

Gender and Spirituality in Anti-Colonial Struggles in Uganda: A Case of Nyabingi Movement in Kigezi Region (1900-1945)

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Abstract

During the anti-colonial struggles, a number of religion and political movements were formed to oppose the colonial rule. In Uganda, particularly in Kigezi region, Nyabingi movement was one of the religion-political movement that pioneered the anticolonial struggles in Africa against the colonialism. However, its success depended on the Nyabingi supernatural powers, which was believed to have only possessed or chosen women as their spiritual mediums. The Nyabingi movement leader (Muhumuza) was believed to have had tremendous powers that could heal the sick, revived infertility in barren women and could give fortune. Such powered also create fear among the colonial powers (Germany, Belgians and the British) as they could be ambushed by the Nyabingi movement followers (Abagirwa) without their knowledge. This forced the colonial government in the western province of the British directorate (The current Kabale district) to introduce the witchcraft ordinance of 1912 that was meant to suppress all the Nyabingi movement activities including all its sorcery acts. Despite, all these, Nyabingi movement, its leadership often characterized with spirituality remained a threat, and eventually led to the downfall of colonialism in Uganda. The study therefore examined the intersection of the gender and spirituality in the dynamics of the (Reasons why the spiritual mediums) Nyabingi movement in Kigezi region in Uganda, how did the mediums (with the help of spirituality) helped in the mobilization of Abagirwa against the colonial rule, how such powers shaped the political landscape in Uganda. The study employed a historical research design and qualitative approach to collect data through archival/document review and historical oral tales from key informant interviews with historians, cultural leaders and elders as well as site visits. The study findings indicated that, gender played a big role in terms of expectations, socialization and power relations. For instance, women had higher capacity to nurture, high intelligence ability and mobilizing the Abagirwa, hence it is believed that these are some of strands that favored women to be possessed by the Nyabingi spirit than men and this can be evidenced from Muhumuza's historical narrative. For instance, despite the existence of patriarchal practices at the time, Muhumuza who was a fearless leader, managed to mobilize the followers against the colonial powers in the name of Nyabingi spirit, irrespective of some doubts about the reality of existence of such powers. Her actions were able to shape women's identity anticolonial struggles, identity of women in leadership and paved way for Uganda's independence. However, despite role of women in anticolonial struggles, their recognition and contributions in various fields including to Uganda's independence remains low. Hence, there is need to develop a robust policy responses for intervention.

Keywords: Gender spirituality, Nyabingi movement, anti-colonial struggles in Uganda

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1. Introduction

Spiritual or supernatural powers refer to anything that is seen as mysterious by scientific understanding of the laws of nature but nevertheless those who believes in it, have the notion that it exists (Sidky, 2019). Immaterial beings like; angels, gods, spirits and claimed human abilities like magic, foreknowledge as well as psychic perception are good examples through which supernatural powers and spiritualities are presumably derived. During the anticolonial struggles in Kigezi region in south western Uganda, the mediums of the Nyabingi movement, (*the religious-political movement that pioneered the anticolonial struggles in Uganda*) were all women. This means that gender had something to do with the leadership in the Nyabingi movement and in anticolonial struggles at large. This study therefore explored the connection between spirituality/supernatural powers and gender in anti-colonial struggles and how this connection shaped the political landscape of Uganda's independence.

1.1 Background to the study

In the early days of colonialism especially during the period 1907-1910, the colonial powers (Germans, British

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and the Belgians) on one side were scrambling for Kigezi and on the other side Nyabingi movement, which was initially a religious movement carried on their activities as usual under its pioneer leader (Muhumuza). Muhumuza was a Nyabingi medium as believed to have possessed powerful spiritual powers that could heal the sick, revive the fertility of the barren women and give fortune. The movement was however transformed into a political movement in order to avert the discriminatory practices often practiced on by colonial powers against the local community in Kigezi. For instance, the people of Kigezi, in addition to facing gender discrimination, were exposed to British-appointed ruthless local chiefs whose task were to enforce colonial exploitation. The first shift of Nyabingi movement was therefore, from the women's religious movement to a rebellion that was political in outlook. The second and related shift was the aim of the Nyabingi movement from the struggle against women discrimination to the struggle against the oppression of the locals especially women by the colonial powers competing in the process of scramble and partition, and effective occupation of Kigezi.

Gender played a big role in anti-colonial struggles in Kigezi region, for instance, the roles, norms, expectations, socialization and power relations were all exercised based on gender. Despite the existence of patriarchal practices at the time, women in general had greater influence in anti-colonial struggles. For instance, Muhumuza who is still being considered as a role model, was able to shape women's identity by demonstrating that women can be leaders in male dominated fields (armed forces). The witchdoctor Kaigirirwa the wife of a Mukiga man called Ruhemba, this woman together with her husband and Bichu Birenga (Ntokibiri) met at the mountain of Nkabwa on the Belgian Congo side of the international frontier and organised the Nyakishenyi revolt. This started with the massacre of a native political agent who was a Muganda and his other sixty-three people who worked with him. After the massacre Kaigirirwa and Bichu Birenga confined themselves in very hilly and thickly forested nature of the place, country between Nyakishenyi and international frontier overlooking Lake Edward. These, and other instances as illuminate the indispensable role women played in anti-colonial struggles in Kigezi. One of the approaches used by these female leaders was spirituality/religion, Nyabingi that was transformed into a political tool to struggle against colonialism.

Women in Nyabingi movement, for instance, Muhumuza in particularly who was a fearless leader, managed to mobilize the followers against the colonial powers in the name of Nyabingi spirit, but the reality of existence of such powers remains doubtful. Oral history and archival sources, such as the Bissell (1938); Captain J.E.T Philips (1928) among others, claims that the cult became prominent by rebellious activities of the sorceress Muhumuza. However, Nyabingi could have been a secret organized society or merely a local superstitious cult used by Muhumuza for her own political ambitions and to end the gender discriminations and the oppression of the locals by the colonial powers, but there is no evidence to show that Muhumuza was possessed by the spirit of Nyabingi. In other words, Muhumuza could have used false pretense in order to accomplish her mission.

According to Bessell (1938) the term Nyabingi means a certain Pagan and politically subversive secret cult in the old kingdom of Rwanda, in the current part which now lies within the Kigezi district of western province of Uganda, (Bissell, 1938). This cult became prominent by rebellious activities of the sorceress Muhumuza. Nyabingi could have been a secret organized society or merely a local superstitious cult used by Muhumuza for her own political ends, however an account of its history may help to give a conclusion. Various sources of research including Bissell (1938), have referred Nyabingi to literally mean "one who possess great riches".

