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Traditional institutions and Violence in contemporary Uganda

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ABSTRACT

Background

In contemporary Uganda, the coexistence of formal state structures and traditional/cultural institutions (such as kingdoms and chiefdoms) remains a source of complex socio-political dynamics. While traditional institutions were constitutionally reinstated in 1993 primarily as cultural entities, their political influence and relationship with the central government continue to evolve, occasionally sparking friction.

Objectives

This article examines the multifaceted relationship between traditional institutions and violence in modern Uganda. It investigates how cultural institutions act as both facilitators of peace and triggers of political or ethnic violence, particularly in regions like the Rwenzori (Kasese) and Buganda.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative approach, drawing on historical analysis, review of institutional frameworks, and contemporary case studies of state-traditional conflicts.

Key Findings

The analysis reveals a dual reality:

- **Traditional Institutions as Peacemakers:** Local kingdoms and chiefdoms frequently utilize deeply rooted indigenous mechanisms for conflict resolution, land dispute mediation, and community reconciliation.
- **Traditional Institutions as Flashpoints for Violence:** Concurrently, violence often erupts due to the politicization of cultural identities, contested royal successions, state interference in traditional leadership, and anxieties regarding land rights and regional autonomy.

Conclusion

The article concludes that violence involving traditional institutions in contemporary Uganda is rarely inherently cultural. Instead, it is primarily driven by the manipulation of traditional sentiments for political gain and the state's fluctuating strategies of co-optation and suppression. To mitigate future

conflicts, a clearer, mutually respected legal and political boundary must be established between state authority and cultural governance.

Keywords: Uganda, Traditional Institutions, Political Violence, Conflict Resolution, Ethnic Identity, Buganda, Rwenzori.

Introduction

One would think that with kingdom status granted, the violence of post-colonial Uganda had received an antidote, but soon after, tensions arose. In Buganda, we see demands for secessions from a number of ethnic groups. New cultural formations, such as Baruuli Cultural Trust (BCT) and Banyala Cultural Institute (BCI), which later became Obukama bwa Bunyala (kingdom of Bunyala), sprout in Buganda's Nakasongola and Kayunga districts respectively. In Ankole, the two main cultural formations are Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT) and Banyankole Cultural Foundation (BCF). Others like Buganda's Kooki are in the process of seceding. Violence began in Buganda. Even in Ankole where the demand for a restored kingdom has not yielded, the demands for the kingdom and cultural symbols are persistent. This only implies that violence could erupt.

Relying on interviews, historical texts and media publications, the chapter makes an inquiry into the composition and nature of traditional institutions in recent post-colonial Uganda. The question that the chapter poses is: How should we understand periodic cultural formations and the violence that is persistently produced by traditional institutions in recent post-colonial Uganda? Answering this question requires us to understand the variance in the demands that these institutions are making. The demands for secessions are majorly to fight for the rights and privileges of their ethnic identity. Secessionist demands, such as the Banyala's and the Baruuli, claim that they cannot continue to be part of Buganda when they are culturally different. Among the various demands is the claim that they are the natives of the area and so the resources such as land in Kayunga district is theirs. They also claim that their access to social services and other privileges from the central state is not efficient when they were still under Buganda. Even the Bakooki secessionist demand, which is still in the process, raises similar demands. The raw material of the recent Bakooki demand for self-determination is not far different from the Banyala struggles. They too demand socio-political autonomy from Buganda affairs. Their demands include: socio-economic, service delivery and cultural recognition result from allocating and distributing power and resources long tribal lines. They state: "We have realized that when it comes to service delivery, we always lag behind, especially when it comes to infrastructure like roads, schools, health centers and water services."¹

Other nationalist voices, such as Buganda are demanding for more power so that they can operate separately or semi-independently from the central state. Buganda's demand for self-determination (federal status) is spurred by the critique that the central state is tribal and so they are not content with its domination of power. The two major cultural formations of Ankole exhibit different kinds of agency. While BCF prefers to preserve cultural aspects like language and sites over a kingdom with political institutions, NCT calls for the restoration of the Ankole kingdom in order to achieve the same for

¹ These words were uttered by Ssemanda, who is quoted in "Kabebugwa, J & Musasizi, A "Buganda, Kooki division deepens." Saturday Monitor, August 6, 2022.

Banyankore culture. What causes the variance in the demands of these traditional institutions? Does the variance in their demands create any difference in the emancipation they envision? For instance, what is the difference between those that are demanding for a kingdom and those that are forming cultural institutions? Are there some that are more emancipating than others?

The chapter demonstrates that the agency of traditional institutions does not show any difference in their emancipation potential. All of them are rooted in the perpetuation of the colonial structure under the decentralized system of governance. In the end, these traditional institutions, whether they are kingdoms or skeletal kingdoms, the fact that they make culture a basis of their demand, they politicize it. They not only reinforce tribalism but also transform these institutions into places where power is still sought after and sometimes exercised, but in a way that perpetuates modern state logics. This is partly because differences in culture serve as the basis for both cultural formations and the demands of many traditional institutions, leading to the politicisation of difference. Also, their campaigns are centered on ethnic identity, and so ethnic politics impairs their potential for emancipation of their respective communities. Even the advocacy for power, like the case of Buganda, the power they demand does not enable them operate outside the structure of the state. They can only be emissaries of the state. In both old and new cultural formations, culture and identity are constructed and deployed for political goals. Consequently, their demands facilitate perpetuation of logics of a colonial state. The emancipation potential of traditional is, therefore, conscripted in the very ways the central state continues to make them its emissaries.

The 2009 violence and Banyala secessionist demand from Buganda kingdom

On September 9, 2009, Buganda kingdom was set to have Youth day celebrations in her Bugerere county, located in the Kayunga district in central Uganda. The Kabaka (king of Buganda kingdom) was to visit Bugerere because Buganda still considers the areas as one of her counties. One of the traditions of Buganda is the king's royal visits around his realm.

However, the visit was blocked by the state because it was a threat to “national security” in 2009.² This was because the Banyala ethnic community, who had already declared their intention to secede from Buganda, did not agree with the planned visit. They wrote a letter to and delivered it to the RDC of Kayunga district, stating their position. They refuted the Kabaka's visit for three reasons: they belong to the Obukama bwa Bunyala, a cultural institution that the state acknowledged at the time and still does today. Secondly, Banyala demanded recognition as the native people of Bugerere from the Mengo government, which is the seat of the Kabaka and other Buganda kingdom officials. They trace their ancestry from Bunyoro Kitara empire. They claim to have been one of the communities (egwanga) that made the enormous Bunyoro-Kitara empire, which ruled over and inhabited the Banyala from 1600 to 1800. When the British defeated Kabalega in the 1885 war, Buganda who had allied with the British, was given the land in question as a reward for its assistance in the struggle against Kabalega.³ Buganda has dominated Bugerere since then, as Bunyoro had lost control of the region. Buganda, on the other hand, began enslaving Banyala, capturing them and forcing them to work in Mengo. Banyala who were able to flee Buganda cruelty dispersed in various locations such as Busoga, Lango, Teso and others.

² The Guardian of Friday 11 September, 2009. Article: “10 reported dead in Kampala riots” by Richard M. Kavuma.

³ As was previously said, Buganda disputes the assertion that it took control of Bugerere with assistance from the British colonists. According to Buganda, Bugerere was a part of Buganda long before the British arrived. (See Mayiga, Buganda Ku Ntikko, 224) Thus, this contradiction gives rise to certain tensions that exist today.

Those who remained were few and Buganda integrated them into the Ganda culture by assimilation⁴. The agenda of the assimilation was to suppress the Nyala identity so that Buganda could take over the territory⁵.

Those that left still faced the same discrimination that bases on ethnic identity. The apex of their discrimination was the 1979 insurgency in Northern Uganda when those that were not Lango were forced out of the part of Lango region they had occupied- presently Amudat district. It was a backlash against any foreigner [referred to as *anam* (singular) and *onam* (plural)] who was not a northerner, e.g. Baruli, Banyala, and Banyarwanda that they deemed ethnically so foreign, compared to other foreigners that came from other parts of the northern region. In 1987, the Lango insurgency compelled some Banyala to return to their ‘homeland’ after many others were killed, while some crossed Lake Kyoga to Nakasongola and others to Bunyoro. At home, they still felt degraded and inferior under Buganda control. Buganda also didn't take the initiative to develop the area, which brings us to our third problem. As an illustration, Banyala were not provided with education by Buganda via the construction of schools in Kayunga. “From Bbale to Kayunga town, there was only one primary school and no secondary school, and the first school in Kayunga was built in the 1970s. Mukono was the destination chosen by parents who could afford to send their kids there for secondary schooling. The year, 1982, saw the establishment of the first secondary school.”⁶

As a rebuttal to the above grievances, Banyala formed a group named "Banyala Culture and Development," and later “Baruuli-Banyala Cultural Trust” which brought Banyala and Baruuli people together in Kayunga. The association sought to front their recognition and development under Mpaji's (a muruli) leadership. They devised a strategy for establishing a leadership structure, which involved mobilizing around culture, or more specifically, cultural heritage. They aimed at having the association registered, which they achieved in 1997. They therefore had to have leadership as well as political representation during the making of Uganda's 1995 constitution. That required the mobilization of local political backing and, later, cultural leaders. They say their demand yielded a number of things, including sending their own children (Hon. Mukasa Muruli (Muruli) and Hon. Kitaka Gawera (Munyala) to parliament for that particular cause. That was the beginning of their campaign for a cultural institution that underlined the fact that Banyala are distinct from Baganda, and that they not only wanted to secede from Baganda, but also wanted that distinction to be acknowledged by the state. The assumption is that once they establish a cultural institution recognized by the state as distinct and independent of Buganda, their issues will be brought to the attention of the government. They will be able to send representatives to state institutions such as parliament, and Bugerere's access to services such as education, which Baganda had previously denied them, will improve. Their agency mobilizing their culture, formation of a cultural institution with a cultural head- Ssabanyala (obukulembeze obwe nono), rather than a kingdom. They are purportedly not after political power.⁷ They voted Kimeze as their ‘cultural’ leader in 2004 and gave him the title “Ssabanyala of the Obukama bwa Bunyala”, which was formed later in 2007. They claim that they pursue a development-oriented cultural institution that is free of political agendas. They want

⁴ Rwebikire & Senkatuka, in conversation with the researcher, March 9, 2022, in Kayunga. This history is recounted by both the Katikiro of the Banyala, Senkatuka and the minister of publicity of Obukama bwa Bunyala.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Rwebikire (He was part of the group that had run away from Buganda's brutality and returned with the 1987 uprising), interview.

⁷ Ibid.

Kayunga gazetted for the Banyala institution and the state had promised to do that. However, this still remains a political goal- claiming rights and privileges over their identity. What is cultural about that?

Unquestionably, the interruption of the king of Buganda's visit to Bugerere was what ignited the riots in Buganda in 2009. Like most districts in Uganda, Kayunga is a multicultural area with a variety of people who speak different dialects and identify as or are referred to as ethnic groups. Banyala and Baganda are the two main ethnic groups there. However, Bugerere is a contested county in the history of Buganda. Whereas Buganda claims that Bugerere was under her control even before the British came, Banyala claim that they never belonged to Buganda and are the natives of the area. Actually, one of the demands that the Banyala presented in the 2009 saga is that Buganda needs to first acknowledge them as the indigenous people of Bugerere.⁸

Their position in the 2009 is that they still felt the undermining of their ethnicity by the Baganda had continued after the restoration of Buganda kingdom, who referred to the Banyala as immigrants. They assert that whatever infrastructure that Buganda set up belonged to Banyala and the whole of Kayunga district belongs to ethnic Banyala. The Sabanyala is quoted to have asserted that: “Mengo has to recognize us as the indigenous people of Bugerere. The Kabaka while opening the Lukiko was misled and he referred to the Banyala as basenze (immigrants). The Kabaka’s statement angered us so much. The Kabaka should retract his statement.”⁹ The Banyala were therefore to stop the Kabaka of Buganda from visiting their “territory”, which they deemed it illegal and unconstitutional and that Bugerere is tired of Mengo people¹⁰, in order to assert their cultural autonomy that the state had granted. They had to plan a demonstration against the planned visit. In the 2009 scuffle, which had its birth in Kayunga, the position of the Banyala is that they were resisting Buganda who want to forcefully bring their Kabaka to their kingdom without permission. They were willing to shed blood to stop the Kabaka from stepping in Kayunga, who had not informed them of his visit¹¹.

