

‘They Came Before Stanley’: The *Arabised* and Antecedents to European Colonial Violence in the Semliki Valley

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Abstract

This paper stands as a chapter of a larger historical inquiry into violence in the Rwenzori borderlands. In this chapter, I specifically attempt to cast a historical light onto the presence (and subsequent impact) of the various *Arabised* groups in the Semliki Valley particularly in the last decade of the nineteenth century. The chapter is primarily informed by fieldwork (archival and ethnographic), which was conducted in four different sites of the Rwenzori borderlands, namely Bwera and Katwe in Kasese District, on the Ugandan side, and Kasindi and Beni in the Territory of Beni, on the Congolese side. Herein, primary findings substantiate the following three-fold argument: (i) to de-emphasise the preeminence of European colonial hegemony much publicised in the colonial historiography of state formation of both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), (ii) to unsettle the presentation of ‘the Arabised’ in nineteenth-century Semliki Valley as a monolithic group both in origin and in pursuit of an imperial project, and (iii) to elucidate the multi-pronged response of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century Semliki Valley dwellers to the varied hegemonic pursuits of these *Arabised* invaders. Taken together, it is this chapter’s contention that digging out antecedents to European (British and Belgian) colonial violence in this region illustrates a much more complex picture of the nature and scope of violence, which intricately contributed to the shaping of political subjectivities of Semliki Valley dwellers, and Rwenzori borderlanders more generally, at the dawn of European colonial rule.

1. Introduction

Historians of the East African coast have amply demonstrated that the latter had long been involved in the wider world of Indian Ocean trade and culture. Derek Nurse and Thomas Spear, in this vein, note that East African trade during the first millennium was largely with Arab and Persian traders from Shirazi ports in the Persian Gulf, while for much of the second millennium it shifted to the Arabian Peninsula.¹ With the rise of the First Imamate at Oman already in the ninth century, the focus of trade later shifted to Oman. It is however reported that Eastern African coastal towns were badly sacked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries by ongoing Portuguese conquests up until Oman defeated Portugal late in the seventeenth century. Thereafter, the Imamate of Oman ushered in two centuries of Omani

¹ D. Nurse and T. Spear (1985). *The Swahili: Reconstructing the History and Language of an African Society, 800 – 1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

dominance across the Indian Ocean, culminating “in the establishment of the Omani sultanate at Zanzibar... during the nineteenth century.”²

In 1820, the sultan of Oman came over to settle in the economically burgeoning British colony of Zanzibar. His settling there saw the development of the already growing plantation economy, further increasing commerce with Western Europe and North America. What is more, the increasing demand of ivory caused Indian bankers to settle in Zanzibar to finance great expeditions in search for more ivory and slaves in the interior of the African continent. Eventually, as Asian colonies—more so Arab, Malaysian and Indian ones—established themselves one after the other, on the coast of Eastern Africa, all those who came from Zanzibar archipelago or thereabouts to the interior of the continent in search for ivory and slaves were summarily referred to as Arabs once they were off the coast. Besides those hailing directly from the Arab Emirates in Asia, most of these ‘Arabs’ were indeed hybrid by intermarriage and otherwise, having settled on the eastern coast of Africa from the late eight or early ninth century—a coastal region which they colonised ever since.³ It is this brand of ‘Zanzibari Arabs’ who made in-roads into the interior of the continent in the last quarter of nineteenth century up until reaching the Semliki Valley via a myriad of routes.

In another related development, the Turco-Egyptian conquest of Sudan in 1821 set the stage for the intrusion of yet another brand of the ‘Arabs’ down the south, eventually up to the Semliki Valley. Medieval Arab travelers had called the territory immediately below the Sahara desert that extends from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea *Bilad al-Sudan*, literally meaning the land of the blacks. A number of factors prevented these medieval travelers from penetrating it. Even when Turco-Egyptian forces first established control over northern parts of the Sudan as they sought natural resources and economic expansion, its southern parts remained isolated, as they had been for many centuries, by the upper Nile swamplands known as the *Sudd*, and the forests and mountains farther south and east. But in 1841, this isolation was broken when Turco-Egyptian steamers penetrated the interior of the South, and exploitation of animal (ivory) and human resources (slaves) of the region began.

The quest for ivory and gold, coupled with slave trade, provided these inaugural Turco-Egyptian invaders—later to be generically known as Sudanese Arab slavers and traders—

² *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³ J. Fleisher “Behind the Sultan of Kilwa’s ‘Rebellious Conduct’: Local Perspectives on an International East African Town” in A.M. Reid and P.J. Lane (eds.) (2004). *African Historical Archaeologies*. New York: Plenum Publishers, pp. 91-123.

with great profits. Shane Doyle reports these invaders in terms of ‘Khartoum-based traders’, who eventually arrived on the eastern shores of Lake Albert (Bunyoro) first in the early 1860s.⁴ It is this brand of ‘Sudanese Arabs’ that liaised with the leadership of the Bunyoro-Kitara kingdom first under Omukama (king) Kamurasi Kyebambe IV and then Kabalega Cwa II in their respective bids for hegemonic expansion (including across Lake Albert) and against British-Egyptian imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century. These so-called Sudanese Arabs too made in-roads into the Semliki Valley mostly in its north-eastern and eastern parts. First arriving on the north-eastern fringes of Semliki Valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth-century, these Khartoum-based slavers (and their descendants) were rather members of the military corps of Kabalega’s revolutionised standing army⁵, the *Abarusura*.

This chapter specifically seeks to foreground the presence of the various invading groups of the *Arabised* in the heartland of the Rwenzori region in the nineteenth century. The argument here, in the first instance and in view of primary data gathered, runs counter to the preeminence of European colonial agency overhyped in the historiography of state formation of both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). In the second instance, the chapter unsettles the presentation of ‘the Arabised in nineteenth-century Rwenzoris’ as a monolithic group and so demonstrates the heterogeneity of these *Arabised*, both in their origins and imperial projects. Lastly, in elucidating the multi-pronged response of nineteenth and early twentieth-century Semliki Valley dwellers to the varied imperial projects of these *Arabised* invaders, the chapter points to the inaugural contribution to the shaping of political subjectivities of then Semliki Valley dwellers (and subsequently most Rwenzori borderlanders) at the advent of European colonial rule there.

Indeed, the last decade of nineteenth-century Semliki Valley here offers a particularly invaluable case-study, which dims the centrality of European colonial agency in the story of state and social formations astride River Semliki. In digging out antecedents to European (British and Belgian) colonial violence in this region, this chapter hopes to paint a much more complex picture of the nature and scope violence in a highly competing era that augured European colonial rule in the region. It is thus the theoretical ambition of this chapter to enrich the scholarship on violence in Rwenzori borderlands by recuperating the historically

⁴ S. Doyle (2006). *Crisis & Decline in Bunyoro: Population & Environment in Western Uganda, 1860-1955*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

⁵ *Ibid.*

shaped agency of all non-European actors—that of the *Arabised* invaders and the Rwenzori *borderlanders* (in the Semliki Valley) themselves—for a nuanced story of the unfolding of violence there particularly since the 1890s. But before delving into the gist of this chapter, two brief notes—one on the geographic scope of the study and the other on the methodology that informed it—are here in order.

Note on the Semliki Valley

This chapter takes Semliki Valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century as a unit of analysis rather than a site. This choice seeks to offer a more representative understanding of its civilisational matrix, within which different human groups exerted their survivability. Semliki Valley here remains a critically important part of the Rwenzori region, as we know it today. Centered around the Rwenzori mountain ranges—emblematically identified with Peak Margarita (5,119 meters above sea level)—this region reassembles a large area spanning from the savannah south-east of the mountain ranges to the border with Lake Edward; the grasslands north-east of the mountain ranges to the border with Lake Albert; the forested lands on western slopes of the mountain ranges; and the plains south-west of the mountain ranges traversed by Semliki River. This valley of the Semliki—also commonly known as the Graben and locally designated by the Yira people as *eyirungu*—consists of a relatively large swath of plains of 916 meters of average altitude⁶, spanning from shores of Lake Edward along Semliki River through its mouth into Lake Albert.

One of the British colonial officials in this region described this valley as cited in the inaugural field report of the first cotton inspector (Mr. Dawe) in the Western Province of the Uganda Protectorate in the first decade of twentieth century:

The Semliki Plains, which stretch from this escarpment [off the foothills of the Rwenzori ranges] to the Mboga Hills having a breath of about 20 miles, is an extraordinarily fertile country. The heat is very intense and, considering the unusual fertility of the soil, products of extra-tropical countries may be expected to thrive here, including Para Rubber. The plains could be easily

⁶ This valley is constituent of two parts differentiated by altitude: Lower Semliki (the lower part of the valley, bordering Lake Albert, with an altitude of below 900 meters) and Upper Semliki (the higher part, bordering Lake Edward, with an altitude between 900 and 1500 meters). For a detailed treatment of this subject, see the first chapter of K.T. Mashauri “Implantation Catholique chez les Yira du Congo Belge (1906 – 1959): Politique apostolique et réactions africaines.” Unpublished PhD thesis, Université Nationale du Zaïre, Campus de Lubumbashi, June 1982.

irrigated if necessary, from the Semliki, which is a swift deep flowing river, nearly 100 yards wide at the crossing of the road to Mboga.⁷

In the words of David Schoenbrun, this valley of the Semliki constitutes a prototypical case of ‘a green place thus a good place’⁸, whose ecology (climate, flora, fauna, fresh water sources, soil and minerals) eased the flourishing of human civilisation, particularly since the dawn of the seventeenth century. Historians of the Semliki Valley agree to the peopling of this region since the sixteenth century as a melting pot of diverse civilisational cultures pulled in from various directions.⁹ Thus, Cecilia Pennacini, for instance, writes that the Bashu people—who migrated into the Semliki Valley in the seventeenth century—after having colonised the new territory, they started to develop a new political system: “If previously they were organized according to clan, they now started to build a chiefdom, using some aspects of the Nyoro royal ideology...”¹⁰ In the same vein, Arthur Syahuka-Muhindo too argues that the history of the Semliki Valley peoples does dispel the myth of the disappearance of the Bacwezi and instead “demonstrates that what has been misinterpreted as their disappearance was in fact the political transformation of their conditions of existence... People belonging to one polity were forcefully drawn into another...”¹¹ Thus the Semliki Valley consists not only of the meeting point in which previously distant social formations coalesced, but the valley also formed the peripheral borderland to Nyoro (and subsequently Toro) kingdom-state.

