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Ethnic Kingship and Inter-Ethnic Relations: Assessing Ethnic Conflicts of the Rwenzori Region of Western Uganda

In the earlier years of the 20th century, kingdoms expanded in their territorial boundaries through annexation of other lands. In the process, a kingdom would be encompassed by many cultural and different ethnic groupings. Today, however, contrary to this, what we see in Uganda is that, kingdoms and other cultural institutions are formed basing on ethnicity with different ethnic groups breaking away from their former entities to form their own cultural institutions on grounds that they have different cultures. This has given rise to what this study terms ethnic kingships. From this study, it is evident that ethnic kingship has proven to be a common source of conflict in different communities within Uganda such as the Rwenzori Region, Bunyoro kingdom, Buganda kingdom as well as the northern Region of the country. Since its restoration in 2009, the Obusinga cultural institution has been at the centre of conflict in the Rwenzori Region as other ethnicities in 205 the same Region have often opposed the one ethnic (Konjo) kingship in favour of having their own kings. The study focused on assessing the impact of ethnic kingship and its relations with the ethnic conflicts of the Rwenzori Region of western Uganda with focus on the Obusinga cultural institution and inter-ethnic relations. It was guided by three objectives; determining how ethnic kingship contributes to the ethnic conflict in Rwenzori Region, assessing the levels of ethnic conflict in Rwenzori Region and, suggesting ways in which ethnicities can live together in Rwenzori Region. The study revealed that ethnic kingship has indeed had an impact on subjects of the Obusinga bwa Rwenzururu to the extent of getting an assailable idea of forming a state called the YIRA state republic. The segregation of the institution in its operations and forceful imposition of the Bakonjo culture and leadership on the different ethnicities has influenced the different ethnicities to form separate entities where they could be in position to promote their own cultures, languages and be autonomous in their decisions. For a peaceful Uganda, the study recommends formation of cultural institutions by the different ethnicities, government intervention, mediation and dialogue among elders as a way forward for reconciliation to take place in the Rwenzori Region in order for the different ethnicities to co-exist. This brings in a wider consideration on other culture institutions in Uganda as it poses a question whether it is necessary for Uganda to have ethnicities with kings and whether for a united Uganda these separatisms are necessary.

Key words: Ethnic, Conflict, Rwenzori, Bakonzo, Bamba