'THE DISTRICT BELONGS TO THE SONS OF THE SOIL': DECENTRALISATION AND THE ENTRENCHMENT OF ETHNIC EXCLUSION IN UGANDA

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Abstract:

La décentralisation a été idéalisée comme l'un des mécanismes de gouvernanc eessentiels pour rapprocher les citoyens des services. En Afrique, celle de l'Ouganda a été considérée comme l'un des modèles permettant d'atteindre les idéaux de la décentralisation. Il y a été généralement admis que la décentralisation des pouvoirs décisionnels et la gestion des ressources par les petites unites améliorerait la prestation des services. Cependant, le potentiel de la decentralisation s'est avéré conditionné par le contexte, en particulier ses ramifications politiques. Parmi les particularités malheureuses de la décentralisation en Ouganda, on peut citer, comme l'a fait l'administration coloniale, que les districts (unites décentralisées) sont principalement issus de groups ethniques, ancrant ainsi la politique d'identité ethnique et les tendances conflictuelles d'exclusion. Une source potentielle de conflits reside dans la concentration du pouvoir sur les ressources au niveau du district, qui rend les positions politiques du district très attractives, ce qui augmente la concurrence. En accentuant la concurrence pour les ressources, la decentralisation paradoxalement déclenche l'obsession de l'appartenance, créant une dichotomie conflictuelle entre ceux qui appartiennent et ceux qui appartiennent moins. Ce document illustre cette trajectoire en utilisant le cas d'un district ougandais connu sous le nom de Kibaale qui a connu des tensions ethniques depuis sa création en 1991. La création du district pour traiter les «injustices historiques» est venu avec une psyché de propriété de la part des «autochtones»,

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mettant ainsi en mouvement des revendications politiques basées sur l'autochtonie. Les dynamiques émergentes reconstituent la citoyenneté en créant des classes de «vrais citoyens» et d '«étrangers», détruisant ainsi la logique de la décentralisation. Le document plaide ainsi pour un cadre décentralisé qui, tout en étant sensible aux questions contextuelles, transcende les clivages ethniques pour des structures de gouvernance plus inclusives.

Uganda is one of the forerunners in implementing decentralisation in Africa. The decentralised system of governance in Uganda is recognised as one of the most intricately designed to extend social services to the lowest people at the grassroots. Indeed, the country has registered significant progress in the implementation of the system defined in the constitution (1995) and guided by the Local Government Act of 1997 (Okidi and Guloba 2006). Accordingly, the system has been reported to have improved service delivery and increased participation in government processes.

However, as argued by Schelnberger (2005), the possible impacts of decentralisation are manifold and very much dependent on circumstances. "Decentralisation is in itself a conflictive process that can open up new arenas of conflict" (*Ibid.* p.12). Despite the many gains of decentralisation, this paper shows that in some parts of Uganda the approach to decentralisation has the downside of breeding inter-ethnic conflict between 'indigenous' ethnic groups and the non-indigenous who are often framed as 'foreigners'. The clashes are centered on competition for political power and other resources where each group claims to be marginalised by the other. In the competition, the indigenous groups often have a tendency of claiming more citizenship rights than the 'foreigners'. This paper illustrates that the above phenomenon is mainly brought about by the logic/politics along which some districts are constituted in Uganda.

Some districts in Uganda are drawn in such a way that their boundaries coincide with ethnic borders. This logic is partly a residue of the colonial administrative system that was inherited and utilised by post-colonial governments (Kigongo 1995; Byarugaba 1998; Mamdani 2001a, 2004; Nsamba *et al.* 2009; Nabudere 2009). Before particularly explaining how district creation has influenced exclusion and conflict in Kibaale District, the history of colonial manipulation is important for us to be able to understand the manifestations of ethnicity in Uganda in general and Kibaale in particular and, to an extent, how/why leaders play the ethnic card the way they do.

The roots of ethnic exclusion in Uganda's administration

Mamdani, one of the scholars who are deeply engaged in the study of colonialism and its legacies, advises that "… key to understanding the state in Africa is the historical fact that it was forged in the course of a colonial occupation" (2004, p.62). In *Citizen and Subject*, he makes a deep analysis of how contemporary African politics is by and large a product of the administrative approach that was used by the late colonial systems in their colonies. The major concern and dilemma of the colonial establishment was how to administratively respond to the 'native question'. That is: "How can a tiny and foreign minority rule over an indigenous majority" (p.16)? The response to this question was established in two systems: Direct and Indirect rule. Direct rule (which Mamdani refers to as *centralised despotism*) was used where the colonialists themselves had settled, while indirect rule (*decentralised despotism*) was preferred where, colonizers were less in numbers on the ground, and where there was need to contain cultural resistance. Eventually, indirect rule became the dominant approach in most British colonies, and Uganda was no exception. It was this approach that was used in Uganda where colonialists predominantly worked through indigenous administrative structures, such as local Kingdoms and Chiefdoms. In stateless communities,

> … colonial imposition could not resonate with any aspect of tradition. Often *tribes were created* [emphasis mine] on the basis of territorial integrity as villages were brought together under a single administrative authority. Chiefship was similarly manufactured and chiefs were imposed. If marginal men who shifted alliances at the sight of a more powerful invader could not be found, others were brought in from the outside (Mamdani, 2004, p.41).

For colonial administrative convenience, the people of Uganda were as such oversimplified and categorized into superficial neat-looking, watertight ethnic identities (Gaju 2005). In his *Abu Mayanja Annual Lecture – August 7, 2009*, Mamdani reiterated his *Citizen and Subject* thesis with the observation that:

> Before colonialism, the tribal identity was open and inclusive. You could become a Muganda or a Munyoro over time. But, under colonialism, the law defined tribal identity as biological rather than cultural. This meant that [as by primordialism] the law considered tribal identity as permanent, passed over from father to son to grandson. As a result, identities that were previously fuzzy and permeable were made permanent. Open and inclusive

cultural systems gave rise to closed and discriminatory political systems[1].

In *Saviors and Survivors*, Mamdani indicates that the crystallisation of ethnic identity "…sometimes involved a benign acknowledgement of existing identities, but at other times, it involved a wholesale re-identification of peoples. Never entirely arbitrary, the re-identification often involved exalting older, narrower identities as historically legitimate" (2009, p.145). Instructive of Mamdani's view, Gaju cites the Acholi, Karamojong, Banyankore, and Bakiga ethnic categories in Uganda as colonially constructed through conglomerating and freezing several groups. The Karamojong:

> … consisted of Matheniko, Bokora, Jie, Dodoth, and other groups who even today see themselves as separate and distinct identities… the people that we call Bakiga today had clan rather than ethnic identities, for example, Basigi and Bainika, Bamungwe and Bakiyagiro. The Banyankore as we know them today are an amalgam of Banyankore (Bairu and Bahima), Bahororo, Baharuguru, Bahweju, Batagwenda, Banyamobo and other groups (Gaju 2005, p. 4).

With such amalgamations, tension was not only created between emergent ethnic groups but even within. In some cases the sub-groups' identities were neutralised through the homogenising effect of the majority ethnic group.

Since the ethnic groups which were solidified or created by colonialism had to be distinctly bounded geographically and culturally, they were respectively categorized and often stereotypically labeled. Ochieng (1995), for example, observes that there were several forms of tribal stereotyping which were used to inform job seekers in colonial Africa, stereotypes which survive until today. Some tribes were specifically employed by colonialists as clerks or foremen. People from certain other tribes could not become servants because they were known to be 'genetically dishonest'. Ochieng gives an example of Carey Francis (1897-1966), a renowned mathematician in the Kenya colony, who kept a Luo as a houseboy and kept a Kikuyu on his *shamba* (farm).

In the same vein, and to illustrate how colonial stereotypes are still prevalent in contemporary Uganda, Kabananukye (2004) cites an example of a Kampala friend who owns a foreign exchange bureau. According to this friend it is better to employ a Mukiga or an Alur as an accountant than to

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[1] http://abumayanja.org/news.php?prog_id=13 Viewed on August 25, 2011.

employ a Muganda. The rationale behind this is that the Baganda have been stereotyped as cunning thieves while the Luo, Batooro, and Bakiga were portrayed as good and trustworthy servants. The Baganda stereotype as a cunning lot could as well be traced from Buganda's strategic collaboration with the British colonisers and a feeling that they greatly contributed to Uganda's colonisation. "And largely because [through indirect rule] the British were in the background, and the Baganda were the ones not only immediately prosecuting the war [in Bunyoro, Mbale, Busoga and elsewhere] but also meting out what the people regarded as gross injustice, the brunt of resentment ended being targeted at the Baganda" (Adhola 2006). In Bunyoro where Kibaale is found, it was the policy of the British colonialists to employ Nilotic labourers in their various tobacco estates because the native Banyoro were considered to be innately lazy (Kabwegyere 1995). This is a stereotype that still reigns large in Kibaale as it was raised or, at least, insinuated by several non-Banyoro as well as some Banyoro respondents in this study. In further illustration of the divisive character of colonial stereotypes, Mamdani observes:

> Every institution touched by the hand of the colonial state was given a pronounced regional or nationality character. It became a truism [in Uganda] that a soldier must be a northerner, a civil servant a southerner and a merchant an Asian (1983, p.10).

