Transformative Processes of the Movement

Many people going to him for Nyabingi from all parts of the district and all being informed by him that his Nyabingi was more powerful than the Government, that no work should be done on Mondays in the shambas, that no taxes should be paid, and that the Europeans would be driven out (DC to PCWP on 29 May 1930 about Komundu, a Nyabingi Mugirwa).

The 1920s witnessed the decline of the Nyabingi Movement simultaneously with the increasing anchoring of colonialism, Christianity, Mohammedanism and alien legal regimes in the GLR. Abagirwa, like Komunda, Ndemere and others, went on the defensive to prevent its decline and the consequent erosion of its status, power and privileges by proclaiming its greatness vis-à-vis the state and the new religions.

The DC gave an interesting narrative of events between Komunda and Zaribugiri, a colonial agent. He narrated how the latter had arrested Komunda for witchcraft. The DC released him due to lack of evidence. Komunda then testified to the peasants that his ‘Nyabingi’ had defeated the government and left him free. The chief’s wife and child fell ill immediately and nearly died. This proved to the peasants Nyabingi’s greatness and powers of revenge.
It had become clear to the state that Nyabingi was ‘above all revolutionary political... chief among chiefs, a state in the state. Its aim is to free the country of Europeans and of all authority other than ‘Nyabingi’...All the agents of Nyabingi with their pretended mysterious and occult power give themselves out as liberators of the country’ (PCWP to CS of 17 July 1928: ‘A Supplementary Report on Nyabingi Movement Kigezi District’).

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

Threatened by religious and political persecution of Nyabingi leaders, worshippers and resisters, by the state and the new religions, and lies by missionaries of the imminent arrests of peasants who did not join Protestantism, abagirwa, like Komunda, began to create propaganda to wield together the disintegrating Nyabingi Movement.

They issued declarations against colonialism and proclaimed the supremacy of Nyabingi over all people, state, other religions and institutions. They called upon all peasants and chiefs to adhere to Nyabingi’s teachings, work on Sundays and observe Mondays and Tuesdays as Nyabingi days. No work was to be done on those days. Peasants feared to die and followed this decree. This was challenging European religions, which had set aside Sunday as a day of worship and rest.

What compounded the problem was their weapon of secrecy: ‘Direct evidence is always difficult to obtain as the pursuit of witchcraft is carefully screened from chiefs who are regarded as the eyes of Government’ (DC to PCWP on 1 March 1928). The colonial dilemma still remained:

It is, therefore, in Rukiga that NyaBINGI presents a peculiar character with more persistent and more dangerous aspirations than elsewhere. It pretends moreover to sovereignty. The principal verse of their hymn in Rukiga is ... ‘The king (or queen) has come to his country’ (KDAR 1928).
In pursuit of their resistance, the *abagirwa* called upon all peasants in Belgian Rwanda, Kigezi and Congo to bring in votives and sacrifices for Nyabingi in form of money, beads, and so on, in preparation for a broader resistance. This money was meant to be for sustaining the resistance. However, it cannot be ignored that the *abagirwa* would have appropriated most of it for their personal ends. This was the phase when Nyabingi became known as *Muzeire-Kasente* - a parent that needed or accepted money. They also called upon peasants to smith more weapons, sharpen them, and begin intensive military training for an imminent resistance. The theme was ‘now *Omukama* (Nyabingi) is coming in the country’.

The CMS evangelist also testified that he and his Mkungu (Sub-Parish Chief) Busisiri had reported to the Gombolola Chief (Sub-County chief), when two hundred persons under the Nyabingi ‘priest’ Ndemere marched through his garden. The DC noted that the Sub-Chief was away as he ‘had knowledge if not complicity in the Organisation’ (*idem*).

DC Trewin warned all Saza Chiefs of an imminent Nyabingi resistance thus:

> The affair of ‘Nyabingi’ is wanting to increase in this district, also I think that all the chiefs are not aware of everything which is going on in this country. Because I see that many chiefs do not want to converse with peasants.

> I know that witchcraft is going high, and that someone is telling people not to do their work on Mondays and Tuesdays. Not one single chief has told me of this... people are afraid to go to work on Mondays and Tuesdays because they are obeying the ‘Nabingi’. Why do you all not put strength to find out about the ‘Nyabingi’? (DC Trewin to Saza Chiefs on 28 January 1928).

