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PEOPLE'S ANTI-COLONIAL STRUGGLES IN KIGEZI UNDER THE NYABINGI MOVEMENT, 1910–1930

Introduction

In its scramble for colonies in Africa, imperialism demarcated a new district, Kigezi, and added it to Uganda. Kigezi, which is south-western Uganda, borders Rwanda and Zaire. It was formed by sharing the Kivu-Murera-Ndorwa region among the three contending imperialist powers in the area – namely England, Germany, and Belgium. After series of confrontations – military, verbal, and diplomatic – they finally acceded to its sharing and concluded it through the 1911 Anglo-German-Belgian Agreement. This district of 2045 square miles was inhabited by six distinct peoples with varying modes of existence. While the Bakiga, Bahororo, Banyarwanda, and Bahunde depended on settled agriculture and/or livestock rearing, the Banyabutumbi and Batwa were still hunters and gatherers.

While the three imperialist powers were struggling amongst themselves over this region, the inhabitants did not fold their arms in despair, as passive spectators. They took initiative and for over two and half decades waged armed resistance against this invasion, the subsequent imposition of a colonial state apparatus and a host of new strange demands upon them. This form of reaction was partly dictated by the invaders' militaristic approach right from their first encounter and partly because of being conscious that these colonial forces were an actual danger to them. In response to this resistance, the colonial agents intensified the use of force to suppress it and threaten others from joining it or starting another one. To colonialism, these "savages" had to be defeated at whatever cost and forced to submit to colonial interests and demands.

It needs to be understood from the outset how the levels of development of these belligerent parties were at a great variance. On the one hand, the colonial forces represented highly developed capital interests. On the other hand, the inhabitants of this area were still in an economy which was characterized by low level of production and organization, rudimentary tools and weapons, still pre-capitalist and pre-industrial. Though some social differentiation was emerging and class formation still in its nascent stages in some areas, there was marked absence of commodity production and relations. There was no strong local social class and no strong state structure – either organically developed and linked in society or even imposed from above. Nor was there any standing armed force or any other organized formal structure to organize and/or defend the society from any external aggression.

Though these limitations acted counter to the people's interests, the people still advanced above them, took initiative and organized armed struggle. The insurgent Nyabingi religion gave expression to their grievances and provided the badly-needed

leadership, ideology and courage. Resistance took various forms – militant and passive, overt and covert etc. In the intensity of these struggles, the Nyabingi Movement developed qualitatively in leadership, membership, recruitment, organization, ideology, politics, training and combat, strategies and tactics, outlook etc. Cognizant of its indestructibility, resilience, and popularity, the colonial agents had to change from their ultra militarist approach and blend it with some political strategies, tactics and ploys before defeating it.¹

After a brief examination of the political economy of pre-colonial Kigezi, the study then deals with the colonization process in the area. It examines the factors underlying colonialism in this area and the reasons why the inhabitants resisted it for so long. It examines, historically and dialectically, how they organized in tension, the forms of recruitment, organization and mobilization, the various ideologies and tendencies that characterized this movement, their conception of the enemy, *inter alia*. It analyzes why it was Nyabingi religion that was singled out among the numerous religions existing then to provide the leadership, and the historical conditions that gave it a leading role in society. It also examines the conditions that dictated its transformation into a social movement and a popular ideology for liberation, and why and how it became a strong political force materially. The study also brings out reasons why such a region, which was at a low level of production with neither armed institution nor strong state structure could choose and sustain militant armed struggle against such a superior force for so long. It then focuses on the transformation that Nyabingi underwent over time, its outlook and functions and how it related to people's lives. It brings out how the Nyabingi Movement cut across the whole society. The study further explains why given a variety of identities, many chose the identity of religion, the forces it represented and the extent to which it facilitated liberation. It also examines the leadership that emerged, its origins, roles, forms of conscientization, how it articulated people's interests and rights, its capacity and limitations etc.

The study goes on to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Nyabingi Movement, its achievements and failures, the factors which led to its defeat and the social and political consequences of these defeats on both parties. The combination and application of various methodologies enables this study to expose the simplistic, erroneous, racist postulations that are premised on the assumption that social movements in Africa were a logical consequence of violence that was endemic and wide-spread in all African societies – a Hobbesian situation. Dr. Carothers (1954), alleges that in Africa, "... life was cheap and full of fear. Only often one's own life was only saved by violence". John Roscoe (1922) is persuaded to fabricate another falsification. To him, the people of Kigezi were the most unruly he had met during all his journeyings, had no respect for anyone from other villages, would spear down anyone they met who was not of their locality. In his false account, they made it too difficult to make the shortest journeys alone as one had to be fully armed even when going to dig and had to keep the weapons near, in anticipation of attack any time. He saw no hope in his "Hobbesian" Kigezi where even men of the same village were easily aroused to anger against each other and would use their spears freely, wounding or killing anyone upon the slightest provocation.

¹ See PHILLIPS' Report: June 1919.

In examining the character, tenets and objectives of the Nyabingi Movement, this study is able to dismiss the distorted misrepresentation of the Movement, attributing its rise to religious fanaticism of illiterate, superstitious peasants led by religious sentiments and fears (Philipps 1919). With concrete historical and empirical facts, this study is also able to expose the anti-Nyabingi Movement accusations by Christian adherents and ideologues that it was "reactionary", "savage", "anti-European", and "anti-civilization" – virtues which colonialism purported to represent (Sebalijja, Y., 1911; Ngoregoza, P., 1969; Rwampigi, J. M., 1980). By examining the interests that each of the contending forces represented and how each party responded to the popular demands, the study is able to bring out concrete historical facts to bear out the Nyabingi Movement from the pejorative and derogatory depictions by sections of society that it was useless, foolhardy, satanic and suicidal and to bring out the heroism involved in fighting against an invincible, superior force that was technologically and economically more advanced.

This study also explores the contributions of minorities in this movement; the internal reforms that were demanded, which ones were initiated and their consequences. It then illuminates the strategies and tactics that the colonial powers employed to defeat this movement, the people's reactions to them and the demise of the movement. It then deals with the colonial response to the Nyabingi Movement, the reforms that it initiated and the effects of armed struggles, violence and repression on both parties. It also shows how the movement was defeated, the methods that were employed to undermine it and pre-empt its resurgence. The study also brings to the open the new consciousness that emerged during and after these struggles and the consequences of these defeats on both parties.

Pre-colonial Kigezi

Pre-colonial Kigezi was inhabited by different peoples, with varying modes of production, cultures etc. While the plain lands like Kamwezi, Rujumbura and Bufumbira were inhabited by pastoralists and peasant agriculturalists, the southern parts around Lake Bunyonyi and the surrounding forests were inhabited by Batwa, a roving nationality. Members of this nationality had no fixed homes. Their mode of existence was predominantly hunting, looting, and pillaging. The rest of the region was inhabited by settled peasants, who practised mixed farming.

Their production was mainly for use-values at household level. Their main tool was the hoe. Nearly every household had its own tools of production and livestock. The livestock were kept for clothing, bride-price, and exchange.

Despite their self-sufficiency, they were still at a low level of mastering their environment. Communication was mainly by land and water. Walking and human portage were the modes of transportation on land while swimming and canoes were the mode on lakes and rivers.

Forms of Ownership and Production

Property ownership was basically at household level. Philipps described it as,

the system by which each valley or hill is occupied solely by a solid block of people consisting each of a different clan ... They do not admit or understand the private ownership of land, which is held by the tribe, sub-divided into the clan, for the benefit of the family or community. They consider land, as the birds, the water, and the air, to be the attributes of mother Earth to provide a sufficiency for the direct maintenance of all.²

Purseglove noted that a man owned as much land as he could cultivate and defend with the assistance of his clansmen. They applied shifting cultivation with a usufruct of as much land as the household could cultivate in a season, together with the fallow land that they had cultivated in the past.³ This type of agriculture prevented soil exhaustion and degradation, soil erosion, invasion of pests, and vermins. It maintained soil fertility and balanced the ecosystem. As it did not encourage environmental destruction, it ensured continuity for the peasants' economic, military, and social needs.

While men had control over this land, production decisions in agriculture were made mainly by women. The same thing applied to matters related to feeding plans. Individuals and households owned their own property namely: shelter, livestock, utensils, clothing and ornaments, beehives, instruments of production, weapons, canoes, and troughs etc. However, *Nyineka* (male family head) was the overall controller. When he died, his property would be divided among his family. This was known as *okubagana* (inheriting). The eldest son would take over the economic, political and social responsibilities of the deceased. This gave him chance to get the greatest share of the property.

The *omuryango* (sub-clan) had external control over land of families at lineage level. At a higher level, the *ruganda* (clan) had external control at a broader level. Both came in times of conflict arising from violation of established property rights, or from external threats inter alia.⁴ Production was based on various factors like nature of the job, the skills, the specialization involved and division of labour based on age, gender, location etc. The 1911 Commission noted that most cultivation was done by women and children.⁵ In Kigezi, polygamy was a common practice. This was because women were desired for economic reasons. They were required for production of wealth and children. This is the basis of women being referred to as *abazaana* or *abairukazi* literary meaning women slaves.

The saying goes that women belonged to no clan. This arose from the fact that women did not belong to the lineage in which they were born. Before marriage, they

2 J. E. PHILLIPS, 1923, "Mufumbiro, The Birunga Volcanoes of Kigezi - Rwanda - Kivu", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. LXI, No. 4.

3 J. W. PURSEGLOVE, 1951, "Resettlement in Kigezi", *Journal of African Administration*, Vol. 3, pp. 13-21. Also refer to File District Book, Department of Agriculture, Kabale District Administration.

4 Refer to epics on "Ruyooka Rwa Maganya" and "Kakwaya Ka Mishereko".

5 British Government Report entitled: Uganda: Report on the Work of the British Section of the Anglo-German-Belgian Boundary Commission, 1911. London, Darling & Son, 1912.

belonged to the father's lineage. They were important in providing labour. Though unmarried women did not have rights to land, they enjoyed the proceeds from it. However, the role of distribution of these proceeds lay mainly with the wives. In the event of death of the mother or divorce, her children would retain the property attached to the household - in case they were old enough. The elder daughters would take over the mother's duties in production, utilization and distribution. Women did not own land. Land belonged to the clan, under direct control of *Nyineka*. However, its products belonged to the household which worked it. The same applied to livestock.

Jobs which required skilled labour were also based on gender and age division. Examples of men's jobs included wrought-iron work, carpentry, leather tanning, and cloth-making. Acquiring such skills required a long period of apprenticeship, dedication, and care. Other vital jobs included medicine and midwifery, prophesying, religious leadership, and rain-making. It was this group which extracted surplus from peasants for their services or as sacrifices or tributes.

In spite of their main role in the production of wealth, women and children were prohibited from eating certain delicacies. These included kidney, the heart, the sternum, the tongue etc., of animals. Men created myths, superstitions, and other ideologies around these foods. They also put heavy penalties around this exploitative practice to bar the women and children from challenging these privileges. Men invoked religions, gods, and spirits to which they were the mediums to check members of their families' behaviour relative to all this and punish all contraveners. Likewise, women were prohibited from eating goat meat or mutton. The cooking and distribution of meat was by men. Eating meat that was being roasted from a roasting-rod was prohibited. A woman caught eating meat which was being roasted would be fined a live goat. If an animal died during *Nyineka*'s absence, they preserved the meat until his return. *Nyineka*'s meals were sacred. We find that women, who actually played a leading role in production of wealth ate dregs and offals. All these rules were taught and re-emphasized. Sanctions against their violation were clear.

These practices created and multiplied social injustice and grievances within families and society at large. This created a basis for various family struggles, both militant and silent, divorces and separation, poisoning etc. This became a basis for Nyabingi religion to come in at the household level on the side of the oppressed for both their spiritual aspirations and social liberation.

Mode of Politics

Taking politics as the concentrated expression of the contradictions and relations at the economic level we find that *Nyineka* was the main object of the struggle at household level, in areas where classes had not formed or where they were in nascent stages. Internal struggles within this social formation were mainly between husbands and wives, youths and parents, and between co-wives etc. These struggles revolved around land and movable property, especially livestock. These took place at household level. They appeared in various ways and were resolved in different ways like fights, abandoning the wife etc. Elders would come in to arbitrate.

The main contradiction between daughters and fathers revolved around livestock for dowry. Pre-marital pregnancies or loss of virginity before marriage would deprive fathers of that wealth. Such acts were condemned vehemently as abominable and punishable by death by throwing the culprits over cliffs. Resistance to this was in form of the victims escaping before detection and rendering themselves into the slavery of some wealthy men. Similarly, contradictions between mothers and daughters revolved around this, as mothers were expected to train and police the latter. Such pre-marital pregnancies also caused contradictions between husbands and wives. This would lead to fights between husbands and wives, or husbands tormenting the wives or sending them away, etc., for failure to train and police the daughters.

At the household level were struggles between wives and mothers-in-law. In her husband's home, the bride was expected to respect her parents-in-law and all those who custom accorded such entitlement. The wife was expected to rear children, feed her husband and all members in the household, remain faithful to her husband and loyal to the new lineage and was not expected to bring witchcraft or magic to hurt people in this lineage.

Mothers-in-law had a big say in the management of the households and in the distribution of resources such as land and livestock to the sons and their wives. In fact the older a woman grew, the more legitimacy and assertiveness she gained. Most of them tended to be very oppressive and demanding. As a sign of respect, daughters-in-law and sons-in-law were outlawed from pronouncing names of their mothers-in-law. This was known as *kusinda*. On their part, mothers-in-law were expected to love their daughters-in-law, counsel them, provide them with some property to assist and facilitate them in marriage. To accomplish this required respect and this was enshrined in their customs. Mothers-in-law were self-appointed overseers and informers on their daughters-in-law to their sons. They counselled the latter on how to tame their wives. Thus, mothers-in-law occupied an oppressive and exploitative position which was sanctioned by tradition.

There were contradictions between these women and some fathers-in-law over sexual harassment. Such fathers-in-law would argue that they wanted to see where their cows went by requiring sexual favours from their daughters-in-law. This contradiction would be resolved in different ways including fights, divorces, dispute resolution by elders and by naming children allegorical names etc.

Men created ideologies, myths, and proverbs to justify and protect their exploitative position. They initiated all brides into this relationship from the first day. A bride was then surrounded by family religions of which *Nyineka* was the religious head. Obedience was enforced through invoking gods and ancestors, known as *okuhindiza*. They also ostracized sons for disobedience. This was known as *okucwa*. This denied the victim the right to inherit property, or to enjoy anything in the family. It was also feared as men threatened that it would bring misery, infertility, disasters, and untimely death etc. Men justified their dictatorship with sayings like the shoulder can never grow taller than the head; two bulls can never stay in the same kraal; two heads can never be cooked in the same pot. They also created and told stories about rebellious characters and how they met disastrous ends. These stories were passed on to new generations.