The myth of northerners[2] as a 'martial race' (Kasozi 1994) thus became concretised through colonial divide and rule. Note should be taken that in comparison to the southerners (mainly the Baganda), the northerners were economically and politically impoverished and thus found solace in joining the military (Mutibwa 2008). This is how the military became a vehicle for economic opportunity (Angucia 2010). To tip the scales in their favour, post-independence leaders such as Obote and Amin who themselves were from the North, later consolidated this colonial legacy by recruiting more Northerners into the army. Mazrui (cited in Finnstrom 2003) would thus label the Acholi a 'militarised ethnicity'. On the other hand, the southerners, especially the Baganda, dominated civil service mainly because they enjoyed most of the benefits of colonial missionary education. Most schools were built around Buganda which also accommodated the capital city of Uganda. It should be noted here that Western formal education was a trusted passport to civil service (Kasozi 1999). In Kasozi's statistically supported view:

> Because of their head start in education, Baganda, not surprisingly, became over represented in the higher

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2 These include ethnic groups such as the Langi, Acholi, Lugbara, Alur and others.

echelons of the civil service. Representing 16.3 percent of Uganda's population of about six million in 1959, Baganda held 40.7 percent of senior civil service positions in 1959, 46.9 percent in 1961, 38.1 percent in 1963, 37.3 percent in 1965, and 35.6 percent in 1967 (1999, p.4).

Uganda gained her independence from Britain in 1962. The decline in Baganda representation in senior civil service after independence was a result of some attempts by the post-independence government to correct the ethnic imbalances. The disproportionately high numbers of Baganda in public service was perceived by other tribes as favoritism by the colonial establishment towards the Baganda at the expense of other 'Ugandans'. Kabwegyere (1995, p.103) argues that "the Baganda were not preferred because they were more educated or more experienced; it was simply because they were Baganda". Although Buganda's initial head start could be explained by the fact that both Catholic and Protestant missionaries and the British colonialists began their work in Buganda (Adhola 2006), Kabwegyere's view is rendered credence by the assertion of Captain Lugard[3] that:

> … subordinate officials for the administration of Uganda [Uganda meaning Buganda] may be supplied by the country itself, but in the future we may even draw from thence educated and reliable men to assist in the government of neighbouring countries [meaning the rest of Uganda] (1893, p.650).

The polarisation and differentiation amongst the colonised subjects explained above inevitably led to the crystallization of ethnic consciousness. People came to identify themselves as fundamentally different from others, and this also came to influence the relationship between the different ethnic groups. Adhola (2006) insists that the colonial games in strategic favour of Buganda, led to the dichotomisation of the politics of Uganda, with Buganda on one side and the rest of the country on the other. On account of this historic dichotomy, the current situation in Uganda shows that there is still, on one hand, some level of resentment and suspicion towards the Baganda from other ethnic groups, and, on the other hand, a feeling by the Northerners that they are resented by the Southerners. Kabwegyere (*Ibid.*) also notices that

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[3] Captain Frederick Lugard (1858–1945) was the head of the Imperial British East African Company in Uganda. The company was in charge of the administration of British East Africa (Britain's colonies in East Africa). Lugard was one of the key architects of the 'indirect rule' and 'divide and rule' policies (see *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* by Frederick Lugard - 1922).

feelings of superiority among some ethnic groups, stemming from the preferential treatment they received from the Europeans, still exist in many parts of Africa and in Uganda in particular.

The above phenomenon is largely a legacy of a colonial governance system whereby the British created tribal hierarchies where they had not existed previously (Mamdani 2004). Through ethnic affiliations, 'purer' and clearer tribal identities were created as the basis for establishing tribal authorities. In cases such as between the Baganda and the Banyoro, existing differences between ethnic groups were exploited for colonial interests through ideologies that promoted the politics of exclusion.

Another important observation is in countries such as Uganda, districts were drawn along ethnic lines where possible and practical in order to achieve colonial objectives (Karugire 1980). This creation of districts and sub-districts along ethnic lines is a trend which continues in Uganda to date, often with the solidification of intra-district ethnic exclusion and claims of special citizenship rights based on autochthony (Geschiere 2009).

Consequent of colonial ethnic distortions, by 1960, tribal royalties were deeply rooted in Uganda. The notion of Uganda as a nation existed primarily in the minds of Europeans, not the 'Ugandans' themselves. It is in this context that Kabananukye thinks that:

> Although the republican rhetoric continued to dominate official government propaganda, the concept of Uganda as a republic continued to make little sense to the citizenry as people simply identified with their ethnic groupings based on linguistic, socio-cultural and economic identities" (Kabananukye 2004, p.262).

Thus Nsamba *et al.* (2009) argue that the colonial state not only set up, but left in place an institutional apparatus that promotes exclusionary ethnic identities. This construct of citizenship and ethnic relations was inevitable with the colonial political arrangement that put emphasis on territorial citizenship and rights so as to suppress nationwide resistance to state power. In Nabudere's (2009) view, the manner in which the 'divide and rule'[4] policy was used by colonialists was so intense that it was mainstreamed into the

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[4] Divide and Rule was an administrative strategy used by the British colonialists to prevent resistance to their rule by creating and/or encouraging divisions, distrust and rivalry among subject communities which would in effect pre-empt the possibility of meaningful alliances against the former's rule.

consciousness of the Ugandan political elite who later became the rulers of the post-colonial state. He believes that it is for this reason that ethnic manipulation has become an important tool of political power, political control and political management in contemporary Africa, more specifically in the Ugandan context.

Basing on the above explanations, it is imperative to agree with Mutibwa that "… the deep wounds that were curved into Uganda society during colonial time would take many years to heal, and would leave ugly scars" (2008, p.48). The colonial history of Bunyoro to which Kibaale District is part comes across as even more striking in shaping post-colonial realities in the district.

Colonialism and ethnicity in Kibaale (Bunyoro)

After a protracted war of over five years (1894-1899) between the British and King Kabaleega of Bunyoro Kingdom, Kabaleega was in the end defeated and exiled to Seychelles Island by the British with the help of the Baganda. Both Kabaleega's brave resistance in protection of his kingdom and his eventual humiliating defeat plus exile with one hand amputated play a crucial instrumental role in the agency of Banyoro memory. The resistance is used to remind present day Banyoro to emulate the determination of their forefather in fighting against domination and suppression. On the other hand, the defeat evokes pain which in turn appeals to action against the possibility of its re-occurrence in sub-sequent interface with ethnic others. As argued by Dunn, "one often finds a violent cycle of memory and counter-memory, where one remembered atrocity justifies another or, in some cases, a pre-emptive attack to thwart an expected atrocity built on the remembrance of past wrong doings" (*Ibid.* P.123). This causal mechanism is facilitated by the catalytic agency of political mobilisation packaged around the memories. This process is later illustrated more vividly in the set of events that led to violence in Kibaale in 2001 and 2003.

Both during its course and in its aftermath, Kabaleega's war with the British came at a very high price for Bunyoro. There is consensus in all accounts on Bunyoro that the kingdom and its people suffered big losses (Dunbar 1965; Kiwanuka 1968; Kabwegyere 1972; Doyle 2006; and Kahangi 2006). In Doyle's view, "nowhere else did conquest involve so many soldiers, require so many engagements, or *proceed with such destruction*" [emphasis added] (2000, p.440). In broad terms the loss was in form of people who died, economic prowess, territory, glory, and in the restriction of cultural freedom. According to Doyle (2006), the defeat marked the acceleration of the marginalisation of the Banyoro for their past 'misdeeds' of resistance and perceived ingrained disloyalty. In effect, the marginalisation would breed a

feeling of bitterness among the Banyoro with far-reaching implications in their subsequent political life and inter-ethnic relations.