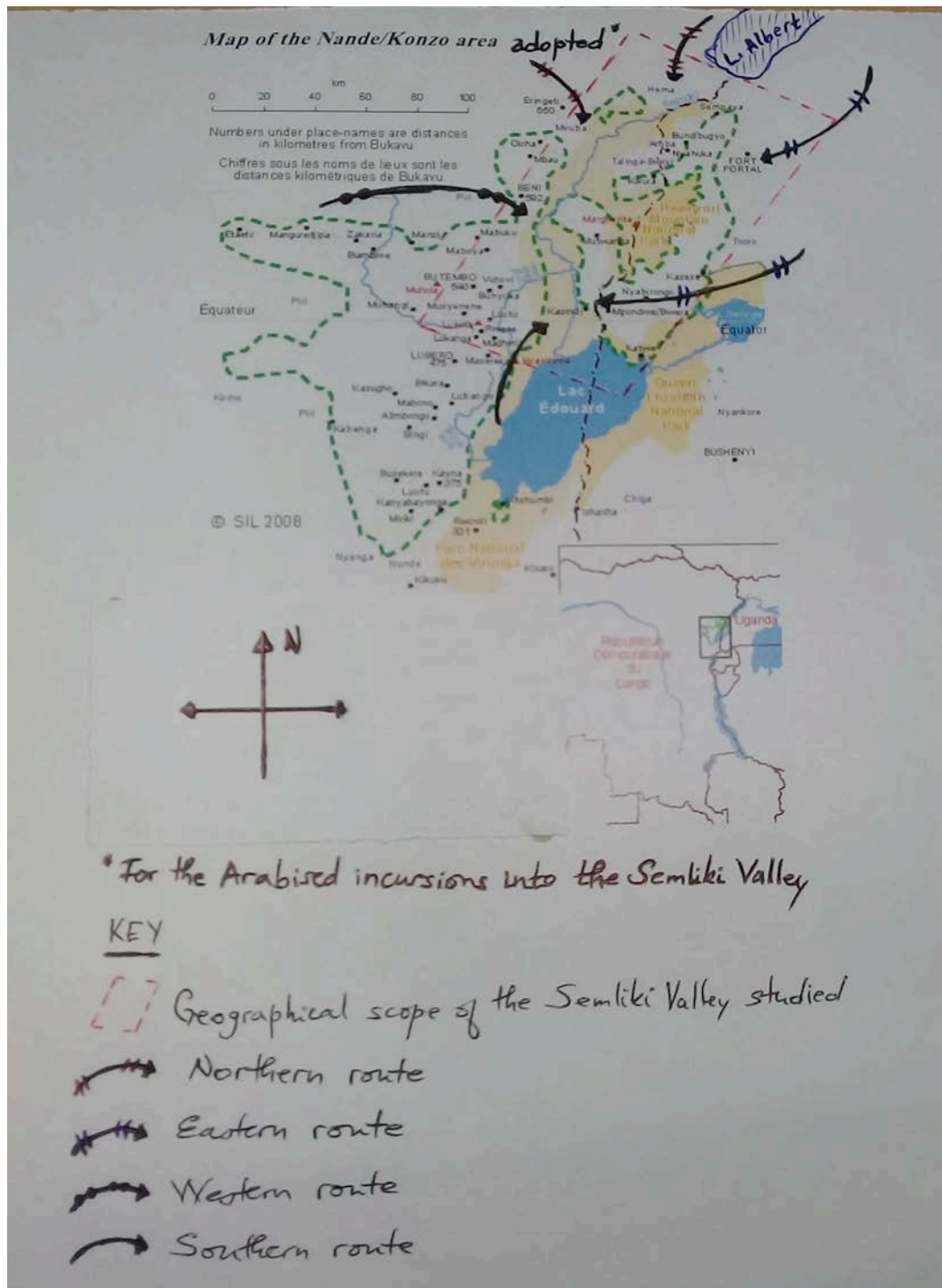
⁷ Report of Mr. A. R. Morgan, Cotton Inspector, for the Month of January, 1910. Uganda National Archives (herewith UNA): UNA-A46/52 – Cotton reports, Toro.

⁸ D. L. Schoenbrun (1998). *A Green Place, A Good Place: Agrarian Change, Gender, and Social Identity in the Great Lakes Region to the 15th Century*. Koln: Rudiger Koppe Verlag.

⁹ According to K.T. Mashauri (1982). *Op. cit.*, archaeological excavations of Ishango (a historical site in Upper Semliki, today located in the Virunga National Park founded in 1925), do present this region as the cradle of an ancient civilisation straddling the interlacustrine expanse to the east and the forested areas to the west of River Semliki.

¹⁰ C. Pennacini “The Rwenzori Ethnic ‘Puzzle’” in C. Pennacini & H. Wittenberg (eds.) (2008). *Rwenzori: Histories and Cultures of an African Mountain*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 75.

¹¹ A. Syahuka-Muhindo “Migrations and Social Formation in the Rwenzori Region” in C. Pennacini & H. Wittenberg (eds.) (2008). *Rwenzori: Histories and Cultures of an African Mountain*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers, p. 20.



Note on methods

This chapter is primarily informed by fieldwork, which was conducted in four different sites of the Rwenzori borderlands, namely Bwera and Katwe in Kasese District on the Ugandan side, and Kasindi and Beni in the Territory of Beni, on the Congolese side. This fieldwork was two-fold: On the one hand, one-and-a-half months were spent on consulting available archival materials (some officially kept by custodians of state administration at district or

territory headquarters, while others privately kept at individuals' domiciles). Important here is to note that most historical records by the Arabised groups (produced between 1885-1915) on the nature of their activities in this region and mostly available in *Kingwana* (a version of the Swahili language slightly different from that at the oriental coast of Africa) are now inexistent. These records (chronicles, including annals and diary notes of slavers and long-distance traders) were destroyed mostly during European colonists' military campaigns against the Arabised—euphemistically called 'pacification operations'. Thus, the available records here consulted consisted of those written by inaugural European colonists themselves about the Arabised (most of which available in the French language on the Congolese side) as well as written recollections by the Rwenzori borderlanders themselves about the Arabised (most of which available in *Kingwana*/Swahili and *Lukonzo*/*Lunande* languages). This part of the fieldwork therefore consisted in an attempt at reconstructing a past mostly through the device of 'history by indirect records.'

On the other hand, two-and-a-half months for this study were spent on ethnographic excavations, which consisted in (i) in-depth interviews with key informants (some purposively sampled and many others identified by snowball sampling technique), (ii) focus-group discussions with respondents identified collectively by virtue of their position/role in society. These included hereditary customary leaders incorporated in state administration since colonial rule, whose diverse recollections on the subject-matter of Arabised incursions in a certain period and place enriched this study, and (iii) targeted observations of artifacts and architectural constructions in some historically significant sites with surviving traces of the Arabised's cultural and economic presence such as in the urban centers of Beni and Bwera.

Ethnographic fieldwork here also extended to a decipherment of oral sources (in form of songs and sayings in social parlance), whether mythical or otherwise. These oral records pertaining to the presence of the Arabised in the region still circulate in vernacular languages of the region (*Kingwana*/Swahili, *Lukonzo*/*Lunande*, *Lunyoro*/*Lutoro*). They have indeed furnished incredible insights in reconstructing a not-so-distant past of this region. In a sense, therefore, ethnographic fieldwork for this study consisted in an attempt at reconstructing this region's past through 'history by ethnography' as alternate means of making for the voids of inaugural archival materials. It should be underscored, however, that these two methodological devices—'history by indirect records' and 'history by ethnography'—were

undergirded by the deployment of critical historical imagination. To borrow a leaf from Neil Kodesh, this is a no less important methodological imperative in historical research that in effect avails “possible ranges of understanding from a limited set of conceptual tools that can be reconstructed to the time and place”¹² in which historical events/stories were occurred/narrated for the first time.

Finally, a host of secondary sources (scholarly works produced mostly by historians and anthropologists/sociologists—some endogenous to the region while others were simply scholars-in-brief-residence) were also consulted in a bid to supplement the historical imagination borne of primary sources. In line with all the above, this research project has adopted a critical-historical method, following a rather diachronic as opposed to a synchronic analysis of salient events—critically selected and scrutinised for their historical validity.

2. The ‘masters’ whom Stanley found on the ground

If the African interior was, up until the dawn of the nineteenth century, a *terra incognita* to Europeans of then, this did not hold as true for Africans themselves living in that interior. Africa’s Great Lakes region, for instance, had known massive movements of human groups perennially in motion from one extreme of its eastern Rift Valley to the other in the west. Besides waves of migration that historians of the African Great Lakes region have documented from the first millennium during the epoch of the Iron Age¹³, pockets of individuals have been seasonally moving from the densely forested areas of central Africa to the savanna grasslands of East Africa for reasons including economic and cultural exchanges. Long-distance trade and trade routes from one interlacustrine kingdom to another reportedly percolated much of Africa’s Great Lakes region from the shores of Lake Victoria to those of Edward and Albert throughout the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries.