Resolving such antagonistic contradictions involved fights, separation, with the husband rejecting to eat the wife's food and/or to enter her house at all (*kuzira*). This

required elders to come in and arbitrate. In case it was proved that the woman was wrong, she was required to appease the husband by preparing special meals and brewing alcohol before he returned to her. This was known as *okuhonga*. On the other hand, if they found that it was the husband who was wrong, he would be asked to return to her. Other methods of resolving these contradictions included naming derogatory and allegorical names, or enmity and fights between the lineages of the husband and the wife. Resolutions like divorces and dowry-refunding (*kuzimura*) depended on the nature of the contradiction, judgement, and the attitude of the affected parties. All these formed fertile ground, which Nyabingi religion exploited to penetrate and gain popularity in this society.

Matters like justice, defence, celebrations, death, crises, marriage cases, property, production, divorce, family social justice, murder, revenge,⁶ individual rights, migration, going in search of food, etc., demanded greater attention than the head of the household. This was for elders of lineages. They, like *Nyineka*, were never elected by all members of the lineage.⁷ They met together as a body to attend to different disputes from different households within their lineages and resolve crises. In these councils of elders even minorities like women, youths, and children were heard although they could not participate in the hearing of the cases and in passing judgement. However, old women or women with skills and reputation like doctors attended. It was through such processes that they maintained internal cohesion.

Defence was a collective responsibility of all sections of the clan. Their weapons included spears, bows and arrows, shields, knives and sticks, alarms and horns. They developed complex systems of detecting the enemies and rallying the message through a system of codes which they varied very often. This was aimed at preventing their enemies from deciphering them and penetrate their defence system. Colonialism attributed this system of codes to be the contribution of Nyabingi. The truth is that these codes were developed long before the rise of Nyabingi religion in the area. However, these codes were incorporated into the Nyabingi movement. In these battles they would kill the males, capture women, children, and livestock. Women and children were converted into wives and slaves. This increased conflicts and disunity between clans. Before any military campaign, they consulted *Abagiriwa* (priests or priestesses) and future tellers (*abaraguzi*). All people spied and participated in defending their clans.⁸ The 1911 Commission Report commented on these peasants' military preparations thus:

All able-bodied men are called upon to fight and in such a case will wear charms, consisting small bucks' horns or small pieces of wood, round their necks. Such charms protect the wearer from death or wounds. Dances take place before the

6 Refer to Epics on Kakwaya Ka Mishereko; Ruyooka Rwa Maganya and the War Songs. Justice of murder cases included revenging (*kuhoora*) and atonement (*kukaraba*). Justice extended to all sections of their existence.

7 Op.cit. These emerged through personal exploits etc. Songs, stories, and oral literature, Nyakeirima Ka Muzoora's great prophecies on imperialism. P. NGOROGOZA, 1969, *Kigezi and its People*. Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau.

8 Op.cit. During this study, our respondents informed us how women and children would equip men with stones and in some cases use the stones themselves. They would shield themselves with winnowing trays. In other cases, they would use their husbands' weapons, pestles etc.

warriors set out for the scene of action and after their victorious return. Their arms are two spears, used either for throwing or stabbing, and bows and arrows. All the male prisoners are killed and the dead have their hands and feet cut off; but women, and children who can march, are made captives ... show great courage and do not hesitate to charge home in the face of rifle fire.⁹

Religion

This area had many religious beliefs. These religions included *Emandwa*, *Ryangombe*, *Mugasya*, *Kahukeiguru*, *Kazooba Bitindangyezi*, *Esiriba* and *Biheeko Nyabingi*.¹⁰ Being at a low level of production with many peasants subjected to the mercy of nature, these peasants still attributed most of what they could not understand and their problems to the supernatural factor. That is why they had so many religions, mostly at household level. While it looked like an ideology of liberation and resistance, Nyabingi religion was an ideology of domination and exploitation by the Abagirwa (priests or priestesses). They used it to extract surplus value from peasants, and used it to threaten them. On the other hand, heads of households who were the spiritual heads and mediums of the other religions used them also for dominating those below them. At the same time, those below them attributed any crises/problem to these religions and it was the heads of the concerned households to intercede for them. Nyabingi gradually gained dominance over others.

Nyabingi religion depended on coercion, intimidation, curses, and threats, the claim to inflict mysterious diseases and deaths. These were plotted and executed secretly by the Abagirwa. However, it gained in popularity also because of its spiritual and temporal ideals. In most social conflicts, it was the Nyabingi religion which identified with the oppressed people, preached emancipation from oppression and exploitation. It provided a foundation for solidarity, courage, and action against oppressors whenever it was possible.¹¹ It extended to Rwanda, Burundi, Tanganyika, Congo, Mpororo, and Nkore. With the advent of colonialism period, peasants did not sit watching in desperation. From the time of invasion peasants resisted. Their resistance took overt and covert forms. Some were militant, others were passive, some took individual courses, others communal forms. However, all of them ended in defeat by an organized, coercive force in alliance with local allies. Nyabingi religion mobilized peasants into armed resistance for over twenty years. Despite increased state repression, massacres, imprisonment, and deportations, Nyabingi resistances

9 The Anglo-German-Belgian Boundary Commission Report, op.cit. Also refer to Epics on Ruyooka.

10 From its doctrine of action, militancy, and courage, Nyabingi came to be known as *Rutatiina Mireego* – one that can never fear bows and arrows. Its other names included *Omukama*, *Nyinekyaro* meaning ruler. 1928 it took on another name: *Muzeire Kasente* – a parent that accepted money.

11 Refer to PHILIPPS Report of July 31 1919. DE LAGGER, LOUIS, 1959, *Premiere Partie Le Rwanda Ancien*. Kadgayi, Imprimatur; TURIAHIKAYO-RUGYEMA, 1974, A History of Rukiga in South Western Uganda and Northern Rwanda 1500–1930. Ph.D. Thesis, University of Michigan. P. NGOROGOZA, 1969, *Kigezi and its People*. Nairobi, East African Literature Bureau.

continued flaring up between 1910 and mid-1930s. Colonialism accepted that "purely military measures have been proved useless".

By the time of colonial invasion, Nyabingi was the strongest religion and spiritual force. There were two major differences in this region. The first category was of areas which were highly differentiated with classes living off the surplus labour of others. These were areas where states had formed or where chiefdoms existed. These included Rwanda and Bufumbira, Kayonza, Kinkizi, and Mpororo. It became easy in such class societies for the exploited and oppressed subjects to accept Nyabingi religion for their emancipation purposes as it promised. It should be noted that this class could not accept easily the teachings of Nyabingi due to the dominant religion of the ruling class and actual fear of reprisal by the ruling class. To concretize this, Emandwa was the religion of the ruling class in Rwanda. It is not by accident that the king was the head of the Emandwa institution in Rwanda. In areas where states had not formed or where they were in their embryonic stages, it was the head of the household, who headed these institutions. As such, Nyabingi's Abagirwa had to use intimidation, coercion and threats to convince them to accept Nyabingi. What is clear is that in any social conflict, Nyabingi religion became the religion of the oppressed and exploited majority.

In the rest of the region where classes were in their nascent stage of formation or where they had not yet come into formation, the Abagirwa of Nyabingi were still able to identify some of privileged sections, groups, and individuals there and the social grievances identified with the oppressed majority. In such societies, the dominant lineages and family heads became the main targets. If the lineage accepted Nyabingi religion, then new targets of its struggle would be found among other lineages. It is of interest to note that at one time the Batwa used Nyabingi religion to raid peasants in these areas. However, the same peasants gradually adopted the same religion to defend themselves against the Batwa. Here Nyabingi had begun as an ideology of domination and then transformed itself into an ideology of resistance. To understand the acceptance of Nyabingi religion amidst all these competing religions requires going beyond its intimidating and coercive characteristics to looking at the people's social grievances and problems that it addressed. Without this it may be hard to understand the core issues, since after all, peasants had the capacity to resist this religion as they had done others where need be. It is clear that religions have an element of intimidation and instil fear, and that state religions, more often than not, are backed by coercion.

Nyabingi was presented to its followers as having been created in the form of a woman: a female spirit which lived under the earth but which often appeared to people, with rapid transformative powers into feminine personalities. It was assumed that it could transform into different forms of destitution, for example, like that of a desperate, poor old woman etc. It was interpreted that Nyabingi would do so to punish whoever mistreated her or scorned her or refused to welcome her or denied her food and shelter. People feared that Nyabingi would punish them through diseases, failure for a woman to get a husband, death etc. It was assumed that she would reward those who treated her well. The moral lessons from this included discipline and reforms, enforced humanity, generosity and humility among the oppressed. All these feminine imaginations about Nyabingi and its being created in a feminine form and

the dominance of selecting females into its service leads us to conclude that it was likely to have been created by the dominated, oppressed females.

The practical character of Nyabingi religion to people's problems and its spiritual aspirations increased its acceptance and popularity among the oppressed sections of society. Despite its intimidatory and coercive character more women came into its service. This was partly because of its Abagirwa's ability to identify with the oppressed, suffering people. These in turn worked hard to spread its fame. This arose mainly from women's resistance to male domination and oppression. Nyabingi had developed through exploiting the grievances of the oppressed. Its common object of attack were the privileged groups and individuals. In so doing, men, women, and children were drawn into its fold. This was for the benefit of their spiritual beliefs and partly out of fear of its powers and malice. The Abagirwa were responsible for defending it theoretically and militarily. They promoted it, spread it and recruited new membership to its fold.

The Material Base for Nyabingi's Rise

When people fell sick, they would attribute such sickness(es) to Nyabingi or any other spirit. They would consult an *Omugirwa*, an *Omufumu* (traditional doctor) or *Abaraguza* (future seers) on what was to be done. These would apply their skills and cunning to guess what the problem was and what sacrifices were required. This was the basic method through which these professionals would also appropriate the surplus from the peasants for these services. In other words, they did not offer free services. The clients had to pay something. The same applied to the rain makers or rain controllers. The Abagirwa were supposed to intercede for people in times of crises and would treat some sicknesses. It should be noted that their initiation involved learning medicine and treatment of different diseases, how to expand imagination in case of new, unique crises. In the same vein, they were taught how to create fears, curse offenders, fight and lead people. In defence of Nyabingi institution, people believed that Nyabingi cured both physiological and psychological diseases and those caused by supernatural forces.

There were two forms of surplus extraction through tribute in form of sacrifices to Nyabingi. These were *okuterekyerera* and *okutweija*. These included cattle, food, meat and *enturiire* (beer made of sorghum and honey) or young daughters. Whoever asked Nyabingi for a favour had to give some sacrifice or offering. Such requests included children, husband, cattle, good harvests or healing of the sick. Nyabingi was assumed to be the source of things. Those who did not have the means would make pledges to bring it. People were taught that if Nyabingi asked for something and the concerned person failed to bring it, then Nyabingi would take it as an offence, leading to rejection of the requests and to deaths. In other words, Nyabingi was not necessarily for the very poor, those without the wherewithal. Its acceptance or rejection of their sacrifices or promises would be known by the fulfilment or unfulfilment of their requests. Whoever promised something would have to fulfil the promise. In other words, requests made to Nyabingi and sacrifices were mainly in material form and the latter was compulsory. This was the surplus value that maintained the

Abagirwa and their source of wealth. Nyabingi gained its popularity from the interests it appeared to project and fight for. Its Abagirwa preached resistance by the down-trodden and articulated their interests. Peasants found this very acceptable and considered Nyabingi to be fearless. In fact, those in its service could not abandon the membership in times of hardship. Instead, new leadership came up when the old one got separated from membership. Similarly, peasants who believed in Nyabingi consulted Abagirwa for its consent before going to war. This was the time for those in its service to exercise their imagination and judge the situation before answering. If peasants learnt that it had sanctioned the war, then they would go to it knowing that Nyabingi was leading them. Its followers believed that Nyabingi would not lead them to war if it did not sanction it. It was assumed that Nyabingi would punish them if they fought badly and lost the war that it had sanctioned. This forced them to fight even harder. It preached action, courage and encouraged struggles against oppression and exploitation. In these circumstances, where the enemy was an already established institution, secrecy was a *sine qua non*. It was because of this that the Abagirwa stressed the importance of secrecy and revenged on all traitors under the cover of Nyabingi.

The question arises as to why it was Nyabingi which developed as people's religion amidst so many religions. In other words, the limitations of the other religions became a fertile ground for Nyabingi and its strengths. In the absence of any organized force to protect these people from internal and external threats the oppressed found a vent in Nyabingi.

However, new developments led women to the fore in some of these military ventures. This was greatly achieved with the emergence of colonialism in this area. People prayed to this Nyabingi religion and dedicated their lives, relatives and property to its care. Colonial repression and witch-hunt forced the membership of Nyabingi to become very secretive and changed the methods and times of worship.

Selection of young females into the ranks of Nyabingi religion was highly secretive, mysterious and frightening. This process always took place at night. The sign for the selected girl was a metallic rod or spear which would be placed between her thighs. From that morning, it would be clearly known and spread among the peasants how Nyabingi had selected so-and-so into its service. No one would object or contradict this choice. Peasants would begin to respect and fear such girls. However, we need to transcend these idealistic postulations and deceptions in order to understand why this selection was made in the dark, especially at night when people were asleep. This was because the Abagirwa who carried out these secret missions of selection wanted to hoodwink the peasants and maintain the myth and sacredness in the exercise and institution. A breach of this practice would have undermined the process and the Nyabingi institution and would have forced peasants, especially men, to resist such choices and the legitimacy of the Abagirwa. It was, therefore, imperative to have people believe that these were works of supernatural forces.

In a context of continuous armed struggles by Nyabingi followers against the established order and privileged groups and persons, Nyabingi religion had to preach more vigorously for the application of instruments of violence by the oppressed. This was a point of departure from the past where weapons were the exclusive monopoly of men.

As Nyabingi was against armed established order, its fold had to be militant for self-preservation. Its Abagirwa and followers had to be militant for defence purposes. They also had to broaden its social base among the population. This became easy as women would meet other women so easily in the gardens and fields or as they worked or while going to dig and in the process they would transmit information about Nyabingi and talk about her exploits. Women were also in a better position to pass on the teachings and influence of Nyabingi to the young and the dependants. All these made Nyabingi get rooted into their lives. This explains why there were many female Abagirwa, who organized, led, and sustained these anti-colonial resistances under Nyabingi for over two and a half decades. It also explains partly why it was impossible to defeat Nyabingi militarily despite superior arms, technology, and skills. In a nutshell, Nyabingi religion tried to address social, political, economic, and military issues of the people. Thus, these anti-colonial struggles were not a continuation of the Hobbesian situation where "human life has no value amongst them".¹² They were a response to a social crisis and had specific objectives of self-emancipation and preservation. Nyabingi religion gave the resistance ideological guidance, leadership, and strength. The military option under Nyabingi was the feasible option for them against the invading armed forces. In this contest, Nyabingi sided with peasant resisters who represented popular interests against colonialism which represented oppressive and exploitative alien interests.