Indeed, anti-colonial resistances followed in the first quarter of 1928. The leadership mobilised peasants and they began war preparations in Kagarama Mountains opposite Kabale. They aimed at centres of colonial oppression and exploitation: the CMS, Kabale Station and Kikungiri. Their object remained to chase away the oppressive, exploitative system and all in its service. This was well-brought out in the Memo by CS to the Governor on Nyabingi, Criminal Case File No. 4, in which two peasants were found guilty and sentenced to five years RI.\(^\text{65}\)

\(^{65}\) Also see the CS’ telegraph to the DC, Kabale dated 24 February 1928 and DC’s reply to the CS on 28 February 1928 about this matter. File:Raids and Punitive Expeditions.
The leadership organised peasants in Kigezi, Rwanda, Congo and Ankore, under the theme of self-emancipation. The leadership urged peasants to contribute something to the movement. Over a thousand peasants from the whole region were said to have participated and contributed in cash, livestock, beads and bracelets. Acceptance of sacrifices in money and beads was another qualitative change of Nyabingi religion. There was a movement to build more shrines for Nyabingi and peasants began military training with bows, arrows and spears. Peasants came from different parts of the region, in preparation for an attack on Kabale Station. It was during this time that they were surprised by colonial forces. People came from Karuzanga and Kumba to attend to these ‘Nyabingi’ chiefs and give their offerings.

The whole resistance began in January to March, from Kabale (Kagarama) to Karujanga and across in Rwanda, under the leadership of Ndungusi, Ndemere, Mweyahusi and others. The first was betrayed by a Protestant convert Senyange, who reported to colonial authorities. The one near Kabale was organised in mountain forests and the hills of Kagarama, four miles (and in sight) of Kabale. The resisters screened all events and secrets from a Muganda agent although over 300 of them passed through the Gomborora (sub-county) compound that day. The local agent had been informed of this resistance and had left the area to avoid being blamed as an accomplice of the resistance. DC wrote to PCWP on 13 September 1928 about ‘Unlawful Assemblies and Incitement to rebellion by ‘Priests’ of NYA-BINGI Society, 1928’:

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

Resistance in Karujanga and in Belgian Rwanda developed faster and in a more organised manner. Peasants crossed from Uganda and joined others in Belgian territory, murdered collaborators, burned many villages, and threatened to burn the Gomborora headquarters. Inside Belgian Rwanda, resisters were reported to have killed 24 Belgian Police (Ag PCWP to the CS on 4/4/1928).

The colonialists went on the offensive on both sides of the border. The Belgian authorities deployed 100 police who subdued about 2,000 peasant resisters. They burnt many villages, killed or injured many of them. British forces suppressed the resisters on the Ugandan side, disarmed them and detained them.
The colonial authorities became alarmed on learning that the revolt was organised from Kagarama to Rwanda under the leadership of Ndungusi. Sending in a reinforcement of ten policemen and one officer from Mbarara, they were determined not to show any leniency to anyone linked to Nyabingi as it would be ascribed to Nyabingi’s powers and indestructibility regardless of time. The colonialists were aware of the political dangers the Nyabingi leadership posed. In their words: ‘it involves the fundamental basic anti-European element whereby all Europeans must be driven out in order to make way for their god and king and queen Nyabingi to rule their country and who for the time being has entered into, and is depicted in that particular person’ (idem.) (sic):

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

Colonial Strategies to Defeat Resistance

The two colonial states used all means at their disposal to suppress it. Some members in the leadership were captured, convicted and sentenced heavily. The DC wrote to PCWP on 30 November 1928 about the Extradition Proceedings following Nyabingi rebellion on Belgian East Africa (Mandate) and Uganda Frontier, March 1928. He reported that he had arrested the following additional accused against Belgian Arrest Warrants of April:- Maheranni, Lupfumu, Bariganengwe and Kagambirwe. Ndemere and Mweyahusi were given five years RI each.66

There were new colonial reforms, based on the weaknesses of Nyabingi institution. The state had learnt the exploitative character of ‘Nyabingi cult to enable it to impose its character of liberator, strikes the imagination of the simple. Thus it preys on the people demanding payment of cows, goats, foodstuffs and money.’ In his supplementary report on Nyabingi Movement Kigezi District which he sent to the CS, the PCWP acknowledged that Nyabingi belonged to all tribes with its headquarters at Omukyante (Report of PCWP to CS of 17 July

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

The state devised a gradualist strategy to undermine the Nyabingi Movement. Peasant resistance was prevalent even after arrests. Peasants were hostile to the colonial system and were not ready to incriminate their fellow peasants. They ‘...had to be forcibly brought to Kabale in order to obtain their evidence which was given reluctantly in awe of the presence of accused. It was clear they were endeavouring to suppress incriminating evidence and had they not been brought in their evidence would not have been obtained’ (*op. cit.* PCWP’s communication to the CS on 23 May 1928).

After this, peasants refused to give information about the captured leadership. Even those who were dragged to court still refused to co-operate. The DC, therefore, recommended that Kagarama be fined 75 head of cattle under Section 2 Collective Punishment Ordinance for conniving in these witchcraft dances; well knowing their nature and illegality, and suppressing and combining to suppress all evidence which would cause the leaders to be apprehended. He argued that this would serve as an example and deterrent to other local areas should they at any time contemplate similar acquiescence in holding these Nyabingi agitations. He stressed that it was ‘...essential to impress on these people that the government will not tolerate these Nyabingi outbursts’ (DC to PCWP on 1 March 1928).