The name Nyabingi was a title of a reigning queen of Karagwe kingdom north western Tanganyika present day republic of Tanzania. Queen Nyabingi didn't have an official husband until king Ruhinda who was a ruler of Mpororo and some parts of Ankole returned with his army from an expedition to the south came through her kingdom. He was a very powerful and respected man thus queen Nyabingi granted him audience. The two became great friends and attracted each other, the King Ruhinda had to break the traditional rules and officially married her. Nyabingi continued to govern as a queen while Ruhinda became a "prince -consort". Ruhinda eventually got tired of this inferior position in the kingdom and planned a coup d'état that had his wife Nyabingi beheaded with the help of his soldiers and then grabbed the throne. He was later accepted by the majority of the local people in the kingdom, but the spirit of Nyabingi through her followers carried out revenge on both the murderers and on those of her indecisive subjects who had allowed him to treat, thus Mugole (Lady).

Self-styled vehicles of her spirit arose and spoke in the name of queen Nyabingi. They were readily and propitiatory offerings were made to them. As the kingdom of Ruhinda was extended and expanded so was also the cult of Mugole. As time went on the kingdom of Ruhinda made some geographical changes for instance the annexation of Ndorwa which was a sub district of Mpororo by Batusi royals of Rwanda. In the early 19th century, Nyabingi spirit (cult) appeared in Rwanda to two natives of Rwanda who had gone on a cattle trading expedition to Uzinza, an area in south western shores of Lake Victoria which had formed part of Karagwe kingdom of Ruhinda. Nine months later after these men had returned to Rwanda, one of them claimed to be possessed by the spirit of Nyabingi a powerful Mandwa of Uzinza. The people in the neighborhood areas brought him gifts and fees, that is, "Kubandwa" (collections and the royal tribute were affected. The local Mandwa complained to Mwami Lwogera who marched on to Kisaka and after a certain amount of resistance, captured and killed the Nyabingi personification.

Nevertheless, her actions can be justified under feminist existentialism theory which proclaims that humans are free and responsible agents who needs to define their own destiny, development and meaning in life by making rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe through acts of the determination. The courage of women in Nyabingi movement was able to shape the identity of women in leadership. This to some extent inspired many women to take on leadership positions and decision-making structures. However, many are still being sidelined both in public and private spheres despite government's attempt to recognize women's contributions in various fields. Hence, there is need to develop robust policy responses for intervention.

2. Methodology

This historical study, employed qualitative approach, where methods key informant interviews, in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were used to collect data in Kigezi (current districts of Kabale and Ndongwa) in south western Uganda, between February-May 2020. The data was collected among cultural leaders, elders and the senior members of the community, most especially those that were well informed about the history and the events pertaining Nyabingi movement and its leadership. The study also reviewed archives and other historical documents related to Muhumuza and the Nyabingi movement from Kabale District Archives, Igongo Museum and from the Uganda National Archives. Six focus groups (of 10 people in each) were held with respondents aged 65 years and above, who had been recruited through established community connections. These inclusion and exclusion criteria based on this age bracket was opted for because, they were perceived to be more knowledgeable and less recall bias than the young generation about Muhumuza and Nyabingi movement and how all these were linked to spirituality. This is because 76 years had passed since Muhumuza died in 1945. The data were collected during the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, therefore the invitations to participate were by phone in order to limit overcrowding. Focus groups were limited to an hour, and were held in an open but in private and accessible locations. Participants were provided with face masks, sanitizer and social distance of two meters from each person was maintained as per ministry of health guidelines. The participants gave either verbal or a written informed consent before being enrolled in the study. Individuals who participated in focus groups were each given a number to identify them rather than the individual's names. Furthermore, no prior relationship existed between research team members and participants. Ethics committees MAKSSREC and UNCST approved the study.

3. Spirituality and Nyabingi movement

Globally, a number of studies have been carried out on spiritualities and supernatural powers and how they have been invoked to explain phenomena such as luck, dream interpretations, lightning, seasons among other diverse events. For instance, while undertaking a study on politics of the goddess in bit to examine feminist spirituality and the essentialism debate, Rountree (1999) argued that spiritualities and supernatural powers particularly the witchcraft have existed for centuries and many believed in them as religions before the introduction of formal religions like Christianity, Islamic Judaism among others.

Most of these beliefs have played a big role especially in gender relations across the world. For instance, according to Sidky (2019), spiritualities and supernatural powers such as use of sorcery have particularly played a significant role in prophesizing on the future events. They have also been used by various social movements in agitating for gender equality and women liberation from various sorts of injustices across the world.

The investigation into the existence of supernatural powers seems to go against modern science. However, empirical evidence in the 20th century, shows that the supernatural powers existed in developed countries such as England, Canada, and the United States (Wood, 2016). In Latin America, for example, the Pentecostals believed that social problems originate from the wrong relations between human beings and the supernatural kingdom or what is commonly known as the kingdom of God our creator (Smilde, 1998). In China, the supernatural powers were commonly used by the Shangy Kings to communicate to the dead ancestors particularly those that were gods of the ruling class. China had and still has temples and tombs for ancestral spirits (Richard Von Glahn, 2004).

In Africa, supernatural powers have been cited to have existed in various contexts with different roles, especially during the colonial period. According to the debates from scholars such as; Gifford, (2016); Redding, (1996); Kaoma (2016) among others, claim that supernatural powers were very crucial in aiding many African countries to manage the colonial resistance. This was because many Africans had a strong belief in superstitions. These supernatural powers possessed some chosen individuals who were women in most cases, as their mediums, especially during the anti-colonial struggles. For instance, in countries like South Africa, the 1880-81 Transkeian Rebellion used sorcery and witchcraft to resist control and taxation by white colonialists (Redding, 1996; Saunders, 1976).

In Zimbabwe, the Chimurenga rebellion used the "Mwari cult" as their cultural symbol of land, and the authority of spirit mediums in their first anti-colonial socio-political and religious protest in 1896-97 (Kaoma, 2016). In Angola, the queen Nzinga of Ndongo kingdom also employed supernatural powers in anti-colonial

struggles to protect her father's Ndongo kingdom. In January 1915 in British Nyasaland (Malawi), prophetic traditions and millenarianism were used by Chilembwe's rebellion in interpreting the longstanding grievances against colonial labour exploitation, taxation, racism, patriarchal practices, arbitrary violence and political illegitimacy as a great war that would only be abolished through radical change (Moyd, 2017).