Being a new and dynamic religion it developed a mechanism of providing new leadership and theories in times of crises that led to separation of leadership from membership. What this shows is that in a desperate situation, with no organization or forum, minorities in many cases resort to any organized platform like religion which allows them a platform for articulating their interests. In such circumstances, it gives them a stage for realizing or defending their rights. It gives them some form of promise, hope, and a sense of direction. Religion, at this stage, increases in relating to these people's material existence. It is only in religion that they find some solution. However, it should also be understood that in oppressive, harsh, and exploitative conditions, the victims still find some solace in religion. In this context, religion is at the service of the exploiters and oppressors. It is in here that one of the functions of religion is to obscure the existing relations between the various social groups within that social formation.

In Nyabingi's context, there was marked development in the role of women both in its service and defence, right from the pre-colonial to colonial Kigezi. As society underwent changes, there were changes that Nyabingi institution also underwent. We see it developing very fast with the advent of colonialism. Colonialism at this time gave Nyabingi a broader platform for mobilization and action. The leadership fell mainly in the hands of Abagirwa. Anyone who mobilized peasants into armed struggles against colonialism had to use Nyabingi. As such, the first armed struggles were characterized by spontaneity and were short-lived. There was poor planning of peasant forces against well-armed, sophisticated enemy forces who were professional.

¹² Assistant District Commissioner Sullivan to Provincial Commissioner Western Province (P.C.W.P.) on September 30 1913. Also see P.C.W.P. to Colonial Secretary October 10 1913.

It is with the coming in of the war between the colonial powers that Nyabingi became very vibrant and reached its climax. We see at this point serious, long, and bloody resistances emerging under the leadership of various personalities with different historical origins, training, experience, and knowledge of struggle. Some of these were army deserters from colonial forces and colonial chiefs. Others had returned from deportation where they acquired a lot of knowledge about the enemy, his weapons, how to acquire and use these weapons and his weaknesses. It was during their colonial service or detentions that they also created friends and allies in the enemy's forces.

Nyabingi Movement underwent a transformation during this struggle. As struggles intensified, some Abagirwa took up its personification. This was mainly for political and military purposes. The need for this transformation sprang from the contradictions between the Abagirwa and some lineage heads who opposed the war or defied being led by women to war. The Abagirwa realized the importance of this transformation in asserting their authority over the membership. It would help them to dictate commands and orders over the membership and maintain control over them. This would have the effect of imposing discipline. Being a Nyabingi personification allowed them the right to deal with any individual or group with dissenting views in a way that they wished. It also had the effect of encouraging the peasant resisters into courageous struggle as they would feel that they were led by Nyabingi's personification. It had the effect of increasing peasants' fears of Nyabingi. This helped to consolidate their resistance, beliefs, unity and secrecy. Its weakness was that the resisters would be blinded by this illusion to attack this sophisticated enemy without retreat. This led to massacres.

The District Commissioner outlined in June 1919 how, Nyabingi cult had been a foreign element throughout Rwanda, opposed to the established native religion, revolutionary in method and anarchic in effect:

On the advent of the protecting powers the European element was included, equally with the two other privileged classes of Watussi and Watwa, within the scope of its virulence. By means of an unusually developed form of witchcraft, in which hypnotic suggestion plays a leading part, the country within the sphere of its operation is completely terrorized. (sic!)¹³

He submitted that it was deeply rooted in the whole region. Thus ideal means and conditions are created for '... fomenting and organization of rebellion, and (the most serious feature of all) absolute secrecy ensured'. They had learnt that the character of the society '... does not shrink from organizing attacks in force on fortified positions held by troops'. It had become clear to colonialism that Nyabingi is indestructible: thus the break up of the agitation and the arrest of the practitioners would not convince anyone of the futility of the practitioners' claims but would only point to the ill luck of the chosen media and to the fact that the Nyabingi had left them to settle elsewhere. It does however have a salutary effect in causing others to be more modest before claiming to be possessed by Nyabingi.¹⁴

By 1930 colonialism had come to understand the complex character of Nyabingi, how it was deeply rooted in people's lives:

¹³ D. C's Report of June 26 1919. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

¹⁴ *Idem*.

'Nyabingi' is a female spirit which is the god and religion of these people and therefore the difficulty in eradicating the beliefs is extreme and will take years until education gradually helps to stamp it out.¹⁵

While colonialism was using European religions for penetration, it could not tolerate Nyabingi religion. It, therefore, had to use all weapons and personnel against Nyabingi. Another important difference lay in personnel. While Abagirwa were from this area and spoke local languages, colonial personnel were different in colour, language, and culture. All these helped peasants to compare the two forces. Many of them understood the historical and social usefulness of Nyabingi. The first contest, therefore, had to be military.

Events that Precipitated Nyabingi Movement

As the Bakiga say, dogs browse on crops of a person with misfortunes. Colonial invasion was following a series of crises that had hit these peasants and weakened them. A persistent disastrous drought had caused great famine which caused untold deaths. This was followed by plague and other diseases. At their heels followed Batwa bands, who invaded them for food and killed many of the survivors. Those who survived and fled these crises lost their cattle, lives or wives in the process to people where they had run to. The survivors and returnees then confronted Belgian forces which came killing, looting, and raping. Then followed the Germans.¹⁶ The colonial report of September 6 1911 described the situation thus:

Apart from the recent change in European control which is in itself an unsettling factor in the native mind, two principle causes have continued to make the settlement of the district ... slow and difficult ... the severe famine which devastated Rukiga and the adjacent countries some four years ago – Rukiga was almost depopulated and the few remaining inhabitants fell an easy prey to marauding bands of Batwa, a hill tribe from the south ... The majority of the Bakiga took refuge in the neighbouring countries of Rwanda and of the Chief Makaburri and have only in the last two years commenced returning ... in most cases the Bakiga lost the greater part of their stock, either from the famine, the Batwa or from the heavy toll levied by the inhabitants of the countries they took refuge in as the price of their temporary sojourn.¹⁷

¹⁵ District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Western Province on May 29 1930.

¹⁶ We learnt from our respondents how the Germans and Belgians came massacring peasants. The encounter between Belgian colonialists and peasants of Bugarama and Kitare concretizes this. The besieged peasants hid in rocks. They used ropes to lift their cattle up the rocks. When the adversaries came, peasants rolled rocks at them. When the latter tried to shoot up at them, they hit the rock and finally left, defeated. Also refer to the Kavu Case in which Belgians killed 32 peasants and looted cattle on March 21 1916. Le Général Commandant en Chef admitted this crime on October 22 1916 and paid 170 heads of cattle. File War With Germany: Kavu Incident. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

¹⁷ Kigezi Monthly Report, September 6 1911.

Colonial Invasion and the Creation of Kigezi

The question why Africa became the target and victim of European capitalism in the last centuries has been addressed by a lot of scholars. The reasons lie in the desperate need for cheap permanent sources of raw materials produced by cheap labour for the expanding European industries, markets for the European industrial products, places for re-investment and re-exportation, and places for resettling her ever-increasing population. (See Mamdani 1976, 1983, Mukherjee 1984, Lenin 1986, Rodney 1976.) As full control of any market entails political control, imperialism had to take political control of Africa – hence the inevitability of colonialism. The explanation why the three colonial powers struggled viciously amongst each other and against peasants for Kigezi lies in the Political Officer's communication to the Colonial Secretary in January 1910 on his scramble for territory;

I would like to remind His Majesty's Government that if our object in acquiring the Mfumbiro District is to obtain a route for the Cape to Cairo railway, it will be necessary to include within a strip of the Rutshuru Valley, since the hills to the S. E. present an impassable barrier to the passage of a railway.

The Belgian Post at Rutshuru will be untenable once the Mfumbiro District comes under us since all food supplies for their troops and employees is drawn from here.¹⁸

But as this region was not empty and the inhabitants were not objects of history, what were their reactions to this invasion and the consequent imposition of political control over them from outside? How did this area come under colonial rule? While European missionaries were an important forward force in the colonization of Africa, this was not the case in the present Kigezi. The first European parties to settle in the Kivu-Mulera region were Catholic Missionaries.¹⁹ These White Fathers had penetrated the region, opened it up, set up mission stations and carried out their mission of preaching. However, they were resisted in various ways. Mulera peasants murdered Loupias, the Father Superior of the French Catholic Mission on April 1 1910 and were not apprehended.²⁰

This new church was already sowing seeds of hatred and enmity among the peasants. Mukasa showed that there was great hostility between the Catholic converts and the "Pagans", that the latter hated the Catholic priests right from the beginning and wanted to kill them. In his account, the neighbourhood was full of

¹⁸ COOTE's letter of 21 January 1910 to Acting Colonial Secretary, in File on Border Demarcation. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

¹⁹ S. MUKASA, 1912, "Olugendo Olw'Abaku'u Abe Mbalala mu Kigezi ne mu Rwanda". *Munno*, Kampala, December 1912. He shows how Catholic Missionaries had set up mission stations, with many Catholic Priests and Brothers, and Catholic converts, very good churches of fired bricks and tiles.

²⁰ Letter of The Political Officer, Kivu Mission to the Acting Colonial Secretary dated April 9 1910. File No. 147/09 Uganda National Archives, Entebbe. K.D. Report of May 3 1912 reported the capture of Chief Lukarra for the murder of the French Father Loupias. He had been captured by the Imperial Resident of Rwanda. Chief Birahira had been giving him sanctuary. Other resisters: Mujaruhara and Manuka were in hiding in British territory near Mt. Muhabura. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

enemies, who had killed two Catholic priests, one boy, three Catholic converts and two pagans in one hour.²¹

In the scramble for this region, the British on their arrival found the Belgians and Germans there. Their arrival sparked off serious protests. Monsieur Davignon protested against British encroachment on Belgian colony in September 1909.²²

These peasants at Kibimba resisted forced food contributions to the British forces under Campbell despite Coote's threats. Coote imprisoned their leadership and forced them to contribute food. The Belgians used these atrocities against the peasants to accuse the British.

This inter-imperialist struggle reached a peak when the Belgian soldiers arrested the British forces at Rubona, and detained them for about a month before they escaped to Mbarara. We find that it was the peasants who had to pay the price for British invasion. Granville complained of the invasion by Congolese forces, looting peasants' property, killing a woman, wounding, raping and abducting some peasants.²³

The defence for British colonialism was that this area was not civilly administered until 1912. The implication of this statement is that this area was pre-political, with a leadership vacuum. This legitimized British invasion to save the situation. It does not take into account the form of politics that was in existence at that particular time. It negates existence of the inhabitants' history and deprives them of any form of politics.

The inter-imperialist and anti-imperialist rivalries intensified. While at Ihunga, Captain Ireland had communicated to the O.C. Uganda Protectorate Troops in 1909 about this rivalry, on the contradictions between Belgians and Germans. Fifteen Belgian askaris had deserted with arms and ammunition on November 21 1909 unpursued. This continued in the subsequent period. Captain Ireland reported in March 1910 low morale and massive desertions among Belgian troops due to heavy death toll. Thirty seven Belgian troops had died of dysentery since August 1909. Twenty three troops had deserted with arms and ammunition previously.²⁴ He urged

21 Idem. Mukasa recounted how they crossed Bukamba from Rwaza with loaded guns.

22 Davignon maintained his protest against the entry of British forces under Coote in Belgian Territory. He condemned their establishing a camp on River Kigezi, in violation of the Clause of the General Berlin Act, which prescribed the use of mediation before arms. He showed how the Anglo-German arrangements of July 1, 1890 and May 19 1909 did not attribute this territory to Britain. He reiterated this in his letter to the Baron Greindl on July 19 1909.

Refer to Communication of von Schoen to Baron Greindl of July 30 1909; communication of British Foreign Office of August 17 1909; and "Agreement Respecting the Boundary Between the North-Western Portion of German East Africa and Uganda" of May 19 1909 which in referring to the rights derived from the Agreements of November 8, 1884 and July 1, 1890 in which Germany ceded to Britain parts of Mfumbiro region that she held and Britain promised to make no further claims on Germany. Document: "Boundaries: Uganda - Congo"; Olsen's letter to District Commissioner Kigezi of July 12 1909 entitled "violation de territoire par troupes anglaises"; No. 405 and Political Officer to the Acting Colonial Secretary of September 3 1909. File No. 147/09. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

23 Earl Granville to Davignon J., Ministère des Affaires Étrangères, Bruxelles on November 8 1909 on "Boundaries: Uganda - Congo", No. 4, 1993; and Davignon's reply on November 13 1909. File No. 147/09. Uganda National Archives Entebbe.

24 Report of Captain Ireland on March 3 1910, 4th K.A.R. commanding Kivu Mission. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

British colonialism to take advantage of the impending peasants' armed resistance against Belgian colonial force.

The British knew how Belgians were weak militarily and discredited in these areas by the untold atrocities. Belgian troops had lost morale due to horrible working conditions, neglect, diseases, and death. The British Consulate in Congo communicated all these and the need for British colonial government to take advantage of the situation as,

a conflict with British troops would be the signal for a general uprising in the Congo amongst the natives. They would be quite unable to rely on the fidelity of their troops ... The native troops are nothing less than savages, looking, as they do, upon the British as the only hope of salvation from the state of oppression in which they have lived for so many years. (sic!) Should hostilities commence the European population would be in imminent danger of being massacred ... Government would be utterly powerless to resist such a rising ...²⁵

These mistakes created a fertile ground for experienced British imperialism to occupy the region using the rhetoric of liberation. Drawing from its past colonial experience and mistakes elsewhere, it adopted cunning tactics. This was in contrast to the crude, naked brutality and exploitative practices by Belgian and German colonialists. To this end, the Political Officer urged the British state to compensate the peasants: '... since all the above mentioned crimes were perpetrated as a direct result of our withdrawal from the country and were intended as petty acts of revenge on the part of the Belgian authorities ...'²⁶ He underlined the urgency to appease peasants by compensating them 'would not only have a most excellent effect in the district but would be a retributive act calculated to clear us of the moral responsibility which at present rests on us.'²⁷ Though these did not affect its imperialist objectives, this approach made the British colonialists appear less dangerous than the others. This inter-imperialist rivalry had to be resolved diplomatically or militarily. Events seemed to be leading to the latter option. British imperialism had deliberately created this situation. The question is why they did not resort to military option. As reported in 1941, 'The 1911 boundary dispute with Belgians had been likely to lead to local fighting, led to the International Commission with Belgium, Germany to mark out the frontier.'²⁸ The Boundary Agreement of May 19 1909 was nullified, a new team was constituted to demarcate a new international boundary, which would accommodate the new changes. Britain and Belgium concluded yet another agreement in Brussels on May 14 1910.²⁹ Another Agreement was concluded on August 26 1910 in Berlin

25 The British Consulate in Congo on November 22 1909 reported the discontent of Belgian askaris which led to an abortive plot.