Thus, within these interlacustrine kingdoms of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries’ African Great Lakes, circulation of goods was not only done through kin relations (particularly relations of parentage), but also through a system of relays. Perhaps due to a combination of difficulties including deficits in transport infrastructure, challenging access to certain

¹² N. Kodesh “History from the Healer’s Shrine: Genre, Historical Imagination, and Early Ganda History.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 49(3), 2007, p. 533.

¹³ For a detailed treatment of this subject, see S. Lwanga-Lunyiigo and J. Vansina “The Bantu-speaking peoples and their expansion.” In M. Elfasi (ed.) (1988). *General History of Africa, Vol. III*. California: UNESCO as well as D. L. Schoenbrun “We Are What We Eat: Ancient Agriculture Between the Great Lakes” *Journal of African History*, Vol. 34, 1993, pp. 1-31.

geographic areas (such as swamplands, mighty rivers) as well as political sovereignties, commercial exchanges through long-distance trade were organised by way of what Omer Mirembe termed as ‘relayed markets’: That is, an ambitious trader could sell their goods at a market site, oftentimes a regional market site situated at the frontiers of kingdoms; from there, another trader bought them, only to resell them farther afield from that regional market site.¹⁴ Thus, the Bakira and the Bahira, for instance, had already emerged into a nucleus of human civilisation on the western shore of Lake Edward¹⁵: On the eve of the grand wave of the Bito migration south-westwards in the seventeenth century, the Bakira and the Bakira actively participated in long-distance trade by exchange of goods in regionalized relayed markets. Fish from Lake Edward, for example, could be traded off with salt then mined from the hinterland of Bunyoro-Kitara.¹⁶

By the dawn of the nineteenth century, however, a network system developed.¹⁷ This was borne of the presence of individual traders or groups of traders who organized caravans in a chain of transport, where intermediaries for long-distance trade often intervened, and traversing a myriad of kingdoms with considerable quantities of merchandise. In this networked system of long-distance trade, one could find professional guides, path-takers/passers who had mastered all commercial routes from one budding end to the other, and who were well versed with the climatic conditions, topography and possibilities for replenishments. It is this networked system of long-distance trade within Africa’s Great Lakes region that the so-called Arab traders and slavers—here best described by the adjective nomenclature of *Arabised*—in the second half of the nineteenth century grafted onto their caravan-trade practiced on the oriental (Red Sea and Indian) coastline of the African continent. It is also no exaggeration to posit that this extant networked system of relayed markets greatly contributed to the expansion of the Swahili linguistic area in the interior of East Africa.

The first European to penetrate into the Rwenzori region markedly was the famous journalist-cum-explorer Henry Morton Stanley. This was during his last expedition of 1887-9 across

¹⁴ O. K. Mirembe “Échanges transnationaux, réseaux informels et développement local: Une étude au Nord-Est de la République démocratique du Congo.” Unpublished PhD thesis, Université Catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve, June 2005.

¹⁵ K. Kangitsi “La Légitimité du Pouvoir Coutumier: Conflits Politiques chez les Bashu et les Baswagha de la Tribu des Wanande du Nord-Kivu (1800-1983).” Unpublished post-graduate dissertation, Department of History at the *Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Kananga* (ISP-Kananga), December 1985.

¹⁶ A. Syahuka-Muhindo (2008). *Op. cit.*

¹⁷ O. K. Mirembe (2005). *Op. cit.*

central Africa in company of one Lt. Stairs. On his return voyage Stanley came along with the Jewish-turned-Muslim former governor of then Egyptian province of Equatoria, Emin Pasha. It is Stanley who ascribed the name ‘Semliki’¹⁸ to the otherwise known River *Kalemba*, which connects Lake Edward (another European naming) and Lake Albert (also otherwise known as *Mwitanzige*). He also spotted the famous snow-capped mountain ranges (romantically described since the times of antique Greek astrologist, Claude Ptolemy as Mountains of the Moon) and baptized them *Ruwenzori*. In his *In Darkest Africa* (1890), Stanley vividly narrates:

Ruwenzori...from its mantle of clouds and vapours, and showed its groups of peaks and spiny ridges resplendent with shining white snow; the blue beyond was as that of ocean—a purified and spotless translucence. Far to the west, like huge double epaulettes, rose the twin peaks which I had seen in December, 1887, and from the sunk ridge below the easternmost rose sharply the dominating and unsurpassed heights of Ruwenzori proper, a congregation of hoary heads, brilliant in white raiment.¹⁹

But Stanley’s penetration into this region was certainly not the first-ever intrusion of a distant foreigner into the region. On the one hand, the intrusion of the Arabised *Abarusura* (hitherto known as Khartoumers)—who constituted an important part of the military corps of Kabalega’s standing army in the 1870s and 1880s—had already left a huge footprint on different social formations in the lower Semliki Valley. Indeed, thanks to these Khartoumers (former Karthoum-based slavers), Kabalega expanded his suzerainty to the western shores of Lake Albert (Bulega) and lower-stream River Semliki (Mboga) among other nineteenth-century Bunyoro-conquered territories.²⁰ The intrusion of Arabised *Wangwana* (hitherto known as Zanzibaris), on the other, in the Semliki Valley is recorded to have taken deep roots towards 1890—with the formal implantation of their forts and stations—though a great deal of what came to be known by 1885 as the Congo Free State (Belgian King Leopold’s colony in Central Africa), particularly in the east, was already at the mercy of these *Wangwana* since 1860.²¹ Thus, Semliki Valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century witnessed the unsolicited coming of Arabised-led groups—northerners (Kharthoumers) and easterners

¹⁸ K.T. Mashauri (1982). *Op. cit.* presents an extensive discussion over how the word ‘Semliki’ came to appear in Stanley’s field notes and eventually in his published book.

¹⁹ H.M. Stanley (1890). *In Darkest Africa or the Quest, Rescue and Retreat of Emin, Governor of Equatoria*. Vol. II. New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, p. 231.

²⁰ J.W. Nyakatura [1947]. *Abakama (Kings) of Bunyoro-Kitara* [trans. T. Muganwa]. Kisubi: Marianum Press.

²¹ P. Ceulemans, (1959). *La Question arabe et le Congo (1883-1892)*. Brussels: Ets. G.I.B.

(Zanzibaris) only united in character by plunder, yet differentiated in pursuits of their respective imperial projects.

The implantation of the Arabised in the Semliki Valley

Characteristic of all the Arabised groups that set strongholds in the Semliki Valley was Islam: for having adopted in the first place the Islamic religion and mores, these Arabised invaders were *de facto* Islamised. Ugandan historiography of the Arabised presence in much of its western part (Bunyoro-Kitara) underscores the apex of Kabalega's reign whose *Abarusura* standing army had been greatly significantly *Arabised* thanks to Kabalega's welcome of "significant numbers of deserters from Egypt's Equatorial army [made of former Khartoum-based slavers] who improved the [Abarususa] regiments' training and discipline."²² Congolese historiography, in counterpart, only alludes that Zanzibari caravan traders—with usury credits from Indian bankers—reached the shores of Lake Tanganyika by 1840.²³ In 1860, they were at Nyangwe on the shores of rivers Lualaba and Kasongo (both of which tributaries to the Congo River to its east bank), and in 1883, they reached the shores of rivers Aruwimi and Itimbiri (in today's Ituri Province in upper-eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo).²⁴ Structurally organised, each of the Zanzibar-originating Arabised expeditions in the hinterlands of the continent was top-headed by the supreme chief (who directly hailed from the coast, Zanzibar or nearby) around whom gravitated two sets of secondary chiefs: the Ngwana and the Ruga-Ruga. While to these *Wangwana* was granted the responsibility of leading caravan-trade, guarding forts and opening up other commercial annexes in conquered territories, to the *Ruga-Ruga* was the task of conquering new territories and increasing the numbers of slave recruits²⁵. The term 'Ngwana' particularly came to designate the Arabised from the interior of the continent, closely associated to the Arabised supreme chief (his master) and whose adaptation of certain practices and behaviours such as circumcision, dress code and eating depicted a sense of 'being civilised'. Thus, *Wangwana*

²² S. Doyle (2006). *Op.cit.*, p. 56.

²³ J-L. Vellut "Réflexions sur la Question de la Violence dans l'Histoire de l'Etat Indépendant du Congo" in P.M. Mantuba-Ngoma (ed.) (2004). *La Nouvelle Histoire du Congo: Mélanges eurafricains offerts à Frans Bontinck, C.I.C.M.* Paris: L'Harmattan, pp. 269-287

²⁴ L. K. Kangitsi and K. Kikonde "L'exploitation de l'Est de la République Démocratique du Congo de l'époque arabe à nos jours, source de conflits et des violations des droits humains." *Revue Trimestrielle du C.R.A.P. – G.L.*, No 01/Juillet 2010, pp. 32-64.

²⁵ A detailed treatment of this subject is found in the two books of one former colonial catholic missionary, Fr. Renault: One published in 1887 with the Société Française d'outre-mer, *Tippo-Tip, un Potentat Arabe en Afrique centrale au XIXe siècle*, and the other published in 1988 with the Edition Afrique Centrale, *Lavigerie, l'esclavage africain et l'Europe 1868-1982*.

came to signify a group of those ‘liberated and civilised’ in opposition to *Washenzi* who were still considered ‘uncivilised’ for not having been Islamised enough. Indeed, as it can be noticed, nineteenth century racism in the heart of Africa was not an affair of European colonists alone; it undoubtedly consisted of a shared fabric of colonisation, much present among the Arabised imperialists as well.