In Senegal, Supernatural powers were used by the rebellions like the Mouride movement to fight the French colonialist between 1883 and 1895. The Mouride movement had the belief that, working hard and protecting their land, properties and people would create a paths way to God. Such doctrine encouraged their followers to work hard and create a resistance to outsiders. This posed high resistance to political societies of the colonial powers and hence created a way towards the sovereignty of Senegal (Gifford, 2016).

In Nigeria, the Aba Women's Revolt of 1929 that took place in south-eastern Nigeria, employed tactics like singing and dancing naked around the houses and offices of the warrant chiefs during their protest against the British-imposed warrant chiefs and the colonial rulers. Although these were not supernatural-related tactics, they were considered by many to be sorcery and as a taboo to whoever witnessed them (Talton, 2009). According to Zukas (2009), the Aba women revolt was purely organized by women to redress social, political and economic grievances that had been brought about by the Warrant Chiefs. The protest was composed of women from six tribes which included Ibibio Ethnic group, Andoni, Bonny, Opobo, Ogoni, and the Igbo women of south-western Nigeria.

The main reason why this riot took place was to call for an end to warrant chief system and replacement of warrant chiefs with clan heads appointed by indigenous people rather than the British. This was because the British colonial government had denied Nigerian women the right to participate in government roles and some men mistreated their wives including the warrant chiefs. The women organized themselves to penalize men who tortured their wives and violated market rules and regulations by sitting on these men until they repented and changed their behaviour towards women. Igbo women resisted the warrant chiefs by undressing, dancing half-naked on streets until their demands were considered (Talton, 2009). These was the only way they would use to redress social, political and economic grievances, for example, the world economic depression caused a reduction in prices of palm oil which was the major export for the Nigerian economy, this resulted into high rates of school fees, prices for goods and services were higher yet this entire burden fell on women.

The unending demand for forced labour by colonialists also annoyed the mothers of the nation leading to a rebellion. Women realized that they had no space in the colonial structures and decided to take their grievances to the roads demonstrating on the streets to demand for a hearing from the government that had ignored them for a long time. The revolt was a success as women were later appointed in native court systems and other local offices. (Zukas, 2009).

In East Africa, supernatural powers were used by various rebellions in fighting against colonial powers. These included; the Maji Maji Rebellion, which was a Religious Movement that resisted the German colonial rule in German East Africa (Tanganyika and Zanzibar) between 1905 and 1907. According to Akiri, (2017), the Maji Maji insurgents through its spirit medium named Kinjikitile Ngwale of Ngarambe, who practiced Folk Islam that incorporated radical beliefs and claimed to be possessed by a snake spirit called Hongo, which allegedly turned to magic to drive out the German colonizers and used it as a unifying force in the rebellion. According to Rushohora (2019), Kinjikitile gave his followers war medicine which included, water mixed with castor oil and millet seeds that was assumed to turn German bullets into water. Another rebellion that used supernatural powers in East Africa was the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya that fought the British between 1952 and 1962. According to Presley, (2019), Mau-Mau fighters used witchcraft and was concerned with the practical and pragmatic forms of power, rather than the merely symbolic. Furthermore, the movement used a campaign of ritualized oath-taking to gain the support and co-operation among its followers. This ritual is still practiced in Kenya by the former Mau Mau sub-sect called Mungiki. The main agenda of this sub-sect was to fight against political, economic and social exclusion in Kenya. (Rasmussen, 2018).

In Uganda, Nyabingi movement was one of the notable rebellions that employed supernatural powers during the anticolonial struggles to demand freedom from colonialists who had occupied the great lakes region and were exercising oppressive rule over its people (Udy and Josiah, 2013). At the time of the colonial invasion in Kigezi in south-western Uganda, Nyabingi movement was one of the many religious based movements that existed alongside other movements such as the Bachwezi religion of which collectively strongly opposed the colonial rule in the region (Moon, 2019).

Nyabingi movement like other rebellions that existed across the African continent, transformed itself into a political movement and launched a resistance against the colonialists by refusing to abide by and to tolerate their increased demands for labour and taxations. Local people in this movement took up arms and fought the colonialists due to its doctrine of action, militancy and courage, where it came to be known as "Rutatiina-Mireego" meaning one who never fears bows and arrows (Rutanga, 2011). Being a religious-political movement, Nyabingi used sorcery to interpret the foretold prophesy and to restructure their political relationships with the colonialists (Bessell, 1938; Ian, 2019; Udy, & Josiah, 2013).

4. Religion-Philosophical Foundations underlying the Nyabingi movement.

This section deals with the forms of religions in the area, factors that gave supremacy to Nyabingi religion in social, religious and political affairs of the area, the forces that it represented, its character, objects and the developments. Among other things, it questions the materiality and historicity of the Nyabingi Movement, the character and functions of Nyabingi and how it related to people's lives in this area that was largely undifferentiated at the time of colonial invasion. It explores how this religion was transformed into a material political force at the moment of colonial invasion, and the historical circumstances that dictated its transformation into a social movement and a popular ideology for liberation. It seeks explanations why and how Nyabingi religion among the competing religions developed and took the initiative to resist colonialism, the socio-political and cultural circumstances that gave rise to the Nyabingi Movement and how it cut across the whole society. It studies why these peasants chose the identity of religion amidst other various identities.

The question is, can the Nyabingi Movement be dismissed as merely 'religious extremism' of illiterate, superstitious peasants led by religious sentiments and fears? Can the peasant resistances be dismissed as reactionary 'savagery', 'anti-European', 'anti-civilization' and 'anti-progress' - that is, against virtues which colonialism purported to represent? Is it correct that Kigezi was a difficult country which had been a refuge of outlaws and bad characters, with a resulting mixing of type? What explains British colonialists' hostility towards Nyabingi religion while at the same time using European religions to penetrate the region? Given that this region was still at a low level of production, undifferentiated, with no developed state structures or army, what explains its inhabitants' choice of upholding militant armed resistance?

Can it be dismissed simply, as some scholars have done, that violence was endemic in pre-colonial African societies; a Hobbesian situation which one commentator explains thus:

'...in indigenous African experience, life was cheap and full of fear. Only often one's own life was only saved by violence...' (Carothers 1954).