26 Cap. Ireland at Ihunga to the Officer Commanding Troops, Uganda Protectorate, on November 26 1909. Also see The Anglo-German Agreements of July 1, 1890 and of May 19 1909. File Boundaries: Uganda - Congo.

27 Political Officer, Kigezi, to Ag. Colonial Secretary on September 3 1909.

28 Article: "Notes On Kigezi District" File Historical and Political Notes (West), 1941. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

29 Refer to "Uganda Congo Boundary Agreement. Convention Between Belgium and Britain" of May 14 1910 signed in Brussels. File Boundaries: Uganda - Congo. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

between Britain and Germany. These culminated into the Anglo-German-Belgian Boundary Commission of 1911.³⁰

Establishment of British Colonial Rule

There was no broad, visible and organized political structure in the area, which British colonialism could manipulate to introduce, promote, and protect British interests through its demagoguery of protectionism called "Indirect Rule". As such, it was forced to import wholesale a state apparatus and a train of administrators, soldiers, and traders from Britain, Buganda, Ankole, Tanganyika, and India to man it. Dominance of agents from Buganda in the administration led to the establishment of a hybrid form of Kiganda-British administration, articulating British interests. The key sensitive jobs were combined and controlled by British personnel. This was due to lack of trained manpower, fear of administrative costs and mistrust of the colonized. To concretize this, the Acting Crown Advocate notified the Political Officer on July 7 1911 that as the latter had been appointed Assistant District Commissioner Kigezi from November 1 1910 'by a notice under the subordinate Courts Ordinance, 1902, dated June 4 1909, you have been appointed a magistrate of the second class to exercise your powers within the local area coterminous with the administrative District to which you may be from time to time appointed.'³¹ A situation was created where duties of conviction were fused with those of prosecution and execution under same officers. This complicated the question of impartiality, justice, and mercy in the colonial system as will be seen later.

British colonialism used agents mainly from Buganda to invade, conquer, reorganize, and administer this region. Buganda region had reached a higher level of state formation with a complex administrative system. Baganda had accepted to co-operate with British colonialism. This was in harmony with colonial interests to preserve resources. As an old imperial power – in both America and Asia – Britain was not blind to the pros and cons of using agents. It had gained rich experience in India to draw from. Although it did not commit all this on paper, it is clear that at that time the choice of alien agents was the appropriate choice. In addition to being of the same colour with the peasants in the region, Luganda language was nearer to the local ones and so was culture. This made it easy for them to communicate the colonialists' wishes to these people. Baganda agents would be used to implement

30 File Boundaries: Uganda – Congo. "Instructions for the Fixed German-British-Boundary Commission", Agreed to in Berlin on August 26 1910.

Also see Kigezi Monthly Reports of April 30 1911 and June 9 1911 on the Border Settlement and the signing between the British and the Belgians. Also "Anglo-German-Belgian Boundary Commission. Anglo-German Boundary Sabinio to S.W. Source of Chizinga" – "The Protocol in English" signed on October 30 1911 and "Anglo-German Boundary, Protocol" signed on November 11 1911. Kigezi Monthly Report of January 30 1912. D.C. Mbarara dated January 9 1912 on "German – Boundary: New Territory, Ceremonial Transfers". File 3226 Part II show how the Kigezi Border was demarcated.

31 Acting Crown Advocate to the Political Officer, Kigezi, on July 7 1911. File Kigezi: Fighting by Natives "Sentences Passed on Natives of Makuburri Country." National Archives.

unpopular, anti-people colonial policies. This would help to hide the real enemy. The oppressed would see the Baganda agents, not British colonialism as the enemy.³²

It depended on these agents for local administration judging local cases, which led them to dominate the political, economic, and social life of the peasants. The first people to resist them were peasants under Makobore. Colonialism saw these resisters as 'a mere curb on the advancement and progress of the district'. Colonialism resorted to its ploy of sympathizing with one section of the peasants. It was isolating the other section so as to lay ground for attack. It, therefore, took a supposedly pro-peasants' stance: 'The peasants in this district appear to be greatly oppressed by the Bahima'. It is no wonder, therefore, that the Assistant District Commissioner, Mbarara, led 30 police and crushed this resistance the following year.³³

One of the administrative solutions of 1913 was to divide the thickly populated area into Sazas and Gombololas with Baganda agents in charge and sub-Gombololas with Bakiga in charge. It would divide the people and also train local people into manning the system. To colonialism, the crisis was that these people were '... addicted to excessive beer drinking and while under its influence, ... were very liable to be quarrelsome and use their spears instead of their fists'. It was confronted with Makobore whom it described as 'the most shifty and unreliable chief in Kigezi' because of his outright resistance to colonialism.

As such, British colonialism depended on the skills, loyalty and initiative of Baganda agents. However, this led to abuse of office. The colonial state was forced to step in:

The powers of the agents have been defined and restricted, and only one case of anything in the shape of persistent extortion has been brought to my notice as this was met by instant dismissal, there is an unlikelihood of any recrudescence.³⁴

The colonial state had acknowledged the role of Baganda agents in the colony the previous year in the following way:

The undoubted administrative gifts of the Baganda have been utilized in these districts by their employment as Government agents to educate and supervise the local chiefs, a system which is open to obvious objections but which in its ultimate results has been incontrovertibly successful. This method of administration is ... only tolerable under the closest supervision by District Officers.³⁵

However, when the contradictions between the colonized and colonialism became antagonistic, the British colonialists came in as arbiters between the colonized and Baganda agents, laid the blame on Baganda agents and replaced them unceremoniously with local agents. The latter had learned from Baganda agents how

32 Captain Brooks in his report: Mahagi Military Garrison, February 1912 drew lessons from the military recruitment of Belgian troops from all sorts of tribes as the best method of obtaining efficiency and avoiding resistance. However, this was no sure guarantee against mutinies and desertions as already seen although it had the effect of minimizing them.

33 Western Province, Administration Reports 1913–14 and 1914–15. The Western Province Administration Reports 1915–16. reported female-witch doctors had re-opened operations which were purely anti-European, were dealt with promptly and firmly militarily.

34 Kigezi District Administrative Report. 1913–14; National Archives.

35 Uganda Protectorate Annual Report 1912–13 noted how Kigezi had been ceded to the British under the Anglo-Belgian-German Boundary Convention of 1910.

to man this state machinery. On their part, Baganda agents had been under the illusion that they were expanding Kiganda political system and culture. This was subsequently shattered by the colonialists in response to armed struggles in the region. Others like Sebalijja also believed that they were spreading the new word of God to the pagans.³⁶

Background to Military Option

Being still stateless, peasants had developed a complex defence system and codes. This was necessary for their defence against their surrounding enemies who included other clans, the organized Batwa bands, and states like Rwanda and Mpororo.

In his report of March 1912, Captain Reid had identified two military problems of this area. One was of peasant uprising and the other was of European hostilities. He argued that in dealing with the native problem, the population was "practically entirely pagan and would therefore be unmoved by any wave of religious feeling which might affect Baganda or Ankole". He showed the objective weakness of these peasants as lack of unity between Makobore's land, Rukiga, and British Rwanda which formed "three entirely separate and distinct districts and it is difficult to conceive any cause which could unite the three". Furthermore, they were unwarike, with no military organization. In Reid's account, the only anti-European tendencies had been due to the preaching of local witch-doctors and witches who practise the Nyabingi cult. To him, prompt police measures would suffice to nip these in the bud. He devised two major strategies in case of any insurgency. The first was to localize the disturbance and if it was necessary to employ local levies, to use Makobore's people against the Bakiga, the Bakiga against the Banyaruanda and so on. The second one was to seize all cattle and stock.³⁷

Resistance was imminent right from the start. Thus, the District Report of February 1911 stressed the need for a strong military force to suppress peasant resisters who had made their country unsafe for unarmed persons.³⁸ It was already clear to colonialism that

Military operations in this district would be extremely difficult owing to the nature of the country and the natives could lay ambushes and escape to the hills where pursuit is useless. The seizure of the cattle and the occupation of the cultivated valleys would probably bring any particular clan to reason. Night operations, though attended by great difficulties, would be the only means of attaining the capture of any considerable body, as during the day time sentries are posted on all the hills and outflanking movements are doomed to failure.³⁹

This became the *modus operandi* of colonialism throughout the struggles that followed.⁴⁰ The initial causes of this resistance revolved around this occupation by

36 Yoana SEBALIJA, 1911, "Olutalo Olwari Mu Lukiga e Rwanda". *Munna*, December 1911, Kampala.

37 Captain Reid's Report of March 14 1912.

38 Kigezi Monthly Report of February 4 1911.

39 Op.cit.

40 Op.cit. One of the first cases in which they implemented this plan was with Lwantali and Bukola's cattle. The Political Officer led surprise attacks at dawn on two successive days;

this foreign force, its territorial claims, demarcating and fixing of borders in their region. This was worsened by its militaristic approach, and atrocities which included massacres, looting and property destruction, imprisonment, forced contributions of food, labour etc. As the imperialist powers were busy struggling amongst themselves for this land, the peasants mobilized under the Nyabingi Movement and waged armed resistance for over two and half decades. Despite their antagonistic inter-imperialist contradictions, the three imperial powers were forced to co-operate over this anti-imperialist Nyabingi Movement.

Course of Nyabingi Movement up to World War I

At the time of colonial invasion, a Nyabingi Mugirwa had organized peasants into resistance and overthrown Chief Ruhayana of Kinkizi. Interestingly, it was in this Ruhayana that colonialism saw an ally. It took advantage of this situation and reinstated him.

The Chief Nduraiana is very old and infirm. I found a section of his people in revolt against his authority under the leadership of a local witch doctor, whom I arrested. These witch doctors are rather a feature of Rukiga and the neighbouring countries. Their influence is great and the mischief they cause considerable, as the doctrine they preach is entirely subversive of all authority whether local or European.

At the same time, chief Mungira in the neighbouring Kayonza, refused persistently to subordinate his authority and peoples to British colonial government. Instead, he organized them into resistance. Being a danger to colonialism, Captain Reid deposed him and replaced him with his collaborating brother, Duybumba.⁴¹ However, Sullivan reinstated him after the C.S. had warned against it as '... not desirable to interfere with the native regime until we are firmly established in this country'.⁴²

Mungira did not conform to collaboration as colonialism had wanted. McDougall accused Mungira that he had persistently refused to heed Captain Reid's summons. Instead, he had mobilized the majority of peasants into resistance, and they fled Kayonza villages when Captain Reid went there in August 1911. He led a peasant force to Izomba at the beginning of the war, 1914. He stayed there till his arrest in February 1917. Accusations against him included banding with Ndochibiri against colonialism, irresponsibility, consorting with the enemy and fighting against the British. He was also accused of possessing the charismatic characteristics of

'In both cases the natives endeavoured to drive the stock into the main Rukiga swamp on the edge of which the kraals were situated ... some spears were thrown and it was necessary to fire a few rounds before natives retired ... the swamp was entered and the cattle and goats collected ...'.

41 Kigezi District Report of September 6 1911.

42 Acting Colonial Secretary to Political Officer on October 2 1911 promised that "the new Ordinance on the subject of witch craft will have to be enforced (when finally approved) as soon as the country is added to the Protectorate". His memo of October 3 1911 and letter of October 6 1911 of Colonial Secretary ordered the Political Officer to transfer Mungira to Mbarara or Masaka pending the Secretary of State's approval of this Ordinance, "a witch doctor should be temporarily transferred to another place".

exercising considerable influence in the District and fuelling resistance even while he was away. It was in the interest of peace and good government that he was deported to Bunyoro where he could have no intercourse with any of the other natives, who had from time to time been deported from Kigezi.⁴³

Muginga's deportation order to Bunyoro, in accordance with "The Uganda Deportation Ordinance, 1906", spelled out that this was aimed to prevent continuance of his misconduct and intrigue against the British rule.⁴⁴ The Governor informed the Secretary of State for Colonies that:

Muginga displayed an antagonistic attitude to the Government on the advent of British Administration to his District in 1911, and that the subsequent rectitude of his chieftainship failed to affect his disloyal tendencies on the outbreak of the present war ... the unsettled condition of the Kigezi District renders it imperative to remove all suspicious influences, and, although no proof exists as to Muginga's actual complicity in the recent disturbances, his continued presence undoubtedly would be a source of danger to the peace and good order of the area in question.⁴⁵

To break him further and consolidate his alienation from his people which also emphasized the lesson that he had to conform when he went back to his land, he was detained internally in Mparo after his term of deportation.

The name of Ndungusi gives an interesting leadership in this movement. There were various Nyabingi insurgencies, whose leadership claimed to be Ndungusi, son of Rwabugiri (King of Rwanda) and his wife, Muhumuza. Such leadership made such claim to this name because of the social, political, military, religious, and organizational capacity of both his mother Muhumuza and Ndungusi himself. The history of Ndungusi and his mother becomes relevant to this study as soon as they are forced to flee Rwanda due to power struggle. Ndungusi failed to replace his father as King of Rwanda. It was during this anti-colonial Nyabingi Movement that Ndungusi became a Nyabingi Omugirwa, like his mother. He learnt the tricks and importance of personification of Nyabingi. He developed military and leadership skills from other Abagirwa and lineage leaders in the struggle. He participated in the battle at Ihanga in 1911, managed to escape capture and death. He then retreated into the peasantry, where he began mobilizing them into further armed resistance. From then onwards, various personalities made claims to this name for political purposes, to gain legitimacy and acceptance among the peasants.

We find one of the claimants to this personality joining forces with Katuregye, being killed in the forest.⁴⁶ Another one, a Ndungusi, was caught mobilizing peasants into

43 District Commissioner to Provincial Commissioner Western Province on April 9 1917. Also see Comments of P.C.W.P. on Muginga on April 18 1917. See Affidavits of June 8 1917 and of June 8 1917. File Natives Affairs. Muginga: Deportation of Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

44 Muginga's Deportation Order of June 29 1917 signed by the Ag Governor. File Native Affairs. Muginga: Deportation of.

45 The Governor's Communication on July 10 1917 to the Secretary of State on Muginga's Deportation. Also see the Attorney General's letter to Ag C.S. of July 28 1917 and the Governor's Communication 517 Minute 1 of August 2 1917.

Kigezi District Annual Report 1922 reported Muginga's return from exile at Masindi. Kigezi District Annual Report ... 1923 noted that Muginga had taken over Kayonza Gombolola.

