

## 2

# The Political Economy of the Great Lakes Region Prior to Colonialism

*All able-bodied men are called upon to fight, and in such a case will wear charms, consisting small bucks horns, or small pieces of wood, round their necks. Such charms protect the wearer from death or wounds. Dances take place before the warriors set out for the scene of action and after their victorious return. Their arms are two spears, used either for throwing or stabbing, and bows and arrows. All the male prisoners are killed, and the dead have their hands and feet cut off; but women, and children who can march, are made captives... show great courage and do not hesitate to charge home in the face of rifle fire...*

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This chapter begins by reviewing, albeit cursorily, the pre-colonial socio-economic and political organisation of this region. The aim is to enable people to understand how this area was developing prior to colonialism, what major problems existed and peasants' solutions to them. It will provide a basis to study reasons that underlay the peasants' choice of militant resistance, the rise of the Nyabingi Movement, its recruitment of membership and leadership, the forms of struggles, their strengths and weaknesses and the forces that led to its defeat. It

will also lead us to understand whether colonialism was a necessary evil, the new social formations that arose from this new encounter and the consequences.

This area was inhabited by different peoples, with varying modes of production, cultures, and so on. While the plain lands like Kamwezi, Rujumbura and Bufumbira were inhabited by pastoralists and peasant agriculturists, parts of the southern parts of Lake Bunyonyi and the surrounding forests were inhabited by *Abatwa*, a roving people. *Abatwa*<sup>9</sup> and *Abanyabutumbi* had no fixed homes. Their mode of existence was predominantly hunting and gathering. *Abatwa* were also feared for raiding the peasants, looting and pillaging sprees.

Within Rwanda region, *Abatutsi*<sup>10</sup> constituted the ruling class and they hired the *Abatwa* into their forces. Both ethnic groups constituted privileged classes, as compared to *Abahutu* peasants. So, in Rwanda, the insurgent Nyabingi religion was opposed to these two privileged classes. It then added on the colonialists who invaded the GLR – the Germans (then locally known as *Abadaaki*), Belgians (locally known as *Ababirigi*) and the British (locally known as *Abangyereza*) and their local allies. The latter included the chiefs – both the pre-colonial chiefs and the colonially appointed ones sometimes called Agents, heads of clans, converts in the foreign religions and self-interested individuals.

The rest of the region was inhabited by settled peasants, *Abakiga*, *Abafumbira*, *Abahunde* and *Abahororo*. These practised mixed farming, which involved crop husbandry, rearing cattle, goats and sheep, poultry, and so on. They supplemented these with hunting, fishing and gathering (1911 BCR). Randall in the 1942 Report noted that livestock were regarded as criteria of wealth, other than rearing cattle for sale as an economic proposition, or as a normal method of augmentation of the annual income. In Reid's account, this region was full of 'food, water, milk ... thickly inhabited, the huts in the valleys and cultivation extending to tops of hills... numerous petty clans' (Captain Reid Report, 1912).

Production in this area was mainly for use-value at household level. Their main tool was the locally made hoe. The 1911 Boundary Commission Report noted:

The chief produce is *matama* (Sorghum), *wimbi* (millet), peas, beans (in great quantities), bananas, sweet potatoes and honey. Hoes and sickles are used in the cultivation of the crops. The iron for these is obtained from the ironstone found in large quantities in the hills and

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9 The colonialists variably wrote Abatwa as Watwa.

10 The colonialists also variably wrote Abatutsi as Watussi.

smelted down by native craftsmen. The iron-ore is collected and carried to the local smithy in long wicker-work baskets.

Roscoe (1922) recounted that the fields in this region:

... looked as though they were laid out in terraces and fenced. Some were planted with peas, which were in full bloom, with blossoms of three or four colours - a sight quite new to me, as I had never seen edible peas with any but white blossom. Cattle plague had not penetrated in the district ... there was an abundance of milk ... pots of milk were presented in such quantities that I had to refuse some of it.'

In his cursory observation on Kigezi, Captain Reid in 1912 reported dense cultivation, notably in the vicinity of the long swamp, with chief crops as sorghum, millet, peas and beans, sweet potatoes and bananas further north.

This sheds light on these people's production of nutritional staple foods and instruments of production before colonisation. This is demonstrated in the table below which deals with the nutritional values of some of the precolonial staple foods in this area and the newly introduced ones, which we may call *modern foods*. The pre-colonial food crops include sorghum, millet, beans, peas and sweet potatoes. The newly introduced ones include solanum potatoes (*emondi*), bananas, and the daily intake of meat and other animal products.

**Table 1: Nutritional Values of Some of the Staple Food Crops and those of Modernity in the GLR (Nutrient Content per 100 gm. of Edible Portion)<sup>11</sup>**

Crop	Calories	Protein (gm)	Fat	CHOs (gm)
Sorghum	354	10.2	2.8	72.1
Millet	346	8.7	2.9	71.2
Beans	330	19.5	1.4	60
Field Peas	330	22.4	1.4	57.0
Sweet Potatoes	116	1.3	0.3	32.8
Solanum Potatoes (Emondi)	75	2.0		17.0
Bananas	100	1.5	0.2	23.3
Milk	64	3.2	3.7	4.7
Beef	202	11.0	14.0	
Mutton/Goat Meat	145	16.0	9.0	
Chicken	200	20.0	12.0	

**Source:** *Food Consumption Tables: (Nutrition Division), Ministry of Health, Uganda. Quoted from Export Policy Analysis Unit Food Security and Export, Vol. I, August 1995, Page 4. The Table is adopted from Murindwa-Rutanga's PhD Thesis, Jadavpur University, 1999).*

Modern foods have, through political machinations, modernity, imperialist push and funding, dominated public taste. However, their nutritional status vis-à-vis the pre-colonial staple foods remain lacking. Unlike the modern people who find it prestigious and class-differentiating to eat different types of meat at every meal, pre-colonial Africans ate meat on a regulated basis. The same applied to milk.

