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A History of the Ndrukpa (Lendu): The Invisible Ethnic Minority Community in Uganda

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This paper documents the history of the Ndrukpa (Lendu) people; an invisible ethnic minority community in the West Nile region of Uganda. Ndrukpa is an indigenous ethnic community and the first inhabitants of the West Nile and parts of the Acholi subregion. The Ndrukpa – often known as the Lendu - belong to the Sudanic ethnic groups of Uganda and are one of the country's marginalised groups. Ndrukpa population in Uganda is approximately 18,000, and the global population stands at 1,411,000 people, with the majority living in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). The central thesis of this paper is that contemporary social exclusion of ethnic minority communities such as the Ndrukpa is a historical manipulation and a colonial legacy often tracing their roots to the colonial divide and rule structure. These structures continue to be evoked and used by contemporary ethnic and political stakeholders to their advantage. Social exclusion is often aggravated as in the case of the Ndrukpa people, when their history remains undocumented. Documenting the history of a socially excluded ethnic minority community can be used as a tool and strategy to end social exclusion.

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INTRODUCTION

This article focuses on the history of the Ndrukpa (Lendu) ethnic minority community in Uganda according to the UBOS Report (2016) number 18,000¹. The Ndrukpa history is not documented and is kept in memory which is narrated by elders who are kingdom orators. Unlike minority ethnic communities such as the Batwa in Western Uganda and Ik in Karamoja, the Ndrukpa remain invisible. Despite being the first inhabitants of West Nile and parts of Northern Uganda, not much is known about the Ndrukpa ethnic minority community. This has perpetuated their social exclusion and marginalization. The Ndrukpa people and history have been under-researched and documented by scholars. This may have implications for their current historical documentation. This study was motivated by the persistent social exclusion and marginalization of the Ndrukpa people evidenced by their being underrepresented in contemporary education, politics, and local government employment.

The central thesis of this paper is that the contemporary social exclusion of the Ndrukpa ethnic community and the lack of documentation of their history has its roots in colonialism. I further argue that the persistent Ndrukpa social exclusion is a result of historical manipulation and colonial legacies linked to Alur sub-nationalism and dominance of the Ndrukpa people which was perpetuated by the British colonial divide and rule structure between 1914-1962. These structures continue to be evoked in contemporary Local Government structures dominated by the Alur ethnic community, and political stakeholders further alienating the Ndrukpa people. The Ndrukpa social exclusion is exacerbated by the lack of documentation on history. The challenge African and societal history faces is that their writing has been relegated to politicians and scholars who are not historians. Through their writings, they have misused and abused history. In

this paper, social exclusion is associated with acts of misuse and abuse history.

This work was inspired by the difficulty of getting publications on the Ndrukpa history and people and their wealth of history and untapped Indigenous knowledge. The lack of documentation of the Ndrukpa history has led to their low visibility, and persistent social exclusion locally, nationally, and at the geo-political level. Colonial anthropologists such as Aiden Southall and John Middleton have done studies among the Alur and Lugbara respectively, with no study undertaken on the Ndrukpa people. Despite the prevailing peace and security, the West Nile region is experiencing, the Ndrukpa have been experiencing a wave of armed conflicts from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to document the history of the Ndrukpa people, open more scholarly areas of research on the Ndrukpa kingdom, and open more debate on their social exclusion as a means to emancipate them. To meet the aspirations of the Ndrukpa people, I will use 'Ndrukpa' instead of 'Lendu' to refer to them. The Ndrukpa consider the name 'Lendu' (literally meaning 'abandoned') a derogative connotation used by the Alur to undermine them.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This was a historical study of the Ndrukpa ethnic minority community. Data was collected using oral tradition, oral history, and written documents. The history of the Ndrukpa was studied backwards from the present to the past as they had no written history. This is an anthropological approach used by Mark Leopold to study the Lugbara people of the West Nile region (Leopold, M. 2005). Studying history backwards enabled me to trace the Ndrukpa history back to their cradle land in Meroe in Egypt. Through oral interviews, the elders narrated the history of the Ndrukpa tracing their social origin to the ancient Sudan-Ethiopia areas. Discussions were held with the Ndrukpa Council of Elders and oral tradition

¹ Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016, The National Population and Housing Census 2014 – Main Report, Kampala, Uganda

narrators who are the cultural memory of the kingdom who in the narratives agree on the specific content as authentic history. The elders and youth narrated the origin and consequences of the Ndrukpa social exclusion and how they negotiated new relationships using their social agencies.

FINDINGS

In documenting the history of the Ndrukpa people, it is overwhelming to discover that the Ndrukpa society has a history that is still vivid and reminds us about their state of nature in the past but also of a painful development of domination, exploitation, and social exclusion from the time of foreign invasion. In the state of nature, all men are in a state of perfect freedom and equality where all power and jurisdiction are reciprocal, with no one having more than the others.²

Who Is The Ndrukpa?