On the defeat of Kabaleega, seven of the counties of Bunyoro (Bunyara, Buruli, Bulemeezi, Buyaga, Buwekula and Bugangaizi) effectively fell as war spoils into the hands of the Baganda through the authority of the British. Whereas Banyoro find this very unfair to them, some Baganda scholars argue that it is justifiable by the rules of the time of the annexation. Lwanga (2007), for example, argues that Bunyoro recognised land rights derived from conquest and that she actually also conquered land from her weak neighbours. He cites examples of Bunyoro kings Winyi I and Olimi I who seized most of Buganda's territory in the 16th century. In the same way, he relates, when Bunyoro was conquered in 1894, "… to the British and their Baganda allies the annexation of some provinces of Bunyoro was a legitimate gift of war" (2007, p.96). By the merits of Lwanga's argument, Bunyoro's claim seems untenable. However, even though his argument is logically sound, it avoids the question of the ethnic relations that ensue from the injustice perceived by the Banyoro – especially considering that territorial annexation was followed by humiliating subjugation from the Baganda.

The territorial expansion of Buganda was formalised in the Buganda Agreement of 1900 which demarcated the boundaries of the Buganda Kingdom and the British Protectorate. This marked the beginning of Baganda sub-imperialism and deculturation in the newly acquired Bunyoro territories. "Baganda came and enforced slavery onto the Banyoro, and my father was also a slave to one Lwasa Mayinja. He could cook, cultivate and even carry Mayinja to Kiryanga to attend mass [church service] everyday"[5]. With his voice getting sterner and the pain audible in his speech, he continued: "the Banyoro would collect food and drinks for the Baganda… Speaking Runyoro[6] was prohibited in places like schools and other public places.

This practice was widespread in all the seven counties". Bearing in mind that "… questions of language are basically questions of power" (Chomsky 1979, p.191) and that this was a way of exercising authority over the vanquished Banyoro, Luganda[7] had now become the official language (Doyle 2009). Whoever did not speak Luganda was arrested by the Baganda Chiefs. Indeed all the elderly Banyoro respondents spoke perfect Luganda, at some points even ridiculing the Muganda researcher that his Luganda was wanting.

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[5] Munyoro elder, interviewed on February 1, 2012.
[6] The language of the Banyoro.
[7] The language of the Baganda.

The implementation of Banyoro deculturation (or ethnic re-identification – Doyle 2009) was possible because, according to one of the interviewed Munyoro elders who is also a retired Reverend in the Church of Uganda, "... all positions – policemen, sub-county chief, county chief, secretary – were occupied by the Baganda. For us we used to pay tax, trim the [their] compound... The Baganda did not include the Banyoro in their leadership. Even studying was a hassle for us"[8]. When asked how he managed to get an education, he paused for a moment then sighed: "phew! It was by some luck, but again I did not study much". Going through his school experience, he said: "... we used to study Luganda at school like from Primary One to Primary Three!" This account is corroborated by Mirima's narrative below:

> They [Baganda] marginalised the Banyoro a lot in education. When a Munyoro finished primary four ... he/she was not allowed to continue to secondary level without dropping their Kinyoro name to a Kiganda one. This led to the adoption of Kiganda names by most Banyoro in order to get a chance to continue with their education. That is why you find many Banyoro in Kibaale District going by Kiganda names like Mukiibi, Mukasa, Ssekitooleko, and others (1999, p.79).

The Banyoro were not only forced to speak Luganda but also to drop their names and adopt those of the Baganda. Up to today, many Banyoro in Kibaale who are above 50 years go by Baganda names.

However, although some Banyoro virtually denounced their then undignified Banyoro identity in order to win the favour of the Baganda and be able to access, some others took the path of claiming their space through various forms of resistance. One of the most significant developments in the Banyoro's resistance was the formation in 1918 of the Mubende Banyoro Committee (MBC) – a Banyoro pressure group that has been very important in influencing ethnic relations and identity politics in Kibaale. One of the landmark achievements of the pressure group was to push for a referendum in 1964 in which it was decided by vote of the residents that the two counties constituting present day Kibaale District (Buyaga and Bugangaizi) are reverted to Bunyoro Kingdom. The later influence of MBC will be explained later.

The historical account of relations between the British, the Baganda and Banyoro needs to be put into perspective with regard to the legacy for subsequent relations between Banyoro and other migrant peoples in the area. As Gottschalk advises, "… narratives regarding the past offer a particularly

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[8] Interview held on October 18, 2011.

useful tool of examination because by their very nature they often include important ingredients for identity [and identity relations]: references to the present community in time and space" (2000, p.69). Shoup (2008) observes that, under certain circumstances, such history has the potency of giving present action and events a particular meaning.

After exploring how colonialism set a conflictual inter-ethnic foundation for the Ugandan 'nation', let us now look at subsequent inter-ethnic relations with specific focus on Kibaale within the context of district creation in Uganda. It should once again be noted that, although we argue that colonialism significantly contributed to (set a path for) post-independence inter-ethnic relations, as the next section explains, there are also other reinforcing factors. Here we mainly focus on the factor of the way in which decentralisation has been operationalised.

The dynamics of the creation of Kibaale district

Kibaale was cut off from Hoima District in 1991 (Mirima 1999). In Uganda, it has been a popular assumption that decentralisation of decision-making powers and the management of resources to smaller units would enhance service delivery. But the potential of decentralisation to realise the above ideal turned out to be conditional upon the context, especially - in this case - its political ramifications. One potential source of conflict flowing from a decentralised set up is in the concentration of power over resources at district level, which renders district political positions very attractive, and hence sharpening the competition for them (Nsamba *et al.* 2009; Geschiere 2009; Baligira 2011; Mitchell 2012). In accentuating competition for resources (especially in contexts like Uganda where districts are mainly created along ethnic lines), similar to colonialism, decentralisation has "the paradoxical effect of triggering an obsession with belonging" (Geschiere 2009, p.6) often creating a conflictual dichotomy of those who belong and those who belong less.

In his book entitled The Perils of Belonging[9], Geschiere explains that in the above dichotomy, the 'sons of the soil'/ autochthons tend to make special claims on the district that are taken to be self-evident while at the same time constructing boundaries of belonging in a way that alienates others. The setting "... inevitably raises the by now familiar issues of belonging: who is to profit from the new-style development projects? And, even more urgently, who can be excluded from them?" (*Ibid.* P.25). Paradoxically, as Dunn (2009)

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[9] The Perils of Belonging is very insightful in understanding the politics of autochthony and indigeneity and its implications for social cohesion. Geschiere's analysis is grounded on cases from Africa (Cameroon, DRC, and Rwanda) and from Europe (Netherlands).

observes, in this politics of belonging, even people who have unquestionably lived in the area for a long time, become vulnerable to social and political exclusion in the emergent general affirmation of roots and origins as the basic criteria of citizenship and belonging. Later we shall see how this was evidently played out in Kibaale in a manner that led to socio-political exclusion and ethnic violence.

It is argued by Schelnberger (2008) that the introduction of local units of government and the way their borders are drawn can upset the balance of minorities and majorities and, in effect, upset the relations in an area. The balance can be upset in two ways: a former minority could turn into a majority, and a former majority could find itself in the position of minority. Both possibilities could set in motion new dynamics in competition for resources and political positions.

Accordingly, as we shall see here, one of the factors that changed the relations and direction of politics in Kibaale was that in the new district entity, the Banyoro progressively obtained a minority status, both numerically and in terms of political power (Mirima 1999). While they were still part of Hoima District, they were also part of the wider Banyoro community that stretches beyond Kibaale District and were the majority. Decentralisation meant that in Kibaale District - as a political entity of its own with competitive political positions - their numbers compared less favourably, reinforced by the dynamics of the 'ethnicisation' of politics.

To be able to understand the identity politics that followed the acquisition of district status in Kibaale, it is important to establish why the people of the area sought to break away from Hoima District in the first place. One of the elders I interviewed used to hold the position of Councillor representing one of Sub-counties of Buyaga County on the council of Hoima District. He was the pioneer of the campaign for Kibaale to gain district status. He said that one of the key reasons for the decision to break away was marginalisation by the 'Banyoro of Hoima[10]'. With a frowned face and a display of disappointment in his tone, he reminisced: "when we freed ourselves from mistreatment by the Baganda, we thought we were now going to be happy as part of Bunyoro once again. But our fellow Banyoro of Hoima marginalised us until we could no longer bear it. It all appeared like we still held an inferior status to them[11]." He went on to explain that they were despised, and often reminded that their culture and language were diluted by Baganda.