This was similar to Roscoe's representation of the inhabitants of Kigezi. He projected them as the unruliest people he had met in all his journeys. To him, everyone was still in a state of nature, without respect for humanity. Everyone lived in a state of fear of being murdered by neighbors. In this anarchical situation, everyone had to depend on individual protection all the time. To him, they were still driven by emotions, instinct and the love for self-preservation rather than being guided by reason, which he considered as the explanation why these people were easily aroused to anger against each other, and why they used their spears freely, wounding or killing anyone upon the slightest provocation (Roscoe, *op. cit.*).

This was the Western presentation of the colonised people of Kigezi as "the primitives". Gallagher and Robinson's (1953) vehement defense and glorification of imperialism is demonstrative enough. In their Eurocentric approach, they used the nationalist movements in Egypt to quickly condemn and dismiss anti-colonial movements. Hardwick (1904) castigated the Africans for imprisoning Africa, the largest continent in perpetual barbarism and darkness. He praised the European colonial powers, which, in their march to irresistible civilization were dividing Africa amongst themselves. At the time of colonial invasion, the area was characterized by polytheism.

Whereas some schools including Judaism advance the movement from polytheism to monotheism, other schools base on the proliferation of new religions to advance the monotheism to polytheism thesis while others advance duo theism, from polytheism or monotheism or even no religion. These demonstrate that there was no fixed order, no fixed formula. Among their religions were Emandwa, Ryangombe, Mugasya, Kahukeiguru, Kazooba Bitindangyezi, Esiriba and Biheeko Nyabingi. Nyabingi came to be known as Rutatiina-Mireego - one who never fears bows and arrows. Her other names included Omukama and Nyinekyaro, meaning ruler. She took yet another name in 1928, namely, Muzeire-Kasente that is a parent who accepted money.

Being at a low level of production, with backward productive forces, many peasants were still subjected to the mercy of nature. They still attributed most of what they could not understand and their problems to the supernatural. That is why they had so many religions, still at individual and household levels. They had not reached a level of monotheism. While it looked as an ideology of liberation and resistance, Nyabingi religion was an ideology of domination and exploitation by *Bagirwa*. They used it to extract surplus value from peasants, and used it to threaten them. On the other hand, heads of households, who were the spiritual heads and mediums of the other religions, also used these religions to dominate those below them. It was in these circumstances that Nyabingi gradually gained dominance over others.

Nyabingi religion depended on coercion, intimidation, curses, threats and mysterious deaths. These were plotted and executed secretly by *Abagirwa*. However, it also gained popularity because of its spiritual and temporal ideals. It was Nyabingi religion which identified with the oppressed peoples, preached emancipation from oppression and exploitation. It provided a foundation for solidarity, courage and action against the oppressors. (Philipps Report of 31 July 1919; Lacer, 1959; Turyahikayo-Rugyema, *op. cit.*).

Nyabingi extended to Rwanda, Burundi, Tanganyika, Congo, Mpororo, Nkore, and beyond. With colonialism, peasants mobilised under Nyabingi religion into armed resistance for over two decades. Despite

increased state repression, massacres, imprisonment and deportations, Nyabingi resistances continued up to mid-1940s. Colonialism had to concede how 'purely military measures have been proved useless'

5. Spirituality of Nyabingi as a political tool

Before the arrival of colonial powers, people in many African countries including those in great region coexisted in harmony. They had a doctrine of traditional way of worshiping through their gods and many had trust in it because they would get whatever they would ask for, from their respective gods (Ian, 2019). However, the arrival of colonialists with their new religion (Christianity), it meant that local people had to adapt to an alien way of life, dictatorship and its re-arrangement of society's traditional ideologies, belief systems, networks and infrastructures. This conquest and colonization of African society came with a profound impact on the independence of its people (Ian, 2019). For instance, the cultural and technological gap that had been brought by the colonists caused major rifts on the inherent culture and sovereignty of African societies.

In Kigezi region in particular, the arrival of colonialists, came with new society arrangements which included; forced demands in terms of labour, taxations and often people's land was confiscated in the name of bringing development. According to Ian, (2019), such oppressive measures seized the freedom of many local communities since they were against the way of life of the society before the coming of the colonial powers. In response, many locals bitterly opposed and retaliated against such acts of oppressions that were being committed among the local people, something that resulted to the rise of various armed struggles against the colonial rule. It was because of such acts that Nyabingi Movement quickly transformed itself from a religion under the leadership of Muhumuza muserekende to a political rebellion to oppose the injustices that were being instigated on the locals' way of life (Udy, & Josiah, 2013).

Various sources such as; Bessell (1938); Ian, (2019), claims that Nyabingi movement was among the three Popular religious cults namely; the Ryangombe, Nyabingi, and Kubandwa that existed in Kigezi before the arrival of the colonialists. It is believed that Nyabingi started as a religion with its main agenda being providing sanctuary to the vulnerable groups such as widows and those women that had been affected by the patriarchal practices which were rampant at the time. Apart from that, Ian, (2019) asserts that, through Nyabingi mediums particularly Muhumuza Muserekende, Nyabingi religion also reversed infertility of the barren women and also gave good luck to its loyal abagirwa (followers) (Vokes, 2013). However, Nyabingi was later transformed into a political rebellion with the aim of liberating the local population from injustices and bad governance that were being legislated by colonial powers (Turyahikayo-Rugyema, 1976 & Uzoigwe, 1975).

The specific factors that forced Nyabingi movement to transform from a religion to a political movement has been reported with contradictions among scholars. However, based on empirical evidence from scholars such as Bessell (1938); Ian, (2019); Jack (1914)¹ and the archival material² and oral history on ground, suggests some consensus on a number of key issues, which included; forced labour, taxation, land and property grabbing and extrajudicial killing of those who opposed the colonial rule as well as overlooking the local traditions and cultural setups by the colonial rulers.

Though in some cases spiritualities or supernatural powers were not directly employed during the anti-colonial struggles in Africa, the strategies that were being employed were sometimes considered to be strange and as sign of sorcery that would bring bad luck to whoever witnessed them. Therefore, many people were coerced to fear that they would be affected if they did not concede to the demands at hand (Talton, 2009). According to Rountree (1999), such techniques were extremely powerful and important presuppositions as they motivated people in their day to day endeavors from diverse cultural setting to work hard and defend their rights and properties in the society. However, it is unfortunately none of the followers in most rebellions that took part in anti-colonial struggles endeavored to investigate whether what they were being about the spiritual powers or the techniques that were being employed by such anticolonial movements were genuine or they were just frightening hoaxes.