The war against the indigenous foods came into the open when children who had been sent to colonial boarding schools became alienated from their cultures, ways of life, foods and feeding habits. They began by despising and rejecting their traditional foods. The first victim was local sorghum bread (*obuhemba*).

<sup>11</sup> NB: This table does not include all the other food values such as vitamins and mineral salts.

They, through their limited acquired foreign language named it derogatorily as *John kyankarata wanyiha ahabi* – meaning that *obuhemba* was an unpalatable food only eaten as a last resort by desperate people.

This war spread like wild fire among the young generation and they abandoned *obuhemba* and *enkumba*. (*Enkumba* is porridge prepared from raw sorghum.) The elite transformed the two types of food into curses. The stigmatisation of local food helped to create a reliable market for European wheat bread. And so, graduates of colonial education and modernity were pitted against African cultures and foods. This resulted in cultural conflicts and confusion. Those who ought to have saved their areas from imperialism transformed their people into haters of their own products and consumers of imported foods. This confirms the dependency discourse which argued that imperialism transformed the colonised people into producers of what they did not consume and consumers of what they did not produce.

In Kigezi, nearly every household had its own livestock. These were kept for clothing, bride price, exchange and home use. The colonial Intelligence Report of March 1911 recorded a lot of cattle of the Ankore type, goats and sheep (Intelligence Report No. 39, March 1911). Reid, *op. cit.* noted wide distribution of cattle, goats and sheep except in the Lake Edward area. Baxter noted, ‘cattle and secondarily, sheep and goats are the most regarded form of wealth throughout the district’. Lardner noted that they worked hard at their crops, producing peas, spinach, potatoes, and maize.

In anticipation of the peasants’ resistance, Captain Reid’s strategy and praxis was to ‘...seize all cattle and stock as the natives are loathe to part with their cattle and to requisition them would be to alienate the natives’. The value of livestock to the natives, was affirmed seventeen years later by the DC in a correspondence to the PCWP about the loss of cows which the indigenous people were incurring through forced milk contributions to the individual missionaries of CMS. He stated succinctly that ‘... the loss of a cow to a Mukiga<sup>12</sup> 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!’ He concluded, ‘A cow to a Mukiga frequently represents the savings of a lifetime.’ (DC to the PCWP on 28 September 1928).

Despite their self-sufficiency in household and societal requirements in form of food, tools of production, livestock, women, defence, entertainment,

12 A Mukiga is an indigene of southern Kigezi. Its plural was Abakiga. The colonialists variably spelt it as Mkiga.

sports, art, religion, and so on, they were still at a low level of harnessing their environment. Communication was mainly by land and water. Travelling on foot and human portage was the mode of transportation on land while canoes and swimming constituted the mode of travel on water, mainly lakes and rivers. Reid *op. cit.* recorded 60 canoes on Lake Edward, 20-30 canoes on Lake Bunyonyi and others on lakes in Bufumbira. Canoes on Bunyonyi were commended for military purposes because of their superiority and stability. All these demonstrate the peasants' resemblance to Alavi's category:

... relatively unstratified, 'segmentary', communities of independent small peasants; their economy centred primarily on the domestic households, their political system involved wider groupings like lineages and clans or the village community. ...relatively egalitarian, the peasant farm as an economic unit was reproduced generationally ... produced primarily for self-consumption, virtually self-sufficient, ordinarily self-governing and relatively undifferentiated and free from exploitation by other class (Hamza, 1987).

What needs to be noted is that Kigezi was not homogenous. Social differentiation was taking place amongst the large scale cattle owning communities. These were, however, scanty and scattered. They lived side by side with agricultural peasants, hunters and gatherers. Other classes which had emerged revolved around professionals and skilled households whose products or services were required by members of the society. This put them in positions where they accumulated wealth, by providing the required products or services. These included *abaheesi* (smiths), *ababuumbi* (potters), *ababaizi* (carpenters, carvers), *abacuruuzi/abashuubuzi* (traders), *abafumu* (medicine people), *abavubi* (rain makers), *abaibiki* (apiarists), *abambari/abagirwa* (priests and priestesses) and *abaraguzi* (prophets, prophetesses, prognosticators).

The most famous *muraguzi* was and still is Nyakeirima Ka Muzoora. He foretold *inter alia* the impending colonial invasion, the form of the invaders, their behaviours, their objectives, their technologies of power, their negativities, invincibility and the long term consequences of this invasion (Ngorogoza, 1969; Aseka, 2005).

### **Forms of Property Ownership and the Labour Process**

Property ownership was basically at household level. Cap. Philipps (*op. cit.*) described it as:

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

In his study of Kigezi, half a century after Britain had carved out Uganda and declared it its colony, Purseglove was able to grasp property ownership in land. He explained that a man owned as much land as he could cultivate and defend with the assistance of his clansmen. His explanation leaves out women, children, dependants and *abatendezi* – poor men who came to work in order to be rewarded with wives for their long term services. These too had certain property rights in land and other agrarian property, and those rights were enforced and protected by culture and members of society. They applied shifting cultivation with the use of as much land as the household could cultivate in a season, together with the fallow land that they had cultivated in the past (File District Book, KDA; Okumu-Wengi, 1997). There is the need to appreciate the scientific and practical value of this form of agriculture. It prevented soil exhaustion and degradation, soil erosion, invasion of pests and vermin, maintained soil fertility, and balanced the ecosystem. As it insured against environmental destruction, it also ensured continuity for the peasants' economic, military and social needs.

While men seemed to have the main control over land, production decisions in agriculture were made mainly by women. The same applied to matters related to feeding plans. Individuals and households owned property in form of land, shelter, granaries, livestock, utensils, clothing and ornaments, beehives, instruments of production, weapons, canoes and troughs, and so on.