The Ndrukpa, also known as the Lendu ethnic community is an invisible ethnic minority community located in the north-western corner of Zombo District, in the West Nile region in North-western Uganda. According to the 2014 Population census, the Lendu population stood at 18,919 which is 0.056% of Uganda's total population of 34,634,650.³ They form one of the six ethnic groups (Lendu /Ndrukpa, Kebu, Lugbara, Madi, Alur, and Kakwa) that inhabit north-western Uganda. The Lendu (Ndrukpa) ethnic community speaks the Ndrulo language. The Lendu people in Uganda originally known as the Ndrukpa are the Sudanic ethnic groups of Uganda. The majority of the Lendu are found in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)⁴. The Lendu (Ndrukpa) ethnic community is one of the 56 original ethnic groups in Uganda as of 1st February 1926 (1995 Constitution of the Republic

of Uganda). Today, they are one of the 65 ethnic groups in Uganda.⁵

The Ndrukpa today belong to the invisible and serene Ndrukpa kingdom one of the oldest kingdoms in the West Nile region yet unknown by the majority. In this study, they are referred to as the Hero-ethnic community of the West Nile region. They are found in Lendu Parish at the edge of Lendu Forest in Akaa Division, Zombo District, bordering the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The Ndrukpa are the first inhabitants of the West Nile region having migrated from the Sudan-Ethiopia region. This is confirmed by Hopkin's assertion that modern humans are believed to have emerged from Ethiopia.⁶ When the Alur a segment of the Luo migrants arrived in Uganda in 1125 AD, they found the Ndrukpa and Kebu had already settled in the area⁷.

Origin of the Ndrukpa People and Kingdom

Ndrukpa are considered as the forest agriculturalist Negroes.⁸ The Ndrukpa Kingdom is considered the first Indigenous Kingdom in the West Nile region of Uganda. The current kingship traces their lineage to the first-born line of their hero-ancestor. According to Ndrukpa oral tradition, Ndru the Hero-ancestor reigned in the period 300-1000 AD while in Meroe in Egypt. Bbale who was Ndru's son reigned 1,000-1150AD in Bar-el-Ghazel. Bbale's sons ruled in 1600-1700 AD. King Rapia I reigned in Pakwach-Wadelai from 1700-1750 AD. The period 1750-2010AD among the Ndrukpa is considered an era of instability and a dark age for the Ndrukpa people and was characterised by the Alur conquest, Arab slave trade, and European colonialism, and finally the post-colonial social exclusion of the Ndrukpa people. The year 1998 witnessed the revival of the Ndrukpa kingdom during the reign of King Manase Rapia II from

² Hindess, B. (2007). The Althusserian moment and the concept of historical time. *Economy and Society*, 36(1), 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03085140601089812>

³ Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016, The National Population and Housing Census 2014 – Main Report, Kampala, Uganda

⁴ Ndrukpa Kingdom (2019). The oral history, customs, and traditions of the Ndrukpa.

⁵ Uganda Bureau of Statistics 2016, The National Population and Housing Census 2014 – Main Report, Kampala, Uganda

⁶ Hopkin M (16 February 2005). "Ethiopia is a top choice for the cradle of Homo sapiens".

Nature. doi:10.1038/news050214-10

⁷ Interview with Mark Utuga November 2022 at Golaju

⁸ Johnston, H. H. (1902). *The Uganda Protectorate*; p 555

1998-2022 AD. Following the death of King Manase Rapia II in 2022, the affairs of the Kingdom were managed by the Royal Council until January 25th, 2024, when King Jimmy Agenunga Rapia III was coronated and enthroned king of the Ndrukpa kingdom.

Claessen (1996) observes that "although there were many lineages and descent groups, there was always found one chief who had a unique status in a village or a clan"⁹. In the later days of their migration and settlement, due to the advancing threats from the migrating Alur and the arrival of the Arab slave trader and colonialist, Ndrukpa people were scattered and some settled among neighbouring ethnic communities such as Alur and Kebu. Some crossed the border to settle among the Ndrukpa of the Democratic Republic of Congo. However, later they recollected to re-establish the Ndrukpa Kingdom under His Highness Manasi Njuni Rapia II who reigned from 1998-2022 AD. In 1972, during Idi Amin's regime, Pidu Hezenia was appointed the first Ndrukpa Nyapara-village head.¹⁰

Ndrukpa (Lendu) origin, Migration and settlement

The Ndrukpa have a collective oral tradition of their migration from the northern parts of Africa, which is used to reconstruct their history. The shared awareness of their identity as a political unit and a people, enables them to trace their descendance to a common hero ancestor which could be mythical or real. The available collective tradition, and the strong oral narratives despite the absence of written records before the colonial and in the post-colonial era, enable whatever reconstructions one can make of the Lendu pre-history closer to their aspirations and past. The narratives are further preserved by the originality of the form of their language which unlike the Alur, Lugbara, and Madi languages has undergone linguistic alterations due to migrations,

acculturation, and assimilation. Reconstruction of the Ndrukpa history is further simplified by the existing Alur, Kebu, and Lugbara oral tradition which enables the corroboration of the historical facts and events.

