

Mythologizing Mwalimu Nyerere and the Kagera War in Banyakyusa Narratives¹

Ignas Fedeo,* *Abasi Kiyimba*,** & *Okot Bengé* ***

Abstract

Mwalimu Julius Kambarage Nyerere is widely regarded as the advocate of peace and stability in Tanzania and beyond. However, the critics of his legacy claim that the Kagera War between Tanzania and Uganda of 1978-1979 represents a contradiction with Nyerere's commitment to peace and harmony. As Commander in Chief, Nyerere led Tanzanians and (some) Ugandans to fight the war against Idi Amin Dada. A lot that has been written about Nyerere's motives for waging the war in the official narratives about the war. However, little is known about the perception of local Tanzanians on the nature of the war and Nyerere's actual role in it. This article, uses a Banyakyusa poetic narrative "*Ubwite bwa Kagera*" (The War of Kagera) to examine Banyakyusa process of mythmaking about Nyerere's perceived involvement in the Kagera War. The article argues that the Banyakyusa narratives present Nyerere as a superman, a demi-god who had mystical abilities, which enabled him to defeat Idi Amin decisively, but also as one who desired a peaceful settlement of the conflict. For the Banyakyusa, it was Idi Amin's murderous disposition that made Nyerere declare the Kagera War to protect the innocent people of both Tanzania and Uganda.

Key words: Banyakyusa, Nyerere, Idi Amin, Myths, Kagera War

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Introduction

One among Mwalimu Julius Nyerere's remarkable ideals was his advocacy for peace and harmony. According to Henry Kissinger (1990), the former US Secretary of State, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere was "a seductive interlocutor ... capable for steely hostility" (Kissinger 1990:223). And to Phillips (2015), Nyerere's devotion to peace is among the reasons for the reverence accorded to him in Tanzania, as one widow explained:

The Father of the Nation came to strengthen the life of peace and cooperation together. He brought peace for all the tribes to live together without discrimination. Anywhere you go in the Republic of Tanzania you will not have a problem (Phillips 2015:101).

As suggested by Phillips, Tanzanians feel obliged to maintain peace in the country as a way of paying homage to his worthy service to the nation. Kissinger's earlier comment further implies that Nyerere's commitment to peace and harmony extends beyond the geographical boundaries of Tanzania. According to Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Nyerere was involved in peaceful settlement of several political conflicts in the region, such as that of Burundi, for which he was the mediator until his death in 1999. Mpangala and Mawazo clarify that as part of his commitment to peace, Nyerere formed Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation. The primary role of the foundation was to help in solving the Burundi conflict, and in maintaining peace in Africa. Of particular note,

while clarifying the main objective of the foundation, Nyerere stated:

Kwa hiyo ninashukuru kwamba taasisi ambayo imeanzishwa ili kulinda na kudumisha Amani, Umoja na Maendeleo ya Watu Wote Barani Afrika; pia ina malengo ya kubamasisha watu wa taasisi mbalimbali kujifunza na kutafakari juu ya Afrika hizi (quoted in Mpangala and Mawazo 2015:197).

(Therefore, I am grateful that the foundation is formed to keep and maintain peace, unity and development of all people in Africa. Also, it intends to encourage different institutions to learn and reason on these ideas.)

Here, Nyerere summarizes the ideals which mark his personality: peace, unity, and development for all Africans. Therefore, the Mwalimu Nyerere Foundation stands as one of the indicators of Nyerere's devotion to peace and harmony.

The foregoing background about Nyerere suggests that he was an ardent believer in peace and security, and in the peaceful settlement of conflicts. Consequently, Nyerere's involvement in the 1978-1979 Kagera War against Idi Amin Dada of Uganda raises critical questions about his motives for waging war despite his commitment to peace and peaceful settlement of conflicts. What was so important about this war that made Nyerere decide to set aside his commitment to peace and peaceful settlement of conflicts? Was the war inevitable? Is the Kagera War a stain on Nyerere's commitment to peace?

This article assesses these questions from the perceptions of Nyerere as recreated in a Banyakyusa poetic myth about “*Ubwite bwa Kagera*” (The War of Kagera).