Governing the people in this region was a responsibility of members of households together with *oruganda*. Though children were collectively attributed to the entire *oruganda*, still, the individual households and *enganda* were responsible for their birth, rearing, moulding, discipline, training, protection and initiation into adulthood. However, the role of caring for households was shared. Security at household level was principally the responsibility of men and elderly people. In the absence of men, women and youths took charge.

Being physical minorities, children together with the disabled people were given utmost attention and protection. It was a societal requirement for adult males to ensure that children and women were never allowed to straggle. This

applied to all, irrespective of whether the relationship was consanguinity or matrimony. It was everyone's collective responsibility to ensure their security until their safe arrival to their destination or where their security would be guaranteed. The saying was that children and women belonged to the *oruganda* (the community).

Similarly, tradition demanded that everyone had to be provided with sufficient food and drink wherever he or she was. It was a cultural imperative to offer food and beverages to whoever came to the compound. Requesting for a drink implied asking for food and beverage – normally *obushera* (sorghum/millet porridge) or *omuramba* (a potent brew from sorghum). It was taboo to deny these to anyone. Cultural sanctions to violation of this included pouring away all the food that a guest would have left in the house after taking his fill. It was feared that eating such food would cause the stomach to bulge (*obwijuranda*) and result in painful death. This has parallels with the Hindu deification and ranking of guests as the fourth god after the mother, the father and the teacher.

Likewise, it was taboo to bypass friends' homesteads without calling on them to inquire about their health. In case of haste, one would have to throw some small stones in the homestead of friends before moving on.

*Nyineeka* (head of household) was the overall controller of household property. When he/she died, his/her property would be divided amongst his/her family. This was known as *okubagana*. The brother to the deceased or his eldest son would normally take over the economic, political and social responsibilities of the deceased. In case the responsibilities were bestowed on the son, assumption of those responsibilities would accord him chance to get the greatest share of the property.

Women who had not established their hegemony in society through bearing and rearing of children to maturity did not normally have substantive ownership rights to the livestock, even to those attached to their households. However, they had the user rights and other residual rights to the livestock which would be attached to their households. They would be entitled to products of these livestock like milk, hides and skins. The substantive ownership normally rested with *nyineeka*. If a domestic animal died during *nyineeka*'s absence, members of the household would preserve the delicacies (*enyama enkuru*) for him till his return. Violation of such codes of behaviour could lead to adverse consequences including fines, separation, curses, and so on. The same applied to any woman found eating cooked meat, eggs, locusts, and so on. These taboos were taught

and re-emphasised, and sanctions to their violation constituted part of the societal knowledge.

*Omuryango* (sub-clan) had external control over land of families at lineage level. At a higher broader level, *oruganda* had external control. Both would intervene during times of conflict arising from violation of the established property rights, external threats, and so on.

We find that production was based on various factors like nature of the job, the skills and the specialisation involved, and division of labour based on age, gender, location, and so on. The BCR noted gender and generational disparities in Kigezi including household labour provision. It stated that most cultivation was done by women and children.

Polygamy was a common practice in this region and there was no limit to the number of wives a man could have. The average number of wives was three to four depending on the wealth to pay dowry. However, some had more wives. For example, Mutambuka, Head of the Baheesi Clan at the time of colonial invasion, had 27 wives. He refused to join the anti-colonial Nyabingi Movement led by Muhumuza and this forced Muhumuza to fight him before attacking the colonialists. Mutambuka sought safety with the invading British forces and his forces combined with the British forces to defeat the anti-colonial Nyabingi Movement.

Women were desired for economic reasons. They were required for production of wealth and reproduction of children. So women were referred to as *abazaana* or *abairukazi*, which literally means female slaves or women-slaves. The word *abakazi* (women) like *abakozi* literary means working people. The same report noted that 'polygamy is common ... children are desired, irrespective of sex...' A lot of children were required as sources of labour for households' social reproduction and investment or insurance against external threats, hunger and old age. Child labour was important in production of wealth, future defence and expansion of *oruganda*. There was a higher preference for male children owing to the people's production and security concerns.

The question arises whether it was possible for an average male to have three to four wives unless the population was predominantly female or whether possession of wives depended on wealth. In this region, various factors determined the mode of marriage. The whole issue revolved around the capacity to pay bride price. The bride price was commonly paid for in cattle. This was one source of increasing a family's livestock. The people had a saying which they developed into a folksong. It means he who did not have a sister would never marry (*Otaine*

*munyaanya tashwera!*). It demonstrated the socio-economic significance of girls in society and the importance of courting them. The second source of bride price was from cattle belonging to the household. This was one of the reasons why nearly every household strove to own cattle and other livestock. These two sources of livestock aided men to marry many wives.

What comes out clearly is that the more wealth one had, the more wives one could take. In addition, there was no age limit. An old man could marry a young girl. Yet, young men could not easily marry due to lack of bride price. Another explanation is that their parents would have to arrange their marriages with families that they chose after putting into consideration different factors regarding those families.

In arranging marriage for their son, the boy's family had to ensure that the girl belonged to another *oruganda*, came from a wealth family, was social, well behaved, generous, hospitable; the medical/morbidity characteristics of her family – especially madness, whether she came from *oruganda* which was associated with ill luck/misfortunes, whether she was loose, check the historical and contemporary relationship between the two *enganda* (clans), and so on. It would be after all these considerations that they would identify a man of respect to entrust with the responsibilities of a go-between or a link between the two families and conduct the marriage negotiations. This was known as *okushaba* by *mafuka* or *kateera rume*.

The young man and the young woman to marry would know nothing and, therefore, would not be party to the whole process - selection, negotiations and arrangements. This is contrary to contemporary practice where marriage is, in most cases, concluded by the intending couples. Other sources of wives included areas outside the region or picking abandoned or excommunicated women, or women slaves, or labouring for wives. This was locally known as *okutendera*.

