Peasants’ Resistance to Colonialism

“We have come to pay tax!” shouted over 1,400 peasants who were carrying spears and other weapons instead of money.

The Society does not shrink from organising attacks in force on fortified positions held by troops, as witness the attack upon CHAHAFI fort held by Anglo-Belgian troops (a few days after a strong German attack with guns had been repulsed) in January 1915. Some two thousand fanatical natives were engaged, and were only driven off after over six hours close fighting.

With colonial invasion, members of the society began thinking about the crisis, the prophecies of Nyakairima and the possible solutions. Various solutions emerged, which guided people’s different courses of action. The people’s grievances revolved around material issues although resistance took a religious tone - politics and religion. The concrete issues that peasants raised revolved around the division of their geographical environment, imposition of borders and the territorial claims by the colonial forces. This resulted into restriction of movement of peasants, and limited their operations and chances of expansion of their production and trade activities.

Other grievances arose because of land and political alienation, forced labour in the form of Ruharo, Kashanju, head porterage and conscription for
military purposes. Some others revolved around the newly imposed institutions, rules and laws, oppressive alien judgment, persistent demands and forced contributions, forced sales and forced production for sale under the label of ‘market gardens’.

This chapter analyses the Nyabingi resistance to colonialism. It examines the claims Nyabingi was anti-people, oppressive and enslaving, while colonialism was for liberation (Rwampigi, 1980).

Colonialists had invaded and occupied this area militarily. Their appearance largely determined the peasants’ response. Their militaristic character contributed greatly to the continuation of the resistance. The various atrocities committed against peasants by colonial personnel increased social grievances. These included looting, collective fines and the imposition of the ‘Collective Fine Ordinance’. They were aimed at punishing peasants and impoverishing them. There were other crimes by colonial personnel like rape, massacres, murders, and so on.

The continued occupation by foreigners was resented by the peasants. This had the effect of raising the level of nationalism in the peasants. What compounded the problem was the imposition of Baganda agents and their superiority complex, languages, corruption and bribery, crude and strange punishments, disruption of the peasants’ social set-up, deliberate attempts to destroy peasant religious institutions, and so on. To accomplish this, colonialism outlawed free worship by peasants, which it termed ‘witchcraft’. The colonial state instituted the 1912 Witchcraft Ordinance. This was aimed at prosecuting anybody caught practising the local religions. It also designed and instituted a Deportation Ordinance in 1912. These were some of the issues that informed peasants’ resistance in the first phase of the struggle.

On their part, abagirwa had to try and retain their economic base. As they lived off the surplus from peasants, and some had begun to accumulate property, they had to try and defend it. They were able to combine politics and religion around all these concrete issues. Peasants saw sense in abagirwa’s teaching and were moved to resistance. Heads of households were also opposed to the modus operandi of colonialism and the new religions. These undermined their political power and social status by setting the young against the colonialists and their established order.

Despite these impositions, the British officers heeded the advice of PCWP on the dangers of imposing Poll Tax in cash:
‘…until the natives have some means of earning money; which at present they have not… should give them time to realise the advantages of being under the British Government and by degrees they will learn that they must contribute something in return for the benefits they enjoy. Premature taxation without opportunities for earning the wherewithal to pay it would cause discontent and might result in migration to the Congo or GEA (WPAR 1913/14).

Despite the absence of a centralised leadership in the area to defend the people’s interests, they did not sit idle as the three imperialist powers were scrambling for their land, dividing and sub-dividing it amongst themselves. They were not ready to surrender their land and autonomy.

The population factor needs to be understood. Though the area had not reached a high level of social differentiation, which was worsened by the crises that had faced the peasants prior to 1910, it had reached a high population level. The population of the new district, Kigezi, was estimated at 206,090 people in 1921 and land per head was 5.4 acres (figures from Kigezi District Resettlement Office, Kabale).

The high population, vis-a-vis the available resources and rudimentary technology contributed to peasants’ mistrust of the colonialists and fuelled their militancy. So, the colonial state was very careful not to encourage raw material production in Kigezi. That would have required the upgrade of the technical level of labour due to the land shortage. Yet the British were not willing to plough back the resources that they were siphoning out.

Secondly, the colonial option was shaped by the peasants’ continued resistance for decades. The state, therefore, opted for labour migration. The creation of Kigezi into a labour reservoir has its origins in colonialism. However, it should be noted that the state colonialism was not hard-pressed by land for these raw materials. It had nearer places like Buganda and Busoga where it was already growing them very cheaply. So, it was economically rational and politically expedient to transport labour from the highly populated area than taking risks to invest resources there.

The Course of the Nyabingi Movement up to World War One

At the time of colonial invasion, an omugirwa of Nyabingi had organised peasants into resistance and overthrown Chief Ruhayana31 of Kinkizi. Interestingly, it was in Ruhayana that colonialism found an ally. It took advantage of this situation and reinstated him:

31 At the time of colonial invasion, the colonialists spelt Ruhayana as Nduraiane.
The Chief Nduraiana (read ‘Ruhayana’) 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 Muginga in the neighbouring Kayonza, refused persistently to subordinate his authority and peoples to the British colonisers. Instead, he organised them into resistance. So, Cap. Reid deposed him, and replaced him with his collaborating brother, Duyumba (KD Report of 6 September 1911). However, the CS had warned against the action as ‘...not desirable to interfere with the native regime until we are firmly established in this country’.

The Ag CS wrote to the Political Officer on 2 October 1911 promising that ‘the new ordinance on the subject of witchcraft would have to be enforced (when finally approved) as soon as the country was added to the Protectorate’. His memo of 3 October 1911 and letter of 6 October 1911 ordered the Political Officer to transfer Muginga to Mbarara or Masaka pending the Secretary of State’s approval of the ordinance - ‘a witch doctor should be temporarily transferred to another place’.

Muginga was convicted on charges of banding with Ndochibiri against the state, consorting with the enemy and fighting against the British. He was also accused of 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 been deported from Kigezi.

Muginga’s deportation order to Bunyoro, in accordance with ‘The Uganda Deportation Ordinance, 1906’, spelled out that this was aimed at preventing continuance of his misconduct and intrigue against the British rule. The Acting 32

32 The name Muginga was variably spelt as Mginga.

33 DC writing to PCWP on 9 April 1917. Also see Comments of PCWP on Muginga’s deportation on 18 April 1917 and the affidavits of 8 June 1917 all opposing his return from deportation. File op. cit. File: Natives Affairs. Mginga: Deportation of. Also see the Attorney General’s letter to Ag CS of 28 July 1917 and the Governor’s Communication 517 Minute 1 of 2 August 1917.
Governor signed Musinga’s Deportation Order on 29 June 1917 (File: Native Affairs: Mginga’s Deportation).

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

Ndungusi gives an interesting leadership in this movement. There were various Nyabingi insurgencies, whose leadership claimed to be Ndungus, son of Rwabugiri (King of Rwanda) and his mother, Muhumuza. The claim was made because of the socio-political, military, religious and organisational capacity of both the personality himself and his mother, Muhumuza.

Ndungusi and his mother were forced to flee Rwanda due to the 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 Nyabingi personification. 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 death and capture. He then retreated into the peasantry, where he began mobilising peasants into more armed resistance. From then, various personalities made claims to this name for political purposes, to gain legitimacy and acceptance among the peasants. One of them joined forces with Katuregye against colonialism. He was killed in the forest.

KDAR of 1922 reported Musinga’s return from exile at Masindi. KDAR of 1923 noted that Mginga had taken over Kayonza Gombolola. The District Report of 3 May 1913 noted that the Imperial Resident of Rwanda had been engaged in operations against Ndungus and Basebya, Ndungusi was killed and Basebya escaped across Lake Bunyonyi.

Another Ndungusi was caught mobilising peasants into resistance in 1913 and deported to Jinja, where he finally died in 1918. Another claimant to this name organised the broad-based regional resistance of 1928. He escaped capture and disappeared among the peasantry. Another claimant to this name was captured mobilising peasants into resistance in 1930. He was convicted and imprisoned. There were other young men who made similar claims to this name. Ndungusi had become an inspiration to resistance. Gradually, the name Ndungusi declined and receded into legend. However, whoever made claims to this name raised a large following and would be hunted down by the state.

34 The name Basebya was variably spelt as Bassebya, Basebia and Bassebja.
Because of the charismatic character of Ndungusi and his role in anti-colonial leadership, the colonial state charged one of the claimants to this name with responsibility for ‘riot, rebellion, sedition and bloodshed in Kigezi’. He was deported for being a ‘dangerous and undesirable person to be at large in this district’. The ADC argued that Ndungusi had incited numerous chiefs into open revolt against the government and attacked collaborators.

Rwagara, a local collaborator, testified against Muhumuza and Ndungusi two years later. He accused them of being:

...bad people and disturbed the Rukiga county. They came to this country about two years ago... went from place to place and took the people’s cattle they preached against the English. If a chief refused to obey them they warred on him, they did this to Chief Mutambuko. They killed his people and burnt his houses and took his cattle. Everyone was in fear of them. Cap. Reid with the soldiers arrested Mamusa and killed many of his people but Ndungutzi escaped. Mamusa and Ndungutzi had three stakes. They said they would place me on one. Agt. Sebalija on the other - and Agt Yonozani on the third one... Ndungutzi went into German territory and did many bad things there but the German drove him into English country again and he stopped at Lubungo. He told Lwantali and all the chiefs around there not to obey the English but to follow him; they did so. The people all refused to obey the Government owing to his words. He moved from one place to place inciting the people to rebellion. He accused me of bringing the English into the country and wanted to fight with me (Rwagara’s testimony of 25 March 1913.)