Nyerere is widely revered in Tanzania as the founding father of the nation, and as a hero who defeated Idi Amin of Uganda in the 1978-1979 Kagera War. Because of this reverence, he has become a subject of myth and political mythmaking among Tanzanians (Phillips 2015:100-123). Stories to this effect are in abundance among the Banyakyusa, the Sukuma, the Maasai, the Bahaya, the Chaga, the Fipa, the Makonde, the Zaramo and among many other communities in Tanzania. The Banyakyusa people are mainly found in Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts in Mbeya region of South West Tanzania, and in Karonga District of Malawi.² Given the location of the Banyakyusa, their selection for this study is significant. They are far from Butiama where Nyerere was born (about 1,100 kilometres), far from Dar es Salaam where Nyerere’s State House was (about 1,000 kilometres), and far from Kagera where the Kagera War was fought (about 1,300 kilometres). This article, therefore, underscores the point that Nyerere was a highly influential leader, revered in various Tanzanian societies, irrespective of their locations. The researchers also use the study to sharpen the understanding of the way local myths

and political mythmaking are used to boost Nyerere’s position in the life and history of the people of Tanzania, the Banyakyusa in particular.

The myths about Nyerere in different Tanzanian societies appear with similar contents and features despite some slight differences which are a result of environmental and economic differences between the people and their locations in Tanzania, who all, as Seger (2012) and Besier (2014) contend, try to associate themselves with their hero, Nyerere. However, little is known about the process of constructing his heroic image in the myths. Understanding processes of mythmaking about Nyerere, especially the language use, would create greater awareness about the process of constructing images/symbols associated with him, such as the myths that carry local voices, beliefs, and perceptions about him.

Local voices, beliefs, and perceptions of Nyerere are significant in comprehending reasons behind his continued reverence for him, as an ardent believer in peace, despite his involvement in the Kagera War. This article explores the mythmaking process about Nyerere’s involvement in the Kagera War, as perceived in the Banyakyusa myths. Through the analysis of literary devices (such as diction, hyperbole, symbols, metaphors, similes, imagery, and point of view) which are employed in the “*Ubwite bwa Kagera*” myth, the article responds to the question on how the Banyakyusa perceived

² This article focuses on Tanzania’s Banyakyusa from Busokelo, Kyela, and Rungwe districts.

Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War through its reconstruction in their myths.

Douglas (1966:121) defines myth as "a representation in fictional form of truths or values that are sanctioned by general belief". Using Douglas' definition as a reference point, myths are narratives which are believed in a society as truth. The truth which myths carry, as Trubshaw (2003) argues, is unquestionable in the society where the myths originate. On her part, Wilson (1960:1) regards myth as "an account of actual historical happenings" which merge fiction and fact. With reference to Douglas (1966), Trubshaw (2003) and Wilson's arguments above, the myth analysed in this article carries Banyakyusa beliefs, and is believed in Banyakyusa society as true.

As Murray (1959:216) explains, a story becomes a myth when "it has invaded numerous other minds and proved its potency by being widely represented in spoken or written words as well as in an ample iconography." Here, Murray indicates that a narrative becomes a myth when it has gained community acceptance. Friedland (1960:84) stresses that myths "represent ways of thinking which are universally held by a group." Friedland explains that a myth is "told by someone who says he heard the story from a friend who got the story from another friend to whom the event is actually supposed to have happened" (Friedland 1960:86).

To Friedland, "the placement of the story at this distance precludes, of course, any investigation of its fundamental truth" (86). Friedland's contentions indicate that myths are owned by a society and that the truth of a particular myth is based on societal beliefs which cannot be contested with evidence. Murray and Friedland's contentions suggest that the community of the Banyakyusa collectively owns the myths about Nyerere, and that the truth of the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, which is examined in this article is based on their beliefs, voices, experiences and point of view.

This article employs the mythological approach to look at the use of imagery, language and meaning in the myth under discussion. As Frye (1957) contends, the mythological approach examines the process of mythmaking and meaning of imagery which the myth employs. According to Trubshaw (2003), the mythological approach which offers an interdisciplinary focus in cultural studies, such as myths, is an appropriate device to examine modern political myths, which are characterised by an interplay of political, historical, scientific, traditional, and religious ideologies.

In agreement with Frye and Trubshaw's arguments, this article deploys the mythological approach to look at the imagery associated with Nyerere's involvement in the Kagera War in Banyakyusa myths. Moreover, the mythological approach enables the

article to capture Banyakyusa voices, beliefs and perceptions of Nyerere, as embedded in their myths, to amplify comprehension of the reasons for Nyerere participation in the war, in spite of his popular image as a man of peace. The significance of this research lies mostly in the intention to uplift the voices and beliefs of local people, and to highlight the study of oral materials including myths, as a way of comprehending local perceptions and beliefs on various aspects of a society's history and politics.