In Kigezi region, especially among the abagirwa of Nyabingi movement in particular, there was a common myth that anyone or anything (such as stones, trees etc.) that showed any peculiar characteristics were considered to holy and therefore believed to possessed some powerful supernatural powers that could bring either good luck or can be destructive if not respected. Such persons or objects could be worshiped since they could be considered as medium of the gods (Ian, 2019; Rountree, 1999). Among the notable examples of objects that were considered sacred by the followers of Nyabingi movement included; the Nyakishenyi caves.

¹ Major E M Jack , was a member of the Boundary Commission in Kigezi region in 1911

² Kabale District Administrative records (1933). Annual Report by District Commissioner on Kigezi District for the Year 1932. Archive Ref No: 29/131, Alternative No: 36



Figure 1: The Nyakishenyi cave where Nyabingi followers gathered for worship

The Nyakishenyi cave had the stone in the middle which resembled the statue of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This place was considered to be holy and therefore, it was here that Nyabingi religion started as their place of worshipping the gods. According to Bessel, (1938); Ian, (2019), it was here that Muhumuza began to practice as a Nyabingi medium sometime around 1900 and allegedly cured her patients including the barrenness using supernatural powers from the Nyabingi spirit. The statue that resembles mother Mary at Nyakishenyi caves.

Furthermore, scholars such as Crosby (1994); Fuller (1992); Von Stillfried et al (2009) also agrees that any woman who presented any unusual attributes came to be considered as a goddess and hence many would worship her with notion that she could solve any grievances they could have. It was through this kind of opportunity that Muhumuza got chance to personify herself as a Nyabingi medium. However, according to various sources, for instance, the communications records at Kabale archives¹, indicates that Muhumuza may have used the opportunity given the ignorance of the Nyabingi followers to proclaim herself as the medium.

According to Ian (2019) also suggests that Muhumuza began to practice as the Nyabingi medium around the year 1900 when she began to claim to be the medium of Nyabingi spirit. Because, she was once the wife of king of Rwanda, she emulated all the rituals that are often performed by the kings using royal symbolism and therefore claimed to be divine representatives of God and she claimed to have possessed a sacred drum, called “Karinga”, which was a symbol of Rwandan royal power, yet this drum had been destroyed during the 1896 Rucunshu coup. During many rituals, she had also predicted that the bullets of the colonialists would turn to water, something that was not true.

Bissell (1938); Captain J.E.T Philips (1928) also asserts that the Nyabingi cult became prominent by rebellious activities Muhumuza who was surrounded by sorceress. However, may have used the advantage of the local superstitions about what was being considered holy for her own political ambitions and to end the gender discriminations and the oppression of the locals by the colonial powers, but there is no evidence to show that Muhumuza was possessed by the spirit of Nyabingi. In other words, Muhumuza could have used false pretense in order to accomplish her mission.

Despite the above, a strong superstition about the Nyabingi spirit and the action that were demonstrated by Muhumuza inspired many abagirwa to abide by the movement. This was able to shape the mobilization of the followers against the colonialist. Nevertheless, the actions of Muhumuza can also be justified under feminist existentialism theory which proclaims that humans are free and responsible agents who needs to define their own destiny, development and meaning in life by making rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe through acts of the determination. Therefore, the courage Muhumuza and many other women in the Nyabingi movement was able to shape the identity of women in leadership. This to some extent inspired many women to take on leadership positions and decision-making structures.

The findings from extended interviews with some historians and cultural elders in the field also seem to agree with what other sources had proclaimed about gender and spirituality in Nyabingi movement. For instance, one

¹ Administrative record; Box 38 with Ref No. 96 & Alt. No. 881 of 1926: Communications with Belgian Congo. Housed at Kabale District Archives

KII narrated that;

“During the anticolonial struggles, women were particularly associated with spirituality. This could be one of the reasons why Muhumuza being one of the women got the chance to seize the opportunity that was at her dispose but in real sense any learned person would assure you that she never possessed by the Nyabingi spirit but rather used spirituality to advance her agenda of ending gender discrimination and suppression.” (KII, Bukinda, 2020).

6. Spiritually as British Strategy of Separating the Leadership from the Membership

While Ndungusi and others managed to escape, Muhumuza was wounded, captured by the colonial forces, dispatched to Mbarara and then deported to Mengo. There followed a hot pursuit of other members in the leadership. However, they could not catch them as they had escaped into the hills. Even peasants resisted cap. Reid’s investigations about the resistance

Her return was blocked as she was a military and political threat - ‘high priestess of revolutionary religious-political cult Nyabingi’. The agents feared her political-religious powers and military attacks. Her return would mean loss of their newly acquired lucrative jobs with tributes, incomes, bribes and prestige. On her part, Muhumuza continued sending messages that she would soon return to chase away the Europeans (PCWP to CS on 4 October 1917). Fearing that she would organise the resistance through messengers, the state denied her visitors from Kigezi. It also stopped Nyindo’s herds’ boys from contacting her while taking Nyindo’s cattle to Gulu (PCWP to CS on 16 July 1917. Vide File: Historical and Political Notes [West] 1941).

The PCWP’s memorandum of 1 May 1922, asked about Muhumuza’s repatriation so as to relieve government of maintenance costs. The district and provincial administrations remained emphatic against her return until her death in 1945. The PCWP communicated this position to the CS on 25 May 1922 that the District Administration was opposed to the return of both Muhumuza and Nyinabatwa. The KDAR 1932 noted that Muhumuza was receiving presents from her people. This colonial strategy of separating the leadership from the membership had some basis. The state had realised that the return of such a deportee would be taken as testimony of Nyabingi’s triumph over the state. The 1926 incident confirmed the fears when *abagirwa* mobilised peasants on the theme that Muhumuza was returning. Hundreds of ‘people came from all parts voluntarily to build a large fence in an area 200 yards by 200 yards to welcome her back as queen of Nyabingi since her ‘Nyabingi’ had obviously overcome everything causing her return to the district - even though she had been exiled for the last fifteen years.

What threatened colonialism most was that not a chief reported it but a Roman Catholic Father. Obviously, the colonial agents feared Nyabingi, and the peasants’ wrath and vengeance. Despite objections to her request for visitors, the peasants devised methods of visiting her secretly in Kampala for initiation into Nyabingi institution and its secrets and took her presents and tributes (*op. cit.*). This made the state more vigilant against the Nyabingi Movement. The Buganda Resident, who went to Rwanda on this mission in 1939, discovered that the Nyabingi Movement was still active. The colonialists were shocked to learn that many people from Kigezi, Rwanda, Congo and Ankore came regularly to Muhumuza for initiation. They, therefore, took strict steps to stop these missions.