It was due to the vigilance of agents like Zaribugire and Ndyabahika that Komunda and other resisters were hunted down. When Komunda received news of his imminent arrest, he moved camp with his followers to the Kayonza Forest, and he continued his political and religious work for two weeks. His arrest caused marked resistance. One of the *askaris* was wounded and a peasant resister shot dead. Komunda was arrested with peasants from the vicinity. The peasants in the neighbourhood were fined fifty head of cattle under Section 2, Collective Punishment Ordinance.

The colonial view, presented by the DM, was that ‘any waiving of punishment on these people in those areas can but have the most serious and deleterious effect and would probably endanger the safety of others in future’. Chiefs who
failed to track the resistance were dismissed. (DC to PCWP on 29 March 1928. File: Nyabingi 1928.):

In the native mind the forfeiture of cattle causes a deep and everlasting impression, well-heeded and observed by others, but a contribution in the shape of work is merely a phase which is ephemeral, possibly irksome, and will by no means be stamped on the minds of onlookers as a deterrent. ‘Emandwa’ is of much more personal a nature - and infinitely less harmful - than ‘Nyabingi’. Nyabingi may extend to the attempt at expulsion from the land of any form of government: Emandwa is not anti-Government in characteristic (idem.)

The convicted appealed against the judgment. This alarmed the colonial state. One of them won the appeal and was released, while Ndemere died under harsh prison conditions (DC to PCWP on 29 May 1930. File: Nyabingi 1928). The appeal was a testimony of the waning of the Nyabingi Movement. Many peasants began to join the new religions. This was partly due to the religious persecution of local religions and the political threats while at the same time promoting the European religions, and partly due to the rewards, privileges and favours that colonialism accorded converts to these new religions. This would be on recommendation of Missionaries and agents.

By the late 1930s, the Nyabingi Movement had been undermined. A new peasant movement occurred in form of Ruvaivuro ‘Revivalist Movement’, whose membership and leadership were pre-dominantly women. They lacked any other organised forum around which they could organise to express their interests and wishes. The colonial policies had developed Kigezi into a labour reservoir. So, most men had to leave the district annually for wage labour for taxes and for other political, economic and social demands. As such, it was mainly women and children who remained in the villages, practising the religions.

By then, the colonial state was sure of itself. The balance of forces had tilted in its favour. The local allies, most of whom had been incorporated into the colonial system, were promising. The colonial assessment was that ‘they are slow to learn new methods but, once learnt, are steady and reliable, with the notable exception of fear of the supernatural as represented by the organisation known as NYABINGI. I know no African race who retain their social equilibrium and mental stability so well under modernising influences’ (idem).

Resistance began to take more individualised forms like arson, murders, suicides, and so on. As an instance, they burnt the house of the District Clerk in July, 1932 and the culprits escaped (KDAR 1932). The same happened to
Mandelbaum’s hut in 1933 in Bufuka. Colonialism had brought her to study these peasants so as to know how to control the Nyabingi Movement. However, these peasants refused to be objects of her anthropological study. The choice of Bufuka was based on the fact that it was taken as part of the headquarters of Nyabingi. She carried out an anthropological research between 1932-33 (KDAR 1933).

**Nyabingi Movement and Colonial Reforms**

Confronted by the Nyabingi Movement, the district colonial officers were able to examine their policies and practice. They came to realise that Baganda agents were causing unnecessary social grievances among the peasants. This practice had been employed in all forms of colonial administration as highlighted below:

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

Following the compulsory use of **Luganda** by the Government; and the consequent association of officers with it, Baganda lords, customs and outlook are gradually becoming fastened... peaceful penetration, upon the local people whose point of view is largely lost sight of in Native Courts where Baganda preside or predominate much natural resentment is felt by the indigenous population with which I entirely sympathise. I consider it almost entirely due to the GANDA atmosphere created by the use of Baganda interpreters, and the **Luganda** Language which is imposed by the Government in Districts where it is as alien as it is unnecessary (KDAR 1919-1920).

As such, colonialism tried to reduce Baganda agents and their powers. It re-introduced Swahili as the official language. It accused Kago (a Muganda) of nepotism; ‘forwarding unduly the interests of his own family and advising DC to introduce alien (Baganda) customs resented by the indigenes which formed inflammable material for the incipient fires of rebellion organised by powerful witchcraft associations, under capable leaders (*op. cit.*)

Philipps pursued this issue further to show that Baganda had become a liability to colonialism:

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

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

The state had two options - either to retain the Baganda agents or to dispense with them. It opted for the latter option. This would have the effect of hoodwinking the colonised peoples that this was a transformation to self-rule. This would make the position of the state even more obscure and secure. At the same time, it reverted to Swahili language as the official language, brought in more personnel from Tanzania of Baziba ethnic grouping to replace Baganda as agents, interpreters, and so on. It was made compulsory for all government personnel to learn Swahili and the state offered a bonus to whoever accomplished this task.