Banyala assert that they were not involved in the riots of 2009. Since they were not even in Kayunga when rioting started, they did not promote violence. Their involvement had been before the riot broke out. They had expressed their discontent with the Kabaka’s visit since Kayunga is no longer part of Buganda. The ministry of internal affairs, where they had been invited for a meeting with Buganda, had shut them inside. The state invited the Banyala leaders from Kayunga to the ministry of internal affairs on the morning of September 9 so they could meet with a Buganda delegation headed by Katikiro Walusimbi. The meeting's stated goal was “for Uganda to hand over Bugerere County to Banyala.” The then-internal affairs minister, Kirunda Kivenjinja, was advised by the Buganda delegation, which comprised few MPs from that country, that they had to first travel to Bugerere to examine the situation before they could participate in the dialogue. They cited their refusal to agree to whatever the Baganda did not find acceptable as their justification. The minister expressed uncertainty that they would be permitted to travel to Bugerere. They disregarded the minister's assurances, so the delegation that had been sent to talk about the handover moved to Bugerere. They were halted by police and the military at the Ssezibwa bridge,

⁸ Matthias Mugisha, “Ssabanyala ready to hold talks with Mengo,” The New Vision, Kampala, September 11, 2009.

⁹ The Ssabanyala, Kimeze, makes this statement in a newspaper article: Mugisha, Mathias “Ssabanyala ready to hold talks with Mengo.” New vision, September 11, 2009.

¹⁰ James Rwebikire, the spokesperson of the Banyala kingdom and personal secretary to the king of Banyala is quoted in an article by Daily Monitor of September 9th 2009 “Banyala Plan to demonstrate against the Kabaka’s visit” by Fred Muzaale. He emphasizes the position in an interview with him on 9th March, 2022 at his home in Kayunga town.

¹¹ Rwebikire, interview.

which acts as a dividing line between the Kayunga and Mukono districts. Only Major Kasiryegwanga was able to pass the barriers. As a major in the military, Kasiryegwanga had been chosen to lead the Buganda delegation because Kimeze, the Banyala leader, of the Banyala was a captain and so held a lower rank. To terrify the leader of Banyala, Kasiryegwanga was to exploit his superior rank. When the party was instructed to return, rumors that the Katikiro had been prevented from entering Bugerere began to circulate. The suspicion is that the political group incited the violence, which they allegedly did from Mukono, where the mob began setting cars on fire. In the name of their ardent kingship, they mobilized the populace via radio. In response, the state shut down those radios, accusing them of being the vehicles to the political propaganda. The reason for this is that despite having promised to meet for a discussion, they instead chose to travel to Bugerere, leaving the Banyala delegation behind. There, the delegation remained until after midnight before being escorted home amid a riot that had broken out in many parts of Buganda.¹²

The struggle for indigeneity and political influence points to the resurfacing of the colonial state logic. As part of its statecraft, the colonial state drew ethnic boundaries in which it defined natives and non-natives.¹³ The Banyala claim to be natives of Buganda's Kayunga area, which the latter considers its county (saza) resonates to the same ethnic politics. Their agency is Banyala as the indigenous reserve all the rights to politics, and resources of the area. That is the reason the Kabaka is welcome to visit Kayunga as long as he first obtains Banyala's consent.¹⁴ Both Baganda and Banyala are claiming control over the area as distinct ethnic groups- politicized as tribes. Each group wants to dominate Kayunga as the political majority.

More to that, the struggles to secede by a group of people from another in contemporary Uganda does not start with the Banyala of Bugerere. Secessionist agitations of the minority group is salient on Uganda's political scene. It majorly results from making ethnicity as the basis for political inclusion¹⁵. They have been here, but are now being escalated by post-colonial regimes, especially the present one of President Museveni, that wants to abate ethnic contestations through giving autonomy to ethnic groups that have suffered suppression under other more powerful groups. The sad story is that this has instead escalated the problem. Museveni creates new districts, kingdoms, constituencies not for any reasons but to deal with the problem of ethnic based conflict through what he termed ethnic emancipation, a practice that aims at exhibiting political inclusion where the marginalized are given a representation. This practice is not only a reproduction of colonization mechanism- governing Africans by 'tribes' but (also) facilitates reproduction of ethnicity and land dispossession of the locals.¹⁶

Since the Banyala are listed in the constitution as a minority tribe, it makes sense to apply the above articulation to their situation and argue that their perception of being marginalized by the Buganda, who make up the majority, is what drives them to believe that having their own ethnically based kingdom would improve their political and economic situation.

Additionally, Banyala's agency in the 2009 agitation should also be appreciated as a nationalist struggle for sociopolitical autonomy on the part of the minority group in the sense that they opposed the king of

¹² Senkatuka, interview.

¹³ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject*.

¹⁴ Senkatuka & Rwebikire, interviews.

¹⁵ Sseremba, "Ethnic emancipation and conflict escalation in Uganda."

¹⁶ Sseremba, "Ethnic emancipation and conflict escalation in Uganda."

Buganda visiting Kayunga because doing so would imply that Banyala are still under Buganda as subordinates. They used the chance to show that Bugerere is not in favor of the Buganda monarch and does not exert control over the various ethnic groups in the district. Banyala, however, rejects any struggle for political power. They say theirs is not a political struggle, but a cultural one since they are not interested in a political kingdom. This is an untenable claim because even the claim for an institution that addresses their privileges as an ethnicity is a political motive. Ssabanyala (head of Obukama bwa Bunyala) thus asserts: “Our struggle is cultural, not political.”¹⁷ They say why would they stand Buganda’s arrogance if the constitution allows them to have their own cultural institution? We can therefore portend that the protest by Banyala over the intended visit by the Kabaka of Buganda and the violence that ensued was more than Banyala’s rejection of the Kabaka’s visit and so more than a secessionist conflict. In any case, Banyala were already granted their autonomy from Buganda by the government.

Banyala are shunning a political kingdom, but even then, what they establish (Obukama bwa Bunyala) has the semblance of the kingdom. It is a skeletal kingdom. The reasons for forming the institution was because they want to fight for the rights of their identity. The fact that the Banyala mobilize around culture- i.e. by making it a basis of their demands, they are politicking it. The claim is that by their language and history, they are culturally different from Baganda. They demand and were given autonomy as a cultural institution because they are a different culture.

Second, the state intervened in the matter and an agreement was reached and signed between leadership of Bunyala, Baganda and the state. The agreement allows, as also stated in Uganda’s Constitution, “the Kabaka enjoys his freedom of movement to any and all parts of Uganda, provided he respects the rights of other cultural institutions/leaders as enshrined in the Constitution and The Institution of Traditional or Cultural Leaders Act, 2011.”¹⁸ This agreement is being used by nationalist voices to claim that they do not have to pay allegiance to the Kabaka of Buganda, even when he visits Kayunga, because Kayunga is purportedly part of the Obukama bwa Bunyala. It also has an implication that the central state backs the agency of a seceding group. That is partly why it is willing to pay sums of money to compensate Buganda for the property she had in Bugerere. Why would the state be willing to pay twenty billion shillings to Buganda on behalf of Bunyala? Even when the constitution recognizes the existence of traditional or cultural leaders in any region of Uganda,¹⁹ the central state’s interest in granting it is questionable. After all, it is the state that legislates. Because of this, the government’s reference is the Constitution, which gives it power to grant autonomy to groups and tribes that demand them.

In its deployment of what Mamdani (1996) has termed decentralised despotism, the modern state is interested in cultural formations. Besides the Constitution, it is also reflective in the utterances that the president makes on the subject of secessions and formation of contemporary cultural institutions.²⁰ The state anticipated a violence if the Kabaka visited Kayunga and so intervened in “favour” of Banyala’s agency. After the violence, the government still negotiated with Buganda. The state was willing and

¹⁷ Kimeze is quoted in a newspaper article “Ssabanyala ready to hold talks with Mengo,” New Vision, September 11, 2009.

¹⁸ The Republic of Uganda in the matter of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda and in the matter of the Traditional Rulers (Restitution of assets and properties) Act Cao 247 agreement between the government of the Republic of Uganda and the Kabaka of Buganda, Ronald Muwenda Mutebi II (p.65)

¹⁹ Chapter 16, Article 246 of the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda, clause 1

²⁰ See, “A Statement by H.E. Yoweri. K. Museveni, during the meeting with the Buganda parliamentary caucus, Entebbe state house, 10th September, 2009,” Saturday Vision, September 12, 2009.

indeed pledged to reimburse Buganda for all the property it owned in Bugerere, and the two parties agreed that Banyala would take their autonomy. The two came to an accord that affirms Bugerere's independence.²¹

What we make of the situation is that their demands do not operate outside the structure of the modern colonial state. One way in which the state continues to conscript people is by giving them traditional institutions they demand. Traditional institutions are continually made domains of power in order to facilitate modern logics of power. They continue to be places where power is exercised but in a way that perpetuates logics of the modern colonial state. Traditional institutions remain decentralized state units serving the interests of the central post-colonial state of Uganda- perpetuating difference.

Buganda agency in the 2009 crisis

The 2009 violence in most parts of Buganda is one of the cases of the violence in post-colonial Uganda. The number of deaths and the injured, the property destroyed and violent scenes of how people were murdered point to a popular struggle:

New Vision saw three bodies being brought into the city mortuary early on Friday morning and another three later in the day. Two of them were burned to death by a mob in Ndeeba, a Kampala suburb. Among the dead was also a senior three student from Lubiri secondary school.²²

Previous scholarly intervention pre-occupied into the problem of conflicts, instability, insurgencies and violence in Uganda have pointed at a number of factors causing such ethnic-based mobilizations. A set of scholars posit that colonialism altered various institutions and their structures, such as chieftainship, in its attempt to consolidate its power in the modern state and it is these very institutions that post-colonial regimes are taking on; for the same purpose²³. The other viewpoint exonerates the colonial state from playing any significant role in altering the pre-colonial institutional structures but rather point at the continuity of the pre-colonial through the colonial to the post-colonial. The assertion that “the era between the 1890s and the 1960s was one in which precolonial dynamics continued to reverberate and refract, albeit through many of the prisms created by colonial administration,”²⁴ point to a neo-traditional perspective that portends that different forms of violence are instigated by the people in power for their selfish interests- consolidating their rule. The neo-patrimonialism discourse blames many of the problems of Africa- from the dictatorship, violence, fragmentation of society, ethnic conflicts, among others to the regimes in power and assert that we need to look at how the politicians are ruling Africa. They point fingers at Museveni on creation of kingdom and ethnic constituencies of patronage- he manipulates state structures – to create personal clients from the population.²⁵ Grace Kibanja et al (2012), in their brief look into post-colonial conflicts in Uganda, have thought of the 2009 violence as a mere ‘coming to surface’ of the long-standing rivalry between the central government and Buganda kingdom. The former aims at consolidating itself in power and so has to weaken the latter since it historically has the potential to take on political power. With limited critical and historical analysis, these scholars are looking at the incident as one of the examples of ethnocultural conflicts that the present regime is using to dominate resources and positions of power. The way the 2009 events played out suggests that there was more at stake than

²¹ Ssenkatuka, interview.