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[10] It should be recalled that Bunyoro Kingdom (of the Banyoro people) covers three out of the 132 districts of Uganda, namely: Hoima, Masindi, and Kibaale.
[11] Munyoro elder, Interview held on October 15, 2011.

In *Ebyafaayo bya Kibaale Distrikti* (The History of Kibaale District), Mirima (1999) explains that the relations between the Banyoro from Kibaale and the Banyoro of Hoima were complicated by religious and political factors. It is important to note that in giving the six counties to Buganda in 1900, the British divided them among the Protestants and Catholics. Buyaga, Bugangaizi and Buheekura were put under the administration of Catholics. As such, Kibaale (Buyaga and Bugangaizi) as a district was deemed to be Catholic territory. Considering that the first political parties in Uganda were built along ethnic and religious lines[12] (Karugire 1980), most Catholics subscribed to the Democratic Party (DP). According to Mirima, in Hoima the Uganda People's Congress (UPC) was the dominant party and most of the councillors at the district were Protestant. Thus the Banyoro of Kibaale were sidelined on two collective identity accounts: Being DP and Catholic.

> The promised land of milk and honey which the Bagangaizi [Banyoro of Kibaale] had hoped to receive from Bunyoro was not to be. They did not notice any plans of developing their counties ... With the lack of such plans, it seemed that their share from the Central Government was also being taken from them to Hoima... Secondly, it was realized that the Bunyoro leaders from Hoima had stereotyped all the Bagangaizi as DP supporters. This stereotype had created a lot of isolation to the Bagangaizi. These things are what opened the eyes of the Bagangaizi. The Bagangaizi then saw themselves in the English adage: 'from the frying pan into the fire'.

> Once the Bagangaizi got to know the truth, they sought to find a way in which to develop their area. They realized if they did not do this quickly, their area would remain backward... The money being put into projects like roads ... and schools mostly remained in Hoima. Schools and hospitals stayed in the same condition as they were during the time the Baganda were in control, apart from a few that had been renovated. The area got only one hospital in Kagadi,

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12 The dominant political parties at independence were Democratic Party (DP), Uganda People's Congress (UPC), and Kabaka Yekka (KY). DP was mainly Catholic while UPC was largely Protestant (Anglican). Kabaka Yekka's (Only the King) influence was mainly around Buganda since it was a party for loyalists (or/and those who presented themselves as so) to the Buganda Kingdom. UPC was the first party to take power (1962-1971) after independence from Britain in 1962. The party regained power from 1980-1984. DP has been in opposition since independence.

> but this also could not be enough for all the people from the two counties. On the whole, Buyaga and Bugangaizi seemed forgotten. They considered it was useless to return to Bunyoro (Mirima 1999, pp.165-166).

The above quotation indicates that the people of Kibaale started with high expectations of a better life by returning to Bunyoro, which would allow them to deal with the wounds of the years of marginalisation by the Baganda. When they returned to Bunyoro, the Banyoro of Kibaale realised that their status and identity as Banyoro was no longer the same as that of the rest of the Banyoro. They were now 'the Banyoro that were once under Buganda' – *Bagangaizi*, as contrasted against the 'Banyoro that were not under Buganda'. They realised that in order to improve their situation they had to run their own affairs in their own administrative entity and that they had to take the political driver's seat to effectively shape their development. This kind of mindset with which the Banyoro entered the new district together with the politics of indigeneity entrenched in Uganda's decentralised units significantly influenced the local political dynamics.

Because the creation of districts in Uganda is done largely along ethnic lines (Nsamba *et al.* 2009), there is a wide perception that these districts are primarily owned by 'natives'/ 'indigenes'. It is clear that the creation of new smaller districts reduced the ethnic heterogeneity of the previous larger districts, and thus produced entities "populated by only one or two major ethnic groups, a state of affairs identified as potentially dangerous" (Green 2008, p.15). Consequently, as illustrated in Kibaale and noted by Green (2008), Nsamba *et al.* (2009) and Baligira (2011), the creation of districts along ethnic lines has – just as the colonial regime did - politicised ethnicity in the country. The politics of decentralisation encouraged people in many new smaller districts to consider themselves (each other) as either natives/indigenes/ autochthons or migrants/ foreigners/ strangers with different sets of entitlements and expectations. We, therefore conclude that decentralisation set in motion a system of identity transformation and social positioning that encouraged the reaffirmation of fuzzy identities and a process of boundary construction by which some were included and 'others' positioned outside. By extension, as the discussion in the next section shows, building on other historical factors, decentralisation prepared a fertile ground for identity politics in Kibaale District.

The politics of 'Sons of the Soil' versus 'Foreigners'

With the creation of Kibaale District, there were openings for political positions in local government that had to be competed for through elective politics. The most important positions included Member of Parliament for the

constituent counties of the district, the Chairperson of the district, and the chairpersons of the sub-counties. The first elections after gaining district status were held in 1994 - that is three years after the creation of the district. These were the Constituent Assembly (CA) elections when delegates from different parts of Uganda were being elected to represent their areas in the making of a new constitution for the country.

It is in the context of these CA elections that an important figure emerges in the narrative of identity politics and conflict in Kibaale District – Toterebuka Bamwenda, a member of the Banyoro ethnic group. With the knowledge that people in Kibaale considered language to be important for choosing who was 'their own'/ who to identify with (even if ethnically different), Bamwenda is believed by both Banyoro and non-Banyoro I interviewed to have played the 'language card' so tactfully to see himself win the elections. He was fluent in many of the languages of the people in the area, and this effectively worked in his favour. But, whether his situational application of languages was an innocent act for effective communication or not, the fact that his strategy worked was instrumental in giving ethnic shape to the politics of the area. The appeal of language in particular and cultural affiliation had been vividly manifested in Bamwenda's political victory.

In the subsequent parliamentary elections of 1996, the politics of the area was characterised by more ethnic calculation and manipulation. Most accounts from the field indicate that this time the non-Banyoro initiated it, especially after realising that their numbers were now significant enough to make their candidate win if each ethnic group would vote for their "own". According to one Mufumbira respondent[13] working with Kibaale District Civil Society Network (KICSON), there was ethnic politics involved in deciding the location of the headquarters of the newly created Kibaale District. The Bakiga opinion leaders wanted the headquarters to be located at Kagadi where they dominated, while the Banyoro opinion leaders wanted it at a place called Kibaale. When the Banyoro's desire triumphed, the Bakiga realised that in order to establish their decision making power, they would need to be politically represented by someone from their own ethnic group. The 'we' – 'them' dichotomy was taking distinct shape.

Of course in elections people often vote their 'own'/ interests (Birnir 2009), but the commonness that matters is situationally selected. "we humans ... have the capacity and the tendency to regard now this, now that component of our complex identities as the one that is the most important" (Smith 2001, P. 39). In some cases it is 'our ideological own', in others 'our religious own', 'our ethnic own', 'our caring own' – or a combination of these. As argued by

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[13] Interview held on 16th September 2011.

Omotola, "... identities are subject to manipulations, depending on the prevailing /social, political, economic, and cultural realities" (2008, p.77). In view of the empirical data from Kibaale, this serves to demonstrate that no particular identity is essentially antagonistic; rather it is the circumstances that determine its form and performance. Accordingly, the Mufumbira respondent cited above said: "When you get the history, now these Bakiga (the opinion leaders) said: 'now do you know why we are losing the district? Now Kagadi has gone to Kibaale! It is because we do not have someone to support us. This time we should get our son". It should be noted that belief in the viability of this strategy of getting 'our own' elected was also facilitated by the Bamwenda precedent.

Respondents narrated that the Bakiga opinion leaders actually had to go and convince one Robert Kakooza (a Mukiga) to stand for the position of Member of Parliament for Buyaga County. They are reported to have said: "we have come to you, we want you to go to parliament for us because enough is enough[14]". Kakooza consented to the appeal and became the only non-Munyoro candidate who stood for the position – eventually winning. After the elections, Kakooza's victory was widely perceived by the Banyoro as a product of ethnic voting by non-Banyoro and as an attempt by the latter to make inroads into positions of power in the area. Moreover, the Bakiga's entry into politics not only marked the reinforcement of ethnic voting, it also had a significant polarising effect. This is also acknowledged by some of the non-Banyoro. One Mukiga elder observed: "Before the Bafuruki [later non-Banyoro migrants] came, we lived harmoniously. Problems came during elections where the Bafuruki were also vying for political positions which did not go down well with the Banyoro. Otherwise, earlier on, we were living peacefully[15]".