British colonialists used these proxy administrators from other nationalities and later from the local ones for various reasons. It was handicapped in terms of British personnel, wanted to keep low the administration costs and also minimise contradictions between colonialism and the colonised by using these proxy administrators as shields.

**The Nature of Colonial Justice: Networks and Syndicates**

Local agents had been learning from Baganda how to man the system. The state embarked on reforming the political system, reorganising the political leadership of the district by removing the less indispensable Baganda agents and replacing them with the local agents. It gave them necessary rewards and privileges (*op. cit.*) By then, both the major and minor chiefs were salaried. However, the role of Baganda as instructors and advisors was still important. So, many of them were retained (*op. cit.*)

The colonial ploy was to disassociate the state from the crises and attribute all of them to Baganda agents. However, it could not shy away from the question of responsibility as it was the one in command, formulating policies and supervising their implementation. Real power lay with the colonialists, not the agents. Baganda agents did not have the autonomy to act as they wished, or to formulate policies. Furthermore, the system represented British and not Baganda
interests. Baganda agents could not be considered at the same level with British colonialism as these colonial accusations do.

Available facts prove that they were an indispensable tool for British colonialism in invading, conquering, penetrating and setting up the first administration system in this area. Even after phasing them out later on, neither colonialism, nor the post colonial governments tried to abolish the system.

It had become clear to the state that ‘the Nabingi organisation cannot be dealt with by military measures’ (PCWP to CS on 13 November 1920). The new colonial proposals for remedies and safeguards against it were: general civilisation of the District, the levelling up of administration on both sides of the two international frontiers, abstention from pressure of tax or labour in frontier areas, increased tolerance of the Ruanda Emandwa (anti-Nyabingi institution), and employment of Abatutsi, the hereditary rulers whenever possible and increasing the police force (idem). The PCWP considered the first two proposals as a matter of time while the last three proposals had been laid down and placed on record as general policy (idem).

In a bid to accomplish this, it increased educational grants to missions, began pushing religious missions to carry out their ideological and educational work and to tolerate the passive Emandwa. In this line, it criticised the CMS’ method of work and hostilities against animists and other religions, their lack of tolerance with them as a basis for social grievances. The PCWP warned:

One of the dangers of these illegal aggressions by native proselytisers, mistaught by Europeans ignorant of the nature of the religions or cults which are endeavouring to destroy and replace is not only the creation in Africa of a feeling of persecution and antagonism against Europeans in general, but also the natural possibility of exasperated reprisals on local churches. The latter are mostly grass huts and easily inflammable (PCWP to CS on 15 October 1930 about CMS’ Mission Methods).

Drawing from the protest in the newspaper the previous year, Philipps advocated the recognition and respect of animists (as in modern China and ancient Rome) who practised the same cults of the ancestral spirit and of great men now with the gods - Emandwa. He argued that these religions could not be mistaken with the little shrine within the enclosure or behind the house:

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

He exposed the CMS and their teachers who accused the colonial state for its new position of hindering the burning of ‘devil-huts’ in the district. Philipps criticised one of the teachers for this view published in the vernacular newspaper thus: ‘He doesn’t add whether he considers the spirit of his own father an animist, to be a devil... Animists in Africa are set down contemptuously as heathen. A sense of both history and realities of the world as well as perspective, seem still to be relatively rare.’ Colonialism had moderated its position and was advocating the freedom of Emamdw and other mild religions.

Philipps’ criticism was multi-barrelled: criticising malpractices of CMS and their greed, their failure on the ideological front, and also pushing forward the political programme to defeat peasants under Nyabingi.

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

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


68 File: Provincial Administration: District Commissioners Conferences:- Minute of Meetings:- Meeting at Mbarara on 4-8 August 1921 of DCs of Toro, Ankole, Kigezi and ADC Kigezi and Secretary.
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The objective of giving a club to this new category of people – *évolue* class – was to uproot them as a privileged class from the rest of the colonised peoples. The colonial concern was on how to stem the nationalist thoughts and ideas which were rising in the country. Which class would they depend on for this project? They thought that providing these *évolue* with newspapers and selected literature would depoliticise them and mould them within the fold of colonialism and the trappings of Western modernity. That way, they would stem the insurgent nationalist ideas.

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

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

Fears of the past resistances, and the prevalent revolutionary feelings demanded that the state should create such a club of docility, of non-active political membership, and so on, who would form a dependable ally. The colonialists did not mince their words on the anti-revolutionary role of this club, ‘intended as a rendezvous for the educated type of young natives and as a check on revolutionary tendencies’ (*op. cit.*).

