out mechanisms for inter-ethnic coexistence. Their involvement may not necessarily provide a pathway out of the maze but makes the engagement more inclusive and, therefore, expanding on the base of pluralism possibilities. Their inclusion is also of importance in averting the obstacles to coexistence (especially frustration and violence) that are associated with their exclusion.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

Among the youth limitations in engaging with ethnic difference which need to be looked into are:

Firstly, it was evident the women/girl marginalising role of patriarchy extends to the youth category. Most front roles in peace dialogues and related initiatives were revealed to be done by male youths. Girls still need more empowerment for self-assertion and ability to challenge gender roles that exclude them. Such empowerment should start right from the family (with parents sensitised first) to the schools. Initiatives such as the African women's university and a girls' secondary school by Uganda Rural Development and Training Programme (URDT) at Kagadi – Kibaale are commendable in this line. Girls should be brought up and trained in a way that enables them to claim their space and voice their concerns without fear. Accordingly, socio-cultural barriers to their participation should be systematically addressed at all relevant levels through cultural institutions (such as Bunyoro Kingdom), religious institutions, and relevant non-governmental organisations.

It was also revealed that one of the reasons as to why youths are easily targeted by politicians for manipulation is their lack of meaningful employment. Whereas URDT has helped in providing a number of Kibaale youths with vocational skills in carpentry, metal works, building and construction and car mechanics, more still needs to be affirmatively done by the central government through Kibaale local government.

The study confirms that for historical reasons and due to conspicuous omissions of all post-colonial governments, Kibaale remains relatively deprived. Agriculture needs

to be boosted for more employment opportunities. But this will go hand in hand with infrastructural development so as to boost trade and attract investors in the area.

By principle of affirmative action and distributive justice, part of the much anticipated oil revenue could be allocated for Kibaale development.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The wider PhD research investigates spaces for pluralism in ethnically sensitive communities with specific reference to Kibaale District.

<sup>2</sup> Kiwanuka (1968) contends that it was more for strategic reasons than for appreciating Buganda that the counties were annexed to the latter. He argues that, the British having appreciated the administrative

structure of Buganda, they wanted to take advantage of it in Bunyoro as well and to curb further resistance to their rule.

<sup>3</sup> The number of counties actually given by the British to Buganda is still contested. Contrary to the popular account of six (or seven) counties, Kiwanuka (1968) and (Samwiri 2007) argue that only two counties (Buyaga and Bugangaizi) were extended to Buganda, the rest had already been conquered by Buganda.

<sup>4</sup> This is the highest position at District level within Uganda's decentralised framework. It is also referred to as Local Council Five (LC 5) as the highest of the five local government councils. LC 4 is the County, LC 3 the Sub-county, LC 2 the Parish while LC 1 is the village.

<sup>5</sup> National Resistance Movement, which is the ruling party.

<sup>6</sup> The creation of a constituency goes with creation of other sub-units there under such as LC III. Leadership of these is also through elections.

<sup>7</sup> Rukiga is the language for the Bakiga.

<sup>8</sup> Issues to do with youths are reserved for the National Youth Policy. The Constitution of Uganda is totally silent about the category of youths.

<sup>9</sup> Rational choice theory explains ethnicity as driven by calculations for group and individual benefit. People's identification with ethnic groups is here viewed as a strategising point for some benefit.

<sup>10</sup> Culture is here defined as "a system of beliefs and practices in terms of which a group of human beings understand, regulate and structure their individual and collective life" (Parekh 2000, p.143). This definition would also encompass religions as cultures, but, for this study, they are excluded from the definition of ethnicity.

<sup>11</sup> Kasirivu Atooki, as of 2009.

<sup>12</sup> The Land Fund was instituted as an initiative to buy off land from the absentee landlords, return the land titles to the Uganda Land Commission, and then give the land to the current occupants/ squatters.

<sup>13</sup> The expression 'every goat on its peg' is used to mean that people should rally behind 'tribe-mates' when it comes to elections.

<sup>14</sup> I refer to it as anachronistic because it belongs to the era when knowledge was mainly gathered through experience. Thus the older one was the more the experiences they had and, therefore, the knowledge collected. The youths would accordingly not be expected to know much due to their limited life experience.

<sup>15</sup> The researcher only visited one school (Kagadi Senior Secondary School) in Kibaale District. The findings from the school may not be representative of all the schools in the district but helped provide some insight into youth inter-ethnic relations due to the school's multi-ethnic composition.

<sup>16</sup> The official language of Uganda is English. It is thus the official medium of instruction in schools. The other languages are mainly used for communication in informal settings. The dominance of any of these other languages in a social setting often goes with numerical dominance of the ethnic group to which the language is associated and, in most cases, it is the indigenous group.