²² Anonymous New Vision writers, “City riots deaths,” New Vision, Kampala, September 12, 2009.

²³ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject & Doornbos, Not all the King's Men*.

²⁴ Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, 98-299.

²⁵ Rubongoya, *Regime Hegemony in Museveni's Uganda & Samwiri Karugire, Roots Instability in Uganda*.

just a simple dispute between Banyala and Baganda since the former didn't want the latter to claim Kayunga as its county. The language that defined the campaign, as well as its ferocity suggest that there was more to the Baganda's sovereignty over the county of Bugerere for this was not the first of its nature. We have, in the previous chapter, discussed the formations and struggle for traditional institutions in colonial and earlier post-colonial moment. Buganda's current agency is inextricably linked to its previous struggles.

In the periodic movements, traditional institutions have a political agency. They are not asserting a cultural hegemony and therefore it is imperative to look into both the components of the movement and the nature of Buganda's agency in the 2009 protest. The questions that are worthy reflecting on the Buganda case are: What is the agency of the population? At what moment do the elite join the struggle? What are their calculations? What institutions allow these elite to emerge and become representatives of the state, for instance? Why were people in Kampala rioting when Kayunga, the area of contention was calm?²⁶

The Kayunga riot, as the 2009 riots have been described, started as a popular struggle of the ganda subjects. How did it unfold? Prior to a royal visit, the Kabaka's Katikiro (prime minister) usually pays a visit. As was already said, the Banyala had denied the visit this time via the RDC's office. Nevertheless, preparations by the Ganda subjects for the visit went on. The government intervened and forewarned Buganda against the visit in anticipation of the violence that was anticipated to break out if the Kabaka's visit to Kayunga continued. The state moved ahead and halted all planning for the Bugerere event. Police demolished the stalls and tents that had been erected for the event and arrested people who were not complying with its orders. Media reported that many people were injured in the scuffle.²⁷ However, Buganda was willing to stop at nothing for the visit as "the kingdom official remained adamant that the Kabaka would go ahead with the visit despite an earlier warning from the government, to call off the trip citing security reasons."²⁸ For this determination, the Katikiro who was accompanied by some elite of Buganda, travelled to Kayunga on the day before the Kabaka's visit scheduled for Saturday September 9th 2009. He was stopped from entering Bugerere area by the anti-riot police roadblocks planted at Ssezibwa bridge, which serves as an entrance into Bugerere. For the state, Kabaka's visit was "a threat to national security". Whereas the state was willing to have Buganda on a roundtable discussion, the latter did not show interest in the dialogue. Buganda (the Kabaka) ignored the many calls he received from the president for a discussion between the state, the Kabaka himself and the Banyala leaders.²⁹

The spark of the riot was "false reports that Katikiro Walusimbi had been arrested on his way to Kayunga."³⁰ The alleged arrest of the Katikiro was used as spark for the riot. "What happened in Katikiro's case was obviously pre-planned."³¹ Comments like that suggest that the 2009 riots were not causal but an outburst of the politics of the area. Moreover, the state claims that some Buganda had turned down its call for a dialogue. This is done by a group of some elite group in Buganda who have put up "a

²⁶ The question was posed by Baker Kimeze, the Ssabanyala who is quoted in Matthias Mugisha "Ssabanyala ready to hold talks with Mengo," New Vision, September 11, 2009.

²⁷ see, Daily Monitor, "Tension Builds in Kayunga," Daily Monitor, September 8, 2009.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Cyprian Musoke "Museveni sets conditions for the Kabaka's visit to Kayunga," The New Vision 11 September, 2009.

³⁰ Namutebi, J et al, "Katikiro blocked at Ssezibwa Bridge," New Vision, September 11, 2009.

³¹ John Nagenda, "What shall we do with Buganda?" Saturday Vision on 12th September, 2009.

strong fence around the Kabaka.”³² It is questionable that the riot that was birthed from Bugerere (Kayunga district)- started as protest to the Kabaka’s by Banyala, who take themselves as the indigenous people of the area, how come it spread to Kampala and people joined the struggle with all the fervor to fight. The riot translated into a popular social conflict in many districts in Buganda such as Wakiso, Kayunga, Mpigi and Masaka. Whereas it is true that the elite participated, such as Members of parliament, in the struggle, the locals’ agency should not be overlooked. What differs are the calculations of the two groups of participants in the struggle i.e. the locals and the elite. As Gramsci, argues, a revolution can crystalize when the groups ally.³³ The 2009 agitations took shape when the elite aligned with the subaltern. The subsequent paragraphs discuss the agency of each group.

The riots that ensued in various areas of Kampala and other districts in Buganda resulted in many deaths (the media reports thirty), numerous injuries, and destruction of property like several cars, a bus, and a police station that were set ablaze by the rioters. This degree of violence goes beyond the need to protect the king and the institution. What kind of rage results from murdering someone and setting their body ablaze? Additionally, the riots were systematic. In many areas they took place, rioters were employing similar tools of language and totems. The riots were systematic and this is evidence that they had top organizers that the state referred to as “wrong elements.”³⁴ The severity of the violence forced business in Kampala to be halted for a while. An extract from the media coverage captures the ferocity of the situation:

Offices and shops closed down and motorists vacated the roads amid sporadic gunfire, teargas explosions, a heavy presence of regular and anti-riot police backed by military police. In Bwaise, demonstrators set a huge stone on fire before going on a looting spree. The police fire brigade put out the fire. The rioters also set ablaze the Natete Police Station, and the vehicle packed there. A police woman in Natete was stripped naked and beaten.³⁵

A number of roads were barricaded by protestors in Kampala and other districts in Buganda such as Kayunga itself, Mukono, Wakiso, they set a language test, that whoever was to cross the road had to; pronounce some words in Luganda as well as cite their ancestral lineage. The intention was to identify those that were not Baganda and therefore could not pronounce the selected words or phrases. Pronouncing Luganda words; ‘Namungoona’ and ‘omufaliso’ in a typical Ganda accent as well as reciting one’s ancestral lineage were set as parameters for identifying non-Baganda in Buganda. The latter was termed “Okutambula ng’omuganda” which loosely translates to “walk like a muganda”. It metaphorically meant that one should mention his father, grandfather, great grandfather and other ancestors. Those ancestors should all have Ganda names so that you can qualify as one. When one failed to pass the set test, they would be beaten up and those who were in cars, the cars were vandalized. The language that defined the Buganda- Bugerere campaign is “tambula ng’omuganda”, a slogan that formed a basis of

³² The president, Museveni, is quoted to have told MPs from Buganda thus: “Can you imagine, I have been denied access to the Kabaka for two years? Yet it is me who restored the kingdoms.”

³³ Antonio Gramsci, “Selections from the Prison Notebooks.” (ed) Quentin Hoare, (trans) Geoffrey Nowell Mith (London: ElecBook, 1999).

³⁴ This was mentioned by the then minister of state for internal affairs, Matia Kasaija, while addressing parliament. He is quoted in Namutebi, J et al, “Katikkiro blocked at Ssezibwa Bridge” New Vision 11th September, 2009.

³⁵ New Vision, “Riots rock city,” New Vision, September 11, 2009.

identifying non-Baganda. It aimed at stopping the latter from participating in the politics of Buganda—they could not speak Luganda and so are non-Baganda who should not be in Buganda.

The question of who a Muganda is notwithstanding, is every Muganda in position to recite their ancestral lineage. Definitely not. Even the Ganda identity was valorized, as evidenced by Simon Musoke's experience, a Muganda who was only able to name three of his relatives. He describes his experience as tough one. Simon was requested to transport a co-worker and her little child to Kawempe on the way home from Wandegaya. As a Munyankore who could not even correctly speak the words to the satisfaction of the rioters and survive the brutalizing, Simon's coworker feared she would not be able to clear the road barricades at Mulago, Kalerwe, and Bwaise to get to her home in Kawempe. It was hoped that Simon, who was born in Buganda, might negotiate the blocked-off routes. So as Simon drove towards the roadblocks, the two decided that the non-Muganda woman should sleep in the car and make sure the rioters do not spot her. They still had to figure out a method to get around the roadblocks because there was a good probability that the rioters would halt the car and search inside of it. Additionally, Simon had trouble recalling most of his forefathers, raising doubts about his Gandanness. The majority of the roadblocks, he claimed, were avoided, with the exception of one near Tuula, Kawempe. When they took the route, they had no idea it would be there. When they got close to it, Simon came up with a plan to demonstrate his affiliation with the rioters by lowering his car window glass and yelling, “Tugende e Bugerere. (We go to Bugerere)” As they approached his vehicle, the rioters joined the chant. After that, he was able to take off, saving both his own life and the life of the coworker who had been sitting motionless in the car with her child the entire time. Simon's experience leads us to believe that not even Baganda could pass the test.

The other issue that deserves attention is why, if the Banyala were the ones who prevented the Kabaka from traveling to Bugerere, the focus shifted from Banyala to non-Baganda? The rioters were targeting non-Baganda populations, particularly Banyarwanda and Banyankore, according to media coverage of the incident and the accounts of the survivors. The excerpt that follows implies that the rioters wanted to purify Buganda of non-Baganda. It also underlines the use of physical attributes as a criterion for distinguishing muganda from non-muganda.

According to eye witness accounts, many people were dragged out of cars at roadblocks in several parts of the city for looking like Banyankole and beaten up. “You are not a Muganda,” a female passenger was told by youth manning a roadblock in Namirembe on Thursday night. She was saved from the irate mob by a Patrol Police.³⁶

Another account is of a businessman, Arthur Gakyaro, in Kiseka Market. His experience with the rioters further supports the idea that the aim in Buganda was not Banyala but rather non-Baganda. He describes how he had been trading motor spare parts in Kiseka Market since 1990 when the riots broke out in what is known as down town Kampala. He recalls that riots in Kampala originated in Kiseka, and one of the reasons is that it is simple to organize a mass there. It is crowded with young individuals who are jobless and working part-time in the market. They are without a doubt convinced that they are the victims of the “tribalistic” government. They are moving through poverty, unemployment, and aggravation. When the Kiseka revolt began, Arthur made the decision to close his motor spare parts shop and stay in Makindye, another Kampala suburb where he believed things were more tranquil. He was buying time to pick up his children from City Parents school in the evening. His children's school called him shortly after he arrived

³⁶ Anonymous “City Riots deaths,” New Vision September 12, 2009.