All these colonial measures had some impact on the movement. Colonialism spelled out that the matter was one of general administration, which would always require watching. But as the district progressed, any possible danger to Government would disappear and all cases harmful to natives would be dealt with by law (DC to CS on 17 January 1922 & PC to CS commenting on Philipps’ report *op. cit.*).

The Politics of Christian Revivalism

The ideological, political and cultural contributions of European religions to colonial interests were quite clear to the state. Being the most interested party, the state could not leave this important work unplanned. Yet, missionary work was hotly challenged by peasants. In 1915 the religious and secular work by both
missions had been retarded by the Nyabingi Movement. This had climaxed in the murder of a CMS teacher (WPAR 1915-16).

The state wanted a planned education for the ‘natives’. The creation of a semi-literate and unskilled class of natives was most undesirable. It, therefore, planned a strategy for the success of this work through compartmentalising the District, basing on ethnicity, language and other differences.

Protestantism had been rejected in Rwanda where they stuck to their religion. The White Fathers had nine Catholic missions manned by priests in Rwanda. Its personnel spoke the local language and had a wide experience with the people. The state correctly understood that Baganda Protestant Teachers would hinder this valuable work by Abanyarwanda teachers and White Fathers. This also applied to the Abakiga, who disliked Baganda but liked Abanyarwanda and were accustomed to them. The state saw it as ‘politically and tribally desirable’ that ‘these two counties which are ethnologically, historically and geographically part of Rwanda’ be under the spiritual charge of the vicariate of Sud-Nyanza. Rujumbura of Bahororo and Kinkizi of Batumbi, who were ‘not unsympathetic to Ankole and Protestant influence’ had to be left for Protestants, whose personnel spoke Runyankore language.

The plan was implemented successfully. One of its achievements was to create deep-rooted divisions amongst nationalities in the region based on religions. It sharpened these differences, undermined local religions and increased religious animosity amongst the new converts (idem. Vide KDAR 1961 on District politics and Provincial Reports from 1956-1962 on religion and politics in Kigezi).

As the military option had failed, the state began to combine various methods to defeat these resistances. It saw education as important ‘to combat the influence of the witch doctors. The intelligence of the natives generally could be much improved by widening their outlook, and education would prove of much assistance in this and in making the chiefs independent of alien clerks’ (KDAR 1917-18). In pursuit of this, it maintained its supportive programme to these missions. By 1930, it offered £ 500 as educational grants, and raised it to £ 547 the following year. In 1933, the total educational grants had been raised to £ 656.12 (KDARs 1930-1933). Although these figures cannot tell how the money was used, they still show a commitment of the colonial state to education.
Riding the Unruly Horse: From Christian Revivalism to Christian Revisionism

The new religions created new antagonistic contradictions between the whole colonial train and the colonised. There is a school of thought which argues that the coming of the missionaries was a blessing for the pagans. Among these are Rwampigi (1980), Ngorogoza (op. cit.) and Sebalijja (op. cit.). These contradictions revolved around material resources, notably land, labour and livestock. These increased peasants’ resolution to wage an armed struggle.

In Kigezi’s context, the cross followed the sword. It was the colonialists with the Kivu Mission, who paved way for Christianity. The White Fathers, who had arrived earlier in the southern part of the region, did not extend their work to the Ndorwa-Mpororo-Kajara areas. Colonial administration embarked on hoodwinking peasants to allow the missionaries in. In 1913, the Provincial Commissioner, Western Province (PCWP) disclosed that chiefs had said that peasants would allow missionaries to come provided they did not deprive them of their plural wives or their land (PCWP Report, 1913-14). It was in the following year that White Fathers and CMS selected plots around Kabale (KDAR 1914-15). The so-called conditions laid by the peasants were violated immediately.

Continued peasant resistances necessitated intensive ideological work. In this pre-literate, peasant society, religion would play an important role. The problem facing colonialism was that Nyabingi, the dominant religion, was against it. Worse still, peasants did not and could not understand or accept British interests, let alone represent them.

The duty fell on European religions, as was happening elsewhere on the continent. It had its own religions which people believed in, revered and feared. In such a context, the new religions could not be accepted wholesale. This was aggravated by misconduct by the missionaries and their new converts. Their association with the murderous state and its forced demands exacerbated the situation. Eventually, the activities of these new missions caused a lot of conflicts with the peasants. This called for the state to come in and control their activities.