Nyerere and the Kagera War in the Banyakyusa Myth

Before looking into the depiction of Nyerere and the Kagera War in the “Ubwite bwa Kagera” myth, it is important to understand the position of Nyerere towards the outbreak of the war. In his account as to whether the Kagera War was a just war, Acheson-Brown (2001) argues that the Kagera War was the result of long time hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin (Acheson-Brown 2001:3-5).

The hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin began immediately after the overthrow of Milton Obote's government in Uganda by General Idi Amin Dada in 1971 according to Matata (2016), the hostility between Nyerere and Idi Amin resulted from Nyerere's support for Milton Obote, on the one hand, and Idi Amin's invasion and torture of civilians in Kagera, Tanzania, on the other. Both, Acheson-Brown's and Matata's

contentions, in general, associate the Kagera War with Nyerere and Idi Amin, with each wanting to show that his decisions were right.

The association of the Kagera War with a personal misunderstanding between Nyerere and Idi Amin by Acheson-Brown (2001) and Matata (2016) above is an important element in understanding the emphasis placed on Nyerere's commitment to peace versus his involvement in the Kagera War. For Acheson-Brown and Matata, the root cause of the war was a personality clash between Nyerere and Idi Amin, which suggests that Nyerere and Idi Amin involved their nations in their personality conflict. However, according to Mpangala and Mawazo (2015), Tanzanians strongly supported Nyerere to wage the Kagera War.

Mpangala and Mawazo report that local Tanzanians with one heart contributed livestock, food crops, and money to support the war against Idi Amin. The support Tanzanians rendered to the war suggests that for them, Nyerere had reasonable grounds to fight Idi Amin. Acheson-Brown (2001:9) also reports that when Tanzanian troops captured Kampala on 10 April 1979, they “were greeted by a jubilant population.” As in the case of local Tanzanians' support to the war, the warm welcome, which Ugandans showed to Tanzanian troops suggests that the removal of Idi Amin was important to them. The support, which Nyerere got from local people to fight the Kagera

War, denotes that his departure from peaceful settlement of conflicts to war was reasonable and that the war was not for his personal benefit.

Banyakyusa have a number of myths about Nyerere’s involvement in the Kagera War. Most of the myths are short and each tells of a single event. The “Ubwite bwa Kagera” poetic myth, similar to a myth about the involvement of Nyerere’s mother in the Kagera War, recounts the war from its outbreak up to the defeat of Idi Amin. However, contrary to the myth mentioned above, which associates the outbreak of the Kagera War with Nyerere’s mother; the “Ubwite bwa Kagera” myth links the Kagera War to the call of the Tanzanian people who wanted Nyerere to uproot Idi Amin.

Of particular importance in the myth under discussion is the reoccurrence of several issues represented in a number of other Banyakyusa myths about Nyerere’s involvement in the Kagera War. These include the belief that he possessed mystical powers and the ability to transform himself into different creatures such as birds. The myths also underscore Nyerere’s devotion to peace despite his involvement in the Kagera War. As a result, the recreation of Nyerere in this myth reflects his representation in a number of other Banyakyusa myths about the Kagera War.

In this story, “Ubwite bwa Kagera” Idi Amin is portrayed as one who is cursed by elders. According to the narrative, Nyerere did not intend to

fight Idi Amin despite all the killings and torture which Idi Amin had carried out. The citizens however convinced him to end the Idi Amin curse. This story is divided into three sections: pre-war, declaration of the war, and the war itself. The story provides a comprehensive understanding of the war from the point of view of this community. The pre-war section presents the personality of Idi Amin, what he was doing in Uganda and later in Tanzania; it then adds Nyerere’s reaction to Idi Amin’s actions. In the first fifteen verses, the narrator talks about Idi Amin’s personality. The narrator relates the story of how Idi Amin was killing, arresting and throwing very old women and disabled people into River Kagera. From verse 6 to 11, the bard states that:

Ugwakisige kimo
 Ulinkuntaga mwa Kagera
 Ulinkuti fyakulya fya ngwina
 Ugwalobe lumo
 Ulinkuntaga mwa Kagera
 Ulinkuti fyakulya fya ngwina

(The person with single eye
 You were throwing him in Kagera
 You were saying it was a crocodile dish
 The person with single finger
 You were throwing him in Kagera
 You were saying it was a crocodile dish)

The above section of the myth present Idi Amin as killing helpless and harmless people. The act of

throwing *ugwakisige kimo* (the one with a single eye) and *ugwalobe lumo* (the one with a single finger) in River Kagera to be eaten by crocodiles projects Amin as a merciless killer and prepares ground for the justification of the war against him. From verse twelve to twenty-two, the narrator states that Idi Amin's parents, grandparents, and great grandparents held a meeting with him. The elders asked:

...jwani uju ikupapigwa nu unna ulwakwanda

Uju ikwingila munna ulwabubili ukupapigwa bo untu gubele panja?)