Our respondents accused collaborators like Rwagara and Baganda of fighting for Europeans for loot and posts. To attribute all the peasant resistances to individuals as the colonialists did was to negate the people’s history. Peasants resisted in various areas of the district at different times without Ndungusi’s knowledge or influence. However, he was convicted of being dangerous to peace and good order, ‘endeavouring to excite enmity between the people of the Protectorate and His Majesty and… intriguing against His Majesty’s power and authority and the Protectorate’:

It would be a great mistake to allow Ndungutzi to return to Kigezi for some considerable time to come as he would be certain to cause trouble again. Experience has taught me that to haste forgiveness or lenience with natives who have misbehaved themselves (especially with fanatical ones) is misplaced kindness and instead of being appreciated is invariably abused (PCWP to CS on 23 December 1913).

35 Mutambuka was variably spelt as Mutambuko.
It was reiterated in July 1914 that his return would be most injurious and would lead to a recrudescence of the disturbances, which had led to his deportation.36

The ACS wrote to the PCWP on 6 April 1915 on the same decision and on 3 October 1916, the Governor informed the Secretary of State for Colonies that the question of the return of Ndugusi to Kigezi would have to be deferred until normal conditions had been restored and the district brought under closer administration. This objection was reiterated the following year by the Governor to the Secretary of State for Colonies. This Ndungusi died in exile in April 1918 (PCWP to CS on 2 May 1918. Also see DC to PCWP on 30 December 1918).

**The Abatwa Resistance**

*Abatwa* ethnic grouping who are pejoratively called ‘pygmies’ lived in the whole of the Great Lakes Region, including Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda and the DRC. Their mode of existence was principally hunting and gathering, which they supplemented by primitive plunder of wealth characterised by massacres, arson, property destruction and looting. They constituted a military and political threat to the local peasants.

Jack exaggerated that they were ‘cannibals’. Colin Turnbull, however, gives a more convincing picture of the *Abatwa* (pygmies) in the Ituri forest, their mode of production, organisation, character, bravery and skillfulness. It is no wonder, therefore, that *abagirwa* mobilised peasants against *Abatwa*:

...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 *Abatwa* who always attacked by night, killed all their people and stole their food.

*Abatwa* 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 husbandry or crop husbandry. They could not accumulate and concentrate the looted property to make it reproduce itself. As there was no form of accumulation of wealth, no classes existed among them. This made them very vulnerable. The Colonial state capitalised on these weaknesses to isolate and
defeat them politically and militarily. In their primitive plunder, Abatwa would burn whatever remained after acquiring whatever they wanted. They killed all livestock as they could not look after them. The respondents argued that Abatwa were so wasteful because they did not participate in production of wealth.

The 1911 BCR presented Abatwa as a race of fierce, savage and undersized people, looked upon with suspicion and dislike by the other natives whose land they constantly raided, always independent and truculent, acknowledging none but their own chiefs. Contrary to the colonial view, it should be understood that Abatwa were also inhabitants of the area, regardless of the sentiments of other ethnicities. After all, there were conflicts at different levels in other ethnicities, too.

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 organised states and peoples. The colonial state anticipated that they were not likely to give any trouble but that if it was found necessary to deal with, then native levies could be raised without difficulty to assist in driving them from their bamboo forests (op. cit.).

One of the colonial tactics was to exploit pre-colonial conflicts between the local peoples. In the case of Abatwa, the plan was to ally with other ethnicities against them. Though they were still dependent on nature, they were militarily superior to the other inhabitants. Because of this level of organisation they could invade, terrorise, loot and pillage the populous peasantry who were disunited, politically disorganised, and militarily weak.

However, Abatwa soon realised the dangers of the new enemy and started attacking it and its allies, disrupted its communication system, and so on. The three colonial powers combined forces, intelligence and military information to fight them. They found it easy to mobilise peasants against Abatwa, by exploiting the past hatred against them. So, while wars were waged in Lake Bunyonyi by the British against Katuregye, the Germans and Belgians were also fighting against Abatwa in their colonies.

The question arises as to why their resistance was defeated. While colonial powers were ready to smash any local resistance, Abatwa received no sympathies, material or military assistance or alliances from the peasants in the neighbourhood. They lacked continuous food supply. At the same time, the area where they could go to for supplies had come under different colonial powers. As

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37 Katuregye was variably spelt by colonialists as Katuleghi and Katuleggi.
a result, they faced shortages without replenishments. Another explanation is that they never held to any territory as they lived a nomadic life. As such, they were able to move from territory to territory, while being pursued by colonial forces. Studies revealed how Rukara and Muramira led collaborators with Europeans against Katuregye et al.

Their resistance under Katuregye gave colonialism and its local allies considerable trouble. They 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. The British sent a strong force to dislodge and defeat them. This was led by one British Major and four Lieutenants – Major Lawrence and Lieutenants Turpin, Moore, Sullivan and Wagstaff. The strong, well armed force failed to dislodge and defeat them. This was because of the resisters’ excellent knowledge of the terrain, their military skills and the protection that they enjoyed from the population. The inhabitants were not willing to betray them by giving incriminating information to the colonialists.

Basebya combined forces with Ndungutse, and led the resistance against the German colonialists in Ruanda in 1912. While Ndungutse was reportedly killed, Basebya escaped to Rwanda. The British colonialists could not rest with Bassebya at large, just across the border in German East Africa. They, therefore, communicated to the German colonialists in Rwanda on 22 May 1912, proposing to them the necessity of instituting measures to strengthen their protection ‘by a simultaneous closure of the border’. This was concurred to by the Imperial Resident at Kigali as he submitted that ‘...the natives in not a few cases have escaped punishment by crossing the border or they commit crimes on the other side of the border in the hope that they will not be called to account for them. The many problems of the open country in the border areas favour such behaviour, which is unpalatable to both governments. Without doubt, a common action by the German and British authorities will stop the border population from committing crimes.’ It was in this spirit that he announced the summary execution of Bassebya just a week before. From his account, Basebya had been caught, arrested, prosecuted, convicted by the German Court Martial, which in all senses was a kangaroo court, and executed on the same day:

I succeeded on 13/5/1912 to arrest the Abatwa chief, Bassebja (Read ‘Bassebya’). Bassebja was condemned to death by the military tribunal on 15th May and the sentence was executed on that very day. Bassebja’s raid on English territory has thus been avenged.
The Imperial Resident, Kigali on 22 May 1912: ‘Betr. Einfall Bassebja’s in Süd - Rukiga’ No. 1/433 replying to the Political officer’s letter of 21 May 1912 No. 48/12 on a joint military co-operation against Abatwa opined that there was no more need to take measures against Abatwa living near the border after Bassebya’s execution. He informed the British officers that the second Abatwa Chief Grue had been submissive for the past two years, and that he, together with the British Border Commissioner had stayed in Grue’s place in December 1911. He had deliberately refrained from calling on him in the recent expedition in fear of arousing Grue’s suspicions.

Not ready to take any chances, he planned to monitor and curtail Abatwa’s activities. He was to ensure constant monitoring of Chief Grue’s activities. He would achieve this by imposing a Omutusi chief upon Abatwa. In his own words, he would employ an energetic Mtusi Mtwale (an omututsi chief) to oversee Grue’s Abatwa at the latter’s residence. ‘I consider this measure ideal in trying to stop the Abatwa from making raids on British territory in the future.’ He planned to employ an agent ‘chief’ from the privileged Abatutsi ethnic group to oversee the Abatwa.

Abatutsi ethnic group had constituted the dominant ruling class in Rwanda since the inception of Rwanda Kingdom in the 15th century. What endeared this group to the colonialists was its long experience in administration as they had been the overlords in this region.

Secondly, they had allied with the German colonialists at the advent of the colonisation of Africa. As such, the Germans found it convenient in all regards to get cheap labour from them and also be able to penetrate the society at the lowest levels without any direct interaction. It also gave them legitimacy and in cases of conflicts between the colonised and the local agents, the Germans came in as just arbiters (idem).

The anti-colonial struggles by Abatwa were patriotic. They attacked colonialism and its collaborators. However, they got dispersed through the defeats and deaths of their leadership (idem). The fault with colonial reports is that they attributed the raids to influences by the Germans. That view presented the resisters as having been prompted from without. Katuleggi (read ‘Katuregye’) was reported to have died of wounds sustained in a fight with colonial forces under Abdulla (KDAR 1915-16 and KDAR 1916-17).

However, the colonial governments were determined to defeat these resistances at whatever cost. The Political Officer clarified this in his report
entitled ‘Fighting Among German Natives.’ He advanced the need to take advantage of local conflicts:

‘With regards 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 Abatwa 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, Katuleggi’s brother GEA... wants bringing to his senses in a prompt and effective manner’. Report of Lieut. Kigezi of 11 October 1915 to the Political Officer on ‘Fighting Among German Natives’.

Given their mode of existence and their professional linkage with the Rwandan state, Abatwa were above religions. As such, their resistance to colonialism was consciously organised.

**Progress of the Nyabingi Movement with the 1914 War: ‘Local Agent Collaboration as State Treason’ Treachery**

The ceaseless Nyabingi struggles against the imperialist powers were matched with the latter’s unyielding recalcitrance. The question is what measures the three rivalling colonial powers employed to defeat it, stop it from expansion and stop others from flaring up. The peasants’ reactions to these colonial measures have also to be analysed. What did their success depend on? What was their level of consciousness and their perception of their enemy(ies)? What explains the varied tendencies within this region at that time? Why did some individuals and groups take to collaboration with colonialism?

There was a great advancement in the anti-colonial struggle in 1914. The peasant resisters in the three colonies amalgamated their grievances and articulated them together. They organised peasants around these issues. This enabled them to reach deep into the three colonies in terms of mobilisation, recruitment and fights. This guerrilla force took maximum advantage of the defeat of Imperial Germany and the colonial borders.

The ideology of the movement was still around the colonial occupation, colonial borders, land for the state and the in-coming missions, forced labour and contributions, imposition of alien administration and administrators, laws, cultures, new religions, and so on. The colonial state had also marginalised local chiefs like Nyindo and Muginga and deprived them of the opportunity.