According to Ndrukpa oral tradition, they trace their origin to Egypt. The Ndrukpa then called Ndru (literal meaning 'a person'), during the migration and settlement of societies in Africa, moved as one large group from Meroe in Egypt, under the leadership of Ndru their hero-ancestor. They moved southwards along the Nile valley until they reached present-day South Sudan where they settled at Kpangbala, the present-day Bar-el-Ghazel.¹¹

According to Harry Hamilton Johnston, they came from countries west of the White Nile and were forced to leave by the advance of tribes moving from the north down towards Lake Albert.¹² The migration of the Ndrukpa was mainly from north to south.¹³ These tribes included the Kebu, Lugbara, Luo, and the Arab slave traders.

Theories of Lendu Origin and Migration

The Ndrukpa oral tradition traces its origin to Meroe in the Sudan. The earliest occurrence of the name Meroe so far found was on the stele of Irike-Amannote who ruled 431-401 BC in the last third of the 5th century BC^{14 15}(Fattovich et al, [1998: 49] & Elzain, [n.d:37]). It is known that the major political centre of the kingdom lay at Meroe long before the royal burial ground was moved there. The empire of Meroe is thought of as the successor to the Napatan Empire, but it is more or less contemporary with the group of Napatan cities centred on the Fourth Cataract of the Nile. Still, the chronological and cultural relationship between Napata and Meroe is not fully understood (Elzain, I. S.n.d:37). The civilization of Meroe has

⁹ Claessen, 1996, p 342

¹⁰ Interview, Royal Council, 23 Feb 2023

¹¹ Ndrukpa Kingdom, 2019.

¹² Johnston, H. H. (1902). *The Uganda Protectorate*; p 550

¹³ Johnston, H. H. (1902). *The Uganda Protectorate*; p 548

¹⁴ Elzain, I. S. (N.D) MEROE, THE CITY STATE, THE KINGDOM, THE EMPIRE WHY MEROE?

¹⁵ Fattovich, R., Manzo, A., & Bard, K. A. (1998). Meroe and Aksum: New elements of comparison. *Archéologie du Nil moyen*, 8, 43-53.

been referred to with different terms; empire, kingdom, state, and monarchy (Elzain, I. S.:35).

The organization of Ndrukpa society

The Ndrukpa people have a well-set political, social, and economic organization unique to their history, culture, and environment.

Political Organisation of Ndrukpa Society

The Ndrukpa live in Ndrukpa kingdom. The Kingdom Royal Palace is located at Golaju and is the centre for all political, social, and economic activities. However, due to the early migration, settlement, and conquest by the Alur, the kingdom is characterized by a mixed settlement of the Ndrukpa and Alur ethnic communities in Akaa and Lendu Parish which are part of the Ndrukpa kingdom.

Photo1: HRH Manesseh Njuni Rapia II



Source: *Fieldwork*

There are situations under which the first prince is relieved from inheriting the throne especially when he is insane, does not believe in, and upholds the beliefs of the Ndrukpa kingdom,

Ndrukpa is a centralized and compact society with a king called *Rapia* who is at the top of the hierarchy. The present King His Royal Highness Agenunga Jimmy Rapia III was crowned on Sunday 25th February 2024 at Golaju in Ndrukpa Kingdom.¹⁶

Kingship and ascendancy to power is heredity through the firstborn son born of the official first wife of the King who is considered the Queen Mother known in Ndrulo as *Pey Dhi*. Inheritance to the throne was when the king died or under extraordinary situations unless the king and the Royal Council decided otherwise.¹⁷ HRH Agenunga Jimmy Rapia III inherited the throne from his father King HRH Manasseh Njuni Rapia II crowned in 2009 and died in 2022. His mother is the Queen Mother *Pey Dhi* Eliseba Oroya.¹⁸

Photo 2: HRH Agenunga Jimmy Rapia III



including undermining the supremacy of the Ndrukpa.¹⁹

The Ndrukpa Kingdom has a Royal Council whose central role is advising the king and ensuring that there is law and order in their area of

¹⁶ As part of her research, the researcher was invited to personally attend the coronation of HRH Jimmy Agenunga Jimmy Rapia III held on 25th February 2024 at Golaju.

¹⁷ *Ndrukpa Kingdom 2019 The Oral History, Customs and Traditions of The Ndrukpa* p20.

¹⁸ Discussion with the Ndrukpa Royal Council at Golaju Palace, November 2022

¹⁹ *Ndrukpa Kingdom 2019 The Oral History, Customs and Traditions of The Ndrukpa* p20.

jurisdiction. Their role is to ensure that the young Ndrukpa populace learns, upholds, and defends Ndrukpa histories, cultural values, practices, customs, and traditions which is their identity. A young Ndrukpa man observed that: “our problem is that, the young generation in Ndrukpa do not know their histories and the communities around do not know the Ndrukpa histories as well, often triggering conflicts between us and the Alur. Our history is distorted and is not documented” (Interview November 2022).

