

Historical Trajectories of Ethnic Conflicts in Busoga, Uganda, 1890 to 1967

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This research drew on a triangulation of theories of primordialism, constructivism and political instrumentalism to historicise the trajectories of intra-ethnic conflicts in Busoga in eastern Uganda, from 1890 to 1967. Using archival sources and oral interviews, the research analyzes the socio-cultural and political conditions of Busoga region by 1890, the early colonial historical trajectories of ethnic conflicts, the role of the Young Basoga and Abataka Association in intra-ethnic contestations, the late colonial historical trajectories of ethnic conflicts, and the legacy of Uganda's independence on the politics of Obwa'Kyabazinga as an institution. The study reveals that there was formation of Busoga ethnicity before colonial rule and that the imposition of colonial institutions hardened ethnic identity and generated contestations over traditional authority, and tensions between nationalism and monarchism. The findings highlight the dynamics of ethnic identity and conflict in Busoga throughout the colonial and early post-colonial periods. For instance, in spite of the evolving conceptions of Busoga identity, pre-colonial 'ethnic cords' were stifled by internal strife and the geo-political influence of the 'big powers' of Buganda and Bunyoro. Busoga's ethnic infrastructures only emerged as a consequence of colonial rule in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, the differing conceptions of kingdom politics complicated the trends of Busoga's ethnic development. For instance, the colonial view of the Kyabazinga as a serving officer; liable to dismissal by the state sharply contrasted the indigenous perception of the Kyabazingaship as an equivalent of Kingship within the perspective of the Buganda model. Eventual efforts by certain indigenous groups to collude with the Uganda People's Congress post-colonial government and fully monarchise the Kyabazingaship to the status of kingship only occasioned the destruction rather than the preservation of the institution.