46 Kigezi District Report of May 3 1913 noted that the Impérial Résident of Rwanda had been

resistance in 1913 and deported to Jinja where he finally died in 1918. Another claimant to this name organized the broad-based regional resistance of 1928. He escaped capture and disappeared among the peasantry. Yet another claimant was to be captured mobilizing peasants into resistance and collecting tributes in 1930. He was convicted and imprisoned. There were other young men who made similar claims to this name. Ndungusi had become charismatic, an inspiration to resistance. Gradually, the name Ndungusi declined and was rescinded into legend.

Batwa Resistance

The Batwa nationality lived in forests stretching to Zaire in the west and Rwanda in the south. Their mode of existence was principally hunting and gathering which they supplemented by primitive plunder of wealth characterized by massacres, arson, property destruction, and looting. They constituted a military and political threat to the local peasants. It is no wonder therefore, that the Abagirwa mobilized peasants against this nationality

... of a treacherous and thieving disposition, and at certain times of the year band together for the purpose of raiding their more peaceful neighbours ... peasants near Mabaremere and other parts, lived in the most lively dread of the Batwa who always attacked by night, killed all their people and stole their food.⁴⁷

The Batwa could not accumulate wealth through this process of hunting and gathering, leading a nomadic life. They were not engaged in settled production of either animal or crop husbandry. They could not accumulate and concentrate the looted property to make it reproduce itself. Neither did they engage this wealth in production for it to reproduce itself. As there was no form of accumulation of wealth, no classes existed among them. This made them very vulnerable. Colonialism capitalized on these weaknesses to isolate and defeat them politically and militarily. We learnt from our informers that in their primitive plunder, Batwa would burn whatever remained after acquiring whatever they wanted. They killed all livestock as they could not look after them. Our informers argued that the Batwa were so wasteful because they did not participate in the production of that wealth.

The 1911 Border Commission presented the Batwa as a race of fierce, savage, and undersized people, looked upon with suspicion and disliked by the other natives, whose land they constantly raided, always independent and truculent, acknowledging none but their own chiefs.⁴⁸ Contrary to this colonial view, it has to be understood that the Batwa were also inhabitants of this area, regardless of the sentiments of other nationalities. After all, there were contradictions at different levels in other nationalities, too.

engaged in operations against Ndungusi and Bassebya, that Ndungusi had been killed and that Bassebya had escaped across Lake Bunyonyi. More information was given by our respondents including Rukara and Byandageire.

47 Op.cit. Jack exaggerated that they were "cannibals". It is Colin TURNBULL, op.cit., who gives another picture of the bigger section of the Pygmies in the Ituri Forest, their mode of production, organization, character, bravery, and skillfulness.

48 Op.cit.

Because of their military expertise, skills, and lack of a settled mode of production, it became easy for them to hire themselves out to fight for organized states and peoples, nationalities, and classes like Rwanda. Colonialism anticipated that they were not likely to give any trouble but that if it was found necessary to deal with them, then native levies could be raised without difficulty to assist in driving them from their bamboo forests.⁴⁹ One of the colonial tactics was to exploit pre-colonial conflicts between the local peoples. In the case of the Batwa, the plan was to ally with other nationalities against them. Though they were still dependent on nature, they were militarily superior to the rest of the inhabitants. They were more organized into a military force, under militant chiefs, more advanced in weaponry etc.⁵⁰ It was because of this level of organization that they could invade, terrorize, loot, and pillage the populous peasantry who were disunited, politically disorganized, and militarily weak. Colonialism had to deal with them immediately.⁵¹ However, the Batwa soon realized the dangers of this new enemy and started attacking it and its allies, disrupted its communication system, etc.

The three colonial powers combined forces, intelligence and military information to fight them. They found it easy to mobilize peasants against Batwa, due to past hatred between them. So, while wars were raging on Lake Bunyonyi by the British against Katulegye, the Germans and Belgians were also fighting against the same nationality in their colonies. The question arises as to why their resistance was defeated. While colonial powers were ready to smash any local resistance, the Batwa received no sympathies, material or military assistance or alliances from the peasants in the neighbourhood due to their past history. Worse still, they had no continuous food supply. At the same time, the area where they could go to for supplies had come under different colonial powers. As a result, they faced shortages without replenishments.⁵²

The Batwa resistance under chief Katulegye gave colonialism and its local allies considerable trouble. His forces attacked and killed 'friendly natives on two occasions' and interrupted communications by seizing the canoes on Lake Bunyonyi. They attacked and fired at runners, messengers and natives sent to fetch wood for the troops. British colonialism sent a strong force to dislodge and defeat them.⁵³

Bassebia, Chief of Batwa combined forces with Ndungusi, and led a cross-section of peasants against the German colonialists in Rwanda in 1912. While Ndungusi was reportedly killed, Bassebia escaped to Rwanda. He was caught, arrested, prosecuted, convicted by the German Court Martial and executed on the same day.

49 Op.cit. A lot of valuable information about the Batwa was provided by our respondents.

50 Op.cit.

51 Interview with Karamagi, Mucoori, Ndyabura *inter alia*. They described the massacres and plunders by the Batwa and how people fled in terror.

52 Our respondents informed this study on this alliance and the consequences. Byandagaire et al. showed how Rukara and Muramira led collaborators with Europeans against Katulegye et al.

53 Report of May 3 1912 and communication of May 4 1912. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

A force led by Lieuts Turpin, Moore, Sullivan, Wagstaff and Major Lawrence had failed to defeat and dislodge them. This was because of their knowledge of the terrain and military skills.

I succeeded on May 13 1912 to arrest the Batwa chief, Bassebia. Bassebia was condemned to death by the military tribunal on 15 May and the sentence was executed on that very day. Bassebia's raid on English territory has thus been avenged.⁵⁴

These anti-colonial struggles by the Batwa were nationalistic. They were attacking colonialism and its collaborators. However, they got dispersed through these defeats and death of their leadership.⁵⁵ The fault with colonial reports is that they attributed these raids to have been influenced by the Germans. That view presents these resisters as being prompted from without.⁵⁶

Nyabingi Movement and the 1914 War

We witness a great advancement in the anti-colonial struggle with the advent of the year 1914. The peasant resisters in the three colonies amalgamated their grievances and articulated them together. They organized peasants around these issues. This enabled them to reach deep inside the three colonies in terms of mobilization, recruitment and struggle. It was this guerrilla force that took maximum advantage of the defeat of Imperial Germany and the colonial borders. The ideology of the movement was still around this colonial occupation, colonial borders, land for the state and the in-coming missions, forced labour and contributions, the imposition of alien administration and administrators, laws, cultures, and new religions. Colonialism had also marginalized local chiefs like Nyindo and Musinga, deprived them of the opportunity to extract surplus labour from their subjects as prior to colonialism. What worsened the situation were the new impositions of other colonial demands onto the peasants to support the war. Sebalijja and Abdulla were instrumental in resource mobilization. The world war had forced the colonial state to intensify its methods of extracting resources from peasants. This had forced it to increase labour demands, food and livestock to feed the troops. The Assistant District Commissioner had underlined that the colonial state needed 12,000 goats and sheep to feed the troops in this district a year.⁵⁷

54 The Impérial Résident, Kigali on May 22 1912: "Betr. Einfall Bassebia's in Süd-Rukiga", No. 1/433 replying to The Political officer's letter of May 21 1912, No. 48/12 on a joint military co-operation against Batwa. This study acknowledges Dr. Muranga's assistance in translating these documents from German into English.

55 *Idem*.

56 Kigezi District Annual Report 1915–1916 and Kigezi District Annual Report 1916–17. Katulegye was reported to have died of wounds sustained in a fight with colonial forces under Abdulla.

Report of Lieut. Kigezi of October 11 1915 to the Political Officer No. Pol. 3/15 on "Fighting Among German Natives" advanced the need to take advantage of local contradictions; 'With regard to our people, there are certain clans such as Musakamba at Kigezi who are bitterly opposed to Bukamba of Mulera, and reprisals for recent raids would cause no surprise ... the Batwa and the unruly natives to the South of Lake Bunyonyi be punished for their raid on British territory in November last, as soon as the opportunity presents itself. Mugengi Katulegye's brother G.E.A. ... wants bringing to his senses in a prompt and effective manner.'

57 Op.cit.

The latest imposition for resource extraction was taxation. The Provincial Commissioner had warned in 1913 against abrupt taxation in cash until the natives had some means of earning money which they still lacked. He warned how 'premature taxation without opportunities for earning the wherewithal to pay it would cause discontent and might result in migration to the Congo or G.E.A.'⁵⁸

However, colonialism was forced to introduce it due to pressure for resources to meet the administration costs of the district, support the British economy in the war and meet other expenses. This increased peasants' discontent. The state used chiefs to collect it and gave them tax rebates. In the process, some money paid for tax got embezzled.

Other issues revolved around the new religions and their demands and the privileges that colonialism was according them. Yet, these privileges were based on exploiting peasants' property and religious persecution of Nyabingi by the colonial state. Worse still, a new contradiction emerged between peasants and colonial personnel over promiscuity. This arose partly from the fact that those in colonial service did not bring their wives with them, while others were still bachelors. Colonial service had subjected all of them to a bachelor life. This led to new developments. They began chasing after women and girls among the peasantry. Yet, this was an area where virginity was expected to be preserved until marriage. As such, this new development led to adverse consequences. Girls became pregnant and ran away, others got harassed by members of society for fraternizing with colonial personnel. All these were forced to flee to Kabale Station. A new institution of prostitution began to emerge around administration centres. This was reinforced by other women from other areas who came not in search of men but to work for money. Even colonial personnel used their state positions to force some women into carnal affairs with them. All this was detested vehemently by peasants. Worse still, this new development introduced and helped in the spread of venereal diseases not only among prostitutes and government personnel but also among the peasants. This led to adverse results in the area.

The persistent armed resistance of peasants in Kyogo in Kamwezi and its environs to British colonialism evidenced peasants' determination to regain their lost independence. Their resistance began with colonial invasion. This led to the bloody war of March 1915. As early as January 1914, the Provincial Commissioner reported that some Bakiga in Kyogo had indulged in some outbreak with spears. He was optimistic that 'as soon as the rains commence, these people will devote themselves to cultivation instead of beer drinking and fighting'.⁵⁹ Not long after, the Assistant District Commissioner accused them of armed resistance. They had murdered a government agent in December, who had gone to ask them to supply their quota of forced labour. They attacked and chased away messengers between the A.D.C. and the agent persistently, denied passage to anyone in colonial service regardless of colour or origin.

This was a time when Nyindo, Semana et al. mobilized peasants into resistance in the south-western part of the district. It should be recalled that Nyindo was chief of Bufumbira by the time of colonial invasion. Bufumbira was highly differentiated. Chiefs extracted surplus through tributes, presents and other contributions. Coloni-

58 Western Province, Annual Report 1913/14.

59 Western Province, Monthly Report of January 1914.

alism feared that he could raise five thousand spearmen in the field on short notice. Colonialism took careful steps not to confront him directly. There is evidence showing that Nyindo was related to Musinga, King of Rwanda, and that it was Musinga who had appointed him chief. Despite all the precautions by the colonial state not to draw Nyindo into armed struggles, Nyindo saw the dangers of colonialism and began to organize people into resistance. By then, it had transformed him and other chiefs like Makobore into nominal figure heads. His first move against colonialism was in 1912/13. This was when he led a group of peasants to Rwanda, kidnapped Kalemarima, a Church Missionary Society (CMS) teacher, and killed him. The colonial State arrested them and convicted them.⁶⁰ Some of this fine was given to the widow, some was paid to eleven small chiefs, who 'rendered valuable assistance but who had not been rewarded for their assistance in dealings with the natives'. The rest was sold and credited to the state.

These resisters allied with the Germans to take advantage of the inter-imperialist contradictions. They aimed at using them to drive out the British and then break loose from the Germans. In this arrangement, the Germans wanted to use in their inter-imperialist contradictions to defeat both the British and the Belgians and then occupy that area as the new colonial power. This was a situation of maneuverability. What is evident is that these peasants neither wanted the presence of any of these colonial powers, nor their new rule.⁶¹ The reasons for this resistance go beyond the colonial view that it aimed to reinstate Nyindo.

With the beginning of the First World War in 1914 some peasants crossed with their cattle to Belgian territory and others under Nyindo crossed to German East Africa (GEA). They then began raiding loyal peasants.⁶²

What is evident in these struggles is that the allies of colonialism were the immediate targets as they were the nearest as the real enemy was distant and sometimes not clear. These allies were poised as an obstacle, which had to be removed first before resistance could reach the principal enemy. Colonialism retaliated viciously. It arrested some of them and confiscated their cattle. Kilongole, Kalafa, Mutago and Biunyira were sentenced to one year in Kampala gaol with a fine of cattle and goats. Taking them to Kampala aimed at widening their narrow outlook: 'Besides the possibilities of escape from Kabale gaol, detention here would not make them realise that Kigezi is not the only district under British rule.'⁶³ He explained how their short-term imprisonment was determined by their low level of consciousness, organization, and mobilization, 'These men are ignorant and superstitious semi-savages and not on the same plane as intelligent chiefs such as Nyindo.'⁶⁴

60 File Murder of a Native Captured in German Territory. See P.C.W.P.'s to C.S. of March 20 1913 on "fines imposed". Nyindo was fined fifty heads of cattle, Minyana and Badutwarumu were charged twenty five heads of cattle each and Biteraboga was fined five head of cattle. Western Province Annual Report 1912/13 commended it "This I believe has had a good effect, and is expected to result in applications for redress being made to the District Officer, instead of reprisals, when an offence has been committed."

61 Idem.

62 Western Province, Monthly Report of August 1914.

63 Assistant District Commissioner's letter of April 19 1917 to Provincial Commissioner Western Province. These four resisters lived at Namakumba. I argued that Ndochibiri had just been residing there. Refer to Map 3.