Although commercial rapports of the Arabs with the coasts of the Indian Ocean predate Islam, religio-political refugees as well as merchants who hailed from the Arabian and Persian gulfs in the seventh century transplanted it there from the seventh century onwards. They thus founded, among many other eastern African coastal settlements, Mogadishu, Lamu, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Comoros and Kilwa in the late eight or early ninth century.²⁶ By the ninth century, it is reported that the town-states of Zanzibar, Kilwa and Comoros were totally Islamised. But it was only in the nineteenth century that the descendants of these Arabs (now the Arabised), already fully implanted on the African coastline of the Indian Ocean, penetrated the interior of the African continent. They eventually reached the shores of Lake Tanganyika at Ujiji and Tabora in 1840²⁷, from where they proceeded to cross important tributaries of the Congo River to its east bank in 1860.²⁸

Thus, Hamed Mohamed el-Murjebi, who hailed from the Islamised isle of Zanzibar, is credited to have led the expedition of the Arabised slavers and traders into eastern Congo—an expedition that introduced Islam into that region in the middle of the nineteenth century²⁹. This Zanzibari conqueror was nicknamed *Tipo Tip*, after the sound of his muzzle-gunshots. His later collaboration with King Leopold’s colonial agents in the Congo in the last decade of the nineteenth century, briefly earned him the position of Governor of the Falls District to where his expedition’s influence had greatly spread. Here, it can be noted that by the time Stanley founded station of Stanley-Falls (Kisangani)—the first-ever colonial station in the east of King Leopold’s Congo—in 1883, el-Murjebi’s invading forces that roamed much of would-be eastern Congo Free State had already constituted a contending dynamic to reckon with for any attempt at state formation by European colonial power in the wider region. As they unfolded, these Arabised expeditions were characterised by the hunt for slaves, ivory as

²⁶ J. Fleisher (2004). *Op. cit.*

²⁷ L.K. Kangitsi and K. Kikonde (2010). *Op. cit.*

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ For a detailed engagement with this subject, see H. Adan (1983). *L’Arabe et le Swahili dans la région du Zaïre: Etude islamique, Histoire et Linguistique*. Paris: Sedes.

well as other precious commodities and foodstuffs.³⁰ By enfranchising former slaves—who became known as *Wangwana*³¹—the leaders of these Arabised expeditions boosted not only their rank-and-files but also the leadership clique for their next expeditions in unconquered territories. Along these Wangwana were the *Ruga-Ruga*³², subaltern leaders to and outsourced by the Arabised chiefs of expeditions, to whom the latter granted guns particularly for the hunt of more slaves. Hence, as the grand settlements among European colonial powers were being reached at the Berlin Conference in 1885, Arabised slavers and traders were busy gaining much ground in the interior of the African continent.

Four grand routes led to the incursion of the Arabised slavers and traders into the Semliki Valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century: the northern, western, southern, and eastern routes. Indeed, prior to the arrival of Arabised slavers and traders in this specific region, the latter had been organised by a politico-administrative, economic and socio-cultural set-up mirroring that of the hinterland of seventeenth-century Bunyoro-Kitara from where a considerable wave of migrations into the Semliki Valley issued.³³ Politically organised in form of clan confederations, the relations among these human groups that peopled the Semliki Valley from the second half of the seventeenth century through the nineteenth were at times convivial and frosty, if adverse, at others. But who peopled the Semliki Valley in the nineteenth century prior to the arrival of the Arabised invaders? By the dawn of the nineteenth century, seven differentiated groupings³⁴ occupied this region: the Bambuti-Basumba, the Bayira-Banande, the Bapakombe, the Bambuba, the Babira, the Bapiri, and the Balese. Later in the last quarter of that century came in other differentiated groupings in very small numbers who included the Sudanic-speaking Lendu and Ngiti and

³⁰ Information collected from a focus group discussion (FGD) with four elders in Beni Town, 03.04.2018

³¹ Information collected from an in-depth interview with one descendant of the Arabised invaders in Bwera, 05.04.2018

³² *Ibid.*

³³ R. Packard (1981). *Chiefship and Cosmology: An Historical Study of Political Competition*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

³⁴ For a detailed treatment of this subject, see A.K.N. Waswandi, "Mariage dans son Symbolisme Royal: Problématique du Mariage Chrétien chez les Banande du Zaïre." Unpublished MA thesis, Université Catholique de Lyon, June 1977 as well as K.L.-L. Kasay, "Dynamisme Demo-Geographique et Mise en Valeur de l'Espace en Milieu Equatorial d'Altitude: Cas du Pays Nande au Kivu Septentrional, Zaïre." Unpublished PhD thesis, Université de Lubumbashi, July 1988.

the Bantu-speaking Bira. Of all these culturally differentiated groups, the Bayira-Banande occupied a pride of place, especially by way of their demographic strength.³⁵

Thus, the arrival of Arabised traders and slavers into this region encountered an already complex political, economic and socio-cultural set-up, which no doubt shaped their subsequent interventions: diplomatic-collaborative or confrontational-coercive. There was, for instance, collaboration with local chiefs Mbene³⁶ (who then reigned over the locality of Beni in the 1890s) and Aluta³⁷ (in the locality of Malese), while confrontation characterized the relationship of the very Arabised invaders with other autochthone chiefs in other localities during the same decade. The Swagha Chief Mbene, in fact, is alleged to have extended a warm welcome to the Arabised invaders from Mawambi (north-west of Beni Territory) and even availed himself and his entire entourage to serving them. Only at the launch of the anti-Arabised military campaigns by King Leopold's colonial agents towards the second half of the 1890s did Chief Mbene switched his alliance to the new occupying force.³⁸

a) The northern route

The first Arabised in this region are reported to have undertaken the northern route, between the years 1885 and 1895³⁹. These, it is further reported, were escorted into the Bira, who then entertained frosty relations with the Yira-Nande.⁴⁰ Having hitherto arrived in the then District of Ituri (adjacent to Lake Albert in the Congo), these Arabised sought to expand their sphere of influence and so descended into the Semliki Valley, in company of allied autochthone chiefs (Bira), who were not unfamiliar to the region. From Irumu in the district of Kibali-Ituri where their invasion of the heartland of the Semlii valley started, these Arabised slavers and traders were superintended by three commandants, namely Kirundu, Said bin Abed, and Kibonge (also known as Hamed bin Ali). Of these three commandants, Kibonge is reported to have been the most powerful⁴¹; his hegemonic influence extended to the forested areas on

³⁵ K. Muwiri and K. Kambalume (2002). *Identité culturelle dans la dynamique du développement*. Bruxelles: Academia-Bruylant.

³⁶ Information collected from an FDG, *supra* note 29.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ Archives du Territoire de Beni (hereafter ATB [Official Archives of Beni Territory]): Registre de Renseignements Politiques (hereafter RRP) No. X, 1927-29.

³⁹ Information collected from an in-depth interview with a notable customary leader in Beni Town, 04.04.2018.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ ATB: RRP/No. I, 1906-13.

the western slopes of Rwenzori Mountains as well as the lowlands of Boga adjacent to the confluence of Semliki River with Lake Albert. In their descent into the valley, they did carry out macabre massacres targeted at all their non-allied, especially the Yira-Nande confederations.

Once deep into the valley, they established a military garrison, inside which “counted some five hundred guns.”⁴² This Arabised expedition via the northern route into the Semliki Valley was led by one *Ngwana* commandant named Manala who in turn received his order the Arabised chief commandant, Kilonga-Longa residing in Mawambi in the District of Ituri (then part of Oriental Province)⁴³. Both Manala and Kilonga-Longa were acolytes of and thus ordered by Kibonge in hierarchy. To Manala was added another commandant named Mafuta, who reportedly hailed directly from Zanzibar, and with whom he carried bloody sackings throughout the territory of Beni up until they established the trading station of Matongo at the heart of that territory.⁴⁴ Matongo as an important Arabised station thus grew from being an inaugural fort stocked with some 500 guns to a fully-fledged station of Arabised invaders from this northern route. Following the capture of Kibonge by Belgian Lieutenant General Henry Josué in June 1894, it was Kilonga-Longa who became de-facto leader of all the Arabised invaders west and south of Semliki River.⁴⁵ Under his commandment, these Arabised invaders first subdued Chief Mugheni of the Batangi-Mbau⁴⁶ (northern part of Beni Territory) before descending to the chieftainships of Basu and Baswagha where they did carry repeated odious raids.⁴⁷

What is more, Charles Stokes became the second person of European descent, after Stanley, to mark this region with an important footprint. He was a South African of British origin, who travelled in the German-controlled zone of influence and under the banner of a member of the Church of England Mission.⁴⁸ Stokes was in effect purchasing ivory tusks in exchange of firearms and ammunitions. He was first allied to the Arabised slave traders based in Beni;

⁴² A. P. Muli “Les Incursions des Arabisés et leur Impact en Territoire de Beni de 1890 à 2007.” Unpublished post-graduate dissertation, Institut Supérieur Pédagogique de Bunia (ISP-Bunia), August 2008, p. 36.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Information collected from an in-depth interview, *supra* note 38.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Information collected from an FGD, *supra* note 29.

⁴⁷ Information collected from an in-depth interview with a prince of Basu chiefdom in the town of Butembo, 31.03.2018.