In a life history interview[16], one female Munyoro elder gave an account which brings another important insight to the narrative of the changing relations:

> At first they [Bakiga] were not involved in politics because they knew the problems that brought them but later, they picked interest. Because they were many, they would stand for political positions. They would stage one candidate and every Mukiga would vote for a fellow Mukiga even though he/she was not competent. [Remember that…] the Banyoro felt oppressed and wanted to know why the area is

[14] *Ibid.*
[15] Interview held on 16th September 2011.
[16] Interview held on 17th September 2011.

> backward and felt the problem would be addressed through politics. But because of failure in politics, the Banyoro became angry and that is where the problem came from.

In addition to the idea that the Banyoro viewed politics as an important avenue for the betterment of their situation – hence their discontent with the Bakiga's entry into big political positions, the above elder's account also brings a new important aspect into perspective. She introduced a focus on the population of the Bakiga and how this became an important factor in the political dynamics of Kibaale District. Both Banyoro and non-Banyoro respondents indicated that the population of migrants had increased significantly over time, due to both high fertility and their uncontrolled influx into the area. I was not able to verify the fertility factor, but migration is quite evident. At the time of the elections of 1996, the population of the non-Banyoro was almost surpassing that of the Banyoro. Based on heavy migration and high fertility rates (Republic of Uganda 2006), Kibaale's population growth significantly differs from the national trend. The 2002 Uganda Population and Housing Census indicates that whereas the national average population growth rate was at 3.3, the one of Kibaale was at 5.2. Most of the Banyoro respondents described this growth rate as 'unnatural' and mainly attributed it to uncontrolled migration into the area. All Banyoro respondents in this study claimed that the realisation by the non-Banyoro that their numbers had become big enough to give them a political victory, and their improved economic status were two factors which changed the behaviour of the non-Banyoro.

Numerically, the Bafumbira are the majority among the migrant ethnic groups. However, the Bakiga were particularly singled out in the Banyoro's responses because they were more politically active than other groups. This therefore positions the exclusion to be more as a response to a threat than utter dislike of the ethnic 'other' (Omotola 2008).

The increasing political and economic influence of the non-Banyoro and the attendant change (both actual and perceived) in their behaviour appears to be a key factor that led to the change in Banyoro perceptions about them. Non-Banyoro were progressively transforming their identity from the low and humble socio-political status that characterised them in their earlier years in the area, to a status of citizenship claims equal to those of the Banyoro. Both the actual and perceived behavioural changes in the competitive environment are analytically useful because "it is not the reality of competition that counts; it is a perception that the out-group wishes to increase its share of valued resources and statuses at the expense of the in-group" (Bobo and Hatchings cited in Sniderman and Hagendoorn 2007, p.80). The empirical findings of

this study do not indicate that the Banyoro are particularly intolerant of other ethnic groups. The eventual intolerance emerged over time and due to a set of events.

When the Banyoro's perceptions and attitudes towards the non-Banyoro started changing in the 1990s, especially after Kakooza's victory, even things that previously did not matter, now changed in significance. Now viewed as a threat, most of the non-Banyoro's actions were then interpreted with suspicion and considered sinister. This observation corroborates Omotola's view that "... one pertinent factor and perhaps the single most significant influence on the strength of identity is the perceived existence of an external threat to that identity" (2008, p.77).

The set of events at the time bring to attention Dunn's (2009) observation that, in the politics of identity, stories told of the 'Self' and 'Other' are often cast not just as autochthon versus alien but also as victim versus aggressor. According to Dunn, such narratives of victimisation are instrumental in justifying exclusionary tendencies and violence. "One often finds a violent cycle of memory and counter-memory, where one remembered atrocity justifies another or, in some cases, a pre-emptive attack to thwart an expected atrocity built on the remembrance of past wrong doings" (*Ibid.* P.123). To an extent, the Banyoro's suspicious view of the non-Banyoro at this time was informed by the former's memories of domination by the Baganda and by the idea that non-Banyoro were now demanding for more citizenship rights that they were entitled as 'foreigners'.

It should be remembered that "... the primary factors in the development and persistence of an ethno-political identity are group members' collective memories and interpretations of ethno-political events" (Dutter 1990, p.318). When subjective perceptions and past experiences interact with 'political memory', new categories of identification emerge. These new 'socially constructed' categories form the 'basis of a consciousness that in some instances can prove very destructive' (Rothchild cited in Kaye and Beland 2009, p.179). Thus we see the migrants being characterised as a new brand of oppressors. And, to give this feeling more emotional force, the history of relations between Banyoro and Baganda is invoked. As explained by Dunn (2009), the reference to Baganda slavery evokes the memory of pains that should not be allowed to re-occur. In another life history interview with a female elder[17], she asked with a facial expression of pain: "from Baganda oppression to Bakiga oppression, where is the independence [Uganda's independence] we got in 1962?"

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[17] Interview held on 17th September 2011.

Rallying on the characterisation of migrants as the new oppressors (basing on real and imagined threats), Banyoro politicians magnified the level of threat posed by the migrants. Unlike in Brass' observation that ethnicity is simply a discourse that guilty elites invoke to obscure the real, venal causes/triggers of violence that they incite (cited in Hale 2008), the politicians I interviewed openly admitted their polarising role. For instance, when I asked a Munyoro Member of Parliament whether there was a real threat at the time, he smiled and said: "... it [the threat] could have been there, it could have been real, it could have been assumed. But you know with us (me inclusive) the politicians - we said this is an opportunity for us to organize again[18]". For the politicians this was capital for winning ethnic popularity and votes.

The increasing voices of Banyoro moving to 'emancipate' themselves from the non-Banyoro ('foreigners') and save their land in effect created fear among the non-Banyoro and occasioned a reactionary call to resist eviction/expulsion from the area. All the events above happened in the period between the creation of the district in 1991 and the year 2000. Around this time, and largely through local radio influence, the word *Bafuruki* became widely used among the Banyoro as an 'othering' tool. The dynamics around its meaning and instrumentalisation to emphasise that foreignness of non-Banyoro are explained in the next sub-section.

From non-Banyoro to Bafuruki: The 'Othering' of non-Banyoro

It is between 1991 and 2000 that the neologism *Bafuruki* (*Mufuruki* is the singular) came into prominence in Kibaale. One Mufumbira respondent who was born in the area and active in local politics said: "I went to their [Banyoro's] primary schools. There is no single day I was ever referred to as a Mufuruki until around 1997- 1998"[19]. The circumstances of the emergence of the label and its use are important in understanding the relations between Banyoro and non-Banyoro. As argued by discourse analysts, images, statements, and ways of talking can produce/construct a particular version of events (Woods 2006). The language/labels used often effectively construct a host of expectations, entitlements and obligations. Such construction of social reality through discourse is seen in the agency of the Bafuruki tag as explained below.

Because there are linguistic commonalities between Runyoro and Rukiga, it is not easy to exclusively establish from which of the two languages the word Bafuruki originates – especially because both sides ascribe meaning (related but not exactly the same) to it. However, what is more important here is the

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[18] Munyoro Member of Parliament, interview held on 17th September 2011.
[19] Interview held on 15th September 2011.

way it emerged and how it was used. This is because, as explained below, the context of the emergence of the label and the dynamics of its usage also played a role in influencing ethnic relations through transforming identities in a conflictual manner.

According to a Munyoro LC3 Chairperson I interviewed:

> ... the word *mufuruki* means someone who is not in his/her home area. And in terms of settlers, it has a period of time. It does not go beyond six months. You can be a Mufuruki for six or less than six months. When you come to my place and we host you, if you grow your food like groundnuts, beans, sweet potatoes, up to harvest, that word *mufuruki* goes off from you[20].

The above explanation indicates that the label is temporary and, specifically, that one can only shed it once someone becomes self-sustaining. As such, it is said to be an innocent word. In a focus group discussion with women of various ethnic groups[21], it was indicated by a Munyoro woman that one needed to be socially accepted by the hosts in order to cease being referred to as a Mufuruki.

> When a person came in and we found that he/she was well-behaved and seen to have no problem, then they became our own. Being a Mufuruki took a short time and that person became part of the community. The person then became a native like those already in the area. This is because he/she probably has dropped the home elements and adopted new ways. Therefore whoever acts forcefully fails being accepted as a refugee. This includes being bad-behaved. That is why today you see many people saying the Bafuruki... But all in all if they come and they are well behaved, we appreciate them, but if not then the tag Bafuruki will not end.