(...who after being delivered by his/her mother

Goes back in his/her mother's womb to be delivered again, after his/her head has increased the size?")

They then ask:

...jwani uju egile akakikulu akanunu akakalibuno

Uju ikuntendela unkasi munda ukuti ngupapa mwana bulibe?

(...who after marrying a very beautiful young woman

Who peeps at his wife's womb to know the child she is going to have?)

The answer to all these questions was *najumo* (no one). The bard uses the above rhetorical questions to signify that human beings do not have ability to prevent themselves from being born disabled. Thus, the elders found that Idi Amin mistreatment of disabled people was illogical and for those reasons (as the narrator states

in the thirtieth line), they cursed him and he ran mad.

Verses twenty-three to thirty-five narrate that Idi Amin invaded Tanzania, killed people, cattle, and destroyed the bridge across river Kagera and the sugar industry in Kagera region. The narrator states that regardless of all that Idi Amin did in Tanzania, Nyerere was reluctant to declare war against him. In verses, thirty-eight and thirty-nine, the narrator says:

Jope Nyerere atifwile limolyene
Alinkuti ndi nkilisiti

(Nyerere also ruined one thing
He said he is a Christian)

The above lines suggest that Nyerere's refusal to declare war against Idi Amin was based on his religious beliefs. Following Nyerere's refusal to declare war against Idi Amin, the narrator states that Tanzanians rhetorically asked "*Nyerere, bho mwukwiitawala gvalondaga ifike?* (...Nyerere, what were you looking for when we became independent?); to which he replied that "*...nalondoga abandu*" (I wanted people). Following Nyerere's answer, Tanzanians told him in the verses forty-two, forty-three, and forty-four that he will remain with trees and grass only.

This suggests that Idi Amin was determined to kill all Tanzanians. Remaining with trees and grass as used in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, suggests that if Idi Amin was left to continue with his actions, all Tanzanians would be killed. The narrator in line fifty-seven states that

Nyerere replied by saying “...*mbilike*” (...I have heard) which signified that he had accepted the call of his people who wanted him to declare war against Idi Amin.

In the second section of the narrative, Nyerere is claimed to have “*atulile ikitabu kiyake biblia abikile mumpiki mwa mwammembe*” (removed his book, the Bible and put it on a mango tree). Nyerere’s act to remove his Bible implies that he decided to go against his faith to protect his people from Idi Amin. After putting aside his religious beliefs, Nyerere went back to Dar es Salaam from where he led his troops to River Kagera. The narrator states that Nyerere found the bridge already destroyed and Idi Amin told him that he cannot swim across the river because the river is full of crocodiles and has a strong water current. From verse fifty-two to fifty-six, the bard states:

Ngimba pa Kagera balipo
amashabiki

Batile kutwaku Nyerere na
abhandu bhako?

Atile ndumigwe ni ikisu

Ngubhuka isilya lila kwa Kagera
kunsebho

Ngakete abhandu bhangu

(But there were supporters in
Kagera

They asked him “where are you
going Nyerere with your people”

He said that “I have been sent by
the nation”

I am going to that side of the
river on Kagera road

To look at my people)

Here, the myth stresses the belief that Nyerere’s involvement in the Kagera War was prompted by his determination to protect his people. The verses “...*ndumigwe ni ikisu*” (I have been sent by the nation) and “*Ngakete abhandu bhangu*” (to look at my people) indicate the influence which the people (Tanzanians) had on Nyerere’s decision to wage the war.

Verses sixty and sixty-one state that Nyerere transformed himself into a bird and flew above the river up to the other side. This indicates that Nyerere had mystical powers that he used to transform himself into a bird to overcome challenges. According to Wilson (1959), Banyakyusa believe that community leaders, *Abanyafyale* (chiefs) and *Amafumu* (spiritual leaders) possess mystical powers, which make them majestic and brave, and instil fear and elicit obedience from their subjects. As the myth under discussion shows, the Banyakyusa believed that Nyerere possessed mystical powers which made him brave, and enabled him to protect his people.

After crossing to the other side of river, Nyerere found corpses of Tanzanians and a lot of blood, and he cried in Kinyakyusa “*etatagwe! Abhandu bangu unne!*” (Eee Father! My people!). The fact of Nyerere cries, denotes the pain that he felt over things that Idi Amin had done to his people in the Kagera region, and secures his position as saviour. After witnessing what Idi Amin had done to his people, Nyerere went back to

State House in Dar es Salaam and declared war against Idi Amin.