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38 The name Nyindo was variably written by colonialists as Nindo.
to extract surplus labour from their subjects as prior to colonialism. To worsen the situation, new demands were imposed upon the peasants to support the war. Sebalijja and Abdulla were instrumental in resource mobilisation. 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 ADC had underlined that the colonial state needed 12,000 goats and sheep to feed the troops in the district per year (op. cit.).

The latest strategy for resource extraction was taxation, which the PC had warned against in 1913. They had been prompted to introduce taxation due to pressure for resources to meet the administration costs, support the British in the war and meet other expenses. That increased the peasants’ discontent. The state used chiefs to collect it, and gave them tax rebates. Even the method of tax collection terrorised those who failed to pay it. Tax collectors unleashed terror in the peasantry through patrols for tax defaulters - potoro. 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 acquired through looting peasants’ property. Worse still, a new conflict emerged between the peasants and colonial personnel over promiscuity. This arose partly because those in colonial service did not bring their wives with them. Colonial service had subjected all of them to a bachelor life. So, they began go after the peasant women and girls.

The new development had adverse consequences. Girls became pregnant and ran away. Others were harassed by members of the society for fraternising with colonial personnel. Victims were forced to flee to Kabale Station. A new institution of prostitution began to emerge around administration centres. This was reinforced by women who came from other areas of the country, not in search of men but to eke out a living. However, as the state did not employ women in its service, the only way out became prostitution. Even colonial personnel used their state positions to force some women to sleep with them.

This was detested vehemently by the peasants. Worse still was the introduction and the spread of venereal diseases, not only among prostitutes and government personnel but also among the peasants.

The persistent armed resistance of peasants in Kyogo and its environs against British colonialism showed the peasants’ determination to regain their lost independence. This led to the bloody war of March 1915.
The PC had reported in January, the previous year how Kyogo peasants 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’ (WP Monthly Report of January 1914). Not long after, the ADC 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 for the ADC and the agent persistently, denied passage to anyone in colonial service regardless of colour or origin. They attacked the agent’s boma twice and the colonial forces fought back. There were to heavy casualties on the side of resisters.

The Ag PCWP wrote to the on CS 12 July 1915 regarding the measures taken towards the end of March against certain Natives of Kyogo:39

They have persistently refused to do any work or to bring food for the feeding of the troops, and have endeavoured to get other natives to follow their example. This was followed by the murder of one of the Agents followers, and two attacks in force were made on the Agents Boma... I requested Mr. Turpin ASP... to seize the cattle of these rebels, and thereby bring them to reason as half measures are worse than useless when dealing with savages of this type (idem.)

Attributing the peasant struggles to German influence, the British obscured both the reality and the basis of these struggles. They did not resist and later cross the border on the grounds that they had allied with the Germans, but because they considered the whole region as part of their land and were running away from their enemies. The proverbial route of the one being chased which is mapped out by the chaser became clear during that period.

The Meting of Politically Inspired Punishments as a Strategy to Curb Resistance

This military encounter was characterised by courageous resistance despite the peasants’ weaknesses in planning, military skills and technology, organisation, and leadership. In his report, Turpin argued that Kyogo peasants had attacked the government forces with spears and arrows; declined to listen to the agent, challenging them to fight if they were men. This portrayed the peasants’

39 ADC Sullivan’s Communication of 11 April 1915 to PCWP & PCWP to the CS on 3 February 1915 & on 12 July 1915. Vide Report by Turpin, at Ngarama to ADC, Kigezi dated 28 March 1915 on ‘Kyogo Counter-Insurgency’. Also see ADC’s report of 5 July 1915 and June 1916 & PCWP (vide Min. 16 in SMP 2471 D).
weaknesses as they had failed to realise that the force had come for war. He had, therefore, considered the position so dangerous and opened fire on them. Although the peasants fought bravely, they lost this battle. Even Kahondo peasants, who rushed to their aid, were repelled by the colonial forces.

In the battle, over seventy-one resisters were killed, and 180 cattle, 650 sheep and goats, and 500 loads of millet were seized. These were treated as a collective political fine on the grounds that ‘the conduct of these people requires exemplary punishment... must be taught that they cannot treat the government with contempt... 1,000 goats and sheep are required monthly as food for troops in this district, at the cost of Rs. 1500/= per month’ (idem).

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

The government feared that Nyindo could raise a thousand spearmen in the field on short notice. So, they 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 organise people into resistance. By then, the state had transformed him and other pre-colonial chiefs like Makobore, Musinga and Ruhayana 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 CMS teacher and killed him. The colonial state arrested them and convicted them. 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. WPAR 1912/13 commended it thus; ‘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’ (idem. Also see WPAR 1912/13).

Some of the 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.

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40 File: Murder of a Native Captured in German Territory. Also see PCWP’s to CS of 26 March 1913 on ‘Fines Imposed’. 
Such heavy punishments were a source of resources to run the state. The state also wanted to encourage more people in its service and wanted to inflict pain by impoverishing the culprits. This was aimed at discouraging more resistance. Capturing livestock of resisters was aimed at depriving them of material resources essential for supporting the resistance. The heavy punishment given to Nyindo was meant to pre-empt any further rebellious activities by him. The state also wanted to placate the CMS and encourage them to come to the District to carry out the ideological and educational work. Implicitly, it was aimed at showing its capacity to protect those in its service.

The local leadership timed when the colonialists began war against each other and commenced their resistance. They had also realised that the colonial state was ‘not strong enough to take rigorous action on the frontier at the commencement of the war...’ Nyindo and others had been aware of their objective weaknesses vis-a-vis the joint British and Belgian forces. They were also aware of the racial differences between Europeans and Africans. Their search for allies went beyond the borders down south to the Germans. They were able to link with them through King Musinga, of Rwanda. It was clear that he had no interest in the Germans and neither did the Germans have any personal interest in him and his group. Neither could they trust any Belgian or English, who formed the object of the struggle. He had faced it earlier on and witnessed other atrocities meted on other peasants - the witch hunt, collective fines and imprisonment etc. He knew the risks involved. The only option remained the peasants and the Germans. It was under those conditions that he and his group struck some agreement with the Germans. Colonial Intelligence Reports show that two German officers visited Nyindo under the disguise of being White Fathers and sealed an agreement for cooperation. These reports showed that Germans had promised Nyindo et al more cattle and expansion of territory (WPAR 1915/16).

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

What followed was that with the beginning of the First World War, some peasants crossed with their cattle to Belgian territory, others under Nyindo...
crossed to GEA. They, then, began attacking ‘loyal peasants’. (WP Monthly Report of August 1914.) Although the peasants were busy cultivating in October, the PCWP was certain that ‘the condition of this part of the district must remain unsettled as long as Nyindo is at large across the frontier and from under the wing of the black eagle sending threats to our people...’ (WP Monthly Report of October, 1914). It is not surprising that the resisters attacked British forces and their allies near Mulera the following month. Meanwhile, there were also other attacks led by Katuregye. These continued for months. By then, British colonialism had mistaken Katuregye’s retreat and change of tactics for surrender or abandonment after his mother’s arrest. (WP Reports of November and December, 1914).

The native leaders mobilised peasants into continuous resistance against colonialism. They blocked the colonial resource mobilisation in form of taxes, labour, forced contributions, and so on. To concretise this, they attacked colonial forces under agent Abdulla near Miserero’s, where he had gone to collect forced labour. They reorganised and attacked again within a month. In this encounter, they attacked, killed or wounded ‘loyal natives’. A section of resisters under Semana ‘burnt nearly all Mushakamba’s villages’ and about twenty other villages of loyal chief Mutesi and Abdulla’s Boma in October 1914, and looted their livestock:

The District Political Officer of Kigezi reported to the CS on 9 November 1916 about Nyindo that; ‘The natives of these villages were loyal and were attacked without provocation or excuse’ (sic!) (File: Kigezi: Nyindo - Deportation of). Nyindo and others led new attacks against colonial forces at Kisoro and defeated them. The latter fled towards Ikumba Headquarters with losses, bruises and humiliation. The resisters then burnt the administration quarters and looted the cattle there. More bloody battles followed under the war cry that they were going to drive the Europeans out of the country (Affidavit by C.E.E. Sullivan on 6 December 1916).

The Political Officer accused them of ‘circling round to cut me off from Kigezi Hill, and I was lucky to extricate myself...’ He and his forces fired and shot several locals. In this encounter, Nyindo commanded over 1,200 peasant resisters, the following day, against the colonial forces and the local collaborators. Their major weapons were the people, arson, arms, belief in Nyabingi, courage and unity. Their rear base was across the borders. This battle lasted for four hours. The resisters killed many loyal natives and looted most of their livestock.
Evidently, the allies of colonialism were the immediate targets. They were the visible enemies. The real enemy was distant and sometimes not clear. These allies were regarded as an obstacle, which had to be removed before resistance could reach the principle enemy.

The state retaliated viciously. It arrested some of them and confiscated their cattle. Kirongore, Karafa, Mutago and Biunyira were sentenced to one year RI in Kampala gaol with fines of cattle and goats. They were sent to Kampala with the aim of widening their narrow outlook: ‘Besides the possibilities of escape from Kabale gaol, detention here would make them realise that Kigezi is not the only district under British rule’. The four resisters lived at Namakumba. The argument was that Ndochibiri had been residing there (ADC to the PCWP on 19 April 1917). He explained how their short-term imprisonment was determined by their low level of consciousness, and mobilisation: ‘These men are ignorant and superstitious semi-savages and not on the same plane as intelligent chiefs such as Nyindo.’ (idem).

The Introduction and Use of the Court System to Defeat Politically Inspired Resistance

The Attorney General advised the District Magistrate/District Commissioner (DM/DC) not to imprison them under martial law in the existing circumstances of the war but to deport them on an affidavit. This was because he feared that such imprisonment would require the British to accord them some rights as prisoners of war in accordance with International Law. Secondly, it would show, internationally, British acceptance as an army of occupation and its recognition of existence of people’s struggle for self-determination. As such, they were convicted under sections 148 and 149 of arson, attempted murder, theft, causing hurt, and so on, and deported after imprisonment.