in Makindye to ask him to pick them up immediately since the situation in Mengo, where the school is located, had gotten worse. He hurried to his children's school in the city, but he made the security-conscious decision to travel with two staff members who were Baganda and so could speak Luganda better than him. They continued to avoid the routes where they anticipated blockages by the protesters because there were rioters all across Kampala city at that time. They passed through Katwe on their way to the school where they managed to reach safely. They got a clear view of the rioters at the Mengo roundabout (Kabaka Anjagala) close to the Buganda palace as they drove after picking up the kids. The rioters had closed off Nattete's access point to Masaka Road. There, the rioters set cars on fire with their tires, vandalized every vehicle they touched, and beat up anyone who was moving. In the Mengo suburb, they had set fire to the roads. They carried a variety of weapons for combat, including knives, pangas, and metals. Since they couldn't travel that path, Arthur and his friends had to figure out a way to get to Ndeeba, where they could link to Najjanankumbi, a suburb in Kampala along the Entebbe Road, where Arthur lived. They were horrified to discover a new crowd at Ndeeba that they were unable to avoid this time. Arthur's car was stopped and deflated, by the protesters. They asked Arthur to "walk like a Muganda" when they extracted the kids and the other two boys. Even though he understood what the phrase meant, he refrained from speaking because he was afraid they would realize he was not a Muganda. The kids were just sobbing and the mob was yelling: "Mwe Banarwanda abawagila Museveni tujja kubatta tubamalewo." It might be loosely translated as "We will kill all of you Rwandese who support Museveni." The lads who could speak Luganda fluently were not given the chance to speak. Their clothes were torn as they were hurled from the car. He could not notice how they disappeared in thin air. When the rioters grabbed the children and embarked on Arthur who was now in the car alone, tore his shirt, he quickly pulled a bundle of money out of his trousers pockets that he had and threw it outside. Arthur was shrewd enough to take advantage of the chance to exit the vehicle and flee as the rioters rushed to collect the dispersed notes of money that he remembers was close to one million shillings. He went into a certain garage; whose owner just locked a large gate when Arthur entered. The rioters were refrained from entering the garage. To his relief, the mob did not pursue him and there were other persons inside. A group of six men arrived at the gate after a little interval (he places the time at ten minutes). They could hear Arthur sobbing for his children because he was unaware of what was happening to them at the time. They asked if he had money to give them if they brought him his kids from outside the gate. The cost was agreed upon by the parties (100,000 shillings). When they arrived with the kids, the garage owner opened the gate, let them in, then shut it again, leaving the group outside. However, because he had blown everything, Arthur did not have the money. His cell phones had also been stolen. To force their way inside, the mob began to bang on the gate. Armoured military vehicles drove through the streets, firing in the air and hurling tear gas canisters before they were able to open the metal gate. After some time, the mob dispersed. The remainder of the day was spent by Arthur and his kids being stranded within the garage. Around 5:00 PM in the evening, a group of young guys who had all spent some time in the locked garage where Arthur had sought safety offered to accompany him and his kids home in exchange for 100,000 shillings. He agreed to take the risk despite the fact that rioting was raging in most parts of Kampala. The sheer number of protestors overpowered the military and other security personnel, he thought. The instructions they gave him said that he was not to speak a single word throughout, as doing so would result in his death. He could not fool any one that he is a Muganda, as evidenced by his Luganda accent. While the party was guarding Arthur and making their way to Najjanankumbi, Kampala was still in a state of chaos with rioters making noise everywhere. The group walked while guarding Arthur and carrying the kids on their shoulders. They would yell, "Musajja wa

Kabaka wuno bamukubye,” whenever they came to a roadblock set up by one of the numerous rioters they saw along the trip. “Tubadde tulwana naye bano baana be.” “This is our own with whom we have been fighting, but he has been beaten and these are his children,” is how it may be translated. Then they would be permitted to proceed and they used the same till they arrived at Arthur’s house. He gave them money and even promised to have his car delivered. They said, however, that they were unable to bring it that day because a body was lying next to it. They waited until the body had been removed before pushing the car to Arthur’s house.

Experiences of the witnesses of the 2009 up rise indicate the rioters massive and valorizing the Ganda identity. Simon is a Muganda, born and raised in Buganda but he could not recite the ancestral lineage. He did not even try it because he knew he would not pass the test to the satisfaction of the rioters and so, had to demonstrate that he is part of the contestation before he would pass the roadblocks. In Arthur’s view, even the boys who would perhaps pass the test were not even given the opportunity to do so. They were not the target. The target was this man who was driving and perhaps imagined in a given class- one of the beneficiaries of the current government. The rioters were using Luganda language and ancestral lineage not to assert a kind of cultural hegemony, but to make political statements. Also, the contested area in the 2009 crisis was Bugerere, and as the leader of the Banyala (Sabanyala Kimeze) questioned, why were people rioting in Kampala, yet Bugerere was calm³⁷. Indeed, the riots in Buganda had nothing to do with the Kabaka’s interrupted visit to Kayunga. The locals, produced by circumstances of a post-colonial state, start up a popular protest to agitate for right of the Kabaka because they think that with a kingdom, they can access the center of power from which they can demand a few things to better their socio-economic welfare. That is why they are willing to fully involve in this machination political project. In other words, they want an institution that they can access.

Along the way, the elite aligned with the locals in the struggle. So, the struggle was for the elite as well. Because their agency was to challenge the state, the tensions ensued. The demand comes from the fear that Buganda is a kingdom, which is deliberately being weakened by the state. They also believe that their emancipation is in its kingdom. The kingdom should be strong and its strength is in numbers. The other fear comes from the perception that these periodic secessions that the government presides over are meant to weaken their kingdom. According some observers, Buganda’s suspicion is that the central government is pushing for Banyala and other groups’ sessions.³⁸ They thus contend that “it is apparent that there is an ongoing project to undermine and break up the kingdom of Buganda.”³⁹ This was majorly because it was along the way hijacked by the elite Baganda and non-Baganda. They formed a nationalist group to contest the power of the state. That is why a number of voices attest to the fact that there has been a long-standing enmity between the central government and Buganda kingdom. That the state is trying to separate Bugerere from Buganda and that is why the government was backing up Banyala in the conflict. “The government is trying to chop off bit by bit Buganda, sort of to weaken.”⁴⁰ To him, the Banyala were not involved but it was the government that planned and staged the protest. Also, “there are people interested

³⁷ Kimeze is quoted in Matthias Mugisha, “Ssabanyala ready to hold talks with Buganda,” New Vision, Friday September 11, 2009.

³⁸ John Nagenda, “What shall we do with Uganda?” The New Vision, September 12, 2009.

³⁹ Medard Lubega, the Buganda acting information minister then, is quoted in Fred Muzaale and Robert Mwanje, “Tension Builds in Kayunga,” Daily Monitor, Kampala, September 8, 2009.

⁴⁰ Owekitimbwa Isreal Mayendo, former minister without portfolio in the Katikiro of buganda’s office, in a televised interview on NBS television.

in Bugerere, not Banyala.” These voices are claiming that the government is supports of Bunyala as an autonomous chiefdom, defying its own constitution that states that Bugerere is a county of Buganda. That is why Buganda agitates for a constitutional review because the 1993 constitution does not clearly state the position of Buganda as well as other kingdoms. Buganda alleges that the central state does not solve Buganda’s problem- need for a federal relationship between Buganda and Uganda.⁴¹ To Buganda, federate means “a federal system in which the regional government of Buganda is headed by the Kabaka (King).”⁴²

The elite spearhead Buganda’s agency of cordoning off the place so that ‘non-Buganda’ do not have political rights in Buganda. The institution claims dominance over other kingdoms in Uganda, having taken that top position from Bunyoro from the 15th century⁴³. Buganda also continues to assert its desire for self-determination and so the need to keep her boundaries defined. That is why, when it comes to the Bugerere matter, she claims that Bugerere was one of the counties annexed to Buganda even before the colonialists got involved in the region's politics. That the 1900 agreement was merely a confirmation of what had already been accomplished many years before. As a result, the king's scheduled visit to one of his holdings in 2009 was routine, and the Banyala who occupy the cattle corridor in some parts of the county cannot claim sovereignty of the entire territory. Elite Buganda saw the king’s detention by the state as an opening to contest the state’ sovereignty. In the case of the 2009 Buganda riots, a fight that began between Baganda and Banyala, with the latter considering themselves independent of the former, developed into a question of Baganda against ‘non-Buganda’ under the *tambula nga omuganda* slogan. Consequently, they deploy culture whereby cultural language serves to seal off access to politics in a restricted domain in the context of political modernity. The employment of the language of culture is to cordon off access to politics in a closed domain in a context of political modernity. Only the Baganda have the right to participate politically. There is no question of majority vs minority here. It is not about the place of minority is this and the sovereignty of the majority is that. It is not about that. It is simply an assertion that one particular identity- Baganda belongs and has the right to participate in the politics of Buganda. By excluding some people from their struggle for power, the Ganda nationalists are also reproducing political minorities, something they are critiquing the central government for. The politicization of identity had a bigger political goal: contending the governance of Buganda kingdom.

Buganda’s agency is also an advocacy for power sharing or decentralization and the basis is a kingdom. This is a suggestion that has risen from Buganda and not any other kingdom⁴⁴. There is more evidence to clarify that. Recording voices of people that compelled him to comment on the situation, a one Opiyo Olaya, *New Vision* columnist, recorded a number of reasons that some voices raised as the reasons people hit the streets of Kampala and other areas within the cultural ‘boundaries’ of Buganda with the will to kill or be killed. The columnist writes that “... the problem was never about the Kabaka going to address the youth in Kayunga, or that the Banyala were reluctant to grant him access to his people. The riot, many of the readers wrote, was simply the tip of the larger iceberg that threatens the current NRM government.”⁴⁵ Mainstream media has continued to describe Buganda nationalism as an expression of

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Moses Mulondo, “Kabaka to visit northern Uganda,” *Sunday vision*, September 27, 2009.

⁴³ Mayiga, *Buganda Ku Ntikko*, 21.

⁴⁴ Mayiga, *Buganda ku Ntikko*.

⁴⁵ Oloya Opiyo, “The riots were not about Kabaka Mutebi and Kayunga,” *New Vision*, September 11, 2009.

dominance. A commentator in *The Daily Monitor* once wrote that the greatness that the Baganda sing about in their anthem is perceived as one of domination and humiliation of other ethnicities in Uganda as well as greatness. This is at the expense of other ethnicities in Uganda⁴⁶. That they are the largest ethnic group who existed from time immemorial and so require an ethnic recognition of its independent existence- federal state in order to liberate themselves from the present predicament of being politically dominated⁴⁷. Kalundi Serumaga, another communist in *The Daily Monitor*, put it frankly: Buganda is an ethnic nationalist entity, driving an ethnic nationalist movement. It is using ethnic identity as an argument for greater orderly guaranteed inclusion.⁴⁸ Buganda's nationalism, as Sserumaga rightly calls it, that became explosive in 2009, is a manifestation of today's politics in Buganda. It is an assertion of oneness with no minority. None whatsoever. Kampala was the epicenter of the riots since it is one of the hotspots in the desire for Federo, where Buganda wants it to be a part of Buganda. When a group of researchers presented a proposal on behalf of The Kingdom of Buganda to the Uganda Constitutional Review Commission, one of the contentions was that Kampala should be constitutionally recognized as part of Buganda kingdom and they presented a number of reasons for that demand. One of them is that "Kampala District consists of the most important and most cherished traditional and cultural sites, which actually make Buganda. Among these are: the Kasubi Tombs where several Buganda kings are entombed; Lubiri, Kabaka's traditional official residence; Bulange, the seat of Buganda administration; the Butikkiro; Kabaka's Lake, an important traditional site; Mujaguzo Palace at Kabowa; Kalinda Well an important traditional water fountain for the Kabaka and several traditional functions in Buganda. There are other several important traditional sites in Kampala."⁴⁹ The federo struggle is a struggle for self-determination of Baganda. It partly defines its nationalism. One of the political statements that Baganda nationalists make in the 2009 uprising is Buganda's demand for political power. Their hope is in the kingdom as an emancipatory entity in the quest for decentralization of political power- "sharing power and responsibilities between the central government and regional governments."⁵⁰ The question of whether the kingdom (s) has that liberatory power or not shall be returned to later in the discussion. This is historical. Buganda kingdom intended to dominate political spaces such as Constituent Assembly (CA) so that her delegates can fight for "Buganda's package". During the 1993 election campaigns for CA seats, Hajji Mohamed Kateregga, a then member of Buganda's Lukiiko and head of the cultural representatives to the council is quoted to have sent a message to the contestants as thus:

Buganda doesn't need people with ranks spotted with high-sounding academic qualifications; say 20 degrees to represent her in CA. We need persons who can fight for federalism, land and balance of power in favour of Buganda. And these causes can only be championed by persons who have Buganda at heart, not those who have made fortunes from political institutions.⁵¹

More radically, the Lukiiko member stated that:

The delegates have to fight tooth and nail to secure our survival as a kingdom. If they fail to articulate successfully our eight key issues, like the maintenance of the status quo on land issues, recognition of

⁴⁶ "Buganda Nationalism 'written' in its Anthem," Daily Monitor, July 21, 2013.