In the same vein, another Munyoro elder urged that "...let them learn the language of the area and we stop calling them Bafuruki"[22]. In the above accounts, it is implied that the increased use of the word Mufuruki/ Bafuruki was partly due to the changing behaviour of the migrants (some) in the direction of not being 'well-behaved', not behaving as they were required to

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[20] Interview held on 17th September 2011.
[21] FGD with women held 17th September 2011.
[22] Life history interview held on 15th September 2011.

by their hosts. One of the forms of 'bad behaviour' which was of much concern to the Banyoro was the move by non-Banyoro to take up political positions, giving Rukiga names to places in Kibaale, and the 'arrogance' of assertive boastfulness.

It appears that one of the socio-political functions of the label was to influence or even compel assimilation and/or submission of non-Banyoro to the wishes of the host community or else be 'othered'. It also alludes to a sense that one of the reasons as to why the initial relations were good was because the migrants kept a low profile and largely lived by the terms of the Banyoro, a situation which was changing in the 1990s. In my view therefore, the fact that the initial relations between the two groups were not conflictual is not in itself an indicator that the relations were pluralistic. Pluralism would entail dialogical space in which the different groups/ individuals have room to express themselves on mutually negotiated terms, not mere toleration of a group/person because they accept the 'others' terms (Connolly 2005; Parekh 2008; Eck[23]). At the time, the migrants had limited freedom to express their difference and preferences in their own terms because they were literally at the mercy of their hosts. Even where there was a semblance of negotiating difference, it was more on the terms of the host.

Together with the factors discussed above, a number of non-Banyoro attributed the emergence of the Bafuruki label to a renewed activism of members of Mubende Banyoro Committee (MBC). After the 1964 Referendum, the group had gone silent but, with the growing concern over the 'Bakiga' among the Banyoro, its members started rising up again albeit at individual level.

In tracing the roots of the Bafuruki label, one Mukiga Member of Parliament said: "This man called [Joseph] Kazairwe [one of the MBC veterans] is the one who said 'these are Bafuruki', meaning immigrants. That was around 1998 when they were saying the immigrants had become too many. The MBC was repositioning itself"[24]. Many non-Banyoro respondents said that Kazairwe would use the word on radio to emphasise the 'othering' point that land in Kibaale primarily belonged to the Banyoro and that non-Banyoro were Bafuruki (migrants/ settlers/foreigners) that did not have to forget their status. The label thus became a vital instrument to not only distinguish between Banyoro and non-Banyoro by emphasising the foreigner status of the former, which was a hitherto irrelevant fact (Soeters 2005), but also to differentiate between respective entitlements. Bafuruki had to be grateful enough that they had been hosted by the Banyoro. Taking up political

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[23] www.pluralism.org/pluralism/what_is_pluralism.php viewed 3rd March 2010.
[24] Interview held on 24th January 2012.

positions was therefore lack of appreciation, disrespect, and arrogance. Accordingly several non-Banyoro respondents recalled being often reminded with the Runyoro slur: '*mukaija kulima, mutaije kulema*' (you came to dig, not to lead).

The above discourse surrounding the activism of Kazairwe to entrench the 'Bafuruki' label for exclusionary purposes resonates well with Dunn (2009), Geschiere (2009) and Mitchell's (2012) explanation of the politics of autochthony in discourses of belonging. In *Sons of the Soil and Contemporary State Making*, Dunn argues that claims for privilege based on appeals to original inhabitancy (autochthony) are often employed in search for certainty and security in a context of insecurity. These appeals seek to address uncertainties in terms of access to power and resources in changing competitive environments such as the Kibaale decentralised context. "Autochthony discourses are an attractive response ... to the ontological uncertainty of the postmodern/postcolonial condition ... [because they] appear to provide a sense of primal security and certainty" (Dunn 2009, p.114-115). The autochthony discourse is imagined to be effective in providing primal security because it seems to come across as self-evident, almost natural – hence giving it considerable mobilisation impact (Geschiere 2009). Here the need for reconstructing identity boundaries becomes vital for redefining citizenship and entitlement.

Establishing oneself as a 'son of the soil' provides strategic leverage against 'dubious' citizens that migrated from elsewhere. In other words, migrants are made to remain visitors to the area as their claims to autochthony must be traced back to where they emerged from the soil (Mtichell 2009). "This is ultimately the principal agenda of autochthony movements – to exclude 'strangers' and unmask 'fake autochthons' who are often citizens of the same nation-states and districts in this case as 'real' autochthons" (Ceuppens and Geschiere cited in Mitchell 2012, p.272). In this process, answers to the questions: 'Who can vote where? Who can run for office? And where can they run?' (Bayart, Geschiere and Nyamnjoh cited in Mitchell 2012) are reconstituted by application of autochthony standards. Thus we may impute that the narrative of Bafuruki (foreigners) versus the Banyoro 'sons of the soil' exemplifies political manipulation of exclusionary notions of citizenship spearheaded by elites and adopted by their group for purposes of providing more cultural and political space/ leverage for themselves (the native Banyoro) in the midst of fears of being dominated by 'others' in a decentralised framework.

Despite this differentiation in feelings about the Bafuruki label, a big section of the non-Banyoro seem to have been driven by fear to identify themselves as one group and respond as such. A unifying factor was the perceived threat

of being chased away collectively on account of their relational collective identity as non-Banyoro. In the face of this threat, what is particularly interesting is that although many non-Banyoro had misgivings towards the Bafuruki label, they used this as they rallied for a collective identity in response to the threat of eviction.

When I asked a Mufumbira politician how the label Bafuruki came about, he responded: "Bafuruki was started by the Banyoro. They would say: 'The Bafuruki came and found us here, they grabbed our land and now they want to take our political power'. And eventually even us (because I am a leader of Bafuruki myself ...) bought it [the label][25]". Strategically, this was because "... the problem was politics and in politics you look for a suitable story or word that you will use so that you can get the minds of the people. If these people [Bafuruki] had not used the word Mufuruki, (*itwe Bafuruki* - we the Bafuruki) they wouldn't have got that power"[26]. Therefore the label was not 'owned' by the non-Banyoro because they accepted it, but rather for strategic 'bloc mobilisation' (Oberschall 2007) for the common cause of the non-Banyoro. This way, particular ethnicities of the non-Banyoro were strategically muted under the more inclusive collective identity of Bafuruki. Accordingly, non-Banyoro formed the Bafuruki Committee as their own pressure group to rally for their interests.

Rejection of an elected non-Munyoro and emergence of violence

The height of politically motivated ethnic conflict and violence in the Kibaale District was in 2002. As noted earlier, in 2001 some Banyoro politicians had asked non-Banyoro to stay out of politics – a suggestion that the latter out-rightly rejected. In fact, they say that they realised that they now had more reason to vie for political positions so as to avert the threat of being chased away and to enjoy other rights that they were being denied. In the local elections of 2002 therefore, they not only vied for LC3 Chairperson and Member of Parliament positions but also for District chairmanship – which is the highest administrative position in the district. According to one of the founders of the Bafuruki Committee:

> … originally no one had stood for that position. They [immigrants] were just becoming councilors. But when matters became worse then they said ok, let us call a spade a spade. So, initially it was not the intention of the non-Banyoro but when they were tickled and ticked then they said ok. I don't know if you have it in Luganda but the

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[25] Interview held on 15th September 2011.
[26] Interview with a Munyoro LC 3 Chairperson held on 17th September 2011.

> Bakiga say *kwojuma omukuru omuherebura* - when you abuse an elder then abuse him seriously - because even if you do not abuse him enough in any case you will be punished. They [non-Banyoro] said now if this is the case then let us fight for the big thing. But initially that is not the way it was[27].

Earlier in this paper I explained the potential of decentralisation to turn around local politics through accelerating competition for power and resources (Nsamba *et al.* 2009; Geschiere 2009; Baligira 2011; Mitchell 2012) thereby accentuating division and conflict. This projection clearly manifests itself in the dynamics that surrounded the competition for the strategic position of LC V Chairperson.

According to one of the narratives of the conflict in Kibaale, tension had also built up in the District Council over power and resources. A non-Munyoro Member of Parliament reminisced that at one point Henry Ford Mirima, a son of Joseph Kazairwe and member of MBC wrote a book about the history of Kibaale (cited earlier in this study) where he argued that if the Banyoro did not 'wake up' they were going to be swallowed by the immigrants. "He tried to influence the District Council to buy it [the book] in quantities. They refused it[28]". It is indicated that it was mainly resisted by the non-Banyoro members and, in the anger that ensued, MBC became more aggressive in their campaigns against immigrants. At this time the District Councillor for Muhooro Sub-county, Fred Rulemera -an immigrant-, had developed sharp differences with the Chairman of the District, Sebastian Ssekitooleko – a Munyoro. In one heated exchange witnessed by the above non-Munyoro Member of Parliament, Rulemera told the Chairman:

> 'You, you! You are going back to Kakumiro [the Chairman's place of origin in Kibaale] to eat dust. I am going to stand against you'. I witnessed this! Then the chairman said: 'you a Mufuruki who has just[29] come here! How can you rule here? You will never be a leader here'.