⁴⁸ K.T. Mashauri (1982). *Op. cit.*

that is why he reached Makala (Irumu) where he got in touch with Kibonge.⁴⁹ For Kibonge had grown into being an uncontested sovereign over slaves and ivory from Irumu to Boga (lower Semliki Valley), Stokes eventually reached to him between the end of 1892 and early 1893 in quest for ivory purchases: a barter trade of his German-made Mauser firearms against Kibonge's ivory sealed the two men's association.⁵⁰ By the time of his capture by Belgian Lieutenant General Josué Henry in 1894, Stokes had erected a fort of military arsenal in Beni, guarded by a 400-armed Arabised men force with German-made Mauser firearms.⁵¹ With his armory located in Beni, Stokes was caught up in the anti-Arabised military operations under Belgian Commandant Lotaire in Makala in 1894; he was hastily hanged.⁵² Kibonge himself was captured in the same military operation and eventually died in Mukupi.⁵³

b) The southern route

The second route by which Arabised reached the Semliki Valley was southern. These are reported to have come from the Territory of Walikale⁵⁴ in the south. They in turn had reached Walikale from Maniema⁵⁵, which then had been the most Islamised Province in eastern Congo. Their first sackings are reported to have targeted the Batangi and Bamate in Lubero Territory in the first years of the 1890s.⁵⁶ The brutality of their massacres has been memorialised by oral tradition both in localities of Lubero as well as other sites to where descendants of those who survived fled in refuge.⁵⁷ Heading this southern-route expedition was one of Kibonge's acolytes named Lukundula.⁵⁸ When King Leopold's colonial agents arrested Kibonge during the so-called pacification campaigns, Lukundula who had settled in Walikale (south of Lubero Territory) carried on with the raids in the entire area south of Lubero River (Lubero)⁵⁹. Upon their arrival in the Semliki Valley, these Arabised invaders

⁴⁹ Information collected from an in-depth interview, *supra* note 46.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ ATB: RRP/No. VI, 1908-1913.

⁵² Mashaury (1982). *Op. cit.* also corroborated with information collected from an in-depth interview, *supra* note 46.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Information collected from an in-depth interview with an elderly historian in the town of Beni, 03.04.2018.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Information collected from an FGD with four village heads in Isale-Bulambo, Basu Chiefdom, 28.03.2018.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ K. Kangitsi (1985). *Op. cit.*

made alliances with two other traders who too had made in-roads in the region around the same time: Maboko, an ivory-and-slave trader and Stokes, an ivory-and-arms dealer.⁶⁰

Maboko is reported as the son and heir of Chief Kalekwenzi⁶¹, a former Tutsi subject in the Kingdom of Rwanda under King Musinga. Upon his capture and detention at Mawambi by the anti-Arabised military campaigns of King Leopold's colonial agents in the region in 1894 and his death a year later⁶², Kalekwenzi got replaced by his son Maboko, who, fearing a subsequent arrest akin to his father's, relocated south into the Mitumba mountains at Bilingate where followers of his father joined him.⁶³

c) The western route

The penetration of the Arabised into the Semliki Valley by the western route reportedly issued from their previously established station of Epoto on the shores of River Ituri.⁶⁴ It has been documented that the station of Epoto, not far away from Mawambi, served as a rear base for some important Arabised expeditions in the territories of Mambasa and Beni. The nicknamed Arabised chief Tippo Tip and his nephew Rashid are said to have commanded the expeditions that led to the creation of the station of Epoto.⁶⁵ At Epoto from where this penetration into the Semliki Valley began, a 250-personnel, including men, women and children with some 90 guns made in-roads in the valley under the commandment of the Arabised chief Kilonga-Longa, who too reported to one Obed Bin Salim of Nyangwe Station in Maniema.⁶⁶ Chief Kilonga-Longa was also deputised by other lieutenants who included Yuma, Musafiri, Alafu and Abdallah—majority of whom were Arabised Kusu and Tetela tribesmen.⁶⁷ Once in Mambasa in then Oriental Province, this expedition took different

⁶⁰ *Supra* note 55.

⁶¹ K.T. Mashauri (1982). *Op. cit.* writes that Kalekwenzi was headquartered at Katwe from where he wielded considerable influence over the whole area spanning Upper Semliki (Busongora). In there, he had deployed his *nyampara* (governors) throughout all conquered territories of Busongora where he was eventually assured of monopoly of ivory by 1890. Goods that consisted of ivory and slaves were collected by these *nyampara* and then channeled to Katwe and from there to Ankole. There, Kalekwenzi sold his goods to Charles Stokes in exchange of firearms and ammunitions. Only later did Stokes penetrated the Semliki Valley where he found his death in 1894.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Supra* note 55; also corroborated in A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

⁶⁴ *Supra* note 53.

⁶⁵ A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

⁶⁶ *Supra* note 53 and also corroborated in M.M. Mbonzo "Les Banande-Kainama dans la Problématique d'Integration Ethno-Politique et Administrative de la Zone de Beni, 1894-1993." Unpublished postgraduate dissertation, Institut Supérieur Pédagogique – Bunia (ISP-Bunia), December 1994.

⁶⁷ A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

directions. One part headed to the localities of Mandima and Mawambi (to the east) while the other penetrated the territory of Beni by the west. These Arabised slavers who invaded the Semliki Valley from the western route are said to have aided by one Muliamba⁶⁸ in terms of providing them with direction to navigate the rather steep topography west of the Semliki Valley. In Beni Territory, this expedition first devastated the chieftaincy of Malese⁶⁹ under the autochthone chief Aluta, where these Arabised invaders carried out massive pillages and macabre kidnappings.

d) The eastern route

The Arabised incursions into the Semliki Valley by the eastern route is the least documented yet seems to have predated the 1890s. A considerable cohort who marched this eastern route hailed from the (in)famous Egyptian province of Equatoria. John William Nyakatura writes that between 1824 and 1827 Egypt under the rule of Mehemet [Mohamed] Ali conquered the Sudan and incorporated it as part of Egypt, and successive Egyptian governments since then began to cherish hopes of extending their tentacles further south as far as Bunyoro-Kitara and Buganda.⁷⁰ It was the Egyptian government of Khedive Ismail that sent Sir Samuel Baker in 1872 with the mission of annexing all the areas south of Khartoum to Egypt. Later, following the failure of Baker's mission, the same Egyptian government sent General Charles Gordon, and finally Emin Pasha, who was headquartered at Gondokoro as Governor of the Equatoria Province up until the illustrious Mahdist revolt in 1881.⁷¹ This province had hitherto comprised areas directly south of Khartoum in the north, the enclave of Lado in the centre and the areas situated astride Nile River—the districts of West Nile and Gulu in northern Uganda, as well as the territories of Djugu and Mahagi on the western shores of Lake Albert in upper-eastern Congo—to the south.⁷² Emin Pasha, in addition to having about 1,500 male servants, women and children who were all Muslim, had built “an army of about two thousand, made up of... people of Arab-African parentage (the descendants of the African slaves who had been captured by the Arab slave traders), and Nubians.”⁷³ This army is remembered for its ruthless treatment of inhabitants of the areas it occupied and through

⁶⁸ M.M. Mbonzo (1994). *Op. cit.*

⁶⁹ *Supra note 55.*

⁷⁰ J. W. Nyakatura [1947]. *Op. cit.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² Information collected from an interview with an elderly historian in the town of Bwera, 03.05.2018.

⁷³ J.W. Nyakatura [1947]. *Op. cit.*, p. 114.

which it passed. Ironically, Emin Pasha's army was purposed for the eradication of slave trade throughout Equatoria until 1885 when the Mahdists sacked Khartoum, and for four years Emin Pasha with his army were besieged by the Mahdists at Wadelai on the west bank of the White Nile.

Once in the Semliki Valley from the eastern route via the West Nile, these Arabised rank-and-files of the defeated army of Emin Pasha earned the nickname of 'Songa-Songa' by the autochthonous populations in this valley, for their ferociousness vis-à-vis their captives, coupled to their lust for amassing vast amounts of ivory in the Virunga plains (mid-stream Semliki).⁷⁴ With the Mahdist take-over of the Sudan, slave trade coupled with the quest for ivory went booming in the southern parts of former Equatoria Province through the Semliki Valley (no less endowed with ivory tusks). Within a short while in the last decade the nineteenth century, these *Songa-Songa* became competing sovereigns in the hilly localities of Muramba, Ighaviro, Masambo, Rugetsi, Mutwanga and Mwenda in the counties of Ruwenzori and Busongora.⁷⁵ These *Songa-Songa* invaders were added to the equally notorious *Abarusura*—most of whom former Sudanese slavers (Khartoumers) who got recruited into Kabalega's standing army for Bunyoro expansionist policy.⁷⁶ Since 1872, Kabalega desired massive acquisition of guns from all long-distance traders—whether Zanzibaris (easterners) and Khartoumers (northerners)—in exchange for ivory. Thus, in his bid to ensure larger possessions of ivory Kabalega relied on mercenaries⁷⁷ (mostly northerners) incorporated into his standing army for aggrandizement of Bunyoro by conquest: In addition to expanding into Acholi, Alur and Bulega chiefdoms, Mboga too, in the northern fringes of the Semliki Valley, "had been heavily raided and then fully incorporated into Bunyoro in early 1886."⁷⁸

In fact, on his return journey accompanied by Emin Pasha rescued from besiegement by the Mahdists, Stanley confronted these *Abarusura* in the Semliki Valley adjacent to the Rwenzori Mountains in April 1889, aided with 1500-armed porters, whom he had acquired from his

⁷⁴ Information collected from a FGD with three Nande customary leaders in the town of Kasindi, 05.04.2018

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Supra* note 71.