All these prove the effectiveness of this weapon of separating the leadership from the membership. Had she been in Kigezi, then, it would have been easier for her to effect a better organised resistance as Kaigirirwa was later to do. This dismisses the narrow view presented by the colonialists that Muhumuza was just fighting to establish herself as ruler. Even this official view had 56 Memo of the Buganda Resident Commissioner to CS on 14th April, 1939 and his report on Ruanda dated 13th April, 1939 and changed by 1941 to the view that her special aim was to form a kingdom for her son Ndungusi. The problem with such presentation is that the resister is projected as using peasants to fight and die for her personal interests. This fails to show what popular interests were being advanced, the progressive nature of such a struggle and its achievements.

7. The intersection of the spirituality and gender systems in the dynamics of the Nyabingi movement

The discrimination against women has existed for centuries, traditionally, the major responsibility of women had been to maintain the wellbeing of the family through the performance of domestic responsibilities and childcare within the private settings. Breadwinning in the public setting on the other hand was the main responsibility of men. It is through this tradition that men have become associated with the position of being bread winners. This notion of gender norms, roles, expectation, socialization and power relation has been deep-rooted in the socio-cultural, religious, ideological and institutional systems where both boys and girls has been brought up and trained to socialize in line with their gender definition. However, these gendered socialization of males and females largely excludes women from the public space.

Various studies however show that women position in the society though short-lived, it changed during the anti-colonial struggles more so under the Nyabingi movement in Kigezi in Uganda. For instance, women in this movement were defiant of such deep-rooted systems of gender discrimination due to strong superstition about

spirituality that existed at the time (Bessel, 1938). For instance, according to Crosby (1994); Fuller (1992); Rountree (1999); Von Stillfried et al (2009) that supernatural powers which were closely linked to women as mediums of communication in colonial era played a big role in changing how gender identity i.e. women and men in the society were socialized to be, in terms of their gender roles, expectations, socialization, and power relation. This is because women's position in the anti-colonial struggles, as many became leaders of the movements which agitated for more liberation not only of women from injustices and inequalities but for economic and political sovereignty too. This is because such women would easily be able to use the perceived gifted supernatural powers to foretell events and hence mobilize the troops with little ease against their enemies.

In a study titled "new age of goddess worship in new wave feminism", Kostopoulos-Riganello (2009) gives an account of why supernatural powers were linked to women in pre-colonial and colonial era and not men and why this was very key to changing the gender identity of women in the society. Kostopoulos-Riganello (2009) asserts that due to patriarchy men dominated all spheres of life including controlling the women's wellbeing both in public and private sphere. However, through being in these positions, men in most cases feared women as it was believed at the time that women were able to command the satanic powers to destroy their enemies, hence many women would be referred to using obscene words like witches, wizards and sorcerers. This helped women to play key roles in leadership positions something that was defiant to the traditional gendered identity of men and women.

Another scholar whom while carrying out a study on the politics of the goddess in bid to examine feminist spirituality and the essentialism debate, Rountree (1999) also agrees with Kostopoulos-Riganello about the linkage of spirits to women in pre and during colonial era. Rountree (1999) observes that what was initially a myth of fiction came to be a reality where women who showed peculiar characteristics were considered to be possessed with powerful demonic powers that could easily be destructive if played with them. Scholars like Crosby (1994); Fuller (1992); Von Stillfried et al (2009) states that any woman who presented any unusual attributes came to be considered as a goddess and hence many would worship her with notion that she could solve any grievances they could have. This was evident in Kigezi where such beliefs existed throughout the 19th and 20th century where they came to be a subject of interest especially in the 1890s and 1920s. Rountree (1999) asserts that despite the stigma attached to spiritualities and supernatural powers, many women who had such peculiar gifts saw the opportunity to transform their lives and the wellbeing of those people around them. This is the reason why many anti-colonial rebellions in Africa were led by women who allegedly employed witchcraft and other frightening symbol to advocate for womanhood liberation from patriarchy and other political and economic inequalities.

8. Spirituality and women in anti-colonial struggles

Initially, the women in Uganda had no space within political structures during the colonial period due to the patriarchal practices (Bessel, 1938). This gave them no space on the decision-making table or in policy formulations because of patriarchy as many of the roles were preserved to be for male. However, despite the above, women's contributions were equally crucial (Nyirahabimana and Nkejabahizi, 2016). Empirical evidence on anti-colonial struggles across the world acknowledges that women had greater roles and contributions to the sovereignty of various countries. According to Talton (2009), women were key mobilisers of various rebellions that participated in anti-colonial struggles in Africa.

Rebellions like the Aba Women's Revolt of 1929 which was purely a woman organized political rebellion whose aim was to redress social, political and economic grievances arising out of colonialism. According to Talton (2009), the Aba Women's Revolt was composed of women from six ethnic groups including Ibibio Ethnic group, Andoni, Bonny, Opobo, Ogoni, and the Igbo women of south western Nigerian. These women played a big role in opposing British rule which were characterized by forced labour, taxation, trade restrictions as well as hostility against local population. Many had no way to air out their grievances, hence just like the Nyabingi, they resorted to pose resistance by utilizing the radical anti-colonial practices and political structures to demand a hearing before colonial administration that had ignored these women for a long time. After the revolt women were later given space and some women became chiefs in local offices (Talton, 2009; Zukas (2009).

Vokes (2013) observes that in developing countries in the Middle East, Asia and Africa, women's social influence was uncontested until the fight of colonialism was over. African women in particular played crucial roles, these included; holding firm positions in agricultural sector, where they were an essential part of the economy from the labor they provided to produce food in order to sustain their combatants and families (Bouilly *et al.*, 2016). Apart from that, women also fought their enemies alongside males and sometimes they could act as advisors or leaders.

In Sub-Saharan African states, women played different leadership roles in the fight against colonial rule and imperialism (Price, 2009). Scholars like Rutanga, (2011) observed that most women were able to overcome various barriers and played crucial roles in the fight against colonial rule as their male counterparts. Kombo, (2012) asserts that during anti-colonial liberation wars in Algeria, Kenya, Mozambique, Angola and Guinea-

Bissau, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and South Africa, women were combatants, civilian activists and supporters providing non-combat services with the expectation of advancing their interests and acquiring new political rights after independence. Yet after playing such vital roles in the liberation of their countries women are still politically underrepresented in most post- liberation countries (Bouilly *et al.*, 2016).