⁴⁷ This is reflected in the press release by the then Buganda Prime Minister, J.B Walusimbi, that followed the events on 10th September, 2009.

⁴⁸ Kalundi Sserumaga, "Bobi's NUP, Buganda and tribalism," Daily Monitor, August 26, 2020.

⁴⁹ A report titled "The main issues to be presented to the Uganda Constitutional review commission" by Buganda Kingdom.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Henry Bayego, "Crisis if Buganda loses in CA- official warns," The Monitor, December 14-17, 1993.

Buganda as a federal state etc., that would be the end of their political career, and no doubt their homes would be ransacked.” (ibid)

Whether these were personal thoughts or they represented the views of Buganda as a whole does not matter. The struggle is in context.

The fusion between Ganda culture and nationalist ideology, which greatly demonstrates what happened in Buganda in 2009, has happened before and will likely happen, as the trend analysed indicated. The articulation is important in pointing at the use of culture as a means to push a political agenda. The agenda is to build a nation, a nation that shall operate separately from the central state. A Eurocentric analysis advances a notion that nationalism at a national level, which is always the case with West, has political advances. The analysis states that when a movement is organized by an ethnic group, which is always the case with East, it is a mere unification by some cultural commonality and lacks a political thrust. The former, just like its discourse in, for instance, the works of Locke, emerged in modern West in the enlightenment epoch as a people rose to question government power and demand civil rights and the latter emerged in other less politically advanced areas as a cultural movement in cultural elements such as poetry.⁵² Such a perspective has been challenged. The fusion between politics of nationalism in formerly colonized contexts has been described as a means to an end. Culture is reconstructed in advancing nationalist thought. Actually, for scholars on nationalism in the colonial context, the fusion is between culture and nationalism (thought and practice) and power. Nationalist thought in the colonial context, which started as an anti-colonial thought was selective and deliberate to oppose a given rule- colonial rule but it had to find justification of having people on board. It aimed at creating a nation much as it was using tools of culture, both indigenous and borrowed from the West. Anti-colonial nationalism used culture as concrete means to pursue abstract political ends. In the non-Western world nationalism mobilized behind cultural elements such as art, architecture, music, philosophy among others, through discourses. Nationalism has political ambitions if a close look is paid to the relationship between thought, culture and power. Partha Chatterjee argues, therefore, that nationalist discourse should be located in the discourse of power and hence acknowledging the relationship between culture and power. The political content of nationalist thought is undeniable and doing so implies overlooking the political location of nationalist thought.⁵³ However, three main pitfalls are observable in the present-day nationalist struggles.

One is on the history of the making of these kingdoms. Nationalists are using culture to restore the old structures as they argue that “from the very foundation of the country, Uganda was a federation of the kingdom states of Ankole, Buganda, Bunyoro, Toro, the Territory of Busoga and the other non-kingdom states that make up the rest of Uganda”⁵⁴. So, it is a struggle for the position of traditional institutions, using culture. Culture is a tool for political end and the nationalist thought in the non-Western world mobilized behind cultural elements such as art, architecture, music, philosophy among others, through discourses.⁵⁵ This line of thought is in line with Fanon’s articulation on culture as a powerful tool for anti-colonial politics. Fanon views culture as a significant political tool in the struggle for freedom but only possible if a national culture is forged and also when culture is viewed, not as folklore or abstract

⁵² See, Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State*, 35-36.

⁵³ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

⁵⁴ This is extracted from a report titled: “The main Issues to be presented to the Uganda Constitution Review Commission presented by the kingdom of Buganda. it is compiled by anonymous researchers on Buganda and signed by Buganda kingdom top officials

⁵⁵ Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*.

populism that claims a discovery of people's true nature but "the whole body of efforts made by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify, and praise the action through which that people has created itself and keeps itself in existence"⁵⁶. For Buganda, some nationalists want to refer to the colonial history of Uganda and recount thus: "Each of the kingdom states entered into an agreement with the British colonial Government to give up their respective independence to join a new federal state known as Uganda, on terms spelt out in the respective protection Agreements. In the case of Buganda, this was under the 1900 Buganda Agreement."⁵⁷ However, if Buganda was built by integrating new entrants into the territory, as her political history suggests, on what grounds does it start to cordon off Buganda? The politicization of cultural difference, as seen in the 2009 protest, is partly owing to Buganda's incapacity to integrate non-Bagandas today in order to safeguard its borders if Federo's wish is granted. Buganda's agency fails to go beyond colonial essentialized identities.

The second issue this struggle for nation-building raises is on the composition of the struggle. How do the local emerge? If the locals are produced by circumstances- of joblessness, hunger, poverty, etc., what about the elite (such as members of parliament) in the same struggle? Looking at the components of the 2009 agitations, the elite are trying to package for the people- need for power of the kingdom, but also the locals are willing to fully involve in this machination political project. For what gains are they involved? For the locals, they know that with a kingdom, they can negotiate for a few things. They want an institution that they can access. Like Gramsci's (1999) traditional intellectuals, the agency of the elite rises from the same realm of power. They are made by the state they are critiquing and so they remain its subjects. Also, they claim that power from the central state, yet the central state is the first-class representative of the modern state. The central state can only give them power that will make them its emissaries. In the end, the demands they make can only allow them to operate outside the central state but they are not escaping the state for they are operating within the structure of the modern colonial state-nation state structure.

Lastly, traditional institutions' decolonizing potential is limited by the nature of their agency. Certainly, states have historically developed from kingdoms, which also have emancipatory authority. Arguably, Akan state is a political kingdom that was founded on a union of matrilineages and matrilineages that gave rise to a kingdom. They emerged from a fluid social amalgamation.⁵⁸ The kingdoms that we have and continue to be formed in contemporary Uganda are ethnic kingdoms. They, therefore, end up in ethnic politics of doing away with those they deem non-native to the area. The politicization of cultural difference and the creation of ethnic homelands is a logic of a modern state that the post-colonial state has failed to overcome.⁵⁹

Also, cultural dominance and federal liberty might not be enough unless the socio-economic situation improves. This is because those who advocate for these movements, the rioters, have not looked into the core causes of the complaints they express. For example, they are blaming the ruling government for discriminating against non-western ethnic groups, unemployment and the resulting disenchantment, nepotism, corruption, and a slew of other socio-economic issues. When Museveni is no longer in power, the blame will fall on whoever is in power at the time.

⁵⁶ Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 188.

⁵⁷ The main issues to be presented to the Uganda constitution Review Commission presented by the kingdom of Buganda.

⁵⁸ Ivor Wilks, "Forests of Gold: Essays on the Akan and the Kingdom of Asante," Ohio University Press, 1993.

⁵⁹ Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject* & Sseremba, "Ethnic emancipation and conflict escalation in Uganda."

Where does the problem come from? Is Buganda accusing the right perpetrator of its present predicament? Is the solution an ethnic federal liberation? For instance, when people of Rwenzururu fought for the kingdom and got their autonomy, it did not give them political and socio-economic progress. They did not gain what they had imagined and that is partly why the area is experiencing continuous secessions, as Sseremba notes.⁶⁰

2019 Protest in Mbarara

Just like the Buganda incident, the Ankole one mobilized behind culture and the claimed symbol was a cow monument, which was old and dilapidated that the city administration decided to replace with a 'modern' fashion to refashion the city. The Ankole campaign was defined by "we want our cow" slogan. The demand is that the removal of the cow monument is an indicator of destruction of Mbarara's identity, culture, and tradition. The arbitrary relationship between the abstract issues of identity, culture and tradition and a cow monument simply implies that what the protest points to is more than a mere agitation for a sculpture. Through the protest, nationalist emotions were aired, and the demonstration acted as a vehicle for a people to voice their desire to have their kingdom restored. Hence the claim that, when considered in the context of Ankole's sociopolitical history, the protest's characteristics are inexorably connected to the rising calls for the restoration of the kingdom since 1993.

The call for restoration of Ankole comes as a counter response to the previous nationalist voices that rejected the restoration of Ankole in 1971. As, already hinted earlier, Obote banned traditional institutions in 1966. When Idi Amin Dada overthrew him and assumed power in January 1971, there were agitations for restoration of traditional institutions. Amidst this agitation, a group of people from Ankole who identified themselves as Elders of Ankole, wrote a letter to President Amin in which they suggested that the President should not consider the restoration of traditional institutions, citing among other things their divisive nature and their ability to revive factionalism. They argue that these are limitations in building a "United Sovereign 'Nation'".⁶¹

However, immediately after the kingdoms of Buganda, Toro, Busoga and Bunyoro had received a green light about the restoration of their respective kingdoms in 1993, Ankole did not hesitate to submit its request for the same. However, on many occasions, the state has asserted that people of Ankole have not expressed interest in the institution. The controversy, coupled with a number restoration demands makes Ankole Kingship's restoration issue contentious. The controversy can be understood in two major ways. The first is that it has divided people of Ankole into two factions whereby one is advocating the restoration and has been referred to as 'pro-Bugabe' faction and the one that contends the restoration can be referred to as the 'anti-Bugabe' faction. The pro-Bugabe has formed an institution called Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT). Its counterpart, Banyankore Cultural Foundation (BCF). The activities of the two cultural formations are key in pointing out key contentions in the Ankole question. How should we understand the variance in the demands of the two cultural formations in Ankole? While BCF prefers to preserve cultural aspects like language and sites over a kingdom with political institutions, NCT calls for

⁶⁰ see, Sseremba, "The Making and Remaking of "Native Tribes" in Uganda's Toro Kingdom," (*Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, 25, no.3, (2019): 311-328.

⁶¹ See, Martin R. Doornbos (1978), *Not all the King's Men: Inequality as a Political Instrument in Ankole, Uganda*, Appendix: "Memorandum by the Elders of Ankole to the President, General Idi Amin Dada, On Restoration of Kingdoms."

the restoration of the Ankole kingdom in order to achieve the same for Banyankore culture. Does the variance in their demands create any difference in the emancipation they envision?

On August 23, 1993, a delegation from Ankole, led by its patron Prince John Barigye, walked to the president's office and in a meeting with President Museveni, they asked him to consider restoring of Ankole kingdom. The delegation had come under an umbrella of Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT), and as asserted by its chairman, its mission was “purely to revive the culture of the Banyankore”⁶² but this requires unity for all Banyankore and the Obugabe (Ankole kingship) is a key factor in achieving this unity.⁶³ The agency of NCT is, therefore, to restore culture and that the Obugabe is not just part of it, but the custodian of Ankole culture and so should be restored for both cultural heritage⁶⁴ as well as restoring sovereignty of the ‘nation’ of Ankole.⁶⁵ This objective is in line with the 1993 amended constitution statute. Ankole advocated for the restoration of Obugabe (Ankole kingship), along with the other communities that had once been kingdoms. However, the president advised the group to go and make wide-range consultations among Banyankore on the issue. The task was to gather opinions of the populace of Ankole about the restoration of Obugabe.

Disregarding the resolutions of the August meeting with the president, NCT organized a coronation ceremony of the then prince John Barigye, son of the previous Omugabe Gasyonga II as the heir of his father's throne of Ankole. He was crowned “Omugabe Rubambansi Ntare VI on 20th November, 1993. The coronation was done at the burial site so that both funeral rites for the last king of Ankole- Gasyonga II, who was the father to the Barigye, and reinstate as the former as the heir of his father), which is the symbol of power for the Omugabe. It was, however, done without the royal drum, Bagyendanwa, which was believed to be kept at the Uganda National Museum but its absence could not stop the crowning of the king.⁶⁶

Whether members of NCT did conduct any consultations or not, the coronation was done before they gave feedback to the president. So, the state had not okayed the coronation of the Omugabe in question. The function was organized and carried out by NCT. The invitation letters that were sent out invited guests to a function to commemorate the death of the previous king, Sir Charles Gasyonga.⁶⁷ It was performed at Nkonkonjeru royal tombs in Mbarara before they proceeded to Ruharo Cathedral where both prayers for the late king and the newly crowned king were held.