Other sources of livestock for paying bride price included buying and exchanging, looting, donation or gifts from friends, begging, stealing and rustling and borrowing cattle on long-term basis, and so on. The saying that a man can neither be ugly, nor old has its origin in the bride price issue. As long as there was bride price, a man could marry any girl. It was not uncommon to find old men paying bride price for the yet unborn. This would be on the understanding that if the child came out as a baby girl, such a man would marry her. On the other hand, boys would marry at a much later age than girls, being restrained by anatomical and physiological differences and lack of bride price. At the same time, custom demanded that men had to take over the responsibilities of their

dead brothers or their late fathers, and so on. These responsibilities involved looking after the widows, their families and property. All these reinforced polygamy in the region. Another alternative solution was for the young men to go and provide labour for men who had daughters. They had to labour for such families for a long period before they could be paid with wives. The head of the household would then give such a poor man the oldest of his daughters or the one with deformities. The man would have to oblige. In most cases, the new fathers-in-law would give them land to construct homes and produce food for their social existence.

Besides *okushaba* and *okutendera* there was another practice called *okujuumba* which means paying the bride price for a girl taken as a wife in ambush. This happened when people from one lineage identified a girl from another lineage that one of them desired to marry. This would normally be done by daughters from that lineage who married into the other lineage. This would still have to be reflected on and sanctioned by the elders of the lineage before its execution. In other words, it was not done haphazardly. If the man's family and elders accepted her, then, a conspiracy would be hatched to marry her through *okujuumba* mode. Energetic young men would be entrusted with that social responsibility. That group would have to plan how to waylay her on her return from her chores.

That conspiracy would involve one of the daughters of their *oruganda* currently married in *oruganda* where the identified girl hailed from. After all, they were such daughters of *oruganda* who normally identified girls to be married by young men from *enganda* of their nascence. Their interest would be to have such girls become part of *enganda*. At the same time, it would be considered as paying back or revenge. Her main role would be to lure the girl into an ambush being laid by the young men from her *oruganda*. On the planned day, they would have arranged so that the cattle for the bride price would be grazed near that girl's place. As one party would be struggling to take the new bride to the new bridegroom, another section headed by old men would be driving the cattle to the home of the bride.

It was advanced that women did not belong to any particular *oruganda* as they would gradually get married off to other *enganda*. They would not, therefore, expand their paternal *enganda* through procreation and be able to defend them. This led to the bias of referring to male children as arrow bearers (*enkwata-mata*) and to girls as sorghum stalks (*ebikonko*). Sons participated in defence and other military demands of their *enganda*. They took over the roles of *nyineeka* when the father grew old or passed away. However, in addition to production of food,

crafts for home use and other services, daughters were crucial for bringing in wealth as bride price.

Women did not belong to the lineage in which they were born. Their ability to belong to any lineage was transitional and temporary. Before marriage, they belonged to the father's lineage. After marriage, they became members of their matrimonial *oruganda*. However, in the event of separation, the woman lost her identity and rights in that *oruganda*. She could return to her original lineage and if she remarried, she would assume membership of the new *oruganda*. The only important thing was that women could not get married in *enganda* of their nascence or those with which their *enganda* had enmity. The argument against marrying in one's *oruganda* of nascence was to avoid problems of inbreeding (*amatebane*). If we look at this more broadly, we find that this was also meant to prevent promiscuity and premature marriages. On the other hand, men belonged to the lineages of their fathers. They did not belong to the *enganda* of their wives after getting married.

This mobility of women became a basis for denying them property rights by some of their unscrupulous male siblings. However, unmarried women or those whose marriages failed did enjoy the proceeds from it. Interestingly, the role of distributing these proceeds lay mainly on the wives. In a situation of death of the mother, or divorce, then, her children would retain the property attached to the household. The older daughters would take over the mother's duties in production, utilisation and distribution.

On being married, the brides would have to work for their parents-in-law. When the time came for them to start an independent life, the husband's parents would give the new couple some property to start their married life independently. This came in the form of land, livestock, house ware, and so on. This was known as *okutekyesa amahega*. Though these were given to the couple, it was the wife to whom they would be addressed. She had reference and user rights but could not take them to another *oruganda*, either of nascence or through re-marriage. However, the husband retained the ownership and control rights. So, he would retain that property and not surrender it to her parents in case of failure of the marriage. In case the woman got married to a polygamous man, then, it would be the duty of the husband to give her property instead of his parents. This did not preclude her parents-in-laws from gifting her fixed and even mobile property. In case of separation, this property stayed with the *oruganda*.

In polygamous marriages, men had a roster for staying in every wife's house. They would ensure that they divided the days equally amongst all the wives. The political object was to avoid creating bases for conjugal grievances and feuds.

As earlier shown, stability in marriage was a source of women's respectability and guarantee of rightful ownership of property. This meant that such property would be distributed among their children. It should be noted that unmarried daughters - whether spinsters or those who returned to their parents' homes after their marriages had failed would be entitled to share or inherit the property attached to their mother's household. This property would be for their sustenance or reproduction.

Land ownership belonged to the *oruganda*, under direct control of *nyineeka*. However, its products belonged to the household which worked on it. The same applied to livestock. Actual ownership of the livestock would be proved when *nyineeka* wanted to take another wife, give it away, and so on.

There were cases where women headed households. Such cases included women who had established their hegemony in the *oruganda* and beyond. Such women included *abagirwa* like Muhumuza, medicine women, and so on. The main determinants included age in marriage, number of issues produced, grandchildren and in-laws, status in society (because of skills and other contributions to the society) or even widowhood. This refers to widows who were not taken on by men after their husbands' deaths because of age, status in society, and so on. They would have to assume responsibility, take direct control of their households and their actions would not be questioned or contested. Another situation could rise out of wars. If there were crises that could lead to death of men or if men went in search of food during famine (*okushaka*), then the women would take over control of the households.