The Politics of Land Grabbing and New Forms of Ownership

The first major conflict revolved around land. On his first visit, Lewin of the CMS ‘marked out the choicest pieces of cultivated land for his plots’. Instead of compensating the peasants for their gardens and land, he deceived them that ‘if they resigned their claim to the land and became mission people that they would
be released from all obligations to their chiefs, the government, and also from road work.’ He forced them to supply free food to mission teachers. The state had to come in to resolve it. (ADC writing to Governor on 23 August 1914 in defence against CMS accusation ‘Obstruction in the Granting of Plots to CMS in Kigezi’. Vide Sullivan to ADC on 13 March 1916):

Owing to the density of population and extremely strong feeling among the clans as to alienation of their land whether fallow or cultivated it has been explained to the indigenous population that such lands will not be alienated without their consent (obtained after individual explanation to those interested that lands then granted would cease to belong to them) missionary societies were simultaneously informed that applications for unoccupied lands (not cultivated or fallow) would receive sympathetic consideration (KDAR 1919-20 & WPAR 1919-20).

The subsequent years witnessed an intensification of the scramble for land by missions. By 1928, the colonial state was alarmed. Missions had 407 Temporary Occupation Plots, of which 272 belonged to CMS. In addition to that, they had three miles of freehold land. This land had been acquired through force, intimidation and deceits to peasants. The CMS later deceived the state that all its plots were bush schools. Because of that, they were able to get educational grants from the state for these unoccupied plots (DC to PCWP on 1 August 1929: ‘Land, T.O.L., Missions.’ Sub-grade [Bush] Schools).

**Politicising Land Ownership for Colonial Ideology**

However, the state realised that the CMS was failing to execute its ideological duties. Most of its plots lacked teachers while the rest were manned by young boys, ‘practically illiterate, irresponsible... unfit to teach the doctrines of Christ’. To the DC, their presence was doing more harm to the community. The colonial argument was that, these evangelising classes made children ‘develop a contemptuous insubordination to both domestic and tribal discipline’ (Report of DC on ‘272 Temporary Occupation Plots. Plots at Kihi’). On its part, the CMS preferred to exploit the cheap labour as it paid only a shilling a month and freedom from forced unpaid labour (*oruharo*).

While the CMS was receiving enormous educational grants for these empty plots on the pretext that they were schools it was exporting teachers to Belgian Rwanda, where its outlook and main interests lay (DC to PCWP on 1 August
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1929. Also see KDAR 1933). The state was forced to spell out its educational policy in no uncertain terms, thus:

> We owe it both to a contented continuance of English trusteeship, and in fairness to the men with whom we shall have to deal in the new Africa of ten and more years hence, that the rising generation should either remain under a proper African or a proper European influence. Unless such conditions are rectified, we would appear to be drifting aimlessly (if not dangerously between the two) (op. cit.)

The state limited the amount of land acquired by missionaries. It also forced them to visit these plots regularly and staff them with qualified personnel. It did not want these plots to develop into centres for dissention, resistance and insubordination to disrupt colonial order. It threatened to withdraw educational grants, deprive them of most of the land and the privilege to church teachers if the CMS did not fulfil its ideological obligations. It demanded accountability of the CMS, stopped them from exporting teachers to Rwanda, and accused them of embezzling most of the resources received for educational purposes. ‘Money granted to White Fathers seems to go much further (Sic!) than an equal amount given to Protestants, who encumber themselves with large families.’ (KDAR 1929 & 1930).

**Exacting Forms of Slavery and Servitude**

In 1931, the Roman Catholics had nearly twice the number of converts of Protestants. The former had 9,186 converts and the latter had 5,087. It reported that 232,603 peasants were still worshipping their pre-colonial religions (1931 Returns on Converts, KDAR 1931). This was also reflected by the enrolment at school. In 1930, CMS had less than half the enrolment number of the WFM. It had 109 pupils while the WFM had 230 pupils. This worsened the following year when WFM had 287 pupils while the CMS had 96 pupils. By 1933, WFM had 525 pupils while CMS had 164 pupils.

The colonial state continued demanding accountability from CMS as it was receiving more money than WFM. The CMS was forced to respond. By 1960, it had narrowed the gap. It had 8,817 pupils while WFM had 11,398 pupils (KDARs 1930-33 & 1960).

Secondly, it discouraged the CMS from using crooked, cunning and deceitful methods to extort peasant resources in form of free labour. The first example is Seseme Church, which was struck by lightning. The CMS demanded its
replacement by oruharo labour, lying that it was ‘burnt by incendiariism’. It received and used oruharo labour worth a hundred pounds to build a bigger and better one. The oruharo labour was worth more than a hundred Pounds (Dr. Smith CMS to DC on 23/9/1927: ‘The CMS ‘Freehold’ at Seseme (Kisoro), Bufumbira (Rwanda)’ DC to Dr. Smith on 13 October 1927 and Dr. Smith’s reply on 3 November 1927).