Ndrukpa kingdom is organized into clans and sub-clans (minor clans) which are the basic unit of organization. The kingdom has around 120 clans in Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The minor clans in Uganda are under the clanship of major ones because they have a small population, and most of the clan members live in the DRC. In this case, for effective governance and administration of the minor clans, they are placed under the leadership of the major clans.²⁰

Some clans have remained invisible because they are absorbed among the dominant tribes of Alur, Bunyoro, and Buganda in Uganda. They include the Alisi clan of Paidha and the Andrasi clan of Jangokoro. Some of the clans migrated to Bunyoro and they include the Androsi, Andhosi,

Ajusi, Asisi, Ayisi Awuhwe, Alusi, and Alosi. However, a section of the Ndrukpa clans in West Nile migrated to the Bunyoro region to farm as they were dispossessed of their land given out for the development of the Lendu Forest Reserve. Bunyoro at the time had vast and fertile land for settlement and farming. Similarly, the Ndrukpa who did not want to be under the Alur Lordship moved to settle in Bunyoro. The Ndrukpa population in Bunyoro is growing, with most of them keeping their Ndrukpa identity, living together and speaking the Ndrulo language. Currently in Bunyoro, the Ndrukpa are found in the villages of Nyakyanika in Masindi District and Nyakasenene, Kabale, Buseruka, and Buguma in Hoima District. Ndrukpa clans currently settled in West Nile include the Ajusi, Ayisi, Arisi, Adusi, Azasi, Asisi, Abesi, Anbusi, Alisi, Androsi, Andrasi, Arosi, Anyasi, Abisi, Urusi, Akisi, Agusi, Agisi, Angasi, and Ayesi among others. The Ndrukpa clans in the DRC include the Arisi, Ayisi, Azasi, Adusi, Agusi, Alosi, Alusi, Andhosi, Ayesi, Abesi, Alesi and Urusi. All the clans have their chief who directly governs them under the directives of the King. The clan chiefs are responsible to the king. The King comes from the royal clan called Dduts while the queen comes from the Djowts clan.²¹

The Major Ndrukpa clans and their current leaders in the Royal Council

Clan	Clan Head
Djowts	Athocon Samson
Ruts	Kasamba Sibriano
Dduts	Athocon William
Thits	Raimond Binaga
Ayesi	Adidi Moris
Arisi	Gilbert Udota
Huhwi	Onen Peter
Ndrats	Ocama Juma

Source: *Ndrukpa Kingdom 2019 The Oral History, Customs and Traditions of The Ndrukpa p18.*

The kingdom is grounded on Ndrukpa indigenous law and order which has been passed by word of mouth, practice, values, and beliefs through generations. Ndrukpa indigenous law has had the effect of creating a classless and egalitarian society. It is a society where the king, the Royal

council, and elders are revered. However, the context in which the Ndrukpa male described the society as 'classless and egalitarian' was from a patriarchal perspective in which any male who

²⁰ Ibid, p18

²¹ *Ndrukpa Kingdom 2019 The Oral History, Customs and Traditions of The Ndrukpa p18*

met the standard could rise to the level of the Royal council and the council of elders.

The royal council and council of elders were men of integrity, incorruptible, impartial, and had shown proof of wisdom and skill in conflict transformation. Similarly, they have a deeper knowledge of Ndrupka history. They interrogated the offender, victim, and witnesses. Judgment was passed based on family history, the individual's record, and the situation under which the current conflict or offence had occurred. (Field interview: Royal Council, 2022). The conflict was viewed from a broader perspective, and its possible origin within the lineage was traced to address the actual or perceived root cause. Indigenous courts therefore considered the deep-seated conflicts, the role of culture, and the existing social relations in resolving conflict.

Conflict Resolution and Mechanisms of Administering Justice among the Ndrupka People

According to the Royal Council, Ndrupka society continues to experience internal and external conflicts. The history of conflict is as old as the history of society. Conflicts existed between individuals, families, clans, and neighbouring communities and there were mechanisms to resolve differences.

The conflicts were mainly on land, conflicts over women, struggle for power, witchcraft, adultery, envy, theft, laziness, lack of respect and murder, and drunkenness. The way conflict is resolved among the Ndrupka depends on their magnitude and nature. Ndrupka people had mechanisms for administering justice and maintaining peace.

Internal conflicts within the kingdom were presided over by the Kingdom's Chief Judge (Bbadja). External conflicts were presided over by "Ndrupka mi Pey dja" (King of the Ndrupka) and the counterpart king of the other chiefdom or ethnic community. In such conflict, the compensation to the aggrieved party is made by the king of the offending party, and not directly by the perpetrators themselves. The perpetrators are then handled internally by the King's council to

meet the payments and charges levied against them by the aggrieved community. The Ndrupka king acts as an advocate, representing his subjects in external conflicts (the Ndrupka Kingdom, 2019 and Royal Council, 2023).

Mechanisms of Administering Justice

Indigenous courts existed among the Ndrupka people to administer justice, maintain peaceful co-existence within the communities, and prevent conflicts from turning violent. Through the intervention of clan elders, the case is presented to the Bbadja. In a conflict involving two individuals, the elders are gathered under the leadership of the clan head called "Bbadja". Each party brings a goat which was slaughtered and eaten in resolving the conflict. The conflict resolution process was democratic and transparent. Each party and witnesses make statements and the council of elders passes judgment. The offender is charged according to the nature and magnitude of the offence committed, after which the two clans are reconciled, and the sheep are eaten. Courts were therefore used to end conflict if it had started. Conflicts were resolved by the Council of Elders through open discussion and mediation between the conflict parties.