Exploitation based on age was prevalent. Children were initiated and integrated into production at a very early age. They were instrumental in food production and preparation. They fetched firewood and water, scared away birds from cereals, grazed and shepherded livestock, looked after younger ones and ran errands. Drawing from this exploitation of child labour, a saying developed that the child is for *oruganda*. Everyone was expected to feed all children. Another proverb for this exploitation of child labour was that a child who accepts to run errands defecates a big mound. That means he would have so much to eat for going to various places.

The distribution of cooked food in a family was illustrative of the power relations at household level. Given their dominant position, men were expected

to play the politics of benevolence. This was an important mechanism of power which ensured the longevity of the hegemony of the heads of households. It would be well demonstrated during meal times. Before eating, *nyineeka* would have to partition the food served to him and send part of it back to the women who had prepared the meal. This was known as *okubegyera* or *okuha enjeru*. It should be noted that women slaves were never treated that way. This was because they occupied a different social position in society. If children were around, *nyineeka* would then hand some food to everyone of them before eating. This was known as *okubegyera abaana*.

The order of eating was also particular. *Nyineeka* was not expected to start eating before all those below him had started eating. At the same time, he was expected to end eating before all of them finished. He was expected to leave some food in the container for the children and those who prepared it. This was known as *okusigira* – reserving some food for the children and women. It was an abomination for a man to eat everything served him or even to finish eating at the same time with the young ones and women. This had three major significances.

The first one was to ensure that the women and the young ones did not starve. The man had to ascertain that they fed well. The second one was to demonstrate through this benevolence that the giver was powerful and had to be respected and obeyed. The source of food signified socio-political and economic power. Although the food was cooked in the kitchen, it was the man who had the powers to distribute it, and even give part of it to those who cooked it. It reflected the various forms of exploitative relations within the region - a person who never participated in the production process having the power to distribute it to those who produced, cooked and served it. The third one was the inculcation and preservation of a culture of benevolence, generosity, sharing and responsibility in all members of *oruganda*. It also inculcated a strong spirit of love and attachment within the household and *oruganda*. Through these arrangements, households ensured self-sufficiency in use-values and defence, and they maintained internal cohesion.

Mothers trained their daughters in the social roles prescribed for women. These included food production and preparation, processing milk products, making utensils, and so on. Boys were integrated into roles performed by men like bush-clearing, construction, animal husbandry, defence, tool and weapon-making and usage. The gist of this training was home control.

Seen broadly, females were initiated into roles of direct food production, and minor roles in animal husbandry like processing of animal products and cleaning the kraals. Their education emphasised subordination, faithfulness, managing polygamous life and hardships, and so on. On the other hand, male initiation was into actual ownership and management. The main tool of production - the hoe - was in the hands of women and children. While the tools of defence, ownership and discipline were in the hands of men. They included the machete, spear, bow and arrows, and clubs (*obuhiri*).

This exempted *Abatwa* and *Abanyabutumbi* who were at band level and whose main mode of production was hunting, gathering and fishing. Every member of the band must have his/her instruments of production and defence. Their conception was above religions. The fact of the matter is that they despised religions and they used it in a joking way to threaten the peasants and exact resources in form of food and drink from them.

The exploitative relations that characterised this formation revolved around *nyineeka*. Differentiation took place based on homesteads and skills. Exploitation involved women, children, apprentices, dependants, and scattered slaves – *abahuuku*, *abashumba* and *abazaana*. Desperate people from poor families or without any help would go to big families to work for food. In other cases, during wars between *enganda*, women and children would be captured and taken as slaves and wives while the men and boys would be killed for fear of revenge. Payment or remuneration in this formation was mainly in kind, in form of food, clothing, livestock, accommodation and individual protection, and so on.

It should not be misconstrued that men did not participate in the production process. They occasionally participated in cultivation, animal husbandry including herding and breeding, undertook bush-clearing and scaring away animals, hunting, trapping, fishing, and so on. What needs to be noted is that most of these duties were non-repetitive and labour intensive.

A household was not a totally sealed off, isolated production and consumption unit. Performance of certain activities of collective or social nature demanded more labour and more skills than one household could provide. Heavy duties like construction, roofing, hunting, defence, and so on required combined labour. This was possible at the level of *omuryango*, *oruganda* or beyond. Although communal labour rotated among them, ownership was mainly at household level. These demonstrated forms of property relations. Co-operation extended to animal husbandry. Grazing of livestock rotated among households. This was known as *okutaana*. In other cases, livestock would be put under another household's

care on mutually agreed terms. This was known as *okuhereka*. Co-operation was also important in hunting wild animals for self-protection, crop-protection and animal products. They jointly planned hunts and executed them, combined their dogs and nets, divided roles, and shared the meat and skins; based on the established rules. However, with the exception of *Abatwa* and *Abanyabutumbi* peoples, hunting was a complementary occupation. Co-operation was also used in cultivation, especially based on gender and age.

Jobs which required skilled labour were also based on gender and age division. Examples of men's jobs included smithing, carpentry, leather tanning and cloth-making. Acquiring such skills required a long period of apprenticeship, dedication and care. Other vital jobs included medicine and midwifery, prophesying, religious leadership and rain-making. These were shared by both genders.

In spite of their main role in production of wealth, women and children were prohibited from eating certain delicacies which were exclusively reserved for men. These included the kidney, the heart, the sternum, the tongue, and so on. Men created myths, superstitions and other ideologies around these foods. They also put heavy penalties around them to bar the women and children from challenging these privileges. They invoked their religions, gods and spirits to watch the behaviour of members of their households in all these and to punish all contraveners. Surprisingly, the established women – especially mothers-in-laws and sisters-in-laws – were the custodians of these impositions and deprivations.