⁷⁷ E. I. Steinhart (1977). *Conflict and Collaboration in the Kingdoms of Western Uganda*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

⁷⁸ S. Doyle (2006). *Op. cit.*, p. 50.

brief passage in Buganda.⁷⁹ The battle for Stanley-Emin Pasha safe passage through the Rwenzori region—from the plains of River Semliki to Busongora and Katwe, lasting three months—bore further strain on then Rwenzori borderlanders.⁸⁰ The defeat of the *Abarusura* by Stanley's armed caravan notwithstanding, the two Arabised groups (*Songa-Songa* and *Abarusura*) had earned the highest level of notoriety of all the Arabised in the Semliki Valley, for their heinous acts inflicted on the conquered autochthones irrespective of age and sex.⁸¹

Meanwhile, Kalekwenzi who allegedly had left his original residence (on the shores of Lake Bayonda) for Katwe by crossing River Ufumbira then proceeding to Kitameko in the northern part of the territory of Rutsuru (eastern Congo) from when he penetrated then Kingdom of Ankole (southwestern Uganda) following the right-side shoreline of Lake Edward. While at his new residence in Katwe, Kalekwenzi was a confident collaborator with King Kabalega Cwa II of Bunyoro-Kitara, who placed him as superintendent of the far-southwestern part of the kingdom. As chief collector of ivory, Kalekwenzi further collaborated with the Arabised traders already in contact with Bunyoro-Kitara, and from whom he received important caches of arms in exchange for ivory. In 1890, Kalekwenzi crossed River Semliki and ventured deep into the territory of Beni where acquired great renown as an undisputed warlord capable of amassing greater quantities of ivory with a great deal of vassals at his disposal, thanks to the accumulated guns.

Though the shortest in duration, the occupation of these Arabised invaders on the northern and eastern edges of the Semliki Valley arguably had the most lasting effect on the political subjectivity of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century Semliki Valley dwellers, not least for the violence recorded there during that short period.

3. Shades of the Arabised groups in the Semliki Valley

Coming into Semliki Valley, Arabised traders and slavers founded many imperial stations starting in the first years of the last decade of the nineteenth century. These stations, which grew out of inaugural imperial forts, later expanded to becoming urban agglomerations when European colonial rule, following the military defeat to the Arabised, grafted them in their

⁷⁹ J.W. Nyakatura [1947]. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁰ *Supra* note 73.

⁸¹ *Supra* note 71.

territorial administration. The relatively short period of the Arabised in the Semliki Valley (particularly in Beni Territory) meant that fewer imperial stations were founded there in comparison to other regions that had come under their influence in nineteenth-century Africa's interior. Of the seven stations they founded there in the 1890s, two stand out as of critical importance for our understanding of antecedents to European colonial violence in the Rwenzori borderlands: Kainama and Kasindi.

The Arabised station of Kainama

This is arguably the oldest imperial station founded by the Arabised traders and slavers in the Semliki Valley of the Rwenzori borderlands.⁸² By the time Captain Lugard's Sudanese forces battled down some regiments of Kabalega's *Abarusura* south of Bunyoro and proceeded to install the fugitive Toro prince to the throne in Mwenge (mid-western Uganda) in 1891, Arabised invaders who had hailed from the territory of Irumu (District of Ituri) through Gety—penetrating the valley by the northern route—had created this station. Kainama is thus located in the extreme north-east of Beni Territory, closely adjacent to the Ituri equatorial forest on the western slopes of the Rwenzori mountain ranges. This station, it is said, comprised more than 150 Arabised traders and slavers, majority of them in possession of firearms.⁸³ They brutally ravaged the human settlement of Banande-Kainama then under the Bashu Chieftaincy. The macabre brutality carried by these Arabised conquerors in Kainama was aided by Bira and Budu tribesmen, who acted as pathfinders.⁸⁴ Bira and Budu tribesmen, it is reported, saw this Arabised invasion into the Semkili Valley as an opportunity to settle their historical scores with the Banande-Kainama.⁸⁵ So bloody of the human experience of this expedition that the Bira and the Nande particularly kept at war way into European colonial rule in the second decade of the twentieth century.

The Arabised station of Kasindi

This was the most short-lived imperial station founded by a conglomeration of Arabised invaders. Reportedly founded in 1896 by the Arabised from the eastern route expedition

⁸² Information collected from an in-depth interview with a retired officer in the native colonial administration in the town of Beni, 03.04.2018 and also corroborated in M. M. Mbonzo (1994), *Op. cit.* and A.P. Muli (2008), *Op. cit.*

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ *Supra* note 73.

⁸⁵ Information collected from an in-depth interview with a clan leader of Basongora in town of Kasindi, 05.04.2018.

(those from Nkore and Toro in western Uganda) on the one hand, and from the western route (those from the already founded station of Matongo in the heartland of Beni Territory), on the other, this station-cum-town epitomised the most fundamental contradiction that characterised Arabised incursions into Semliki Valley. There, a clash of two Arabised groups ensued with different pockets of the conquered local populations too clashing. This station is thus located in the extreme east of Semliki Valley, adjacent to Lake Edward and the savanna grasslands east of Rwenzori mountain ranges. While this station rather comprised a small number of the Arabised, the latter were reportedly the cruelest of all. In this rocky-hilly locality of Kasindi, local populations there have memorialised the brutality with which these Arabised invaders colonised that area: they instituted Arabised-presided tribunals against recalcitrant autochthones who would have no other punishment than death by stone-crashing.⁸⁶ It is here reported that the word ‘Kasindi’ is in fact etymologically derived from a descriptive word in Luyira language, ‘katsindi’, meaning ‘who kills in hiding’.⁸⁷ Soon, such exactions—dismembering the captives, including chopping of women’s breasts and smashing of men’s testicles other horrendous acts of mutilation—set in motion a series of counter-attacks on the part of the autochthones. Most remembered of these in the local collective memory are the counter-attacks that the chiefs of Masambo and Mwenda localities led.⁸⁸ The resistance initiated by these local chiefs eventually outlived the presence of the Arabised in this zone and found more vivid expressions in the course of European colonial rule.

Yet, colonial historiography of the Rwenzori region—scholarly mapped out against the cartography borne of the political divide of Belgian Congo and British Uganda—not only casts the presence of the Arabised in the Semliki Valley in an utterly disparaging light but also presents them as a monolithic group in pursuit of one single utilitarian imperial project: their own wealth creation through merciless hunt for slaves and ivory among other precious resources from the interior of the African continent. Thus, one finds in the inaugural ethnographic work of Jan Czekanowski the depiction of all Arabised in the Rwenzori borderlands as Zanzibari in origin. He however went to great length in giving a somewhat unusual acknowledgment for the savoir-faire of these Arabised invaders in the following words:

⁸⁶ *Supra* note 81.

⁸⁷ *Supra* note 84 also corroborated in A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

⁸⁸ *Supra* note 73.

[...] Yet, they [Czekanowski's Arabised invaders] did not lived in favorable conditions, having left their distant island, which was already in total dependence of Britain whose representation had the last word on each and every matter. In spite of that, they succeeded in creating a vast colonial empire in the hinterland of the Black continent! Steadfast, entrepreneurial, profoundly despising the non-believers [in Islam], they compensate their lack of capital by exceptional harshness and cruelty. Though they simply consisted of a handful of adventurers running to the interior of the continent from their usury creditors—most of them Hindu—they rapidly founded centres of a civilised life and so formed, with the aid of local human resources, a new socio-ethnic stratum: the Wangwana.⁸⁹

Jean-Luc Vellut too—a no less important contributor to the historiography of Congolese state formation—does point to the presence of the Arabised in much of eastern Congo (then vaguely included in King Leopold's Congo Free State), and the Semliki Valley in particular, as simply a monolithic group of Zanzibar-originating traders and slavers, whose *modus vivendi* once in the interior of the continent consisted of abhorrent violence for assertion of their sovereignty. Undoubtedly, Vellut takes cue—among a myriad of written sources produced in the course of Belgian colonization of the Congo—from the work of Belgian Catholic missionary Ceulemans. In whose referential book, *La question arabe et le Congo*, Ceulemans attributes the origin of all the Arabised (traders, slavers and even proselytizers) to Zanzibar. Vellut hence homogenises the presence of all nineteenth-century Arabised invaders roaming in most of what become eastern Congo, including the Semliki Valley of the Rwenzori borderlands, as Zanzibar-originating and depicts them in the following words:

These freed beings [the Arabised invaders] having left Zanzibar conquered for themselves immense spaces in the grasslands, savannahs and forests [in the interior of the continent], where they practiced a barbarous and ruinous economy, which assured their well-being and wealth. In order to combat them, there had to be a great mobilisation of Europeans with enormous assistance from humanitarian calls. On the ground, however, the fight [against these Arabised] often presented itself as a struggle for the control of booty, that is, goods (ivory) and men (slaves).⁹⁰

Likewise, Edward Steinhart, after an elaborate presentation of the three possible routes into nineteenth-century western lacustrine region—the east coast route (from Bagamoyo or Mombasa), the west coast route (from Matadi at the estuary of River Congo), and the

⁸⁹ J. Czekanowski [2001]. *Carnets de route au coeur de l'Afrique. Des Sources du Nil au Congo*. Montricher: Les Editions Noir sur Blanc. [My own English translation]

⁹⁰ J-L. Vellut (2004). *Op. cit.*, pp. 277-8 [My own English translation]

northern route (up the Nile River from Egypt)—goes on depict the presence of the Arabised invaders in particular region as a monolithic Khartoum-originating group:

By the 1860s, when the first European explorer used the northern route to reach the lacustrine region, the ivory and slave trade had developed into a booming business for... Khartoum merchants. The close association between the northern route and the disruption and anxiety caused in lacustrine by the *Khartoum slave raiders* was to prejudice the relationship of the early explorers and the African kingdoms for decades.⁹¹

But a critical gaze at the second half of the nineteenth century (and more particularly its last decade) in the Rwenzori borderlands, and the Semliki Valley in particular, does unsettle many of the claims loaded in the scholarship of that region, which has shown so little care at researching both the content and time scope prior to the advent of European hegemony in the region. An ethnography-informed historical inquiry into the provenance of the Arabised in nineteenth-century Semliki Valley as well as the nature of their imperial project there reveals a much more complex picture. While some—indeed many of them, having trekked northern, western and southern routes into the Semliki Valley—were definitively Zanzibar-originating, others were not. Remarkably, those who penetrated the Semliki Valley from the eastern route were immediately western Sudan-originating⁹² (Karthoum and its southern surroundings. Still others hailed neither from Zanzibar nor the Sudan, as was the case of one Bana Djamaldini⁹³, a Pakistani long distance trader famous ivory buyer who attained the Semliki Valley via Boga in Ituri (the northern route) in quest for ivory purchases from Zanzibar-originating Arabised already roaming in that region. Commercial ties between Djamaldini and his Zanzibari partners grew further that the latter reportedly settled in the Arabised imperial station of Matongo (in the heartland of Beni Territory) with his other business partners, kin-and-kith.⁹⁴ Adding to this complexity, Djamaldini married a Sudan-originating Arabised woman via Uganda with whom he settled in Matongo (centre-east of Beni Territory).⁹⁵ Together with his brother-in-laws and associates, Djamaldini formed a multi-Arabised business cartel for the aggressively hunted ivory.

⁹¹ E.I. Steinhart (1977). *Op. cit.*, p. 29. [Italics added for emphasis]

⁹² Information collected from an in-depth interview with a clan elder in the town of Katwe, 05.05.2018

⁹³ *Supra* note 53.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* also corroborated in A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

Most striking, however, the pursuit of an imperial project by different Arabised groups in the Semliki Valley was not bereft of internal contradictions, if violent dissensions. For having hailed from not one single but rather multiple origins, the Arabised in the Semliki Valley eventually clashed in pursuit of their respective self-aggrandising imperial projects. Particularly noted in this regard was the bloody rivalry that pitted Zanzibar-originating Arabised traders and slavers against Sudan-originating ones via Uganda. These two distinct groups violently clashed in the Virunga plains on the eastern of River Semliki. Important here is to note that the Virunga plains had long been vied for its outstanding endowments in ivory as an important part of the valley's elephant corridor.⁹⁶ Therefore, Sudan-originating Arabised traders via mid-western Uganda who settled in Kasindi in close vicinity of the Virunga plains drew important wealth from ivory, not least for their ferociousness vis-à-vis the autochthonous populations there. The violent clash that opposed these Arabised slavers and traders to their Zanzibar-originating peers is said to have ensued from a persistent demand by the latter to have both Basu Chieftaincy and the east of Semliki Valley divided for a fair access to all traders.⁹⁷ By the end of 1890s, Zanzibar-originating Arabised traders accused their Sudan-via-Uganda-originating counterparts of being sheer looters⁹⁸ and so waged a fierce attack on them.⁹⁹ The death toll ensuing from this clash is reported to be the greatest¹⁰⁰ in the relatively short history of the Arabised hegemony in the Semliki Valley: not only did many Arabised invaders' lives in both camps were lost, but even more so were the losses on the part of the local populations—counted in hundreds for yet a relatively sparsely populated locale.

However, not all Arabised invaders (Zanzibari or otherwise) who attained Semliki Valley availed themselves to the sole hunt for slaves and ivory; others—albeit remarkably few in number—simply concentrated all their energies on Islam proselytising.¹⁰¹ Vividly remembered in the local collective memory is the proselytizing work of one Oumari Semba¹⁰², a Zanzibar-originating Arabised who reached the Semliki Valley via Kasongo in Maniema (western route) and settled in then nascent Arabised station of Matongo. Unlike his

⁹⁶ UNA: A46/1062 I – Boundary Commission to Mfumbiro

⁹⁷ *Supra note 84.*

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.* also corroborated in a FGD with four elders in the town of Katwe, 06.05.2018.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Information collected from an in-depth interview with an imam in the town of Bwera, 06.05.2018.

¹⁰² *Supra note 53* also corroborated in A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

compatriots essentially vested in the quest for slaves and ivory, Oumari Semba dedicated all his time to the preaching of Islam and its associated way-of-life¹⁰³; his impact borne out of his unrelenting commitment to entrenching an Islamic culture on the lives of the autochthones of Matongo and beyond remains outstanding.

4. Local responses

Whereas in other places of eastern Congo such as Maniema (on the east bank of upper River Congo) Arabised invaders endeavoured to established ‘a Swahili culture’ politically negotiated along humanitarian lines, their approach and actions once in the Semliki Valley mostly consisted in raids and pillage whether with or without collaboration on the part of the local chiefs they found. A prototypical description of the violence perpetrated by these Arabised invaders in the Semliki Valley at the dawn of the twentieth century was given by one European witness in the following words:

By groups of three hundred, five hundred and often one thousand, these Arabs [Arabised] descend well armed... in the night, they crawl, go around a village and encircle it. At daybreak, the attack starts slowly and the circle narrows... accompanied with arrows and spears, the Arab stops; he sets the bush on fire and the whole village flames up. Then, in such move of despair, the poor blacks hasten...¹⁰⁴

The foremost written source in a European language on mass violence in the Semliki Valley since the dawn of the twentieth century, however, consists of the ethnographic notes of the Polish anthropologist Jan Czekanowski found in his fieldwork diary (1907-1909)¹⁰⁵: Only the pygmies, Czekanowski writes, succeeded to keep a considerable degree of autonomy in face of intense violence that Zanzibari slavers (whom Czekanowski referred to as the *Wangwana*), and their successors of the State, inflicted on the most exploited strata of society (here referred to as the *Washenzi*).

But against the backdrop of the violence they were subjected to by different Arabised groups in their hunt for slaves, ivory and other precious goods, different Semliki Valley dwellers reacted varyingly. Important here is to note that prior to the coming of these Arabised traders

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ Excerpts from the notes of one Belgian missionary in the Semliki Valley in the first decade of the twentieth century, Rev. Fr. Van Tricht. Those words were inaugurally cited in the work of H. Depester (1932). *Les Prisonniers Belges au Congo*. Brussels: Duculot-Roulin. [My own English translation]

¹⁰⁵ J. Czekanowski [2001]. *Op. cit.*

in the Semliki Valley, the Bayira in particular did not constitute one single political conglomeration, but were rather a sort of a loose confederation of inherently autonomous clan entities. In this respect, there were instances of inter-clan clashes around some thorny issues pertaining livelihoods such as access to farmland, grazing fields or hunting grounds. However, faced with an altogether external threat to any of any one or a group of clans, the Bayira clans could coalesce into a single political force to deal with the external threat. The case in point was the incursion in the Semliki Valley of Kalekwenzi and his heir, Maboko in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Responses of the autochthones in this region to foreign incursions (particularly Arabised) took two broad forms: pacific (non-violent) resistance and fierce (violent) resistance.

(a) Pacific resistance

Pacific resistance to Arabised incursions in the Semliki Valley also took diverse forms from desertion or fleeing of the autochthones deep into forest hideouts to ruse or subterfuge. Often, upon hearing word of a coming of ‘strange foreigners’ into their midst, autochthonous populations could desert their villages, taking flight into hideouts in thick forests or mountaintops. In the highlands of Mutwanga, Kikura, Lume, Masambo, Rugetsi and Muramba, for instance, the autochthones preferred climbing atop of the hills where they could survive the earth-scutch technique used by the Arabised invaders. Local populations in the lowlands, however, resorted to flight into thick bushes as well as the digging of deep pits, which they used as hideouts.¹⁰⁶ Still, for other autochthonous populations who reside in vicinity of water sources, such as rivers and lakes, escaped these invasions by a swim across the waters.¹⁰⁷ The case in point is that of the Zanzibar-originating Arabised incursion by the western route when these Arabised invaders had ransacked the chiefdom of Aluta toward 1890 and then proceeded to Buswagha in the chiefdom of Mwirima¹⁰⁸: The latter, on hearing of the devastation carried in the chiefdom of Aluta, simply hid with his entire entourage and

¹⁰⁶ *Supra* note 73.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ ATB: RRP/No. VI, 1908-1913

populace in the highlands of Loyisa.¹⁰⁹ In his written reflections on these times of foreign invasion of the Semliki Valley (and beyond) in late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Yves Vereydt too captured the local response to the invasions in the following terms:

The Wanande awesomely resisted. They did employ a war tactic that made proof of its prowess: Sentinels blew their trumpets or sounded their war drums, upon whose sounding inhabitants simply took flight.¹¹⁰

Thus, finding their villages deserted, these Arabised invaders proceeded with hunger to a general loot of whatever could have been left behind: poultry, livestock, harvests in the farmland, and any other property abandoned by the fleeing populations.¹¹¹ In the aftermath of their pillage, they could set ablaze the emptied villages. Indeed, one strand of the argument in the debate over the origins of the ethnonym ‘Nande’ posits that it was from these Arabised invaders that the said ethnonym originates¹¹²—a mispronunciation of the *Kingwana* word ‘wanaenda’ (they have fled) bestowed upon all fleeing populace in face of their invasion!