Conflicts between state and the CMS arose when the church was being completed. Dr. Smith informed the DC that he had made a sad ‘discovery’ that he had been appealing for help ‘under false pretences. Apparently, it was not destroyed by incendiariism, after all, but struck by lightning’ (Dr. Smith to DC on 3 November 1927). The DC was angered by this duplicity and exploitation; ‘an act of god and not of naughty natives,’ though it was the latter who had to suffer for it... the CMS asked (and obtained) ‘unpaid forced labour’ against the existence of which they inveighed so forcibly public (op. cit.). He warned them against this malpractice.

The CMS created lies and promised converts rewards, absolution from work and other obligations and punishments. One of the lies it created was that natives that were not Christians would be considered sympathisers with Nyabingi and would be thrown into prison and that safety lay in the ‘religion of the Government’, namely Protestantism. It was reported that ‘a few pagans, oscillating alarmed between Scylla and charybdis, betook themselves to Islam’.

The Roman Catholics retaliated by creating a rumour that the PCWP had become Catholic and that Catholics alone could and would communicate to him and would be the ones to get jobs. The DC had to disprove this publicly that ‘there was no religious ‘reservations’ mediaevalisms which would get them into or keep them in any post...’ (KDAR 1915-16, 1928).

Resistance between peasants and missions arose over school fees. The best case is of Ruhara’s three children, who were expelled from school for failing to pay church dues. What complicated matters was that they had paid school fees. The state accused the Catholic Church of manipulating school fees to exploit resources for the church. After a lot of correspondences, the colonial state concluded thus:

Education, is after all a social service. In Uganda the Protectorate Government has entrusted it, almost entirely, to the Mission Societies. ... Responsibility still rests with Administrative and Education Officers to exercise, in the name of Government,... who wish to make use of educational facilities, provided largely by public funds, in spite of
statements to the contrary, and are willing to behave themselves, must be allowed to do so; and to attend Mission schools until state schools are established. Schools must not be used as instruments for enforcing Church discipline against children or parents, especially when it appears to be only a matter of tithe payments.

Uganda has suffered since 1890, or earlier, from the political and religious rivalry of the Mission Societies... (op. cit. Vide Memos of 10 February 1941 and of 15 February 1941 on the same issue).

Protecting Flora and Fauna for Political Tourism

The colonial authorities called Kigezi the Switzerland of Africa. They knew that it had the best climate, and that it was free of diseases that affect cows. Their aim was to preserve it for their settlement. The colonial state, therefore, had to take practical steps towards this important project.

It stopped the CMS’ activities of hunting and shooting game for ivory and meat in the outlawed Sleeping Sickness (S.S.) belt. In addition to violating S.S. laws, they were depopulating the animals. To make matters worse, the colonial state had prohibited peasants from going there, let alone hunting there or killing animals. During their hunting expeditions, the CMS personnel exploited unpaid labour of peasants on these trips. They took an average of 50 porters per trip to these S.S. areas for an average of twelve days.

The colonial state accused the CMS of exposing these porters to sleeping sickness, overloading them without remuneration, separating these peasants from their households for twelve days, forcing peasants to contribute food and milk without pay, and then forcing men to carry them for long distances and many days, and inhuman exploitation, without feeding these porters on these trips, inter alia (DC to PCWP on 15 May 1929).

Not only were these grievances bases for Nyabingi resistances, but they also had the effect of teaching peasants to defy government laws and go into the S.S. areas to hunt as the Whites were doing. This came to be known as poaching. Peasants saw this as a racist move to block the Africans from hunting and keeping it exclusively for Whites. The state threatened to prosecute any missionary violating this rule. This was a strategy for resource consolidation. It marked a gradual movement from antagonism to consolidation to achieve economic benefits for political sustainability. This was vivid in these fresh strategies of protecting animals and plants for tourism, health reasons, and so on.
Peasant Resistance to Super-Exploitation by Non-State Actors

The state intervened when peasants appealed against forced milk contribution. When peasants changed from militant armed struggles to legal methods, appeals, and so on, the state seized the opportunity and came in with a pro-peasants’ face. It began to address some of the social grievances.

Peasants appealed to the DC against forced milk contribution (ezekibeere) by the CMS. They had been compelled to take one cow each to the CMS at Kabale, three days’ march away. They were compelled against their will to remain on the CMS Mailo for 30 days and to supply milk. They had to take their own money for food and cook the food themselves while so detained. To make matters worse, the CMS gave them two shillings per cow for one month’s milk. An average of thirty peasants were thus compelled every month to take, each, a milk cow, to the CMS, principally from Nyarushanje and Nyakishenyi Gombololas (DC to PCWP on 28 September 1928. File: CMS). The DC explained this super-exploitation, by showing that a Kiga cow produced as much as three bottles of milk. The standard price of milk was 20 cents a bottle, which meant Shs. 9/= per month, per cow.