64 Idem.

We find that when Nyindo finally surrendered, his property was confiscated as punishment for resistance. He was accused of fanning anarchy, attempting to murder the civil officer in charge of the District, inciting people to murder Agent Abdulla while collecting porters at Mizerero's in 1914 and on many other occasions, burning the agent's house at Kisoro, mobilizing peasants to loot the Indians' shops and to attack the Boer family. He was also accused of constantly attacking the civil officers and their escorts between Kumba and Rutchuru, mobilizing other Batusi gangs into resistance operations on the Congo border and looting the post of Goma, inciting his forces to attack, kill and rob many loyal peasants and chiefs who refused to join him, killing a missionary teacher, allying with Germans and participating in the German attack of Chahafi of January 1 1915 with Ndochibiri. Other charges included aiding Chief Katulegye in raiding and looting loyal natives, instigating numerous petty raids at various times and places, rioting, encouraging and commanding peasant resisters to kill Europeans.⁶⁵

He was convicted and deported to Masindi. To silence the membership under Nyindo, colonialism replaced him with his child as their chief. 'The son is a small boy of about 6 or perhaps 7 years of age, who can do no harm for some time to come.'⁶⁶ Colonialism deported him for '... peace and good order in the Kigezi District ... would be dangerous to peace and good order ... if he were ever allowed to return there to; and to prevent effectually his having any evil influence in this said district ...'⁶⁷

Resistance under Ndochibiri

Available evidence shows that Ndochibiri and his comrades got initial military training in scientific warfare, skills, and military tactics from colonialism. They had been employed in colonial forces as askaris and then deserted with arms. It shows that Ndochibiri and some others were recruited by Belgians and participated in the war against Germans. This was important for his career as a guerrilla leader. That is where he gained military skills, training, commanding, and knowledge of geography. It also assisted him to learn the weaknesses of the Europeans and their weapons. These were important as he was to capitalize on them in the struggles that followed. This involvement in this war also facilitated him to make more friends, create more comrades and allies in these forces. He was able to recruit more combatants and seal comradeship and brotherhood under the practice of blood brotherhood and other cultural practices. It also gave him opportunity to popularize the people's cause and the need for self-emancipation from colonialism in the whole region.

Their other important achievement was their acquiring weapons and ammunition from the colonialists – the dead soldiers and from stores and others captured from the enemy. Others were got from the defeated Germans on their hurried evacuation. These activities led to his designs being suspected. The colonialists tried to burn him

⁶⁵ See Police Statements by Abdulla Namunye and Sulimani Ntangamalala of January 7 1918 and January 10 1918 confirming these. Other Statements include those by Mushakamba's son, Kanyamanza, Luwanya, Police Constable Saidi Bitensi on January 8 1918 who showed how peasant resisters overwhelmed them, defeated them, forcing them to flee to Ikumba, and how the resisters burnt their homes and captured all their cattle.

⁶⁶ Op.cit.

⁶⁷ Op.cit.

in his house but he managed to escape with serious burns. It is alleged that his three fingers were lost in this tragedy. Ndochibiri in the local language means two fingers. It was this event which forced his resistance into the open. He began actual organization, politicization, and recruitment of peasants into the struggle. Another important method he employed in preparation for the struggle was of creating blood brotherhood wherever he passed. By 1916, the colonial State confessed how 'witch doctor Ndochibiri has been the cause of considerable trouble, in April he ravaged the country within a few miles of posts garrisoned by the U.P.S.B.' It was, therefore, forced to station a post of 10 special constables near the border to prevent his rebel activities.

Anti-colonial struggles under Ndochibiri came into the open in January 1915 in the Kivu-Mulera-Kigezi region. He timed when colonialists were fighting amongst themselves and organized peasants into armed resistance. He, too used Nyabingi religion for military, political, and ideological purposes. By 1916, the colonial state was highly paralysed by the peasant force under his command operating in the Kivu-Mulera-Kigezi region: Rwanda, Congo, and Uganda. He began by organizing peasants into a powerful resistance. Ndochibiri understood clearly the importance of Nyabingi religion in enforcing unity, discipline, determination, secrecy, and cultural bindings among the fighters and their see. His maiden attack was a great blow to colonialism, 'a crowd of fanatical natives, with a "sacred" sheep as an emblem, were with difficulty driven back, with the aid of two mitrailleuses, after some hours fighting'.⁶⁸

The two main objectives of this attack were to defeat and dislodge the Belgians and English forces from that fort and to capture arms. This sacred white sheep was believed to have powers to send away Europeans. Ndochibiri encouraged peasant resisters that he would turn bullets into water. In January 1916, the colonial authority reported that peasants in Rwanda behaved in 'a disloyal and defiant manner and under the leadership of Ndochikembiri with his sacred sheep' attacked Chahafi and that the prophet was severely wounded.⁶⁹ The wounding was later disapproved as wishful thinking of the colonialists. In April that year, Ndochibiri led an attack on colonial forces, looted the collaborators' property and livestock and disappeared in Kayonsa forest.⁷⁰

The colonial state arranged a combined military venture with Belgian forces from Rutchuru and Kigali on Congo and Rwanda frontiers.⁷¹ The Commissioner of Police, Kampala, was awaiting 'final instructions for dealing with Knochibilili's people ... I hear they are well armed and this seems a good opportunity to bring them to reason – and disarm them'.⁷² The Belgian authorities were enthusiastic to punish the rebels

⁶⁸ Acting District Commissioner Kigezi to Monseigneur Le Commissaire de District Ruzizi-Kivu of June 7 1919. We are grateful to our respondents for their valuable information on this resistance. Among these are Bayanguha, Rwakishieya, Bafwokuheeka and Mucori who informed this study on the contributions of Ndochibiri, Komunda, Muhire, Baguma, Rwa-mutwe et al.

⁶⁹ Provincial Commissioner Western Province, Monthly Report of January 1916. File Raids and Punitive Expedition.

⁷⁰ Provincial Commissioner Western Province, Monthly Report of April 1916, op.cit. Also see C. 228 II. Intelligence Reports, Lake Detachment. U.N.A. Entebbe. Also see Excerpt from Intelligence Reports, Lake Detachment. Kigezi, Punitive Expedition Against Ndochibiri. Also see Report of Provincial Commissioner Western Province of May 1916.

⁷¹ Telegraph from Major Lawrence, commanding U.P.S.B. to Commissioner of Police, Kampala on December 16 1916. Tabora.

⁷² Telegraph of Commissioner of Police, Police Headquarters Office, Kampala, of December

who had murdered their mail runners and two of their soldiers. Another strong force came from Mwanza under Major Lawrence.⁷³

However, the resisters learnt of this expedition and foiled their plan by dispersal method before the enemy's attack. In retaliation, colonial forces arrested peasants and their leaders for assisting Ndochibiri.⁷⁴

There followed series of attacks in this expedition, leading to heavy casualties on both sides, arrests and capture of colonial troops. This expedition increased strife to peasants and hostilities between them and colonialism.

The strength of this peasant resistance can be assessed from the colonial force and weaponry that came to fight it under Major Lawrence who 'left Kabale on 3rd instant as follows: – Lt. Col. C. Riddick, Inspector Dryden, Assistant Inspector Wagstafi, Dr. Doble, Mr. Mc Dougall, A.D.C., and 80 Rank and File Uganda Police, with one Machine gun and 200 odd porters ...'⁷⁵

Lt. Col. Riddick accepted both the leadership's superiority in organization and execution of armed struggles, using the masses as the sea, despite the colonialists' brutality, cruelty, and illusions because of this paralysis. He confessed how both Ndochibiri and Kanyaruanda were seasoned guerrilla fighters, who were outsmarting the colonial forces in the forest, in the caves, and among the people. They knew when and how to engage the enemy and when to retreat and had learnt about their enemies' military capacity, weapons, tactics, allies, and movements and above all won the confidence, support, and love of the people. He concluded by confessing,

without the power to punish the people who were aiding and abetting his escape, Ndochibiri was master of the situation, there were no roads, very hilly country, lookout huts and signal fires on every hill and every native as far as lay in his power apparently under Ndochibiri's control – none of whom we could touch.⁷⁶

In despair, British forces under Lt. Col. Riddick embarked on a massive arrest of peasants, accusing them of being relatives of Ndochibiri, two wives and their children being of Ndochibiri, and four leaders for conniving with him.⁷⁷ However, commitment to the struggle had made Ndochibiri resilient even during such trying moments. The

16 1916. Also refer to telegraph of Colonial Secretary, to Col. Riddick of December 20 1916 and to Political Officer, Kabale; and another to the Provincial Commissioner Western Provinces on December 22 1916.

73 Commissioner of Police, Mwanza to Colonial Secretary on 21 December 16. Also see Telegraph from Maj. Lawrence, to Commissioner of Police, Kampala on December 16 1916.

Le Major Commandant le C.O. Kigali Stereng G. to D.C. on November 28 1916: Coups d'occupation Commandement. No. 1280: participation eventuelle des troupes belges a la Capture de N'Doki-Bili.

74 Maj. Lawrence to the Colonial Secretary on February 21 1917. Op.cit. and O.C.'s report to Colonial Secretary on Expedition dated February 17 1917. See Appendix VI: Report on the Expedition Against Ndochibiri and Kanyaruanda on March 29 1917.

75 Commissioner of Police, Major Commissioner Lawrence to the Colonial Secretary, on February 21 1917.

76 Report of the Commissioner of Police Lt. Col. Riddick to the Colonial Secretary, dated March 29 1917 on Expedition Against Ndochibiri and Kanyaruanda.

77 He had arrested 37 peasants, of whom some were claimed to be Ndochibiri's wives and children.

Belgian Lieutenant rejected Riddick's proposal 'to capture and keep in custody his (Ndochibiri's) women etc., and to punish those who helped him with food etc'.⁷⁸

It was Kanyaruanda, who was forced to surrender after colonial forces captured his son and held him as a bait. He was charged with being a member of unlawful assemblies which committed murder, arson, hurt with dangerous weapons, theft and other crimes. He was convicted and sentenced to four years rigorous imprisonment in Kampala. His fate for deportation would be decided thereafter. As a rebel, all his cattle were confiscated.⁷⁹ That way, colonialism was able to separate the leadership from the membership, deprive them of resources and ability to make war, inflict psychological pain and a sense of separation and loss. It was also meant to threaten others from struggles against this colonial power and for politicization purposes. The politics underlying imprisonment of the culprits to Kampala was to open their eyes to the fact that the regime of the British Government was not confined merely to this district, and give them some idea of the British power.⁸⁰

The Tragedy that Befell the Movement

British colonialism invited Belgian participation in a joint military venture in 1919. The District Commissioner (DC) notified them that the rebel Ndochibiri had appeared from Buitwa on frontier of Kigezi at Namikumbwe, Kwa Kabango, slightly south of Chief Itembero and reminded him of 'the double danger of the movements headed by this man in that they are essentially anti-European, and supported by fanaticism inculcated by Nyabingi worship, which, by terrorism, renders every native his spy and a willing host... was recently joined in Buitwa by Wakiga Lumuli and Luhemba and the latter's wife Kaigirirwa, a Nyabingi ... are organizers of dangerous and fanatical anti-European movements in the Kivu-Mlira-Kigezi area.'

Colonialism had resolved that 'even should no disturbances occur, these rebels should be hunted mercilessly in our respective districts. Their death or capture will alone ensure peace'.⁸¹ This course of action was agreed to although Belgian authorities remained skeptical:

we shall find it extremely difficult to effect his capture since he is always informed of our slightest movements. He is held in terror by the native population by reason of his supernatural associations, and no one dares to denounce his gatherings for

78 Kigezi District Annual Report 1916–1917. He released them. There were four arrests of Ndochibiri's confederates

79 See P.C.W.P. communication to C.S. of July 5 1919. The Acting D.C. to P.C.W.P. on August 11 1917 on "Lawless Natives in Kigezi District". The Ag. D.C. to P.C.W.P. on July 28 1917 and P.C.W.P. to C.S. on August 9 1917 on Kanyaruanda's conviction. Also refer to File Native Affairs: Kanyaruanda. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

80 Idem.

81 Acting District Commissioner to Mon. le Commissaire de District Ruzizi-Kivu of June 7 1919. He outlined his military plans against these peasant resisters. He had set up a military post on Birahira's in British Rwanda, another at Kinkizi-Kayanza opposite Itembero's (Kisaiu). Le Résident du Ruanda to D.C. on June 14 1919 on "Rebel force under Ndochibiri".

See Map on British and Belgian patrols.

the additional fear of reprisals ... he seldom risks remaining in villages and takes the precaution of establishing his camps in places which are far from population and kept secret, these rendezvous even he changes frequently.⁸²

The P.C. Western Province confirmed in November that the peculiar geographical features and power of blood brotherhood among these wild and backward peoples "make it impossible to rely on the local natives at all".⁸³ Van de Ghinste informed the D.C. Kigezi on June 23 that a Belgian force of 25/30 rifles under a European was going to patrol frontier so as to cut off retreat of the Ndochibiri rebels.⁸⁴ He communicated to the D.C. Kigezi how chiefs Kabango and Itembero had feigned ignorance of the movements of Ndochibiri that morning.⁸⁵ It was that night that the colonial forces caught up with the top leadership of this resistance and wiped it out.

Strong force rebels crossed frontier into *Kayonsa* nineteenth ... enticed from forest and attacked *Kumba* three hours north *Kabale* ... their retreat cut off and gang entirely dispersed leaving leaders *Ndochibiri* and *Luhemba* instigator *Nakishenyi* rebellion, with two other rebels dead in our hands ... "sacred" Nyabingi sheep captured together with two rifles, bayonets, bows, arrows, and British and German ammunition ... our casualties one wounded.⁸⁶

Their death was of great significance. It was a great success for colonialism. In the P.C.W.P.'s words, hadn't they been so promptly and successfully dealt with, 'within a month, we should ... have had very serious native trouble in Rukiga and perhaps in Rwanda also'.⁸⁷ That is why it was celebrated in Kabale where they exposed Ndochibiri and Luhemba's bodies. Ndochibiri's two-fingered hand was cut off and circulated in public 'to assure publicity for the death'. They also burnt to ashes the captured "sacred" white sheep publicly at Kabale.⁸⁸ These were aimed to prove their death to the public, demystify and discredit Nyabingi and threaten peasants to give up Nyabingi resistances.⁸⁹

... it is difficult to realize the immense importance locally of the death of this rebel who has defied two Governments for five years and was a leader of an anti-European secret society which has terrorized the Rwanda-Rukiga county for four generations. (sic!)⁹⁰

82 Communication from D.C. Ruzizi - Kivu to District Commissioner Kigezi, on June 18 1919.

83 Western Province, November 1919 Report.

84 Communication of D.C. Van de Ghinste to D.C. Kigezi of June 23 1919 in reply to D.C. Kigezi of the previous day June 22 1919. They were going to patrol the frontier between Rutezo and Mt. Nkabwe.

85 Van de Ghinste, D. C. Ruzizi-Kivu, Rutchuru on June 23 1919.

86 D. C's telegraph of June 24 1919 and his letter of June 25 1919.

87 P.C.W.P. to C.S. on July 5 1919.

88 Op.cit. It was burnt on 3rd. "a very serious general rising organized by a powerful anti-European "religious" society has been most narrowly averted".

89 Op.cit. The death was celebrated in Entebbe, Kampala, Kigali, Rutchuru and England. His head was hurried to the British Museum for public display. Refer to nationalistic songs on these struggles under Ndochibiri.