These sharp differences defined the political environment of the 2002 elections, with each side campaigning to its own ends. More importantly, the campaigns are said to have been largely conducted along ethnic lines. To a

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[27] Interview held on 1st April 2013.

[28] Interview held on 24th January 2012.

[29] At this time, Fred Rulemera had stayed in Kibaale for over forty (40) years. His parents migrated to Kibaale when he was about 4 years old. At the time of the elections he was 45.

large extent, the elections became "... an ethnic census and a public demonstration of numerical strength" (Oberschall 2007, p.15). The tension peaked into violence between February and May 2002 following Fred Rulemera's – a Mukiga – election as Chairman of the District with 56 percent of the votes (Espeland 2007; Schelnberger 2008). Not ready to handover office to a 'foreigner', the incumbent and loser of the election – Sebastian Sekitoleko -, a Munyoro, refused to step down from the post. The conflict was catalysed by the then revived MBC, with agitation for Fred Rulemera to step down and increased threats to chase away the Bafuruki. One of the MBC leaders interviewed argued that it was unacceptable that "… the Bafuruki ganged together and voted Rulemeera as the District Chairperson". But in the view of a non-Munyoro politician, the cause of this tribal voting is found in the behaviour of some Banyoro:

> Actually what escalated the whole issue of tribalism was, there were some Banyoro extremists who would come here under Mubende Banyoro Committee. They would say: 'no no, no, we do not want any Mufuruki. They should go, we are going to kill them ...' and when they would make such pronouncements even the [Bafuruki] sympathisers of Banyoro would start finding their way/level and associate with fellow Bafuruki. So eventually, and given that the Bafuruki numbers were very high in this place that was how Fred Rulemera stood and won[30].

Following the victory of the non-Munyoro, houses of migrants were burnt down and five of them killed.

The Central Government responded to the conflict by instituting a 'Committee of Inquiry into the Political Developments in Kibaale District' (2002) which subsequently recommended that a neutral person be considered for the contested post (Republic of Uganda 2002). The president accordingly persuaded Fred Rulemera to step down after being officially sworn in.

Although the push for the democratically elected non-Munyoro to step down was eventually assented to by non-Banyoro opinion leaders, some degree of dissatisfaction can still be felt. For example, a non-Munyoro Member of Parliament said in an interview:

> Rulemera was pushed out of politics but the State made a mistake. By then I was studying for masters and had asked for a study leave from my employer (Tororo Local

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[30] *Ibid.*

> Government). Around this time I was mobilising both
> Banyoro and Bafuruki to resist this thing. The state refused!
> They said, 'for us to have harmony in this area this Mufuruki
> should leave'. They forced him out. They took him to study,
> promised him a job, paid him some money and that marked
> the end[31].

On the basis of the Central Government's suggestion to quell the violence, the compromise candidate to be selected had to be a Munyoro. According to the President, it had to be a Munyoro because the Banyoro's history had made them:

> … weak, sensitive, and suspicious. What they least need, at
> this time, is symbolic domination by [a] Mufuruki taking over
> the supreme position in one of their remaining districts:
> Kibaale … Remember that Kibaale district was created as
> a result of the Bagangaizi feeling of being marginalised by
> even their kinsmen in Hoima. How will they feel when now
> they will be managed from Kabale [where the Bakiga
> originate from] as they keep saying? (Presidential
> Communique 15th April 2002, p.4-5)

But in order to put the Bafuruki's interests into consideration as well, it was up to them (Bafuruki) to suggest an actual person. After complex mutual engagement between Banyoro and non-Banyoro, George Namyaka[32] was agreed upon.

As a way to cater for interests on either side, Namyaka ensured that there was almost equal representation by Banyoro and Bafuruki at the District Executive Council. Of the seven secretaries, the Banyoro only outnumbered the non-Banyoro by one. As such, the non-Banyoro were somehow compensated for the loss of the chairmanship and the situation was stabilized. However, violence re-emerged in April 2003, triggered by reports that the District Land Board was distributing Bakiga Land to Banyoro. But in the period between 2003 and 2014, there had been no reports of violent ethnic-based conflicts in the district. I showed and explained earlier that tension and violence tend to build up during election time. However, although there is still some tension, expressions of ethnic distrust, and sectarianism, in both the local elections of 2006 and 2011, there is evidence that the ethnic

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[31] Interview held on 24th January 2012.
[32] George Namyaka is still the District Chairperson up to today. He has been re-elected twice since his selection in 2002. This in itself raises questions about what will ensue when time comes to replace him.

card was used less or/ and became reduced in political significance. However, as the next section shows, some of the reasons given by the people to explain this trend raise critical sustainability questions.

Solving divisions by further divisions

When Central Government realised that, apart from the other contentious issues in Kibaale, there were some key political personalities fuelling the ethnic conflict and that they all had some social backing, one of the interventions it pursued was to split the existing constituencies in order to create more political space for the competing politicians. This way, the positions would be 'distributed' among Banyoro and non-Banyoro. Thus in 2010 Uganda's president (Museveni) passed a directive to the Attorney General and the Minister of Local Government to create two new counties/constituencies. In his words: "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). This intervention was effected, and, albeit with some anxieties, it was viewed by most of the respondents in this study as having fundamentally contributed to the peacefulness of the 2011 elections and after.

In an FGD with women, a Munyoro woman explained the positive outcomes of splitting the area by saying:

> ... the creation of new administrative units has brought about relative peace. Now in Buyaga West [constituency] there is a Mukiga. Everyone has their own area of jurisdiction. Formerly Besisira[33] and Barnabas were always at loggerheads, [but now] the situation has changed with the separation of the two. These days if the Bakiga are conflicting, it is amongst themselves, the same thing with the Banyoro[34].

Similarly, another male Munyoro respondent observed that:

> Now the Banyoro are represented by Buyaga East Constituency and the Bafuruki by Buyaga West. And the same story with Bugangaizi, Bugangaizi East has a Munyoro and Bugangaizi West has a Mufuruki. And with the District

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[33] Ignatius Besisira is one of the Banyoro MPs while Barnabas Tinkasiimire is a Mukiga MP.
[34] FGD with women held on 17th September 2011.

> leadership, we agreed, the Chairman is indigenous and
> members of the executive should be shared. Like the posts
> of Vice Chairman and Secretary Finance are Bafuruki and
> the rest too are Banyoro. So we are now sharing the
> political leadership in the District so as to calm down the
> minds of people who are thinking of grabbing power[35].

What is significant in the splitting of the district is that the constituencies were explicitly divided along ethnic lines. Both Banyoro and non-Banyoro opinion leaders expressed the view that this division worked well to reduce inter-ethnic tensions because it meant that each side was busy fighting amongst themselves and thus had no time and space to contest issues along ethnic lines. As such, at least as witnessed in the 2011 elections, it meant that the problem of 'the ethnic other' did not take centre stage.

It should be noted that, de facto, splitting constituencies meant that the ethnic-based constituencies were divided between particular politicians. This point is made as follows by a Mukiga MP:

> We agreed informally to having a Munyoro represent one
> part of Buyaga and another part to be represented by a
> Mufuruki [the same in Bugangaizi]... that we shall work
> towards that as leaders, and it has happened. We actually
> made sure that what we had agreed worked. I stood with a
> Munyoro, I defeated him. The other side Besisira stood with
> some Mufuruki, he defeated him. We mobilised the Bafuruki
> [there] consciously to vote for Besisira. This side, Mable's[36]
> area, there was no Munyoro who stood against her and she
> stood with Bafuruki and won. This side, Kasiririvu stood with
> Banyoro only and won the election[37].

Although in principal anyone (regardless of ethnicity) was free to stand for office anywhere as stipulated in the Constitution of Uganda (1995), the logic of splitting the district on an ethnic basis made it rather obvious who would win and who was wasting their time by standing for a particular position in a particular area.