The Attorney General had advised the DM/DC that under the existing colonial law, mere participation in the unlawful assembly made a person liable for all offences committed by the others in prosecution of the common object of the assembly (Ag Attorney General to CS of 16 May 1917). They were charged with lawless acts and sentenced. Mitobo was sentenced to 2½ years RI and Karafa, Mutago, Kilongole, and Biunyira to 1 year RI each. DC informed PCWP on 23 August 1917 that rebel Semana had been sentenced to 5 years RI (Idem. Also see communication from PCWP to the CS of 4 May 1917 on the lawless acts and judgment, Ag Governor’s letter of 16 May 1917. Ag DC to PCWP on 11 August 1917).
When Nyindo finally surrendered, his property was confiscated as punishment for resistance. His charges included fanning anarchy, attempting to murder the civil officer in charge of the district, inciting people to murder agent Abdulla on many other occasions and burning the agent’s house at Kisoro, mobilising peasants to loot the Indian shop and to attack the Boer family. He was also accused of constantly attacking the civil officers and their escorts between Kumba and Rutshuru, organising peasants into resistance on the Congo border and looting the post of Goma, inciting his forces to attack, kill and rob local allies who refused to join the resistance, killing a missionary teacher and allying with Germans and Ndokibiri against the British.

Other charges included aiding Chief Katuregye in raiding and looting loyal natives, instigating numerous petty raids at various times and places, rioting, and commanding peasant resisters to kill Europeans. The police statements by Abdualla Namunye and Sulimani Ntangamalala of 7 January 1918 and 10 January 1918 confirmed these. Other statements include those by Mushakamba’s son, Kanyamanza, Luwanya and Police Constable Saidi Bitensi on 8 January 1918. Statements made by six constables confirmed that the resisters overwhelmed them, defeated them, forcing them to flee to Ikumba, and that the resisters burnt their homes and captured all their cattle.

Nyindo was convicted and deported to Masindi. To silence his followers, the state 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’ (Op. cit.) He was deported 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...’ (op. cit.) That way, the state was able to separate the leadership from the membership, and deny them direct contact to mobilise them into advanced resistance.

**Resistance Under Ndchibiri Bicubirenga**

Available evidence shows that Ndchibiri and his comrades got initial military training in scientific warfare, skills and military tactics from the colonialists. They had been employed in colonial forces as *askaris*; they then deserted with arms. This was important for his career as a guerrilla leader. There he had gained military skills, training, command and knowledge of geography. He had also learnt the weaknesses of the Europeans and their weapons. He capitalised on these in the struggles that followed.
His involvement in colonial war also helped him to make more friends, comrades and allies. 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 popularise people’s cause and the need for self-emancipation from colonialism in the whole region.

Their other important achievement was that they acquired weapons and ammunition from dead soldiers, the reckless and from stores. Others were got from the defeated Germans on their hurried evacuation. Resisters were to capture some weapons from the enemy. These activities led the colonialists to suspect him. They tried to burn him in his house but he managed to escape with serious burns. It is alleged that his three fingers were lost in the tragedy. Ndochibiri in the local language means two fingers.

It was this event which forced his resistance into the open. He began actual organisation, politicisation and recruitment of peasants into 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 that, ‘witch doctor Ndochimbiri has been the cause of considerable trouble; in April he ravaged the country within a few miles of posts garrisoned by the UPS.B.’ It was, therefore, forced to station a post of 10 special constables near the border to try to prevent his rebel activities.

The new leadership had no illusion of returning the society to the pre-colonial one. Their wide travels in the whole region and beyond and their experience with the colonialists had given them enough chance to appreciate the importance of organised administration, with a standing armed force. They aimed to rid the area of the force of occupation, and establish a strong administration aimed at defending people’s interests. This was reflected in his strong, broad-based leadership, which included men and women.

Furthermore, the leadership came from various ethnicities in the whole area. This was also reflected in the membership. However, the leadership was divided over Nyabingi. Some of them believed strongly in Nyabingi and were backward-looking in terms of the society’s movement, to return to the period when there would be no taxes, no chiefs, and no any other ruler other than Nyabingi. However, other members who had been in colonial service appreciated the inevitability and usefulness of some of the colonial institutions and weapons.

Anti-colonial struggles under Ndochibiri came into the open in January 1915 in the Kivu-Mulera-Kigezi region. He, too, used Nyabingi religion for military, political and ideological purposes. By 1916, the colonial state was
highly paralysed by the peasant forces under his command operating in the Kivu-Murera-Kigezi region - Rwanda, Congo and Uganda.

He began by organising peasants into a powerful resistance. Ndochibiri understood clearly the importance of Nyabingi religion in enforcing unity, discipline, determination, secrecy, cultural bondings, and so on, among the fighters and the peasants who formed their sea. His maiden attack was a great blow to the government: ‘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’ (Ag DC Kigezi to Monsieur Le Commissaire de District Ruzizi - Kivu of 7 June 1919).

The two main objectives of the attack were to defeat and dislodge the Belgians and English forces from that fort and to capture arms. The ideological content of this sacred White Sheep was that it would send the Europeans away. Ndochibiri encouraged the peasant resisters that he could turn bullets into water. In January 1916, reported that peasants in Ruanda behaved in ‘a disloyal’ and defiant manner and, under the leadership of Ndochibiri with his sacred sheep’ attacked Chaha; and that the prophet was severely wounded (PCWP Monthly Report of January 1916). The wounding was later discovered as wishful thinking of the colonialists.

In April that year, Ndochibiri led another attack on colonial forces, looted collaborators’ property and livestock and disappeared into Kayonsa forest.41

These resisters waged a series of incursions on colonial forces and then retreated into the peasantry, forest or across the border. What increased the colonial fears was that these ‘rebels’ had overwhelming peasant support, were well armed with lethal weapons and were also capturing both colonial troops and their arms. Worse still, there was a major shift in the methods of struggle from those prior to the war. These resisters employed guerrilla tactics and did not want to engage the enemy into direct combat. The PCWP monthly report of July 1916 noted that before retreat, they had lost 13 combatants; ten were killed and three captured (PCWP Report of June 1916; vide ADC to PCWP on 21 December 1916).

The state was compelled to deploy a strong, well-equipped force against this movement on the enemy’s terms. The September Report noted that ‘inhabitants of Ruanda are still out of control and likely to remain so until Ndochibiri and

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41 PCWP Monthly Reports of April and May 1916. op. cit. Also see C. 228 II. Intelligence Reports, Lake Detachment. Also see Excerpt from Intelligence Reports, Lake Detachment. Kigezi, Punitive Expedition Against Ndochibiri.
his followers are finally dealt with, and until such time as the Belgians over the border manage to exercise control over their natives’ (Telegram of 4 November 1916 from OS):

Rebel Chief Ndochibiri causing great trouble around Kabale in Kigezi District… Governor considers it advisable he should be dealt with at once… release one company of the police service battalion with maxims for this purpose… Lawrence suggests Mwanza Company as any punitive measure…42

The colonial state arranged a combined military venture with Belgian forces from Rutshuru and Kigali on the Congo and Rwanda frontiers (Telegram from Major Lawrence, commanding UPS.B. to Commissioner of Police, Kampala on 16 December 1916, Tabora). The Commissioner of Police, Kampala awaited ‘final instructions for dealing with Knochibililli’s people… I hear they are well armed and this seems a good opportunity to bring them to reason - and disarm them’.43

The Belgian authorities were enthusiastic to revenge the murder their mail runners and two of their soldiers. Another strong force came from Mwanza under Major Lawrence.44

However, the resisters learnt of the 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.45 There followed series of attacks on the expedition, leading to heavy casualties on both sides. There were

42 Telegraph of CS to OC Lake Detachment Ndala of 11/11/16. Vide telegraphs of 6 November 1916 of CS to Major Lawrence and Governor’s telegram of 8 November 1916.

43 Telegraph of Commissioner of Police, Police Headquarters Office, Kampala of 16 December 1916. Vide telegraph of CS to Col. Riddick of 20 December 1916 and to Political Officer, Kabale; and another to the PCWP on 22 December 1916.

44 Commissioner of Police, Mwanza to CS on 21 December 1916. Also see Telegraph from Maj. Lawrence, to Commissioner of Police, Kampala on 16 December 1916. Le Commandant le C.O. Kigali Stereng G. to DC on 28 November 1916: Coups d’occupation Commandement participation eventuelle des troupes Belges à capture de N’DOKI-BILI.

arrests and capture of colonial troops. This increased the strife among peasants and hostilities between them and colonialism.

The state failed to achieve its objective despite all the preparations and superior arms because of the local leadership’s level of organisation, intelligence network, knowledge of the terrain, and the methods of struggle; the integration of the population into this struggle and the peasants’ participatory role in the struggle. Any victory was the peasants’ victory. It was impossible to separate them from it. Even those who would have informed the colonial forces of the resisters’ movements were denied access to such vital information.

In frustration, the colonial forces resorted to repression and the scorched earth policy ‘destroying shambas and property as reprisals for supporting the rebels’ increased insecurity (OC Expedition to CS on 17 February 1917). This had disastrous consequences. Worst among these was famine. This was because the peasants were drawn out of production. The state blamed it on the resisters: ‘Owing to the former raids of Ndochibirí during the time Ruanda was supposed to be under the protection of the Belgians the people were prevented from planting adequate crops. There is now a considerable scarcity of food, and there is some fear of a famine’.

Lt. Col. Riddick accepted the local leadership’s superiority in both organisation and execution of armed struggles. They had used the masses as the sea, despite the colonialists’ brutality, cruelty and illusions. He confessed that both Ndochibirí and Kanyarwanda were seasoned guerrilla fighters, who were outsmarting the colonial forces in the forest, in the caves, among the people, knew when and how to engage the enemy and when to retreat, 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:

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


In despair, British forces under Lt. Col. Riddick embarked on massive arrests of peasants, accusing them of being relatives of Ndochibiri. Two women and their children were identified and arrested on the claim that they belonged to Ndochibiri. They also arrested four leaders for being Ndochibiri’s confederates. In total, he arrested 37 peasants, of whom some were claimed to be Ndochibiri’s wives and children. The Belgian Lieutenant rejected Riddick’s proposal ‘to capture and keep in custody his (Ndochibiri’s) women and so on, and to punish those who helped him with food, and so on. He, therefore, released them (KDAR 1916-1917).