In East African states women played a crucial role especially in rebellions such as Mau-Mau in Kenya, Maji-Maji rebellion in Tanganyika, in Nyabingi movement in Kigezi region Rwanda and Tanzania, Muhumuza of Nyabingi played different roles in the fight against colonialism.

In Kigezi region in particular, women such as Muhumuza of the Nyabingi movement who was a crucial leader, conquered the Germans in Ndorwa, in south western Uganda between 1910 and 1930 with allegedly the help of Nyabingi spirit, whereby Nyabingi's spirits possessed various people named Abagirwa to speak on her behalf. According Rutanga, (2011), the Nyabingi, as a spirit that presented itself to its followers in the form of a woman. Once it appeared to people, it would rapidly use its transformative powers to change into feminine personalities. People believed that Nyabingi would punish them with diseases, infertility, deny them marriage and cause them death to whoever refused to welcome the spirit. In Rwanda, Nyabingi Movement remains one of the most fearful supernatural powers that ever existed in the Rwandan history (Udy and Josiah, 2013).

Despite the contribution of various group of women in anticolonial struggles, scholars like Oyeronke Oyewumi, (2018) asserts that many young scholars have failed to fully document in order to recognize the roles that women played of women in anti-colonial struggles. This means that scholars need to highlight ways in which some of the historical women have not been recognized and recognize them in feminist books and journals. This is the only way women laboured for their communities needs to be paid back for their participation. This means that, gender identity needs to be positioned in its historical context during colonial struggles in Africa (Bouilly *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, an investigation into the attribute of female and their contribution in the struggle against colonial powers makes the current work so unique and relevant.

According to the findings, women played various roles during the Anti-Colonial Struggles in the Nyabingi Movement. These included; leadership roles, advisors care takers among others. This was because the movement neither constituted by one gender nor one generation. This study attempts to locate the females in this movement. It examines how the Nyabingi Movement addressed the issues of gender and of outsiders in leadership and membership. It seeks explanations for the activeness and staunchness of many women in Nyabingi's service at all levels both prior to the invasion and during these new struggles. It explores the internal reforms which were demanded and initiated during and after these struggles and their consequences.

As mentioned earlier on, women were very instrumental in the leadership of the Nyabingi Movement. This was mainly because of their leadership role in Nyabingi religion. Women took an active role in military adventures. This study also deals briefly with their role in this movement, and factors that facilitated them to play this crucial role and their limitations. The prohibition of women from owning weapons and active participation in war was premised on the argument that women were weak, lacked experience in wars and had their specified roles. A more plausible explanation seems to have lain in the question of whether men were ready to allow ownership of weapons to all sections of society. Could such a process have facilitated these other sections of society to resist men's domination and oppression or the whole arrangement was symbolic - to preserve the status of men as heads of households? This calls for revisiting the restrictions of women and children to go to forges, let alone touching the raw materials like charcoal. This, therefore, meant that the oppressed sections of society had to be protected from any external aggression. Monopolizing the protective role had the effect of legitimizing the oppressive position of men, their magnanimity, infallibility and indispensability in society.

However, this did not mean that these other sections of society did not contribute to the defense of their society. Field research shows how women and children equipped men with stones during these fights and threw stones at the enemy while shielding themselves with winnowing trays (*entaara*). Women used their staves (*emihunda*) to stab their enemies. In case of attacks, women and children could use men's weapons for self-defense. This was not directly condemned by the lineage elders as they would be defending themselves and their *enganda* from external aggression. In such instances, there would be no condemnation and no purification rites. Any defeat or victory affected all people, their economy and social set-up. In other cases, they would poison the enemy or make them drunk and then kill them with daggers (*endiga*) or other weapons.

This did not apply to *Abatwa* ethnic grouping, where all sections of society had their instruments of production which were at the same time, weapons. It was through the Nyabingi Movement and such charismatic leadership that a spirit of comradeship developed. This had the effect of sealing together various peoples in the struggle. All other practices and cultural initiations contributed to this. Another development was that women in leadership discussed with men on equal basis and commanded all membership in the fight. Combatants had realised that the issue at stake was to combine efforts of all members of society to defeat the invaders. As such, every contribution was welcomed. The role of *abagirwa* was also critical in the treatment of injuries sustained during the struggle.

It was *Abagirwa's* role to invoke Nyabingi, threaten with curses and death penalty or actually arrange the deaths of the saboteurs. The peasants who did not take up arms to resist gave logistical support in food and arms supplies, transport, scouting, intelligence, keeping secrets, making arrangements, guiding and directing resisters in movement, transmitting information, hiding the resisters and confusing the enemy, recruitment, morale boosting and encouragement and harassment of collaborators. All these contributions were critical in sustaining and promoting the struggle.

The Kivu Mission and the Boundary Commission were confronted militarily by peasant resisters. The first two main anti-colonial resistances were led by Muhumuza and Kaigirirwa. Muhumuza, mother of Ndungusi, was widow to the former King Rwabugiri of Rwanda. On her husband's death, both Muhumuza and Ndungusi got involved in power struggles against Musinga. Musinga got the backing of colonialists and took the reins of power. These events and the subsequent ones forced Muhumuza and her son to Rutobo, which was soon to be made the border between the new Ankore and Kigezi Districts. So, they joined peasant life and developed new relations with these peasants after falling from the ruling class in Rwanda. Also, Kaigirirwa came from the peasantry and was *omugirwa* of Nyabingi.

What is worth noting here is that while female *abagirwa* like Kaigirirwa were selected into the service of Nyabingi in their girlhood, got initiated into Nyabingi secrets and rites, and had more religious faith in Nyabingi religion, Muhumuza and her son adopted this religion, after leaving the palace. Their choice of Nyabingi religion was a conscious one, unlike other *abagirwa*. Nyabingi religion, became a powerful ideology for mother and son to gain legitimacy and credibility among peasants. Like other *abagirwa*, Nyabingi religion was important for them to extract surplus from the peasants through *okutweija* and *okuterekyerera* to Nyabingi and to declare war. Owing to their historical origin, Muhumuza and her son were more conscious politically, ideologically and militarily than these peasants. Furthermore, they had encountered German colonialists and European missionaries in Rwanda. Both son and mother had no illusions about colonialism. In addition to that, they had been beneficiaries of the Rwanda state and understood the need to defend land and independence.