The third section of the narrative is about the war itself. The myth features, from verse seventy-one to the last verse, the different war tactics used by both Amin's and Nyerere's troops in the battlefield. The narrator states that Idi Amin, after hearing that Nyerere had declared war, he vowed to beat Nyerere up to his home and defeat Tanzanians. But the narrator states in verse seventy-five that Idi Amin and his troops "*bakalimenye ukuti Nyerere nnuguna gwa Jesu ntubatiko*" (they did not know that Nyerere is a young brother of Jesus in the order).

The narrator, in verse one hundred, emphasises that "*kokuti unna alijomalija umpapa Jesu*" (it is like his mother was Mary, the mother of Jesus). Here, the narrator suggests that Nyerere's power is second to that of Jesus and that Idi Amin had no chance against him. The narrator states in verses eighty-three to eighty-six:

Batile tukome bosa nabakumyitu
tukajagege inafasi

Bakomigwe bosa abakwa Nyerere
na abakwa Idi Amin kolumo

Po apa balinkuti bafwile abandu
aba kwa Nyerere

Ngimba tugogene jujuswe

(They said that "let us shoot all
even ours to get the way"

They shot all, those of Nyerere
and those of Idi Amin together

It was then they were saying that
Nyerere's people have died

While we killed one another)

The above verses highlight the belief that Nyerere and his troops could not be defeated by Idi Amin by indicating that even those Tanzanian soldiers whom Idi Amin claimed he had killed had actually died in friendly fire from fellow Tanzanians in a sacrificial operation because they were surrounded. Verses ninety-one to verse ninety-five indicate that Kawawa (former prime minister and minister of defence during the Kagera War, and a long time Nyerere's close associate) believed that though the war had started, Nyerere was not willing to continue with it until Idi Amin attacked a plane that carried a child of a Whiteman and killed him. The narrator states in verses ninety-nine and one hundred that Nyerere said in Swahili:

Kumbe vita haina macho

Songa mbele watoto, mimi niko
nyuma

(The war does not have eyes

Move forward my children, I am
behind you)

The use of Kiswahili in the above verse signifies that those words were actually spoken by Nyerere himself. They imply that Nyerere decided to continue with the war against Idi Amin fearing that if Idi Amin remained in power, he would kill even those who did not have a direct connection with the war. The narrator states in verse one hundred five that "*Po apa Nyerere atile "komaga kangu komaga"* (It was then Nyerere said "shoot then shoot"). The repetition *komaga kangu*

komaga (shoot then shoot) in that verse emphasises Nyerere's decision to continue fighting against Idi Amin. The narrator concludes that Nyerere ordered the soldiers to fight against Idi Amin until he fled to Libya "*mpaka nauli*" (up to now).

The "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, reveals the extent of Nyerere's commitment to peace. The myth explains that Idi Amin was killing and torturing his people (Ugandans), especially disabled people and old women, people who had no ability to harm his government. Following his inhuman acts, the Banyakyusa believe that Idi Amin was cursed by elders. In verse twenty-two the narrator states "*ngimba abhagwise bankulile imbepo Idi Amin*" (his fathers blew the wind to Idi Amin). The Banyakyusa word *imbepo* (wind) literary means madness.

The phrase *bhankulile imbepo* (blew the wind to him) signifies that elders cursed him by making him mad. Also, the Banyakyusa adverb *ngimba* at the beginning of the above verse is used to clarify motives behind all evils that Amin was doing by associating them to the curse. Thus, it is believed among Banyakyusa that Idi Amin was mad; he became mad after being cursed by elders, the Banyakyusa signify that his madness was so bad to the extent that it could not be cured. The implication of this story is that Idi Amin was incapable of arriving at any peaceful settlement, and had to be fought. Armed struggle was the only solution to end Idi Amin's killings and torture in Uganda and Tanzania.

On the other hand, the narrative states that despite all that Idi Amin was doing in Uganda and later in Tanzania, Nyerere did not want to fight against him. In the verse thirty-six "... *tufwile tata gwe nzanaki gwe mwafrika*" (we are dying our African Zanaki father) whereby African Zanaki stands for Nyerere who was a Zanaki by ethnicity. Verse thirty-seven says "*gwimikege ingwego ni ndusu*" (prepare spears and guns), an indication that Tanzanians were requesting Nyerere to declare war against Idi Amin to save them from being killed. But, as it emerges in verse thirty-nine, Nyerere replied to the people's call, to fight against Idi Amin, with "... *ndi nkilisiti*" (I am Christian). According to Matata (2016), more than four thousand (4,000) people (soldiers and civilians) lost their lives during the Kagera War. With respect to Matata's contention, the recreation of Nyerere as a Christian in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth sanitises his image as a leader who would not entertain bloodshed.