We find that in sanctioning this forced milk contribution, the colonial state, which was still in its embryonic stage, was too careful to antagonise the organised large cattle owners. The victims were peasants owning an average of two head of cattle apiece. The agent received orders of the needed cattle and he then acted. There was very high mortality among the cows and calves, thus, brought to Kabale due to great climatic differences and pasturage which were injurious to the cows and their calves.

The DC recounted to the PCWP the hazards these cattle and their owners were exposed to: the marked climatic differences (damp-cold) in Kabale; differences in composition of both water and pasture between the valleys of the Edward watershed and those of Victoria (For example, Kabale). On pasturage, he argued that MBULALLI69 and RUMBUGU70 formed the staple pasture, while the latter was relatively rare and the former practically did not exist:

‘The MBULALLI grass at Kabale was injurious to cattle when unaccustomed to it, leading to high mortality among cows and their calves brought to Kabale (idem). This is a source of grievance among

69 The word Mbullali was used to refer to a particular grass locally known as Emburara. It is nutritious for cattle.

70 Rumbugu means couch grass or agropyron repens.
the peasantry. The average price of a cow in milk is about Shs. 100/=.
No compensation is paid by the CMS in case of deaths.

Worse still, there were relatively very few cattle. The DC explained that ‘the proportion of cows, and in milk, at any one time was small, and nearly all Rukiga cattle were owned in ones and twos, which made the taking of the only cow a man had, and any death, a matter of real hardship’:

To gain a sense of perspective, one might reasonably say that the loss of a cow to a mKiga (Omukiga) is equivalent to the loss by fire to a poor European, who has neither income nor bank balance, of his house and all its contents ... uninsured! A cow to a mKiga frequently represents the savings of a life time (idem).

The PC ruled against the practice: The assistance of chiefs and the native courts cannot be invoked in this matter. He stressed that it was not equitable that the peasants of Rukiga should be forced to bring the cows for providing the milk and ghee for the 16 Europeans on the CMS Hill (PCWP to CS on 23 October 1928 and C.S.’ comments on 30 October 1928). The practice was abolished that December.71 The DC then castigated the criminal nature of forced milk contribution:

It should however be placed on record that throughout the past eight years the cattle have, in point of fact, had to be brought in by ORDER of the DC supported by criminal convictions (flogging and fines) in Native Courts, all of which are now stated to have been illegal. The question of influence has never arisen. The matter is now seen frankly to have been one of illegality, profiteering on and discrimination against, the native. Had the cattle belonged to a White man, this state of affairs would clearly never have occurred (DC to PCWP on 14 February 1929 on ‘Compulsory Milk CMS’).

Peasants needed the milk for themselves. Besides, it led to the detention of men, who commanded respect in society and were heads of households on the mission station for a month. It forced them to carry out roles which were hitherto considered in their customs to be exclusively for women. These included cooking.

71 Telegraph of CS to PCWP of 22 December 1928 and telegraph of PCWP to Districter, of 24 December 1928. Also see DM to the Attorney General on 13 January 1929 and the Solicitor General to CS on 22 January 1929.
This degraded and humiliated the men. It had the possibility of undermining their social position in society. It disorganised their households and their production plans, their defence system, and so on. Worse still, they had other compulsory state obligations to meet (DM to Attorney General on 13 January 1929 & Communication of the Solicitor General to CS on 22 January 1929).

In fact, the state was able to assess the effectiveness of its reforms the following year by attributing the confinement of NYA-BINGI to ‘a MAGNIS NOMINIS UMBRA’ to be principally the ‘removal of a number of grievances, petty enough to the European who is not touched by them but acute and infuriating to the African, and easily exploitable by the Nya-BINGI, laudator - temporis - acti’ (KDAR 1929).

In all the aforementioned conflicts, the state sided with the aggrieved peasants. This shows that the colonialists were not willing to condone the crooked ways of the missionaries, who constituted a crucial ideological wing of colonialism. At the practical level, it did not want to leave unattended to, any grievances which could constitute fertile grounds of insurgencies.

While this approach exposed divisions amongst the Europeans before the eyes of the colonised, it ended up creating an alliance between the colonialists and the peasants versus the missionaries. It constituted a strong basis for forging state-peasant alliance. It also exposed the class of interests between the colonial administration and the missionaries over economic interests. The administration wanted the missionaries to concentrate on the ideological front and vacate the economic domain.

This helped to deconstruct religious-political alliances while reinforcing the forging of a nouveaux (new) political alliance between the colonialists and the peasants. Above all, the colonialists could not condone the corrupt practices by the non-administrators which had high possibilities of refuelling and igniting peasant resistances. Another compelling motive was that the colonialists could not sanction corrupt privileges for a non-entity group which, they themselves, were not enjoying. They, therefore, used political power to tame religious power. State power had to reign supreme over spiritual powers and preclude it from involving and benefiting from temporal domains.