The church and the state were supposed to preside over the ceremony and because the latter had already lost interest in the kingship and so did not sanction it, the former did not want to conflict with the state.⁶⁸ It was instead presided over by a Muslim- Sheik Rashid Kaduyu and done from Nkokonjeru burial⁶⁹. Officials from the state who attended- Gen. Elly Tumwiine and Gen. Tinyefuza as well as church leaders- Rev. Canon John Rujoki and Rev. Canon Sam Ruhunda, did so in opposition and contestation of the

⁶² Anonymous writer, “Rwakitura: To Crown or Not to Crown,” The New Vision, December 15, 1993.

⁶³ Interview: Kesi Bunanukye (Publicity secretary of NCT), Kashaari-Mbarara.

⁶⁴ George-William Katatumba, in conversation with the researcher, Ruti in Mbarara District, August 21, 2021. Katatumba is the current enganzi of the defunct Ankole kingdom and the chairman of Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT). He was appointed to the position by Prince Barigye and continues to claim the position even when both Barigye and the kingdom are no more.

⁶⁵ Lukas Kyankaga at Rwampara, in conversation with the researcher, Rwampara, August 20, 2021.

⁶⁶ Sam Mukalazi & Enoch Ahimbisibwe, “Barigye crowned,” The New vision, November 22, 1993.

⁶⁷ Anonymous writer, “Rwakitura: To Crown or Not to Crown,” The New Vision, December 15, 1993.

⁶⁸ Rev. Canon Mutabazi Simon, in conversation with the researcher, Nkokonjeru, Mbarara, August 16, 2021.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

state's position on the matter. What that implies is that the coronation of the would-be king Barigye was both expedited and contested.

Having been conducted at the Royal graveyard, the state perceived it as a clandestinely done and so did not reflect the views of Banyankore. "It was as if they were brewing illicit beer."⁷⁰ The president also uttered that even if what Barigye did was lawful, that law can be reviewed by the legislature. In other words, the law does not defend him if people are opposed to what he did. However, the media reported that the ceremony was attended by a huge crowd at Nkonkojeru, and according to the chairman of NCT, James Kahigiriza, the president was invited for the coronation ceremony but to their dismay, he did not turn up.⁷¹

It is further noted that the very period of agitation for Obugabe was a period the constitutional review process of 1993 was ongoing. Particularly prior to the enactment of the Cultural institutions Act of Uganda, the state asked different kingdoms to state their positions on the restoration of their respective kingdoms. According to President Yoweri Museveni, the 1993 bill on traditional rulers was intended to remove barriers so that groups that wish to have their rulers back can suggest so. Unlike other councils of regions like central Uganda that presented their ardent desire to have their Buganda kingdom restored, the councils of the three districts that formed Ankole sub-region (Bushenyi, Mbarara and Ntungamo) at the time of drafting the 1995 constitution presented a proposal in which they opposed the restoration of the monarchy, as per the Government statement on 5th December that: "All the three District Councils of Mbarara, Bushenyi and Ntungamo read their memoranda rejecting the purported coronation of Prince Barigye as Omugabe of Ankole on November 20th, 1993."⁷² The districts were represented by their respective District resistance council (RC5) members. In the first place, it is not clear whether the RCs had consulted with the Banyankore populace before presenting their views to the Constitutional Review Commission. However, the statement that the state issued regarding Ankole was that the two districts (Mbarara and Ntungamo) had rejected the Obugabe. The Bushenyi memorandum even further declared the district out of bounds for the Mugabe."⁷³ This was so because Bushenyi, which was formerly Igara kingdom whose kingship was Obukama before it was forced into a merger that formed Ankole district at the onset of colonial rule in the region, as discussed in chapter three of this thesis. Therefore, Ankole's advocacy and effort to restore itself as a kingdom was frustrated on the pretext that people were not interested in the institution.

Basing on both the activities of NCT and then the districts' memoranda, President Museveni convened a meeting on December 4, 1993 at his home in Rwakitura-Kiruhura which he termed as the consultation meeting since the members who had interested themselves in the matter (NCT) had not done so. The sole objective of the meeting was to gather people's opinions on the Obugabe issue. It was to give platform to the people of Ankole to decide whether they want the kingdom or not. Attendees were therefore 'opinion' leaders—representatives and member of parliaments from the three districts in Ankole then and top religious leaders (members of the Joint Christian Council)—so that the matter might be decided

⁷⁰ Sheila Kawamara, "Museveni rejects Barigye Coronation," New Vision, December 8, 1993.

⁷¹ Sam Mukalazi, "Rwakitura meeting rejects coronation," New Vision, November 6, 1993.

⁷² Sam Mukalazi, "Rwakitura meeting rejects coronation," New Vision, December 6, 1993.

⁷³ Ibid.

‘democratically,’ as is his ‘government's principle’ other than just imposing kingship on a people that had even never asked him to restore it as other kingdoms like Buganda, Bunyoro had done.⁷⁴

However, the meeting registered some controversies. In the first place, there were two indicators for the rejection of the kingdom. The councilors that had represented their respective district councils presented a memorandum to the president in which they still stood by their proposal which contributed to the draft constitution. They assured the congregation that they had made consultations with the populace of their respective districts which had contended the restoration of the kingdoms. Actually, for Bushenyi, the RC5 Yowas Makaru said that even if the people of Bushenyi would want the monarch, they would not be part of Ankole. They would choose from their own people who was to be their ruler. He insinuated that the people of Bushenyi would be agitating for restoration of Igara kingdom if they wanted a kingdom anyway. After all, according to their cultural norms, a Mugabe does not cross any water body and so their king would not cross river Koga to come to Mbarara.⁷⁵ However, Makaru's submission was challenged by the Muslims leader, Sheikh Kaduyu who assured the meeting that NCT did make consultations with the populace of Igara, whose side was actually of restoring the kingdom. The second indicator is that when a vote was cast after the meeting, almost all attendees voted against the restoration, with exception of the two Army Generals who had even attended Barigye's coronation as some National resistance council members who abstained from voting (these were to later attend another meeting with the president the following day). Therefore, the fate of the kingdom was determined then. However, all hope was not gone as per the president's conclusive remarks. There is no need to hurry, the president assured the congregation, as Ankole is well-known and has her people in many areas such as Tanzania. He reassured them that they should wait because it will happen if it is meant to.

The meeting did not only reject the restoration of the kingdom but also resolved to annul Barigye's coronation and the bottom line was that “the President disagreed with Barigye's coronation.” The president, just like he was accused of boycotting Barigye's coronation, wondered why Barigye had boycotted the meeting yet he was invited.

It is imperative to look into the process by which the voting was conducted. In the first place the majority of the attendees of the meeting were state officials, and so they knew the position of the state. They knew that the president was not interested in the kingship. For example, all delegates from Mbarara district had a meeting prior to meeting the president and agreed to have the “same” voice. The nature of the voting arranged was that representatives from the district stand up in turns. When they stood the president announced that those who opposed the Bugabe should sit and only those that want the institution should keep up. Each group would have not more than two people remain standing.⁷⁶

Also, besides the two generals who voted for restoration, was a member of National Resistance Council (NRC) of Kashari. He too showed signs of supporting the pro-Obugabe's faction in his submission at the meeting that the meeting should bear the law in mind. The minister's contention was on the bill about traditional leaders. He argued that If the clause says that “if the community so wishes to have their king back” and does not specify the number of people required in the clause, then why not let the Omugabe be since at least a certain number of people expressed their interest. However, hardly had he finished his

⁷⁴Rt. Bishop Elijah Kyamugambi (Bishop emeritus of Ankole Dioecese, Mbarara. He is one of the attendees of the 1993 Rwakitura meeting on Restoration of Ankole Kingdom), in conversation with the researcher, Mbarara City, August 12, 2021.

⁷⁵Ibid.

⁷⁶ Kyamugambi, interview.

submission when the president interrupted and reminded the minister that “the law is like butter which is put on bread to soften it but not to just eat the butter. Otherwise, you could eat bread without butter”⁷⁷ Museveni’s analogy is meant to point to the fact that the law is not above people’s ‘opinions’ and as he said earlier, it could be amended accordingly.

With resolutions from the two meetings, the state’s counter response in contending Obugabe of Barigye released a statement that nullified the coronation of Barigye. In the statement, the position of the state was that the people who conducted the coronation did not adhere to the July, 1993 Constitution Statue, which provides that a kingdom status is granted to a community for which a person is to be ruler wishes so. It also states that both the traditional institution and ruler should exist in accordance to the culture, customs and traditions of those people. Referring to the bill and the resolutions of the meeting between the president and members of NCT, the state declared the coronation of Ankole king null and void.⁷⁸

The second response was the nullification of the coronation for the second time. This time in a press conference by President Museveni himself. He held a five-hour press conference where he officially nullified the coronation of John Barigye as the Omugabe (king) of Ankole. Speaking in the capacity of the ‘High Command’, the president went ahead and instructed the police force to act in case Barigye goes “around Ankole parading as a Mugabe.”⁷⁹ Museveni further states that even if the Barigye contested the government’s stand in the courts of law, and the law was on his side, it would be politically wrong because he is still imposing himself on people that do not want him. “Even if the law says so, me Museveni as the ‘Ssabagabe’ and with my managerial capacity, I think it would be correct to consult the people. And if the law is there, it can be reviewed by the legislature.”⁸⁰ This is followed by a warning from the president himself that whoever thinks of violence shall be ‘handled’. By that, the president implied that the state is above traditional institutions and so the president is above the kings – “Ssabagabe”. The central state has the power to alter the law to suit the stand of the entire state. What is lawful can be politically wrong. Whether this was a joke from the President or not, some Banyankore believe that Museveni is the Omugabe of Ankole himself and so Ankole cannot have two of them at the same time.⁸¹ The state did not only refuse to sanction the coronation of Barigye but (also) delegitimized it on pretext that people of Ankole are not interested in it and that the kingship (obugabe) was a polarizing institution in Ankole.⁸²

A counter response came from NCT board of trustees, who expressed their dissatisfaction with the resolutions of the Rwakitura meeting. In response to what transpired in the meeting, the board issued a statement regarding the dissolution of the kingship of Ankole. They state that in the first place, the views of the RCs of the three districts are in no way the views of the people of Ankole. Also, to the board, “They were rigged (views) as in the case of Mbarara and were made under undue influence... nothing has taken place to change the fact that the Ankole kingdom exists and it has a Mugabe Ntare VI who was properly crowned in November, 1993.”⁸³ The board further questions the state’s power to nullify the coronation or

⁷⁷ Ofwono-Opondo, “Rwakitura meeting: What went on,” Sunday Vision, December, 12, 1993.

⁷⁸ see, Anonymous Vision reporter, “Coronation nullified,” The New Vision, November 23, 1993.

⁷⁹ Sheila Kawamara, “Barigye Coronation rejected.”

⁸⁰ *ibid.* p.2.

⁸¹ Christopher Mayindo, in conversation with the researcher, Sanga, August 12, 2021.

⁸² Kabasongora, Mariam, “Prince Barigye’s Home Sealed Off.”