It was Kanyarwanda, 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 RI in Kampala. His fate for deportation would be decided thereafter. As a rebel, all his cattle were confiscated.48 That way, the state was able to separate the leadership from the membership and, deprive them of resources and ability to make war.

The British colonialists invited the Belgian forces to participate in a joint military venture in 1919. The DC notified them that the rebel Ndochibiri had appeared from Buitwa on the frontier of Kigezi at Namikumbwe, Kwa Kabango, slightly south of Chief Itembero and reminded them of ‘the double danger of the movements headed by this man in that they are essentially anti-European, and supported by fanatics inculcated by NABINGI 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,49 a Nyabingi... are organisers of dangerous and fanatical anti-European movements in the KIVU-MLERA-KIGEZI area’.

The colonialists resolved that ‘even should no disturbances occur, these rebels should be hunted mercilessly in our respective districts. Their death or capture alone will ensure peace’. The Ag DC wrote to Mon. le Commissaire de District Ruzizi - Kivu of 7 June 1919 outlining the British military plans against the peasant resisters. They had set up a military post on Birahira’s in

48 PCWP’s communication to CS of 5 July 1919. The Ag DC to PCWP on 11 August 1917 on ‘Lawless Natives in Kigezi District’. The Ag DC to PCWP on 28 July 1917 & PCWP to CS on 9 August 1917 on Kanyaruanda’s conviction. Also refer to File Native Affairs: Kanyaruanda.

49 The name Kaigirirwa was variably spelt by colonialists as Kaigirwa.
British Ruanda, another at Kinkizi50-Kayonza opposite ITEMBERO’s (Kisalu). (Refer to the Map below.) This course of action was agreed to, although Belgian authorities remained sceptical:

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 from 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 (Communication from DC Ruzizi - Kivu to DC Kigezi, on 18/6/1919).

50 The area Kinkizi was also spelt by colonialists as Chinchizi.
The PCWP confirmed in November that the peculiar geographical features and the power of blood brotherhood among these wild and backward peoples make it impossible to rely on the local natives at all (WP Report of November 1919). Van de Ghinste informed the DC, Kigezi on 23 June that a Belgian force of
25/30 rifles under a European was going to patrol the frontier so as to cut off the retreat of the Ndochibiri rebels. They were going to patrol the frontier between Rutezo and Mt. Nkabwe (Communication of DC Van de Ghinste to DC Kigezi of 23 June 1919 in reply to DC Kigezi of the previous day 22 June 1919). He communicated to the DC Kigezi that Chiefs Kabango and Itembero had feigned ignorance of the movements of Ndochibiri that morning (Van de Ghinste, DC Ruzizi - Kivu, Rutshuru on 23 June 1919). It was that night that the colonial forces caught up with the top leadership of the 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 NDOCHIMBIRI and LUHEMBA instigator NAKISHENYI rebellion, with two other rebels dead in our hands ... ‘Sacred’ Nabingi sheep captured together with two rifles, bayonets, bows, arrows and British and German ammunition ... Our casualties – one wounded (D.C’s telegraph of 24 June 1919 and his letter of 25 June 1919).

The death of these resisters was celebrated by the colonialists throughout the GLR - in Entebbe, Kampala, Kigali, Rutshuru – and also in England. The jubilation for this victory was clearly manifested in the various communications as they now hoped for an immediate permanent peace, which was not to be.

It is of interest that Ndochibiri’s head was cut off and hurriedly despatched to the British Museum for public display. Incidentally, it has never been returned and no African has ever asked for it. The death of the rebel leaders was seen as a great success for colonialism. In the PCWP’s words, had they not been so promptly and successfully dealt with, ‘within a month, we should... have had very serious native trouble in Rukiga and perhaps in Ruanda also’ (PCWP to CS on 5 July 1919). So, 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 of the death’. They also burnt to ashes the captured ‘sacred’ white sheep publicly at Kabale. These were aimed at proving their death to the public, to demystify and discredit Nyabingi, and restrain the peasants from Nyabingi resistances (ap. cit. Refer to nationalistic songs on these struggles under Ndochibiri).

The DC confessed ‘... considering the 600 rebels known to have crossed into British territory with the Nabingi this month, and the simultaneous presence of its fighting leaders around Kabale, I can only repeat that I am of the honest conviction that a very serious general rising organised by a powerful anti-
European ‘religious’ society, has been most narrowly averted.’...it is difficult to realise 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 terrorised the RUANDA - RUKIGA County for four generations (sic!) (op. cit.)

After the death of Ndochibiri and others, the Kigezi DC on 26 June 1919 replied to the PCWP’s letter of 5 June 1919 on ‘Defence Scheme’. He expressed real fears in his letter. He argued that on the successful conclusion of operations against the rebel Ndochibiri, it was necessary to study the possibility of further disturbances organised by the Nyabingi society, and, in this connection, the entire indefensibility of the administrative station at Kabale. He argued, ‘The Nabingi cult, since at least the end of the 18th century, has been a foreign element throughout Rwanda. It has been opposed to the established native religion. It has been revolutionary in method and anarchic in effect. On the advent of the Protecting Powers (sic!) the European element was included, equally with two other privileged classes of Watussi and Watwa, within the scope of its virulence. By means of an unusually developed knack for witchcraft, in which hypnotic suggestion plays a leading part, the country within the sphere of its operations is completely terrorised.’

They were aware that this was a temporary set-back on the movement since the leadership had all the reasons to fight on. However, they imputed wrongly the actors’ main driving force to revenge and religious fanaticism ‘...the same dangerous and illogical problem of religious fanaticism the world-over’ (idem).

Factors Underlying this Movement’s Longevity

It is important to understand some of the factors that contributed to the sustenance of the guerrilla movement for so long. Firstly, the resisters used strategic places like forests in the district and at the border as their bases. They had a mastery of the terrain, weaponry and developed sophisticated, mobile guerrilla tactics. As the DC argued, to defeat them demanded luring them from the forest. Secondy, they attacked all in colonial service. That way, they defeated joint Anglo-Belgian forces.

51 Memorandum of J. E. Philipps, Ag DC Kigezi to the PCWP on 26 November 1919, in reply to the P.C’s letter dated 5 June 1919 on Defence Scheme; & copied to the Commissioner of Police, Kampala, Uganda.
The colonialists got scared of the movement which was ‘...deeply rooted throughout North Ruanda and Ndorwa. Thus, ideal means and conditions are created for both the fomenting and organisation of rebellion, and (the most serious feature of all) absolute secrecy ensured.’ Worse still, it had defeated the successive offensives by the successive Rwandese kings for over a century. They were scared as it did ‘... not shrink from organising attacks in force on fortified positions held by troops, as witness the attack upon Chahafi fort held by Anglo-Belgian troops (a few days after a strong German attack with guns had been repulsed) in January 1915. Some 2,000 fanatical natives were engaged, and were only driven off after over six hours close fighting.’ The colonial government was compelled to admit that ‘anything, therefore, in the nature of purely military force appeared futile’. So, the colonialists formed a joint Anglo-Belgian patrol along the impenetrable forest (DC’s letter of 25 June 1919). The British government was compelled to broaden its social base among the peasants and deploy many of them to spy for it and monitor all activities of the Nyabingi Movement.

Thirdly, the resisters used the peasants in the three colonies as their sea. These also formed their intelligence network. They used watch-fires, songs, dances and other sounds to communicate information about the enemy. Colonial efforts to render this communication system useless met with limited success. Whenever pursued, they would apply guerrilla tactics of dispersal, leading the enemy to confusion. Therefore, the resistance created real fears in the colonialists.

The resisters exploited all existing social and cultural practices such as blood brotherhood, Nyabingi religion and its rites for making and sealing new alliances, recruiting new fighting forces, other active and supportive purposes, and punishing waverers, sell-outs and betrayers. This is best exemplified by one of those in its top leadership- Ruhungo. His victims included an askari he had killed in Rwanda (op. cit.) Another interesting example is of two domestic boys who killed their ‘master’ for betraying the Nyabingi Movement. They burnt him with the house and fled across the border (op. cit.)

Again, there was increased cooperation in both membership and leadership. The best instance is of Kaigirirwa, a priestess, who was in high command with men. She commanded a strong peasant armed force of about 600 fighters from Congo into Uganda and stayed with them in the forest awaiting instructions from Ndochibiri and 14 other top leaders already around Kabale. She took over the movement’s leadership immediately after their death.

Also, Ndochibiri derived his strength mainly from large numbers of peasants joining the movement. In fact, he was able to convince many people in colonial
service to join the struggle. The best examples were peasants of Rwagara hill - former allies of colonialism. He formed a bond with them through blood brotherhood and other cultural bondings, and mobilised them into resistance twice in early 1919 against forced labour, taxation, *inter alia*. He was able to recruit them into the struggle as both supporters and active participants, drawing on their social grievances.

The leadership’s capacity of organisation and military strategies were exemplified even in the last encounter. By the time their forces, under Kaigirirwa, crossed into Uganda, Ndochibiri and 14 other leaders were busy doing political work around Kabale. They were making military plans and preparations for the next offensive, preparing arms, carrying out initiations, broadening their cause, carrying out cultural and Nyabingi rites, mobilising and encouraging the peasants. They were cementing their faith and courage, using Nyabingi, patriotism and blood brotherhood and all other relations that could be exploited. Surprisingly, ‘not a whisper of their presence reached any alien native, much less any political agents connected with the government’.