The council of elders were men of integrity, incorruptible, impartial, and had shown knowledge of clan history and affairs, and proof of wisdom and skill in conflict transformation. They interrogated the offender, victim, and witnesses. Judgment was passed based on family history, the individual's record, and the situation under which the current conflict or offence had occurred. (Field observation: 10th February 2023). Conflict was viewed from a broader perspective and its possible origin within the lineage was traced to address the actual or perceived root cause. Indigenous courts therefore considered the deep-seated conflicts, the role of culture, and the existing social relations in resolving conflict.

Conflict resolution mechanisms used among the Ndrupka people include arbitration, retribution, reconciliation, word of advice, and rebukes.

Arbitration was used to resolve disputes between individuals or groups by referring them to a third party either agreed on by them or provided by the cultural norms or law. Arbitration was resorted to when the family or sub-clan head had failed to reconcile the two parties. The mediator had the skill and "power to induce cooperation, legitimize, and inspire- persuasive or 'soft' power. Retribution is a form of vengeance justice administered to an offender as punishment or vengeance for an offence committed. The offender is required to pay for the damages caused to the victim.

Inter-chiefdom and ethnic arbitration:

In the event of a Ndrukpa killing a member of another ethnic community or kingdom, the king and the kingdom officials would meet the aggrieved clan or kingdom. The case will be against the king who would stand in as a guarantor of peace on behalf of the Ndrukpa who is the offender. Compensation to the family would be paid by the King of Ndrukpa Kingdom in the form of cattle, goats, or sheep. This was to facilitate a peaceful reconciliation and peacebuilding process. On return home, the culprit would be required to pay for the items the king had offered to the aggrieved family. It was the king's responsibility to protect and discipline indiscipline members of the kingdom.

When the conflict involves two different clans, their heads are in charge of the mediation process. The clans are asked to bring goats to settle the matter. The goats are prepared by both clans together: this is called "nzadha" (community service). The Kingdom's Chief Judge (Bbadja) presides over the case after which the two clans are reconciled, the goats are eaten and the offender is charged according to the offence committed. Conflicts involving other ethnic groups are resolved by the "Ndrukpa mi Pey dja" (King of the Ndrukpa) and the counterpart king of the other tribe. Here the penalty is shouldered by the King of the offending party, not by the perpetrators. The perpetrators are however then handled by the King's council to meet the payments and charges levied against them by the complainant tribe. In this case, we the Ndrukpa are represented by our

King himself. If the case involves murder, the offender must meet the burial expenses of the deceased and other fines such as goats for the deceased family are levied later. The King is the Chief Judge for an aggravated conflict such as murder or serious destruction of property and burning down a house.

Reconciliation and healing of relations were a crucial aspect of law, order, and justice in Ndrukpa society. The two conflict parties each give a sheep which is exchanged and slaughtered. The food called *Juwka* and local brews are prepared and eaten by the conflicting parties and their respective families to restore relations. Hence, Indigenous justice was restorative, unlike the court system which is retributive and emphasizes the rights of the victim rather than the relation.

Curses were used in situations where an offender could not be identified or had denied the offence, therefore ancestral spirits were invoked to cause misfortune, sickness, and death. When a person/family /clan conceals the offence, a curse would be invoked on them and their descendants. This curse usually affects the individual, the individual's children and grandchildren. The clan takes responsibility for being the custodian of peace and societal norms because offence and sin affect every member.

Word of advice or counsel was given to clan members. A child or clan member who misconducts himself/herself was given word of counsel or advice. This involved telling the child or member the cultural ideals and expected conduct to be exhibited. This was done for first-time offenders and lesser offences. Counsel was provided by the senior members to individuals, groups, or the whole clan. Rebukes, open criticism, and the act of condemning unsocial behaviour were given to members who misconducted themselves and did not pay heed to the word of counsel from the family or clan members. Senior members of the family and clan would rebuke offenders who do not reform and often forward the case to an upper court or take more stringent measures. Rebuke is used at all

courts depending on the nature of the offence and the attitude of the offender (Field interview: Royal Council, 10th February 2023). When word of advice and rebuke does not work, canning is administered to an errant member.

The social organization of Ndrukpa Society

The Ndrukpa speak Ndrulo a central Sudanic language. Ndrukpa people are living in the Bunyoro sub-region districts of Masindi, Hoima, Buliisa, and Kiryandogo, in the West Nile districts of Nebbi and Pakwach, and Gulu in the Acholi sub-region in Uganda. In the central region, some Ndrukpa are settled in the Wakiso and Luwero districts. Today following a Ndrukpa headcount organized by the kingdom, the Ndrukpa living in Uganda are approximately 23,000, and worldwide there are 1,411,000 mostly in the Democratic Republic of Congo (Ndrupka Kingdom. 2019). The UBOS (2016) Report places its population at about 18,000. The role of censuses in the construction and representation of social categories, particularly for colonial states, and multilingual and Language and ethnic statistics could be very sensitive. Similarly, “the inclusion of ethnic and language statistics is always a very sensitive political issue”²². Whereas, the Ndrukpa ethnic community appears in the Constitution Schedule as the ‘Lendu’, practically they remain invisible which is often the plight of ethnic minorities subjugated by a linguistically dominant neighbouring community.