According to Msekwa (n.d.:41), religious beliefs made Nyerere "a strong advocate of equality and respect for human dignity, and nurtured his advocacy for peace and his utter dislike of violence." With reference to Msekwa's contention, Nyerere's claim above, that he is Christian, denotes that he preferred a peaceful settlement with Idi Amin. However, as the narrator states in the second section of the story, especially from verse forty-seven to

fifty, Nyerere decided to fight against Idi Amin after being warned by his people that Idi Amin was determined to kill all the people whom Nyerere struggled to free from colonialism. As explained above in the verse forty-seven, Nyerere abandoned his Bible to save his people from Idi Amin.

Elsewhere in real-life scholarship, Mohiddin argues that Nyerere loved his people and cooperated with them in building Tanzania (Mohiddin 1999:4). Mohiddin's argument suggests that Nyerere decided to declare war against Idi Amin to protect the people he loved and needed for the development of Tanzania. Therefore, we can argue that Nyerere's decision to fight against Idi Amin as depicted in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth polishes his image as a leader who devoted himself and his leadership to the life and defence of his people.

Furthermore, Msekwa's and Mohiddin's contentions above emphasise a collaborative interplay between mythical reconstruction of Nyerere in Banyakyusa myths, "Ubwite bwa Kagera" in particular, and actual scholarship. According to He (2006:70), the actual scholarship (such as researched books and articles) is among tools used by elites to popularise political myths in order to "meet practical political needs such as to enhance regime legitimacy, mobilize public support to government policies, and win factional competition" (He, 2006:70). Political myths have the ability to individualise a group of people as complex as the

state (Stoica 2017), and to "justify and strengthen certain political ideologies and or regimes" (Svilicic & Maldini 2014:729).

As a result, myth about political leaders are popularised to create the impression that they are very strong as leaders and that certain things could not have been achieved without them (Brown 2014). According to Stoica (2017), Svlicic and Maldini (2014), He (2006), and Brown (2014), the collaborative interplay between the mythical reconstruction of Nyerere in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" and the actual scholarship indicates that mythmaking is influenced by the elites. Nyerere's image among the Banyakyusa, and Tanzanians in general is influenced, *inter alia*, by the wishes of the elites in Tanzania and beyond to popularise him as a strong leader through articles, magazines, and books.

The stylistic devices used in the narrative are equally significant. The diction, rhetoric and imagery are all calculated to project a monstrous image on the part of Idi Amin, on the one hand; and on the other hand, the stylistic features of the text present Nyerere gloriously as a saviour of the country. For example, to prove the allegation that Idi Amin was determined to kill all Tanzanians, we are told that on arrival in Kagera, Nyerere found a lot of blood and many corpses. The word *ilopa* (blood) as used in verse sixty-two and *imifimba* (corpses) in verse sixty-three are

emotive, and are specially selected to signify merciless killings.

The myth also uses characterisation to build Nyerere into a strong mythical hero that does not always answer to the laws of nature. After witnessing the results of Idi Amin's merciless torture and killings in the Kagera area, Nyerere uses supernatural powers to fly over the river. In verse sixty-one we are told that "Nyerere *kumanga gake alipelengenye ukuja kajuni*" (Nyerere mystically transformed himself into a bird) and in the verse seventy-eight "*apulwike mpaka kwisilya ku nsebo Kagera*" (He flew up to the other side of the river to Kagera Road). The phrase *kumanga gake* (on his mystical ability) carries Banyakyusa belief that Nyerere had mystical power, which he used for his success and the success of his nation.

A bird is often used in Banyakyusa narratives (myths, legends, and folktales) as a creature with supernatural power to help people to overcome challenges or to rescue them from danger. Thus, the act of investing Nyerere with supernatural ability to transform himself into a bird suggests that he was capable of overcoming challenges in order to help his people. The other implication of the image of a bird is that Nyerere was beyond the reach of Idi Amin. It illustrates that there was no way Nyerere could be defeated by Amin who had no ability to fly.