In terms of modern weaponry, they had over 25 rifles during that night. They maintained their patriotic stance even in death. They neither surrendered nor allowed the enemy to capture their guns. Instead, they portrayed great heroism and bitter hatred against colonialism as they resisted it until death. The DC acknowledged, ‘their rifles they deliberately broke, shouting as they died, “we will not look upon a white man, he shall not have our iron but a curse!”’ (*op. cit.*)

One of their main military tactics was arson. Arson as a weapon is easy to apply. One method they used was to tie a bundle of fire on an arrow and then shoot it at the target. This weapon caused great fear among the colonialists. ‘In detail, native tactics locally massed attack just before dawn. As at Nakishenyi, houses are burnt to ‘bolt’ the occupants. All station buildings are mud and thatch. No approach to water can be commanded by rifle fire from any of these, least of all the Office. There is no ‘boma’. Water is a mile away. Any force fighting its way to water would find itself in a swamp with mountains on either side.’ The resisters applied this weapon very often either individually or collectively. The colonial authorities also feared that a section of resisters could burn the headquarters and claim that it was Nyabingi which had burnt them and chased away the government (*Report of PCWP of 28 October 1920 on the Safety of Kabale Station*).

The Commissioner of Police, Kampala on 17 July 1919 suggested the construction of a cemented underground water tank by the PWD and the roofing
with corrugated galvanized iron (Ag CS to Director of PWD, Kigezi Station. Ag CS to the Director of PWD of 24 July 1919: Kigezi Station). Given that fire was a cheap but effective weapon, the district colonial authorities also used it widely against the natives (Ag DC to PCWP on 26 June 1919. File: WP Kabale Station, Defence Precautions). This led to loss of property and credibility in the area (op. cit. PCWP to Commissioner of Police on 7 July 1919). In this light, the DC wrote to the Commissioner of Police and the PCWP underlining the urgency of choosing a site, a boma and constructing the District Government Headquarters of Kigezi in a defensible position, with a water supply within a reasonable range of fire:

No natural cover is available. The District Office and Police Store, which would be the first object of the officer in charge to preserve as containing specie and ammunition respectively, are situated on the lowest spur of a steep mountain range rising steadily for some five miles behind it. The two officers’ houses are on the mountain slope ½ of a mile above. Early in the proceedings the more isolated buildings would be burnt. There is no receptacle in the station for storing water larger than a bucket. ... There is no natural position or cover affording a field of fire, nor water, upon which to base a reliable defensive scheme except by instantly abandoning all Government buildings and taking up a position in the open.

It is difficult in normal times to maintain the telephone line intact, permanent guard huts and patrols being necessary to prevent its being cut. In any case, from 12 noon to 8 a.m. the terminal is earthed at Mbarara. The telephone therefore is scarcely a factor for consideration.

... I feel it essential to point out in this connection that Kabale Station, as it stands, is wholly indefensible against any kind of attacks which might be expected, i.e. a sudden and fanatical night attack in force. The Nabingi organisation is comparatively well supplied with arms retained by deserters and discarded by the Germans themselves in Ruanda during their hurried evacuation.

DC had noted the guerrilla tactics of these resisters:

Speaking generally the rebels expressly avoid fighting and retire into the forest or across international frontiers whence they dart out to raid and retire before any news can even reach the station (op. cit.)
He therefore recommended alterations of Kabale Station and an increase of the police establishment to seventy.

Some natives sought individual solutions to the social crisis. Some fought on individual basis, committed murders or suicides in utter anger or in despair. Others refused to pay tax or to provide free labour as groups or as individuals. A good example was Kayonza and Kinkizi.

As reported, ‘Several villages of criminal fugitives and malcontents are situated just across the Belgian frontier... At the first sign of tax collection or labour demands the greater portion of the people prepare to move across the frontier’. The government instituted an Anglo-Belgian Patrol in 1921 to collect taxes on both sides of the border (WP April 1919 Report. KDAR, 1921). While some migrated across the borders, others opted for opportunistic alternatives - collaborating with the colonialists for material rewards and other benefits.

The colonial states could not accept this. Using references to the Map of German East Africa, Lake Kivu, the DC Kigezi on 30 April 1921 reported about the Anglo-Belgian Patrol on the Frontier of Bufumbira County in January 1921. He reported that there were ‘almost continuous series of frontier disturbances by lawless elements’ in the area stretching from the South-West of Lake Bunyonyi to the East of Lake Chahafi. He noted that these lawless elements were using this portion of joint frontier separating Bufumbira County and Belgian Rwanda to evade obligations to their lawful chiefs, execution of justice and payment of tax. He, therefore, wrote to the Resident of Belgian Rwanda on 16 December 1920 soliciting his cooperation in a joint patrol of the frontier for purposes of maintaining order and enforcing Poll Tax Regulations.

The Resident of Belgian Rwanda replied in the affirmative on 21 December 1920. He directed M. Douce, Chef de Poste of Ruhengeri to meet the British authorities at Chahafi and work out the details. He met with the ADC of Kigezi, Captain Persse. The two were to head the operations on their sides of the frontier.

As the main salient was on the Belgian territory, the Belgians had to provide more troops and logistics. The British attention was mostly confined to patrolling the outer part of the salient and guard possible bolt-holes. The Belgian administration wanted to effect the arrest of certain criminals (read ‘resisters’) like the murderer of Fr. Pere Loupias, and so on. It reported that spies had furnished them with some useful information regarding the whereabouts of the wanted persons.
Persse and Douce worked out at the Old Fort of Chahafi on 5 January 1921. A patrol of 8 police under Andrea had been despatched on 3 January 1921 and it arrived on 5 January 1921. Its task was to prevent fugitives from crossing the border. Captain Persse commanded a patrol of 12 Uganda Police while the Belgian force consisted of 24 *askaris* with about 300 followers under their subchiefs. It was concluded on 11 January 1921 though the wanted criminals were not captured. They instead dealt with civil matters of settling cases of frontier thefts of cattle.

The DC wanted more of these joint patrols and expressed confidence that the act of Anglo-Belgian uniforms again seen in these parts operating in close cooperation and harmony ‘would have an excellent effect among our recalcitrant frontier population’ (DC, Kigezi District, 30 April 1921).

**The Territorial Spread of the Resistance**

Contrary to the wishful anticipation of peace in the District for some months, the Nyabingi resisters did not sit to mourn the dead leaders. They understood the critical demands of the struggle and the need to promote it. As such, they intensified it. To concretise this, there was a strong, armed force of Nyabingi militants (whom the colonial administrators termed ‘malcontents’) that assembled near Lake Bunyonyi on 26 June 1919. The DC appealed for an immediate reinforcement and he received twenty policemen. These policemen had to augment the security patrols in Kigezi till December (See DC’s letter to the Commissioner of Police of 26 June 1919; vide his telegraph of July to the PCWP on the same issue).

Seven ‘compatriots of the late Ndochibiri’, who tried to conscientise the peasants were beaten off at once by British forces. On the same day, ‘there was a simultaneous gathering at Itembero’s (Congo-Belge frontier) of Nabingi malcontents with 28 rifles’.

Both the Belgian and British authorities responded with scorched earth policy and strategic hamlets. They burnt the villages of Kisalu, Kayonza and Kinkizi, and evacuated peasants from the border areas. They opined that ‘while one cannot hope for any permanent result from this section, it has nevertheless had a salutary effect’ (*op. cit.*)

The murder of Biramba and the burning of his body by his domestic boys illustrates some of the ways the resisters dealt with those who betrayed the struggle - the so-called ‘pragmatists’ or, in colonial language, ‘progressives’. The PCWP recounted with profound shock and dismay:
On the night of July 31/1 August the Ruanda 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 Nabingi movement. The latter have announced the act as one of vengeance on an ‘informer’ (op.cit.)

This resistance continued despite the mishaps that the movement was encountering. The DC Kigezi notified the PCWP on 24 September 1919 of the continuous resistance in various forms: passive, military harassment and attacks by the Nyabingi Movement. In chronologising their activities, he revealed that they had carried out border cattle raids by night in the south-west Bunyonyi, then crossed. The following day, Kitumu, the successor of Ndochibiri crossed with other resisters into Bufumbira to Magenge’s area. This had been followed by an armed encounter the following day. This caused casualties and the capture of one Nyabingi Movement leader near Kadio’s area. The resistance had continued the following day on Kisolo hills. Its membership included Nyabingi resisters from Uganda and the Congo, under the leadership of Nyindo’s ex-Katikiro. (Telegraph from the Districter, Kigezi to the PCWP on 24 September 1919).

The colonial government was forced to exempt certain areas like Butare, Bufundi and parts of Bufumbira from taxation for fear of resistance (WP Report of November 1919). It was clear to them that ‘the basis of all negative politics is that alien Government is only temporary... is also a basis of NABINGI ‘religion’ (Sic!) (DC to PCWP of 17 September 1920. Also see his communication to the CS on 1 October 1920).

There was a passive rebellion in Ikumba area. The DC went to investigate it and he attributed its causes to the drinking season and the Nyabingi Movement. It, therefore, intensified political work and organisation of the District. The PCWP telegraphed the DC on 24 September 1920 instructing him to deal with that Nyabingi organisation ‘quietly and efficiently on lines similar to previous occasions obtaining co-operation from the Belgians on their side’.

The PCWP to the DC on 29 October 1920 blamed the DC for not using all available means to suppress the disturbances. He told 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.’

He enlisted the military services of an ex–sergeant major and had sent him reinforcements. They had captured two rifles and other weapons.

The PC warned against strong punitive measures against the resisters as this ‘would bring temporary success’. The DC’s defence was that punitive measures were necessary to quell all international disorders. The resisters employed the weapon of propaganda to explain the phenomena. For examples, new diseases like dysentery and influenza were lumped together with the poll tax and other colonial impositions as plagues introduced maliciously to wipe out people (KD September Report. Vide Communication of the CS to the Principal Medical Officer on 7 November 1919).