Unlike other ethnic communities in Uganda, the Ndrukpa did not have orthography until 2010 when the Summer Institute of Linguistics (SIL) came in to support the development of Ndrulo orthography. This is attributed to the missionaries. Miller, (2018) argues that “Missionaries in Africa have often been suspected of participating in a process of linguistic fragmentation that hampered the process of language convergence and literacy in African languages”²³ This among the Ndrukpa

led to the subjugation of Ndrulo their language under the Alur language (Dhu Alur).

Before the forest land was given away to the British Colonial administration by the Alur King Rwoth Jalusiga in 1928, due to the conquest and assimilation by the dominant Alur and intermarriages with the Kebu and Alur, the Ndrulo language underwent changes losing shades and adopting Kebu and Alur words and eventually losing its original form especially among the younger generation.

Ndrukpa society is patriarchal. Identity and inheritance are through the father and male membership to the clan. Relationships are traced through the Patriarchal bloodline or lineage. However, maternal lineage is considered highly as the giver of the wife and mother of the children. Maternal relations play a key role in giving social and moral guidance and advice to nephews and nieces during assemblies, burials, and funerals.

Whereas Ndrukpa society is patriarchal, gender roles that are socially constructed according to the tradition and customs of the people as handed over through generations are upheld. Patriarchy is embedded in everyday knowledge and social norms that define the status of men and women.²⁴ Ortner (2022) notes that “patriarchy is a social system in which men hold primary power and predominate in roles of political leadership, moral authority, social privilege and control of property.”²⁵

Gender roles are based on the different expectations that individuals, groups, and societies have of individuals based on their sex and based on each society's values and beliefs about gender. “Gender roles are the product of the interactions between individuals, [society], and their environments, and they give individuals cues about what sort of behaviour is believed to be appropriate for what sex. Appropriate gender roles

²² Miller, C. (2018). P.132.

²³ Miller, C. (2018). p.130

²⁴ Bah, A. B., & Barasa, M. N. (2023). Indigenous knowledge and the social construction of patriarchy: the

case of the Bukusu of Kenya. *Critical Sociology*, 49(2), 217-232. p217

²⁵ Ortner, S. B. (2022). Patriarchy. *Feminist Anthropology*, 3(2), 307-314. p307.

are defined according to a society's beliefs.²⁶ The youth acknowledged that society tended to believe less in sexual equality and argued that men played the key roles of the decision-makers and women played the roles of homemakers and family caretakers. Men were to take complete control of the family and women. It was disrespectful for women to disobey the men. However, recognized elderly women were allowed to influence decisions as mothers, wives, and givers of life. They were considered societal memory. The younger women were to show obedience and respect according to the Ndrukpa customs.

The *Pey Dhi* -Queen Mother is responsible for the domestic welfare of the Rapia-king. According to the Queen Mother Eliseba Oroya²⁷, her first responsibility is to show respect to the king. She ensured the king's meals were prepared and served according to the Ndrukpa customs, beliefs, norms, and practices. She is responsible for ensuring the royal housewares for serving meals to the king are available and in a decent state as a symbol of respect. These include a royal pot for boiling water for the king, the handwashing calabashes, winnowers, and baskets. She mentors and instructs the palace women and girls on how to carry themselves as royals and dignity.

Indigenous Religion and Spirituality

Ndrukpa people believe in and practice indigenous religion through their traditions, customs, beliefs, values, and practices. They believe in a supreme God called *Guw*, who manifests himself in different forms and is revered in ways depending on the circumstances. *Guw*; is revered as the supreme God; the creator of the universe and was responsible for everything, good or bad. *Guw*, the supreme God is believed to stay in a shrine called *Guw-dza* (God's house). Any consultation and spiritual ceremonies were performed in the *Guw-dza*. Religious ceremonies were officiated by indigenous religious priests. Each family has a member who serves as the

family priest and consults the gods on any issue within the family that may need spiritual intervention. They perform rituals to revere and appease the gods and spirits.²⁸

The Ndrukpa believed in life after death and the living dead deity. They also believe in the ancestors and ancestral spirits for help in situations that need spiritual intervention, such as in times of war, famine, drought, diseases, or prosperity and success. In the Ndrukpa custom, when an elder dies, the body is treated with great respect, and death is considered a transition to the spiritual world where the deceased is said to have joined the creator, ancestors, and spirits. The death of an elder is a blessing to society because they intercede with the gods on behalf of their living descendants and the land. After the burial of an elder, a small shrine is built close to the hut or house of his eldest or other son who believes in the tradition. This signifies that the dead is still a family member. On a day chosen by the clan priest and the elders, the clan members assemble and a ritual is performed to bring back the spirit of the dead to the shrine. A goat is slaughtered and the high priest sings a song to call the spirit of the dead until he or another member of the clan is possessed by the spirit of the dead. Later, the priest puts the food cooked for that day in the shrine, casts out the spirit, and directs it to the shrine where other sacrifices to the spirits will continue to be offered by the son considered custodian of the shrine. Whenever there is a problem in the clan, people raise sacrificial items like a white chicken and the priest goes with it to the shrine for consultation. At the end of the month, and during the first harvest a sacrifice is offered to the spirits in the shrine. To seek blessings from the spirit, part of the first harvest is taken to the shrine.²⁹