90 Op.cit.

Developments Consequent to these Deaths

These resisters understood the critical demands of the struggle and the need to promote it. As such, they intensified it. To concretize this, seven "compatriots of the late Ndochibiri", who had tried to conscientize the peasants had been beaten off at once by British forces. On the same day, 'there was a simultaneous gathering at Itembero's (Congo-Belge frontier) of Nyabingi malcontents with 28 rifles'. Both the Belgian and British authorities responded with scorched earth policy. They burnt villages of Kisalu, Kayonza and Kinkizi, and evacuating peasants from the border areas. They knew that 'while one cannot hope for any permanent result from this section, it has nevertheless had a salutary effect'.⁹¹ The murder of Biramba and then the burning of his body by his domestic boys illustrates some of the ways how resisters dealt with those who betrayed the struggle - the so-called "pragmatists" or in colonial language "progressives". The Provincial Commissioner Western Province recounted:

On the night of July 31/August 1 the Rwanda Chief *Biramba* of Bunagana was murdered by two servants who were sleeping in the same house adjoining that of Agent Abdulla. They burnt the house over his body and fled to the Congo. *Biramba* was a useful progressive chief who had accompanied me twice on tour and given under secrecy much valuable information by the Nyabingi movement. The latter have announced the act as one of vengeance on an "informer".⁹²

There was continuous resistance in various forms. The main contention in many parts remained taxation, forced labour and other demands by the state and religious missions. Colonialism was forced to exempt certain areas like Butare, Bufundi and parts of Bufumbira from taxation for fear of resistance.⁹³ It was clear to colonialism that "the basis of all negative politics is that alien Government is only temporary ... is also a basis of Nyabingi 'religion'." (sic!)⁹⁴ It, therefore, intensified political work and organization of the District.⁹⁵

The P.C. warned against strong punitive measures against resisters as this "would bring temporary success". The D.C.'s defence was that Punitive measures were necessary to quell all international disorders.⁹⁶ This was the same time when peasants attempted to burn the residence of the agent of Rukiga.⁹⁷

91 Op.cit.

92 Op.cit.

93 W. P. November 1919 Report.

94 D.C. to P.C.W.P. of September 17 1920. The P.C.W.P. on tour on October 27 1920: "Operations connected with Nyabingi Kigezi District 1920" showed that he had gone to check on passive Rebellion "in Kumba area attributed its causes to the drinking season and to Nyabingi movement. Also see his communication to the C.S. on October 1 1920. File Nyabingi (1920). Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

95 Telegraph of D.C. to C.S. of September 26 1920 on passive resistance. He had sent reinforcements to an ex sergeant major, had "captured two rifles, other weapons". Also see telegraph of C.S. to P.C.W.P. of September 27 1920. File Nyabingi and its Defence (1919-1923). P.C.W.P. telegraphed D.C. on September 24 1920 instructing him to deal with that Nyabingi organization "quietly and efficiently on lines similar to previous occasions obtaining co-operation Belgians their side".

96 District Commissioner's telegraphs to P.C.W.P. of October 6 1920; October 9 1920 and of

Without understanding the social, political and economic conditions that had given rise to Nyabingi movement and the grievances that fuelled this resistance, colonialism simplified it as 'dangerous as containing a fanatic religious element'. However, colonialism understood why Nyabingi paralysed it most was its 'working in the African territories of three European powers and gradually extending the sphere and malignity of its influence'.⁹⁹ Faced with the imperialist war on a broader scale and this Nyabingi movement domestically, colonialism was forced to seek other solutions in addition to militarism. It was forced to make a series of reforms, based on the prevailing social grievances so as to undermine the Nyabingi movement. These revolved around taxation, forced labour, forced production and contribution, land, religions, and change of agents. At the same time, it began to increase its social base among the peasants. It accomplished this through material rewards and posts, promises, and promotions. Another method was direct decampaigning of Nyabingi, citing the malpractices of the Abagirwa. Though this phase evidenced the climax of Nyabingi Movement, it also witnessed the beginnings of its demise.

New Methods of Struggle and the Demise of Nyabingi Movement

The 1920s witnessed the decline of the Nyabingi Movement simultaneously with the increasing anchoring of colonialism in the area. Abagirwa like Komunda, Ndemere, and the others went on the defensive to prevent its decline by proclaiming its greatness vis-à-vis the state and the new religions. The District Commissioner gave an interesting narrative of events between Komunda and Zaribugiri, a colonial agent. He narrated how the latter had arrested Komunda for witchcraft. The D.C. released him due to lack of evidence. Komunda then testified to the peasants that his "Nyabingi" had defeated Government and left him free. The chief's wife and child fell ill immediately and nearly died. This proved to the peasants Nyabingi's greatness and powers of revenge. It had become clear to colonialism how Nyabingi was

October 12 1920. Also refer to District Commissioner's report of September 17 1920 about the same issue.

Provincial Commissioner Western Province to Colonial Secretary on October 6 1920 requested for closure of British Rwanda until mid-December on the grounds that it was more than likely that this trouble was due partly to the drinking season and partly to the Nyabingi movement. The Provincial Commissioner Western Province warned against further arrests in the existing quiet condition in the country.

The P.C.W.P. to D.C. on October 29 1920 blamed D.C. for not using all available means to suppress the disturbances. He taught him to plan repression by listing "all chiefs, headmen and people known to have been implicated and from time to time ... effect arrests and mete out punishment on individuals, such action would have a very good effect on untutored people as they would understand that the Government's arm though slow is long ... These disturbances are the normal work of your district, as time goes on and our influence extends they will decrease but must be expected for some time." File Congo: International Border: Administrative Proposals. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

97 Provincial Commissioner Western Province reported on October 28 1920 their failure to trace the culprits.

98 Report of District Commissioner on July 31 1919.

In August 1922, the D.C. abandoned his house in fear of peasant resisters.

above all revolutionary political ... chief among chiefs, a state in the state. Its aim is to free the country of Europeans and of all authority other than "Nyabingi" ... All the agents of Nyabingi with their pretended mysterious and occult power give themselves out as liberators of the country.⁹⁹

The colonial state's predicament was its failure to distinguish between Nyabingi as a religion, Nyabingi as a supernatural force, Nyabingi as a revolutionary movement, Nyabingi as an ideology, its character and dynamism and other practices like witchcraft, prophesying, healing, curing, rain-making, etc. It lumped all of them together. This was advantageous to the resisters. It helped them to recruit all those who colonialism persecuted, even those who would have refrained if the state had first made a theoretical and analytical study of this society's movement. Thus, by 1927, the District Commissioner reported a large amount of Nyabingi practice.¹⁰⁰

Threatened by religious and political persecution against Nyabingi leaders and lies by missionaries of the imminent arrests of peasants who did not join Protestantism, Abagirwa like Komunda began to create propaganda to wield together the disintegrating Nyabingi movement. Trying to live with the times, they issued declarations against colonialism and proclaimed the supremacy of Nyabingi over all people, the state, other religions, and institutions. They called upon all peasants and chiefs to adhere to Nyabingi's teachings, work on Sundays and observe Mondays and Tuesdays as Nyabingi days. No work was to be done on those days. Peasants feared to die and followed this decree. This was challenging European religions which had set aside Sunday for their god. This was underlined by the District Commissioner:

Many people going to him for Nyabingi from all parts of the district and all being informed by him that his Nyabingi was more powerful than the Government, that no work should be done on Mondays in the shambas, that no taxes should be paid, and that the Europeans would be driven out.¹⁰¹

What compounded the problem was their weapon of secrecy. Direct evidence is always difficult to obtain as the pursuit of witchcraft is carefully screened from chiefs who are regarded as the eyes of Government.¹⁰² The colonial dilemma still remained in 1928 that

It is therefore in Rukiga that Nyabingi presents a peculiar character with more persistent and more dangerous aspirations than elsewhere. It pretends moreover to sovereignty. The principle verse of their hymn in Rukiga is ... "The king (or queen) has come to his country".¹⁰³

In pursuit of their resistance, the Abagirwa called upon all peasants in Belgian Rwanda, Kigezi, and Congo to bring in tributes and sacrifices for Nyabingi in form of money, beads, etc. in preparation for a broader resistance. This money was meant to be for sustaining the resistance. However, it cannot be ignored that the Abagirwa

99 P.C.W.P. to C.S. of September 17 1928: "A Supplementary Report on Nyabingi Movement Kigezi District".

100 Kigezi District Annual Report 1927.

101 D.C. to P.C.W.P. on May 29 1930 on Komunda's Sect of Nyabingi.

102 D.C. to P.C.W.P. on March 1 1928.

103 Kigezi District Administrative Reports 1928.

would have appropriated most of it for their personal ends. This was the phase when Nyabingi became known as Muzeire Kasente: a parent that needed or accepted money. They also called upon peasants to manufacture more weapons, sharpen them, and begin intensive military training for an imminent resistance. The theme was *Now the Omukama (Nyabingi) is coming in the Country*.¹⁰⁴

District Commissioner Trewin warned all Saza Chiefs of an imminent Nyabingi resistance:

The affair of "Nyabingi" is wanting to increase in this district, also I think that all the chiefs are not aware of everything which is going on in this country. Because I see that many chiefs do not want to converse with peasants. If you want to be aware of the news in your country ... with ears wide open. I know that witchcraft is going high, and that someone is telling people not to do their work on Mondays and Tuesdays. Not one single chief has told me of this ... people are afraid to go to work on Mondays and Tuesdays because they are obeying the "Nyabingi". Why do not you all put strength to find out about the "Nyabingi"?¹⁰⁵

Indeed, anti-colonial resistances followed in the first quarter of 1928. The leadership mobilized peasants and they began war preparations in Kagarama Mountains opposite Kabale. They aimed at the Church Missionary Society (C.M.S.), Kabale Station and Kikungiri, centres of colonial oppression and exploitation. Their object remained to chase away the oppressive, exploitative system and all in its service.¹⁰⁶ The leadership organized peasants in Kigezi, Rwanda, Congo, and Ankore under the theme of self-emancipation. The leadership urged peasants to contribute something to the movement. Over a thousand peasants from the whole region are said to have participated, contributed in cash, livestock, beads, and bracelets. Acceptance of sacrifices in money and beads was another qualitative change of Nyabingi religion. There was a movement to build more shrines for Nyabingi and peasants began military training with bows, arrows, and spears. Peasants came from different parts of the region, in preparation for an attack on Kabale Station. It was during this time that they were surprised by colonial forces.

The whole resistance began in January to March from Kabale (Kagarama) to Karujanga and across in Rwanda, under the leadership of Ndungusi, Ndemere, Mweyahusi et al. The first was betrayed by a Protestant convert Senyange, who reported to colonial authorities. The resistance near Kabale was organized in mountain forests and hills of Kagarama, four miles (and insight) of Kabale. The resisters screened all events and secrets from a Muganda agent although over 300 of them passed through the Gomborora compound that day. The local agent had

104 Idem. the Church Missionary Society evangelist also testified that he and his Mkungu Busisiri had reported to the Gombolola Chief, when two hundred persons under the Nyabingi "priest" Ndemere marched through his garden. The D.C. noted that the Sub-Chief was away as he 'had knowledge if not complicity in the Organization'.

105 D.C. Trewin to Saza Chiefs on January 28 1928. File Nyabingi (1928).

106 File Raids and Punitive Expeditions. Refer to memo of C.S. to the Governor on Nyabingi, Criminal Case File No. 4 in which two peasants were found guilty and sentenced to five years rigorous imprisonment. Also see telegraph of Chief Secretary to D.C. Kabale of February 24 1928 and D.C.'s reply to C.S. of February 28 1928. Uganda National Archives, Entebbe.

been informed of this resistance and had left the area to avoid being blamed as an accomplice of the resistance.¹⁰⁷

The principal objectives were the Government Station and the Protestant Mission whose houses and contents were definitely allocated by the leaders. At roughly the same time, exactly a similar manifestation under some of the same (escaped) leaders took place 15 miles south of Kabale on the other side of the frontier.

Resistance in Karujanga and in Belgian Rwanda developed faster and in a more organized manner. Peasants crossed from Uganda and joined others in Belgian territory, murdered collaborators, burned many villages, and threatened to burn the Gomborora headquarters. Inside Belgian Rwanda, resisters were reported to have killed 24 Belgian Police.¹⁰⁸ Colonialism went on the offensive on both sides of the border. Belgian colonialism deployed 100 police who subdued about 2000 peasant resisters. This force burnt many villages, killed or injured many peasants. British forces suppressed the resisters on the Uganda side, disarmed them and detained them.¹⁰⁹

Colonialism got alarmed on learning how this was one organized revolt from Kagarama to Rwanda under the leadership of Ndungusi. It sent in a reinforcement of ten police and one officer from Mbarara. Furthermore, it was not going to show any leniency to "Nyabingites" as it would be taken as a manifestation of Nyabingi's omnipotence and indestructibility regardless of time. Colonialism was aware of the political dangers in Nyabingi leadership,

since it involves the fundamental basic anti-European element whereby all Europeans must be driven out in order to make way for their God and King and Queen "Nyabingi" to rule their country and who for the time being has entered in and is depicted in that particular person.¹¹⁰

And adds further thus:

Any unaccountable incident is put down to "Nyabingi" and is at once seized upon by the witch doctor as a proof of his powers which all helps to foster any agitation he may have in mind. The recent dry weather causing the matama crop to begin to wilt, of course lent colour to the general rumour that a new Sultan would arrive in the country in the place of Government and would bring "nyabingi", new seed, rain etc.¹¹¹

The two colonial states used all means at their disposal to suppress it. Some members in the leadership were captured, convicted, and sentenced heavily.¹¹²

107 D.C. to P.C.W.P. on September 13 1928 on "Unlawful assemblies and incitement to rebellion by 'Priests' of Nyabingi Society, 1928". Also see communication from D.C. to P.C.W.P. on March 1 1928, P.C.W.P. to C.S. on March 29 1928 on a recrudescence of "Nyabingi Movement - Kigezi District". File op.cit.

108 Ag. P.C.W.P. to the C.S. on April 4 1928.

109 D.C. to P.C.W.P. on April 5 1928. Also refer to Document of May 3 1928 on Peasants' uprising in Belgian Rwanda against Belgian administration and Belgian colonialists demand for extradition of the resisters who had fled to Uganda. File Nyabingi (1928).

110 Idem.

111 Op.cit.

112 Extradition to Belgian East Africa (Mandate). Dairy of events 1928/29. File Nyabingi (1928).

There were new colonial reforms, based on the weaknesses of Nyabingi institution. Colonialism had learnt the exploitative character of 'Nyabingi cult to enable it to impose its character of liberator, strikes the imagination of the simple. Thus it preys on the people demanding payment of cows, goats, foodstuffs, and money'.¹¹³

The colonialists exploited this coercive taxation to mobilize peasants in their own favour against Nyabingi. They preached against Nyabingi, suspended taxation and other demands in Butare, Bufundi, and British Rwanda. It should be noted that by this time, peasants could see some tangible results from communal labour in form of roads, hospitals etc. On the other hand, there was nothing tangible by Nyabingi Abagirwa that they could cite. All peasant contributions to Nyabingi were consumed by those in its service.