⁸³ Sam Mukalazi, “Meeting irks Nkore Trust” The New Vision, Monday, December 13, 1993.

the institution of the Omugabe of Ankole, contending that the law of Uganda and customs of Ankole do not empower the government, the district RCs or any politician to do so.⁸⁴

Furthermore, at the meeting and thereafter, there were individuals who challenged Museveni's interpretation of the bill. They argued that the bill did not specify on the number of people of that community who would wish for the monarch. They also questioned why Ankole case should be an exception if the communities that previously had kingdoms had been allowed to install their kings. They further challenged the idea of the consultation meetings, asserting that kings are born and so the Omugabe does not need to go for a campaign or wage a rebellion for him to be installed. Lastly, they said that it is not politicians to decide the fate of the kingdom.⁸⁵

A counter response from the pro-Obugabe faction manifested in another meeting that the President chaired at Rwakitura two days after the first one. This time the president invited religious leaders, elders, members of the Resistance Councils (RCs) and the Constituent Members (CMs) from counties of Nyabushozi and Kazo of Mbarara. The president re-invited this group because pro-Obugabe voices had come from the two counties. Even in the 6th December meeting, the group still showed their position that they wanted the kingdom, in as much as they are supporters of the ruling government (NRM). This is ardent support for the Obugabe, which came from counties that are regarded as Bahima counties.

As hinted earlier, other than the top command, there is a cultural formation that opposes restoration of Obugabe. Provoked by the formation and activities of NCT, Banyankore Cultural Foundation (BCF) was formed to contest any effort to restore Obugabe of Ankole. Unlike its counterpart NCT, which has its roots from the Ankole, the BCF was born in the central region of the urban elites who trace their roots in Ankole. The association stated that "its formation has been prompted by what they termed "distortion" of the Kinyankore culture by NCT. Its agenda is anti-monarchism as it points to "promote an all-round democratic culture and oppose monarchical culture in Ankole which is oppressive, divisive and sectarian."⁸⁶ Its activism was manifested in December, 1993 when a group of over three hundred people from Ankole (Banyankore), who live in the central region (Kampala, Entebbe and Jinja) gathered at Kitante primary school in Kampala and performed a protest. The gathering in Kampala demanded a public apology from Barigye for his clandestine coronation as Omugabe, which they claimed was done without their consent. The demand for an apology by the protesters was hijacked by the BCF which passed it as a resolution for the foundation. "Barigye should come and apologize, we are not fools," fumed one of the protesters. The protesters further argued that the restoration of the kingdoms of Buganda, Toro and Bunyoro did not mean that kingship/kingdom was automatically acceptable to the Banyankore.⁸⁷

BCF bases its claims on the divisive nature of the institution. They claim that the interethnic division within their ethnic group, a division that had fostered formation of a class system, and it is this class system—a kind of caste system—that had placed the Bahinda as rulers on top of the other two groups, the Bahima and Bairu. This faction is allegedly having an influence on the state's actions and the state hinged on that to nullify the coronated Barigye. It asserts thus:

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Mayindo, interview.

⁸⁶ Ndyakira Amooti, "Ankole Forum to meet," *New Vision*, December, 14, 1993.

⁸⁷ Francis Mutazindwa, "Barigye resigns," *The New Vision*, December 17, 1993.

The incidence of religious and ethnic tension is higher in Mbarara than elsewhere and those of us who have led Mbarara peacefully are vigilant against anything that will bring back that bad smell of sectarianism.⁸⁸

Media also cites the fact that the central government fears the demands that shall come from the dissolved kingdoms when Ankole was being forged by colonialists⁸⁹. Some historians' articulations naturalize polarized Ankole. For instance, writing in the post-colonial context, Kahigiriza vividly describes the tensions- he calls them drama- between Bairu Bahima. With barely any attempt to look into the pre-colonial context, Kahigiriza argues that the polarization of the dichotomy between Bahima and Bairu started in 1946 in several institutions, such as school, church and *Ishengyero* (Ankole kingdom council).

Against that back ground, the state has continually rejected proposals for the restoration of Ankole. One can therefore portend that even the failure of the restoration of Ankole kingdom is a top-down phenomenon. The state views Ankole kingship (Obugabe) as an institution that will promote tribalism and division and so was rejected by the 'High Command'.⁹⁰

From the above accounts, the major division in Ankole is between the two cultural formations, which have clear historical origins. The interesting thing lies in their composition. The BCF is made of elite, urban based and Bairu while NCT are majorly Bahima and those whose ancestors were chiefs such as Katatumba.⁹¹ The division is also historical and has manifested in several ways. We have seen how it evolved from colonial discourses. A discussion about its manifestation in late colonial modern and early post-colonial modern contexts shall be engaged with in the next section.

More recently is another group that has called itself Ankore Karo Karungi Cultural Trust. This group has come up to claim that Barigye was not in the royal line and so a one Asimwe, their group leader is. Asimwe calls himself Ntare VI and him and his group have 'grabbed' Itaaba land and occupied it.⁹² NCT petitioned the cultural site grabbing and the court ruled that the grabbers vacate the place. However, up to now, they are still occupying and controlling the site. Members of NCT believe that the state chose to overlook the grabbing of the site in order to frustrate the agency of NCT.⁹³

The state has not only shown disinterest in the restoration of the kingdom, but (also) controls most cultural sites in Ankole and so the nationalist movement is against that. For instance, Burebe which is four Miles (Ahari Ina as the place is presently known) to Mbarara city from Kashaari. It is a stretch along Mbarara-Ibanda and Bwizibwera route in Kashaari now Mbarara district. That is the very place where the Bachwezi founded the kingship in Ankole⁹⁴ and at the same time where the would-be heir to the throne and son to the last king of Ankole, Prince Barigye had set up his palace. In the very premises, the state

⁸⁸ Justine Sabiiti, "Ankole Kingship: Need to move cautiously," Sunday Vision, December 19, 1993.

⁸⁹ Anonymous writer, "Ankole Monarchists' two-decade battle for restoration of kingdom," The Daily Monitor, September 21, 2012.

⁹⁰ see, Sheila Kawamara, "Museveni rejects Barigye coronation," New Vision, December 18, 1993.

⁹¹ Tarsis Kabwegyere, interview. The chapter makes use of the identities of Bairu and Bahima as they come to be used from the colonial period. The categories came to identify the agricultural group and cattle keepers, respectively. They therefore become identities are on ground and imbedded culturally.

⁹² Itaaba is one of Ankole's key cultural sites because according to oral traditions, the royal drum Bagyendanwa was made from a fig tree that was cut at Itaaba in present-day Rwampara. It is also believed that Wamala, the Muchwezi father to Ruhinda (first king of Nkore of the Bahinda dynasty) lived at Itaaba shortly before the dissolution of the Chwezi dynasty.

⁹³ Katatumba, interview.

⁹⁴ Katate & Kamugungunu, *Abagabe b'Ankole I*.

constructed there an airstrip and this followed its refusal to acknowledge the coronation of prince Barigye as the king of Ankole. This has been to the extent that even the royal drum cannot be accessed even from the Museum where it is claimed to be kept. We can therefore say that if the royal regalia and Ankole palace exist, the fact that the public cannot access tells us more about the politics of Ankole. The state has turned the residential house of Eßnganzi in Kamukuzi in Mbarara, just near the Mugabe palace, into a state lodge. The latter has been refashioned by the state- for tourism. NCT claims that its effort to spearhead the campaign for the renovation of Ankole's palace were frustrated by the state. Their agenda was to restore the cultural sites for culture's sake and they actually appreciate the refashioning that the state it,⁹⁵ but the state has a different agenda- the renovated Mugaba palace shall be a cultural site for tourism.

With these demands and contradictions, Ankole only stopped at the threshold of violence. For instance, ten years after the fatal incident in Buganda, a protest erupted there. It happened in Mbarara, the former kingdom of Ankole's capital. Here, a group of people protested the state's removal of a cow sculpture from Mbarara town (now a city) and demanded its reinstatement. When the state, through the local Mbarara government, attempted to give the city a facelift, the old and dilapidated cow monument, which had been known as *Ah'Amahembe G'ente* for a while, was demolished. The project was assigned to the mayor's office. 'City development' was the subject of the project, which required sending a delegation to China to research. The roundabout was redesigned as soon as the delegates arrived with their 'expertise'.

Before that construction was finished, however, a protest broke out. There are noticeable controversies in a people's attempt to make sense of the protest. The contention continues to portray how the polarities in Ankole are still an issue in her demand for a kingdom.

The protesting voices claimed that removing the sculpture, replacing it with contemporary equipment, or even hiding it under 'Chinese' machines would damage Mbarara's identity, culture, and tradition. Others see it as a complete annihilation of Mbarara's identity. They want the 'cow' to be prominently displayed since it is more meaningful to them than the new horn-shaped robots, which have no cultural significance.⁹⁶ They continued to assert that their culture should be preserved and that is why they do not want to "destroy" Obugabe.⁹⁷ Since its erection, the sculpture has on several occasion been refurbished and put back in its rightful place. The only problem with the new look is that the machines put are alien to Ankole culture and the worry is the loss of their identity and kingdom.

In the first place, the monument in question was erected in the place during the colonial epoch and *amahembe g'ente* (which translates to 'cows' horns) by the British colonial government. It was named so because the sculpture that was erected by them were two cow horns.⁹⁸ People claim that during the colonial era, when the colonial state established categories of majority and minority in order to strengthen its control through intra-ethnic divisions, the monument symbolized the Bahima dominance of the Ankole

⁹⁵ Katatumba, interview.

⁹⁶ Paul Agaba (a host to the radio programme on Ankole culture on a Kirihura based radio station), in conversation with the researcher, Kirihura, August 9, 2021.

⁹⁷ Anonymous (contractor of Abu-Baker Technical Services, a company that was contracted to refashion the roundabout): TV West News

⁹⁸ Tumusiime James (Tumusiime describes himself as an advocate of culture. He told me that he founded the Igongo Cultural Center as a protest against the homogenization of Ankole. He is the owner of the center. The variety of artifacts on display at the center illustrates Ankole's diversity.

), in conversation with the researcher, Mbarara, August 22, 2021.

district. However, the horns were removed and replaced by a whole cow sculpture that has been at the center of the town since 1944. It was erected by Rwemijumbi, a Muhinda artist as a symbol of the cattle-rearing community. Today it identifies the entire region, not just the Bahima, because even the Bairu own cattle. That is why rioters were not necessarily Bahima.⁹⁹

Some people assert that protests should be against the kind of homogeneity that such symbols claimed.¹⁰⁰ According to Tumusiime, even when there are common elements of culture among the people of Ankole, sheds of difference should not be overlooked. That is why we see a cow monument of a ‘significant’ cow figure in the history of the area, banana and coffee trees and other cultural items at Ankole’s cultural center such as Igongo Cultural center. Even when categorizations such as Hima versus Iru appear in popular discourses today, the majority minority dichotomy is not the question. The protesters that took part in the 2019 rebellion against the demolition of an antique sculpture were not necessarily pastoralists or ‘Bahima in protection of their identity. Regardless of their Hima or Iru identity, nationalist voices want the culture to be preserved. Even if culture isn’t being employed at the time, the presumption is that it’s critical that its cultural features remain intact. It’s a consciousness that the future is uncertain—claiming a kingdom at a specific moment, for example, is a possibility.

Therefore, the demand for the old look of the roundabout is a rejection of developmentalism of the modern state that post-colonial Uganda is. Developmentalism is viewed as a destruction of culture that is being refashioned with artefacts that are alien to the people. The cow is the identity and so it is a sensitive thing that development should harmonize with cultural and people’s identity. The agency of Ankole is as well a battle with a capitalist state that has been uncritically taken on, which wants to refashion society; give it facial beauty and monetize culture. It is, for instance, saying we are removing the old sculpture in the name of development and so the reaction is against that developmentalism. The aim of the removal by the state on the one hand, the city mayor- Robert Mugabe Kakyebezi explains, was to beautify the roundabout a project that was put to halt when a people contested it.

One of the responses to the beatifying idea is a poem posted on face book. The idea is still that development should harmonise with culture. Below is an extract from the protest poem by a one Gareeba Johnmark:

Last week, news hit Kanshenyi that her sacred place was no more.

Bihogo was finally replaced by something that represented Chinese gods.