With regard ruse and subterfuge, the autochthonous populations later learned of other means by which they could escape captivity by the Arabised invaders. These included the piercing of ears, lips and nose as well as the sharpening of teeth all in a bid to make themselves much less attractive to the eyes of the Arabised invaders.¹¹³ In addition to such body deformation, they also resorted to tattooing¹¹⁴ on the face and limbs to further accentuate the degree of unpleasantness vis-à-vis their potential captors. To majority of these Arabised invaders, such body deformation and tattooing pointed to some unfitness of the person concerned—mostly imagined as a manifestation of ill-health.¹¹⁵ Thus, for fear of imagined contagion on the part of the Arabised captors, such deformed and tattooed captives were often set free. It did not take too long before this ruse gained much ground across the Semliki Valley as one effective means of resistance to the Arabised invasion in the region.

(b) Fierce resistance

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ Y.L. Vereydt “Contribution à l’histoire des Wandande: les guerres d’occupation” mimeo, Butembo, 1975, p.1 [my own English translation].

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹¹² K.T. Mashauri (1982). *Op. cit.*

¹¹³ Information collected from a FGD, *supra* note 98.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.* also corroborated in a conversation with a retired teacher in the town of Butembo, 30.03.2018.

¹¹⁵ A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

In face of horrendous atrocities Arabised invaders inflicted on their captives, those who could escape from being captured or survivors of captivity resorted to defending themselves and their group more fiercely. Thus, different social groups across the Semliki Valley, majority of whom Bayira-Banande, often organized themselves in clusters of ten energetic men armed with spears, arrows, shields and sharp knives and lined themselves up in parallel to a frequently traversed path.¹¹⁶ For the Arabised invaders, on their way to invasion, evidently used the same paths traversed by the local inhabitants. When a caravan of Arabised invaders was perceived from afar, the cluster of ten who were strategically well spaced could hold on up until the first in the Arabised caravan gets adjacent to the last in the lined-up cluster.¹¹⁷ To a signal emitted by one of the members of the cluster—generally one was in charge of surveillance atop a tall tree¹¹⁸—these armed autochthones ambushed the Arabised caravan, each one dealing with the enemy in his front. Ambushed in such a manner, these Arabised invaders, though better armed, had much less chance to survive these attacks. It was under such circumstances that these armed autochthones often seized the opportunity to liberate their kin in captivity and get back their looted goods.

By these ambush-attacks, 40 Arabised caravan leaders reportedly lost their lives in a span of three years¹¹⁹: from 1894 to 1897, six Arabised expedition commandants were killed in Mukoko, in the county of Beni-Mbau; four in Bulongo on the eastern slopes of the Rwenzori mountain ranges; fourteen in the valley at Kalivuli, chieftaincy of Basu; and sixteen in Bwisega in the chieftaincy of Watalinga, east of the Rwenzori mountain ranges. In the locality of Kasindi, in particular, a coalition of autochthonous Bayira-Nande (east of the Rwenzori mountain ranges) and Bayira-Konzo (west of the Rwenzori mountain ranges) ambushed a great expedition of Arabised invaders who hailed from the eastern route.¹²⁰ This ambush-attack, it is remembered, constituted a serious blow to Sudan-originating via Uganda Arabised invaders; the death toll of this attack still remains a matter of conjecture, but there is a somewhat consensus that the loss was heavier on the part of the Arabised invaders, in that,

¹¹⁶ Information collected from an in-depth interview with a former askari of Congolese colonial army in the town of Beni, 04.04.2018

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.* also corroborated in A.P. Muli (2008). *Op. cit.*

¹¹⁹ ATB: RRP/No. I, 1906-1913

¹²⁰ *Supra note 115.*

those who survived the ambush and attempted to regroup on the highlands of Muramba for a counter-attack were again dealt a serious blow.¹²¹

After the registered victory of the autochthones over the Arabised invaders in Kasindi, those in the locality of Bulongo too initiated ambush-attacks on the Zanzibar-originating Arabised invaders who had made in-roads into the Semliki Valley from the western route. In a coalition of autochthonous populations from Bulongo, Lume and Mwenda—all on the eastern slopes of the Rwenzori mountain ranges in Beni Territory—launched a series of destabilizing attacks on these Arabised who had hitherto founded the station of Matongo-Beni. The ambush-ambush attack of 06 January 1894, according to Paul Ernest Joset—the first colonial administrator of Beni Territory—was particularly bloody; the death toll in both camps was considerable.¹²² But these autochthones eventually failed to register victory over the Arabised in spite of their concerted efforts, for the latter still benefited from considerable support of the local chief Mutwanga with whom these Arabised were in strong alliance.¹²³ Weakened by this political alliance of Chief Mutwanga with the invading Arabised, these autochthonous populations eventually resorted to unconventional means of warfare: skilled hunters among these autochthones could capture alive elephants and leopards, which they later unleashed on the Arabised caravans.¹²⁴ It was, however, the decisive victory of the autochthones of the locality of Mabuku (in the western part of Basu Chieftaincy) over the Arabised in 1895¹²⁵ that augured an era of diminution of hegemony of the Arabised across the Semliki Valley. Word of this victory bore a reinvigorating effect to all other pockets of local resistance against the Arabised hegemony in the region.

5. Conclusion

Historiography of social and state formations in most, if not all, of formerly colonised places, has thus far exceedingly underscored a sort of omnipotence of European colonial agency in epochal history-making events in those places. No doubt, one of the most foregrounding reasons for such primacy of European agency in both the making and unmaking of formerly colonised worlds is that the colonial archive—an epistemic venue par excellence where

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, also corroborated by a FGD, *supra* note 73.

¹²² P.E. Joset, “Historique du Territoire de Beni, 1889 – 1939” Unpublished report, Beni, 1939.

¹²³ *Supra* note 53.

¹²⁴ P.E. Joset (1939). *Op. cit.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, also corroborated in an in-depth interview, *supra* note 53.

knowledge meets power *à la* Michel Foucault¹²⁶—has tended to marginalise, if erase, all other historical happenings that foreground non-European agency. A close scrutiny at developments in the last quarter of the nineteenth century in the Semliki Valley here offers a nuanced story, which not only delegitimises the claim of the primacy of European colonial agency much publicised in the Africanist scholarship on state formation both in both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). Instead, and thanks to a critical historical inquiry that goes beyond ‘history by the official archive’ in a bid to recuperating all insights from ‘history by ethnography with historical imagination’, the findings of this study allow for an inaugural argument that the agency of both the Arabised groups who invaded the Semliki Valley in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and the autochthonous populations who lived there prior to that series of invasion did shape, in many important ways, the agency would-be European colonists. In fact, so important was particularly this Arabised’s agency as an antecedent to the later European hegemony in this region that European rulers simply grafted their architecture of rule onto the technology of dominance hitherto developed by the Arabised invaders. Thus, the most paradoxical manifestation of inaugural European colonial violence at the end of the long nineteenth century consists in European colonists’ fight against slave trade by recruiting former slavers in the former’s regiments.

In the second instance, historical scholarship on this region whose methodological sources of data mostly privileged the colonial archive has ended up depicting these Arabised invasions in the western lacustrine region in a monolithic fashion. Yet, ethnographic fieldwork on the Arabised presence in the Semliki Valley here points to the diversity both in origin and imperial project of the latter especially in the last decade of the nineteenth century. If majority of the Arabised groups in late nineteenth-century Semliki Valley originally hailed from Zanzibar, others were Khartoum-originating via Uganda, while others still directly hailed from as far places as Pakistan. In the same vein, so differentiated was their imperial project in the Semliki Valley—albeit undergirded by the common characteristic of plunder—that former Sudan-originating slavers had to clash violently with former Zanzibar-originating slavers over the ivory-rich plains on the eastern bank of River Semliki. Taking seriously the question of antecedence to Stanley’s arrival in this region therefore reveals that beyond European colonial power of naming and reordering conquered spaces—as with the Semliki Valley named after Stanley’s daring expeditions—European colonial hegemony which

¹²⁶ M. Foucault (1978). *The History of Sexuality*, Vol. I. New York: Pantheon Books.

ensued was at best heir to an already convoluted logic of violent exploitation of late-nineteenth century Arabised invaders, replete with all its contradictions.

Finally, primary sources in this study reveal that to the violence they were subjected to during various episodes of different Arabised invasions in the Semliki Valley, different sections of populations who dwelled there responded varyingly. Predominantly, passive resistance, which included taking flight in face of the invasion, and fierce resistance (violent confrontation with the invaders) came to characterized local response to the penetration of different Arabised groups in this region. And perhaps, more than anything else, it was this set of responses to the inaugural violence of the Arabised' invasions in the Semliki Valley that considerably shaped the political agency of Semliki valley dwellers (and by extension Rwenzori borderlanders) whose legacy came to bear onto the next century. Cut out from an inherently limited menu of choices, this agency—borne out of overarching circumstances of violent invasion—has subsequently informed political subjectivities of the society in the Semliki Valley (and the Rwenzori borderlands by extension) for whom violence remains the most tenacious element about the ways in which any particular force external to society engages with the latter in a bid to disfigure from within it any existing or emergent power centres. Here, in view of developments that rocked the Semliki Valley in particular and the broader Rwenzori borderlands since the coming to power of Kabalega in Bunyoro-Kitara, there can emerge yet another historical appreciation of European violent re-ordering of this region as having been neither inaugural nor bereft of all contradictions, whose drifting from the antecedent epochal Arabised invasions late European (British and Belgian) colonial rule intricately absorbed.