The natives were extremely cautious of the colonial motives. They understood the colonial hunger for people’s land and other resources. As such, Nyabingi abagirwa and resisters refused protected spring water in 1929 and warned peasants against ‘a sinister scheme to poison the water and the people, so that the whites in Kenya could seize the land!’ (KDAR 1929)

Philipps’ allegation that Nyabingi was non-indigenous because of being anti-European was aimed at discrediting it at a theoretical level. It also aimed to deprive the Nyabingi Movement of any legitimacy to mobilise peasants and articulate their interests. Hidden in this argument is the misconception that Nyabingi religion was as foreign as European colonialism in the region and so, neither of them had the right and legitimacy to articulate peasant interests.

Even if their argument was true, the major issue would be its relevance to the lives of the peasants and how it addressed their interests. Furthermore, the natives’ choice of Nyabingi and their involvement in the Nyabingi Movement dispels colonial defences. In other words, the natives had the capacity to think, judge, decide and act. They were not sacks of potatoes.

**Colonial Methods to Defeat Nyabingi Movement**

The state applied various methods to defeat the Nyabingi Movement. These included force, rewards and prices on leaders’ heads, persuasion, deportation, plunder and destruction of resources to handicap peasants from making war. The major method was, intensifying military expeditions, using local allies.

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52 D.C’s telegraphs to PCWP of 6 October 1920; 9 October 1920 and of 12 October 1920. Also refer to D.C’s report of 17 September 1920 about the same issue.
and agents from different ethnicities. The latter were normally rewarded with resources captured from peasants, power and promises.

To this end, the state deemed it ‘desirous of adequately rewarding those who have done so well on this occasion ‘in nipping the incipient rising in the bud... desire to offer encouragement to others to emulate their good example, if we should have occasion to call for volunteers again, in the event of Kaigirirwa attempting reprisals for the loss of her husband and brother-in-law’. They expected her to attack soon ‘in the hope of driving from her native country the hated European’. It, therefore, awarded substantial rewards for Nziraba Muzale, Alibatusede and Bigirwenda and booked Sebalijja for ‘some non-pecuniary recognition’.

The Governor sanctioned rewards of sixty pounds to them in recognition of their services for saving the protectorate of the loss of many lives and heavy expenditure by their action. Sebalijja was awarded with the title ‘Kago’ and a medal (DC Kigezi Philipps to PCWP of 25 June 1919, No. 55. Ag CS to Deputy Governor on 16 July 1919, 18 July 1919. Governors’ Authority on 22 July 1919).

The colonial state wanted to smash the resistance before it spread to the whole area. It had everything to lose; and it was its duty to restore and maintain law and order. It also had to prove its capacity to smash any resistance, contain the situation and protect the people. It employed brutal force and repression on both membership and leadership; mounted military expeditions either individually or in cooperation with other colonial forces, massacred peasants, witch-hunted resisters and Nyabingi worshippers, and so on. It had no mercy, carried out operations, arrested en masse, carried out public executions both in Kabale and Kampala, imposed heavy fines with long-term rigorous imprisonment, deported without trial, and so on. It destroyed property and created utmost insecurity. It extradited resisters and suspects and intensified retribution. There was also the joint Anglo-Belgian cooperation in intelligence and sharing of information about rebels, the military and patrols:

While foreseeing at the time the possibility of further disturbances ... I had hoped that the recent severe blow to the movement would preclude active preparations for at least some months.... Meanwhile as the storm-centre is invariably reported to be the same frontier forest areas as before, in proximity to the KIGEZI-RUTSHURU road through British Ruanda, I am again closing that county to all but your regular armed courier. I should be grateful if you give publicity to this order.
... “This measure in conjunction, with surveillance of paths, was one of the principal means which enabled us to prevent NDOCHIBILIS’ communications with his main body in the forest, thus isolating him and facilitating his destruction.53

Early in 1919, we were constantly threatened by the armed raids of Ndoki-mbili and his murderous bands. Their headquarters were, near the frontiers, in the mountains north-west and south-west of Lake Bunyonyi. So, soon as one ordered porters or moved out from Kabale, they were informed before hand of one’s movements. I, therefore, conceived of the idea of establishing myself on a small centrally situated island in Lake Bunyonyi, whence, under cover of night and the usual dense mists, one might be able, unostentatiously and by canoe, to strike at either extremity of the lake. The secrecy and mobility thus attained was in fact a principal factor in the final cutting off and wiping out of Ntochi-mbili.

In order that the island could not be regarded as a Public Rest Camp and its Chief Value (namely secrecy of movement) thereby destroyed, I paid (and gladly) from my own pocket both the compensation to occupiers and for the clearing, planting and building which I undertook. It was thus regarded by everyone merely as a not very serious hobby... (op. cit.)

### Rewarding Local Collaborators as a Strategy

The colonial state broadened local allies, collaborators and spies among the peasants, with attractive remuneration, promises, favours and exemptions from certain obligations and demands. Religious converts played a significant role as informers. As will be recalled, agents from outside Kigezi formed the social base of colonialism right from its invasion.

However, due to increased Nyabingi attacks, the state realised the need to dispense with these alien agents by creating and broadening a local social base. Consequently, it gradually created a social base, first among peasants under lineage leaders like Mutambuka, Rwagara, Mushakamba, Mizerero, Ruhayana, Duybumba, and Ruzindana. These were remunerated with political posts, livestock, and so on. Gradually, it began recruiting individuals in its service from all sections of society. Spies, like Sebisorora Sowedi and Mutasa, were instrumental in gathering intelligence information on Nirimbirima, Ruzira-

53 The Ag DC of Kigezi, to the Commissaire de district, Ruzizi-Kivu on 5 July 1919 and copied it to le Resident du Rwanda, Kigali and to PCWP on movement of Nyabingi-ites. This was in pursuance of Philipp’s earlier letter to him dated 24 June 1919.
kuhunga and Kabango. Their incrimination of the three in the complicity with the Nyabingi Movement testifies to the success of this colonial scheme. The new social base was recruited mainly by Baganda agents, or under their recommendations and the missionaries’ recommendation.

By 1923, the district colonial authorities were including some local people in the chiefly service but at the lower levels as the table below shows;

Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>Sub-County</th>
<th>Names of Head</th>
<th>Region of Origin</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rukiga</td>
<td>County Agent</td>
<td>E.W. Kagubala</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bukinda</td>
<td>Stephen Musoke</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Alikiso Zikale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kikungiri</td>
<td>Stephano Alibaziwonnye</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyakishenyi</td>
<td>Abdullah Namunye</td>
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<td>Maziba</td>
<td>Aliseni Watusimbi</td>
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<td>Kitanga</td>
<td>Alipo Salagumba</td>
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<td>Nyarushanje</td>
<td>Ibrahim Njuba</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<td>Ikumba</td>
<td>Joseph Kalimarwaki</td>
<td>Kigezi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rujumbura</td>
<td>County Chief</td>
<td>Kalegesa</td>
<td>Kigezi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ruhinda</td>
<td>Erasto Musoke</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<td>Kagunga</td>
<td>Benedicto Daki</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<td>Buyanja</td>
<td>Ndanairi Muwereza</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kassese</td>
<td>Leo Mabulo</td>
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<td>Kebisoni</td>
<td>Yafesi Wavamuno</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nyakagyeme</td>
<td>William Biteyi</td>
<td>Kigezi</td>
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<td>Kivumbo</td>
<td>Ndahabwerize</td>
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<td>Kinkizi</td>
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<td>Sulimani Ntangamalala</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<td>Kirima</td>
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<td>Kayonza</td>
<td>Muginga</td>
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<td>Tilugira</td>
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<td>Bufumbira</td>
<td>Country Chief</td>
<td>Nirimbilima</td>
<td>Kigezi</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bufundi</td>
<td>Gelazi Kimenya</td>
<td>Buganda</td>
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<td>Kigezi</td>
<td>Kanyamihigo</td>
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The domination of chiefs from outside Kigezi continued to create discontent among the colonised people.

The informers and those who remained neutral in the struggles were opposed to the Nyabingi Movement. Many sold out for opportunistic reasons. Some wanted immediate wealth in form of livestock, posts, and so on. It was this group that claimed to be pragmatic and argued that they saw nothing wrong with the British forces that were better than Belgians and Germans. However, they undermined the Nyabingi Movement as they sold out, and gave away most important secrets about Nyabingi to the enemy. This facilitated the enemy to understand its adversaries’ strengths and weaknesses and how to defeat it. On the other hand, resisters could not get access to vital information about the colonialists.

The state was receptive to any individual, group or lineage that collaborated or showed positive signs to cooperate. There were collaborators from different lineages and ethnic groups like Abatutsi and Abahutu, who had deep-rooted differences, being united by one colonial master.

Another important thing to note is the role of religious converts. The Muslims played a dominant role among its first cadreship. This was mainly because the first foreign religion in Buganda was Islam. Islam had been introduced hand in hand with trade. When colonialism came, these converts had a broader knowledge and experience of the world than others. This was a windfall for the colonisers.

On the other hand, the Catholic and Protestant Missionaries that came just before colonialism spent much time in wrangles with each other and also wasted too much time at the palace instead of carrying out their work.

On their arrival in Kigezi, the colonisers used Protestant converts headed by Sebalijja to cause crises by fuelling enmity there. These included Sulaimani Ntangamalala, Abdulla Namunye, Saidi Bitensi, Sowedi Sabada, Zambatisi Jute, Luvayagwe, and so on. (op. cit.) These remained very useful in the running
of the state machinery until the colonial state and the new European religions had created a new cadreship from the area. The colonial state had to forcefully use the new religions to carry out their ideological role.

The colonialists, being far-sighted, did not entertain illusions. They expected that ‘a further religious war of revenge will be undertaken by this cult at a not very distant date’. The PCWP suggested a new site for Kigezi Headquarters with a ‘Boma’ in July as he was ‘fully alive to the fact that incendiarism on the part of fanatical followers of the late Ndochibiri, the late Luhemba and the still existing witch doctoress Kaigirwa is a real danger and not to be scoffed at’ (PCWP to CS on 7 July 1919).