African myths do not only carry history of a society but also the culture and innermost experiences

of Africans (Jaja 2013). Jaja adds that "myths represent the African spirit and the African view of reality" (Jaja 2013:13). Banyakyusa as explained earlier, believe that community leaders, such as Nyerere, possess mystical powers which give them majesty (*ubusisya*) to make people obey them and to protect their subjects (Wilson 1959). Jaja and Wilson indicate that the recreation of Nyerere with mystical powers (*amanga*) in the "Ubwite bwa Kagera" myth, as explained above, reflects Banyakyusa cultural beliefs and their view of reality. Moreover, as Mbiti (1991) points out, mystical powers come from the Almighty God. With reference to Mbiti's and Wilson's contentions, the representation of Nyerere with mystical powers in the myth under discussion, lifts Nyerere's position in Tanzanian politics to that of a specially endowed leader capable of protecting his people from any danger.

Furthermore, in political mythmaking as Mushengyezi (2004) contends, a leader who is imbued with mystical powers, such as the belief that one has the ability to transform himself/herself into something else is important in mobilising and stimulating community support. Mushengyezi reports that the belief that the then rebel leader of NRM/NRA Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (who eventually became president of Uganda) regularly transformed himself into certain creatures to avoid arrest, "gave a lot of morale to his

fighters and contributed a great deal to making them invincible fighters” (Mushengyezi 2004:48).

Mushengyezi further argues that the myths about Yoweri Museveni, as a leader greatly contributed to the NRM/NRA victory in 1986. With respect to Nyerere, Mushengyezi’s contention suggests that the belief that Nyerere had mystical powers and that he was able to transform himself into a bird, as depicted in the myth under discussion, plays a significant role in enhancing his stature among colleagues and followers. This belief influenced the reverence accorded to him among Banyakyusa and the support he garnered to wage the Kagera War which, as Mpangala and Mawazo (2015) report, Nyerere obtained from Tanzanians including Banyakyusa.

The myth illustrates Nyerere’s commitment to a peaceful settlement of conflicts even after the outbreak of the war against Idi Amin. In the third section of the “Ubwite bwa Kagera” story, Kawawa is given to narrate that Nyerere was reluctant to continue with the war. The narrator uses Kawawa (then minister of defence), who, for many years before and after independence was very close confidant of Nyerere, to emphasise Nyerere’s desire for peace. Kawawa’s words in verse ninety-four that “*ima papapo uju ikukana ubwite*” (stop there, this person is opposing the war) in which the pronoun *uju* (this person) stands for Nyerere support the view that Nyerere wanted to end the

conflict peacefully. Nyerere’s desire to solve the conflict peacefully is portrayed as his personal preference, as an advocate of peace, despite his outstanding power.

The use of biblical allusion in the myth is also significant. In verse seventy-five, we are told that “*bakalimenye ukuti Nyerere nnuguna gwa Jesu ntubatiko*” (they did not know that Nyerere is a young brother of Jesus). In addition, the narrator in verse seventy-six, further states that “*kokuti unna alijomalija umpapa Jesu*” (it is like his mother was Mary, mother of Jesus). The metaphorical comparison of Nyerere to Jesus is important in comprehending the Banyakyusa’s perception of Nyerere’s endowments and the way the myth under discussion boosts Nyerere’s image among them. For Christians, Jesus is a messiah, a son of God with supernatural abilities including walking on water (John 3:16; Mark 6:48).

The perception of Nyerere as a younger brother of Jesus, flying above River Kagera as described, uplifts further Nyerere’s image particularly in Banyakyusa community as indeed a very special person. He was a hero with the ability to do anything he wanted to protect his people, and that he was invincible. Therefore, getting Kawawa to contend that Nyerere was reluctant to continue with war (verses ninety-one to ninety-five) highlights Nyerere’s desire to solve the Kagera War peacefully and that this was his personal wish, despite

his overwhelming ability to defeat Idi Amin on the battleground.

Similar to Nyerere's depiction in other Banyakyusa myths he is presented as benevolent. In the myths about the Lake Nyasa border conflict between Tanzania and Malawi, he is presented as motivated by a desire to protect Malawians and their property from both Tanzanian and Malawian soldiers through his mystical powers. In the Kagera war, he is shown to have decided to continue with it until he totally defeated Amin to prevent deaths of innocent people. Regardless of his desire to solve the war peacefully, the poem raises an emotional appeal that Nyerere commanded his troops to continue beating Idi Amin after attacking a plane carrying a Whiteman's child and killing him. In verses ninety-five and ninety-six, the narrator states that Idi Amin:

*Alinkutumbula akatege kala
Ngimba alimo umwana gwa nsungu*

(He shot that aircraft
While there was the whiteman's
child)

The phrase *umwana gwa nsungu* (the whiteman's child) as used in the verse above, is used to further project Idi Amin as attacking innocent people such as the whiteman's child who did not have any direct connection to the war, since it was between Tanzanians and Ugandans. The myth, therefore, as it says in verse one hundred "*songa mbele watoto, mimi niko nyuma*" (Move forward children, I am behind you).