It is no wonder, therefore, that her struggles against Germans led to her capture and deportation to German East Africa (GEA). However, she struggled and managed to return soon after. This was also the time when other *abagirwa* were mobilising peasants into resistance against colonial invasion in the whole region. These resistances led to massacres and Kaigirirwa's deportation to Mbarara. The absurd encounters of *abagirwa*, like Muhumuza, with colonial forces in Rwanda and GEA and Kaigirirwa with British forces while in detention at Mbarara were very important for their future military and organizational purposes. These provided them with insight into the mechanics of the enemy, the need to resist and methods to accomplish it.

The deportation of the leader did not cause them to disband. Instead, they became more determined to emancipate their society. They learnt more about the adversaries, their ways of life, their motives, methods of struggle and strengths, weaponry, military tactics, and protection from the weapons. They learnt the importance of mobility, retreat, broader unity, the role of the masses in self-emancipation, the need to study both the enemy and their members with a view to choose capable and dependable ones into leadership positions to keep the struggle going, as well as the need to nonscientist the members. In fact, the separation was very important to the leadership. For instance, Muhumuza's separation from the ruling class in Rwanda and then from the peasants to GEA helped to cut her ties to the aristocracy.

In a similar manner, Kaigirirwa's deportation to Mbarara was a time of reflection. It helped to cut her roots from the geographical and social environment. It was this weakness which had led to the heavy losses and massacres. Peasants would hide in swamps, bushes, caves and rocks in their geographical environment and be besieged by the colonial forces for weeks. Faced by hunger or misjudging that the enemy had left, they would fall easy prey to the enemy while trying to return. Their main problem was that they had not known that the new adversaries were skilled professional fighters. This was evident in the Nyakishenyi resistance. The colonial officer reported how a large number of rebels had become tired of hiding in the swamps and had tendered their submission, while others were following suit daily.

It was thus a time for gaining a rich experience for the forthcoming struggles, in which they were to apply most of this knowledge and skills. It also helped them meet many other oppressed people from other areas. This gave them opportunity to share their experiences about their new enemy and the need to fight to final victory. All these developments became the basis for their charismatic and forward-looking leadership in the struggles that they led thereafter. More to that, their religious and political leadership roles made them the conscience of society.

9. Spirituality, Mobilization, Followership and Muhumuza

Nyabingi Movement which was led by Muhumuza was developed at the expense of the other religions, mobilizing peasants against internal enemies and external aggressors. In its early stages, various peoples used it. As an instance, the Batwa used it to raid the peasants. These peasants gradually adopted the same Nyabingi religion to defend themselves against the Batwa, and other lineages. The oppressed peasants in Rwanda were

informed and guided by Nyabingi to struggle against the ruling class in Rwanda. In other areas like Ndurwa, some lineages accepted Nyabingi religion. Their belief in it became instrumental for their defense against the wrath and potency of other religions and lineages. Nyabingi gradually permeated deep to household levels. Most of the membership came from the oppressed sections of society. They saw solutions to most of their problems in Nyabingi.

Nyabingi gradually became important in being invoked to seal and oversee certain sensitive agreements, social practices and promises like blood brotherhood and swearing. From 1909-1914, peasants were paralyzed by the new colonial invaders. Peasants realised the dangers of this invasion and the immediate solution was a call to action. Therefore, more Abagirwa sprang up to replace the killed, or deported and broaden the struggle. During this time, recruitment was mainly based on nationalities, lineages, and groups; the Abagirwa, lineage leaders, and elders played an important role in the recruitment of membership into the movement.

At this time of the movement, voluntary joining of membership into the movement was still limited. There was mobilization with minimal organization of peasants into a sustained, coherent struggle. The peasants were still rooted to the ground like their crops, the leadership had not developed the capacity, skills and focus to create and sustain a struggle for a long period. People still struggled within their environment, in a circumscribed area. However, they did not understand concretely the basis of this invading force, its military strength and the need to make a more comprehensive military planning, organization; the need for broader unity among various eng'anda (clans) so as to resist at the same time.

Nyabingi movement reached its climax during the years 1914 to 1919. Not only did its membership increase numerically but it also developed qualitatively. There was a marked change in the recruitment process. A new leadership emerged, which was versed with the enemy and its methods of war, knew the enemy's strengths and weaknesses. They also acquired fire arms and ammunition from the adversary. It was also from the enemy that the leadership learned and appreciated the need of mass organization, intensive preparations and involvement of the population into the struggle. To clarify the above, one of the key informants stated that;

Nyabingi movement leadership under Muhumuza was characterized by beliefs in the myth that lured its followers. Among these included: The caves such as the Nyakishenyi caves in Kinkizi, Lakes such as Lake Bunyonyi, trees, songs, creeds, stones, spears and dogs. All these were perceived to be holy and that they had powers that could only be used by the Muhumuza to offer certain services including, healing infertility, repelling the curses among other things (KII, Kabale).

10. Conclusion and recommendations

The study demonstrates that women leaders in Nyabingi movement and more so Muhumuza had the opportunity to change their destiny by adopting more rational measures despite being in an irrational society. Muhumuza in particular, who was the pioneer leader of the movement is believed to have used to have been possessed by Nyabingi spirit in order to end gender discrimination and other oppression by colonialism (Ian, 2019; Bessel, 1938). However, there are conflicting notion about her spiritual connection. Despite such contradictions, her courage together with other female leaders in the movement, to some extent was able to shape women's and men's roles in anti-colonial struggles. This to some extent inspired some women to believe that what the men can do, women can also do it better. This fact was demonstrated by their leadership skills in the Nyabingi movement.

Some women got empowered, took on leadership positions and brought closer to the decision-making structures and many still gets inspired to date for the true feminism characteristics that women leaders in the Nyabingi demonstrated. However, many women are still being sidelined in both in public and private spheres because, some laws and policies that supports gender equity and equality are sometimes not implemented fully to support women empowerment due to lack of transparency in policy designs and conflicting priorities. Though, it was revealed that Uganda has attempted to develop policy responses to recognizing women's contributions in various fields, through ratification and domestication of various international and regional legal frameworks, the implementation of such policies still suffers limited public awareness, institutional and resource weaknesses.

This study therefore suggests interventions in institutional capacity-development, concurrent with awareness creation and redefinition of national development priorities. The study also recommends that there is need to for the government of Uganda, Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs), Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) and Community Based Organizations (CBOs) among other actors, to encourage and sensitize the masses on importance of women participation especially in leadership positions especially in the fields that are perceived to be for male.

11. References

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