These practices created and multiplied social injustice and grievances within families and society. This created a basis for various struggles, both militant and silent, divorces and separations, poisoning, and so on. This dissent became the basis for *Nyabingi* to come in on the side of the oppressed and be accepted by a big majority for both spiritual aspirations and social liberation.

## **Industry and Trade**

There was a vibrant thriving iron industry in this area. This was an exclusive monopoly of men (*abaheesi*). This was partly because it took long to acquire skills for smithing while girls spent most of the time in food production and had to be married off at an early age. It was argued that they did not want these daughters to take these skills to the families they would marry into. This would have the effect of undermining their trade and social status in society while arming the side where the woman would be married. It is probable that the men did not want

women to learn smithing as that would enable them to produce weapons which could be used for emancipation from men's oppression and domination.

*Abaheesi* (smiths) and their apprentices prospected in iron-ore, produced charcoal for the smelting and produced items for local use. Their products included tools like hoes, machetes and knives of all sorts, axes, weapons and ornaments like *enyerere*, *emiringa*, *entayomba*, *enjogyera*, *amajugo*, and so on.

This region is greatly endowed with pure iron ore. Their main product, the hoe, also acted as a measure of exchange. It was an important item in food production, marriage negotiations, transactions and ceremonies.

By the colonial invasion of this area, a locally manufactured hoe had been become a dominant tool of production and a factor in trade. It was not only a commodity but it is also a medium of exchange. As such, four to six locally smithed hoes were exchanged for one big goat while thirty to fifty hoes were exchanged for a cow, and so on.

Provincial authorities in the early 1920s reported that great iron-smelting was going on in Kigezi which was capable of development and was serving local needs... According to them, '...a large local trade in iron articles made by local blacksmiths and natives from Belgian Rwanda bring over food and livestock to barter for these articles...' (WPARs 1920-24; 1911 BCR; Blue Books, 1917-1925; Turyahikayo-Rugyema, 1974; Tiberindwa, 1973).

*Abaheesi* enjoyed a very high social status in society. Their products were highly demanded and durable. They were able to accumulate wealth through their sale. They used their higher bargaining position to get advance payment from their clients when the latter put in their initial order for the commodity. Through this mechanism, *abaheesi* were able to acquire wealth without providing the commodity at the agreed time. Accumulation of wealth would be reflected in livestock, the size of families - number of wives, children and dependents the size of agricultural output, the form of clothing, and so on.

The trade was associated with many taboos. Anybody with a history of bedwetting was never allowed in *ebirubi* (forges). The same applied to men whose male organs were suspected to be deformed as if they were circumcised.

*Abaheesi* played other significant social roles. Girls who feared the sexual act would be taken to the *ekirubi* and left under the care of *abaheesi*. *Abaheesi* had methods of initiating such spinsters and making them ready for marriage. Muscular bachelors would hold them down and make them watch the smiths as these fanned their furnace with their bellows. It was believed that after a while the spinsters would get carried away mentally by these activities and, in the process,

overcome her fear of the forge and, by implication, men. In other words, they used hypnosis to help the girls overcome their men phobia.

Their skills were also sought for beautifying girls by creating gaps between their front teeth by reshaping them. This was known as *okubanga*.

Pottery and weaving were carried out mainly by women. Carving, leather tanning, cloth-making and craft-making, salt manufacturing and the honey industry were men's preserves (File District Book, KDA). In 1936/37, the district colonial officials recorded the existence of 161,961 beehives in Kigezi. As all these trades required skill and specialisation. Families which monopolised them guarded them from other sections of society.

The people produced their own food, implements of production, weapons for defence and hunting, and they provided their own shelter, and so on. In peasantry settings, some form of specialisation and division of labour had emerged. Traders dealt in iron products, grains, livestock, salt, handicrafts, household appliances and utensils, *engozi* and drums. These people were in the process of accumulating surplus labour. Cattle owners exchanged animal products for grains and labour from peasants (Turyahikayo-Rugyema, 1974). Commerce and trade was facilitated by money in form of cowries, bundles of salt, cows, goats, sheep, iron products and/or barter form plus exchange of gifts characterised by a mode of commercial and social interaction.

The BCR reported that no trade existed in this area. This then would have meant an absence of the consciousness of exchange relations. Interestingly the same colonialists reported that these people sold food to the mission.

Although merchant capital had not yet developed, trade was in existence. This was attested to by the Kivu Mission, which in 1909 reported the presence of Greek, Asian and Arab merchants trading in European products. In June 1909, Ireland recorded that he 'established friendly relations en route by prompt payment for all food unlike the Belgians who never paid for anything'. He recounted that when peasants realised that they were being cheated, they withdrew the food supply. He was forced to exercise a rigid discipline with regards to peasants and their property by, 'just treatment of them and prompt payment of their supplies'. This underlines peasants' experience in exchange relations. By 1911, a market at Ikumba Colonial Administration Headquarters had become famous for food, honey, fowls, livestock, and so on. Colonial officials and their train paid in beads, wire, *Americani* cloth, and so on. According to Reid, other

markets included Nyakishenyi, Kinkizi, Nyarushanje, Kigezi and Rujumbura (Intelligence Reports of March and April, 1910).

The BCR acknowledged that Belgians were circulating money in lieu of barter and confirmed abundant food sales (*op. cit.*) Maj. Jack recounted that ‘food came pouring in as soon as the natives found it could be exchanged for the much-desired beads or cloth, and in the short time I was able to stop all supplies from Ankole and feed the porters much more economically and conveniently on the spot’. Roger found them, ‘very friendly, but terrible Jews who cavilled at the quality of the cloth and beads given in payment for food’ (Roger, *op. cit.*). This demonstrated their experience in choosing manufactured imports.