The Ndrukpa are known for possessing mystical powers called 'Ambaya' which the Alur and Ke'bu did not have. When an Alur was organising the Agwara dance, a Ndrukpa who possessed the

²⁶ Blackstone, A. M. (2003). Gender roles and society. P336

²⁸ Ndrukpa Kingdom (2019). pp54

²⁹ Ndrukpa Kingdom (2019). pp54 &56

²⁷ Field Interview: Queen Mother, 10th February 2023

Ambaya powers would be invited to perform the Ambaya ritual to maintain a peaceful dance, otherwise, a violent conflict would break out. Ambaya ritual contests were often organised which included making fire on a grass-thatched hut without the house catching fire.

Ndrukpa people perform a variety of rituals. The clan leaders and royal councils noted that the ancestral spirits still exist and speak. In the case where a family or clan member commits an abomination such as incest, an egg is used during the cleansing process. The cleansing is done by a high priest (Field interview: Ndrukpa youth, 10th February 2023).

Ndrukpa Indigenous knowledge and education

Folksongs, proverbs, oral tradition, and oral history are attached to social meaning. The spoken words constitute the social world in which they are located (Bryman 2012: 522). Proverbs are meant to instil morals in the family and community. "Proverbs are the outcome of the collective experience of a people and qualified instruments for transmitting their cultural heritage". Proverbial messages are derived from direct or indirect life experiences learned the hard way (Dalfovo, 2007: 210). Proverbs encourages parents to consider the distant future in educating the young and provides a guide for daily social life. Proverbs were a tool for social identity and cohesion, communication, conflict resolution, and fostering peaceful co-existence. The Lugbara classified proverbs into four social significances. (1) moral attributes, (2) virtues, (3) obligations associated with death, (3) non-moral attributes or behaviour of parents, and (4) attributes of the child (Dalfovo, 2007). Proverbs instil in the young generation indigenous wisdom which enables them to circumvent societal and environmental challenges (Alidri, 2016). The Ndrukpa are calm, very intelligent, and hardworking people and this is attributed to the fact that elders imparted to them the proverbs. Proverbs were taught by the elders at the evening fireplace and used to educate the young and discourage selfishness, greed, laziness and promote hard work. Selected proverbs include-

Darkness ate a black-skinned cow (Anything done at night cannot be trusted and has costly implications. This means that always act in transparency and broad day).

Slowly by slowly an egg will work. (An action may seem impossible but with persistence and hard work it will become possible).

A real man is seen when returning home in the evening and not in the field (Meaning manhood is determined by a man's success at the end of the day and not while in the field).

A real man retires in the evening (It teaches perseverance to young people).

Bats eat at night (one who is not human or upright will operate under darkness, so it warns one to be careful during the night time).

The Ndrukpa have riddles that nurture indigenous wisdom in the young generation. Elders are the custodians of the riddles and therefore teach the Ndrukpa children to grow morally upright with the community's knowledge and values imparted through riddles. The riddles are taught in the evening by the fireplace. Some of the riddles include:

We are three in our family, but if one of us is sick then we are all sick (If one of the local cooking stones is missing then the two remaining can't support the cooking pot).

I throw my spear to the other side of the stream but it comes back at my feet (If a boy is urinating, the urine goes some distance but still comes back to him).

The hill has separated me from my sister (The left ear has been denied access to the right ear by the head).

The brown lady is seated on the throne of thorns (The pineapples in the suckers).

My military is full in the lorry (The matchsticks are full in the matchbox).

A bee has entered its hive (An insect has dropped in the eye).

Add your spear to what the king has given you (Have your spear for your protection lest you are left with nothing when the king takes away what he has lent you).

Ndrukpa Indigenous Knowledge in medicinal herb and healing:

Ndrukpa people are known for their knowledge of local medicinal herbs which are used in the treatment of different tropical diseases. Treatment, healing, and spirituality are to restore health and well-being. Healing is considered a divine process. Generally, the Ndrukpa were medicine people who used various herbs for different diseases. Ndrukpa land is rich in herbal plants in the Lendu Forest Reserve planted in 1948. The forest provides a habitat for the various species of herbs for different diseases.

The Ndrukpa are known for their traditional healing and knowledge of local medicinal herbs which they use to treat different tropical diseases. The Ndrukpa have medicine persons with deep herbal medicine knowledge. This knowledge is hereditary and is passed along family lineages through apprenticeship. A traditional healer in the family will mentor a keen child who is fast in learning and identifying herbal plants and remembering their names and herbal values. The knowledge is passed when the traditional healer starts working with one of his children who assists him or her in administering the herbal treatment. By the time the medicine person gets old, weak, or dies, the healing power would have been acquired or transmitted to the younger person who fully takes over the responsibility of the deceased parent and continues to serve the community. The Lendu forest was first planted between 1948 and the 1950s and the second phase was planted in the 1970s now the third phase is being planted providing a habitat for various species of herbs for curing different diseases.