Nyerere continued with the war to prevent Idi Amin from killing people who did not have any connection to the war. Whereas the word *watoto* (children) symbolises Tanzanian soldiers, the phrase *mimi niko nyuma* (I am behind you) implies the full support of Nyerere to the soldiers to continue with the war. In addition, the word *watoto* (children) presents Nyerere as a father of all Tanzania. The myth indicates that Nyerere was responsible to protect his children (Tanzanians) by eradicating Idi Amin. To stress his ability to defeat Idi Amin, in verse one hundred one to one hundred three, Nyerere told his soldiers:

*Mimi nina mfagio
Mkishindwa nitaongoza mbele
Mfuate mfagio wa kufagilia*

(I have a broom
If you fail, I will lead
Follow the sweeping broom)

A Swahili word *mfagio* (a broom) as used in the verses above indicates that Nyerere had uppermost powers by which he could defeat Idi Amin on the battleground. Hence, the act of Idi Amin killing innocent people, like that *umwana gwa nsungu* (the whiteman's child), made Nyerere to resolve to defeat him. According to Acheson-Brown (2001), Tanzanian troops continued to fight Idi Amin even after pushing his troops out of Tanzania to prevent him from torturing Ugandans who had welcomed Tanzanian soldiers, especially in Mbarara and Masaka.

Smith (1985:35) opines that though Nyerere was “the most peaceful of all men,” he “had to fight a war to fight aggression.” Smith’s contention suggests that Idi Amin’s presidency was aggressive, hence dangerous to Ugandans, Tanzanians and others people of the region. Like Acheson-Brown (2001) and Smith (1985) contend, the “Ubwite bwa Kagera” story, boosts Nyerere’s image further by insisting that he remained devoted to peace; he fought against Idi Amin to protect innocent people (Tanzanians, Ugandans, and others) from the aggressive actions of Idi Amin.

Conclusion

This article discussed Banyakyusa mythical perceptions of Nyerere and his prosecution of the Kagera War. The war, as depicted in the “Ubwite bwa Kagera” mythical story, was a test of Nyerere’s commitment to peace as a means to protecting his people; the mythical reconstruction of Nyerere by the Banyakyusa suggests that he achieved both. The “Ubwite bwa Kagera” myth, demonstrates that Idi Amin was determined to continue brutalising and killing innocent people in Uganda and Tanzania.

The implication of the myth is that if Idi Amin remained in power in Uganda, he would continue tormenting and murdering innocent people in the region. The myth suggests that armed struggle was, therefore, the only way to stop those tortures and killings, and that

Nyerere’s declaration of the Kagera War against Idi Amin was reasonable. The “Ubwite bwa Kagera” myth, therefore, sanitizes Nyerere’s involvement in the war among Banyakyusa (and other Tanzanians) as a peaceful man who had to wage war to save and to protect his people.

In general, the recreation of Nyerere in this myth boosts his image, among the Banyakyusa in particular and Tanzanians in general. To Banyakyusa, Nyerere was a specially blessed hero. The “Ubwite bwa Kagera” myth, shows that Nyerere was a Godsend leader who was able to protect his people from tyrannical people, such as Idi Amin. The perception that Nyerere was specially endowed by God is stressed by the metaphorical comparison to Jesus Christ and his representation as a good Christian.

The representation depicts Nyerere as a political leader who was wonderful gift to the world. Moreover, Nyerere is, in the myth, portrayed as a reluctant warrior, one who hesitated to declare war and to continue prosecuting it against Idi Amin despite his superior powers and in spite of all the evils Idi Amin had perpetrated. Nyerere’s reluctance enhances his standing as a leader who would do whatever was necessary to promote peace and harmony. Furthermore, his reluctance is seen to further underline the perception that Nyerere’s use of the armed forces against Idi Amin was the only way

by which he would ensure the people were safe and protected.

Generally, the war, rather than being a stain on Nyerere's memory, it sharpens the understanding of his ideals and personality, and his devotion to peace and the well-being of his people. Because of his

determination to protect the life of innocent people, Nyerere set aside his religious beliefs and commitment to peace to prosecute a war to defend the people in Tanzania and Uganda who were in constant danger of further tortured and death at the hands of Idi Amin.

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