In the account of her experiences at Bufundi-Kabale, Mandelbaum (1957) noted that some direct barter and sale as well as some rudimentary markets existed in pre-colonial days but they were more of resorts for emergencies than part of the regular order of everyday life. She said the markets consisted of designated places and a customary time with no middlemen; everyone was either a buyer or a seller. They all went to the market because of a special need.

The most famous trade in pre-colonial Kigezi was the salt trade. Men took grain or livestock to Katwe to exchange for salt which was sold there. This process was known as *okuhonera omwonyo*. The colonial officials reported that goats, flour and other produce were brought from great distances to be bartered for salt with the caravan route through the Ruchuru Valley. Jack reported that there was a constant movement of large herds of sheep and goats for bartering in Ruchuru Valley. A packet of salt was exchanged for a goat. In Rwanda, it was exchanged for two goats.

Industrial products from Western Europe had infiltrated this area long before the British colonial invasion. These were in form of cloth and iron products. Jack noted that cloth was replacing skins, and peasants arranged their hair in long strings or festoons, and ornamented it with beads, shells, or cent pieces. The photographs of the different indigenous inhabitants of Kigezi which were appended to the 1911 BCR show all these succinctly.

### **Mode of Politics**

At the household level, men dominated the socio-economic and political life of the household. At the macro level, male elders dominated the political, social and military affairs of their lineages. This, however, did not exclude notable women and those with special skills like medicine women, prophetesses, and so

on. Areas where states had emerged experienced hierarchical forms of power, which were patriarchal.

The state did not develop organically in the whole area but was imposed from above by the colonialists. In some areas, state formation was still in its infancy. Such areas included Kinkizi, Kayonza and Bufumbira. The Mpororo Kingdom, however, had a very highly developed state structure stretching from the territory of eastern DRC to the districts of Rukungiri, Rubabo, Bushenyi, Ntungamo, Kabale, Kamwezi and Northern Rwanda. This kingdom was headed by Omukama – the king. Makobore was the last king the colonialists disempowered.

This kingdom, like all other kingdoms and empires prior to the modern capitalist hegemonic regimes of power, did not have any fixed borders. Its size in terms of territory and population depended on the capacity of the individual rulers of the time, their military, political and organisational prowess, courage and leadership skills. It should be noted that the whole of the GLR was covered with strong kingdoms. These included Rwanda, Buganda, Bunyoro, Mpororo, Nkore, Buhweju, Koki, Igara, and principalities in Burundi, and so on.

The narratives, folktales and stories, songs, self-praises, poems and other oral compositions are full of kings and queens, princes and princesses as the main characters, and they revolve around kingdoms, palaces, property, power distribution, and so on. These testify to the earlier existence of organised states. Karugire (1980) and Aseka (2005) deal with this subject in detail.

### **Politics and Gender Relations in Pre-colonial Kigezi**

Taking politics as the expression of contradictions and their resolution at the superstructural level and the relations at the economic level, it is clear the *nyineeka* was the dominant figure at the household level. Internal struggles within that social formation were mainly between husbands and wives, youths and parents, daughters and parents, co-wives, and so on, and they tended to revolve around land, the developments on it and movable property, especially livestock. In cases of fights, elders were called to arbitrate, and so on

Virginity was concrete evidence of a mother's good training of the daughter. In fact, girls who lost their virginity before marriage would in most cases be returned and the bride price would be refunded. The female culprits of pre-marital pregnancies were punishable by death. They were thrown over the cliffs. In rare cases some girls escaped before detection. They would render themselves into slavery to some wealthy men.

As mothers were expected to train and police the daughters, pre-marital pregnancies also caused controversies between husbands and wives. This could lead to fights, or even separation, and so on. In addition, it was the responsibility of mothers to teach their daughters how to behave in polygamous marriages and in face of possible sexual harassment by fathers-in-law.

A mother's respect would increase after her daughter was married off 'properly' and brought in livestock. This accorded her a higher social status both in that family and in the family the daughter married into. The proceeds derived from bride price would be attached to the mother's household. This entitled the household to the products of the livestock. Even in the process of negotiating the bride price, part of the payment would be specifically for grandmothers, aunts and maternal uncles. The in-laws were supposed to take great care not to confront the mother of the bride or visit her without prior warning. Violation of this code of conduct would lead to serious consequences against the son-in-law. He would be fined (*okutanzya ekiiru*).

Brides were expected to respect their parents-in-law and all those that custom accorded such entitlements. When a woman gave birth to children, this uplifted her position in society. A woman who gave birth to boys was accorded more honour and privileges. Special care was given to a woman who bore children. Children were a basis for giving women more land, livestock and clothing. A dutiful, responsible woman was expected to rear children, feed all people living in the compound and the guests. She was expected to remain faithful to her husband and loyal to the new family. Women were warned against engaging in witchcraft which could hurt people in that family, and so on.

In their new homes, brides were expected to be hard-working, well-behaved, responsible and faithful. The time of their stay with the mothers-in-law was for mentoring and integration into married life and into the secrets of the new family. They had to do most of the work in the household. This included cooking, making containers, and so on. This period was known as *okwarama*. During *okwarama* – which was more or less a time of probation in marriage – the couple would pass through an initiation into independent marriage life. The couple would be given land, instruments of production, pots and other household wares and utensils, including part of the containers that the bride would have woven during *okwarama*.

After undergoing this initiation ceremony, the couple would go to live in their separate house. However, the wife was expected to continue feeding the people in the whole compound, working for the mother-in-law at the beginning of the

planting season and thereafter. At harvest time, daughters-in-law had to take the first meal of the new harvest and uncooked food to the mother-in-law.