They were certain that the leadership under Kaigirirwa would be able to explain the causes of this death in light of religion as the will of Nyabingi for delinquencies in religious duties and would call on all the membership for revenge. ‘It is the same dangerous and illogical problem of religious fanaticism world over’. They anticipated an attack.

**Intesification of the Persecution of the ‘Nyabingi-ites’**

There were new developments in response to colonial appeals ‘that all indications of Nyabingi, witchcraft or incantations be reported immediately to the DC in person’. This was contained in a document entitled ‘Detail of Events leading to implication of NIRIMBIRIMA WITH NABINGI CONJURATION by DC including evidence’. Local allies like Sebitaka, Rwakazina, Mizerero, Sebisorora had incriminated Nirimbirima, Ruzira-kuhunga and Kabango of the Nyabingi Movement and for allying with Ndochibiri against colonialism.

The Belgian Authorities’ wrote to the ADC on 16 April 1923 attesting that they had discharged Kabango from chieftainship at KITAGOMA for political reasons, that they had always had apprehensions as to his connections with the Nyabingi Sect without obtaining positive proof. Lulebuka and Lwakazina gave similar evidence on 21 April 1923. DC/DM reported to PCWP on 23 April 1923 that the two persons that he had sent to gather information on the above case, Sowedi and Mataza gave a lot of incriminating evidence.54

Ruzira-kuhunga55 was arrested on these charges. His arrest caused some disturbance. They were attacked by eight peasant resisters while bringing him

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54 Also see the DC’s letter of 23 April 1923 to le Resident du Ruanda Kigali (See evidence of the three signed by E.E. Filleul as DM on 24 April 1923).

55 The name Ruzira-kuhunga was variably spelt as Luzira-kuhunga.
(idem. Also see communication of DM to PCWP of 27th April). Colonialism was resolved that Nyabingi, witchcraft or 'okubandwa' activities should be nipped in the bud and not be permitted to pass without the most exacting secret enquiries being made about Ruzira-kuhunga’s practice of Nyabingi (DC to PCWP on 28 April 1923.)

Ruzira-kuhunga’s conviction under ‘The Criminal Law (Witchcraft) Ordinance 1912 was certain, only awaiting evidence from Kigali and Bumbirira ‘to prove anti-European inclinations against him’. He argued that ‘such beliefs against Nirimbirima that have been proved to exist amongst Abahutu can have nothing but a retrograde effect on the general native administration in Rwanda. The native government here is only in the embryo stage and is very fragile and easily disturbed, and the fact that they do not trust their chief can have nothing but a deterrent effect on the advancement of these people’ (DC to PCWP on 23 April 1923). He was convicted and sentenced to three years RI at Kampala gaol with a fine of Shs. 100/= On his release, he was to be deported for at least another year in a distance not less than 250 miles from Kigezi. However, Ruzira-kuhunga maintained his struggles while in prison. He attacked a warder with a hoe, hit him in the head and neck and split his skull. These led to his death sentence, which was later commuted to twenty years RI (KDAR 1924).

Kabango was considered to be ‘a pawn in the Nabingi game, but at the same time a deterrent influence to the rapid advancement of this part of the district...’ He, too, was accused of leading Nirimbirima into resistance, ‘laziness, and bred the distrust of his District officers’. He was, therefore, repatriated to Belgian territory.

The DC concluded: ‘And thus ends the reign of another ‘Nabingi’ authority whose evil influence is so retrograde to the natives of the district’. The colonial sanction of banishment for witchcraft was only abolished by the Constitutional Court in Abuki’s case. Among the panel of the judges was Justice P.M. Tabaro.

The PCWP discovered too late how deep Nirimbirima had penetrated the colonial system and the political implications of deposing him and charging him in court. The colonialists wanted to avoid unnecessary grievances which would form bases for Nyabingi resistance. After all, Nirimbirima was a colonial creation. They dropped all charges against Nirimbirima. The explanation was that Nirimbirima had been in office for only two and half years:
The history of Kigezi does not go back very far (Sic!) and... action in a similar case essential in another District might be unwise in the present state of development that yours is in ... no great harm if we leave this matter for another two months ... it might be advisable to issue propaganda to all chiefs in Bufumbira that as a result of Luzirakuhunga’s case the Government believe that other chiefs and people in Bufumbira were partly implicated and warning them that the government are determined to put down Nabingi and severely punish anyone practising it whether chief or peasant.

We want to teach these chiefs rather than turn them out and that it would not be easy to find others and if we did they might not be any better. Dismissal as rule makes a native hopeless punishment and maintenance in his position sometimes makes him strongly...

PCWP cautioned the DC against the use of force. He disclosed how he had learnt through ‘experience how difficult they are... although a prosecution is justifiable and a conviction probable we have made any great progress in the District and might we not be at rather a dead end?’ (PCWP to DC of 24 August 1923).

There were some important developments. The first one was that despite the missionary education and his friendship with Dr. Sharp of CMS, Nirimbirima still worshipped Nyabingi religion and communed with its abagirwa. Secondly, he managed to penetrate the colonial system through the DC’s Clerk, Yoasi, to get access to important information about himself. This gave him the opportunity to prepare himself and hide all traces of Nyabingi practices. The state realised this too late. It was Yoasi who got dismissed (idem).

It should be stressed that the colonial state was incapable of addressing correctly the causes of the struggle, as colonialism was the problem. Peasant resisters were challenging its existence. To solve such a problem would have required it to dissolve itself, which it was incapable of doing. Secondly, it was dictatorial by nature and could never engage in democratic discussions. It remained confronted by resistances under Nyabingi. ‘Every local grievance, whether real or imaginary, and every apprehension or misapprehension, is greedily exploited, hence the need of going slow, constant personal contact with the peasantry, and seeing under the surface, in Kigezi. NyaBingi and all its works are unlikely to die out except with the present generation’ (op. cit.)

The colonial state took steps to revert from forced food contribution to forced food production for sale. The former had been collected by the chiefs under the supervision of agents. Gradually, this took root as peasants began to bring things voluntarily for sale.
The state also took steps to ensure food security for the peasants. Among the measures was the introduction of famine crops and communal granaries as food reserves. It intensified communal food reserves and granaries in its administration centres.

This increased the peasants’ resistance. They did not understand the rationale of these communal granaries while households had their own granaries at household level. Secondly, they did not trust the colonial state in this. They suspected that it wanted this food for its troops, porters and for selling. This was not baseless as some food was sold without consulting the owners, and agents embezzled some of it.

The peasants knew that these famines were neither caused by Nyabingi, nor by devils but by the colonial state, which was now forcing them to pool food together. To peasants, colonialism had proved to be evil. The pooling of food was also resisted as it had the effect of undermining men’s position in society. While men were the political heads of their households, colonialism reduced them tremendously. In default of any state demand, it was these family heads and other men who were harassed or punished. This undermined their political and social status in society; and as the main generators of ideas, ideology, teachings and as the initiators of moral standards. Colonialism made men become more or less fugitives in their area. The food pooling was aimed at expropriating the end product, usufruct and distributive control at the family level, and to disable the social system and reorder the production relations. It went counter to the concept of indirect rule.

This had the effect of recruiting more peasants into active anti-colonial struggles. The colonial state was, therefore, forced to reform policies on communal famine granaries. Top colonial officials also began touring the whole district, inspecting records and the granaries, and so on.

The colonial state was forced to abolish *kashanju* due to peasant resistance to it. Its abolition was followed by peasants withdrawing their labour as there was no legal basis to force them. Sullivan reported their response thus:

Under the 1920 Ordinance, offenders render themselves liable to imprisonment or to work in custody. Previous experiments have shown the futility of such people to work on plantations, as they merely vanish. The abolition of Kasanvu has removed any form of compulsory labour, with the result, that these people who have no wants, (Sic!) and who can grow their food without any effort, do not undertake voluntary labour. There is apparently a passive movement against tax paying, the natives saying ‘Kasanvu is now abolished,
the Government will not kill us, and the jail cannot hold us all’ (File: Native Affairs. Poll Tax in WP).

The state was forced to revisit taxes and their collection in the area. It desisted from taxing women. It relaxed potoro (patrol) aimed at netting tax defaulters. It also began to alleviate the tax burden both on the young men and on the aged. The first one was to fix the age limits for tax-payment, and the category for those to pay partial taxes. The PC pleaded for tax exemption for ‘elderly men whose earning capacity is exhausted to contribute tax even at a partial rate; actually the sum due has generally to be earned by a younger member of the family’ (PCWP to CS on 6 May 1937).

In fact, it ensured a continued tax-assessment annually, basing on individual’s capacity to pay, age, amount of resources one owned, and so on. The colonial state went ahead and made reforms on forced labour. It allowed peasants to commute oruharo. Gradually, it phased out oruharo by consolidating it with poll tax. In addition to this, it was forced to make other concessions.

This section has shown that there were many changes with the World War. These were in reaction to colonial demands, impositions, punishments, and so on. These demands and brutal coercion, massacres, tortures, and so on, had forced peasant resisters to adopt new forms of recruitment, conscientisation and struggle. They adopted new methods and raised more or less standing forces.

This was also the time when this Nyabingi Movement took a broader internationalist line. They began attacking all the imperialist powers in the whole region. They incorporated the enemy’s technology and weaponry into the resistance, trained peasant resisters into new military warfare and gave them access to use of these new weapons. It is not surprising that colonial forces got defeated in some skirmishes and were forced to flee. This was also the time when many grand military plans were foiled and intelligence agents were rendered useless by resisters.

Faced with the imperialist war on a broader scale and this Nyabingi Movement domestically, the colonialists were forced to seek other solutions in addition to militarism. They were forced to make a series of reforms, based on the prevailing social grievances so as to undermine the Nyabingi Movement. They accomplished this through material rewards and posts, promises, promotions, and so on. Another method they used was direct de-militarisation of Nyabingi, drawing from malpractices of abagirwa. Although this phase evidenced the climax of the Nyabingi Movement, it also witnessed the beginnings of its demise.