By late 1930s, Nyabingi Movement had been undermined. Their new resistance occurred in form of Ruvaivuro 'Revivalist Movement', whose membership and leadership were predominantly women. The main explanation why this resistance came under cover of a religion was that their productive forces were still at a low level, had a weak economic base and their outlook was narrow and still attributing whatever they could not understand to the supernatural forces. They lacked any other forum around which they could organize to express their interests and wishes. The explanation of the dominance of women has to be sought in the effect of colonial policies which developed Kigezi into a labour reservoir. Through this, most men had to leave the district annually for wage labour for taxes and for other political, economic and social demands. As such, they were mainly women and children who remained in the villages, practising these religions.

Some Colonial Reforms in Response to Nyabingi Movement

Confronted by the Nyabingi Movement, colonialism was able to examine its policies and practice. It came to realize that Baganda Agents were causing unnecessary social grievances among the peasants.

Judicially, Baganda endeavour to force their language upon the local population. In a recent case an old woman was refused a hearing for three months being told she must speak Luganda in Court – which she was unable to do. Indigenous peoples are insufficiently consulted by the Baganda caucus (who in Rukiga have the overwhelming majority in court) on cases arising from local usage and tribal custom.

Following the compulsory use of Luganda by the Government, and the consequent association of officers with it, Baganda lords, customs and outlook were gradually becoming fastened "... peaceful penetration, upon the local people whose point of

The D.C. to P.C.W.F. on November 30 1928 about the Extradition Proceedings following Nyabingi rebellion on Belgian East Africa (Mandate) and Uganda Frontier, March, 1928 charge: murder and arson reported that he had arrested the following additional accused against Belgian arrest warrants of April: Maheranni, Lupfumu, Bariganengwe, and Kagambire.

To concretize this, Ndemere and Mweyehusi were given five years rigorous imprisonment each.

113 Report of P.C.W.P. to C.S. of July 17 1928: "A Supplementary Report on Nyabingi Movement Kigezi District" concluded that Nyabingi belonged to all tribes with its headquarters at Omukyante.

view is largely lost sight of in Native Courts where Baganda preside or predominate much natural resentment is felt by the indigenous population with which I entirely sympathize. I consider it almost entirely due to the GANDA atmosphere created by the use of Baganda interpreters, and the Luganda Language which is imposed by the Government in Districts where it is as alien as it is unnecessary."¹¹⁴

As such, the colonialists now tried to reduce Baganda agents and their powers. They re-introduced Swahili as the official language. They also accused Kago Sepalijja of nepotism; 'forwarding unduly the interests of his own family and advising D.C. to introduce alien (Baganda) customs resented by the indigenes' which formed inflammable material for the incipient fires of rebellion organized by powerful witchcraft associations under capable leaders.¹¹⁵ Philipps pursued this issue further to show how Baganda had become a liability to colonialism.

The District has been almost entirely in the hands of the Baganda (who have been steadily increasing in numbers) since its opening. The medium of communication between the Government and the local population has been Luganda, though heretofore agents has always to employ Kiswahili in personal intercourse with officers – i.e. both being on terms of equality in using a medium of speech which was not their own.

The compulsory use of Luganda has been the most material influence in misleading the indigenous population as to the Government's attitude towards alien (Baganda) customs, in misleading the Baganda as to their own position in the country '... I cannot but consider its employment in this district to be a distinct political error.'¹¹⁶

It had become clear to the colonialists how 'the Nyabingi organization cannot be dealt with by military measures'.¹¹⁷ The new colonial proposals for remedies and safeguards against future Nyabingi troubles were: general civilization of the District, the levelling up of administration on both sides of the two international frontiers, abstention from pressure on tax or labour in frontier areas, increased tolerance of the Rwanda Imandwa (anti-Nyabingi institution), and employment of Batutsi, the hereditary rulers whenever possible and increasing the police force to seventy.¹¹⁸

In a bid to accomplish this, they increased educational grants to missions, began pushing religious missions to carry out their ideological and educational work and to tolerate the passive Emandwa. In this line, they criticized the C.M.S' method of work and hostilities against animists and other religions, their lack of tolerance with them as a basis for social grievances. The P.C.W.P. warned:

One of the dangers of these illegal aggressions by native proselytisers, mistaught by Europeans ignorant of the nature of the religions or cults which are endeavouring to destroy and replace is not only the creation in Africa of a feeling of persecution and antagonism against Europeans in general, but also the natural possibility of exasperated reprisals on local churches. The latter are mostly grass huts and easily inflammable.¹¹⁹

114 Kigezi District Administration Report 1919–1920.

115 Op.cit.

116 Op.cit.

117 Op.cit.

118 Idem. The P.C.W.P. said that the first two proposals were a matter of time while the last three proposals had been laid down and placed on record as general policy.

Drawing from the protest in the newspaper the previous year, Philipps advocated for recognition and respect of animists (as in modern China and ancient Rome) who practice the same cults of the ancestral spirit and of great men now with the gods (mandwa). He argued that these religions could not be mistaken since,

the little shrine can often be seen within the enclosure or behind the house ... It is unthinkable that English or native mission-teachers should forcibly penetrate the residence of a Japanese officer or official and set fire to the shrine or even utter threats about it. In Africa, however, even under the British flag and religious liberty, mission teachers have been and are known to trespass on private residences of Africans, chiefs and peasants, to destroy or molest their shrines.

Colonialism found another solution in deliberate creation of social distinctions in this society. This was conceived by Western Province administrators in 1921:

The question of getting into close touch with younger and more educated natives with a view to giving them some vent for their aspirations and preventing them by practical measures from becoming revolutionary or disloyal ... To form a club or reading room in each station for the native clerks, interpreters, young chiefs and other native youths of similar education ... The idea is to enable these natives to have a place where they can meet to pass their spare time, and providing papers and suitable literature to endeavour to curb those ideas which are at present making headway in the country ... The club should be managed by a committee of natives under the guidance of the D.C., who would draw up such rule as local conditions found necessary, and see that only suitable natives are permitted as members.¹²⁰

To ensure discipline, conformity and to discriminate against many people, they set up rules which prohibited access to the club for women and children. They were to set up a committee to screen and bar unsuitable people from entering, to check on political or religious discussions *inter alia*.¹²¹

It should be noted that colonial authorities had learnt clearly the insurgent character and influence of women in Kigezi. They also understood that the mixing up of different sections of society would lead to the revolutionary tendencies that were developing in the district and the world over. Class creation was at the same time aimed at undermining women, and their improved position in society. It aimed at entrenching or exacerbating inequalities through isolationism and social distinction based on gender, age, religion, education, and employment.

All these colonial measures had some impact on the movement. Colonialism spelled out how the matter was one of general administration which would always require watching. But as the district progressed, any possible danger to Government would disappear and all cases harmful to natives would be dealt with by law.¹²²

¹¹⁹ P.C.W.P. to C.S. on October 15 1930. File C. 1605: Missions: Rwanda (C.M.S.) Mission Methods.

¹²⁰ File Provincial Administration: District Commissioners Conferences: - Minute of Meetings: - Meeting at Mbarara on August 4-8 1921 of D.Cs. of Toro, Ankole, Kigezi and A.D.C. Kigezi and Secretary.

¹²¹ *Idem*.

¹²² D.C. to C.S. on January 17 1922 and P.C. to C.S. commenting on PHILIPPS' report, *op.cit.*

Conclusion

This study has shown how the Nyabingi movement arose on the bases of various social grievances from both within and outside society. Within society, the Nyabingi movement was against the ruling classes in areas with states like Rwanda, Mpororo, and Kinkizi. In other areas, it was against the privileged members of society, like heads of households. The enemy from without was colonialism.

What became evident was that to confront the principle enemy, colonialism, there had to be internal reforms. Secondly, it also became clear that in the absence of an organized political forum and an armed force to defend peasants' rights, the peasants had to do it themselves. The Abagirwa took up the initial initiative to mobilize them. As a dynamic armed force, imperialism posed a direct threat to the Abagirwa's privileged positions, social status, and religion. To protect these, the Abagirwa had to mobilize their fold. This led to the flaring up of the Nyabingi movement up to 1930s. Nyabingi as an institution transcended other religions by its active politics. Its Abagirwa devised new ideologies and practices to retain and encourage their fold.

It is important to note that unlike other religions in highly developed class societies, where religion is an ideology of oppression and exploitation, Nyabingi became a solid ideology for peasants' struggles. All the leadership that followed came to recognize the importance of religion in this area. Even the most advanced and sophisticated guerrilla movement under Ndochibiri and his followers recognized this and exploited it intensively. Another important thing was that the leadership tried to incorporate some of the pre-colonial practices, methods of struggle, and language to enrich the movement.

One of the major weaknesses lay in deep belief in Nyabingi as a religion. This was dominant between 1910 and 1914. In this, peasant resisters put too much faith in the Nyabingi institution. This was worsened by the Abagirwa claiming to be the personifications of Nyabingi. While this transformation had the positive effect of encouraging resisters it led them to be massacred by the colonial forces. In the same manner, the dialectical character of the Nyabingi movement of bringing up new leadership whenever the existing one got separated from the membership had positive and negative effects. While it encouraged and sustained the resistance it led to defeats due to limitations like lack of continuity.

We find the Nyabingi movement developing with the First World War. The movement gets new leadership from colonial forces and its detentions. These bring in the enemy's military hardware and methods of struggle, planning, and commanding. This group exposes the enemy's strengths and weaknesses, and it devises new methods. It is this new leadership which paralyzes colonialism and forces it to make various reforms. However, at this point the Nyabingi movement is not an organized, armed force like a state, even though living off the surplus of others. While supply of resources to the state was compulsory, it was by peasants' willingness that helped the movement. They withdrew from the struggle when they realized that the movement was not likely to defeat the enemy.

Gradually, the Nyabingi movement got defeated. The colonial state achieved this through combining various methods. These included the military option, which it sustained throughout, and various reforms that it was compelled to make. In admin-

istration, it had been forced to replace proxy agents with local ones, avoided taxing women, was careful to make Kigezi a labour reservoir instead of introducing production of cash crops and high technical skills, industries or any other major investments. It had to modify its demands in taxation, forced labour etc. Colonialism also intensified deportations, deprived resisters of resources to fuel the movement and maintained its scorched earth policy.

On the ideological front, it encouraged and financed the new missions to promote their work. It broadened its social base among the peasants using pecuniary and other incentives. It also intensified its propaganda. With the use of force, peasants were able to compare results of colonial policies vis-à-vis the blind opposition of the Abagirwa to these policies. Throughout all these times, colonialism managed to anchor onto the peasantry while undermining the Nyabingi movement. The state increased legislations against Nyabingi religion, giving jobs and other privileges to the new converts, offering medals, honours etc. All these had an impact on the peasants. Gradually, peasants began to withdraw into the new religions.

The Nyabingi movement is a concrete testimony of people's persistent struggles to defend their rights and independence. It demonstrates that no matter how backward people may be, they will always resist any threat to their rights, irrespective of the level of advancement of the adversary. It demonstrated practically how religion can be instrumental in providing a platform for struggle, furnishing theories, courage, ideology, and leadership. It also shows that in a situation characterized by backward forces of production, with no state or other strong social or political organization, people will find a base in any form of organization like religion to advance and defend their interests. It is in such a situation that religion takes on a progressive role. On the other hand, we see colonialism using Christianity to penetrate and control these new colonies. It is in the latter case that religion is being introduced for reactionary purposes as "an opium for the people" for oppressive and exploitative purposes.¹²³

Their defeat was a landmark to their loss of independence and incorporation into the broader capitalist system. It was a turning point for this pre-capitalist, pre-state area. The fixing of borders and lumping together of different peoples under one administration was a step forward. Former antagonisms were dropped and peasants began to work together towards self-emancipation. However, the colonial state was quick enough to understand the effects of such nationalism and began fragmenting them. It denied them rights to grow and develop crops for export, killed their industries and developed them into labour reservoirs. Furthermore, it disrupted their social set-up, outlawed their pre-colonial religions. Peasants gradually became more scared of colonialism and tried to combine both pre-colonial religions with the new ones. They took on European names as a sign of conversion to the European

religions. At the same time, they worshipped their pre-colonial religions in secret. The new movement that emerged, "Revivalist Movement", took the new religious line instead of Nyabingi or any other pre-colonial religion. The state approached the Church Missionary Society and the latter confirmed that it was 'in full control of the enthusiasts'. It was 'to impress on their followers the necessity for obedience to civil authority on all forms'. In fact, Dr. Church promised to take disciplinary action in any case of insubordination.¹²⁴

The Nyabingi movement showed in concrete terms the need for leaders of organizations like religions to get involved in solving people's problems the need for them to give courageous and untiring leadership. It showed that dependence on any single section of society while denying others chance in these roles inevitably led to peril for society.

Through the Nyabingi movement got defeated, it still represented popular interests. If we ask why the movement failed to achieve its objectives, or to stem the colonial wave, we have to take into account the limitations of circumstance and leadership. The circumstances of peasant life were highly fragmented. No wonder their unity was overly shaped by ideological factors. While the religious vision articulated by the leadership emphasized the unity of the people, it could not conceal the contradictory aims of the leadership for long. Its anti-colonial aims were intertwined with its aspirations to safeguard its internal dominance. Its alternative to colonial control was its own control within the context of safeguarding the *status quo*. Of course, the nature of the leadership changed as did circumstances. New types of leaders kept mushrooming from the ranks of peasants, particularly from amongst those who had had a close colonial encounter, like soldiers. While their influence could not reverse the fortunes of the movement in the immediate run, it did over the long run steer the course of resistance in Kigezi into the fold of Uganda – the larger entity the British had created to satisfy their own appetite.

123 K. MARX, F. ENGELS and V. I. LENIN, 1972, *On Historical Materialism*. Moscow, Progress Publishers.

See also Michael ADAS, 1979, *Prophet of Rebellion, Millenarian Protest Movements Against the European Colonial Order*. London, Cambridge University Press. MARX and ENGELS, *Selected Works*, Vol. II. Marx noted in *Contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Law* that 'Religious distress is at the same time the oppression of real distress and also the protest against real distress. Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the heart of the heartless world, just as it is the spirit of spiritless conditions. It is the opium of the people'.

124 After interview with Archdeacon Pitts and Dr. Church, the D.C. left the C.M.S. with the duty to control the Revivalists movement. The D.C. instructed the chiefs that they had tribal powers to ensure obedience by women to their legal guardians and to control unruly gatherings. File op.cit.

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