The Ndrukpa administer herbal treatment for sicknesses such as cough and flu which is treated using fresh and soft Eucalyptus leaves mixed with

guava leaves. The leaves are boiled and drunk, and some are used for steaming the patient. Fresh wounds are treated using the Blackjack plant (*Biden Pilosa*) which is used as iodine to stop and heal bleeding wounds. Herbs are used for treating fever, headache, and abdominal pain. The Ndrukpa uses the bitter African tropical cinchona plant – djukpa in Ndrukpa and Kanja in Alur for making quinine to treat fever, headache, and abdominal pain. The Ndrukpa people use herbs to treat chickenpox by rubbing it on the body. It is believed that healing takes three days and the body gets well.³⁰

Ndrukpa Economic organization

The Ndrukpa are predominantly agriculturalists who specialise in subsistence farming with only occasional engagement in animal rearing. Key crops they grow include coffee, plantain, sweet Banana, Avocado, vegetables, beans, yams, cassava, Irish potatoes, sweet potatoes, millet, and sorghum. They rear cattle, goats, sheep, pigs, and fowl.

The Ndrukpa also gathers roots, shoots, and fruits. The fruits include the purple sweet passion fruits, guavas, and wild apples. Knowledge of Avocado growing was learned from the Democratic Republic of Congo.

The Ndrukpa practice fishing (Bbaiy-njouudha) for leisure. The Ndrukpa land does not have rivers where large-scale fishing can be done. Fishing is done in the streams using tools like hook and spearing methods, and bow and arrow techniques. They also poison the water using herbal concoctions which make the fish drowsy and easy to catch downstream using baskets. They practice fishing in streams such as Nyelida and Lengeda streams to the East, which flow into Amuda River whose source is in Lendu Forest, and Amuda River which flows from West to East into Ora River.

The Ndrukpa have shifted to lumbering as a key economic activity for household income

³⁰ Ndrukpa Kingdom, 2019, p52 and Interview: Royal Council, 23 Feb. 2023)

generation. Ndrukpa derive their lumbering activity and expertise from Lendu Forest Reserve which is in Ndrukpa land. Similarly, they import timber from the Democratic Republic of Congo which is rich in natural forests.

The Ndrukpa practice both local and cross-border trade. The key commodities include timber, Irish potatoes, beans, cassava, and general merchandise. Ndrukpa kingdom is the food basket for Arua and Nebbi districts. Their main market and business centre is located at Gulajo center in Ndrukpa kingdom. The key markets the Ndrukpa people visit in the Eastern Democratic Republic of Congo include Katanga, Jelasiga, and Pandruma. From this market, they buy kitenge African textiles, Palm oil, beer, and gold.

Weaving is an economic activity within the household. Women weave baskets and winnowers out of local materials. Men weave granaries. The Ndrukpa practice hunting for leisure and food. The animals hunted are generally small animals like rabbits and birds. With the increase in the Ndrukpa population, there is limited land for agriculture and settlement, therefore traditional hunting grounds do not exist. However, the Ndrukpa hunters cross over to the Democratic Republic of Congo to hunt given the expanse of their hunting ground and natural forests.

Ndrukpa Military Organisation

The Ndrukpa despite being a calm and peaceful community, are known for their unity and military might. War and spirituality are inseparable among them. The Ndrukpa perform war rituals before they go to war. The ritual is to invoke the spirits to protect them during war. The Ndrukpa in the precolonial period, helped the Alur in their war of conquest as far as among the Banyoro and were the royal fighters for several Alur chiefs (Ndrukpa Kingdom 2019, p10). Whereas the Ndrukpa people did not have a standing army, they were always ready for battle. During childhood, the boys were trained in wrestling, hitting targets using bows and arrows, camouflaging, taking cover during combat, and attacking an enemy. The girls were taught self-defence using wrestling and

small axes and knives. Ndrulo; the Ndrukpa language is not spoken by any ethnic community in Uganda giving them the intelligence and military advantage during war.

In case of any external attack, the able-bodied men and youth called Congo-ladja were mobilized from the various Ndrukpa clans and villages. It was the responsibility of the young men to guard and protect the land, village, and kingdom from external attack.

Women were instrumental during the war. They would make an alarm to alert the men and village in case of attack by an enemy. They prepared men for battle. Women moved with short axes tied to their waist. A respondent reminisced that- In 2003 when Ndrukpa land was attacked, women participated in attacking and fighting the enemies. During peaceful times, the youth were engaged in economic activities like farming, hunting, and trade. The weapons used for fighting included arrows, bows and arrows, and swords. The poisoned arrows and spear blades would instantly kill the enemy.

CONCLUSION

This study unveils the unresearched state of Ndrukpa history which has perpetuated their social exclusion. Contemporary historians must show historical and intellectual justice and fairness to ethnic minority groups by extensively researching and documenting minority ethnic community histories, lest history will judge them. Documenting ethnic minorities is considered a tool and strategy to emancipate ethnic minority groups. Similarly, this becomes a strategy to revise and decolonize ethnic minority histories characterized by stereotypes.

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