The case in point, where splitting constituencies was implicitly meant to satisfy particular politicians, raises questions about the sustainability of this pluralism

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[35] Interview held on 17th September 2011.
[36] Mable Bakeine, a Mukiga, is Member of Parliament representing Bugangaizi East while Kasirivu Atwooki, a Munyoro, is a Member of Parliament for Bugangaizi West.
[37] Interview held on 24th January 2012.

measure. For instance, a Munyoro MP argued that if it takes his win to have peace in the area, then why not? At face value, this appears to be a simple attractive idea and a pragmatic response, but it is important to consider its wider implications. One such implication is the solidification of ethnic politics and the attendant 'ethno-territorial' idea that particular areas belong to particular individuals and their ethnic groups. In the long run this may take the area back to the original problem of exclusive claims based on ethnicity. For instance, there is now a balance in parliamentary ethnic representation with two Banyoro and two non-Banyoro MPs. But what would happen if in future a non-Munyoro won in an area that is de facto known to be for Banyoro (and vice versa)? The above anxiety is well articulated in the following reflection of a Bunyoro Kingdom official:

> There is peace [now]. Although it [splitting] is artificial, it has brought about some peace. But how long is it going to remain that this is for Bakiga, this is for Banyoro? One day you might find what you call for Bakiga the Banyoro have gone there, or vice versa. But for the time being it has worked[38].

It is worthwhile to consider if splitting constituencies to give each 'people' their 'own' area would enhance pluralism and an appreciation of ethnic difference and not merely facilitate tolerance. Many respondents from different ethnic groups in this study appreciated the mere fact that this initiative brought about peace. Keeping in mind that the differences between Banyoro and non-Banyoro were more about power-sharing, the respondents imagined that other kinds of difference would be sorted if political representation is addressed as by measures such as constituency splitting and other forms of power-sharing.

However, there was a different opinion from an MBC member who said: "Museveni [the President] gave them [the Bafuruki] their constituencies through ring-fencing, which means he separated them because they are different people. He saw that they [Bafuruki] are not workable"[39]. For this respondent, the separation of constituencies manifests the impossibility of living together due to irreconcilable differences. In an angry tone, he emphasised: "We differ in culture. Our cultural differences do not allow us to stay together. And they are arrogant". As reflected in the radical view of the above respondent, the separation of constituencies may counterproductively facilitate the idea that it is not possible to mend fences through engaging with the real and perceived differences between Banyoro and non-Banyoro.

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[38] Interview held on 1st February 2012.
[39] Interview held on 19th September 2011.

In most cases, my questions about the sustainability of splitting the district into more constituencies as a measure to promote pluralist co-existence were met with mixed feelings. Nevertheless, although many respondents were not sure about how long this measure would be effective, they were happy enough that it had brought about some peace – even if temporary. For instance, I was told by a Mufumbira respondent that:

> ... for now for us we are looking at anything that will bring peace in our district. And as long as it comes and there is peace then we have no problem with it. What will come in future is not an issue now, so long as there is relative peace. If the national cake is shared by a Munyoro and a Mufuruki, if there is no fighting, no killing one another, that is what we are looking for[40].

The current peace, if well utilised, was said to have the potential to buy time and create new openings for more sustainable pluralism measures. As Oberschall puts it, some temporary measures can be significant but they are also "... incomplete roadmaps on how to reach the promised land" (2007, p.200). According to a Munyoro MP, "this [peace] should actually give us an opportunity to ask that: 'now [that] we are in this situation, how do we continue to live [together peacefully]?"[41]

Based on the apparent success of splitting constituencies, one of the other measures for co-existence which is currently pursued is a further splitting of Kibaale District to create three smaller districts (Kibaale, Kakumiro, and Kagadi). Many express the hope that this measure, which Government has already endorsed and is awaiting implementation, would go a long way in solving issues of political representation.

It appears that one of the unofficial yet deeply entrenched logics of decentralisation is the separation of conflicting ethnic groups, so that each group is able to run its own affairs in their own districts (Mirima 1999; Green 2008; Schelnberger 2008). In turn, such a form of decentralisation contributes to the entrenchment of the idea that in particular districts some ethnic groups (especially the autochthons/ indigenes) have greater claim over the affairs and privileges of the district than others (Geschiere 2009; Dunn 2009). Accordingly, the University Secretary for the African Rural University in Kibaale cited the polarising effect in Uganda's district creation thus: "… some of these district things have escalated sectarianism in this country. Much

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[40] Interview held on 15th September 2011.
[41] Interview held on 17th September 2011.

as we say that we are trying to build a nation, we build and spilt it. We build it and spilt it, creating conditions for not having unity"[42]. This process of building and splitting has vividly played out in Kibaale District over time. This history should be kept in mind in order to understand the demand to create new smaller districts in Kibaale, especially because the new suggested boundaries are largely based on ethnic numerical considerations.

When I asked one of the founders of the Bafuruki Committee (BC) why he was optimistic about the creation of new districts as a solution to ethnic conflicts in the area, he explained:

> … the people who have been at the forefront in this struggle to stop non-Banyoro from taking part in leadership are from one part of Kibaale. So, if you partition, these people will remain in one place, in Kibaale [what will remain after the splitting]. These other districts wouldn't have a problem. So, I am trying to say that surely Kagadi doesn't have people who would give Government hard time and trouble. Those who are advocating for ethnicity are just in Kibaale[43].

Then I went ahead to probe: How about the non-Banyoro who will remain in the new Kibaale District? He laughed hard and, after about a minute's pause, he responded: "I don't know. I don't know"[44].

Apparently, it seems impossible for non-Banyoro to take the top position (LC V Chairperson) in Kibaale as one district. It is thus calculated that with the District split, new openings will be created for them to compete for the position in the new districts. After some hesitation, and saying that I was making him reveal some of 'our secrets', one of the non-Banyoro opinion leaders and original BC member revealed that: "We hope in 2012 Kagadi will become a district [this has not happened yet] and automatically the majority will be Bafuruki. We will leave the Banyoro to lead it for the first five years and there after we shall all compete for it. The problem is mainly on that top seat"[45].

The move to create new districts and split existing ones indicates that the key issue which is at stake is the division of power. But dividing the district to

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[42] Interview held on 15th September 2011.
[43] There is an area in Kibaale District that is called Kibaale. This would be the headquarters of the new Kibaale District.
[44] Interview held on 1st April 2013.
[45] Interview held on 10th November 2011.

create automatic ethnic majorities which would take charge of their respective new districts leaves a lot to be desired in terms of sustainable peaceful co-existence. Snyder argues that such 'ethno-federalism' with "territorial subunits within the state whose boundaries are designed to coincide with ethno-linguistic concentrations" has "a terrible track record ... [It] is frequently a recipe for subsequent partition" (2000, pp.327–8). It would be unrealistic to assume that boundaries (and sub-boundaries) of collective identity are not going to continue to be reconstituted in ways that would call for further partition. Owolabi (2003) and Parekh (2008) remind us that assumed collective identities are often continuously constructed and reconstituted in response to the circumstances at hand. This observation raises critical questions about the effectiveness of the measure to split districts: If voting in the new districts again becomes ethnically oriented, how about the ethnic minorities there? This question becomes even more compelling on the grounds that "no group wants to end up a minority in a territory if it can become a majority by redrawing boundaries or by expelling other groups" (Oberschall 2007, p.15). And considering that migration still continues in the area, what will happen if the ethnic numbers are once again tipped in favour of some group other than the one designated for the district?

Conclusion

Whereas we may not question the efficacy of decentralisation in improving service delivery at the grassroots, the findings and explanations in this paper illustrate that decentralisation may come with severe adverse effects if pursued along parochially exclusive ethnic aspirations. The case of Kibaale demonstrates that whereas indeed Uganda inherited a problematically constructed ethnic landscape, in some places decentralisation has been pursued in a trajectory that reinforces and reproduces colonial ethnic exclusionism. In Kibaale the exclusionism has been found to antagonistically pit the 'migrants' against the 'indigenes/autochthons', with the later claiming more citizenship rights as 'sons of the soil' and the former framed as 'foreigners' that only enjoy citizenship rights to the extent allowed by their hosts. This configuration is brought about by the creation of districts along ethnic lines – sometimes in a bid to politically resolve ethnic disputes but only to reproduce them by further polarising ethnic groups and consolidating ethnic identity politics.

It is important to address some historical injustices that continue to affect some ethnic groups such as the Banyoro of Kibaale District, however this ought to be done in a manner that does not create ethnic ownership of districts. District boundaries should not coincide with ethnic ones. In fact, to enhance pluralism, as much as possible, districts creation should ensure intra-district ethnic diversity and the Local Government Act that guides the administration of

district affairs should carry provisions for ethnically inclusive access to jobs and services from the district. This should help contain some ethnically mobilised conflicts over district resources.

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