In case the wife's relatives brought provisions and presents to her, locally known as *ebitenga*, they would be delivered into the house of the mother-in-law. The mother-in-law would choose what she wanted before the remaining things would be taken by the couple. They also had a claim to the labour and protection of children and grandchildren.

Mothers-in-laws had a big say in the management of the households, and the distribution of resources like land and livestock to the sons and their wives. The older a woman grew the more legitimacy she acquired and the more assertive she became both in the home and society. Many mothers-in-law tended to be very oppressive and demanding on their daughters-in-law. It was enshrined in their custom for the daughters-in-law and sons-in-law never to pronounce the names of their mothers-in-law. This was known as *okusinda*. On their part, mothers-in-law were expected to love their daughters-in-law, counsel them, provide them with initial property to assist and facilitate them in marriage. In short, they would be taking over the duties of the brides' mothers, and so on.

However, mothers-in-law and their daughters became self-appointed overseers and informers about the wives to their sons. They counselled the latter on how to tame their wives. Thus, mothers-in-law occupied an oppressive and exploitative position, which was sanctioned by tradition.

Aunts were also accorded a high social status. They were instrumental in the marriage of the girl and teaching her some of the secrets of married life. So, they were given a share of the bride price.

There were also struggles between co-wives in big families. Some wives dealt with these contradictions using witchcraft, magic or poison. In anticipation of such destabilising, deadly solutions, husbands threatened them with *emandwa*, *esiriba*, *Nyabingi*, powerful witchcraft, and so on.

There were controversies between some women and their fathers-in-law over sexual harassment. This was not a monopoly of men. Some mothers-in-law slept with their sons-in-law. This act was called the proverbial chasing away of red ants – *okutamba empazi*.

Controversies arose between barren women and other members of the family, and between women who bore only girls and members of *oruganda*. This was proverbially labelled the destruction of *oruganda* – *okucwa oruganda*. In households with slaves, men slept with the female slaves and they bore children. This caused controversies between household members and the offspring of

such unions as they too would be entitled to property, including livestock for bride price.

There were also contradictions revolving around exploitation of labour. These included contradictions between slaves and their masters, specialists and apprentices, and prospective fathers-in-law and *abatendezi* - those who laboured to be rewarded with wives.

The *Nyineeka*'s superstructural loci enabled them to create ideologies, myths and proverbs to justify and protect their exploitative position. They initiated all brides into this relationship on the first day of marriage. The bride would then be surrounded by religions of which *nyineeka* was the religious head. Obedience was enforced through invoking gods and ancestors (*okuhindiza*) and ostracising the dissenting members (*okucwa*).

*Okuhindiza* was a religious act of invoking the supernatural forces to punish the culprits while *okucwa* was materialistic. *Okucwa* entailed depriving him/her of the right to inherit property, or to enjoy anything in the household and family. It also included denial of protection and belonging. While *okucwa* was an exclusive monopoly of *nyineeka* and other elderly people, it was assumed that the supernatural forces would be on the side of *nyineeka* to enforce this pronouncement. *Okucwa* was assumed to bring miseries, infertility, disasters and untimely death. These were major weapons that *nyineeka* could use any time to control their adult progenies. This created fear among the children and shaped and controlled their behaviour indirectly, and so on

Men resolved contradictions between them and their wives through fights, separation, rejection of the wives' food and/or refusal to enter the wives' huts. This kind of practice was known as *okuzira*. In case it was proved that the woman was wrong, she was required to appease the husband by preparing special meals and brewing alcohol, and so on, for the husband before he returned to her. This appeasement was known as *okuhonga*. On the other hand, if the husband was proved wrong, he would be asked to return to her. *Okuzira* was a major weapon that many polygamous husbands applied to control their wives. Resolutions like separation and refund of the bride price (*okuzimuura*) depended on the nature of the disagreement, judgment and the attitude of husband, the wife and her people. All these formed a strong base of discontent and tension which Nyabingi exploited to penetrate and gain popularity in this society.

### **The Clan as a Political Unit**

Clans or *emiryango* were responsible for handling larger and more important matters that transcended households. These included defence, celebrations, deaths, crises, marriage cases, property, divorce, justice, murder and revenge. They required the attention of clan elders (*bakuru b'emiryango*). These were expected to be men of integrity, who were fair, upright, courageous, articulate and unwavering in decision-making and good at defence. They had to have property and big families. Like *nyineeka*, they were not elected by all members of the lineage. They emerged through personal exploits.<sup>13</sup> They met as a body known as *karuubanda* or *enteeko* to attend to different cases and issues. Other issues included rights, migration and going in search of food, during famines. These practices demanded broader attention and reflections than those of singular heads of households.

Various lineages constituted *oruganda*. As earlier noted in Chapter One, the concept *oruganda* is broadly used by different societies to mean people of the same blood, common ancestry and destiny. Its usage denotes unity. The Alur in the Democratic Republic of Congo call it *jouganda*. The Jalu in Kenya call it *oganda*. The different bantu-speaking groups in Uganda call it *oluganda* or *oruganda*. These constructions informed the British definition and naming of the country, Uganda.

While the family would be in the same geographical location, *oruganda* was not confined to one geographical location. What united lineages belonging to the same *oruganda* were their common ancestry, totem and taboos, and common interests like production, defence and military campaigns. *Oruganda* attended to, *inter alia*, contradictions between its various lineages, organised defence for its people, and determined diplomatic relations and co-operation with other *enganda*. In practical terms, everyone was responsible for *oruganda*. In the councils of elders, even women, youths, and children were heard although they could not participate in the hearing of the cases, and judgment or in political, economic, military and social matters. Their parameters were prescribed. However, old women with skills and reputation attended. Through such processes these lineages and *enganda* were able to maintain internal cohesion.

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13 Refer to songs, stories and oral literature, Nyakeirima-Ka-Muzoora's great prophecies on imperialism and Ngorogoza, *op.cit.*