Who, if not Bihogo is to affirm her love? Where is her identity? What other thing is left for her long-time love memories”

She now stood at Balya Stint hardware and wondered what is left for her and Trevor. What story was she to tell her children about her first love? She wished the cow be brought back to its original place. In as much as she believed in modernity, she still thought that the pumpkin in the homestead shouldn’t be uprooted. As she couldn’t fathom the idea of the new design, she screamed: “¹⁰¹ RESTORE BIHOGO”

Like the last line of the extract, residents of Mbarara made a protest, which points to the question of identity.

⁹⁹ Paul Agaba, interview.

¹⁰⁰ James Tumusiime, interview.

¹⁰¹ Gareeba Johnmark, “The Crucified Bihogo” Facebook on March 27, 2019.

After a couple of months, some members of the then Mbarara Municipal Council agitated for total removal of the modern machines that are shadowing Ankole culture and dignity as a place that produced milk¹⁰². The state later came out to claim that the intention was never to remove the Ankole cow but to replace the dilapidated sculpture with a new one. The replacement meant putting back the sculpture that represents the indigenous cow species, not the machines.¹⁰³

The fact that a people of Ankole have not protested the renovation of Mugaba, the palace of the defunct Ankole kingdom, which was done by the same state is a confirmation that they are interested in its preservation. The renovations are being done by the Ministry of tourism and so the purpose of the renovation is preserving the palace as a tourism site. The renovation is done by the government and it will be run by government, not kingdom.¹⁰⁴ The idea is to bring back the royal regalia, Bagyendanwa,¹⁰⁵ which was a symbol of power of the king of pre-colonial Nkore but became the symbol of Ankole by default when Ankole was established. People have embraced that because it is an attempt of preservation, not destruction.

However, the conflict now is on who is to be in control of the palace when the renovation is complete or who is collecting the revenue to be generated from there. The two state agencies Mbarara district and Mbarara city are conflicting over control of the cultural site, but it is not yet clear how that revenue is going to be collected, whether as a tourist attraction or a cultural institution. Whatever it will be, the conflict already implies that the cultural site is now beyond culture and Ankole identity is not part of the struggle. It has been postulated that with the fragmentation of Ankole district and later Mbarara into many districts, the identity of Ankole lost strength.¹⁰⁶ A people no longer see significance in the identity and the name itself is withering away. These state institutions are no longer thinking about culture or norms but the economic benefit envisioned from the renovated cultural site. Ankole is bigger than Mbarara city and Mbarara district (it consists of ten districts) and the kingdom is not part of this struggle. So, it is a struggle of two state institutions over a cultural site. What should one make of that? There is an underlying political consciousness where both a people and the government are envisioning a political future when these cultural elements shall be significant. This consciousness is detectable even in the president's statement when he summoned opinion leaders that it will be a matter of time for the kingdom to be restored.¹⁰⁷

Other views point to the historical significance in the political history of Ankole.¹⁰⁸ According to Tumusiime James, notable cow figures in the history of the Ankole people include Mayenje ga Ishinjo Rutanyuubwa Bigomba, who sparked a war between the kingdoms of Buhweju and Nkore when the former was robbed of a prized cow by the latter. Mayenje produced so much milk, according to historical records (such as Nganwa's narrative), that a single milking could feed the king of Buhweju and his men¹⁰⁹. The cow was greatly admired by the stronger kingdom of Nkore that one day robbed it from its

¹⁰² TV West News "Agacencwire" March 26, 2019.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Godfrey Kiwanda Suubi (state minister- Tourism, Wild life and Antiquities), Urban TV, PM Live News, June 2, 2021 & Anonymous, Renovation of Ankole Palace nears completion, New Vision, June 8, 2021.

¹⁰⁵ News bulletin on TV West, December 15, 2021.

¹⁰⁶ Richard Mugisha (deputy Mbarara city clerk), in conversation with the researcher, October 10, 2021

¹⁰⁷ Elijah Kyamugambi, interview.

¹⁰⁸ James Tumusiime, interview.

¹⁰⁹ Nganwa, *Abakozire eby'Okutangaza omuri Ankore*.

owner. Buhweju declared war on Nkore, killed the royal guards and reclaimed its cow. That is the reason the sculpture of Mayenje ga Ishinjo was put at Igongo cultural Center; to act as a remembrance of the historical moment- the battle between Buhweju and Nkore.¹¹⁰

As already hinted the sculpture at the Mbarara city round about whose removal sparked the 2019 protest is over 70 years old but it is not in the cultural history of a people in question and neither is it a famous name in their history and that of their cattle. It is named Rusiina, according to the voices of cultural nationalists that wanted it restored yet has features of Bihogo such as brown colour. That is why the nationalist persona in the poem “The Crucified Bihogo” decides to call it so¹¹¹. Gareeba writes: “... At first before Kanshenyi arrived, she thought Amahembe Gente was a place with only horns like the name suggested. Surprisingly the place looked awesome with a full erected cow, which to her looked like Ente Ngoobe, the proverbial cow in the history of Ankole”. But in another stanza, it becomes Bihogo even though it was named Rusiina. “... Kanshenyi asked: ‘So what’s the name of this cow?’ ‘You can call it Nsiina’ ‘But it looks like Bihogo’ she protested to which Trevor accepted’ if it is Bihogo, then it would be the famous *Bihogo bya Mpunga* of the Bachwezi, but it is not.

The protest went beyond claiming cultural hegemony; it was a more than a defence of a cultural symbol. Instead, culture has become politicised in the sense that it is being used to express political viewpoints. Ankole staged an uprising to protest the loss of "tradition" for Ankole, which both cultural formations (NCT & BCF) work to conserve, albeit in different ways.

The demands that were made during the protest also point to the fact that although the desire for a restored kingdom has not been met, the persistence of this and other cultural demands, together with responses and counterclaims from the state and cultural formations, indicate that there is still hope. This can imply that violence is on the horizon.

Some publics have viewed NCT demand for a kingdom as reactionary and so regressive because restoration of Ankole shall pit against democratic values and reproduce class and ethnic discrimination.¹¹² BCF, on the other hand, is romanticised for promoting republican ideas and so is conceived as having progressive sentiments.¹¹³ Whereas the formation of BCF is conceptualised as a decolonial attempt, we reflect on how far they can succeed. One case we make is that BCF is one foundation with a decolonial potential because it is one example of cultural formations that attempts the fight against the colonial forms of governance- nation state structure where the nation is tribal with a fixed homeland. BCF formed in 1993 to fight the activities of Nkore Cultural Trust (NCT). It particularly forms when NCT coronated Prince John Barigye. The foundation tasked itself to fighting restoration of the institution as it was constructed by the colonial regime. This was majorly because Ankole was being sought as was formed at the onset of colonial rule- based on the same nature of power that the colonial regime left. As already discussed, the colonial state power in Ankole had created hierarchies. It set Bahima as a political majority category and Bairu as the minority, and it did not concern itself with other identities such as the Banyaruguru. BCF’s concern today is that the restoration of the kingdom shall prevail on existing structures of marginalization where Bahima remain as lords and Bairu as serfs. We can say BCF has not

¹¹⁰ Tumusiime James, interview.

¹¹¹ Gareeba Johnmark, “The Crucified Bihogo.”

¹¹² See, John Jean Barya, “Democracy and the Issue of Culture in Uganda: Reflections on the (Non) Restoration of Ankole Monarchy.”

¹¹³ Ibid. & Interview: Mwambutsya, October 8, 2021, Makerere University, Kampala.

forgotten the inter-tribal rift that had been brought by colonial transformations, which had led Ankole to the threshold of violence in the 1950s and 1960s.

We can commend BCF for choosing not to re-engage in a struggle for the power that was ostensibly in their grasp when kingdoms were abolished. By virtue of their numbers and elite strength today, they would boldly enter the battlefield. Yet they opted not to make use of this power. They understand that if the Ankole kingdom is restored, there would undoubtedly be violence. Any critical thinker would see, with the aforementioned position, the Bairu have power to fight and from a higher ground. Instead, they decided to take a route that would end in resolution and reconciliation.

Most cultural formations that have wanted to challenge hierarchies that colonialism created sought secession, only to find themselves reproducing the problem- hierarchies and exclusions. BCF asserts that they did not belong to Nkore kingdom, but have not demanded restoration of the kingdoms they once belonged to. This shows their attempt to move beyond colonial logics but still allow to work with the existing infrastructure- of multiple ethnic, religious etc. identities and persuasions. It is an attempt to challenge hierarchies. None of the restoration attempts concerned itself with the injustices of the past. It has not shied away from resisting colonial logics. So, in challenging restoration, BCF is pursuing a truth and reconciliation agenda, saying we cannot continue unless we talk about these issues because if we talk about them, then we shall realise that what we are restoring is a monster that is going to destroy us. Their choice of establishing a foundation providing unity through language (Runyankore) is to accommodate pluralities.

The pitfall of BCF arises from the fact that power shapes agency. They are just pre-occupied with fighting against reinstatement of monarchical power and therefore fails to go beyond the frame of how Banyankore were formed as they are today. BCF only imagines a fixed Ankole, which is closed off for other identities. This can perhaps imply that whoever comes after BCF has completed its formation and granted autonomy to operate, they shall find it difficult to be part of Ankole.

Like the other traditional institutions, BCF is responding to a particular form of power. They exclusively deal with already-existing migrations, and they include all of them. They do not, however, anticipate further migrations. Additionally, if they developed on prior Kumanyana movements as some of its members have asserted,¹¹⁴ then it was created from the politically marginalised minorities- Bairu as earlier discussed. They do not, however, anticipate future minorities.

The fact that they mobilize around culture, by making it a basis for their establishment, they are politicizing it. BCF, just like NCT and many other traditional institutions, is a cultural formation that serves the interest of the modern state because it, too, perpetuates difference. The modern state is an institution that perpetuates and thrives on difference by creating different domains and so cultural formations become important places in which their power to break away, which the central state sanctions, is sought and exercised in a way that continues to reproduce logics of a modern state.

Conclusion

Today, there is a significant attempt to form and reform traditional institutions within Uganda. There is noticeable variance in the demands and formations of traditional institutions. Some are demands for more power in order to realise full self-determination. They see it as a form of decentralization where they should be allowed to operate separately or semi-independently from the central state. How are they able

¹¹⁴ Mwambutsya, interview.

to emancipate themselves when they are operating in the structure of the modern state? When nationalist movements base themselves on these institutions, then they are using the state to fight the state. Other cultural formations fight for privileges over their respective identities. For others, it's a demand for restoration of their traditional institutions for preservation of heritages such as sites and palaces. Despite the variance in demands, these traditional institutions only reaffirm tribalism. This is because differences in culture serve as the basis for both cultural formations and the demands of many of these institutions, leading to the politicisation of difference. Their campaigns are also centered on ethnic identity, and ethnic politics impairs the potential for emancipation of traditional institutions. In the end, the agency of traditional institutions not only reinforces tribalism but also transforms these institutions into places where power is still sought after and sometimes exercised, but in a way that perpetuates modern state logics.

Traditional institutions, no matter how emancipatory might seem in fighting for privileges, rights and resources for their subjects, they are conscripted in the logic of modern colonial state. Their emancipation is conscripted. The ways in which the state continues to conscript people is by giving them traditional institutions they demand. They are made domains of power in order to facilitate modern logics of power. They continue to be places where power is exercised but in a way that continues to perpetuate logics of the modern colonial state. Traditional institutions remain decentralized state unites serving the interests of the central post-colonial state of Uganda.

Consequently, traditional institutions produce period scenes of violence. Therefore, in restoring traditional institutions, the NRM government opened room for more cultural formations and their agency produces violence. If the current regime conceived restoration of kingdoms and the democratizing formations of new ethnic institutions as a panacea to violence, it has only jumped out of the frying pan into the fire.

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