

**FOOD CULTURE OF THE BAGISU DURING THE PRE- COLONIAL, COLONIAL  
AND POST COLONIAL ERAS IN MBALE DISTRICT**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

This Dissertation is my original work and has not been presented for examination at any other university.

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## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my husband Apollo Massa, my children and all those friends who have supported me in doing this research.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This work was accomplished through efforts of many people and I am greatly indebted to them. First and foremost, I thank God who has enabled me to reach this far. His grace has been sufficient even at times when things seemed so hard and impossible. God was right there with me! To Him be the glory and Honour, Amen.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

BCI	Bamasaba Cultural Institution
BPG	British Protectorate Government
CAO	Chief Administrative Officer
CCI	Capitalistic Cultural Institutions
CMS	Church Missionary Society
CTT	Cultural Transformation Theory
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GSR	Gender Sensitive Research Approach
IBEAC	Imperial British East Africa Company
LC1	Local Council One
UCI	<i>Umukuka</i> Cultural Institution
UCLB	<i>Umukuka</i> Cultural Leader for the Bagisu
RDC	Resident District Commissioner
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics

## **ABSTRACT**

The plain drive for this research was to explore forces involved in the food cultural continuities and changes of the Bugisu food culture with a focus on food choices as influenced by the socio-economic and political factors in the traditions of the Bugisu culture. The study was inspired by existing literature which suggested that while culture interests and tastes were evolving, there was a cultural scholarly gap in the factors that determined food preferences, continuities, and changes in food choices, their preparation and serving in a historical perspective. Thus, the academic knowledge limitations in the food cultural choices, continuities and changes from the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods which did not over emphasize on the food culture of the Bagisu, essentially inspired the current study. The research also intended to analyze the merits of food culture as related to the establishment and reinforcement of cultural relationships for harmonious societal existence. Guided by the cultural transformation theory, the study was directed by four specific objectives that comprised; The food culture of the Bagisu from pre- colonial times, how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served in a historical context, the changes and continuities in particular choice foods over time.

The case study of the research design based on a qualitative approach. Data were collected using documentary review, observation, focus groups and face-to-face oral interviews guided by interview guides. The findings established new perspectives on food culture which emphasize a new direction in research that indicates that food culture has played a central role. There's need to emphasis the food culture to the people of Bugisu or else it may fade and lose value in the people's lifestyle in the emerging socio-economic set-up of society.

## DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

**Choice food:** Refers to the fundamental ways that describe how groups of people choose on what food to produce, buy, prepare and eat, all influenced by cultural beliefs, identity, habits, taste, mood, appetite or being in a haste.

**Cuisine:** A unique process of preparation and cooking whose features may comprise some special procedures, practices, foods and dishes associated with a specific culture or geographic location.

**Culture:** Beliefs, behaviours, objects, values and other characteristics shared by groups of people which may include ceremonial artefacts, jewellery, or even traditional clothing and music.

**Food Culture:** The connection, beliefs, and experience specific population groups have with specific food items and food system, incorporating cultural heritage and ethnicity.

**Cultural setting:** Patterns of culture, behaviours, relationships, moral values, political systems, class structures, gender roles and beliefs that dominate the society at a given epoch in history.

**Factors:** Reasons advanced to account for the continuities and changes in food choices, changes, preparation procedures, consumption and ways of serving.

**Lifestyle:** Refers to the ways, attitudes, tastes, moral standards and economic level which may collectively make up the style of living of an individual or groups of people.

**Food:** This is any item ingested to acquire nourishment for any living being in form of plant, animal-based to provide vital food values which maintain life.

**Historical context:** Analysis that profoundly relies on past events, past socio-economic, legal, philosophical and political aspects of society focusing on a specific period in time.

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

#### 1.0 Introduction

The research explored the significance of food in the socio-economic lifestyle of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda of the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial times. The study focused on the preferred foods, the relative stability in particular choice foods over time and shifts in some cuisine. While global and regional patterns in food culture demonstrate strong relationships between food preferences and peoples' lifestyles, there were inadequate explanations on this concept and 'food choices' as different food preparation, consumption and changes in this over time among the Bagisu.<sup>1</sup>

Accordingly, the extant body of knowledge before the current investigation offered casual descriptions on food production and consumption among the Bagisu. The current research generated academic information on what food was considered to be cultural, as well as the historical factors that accounted for changes in particular food choices.

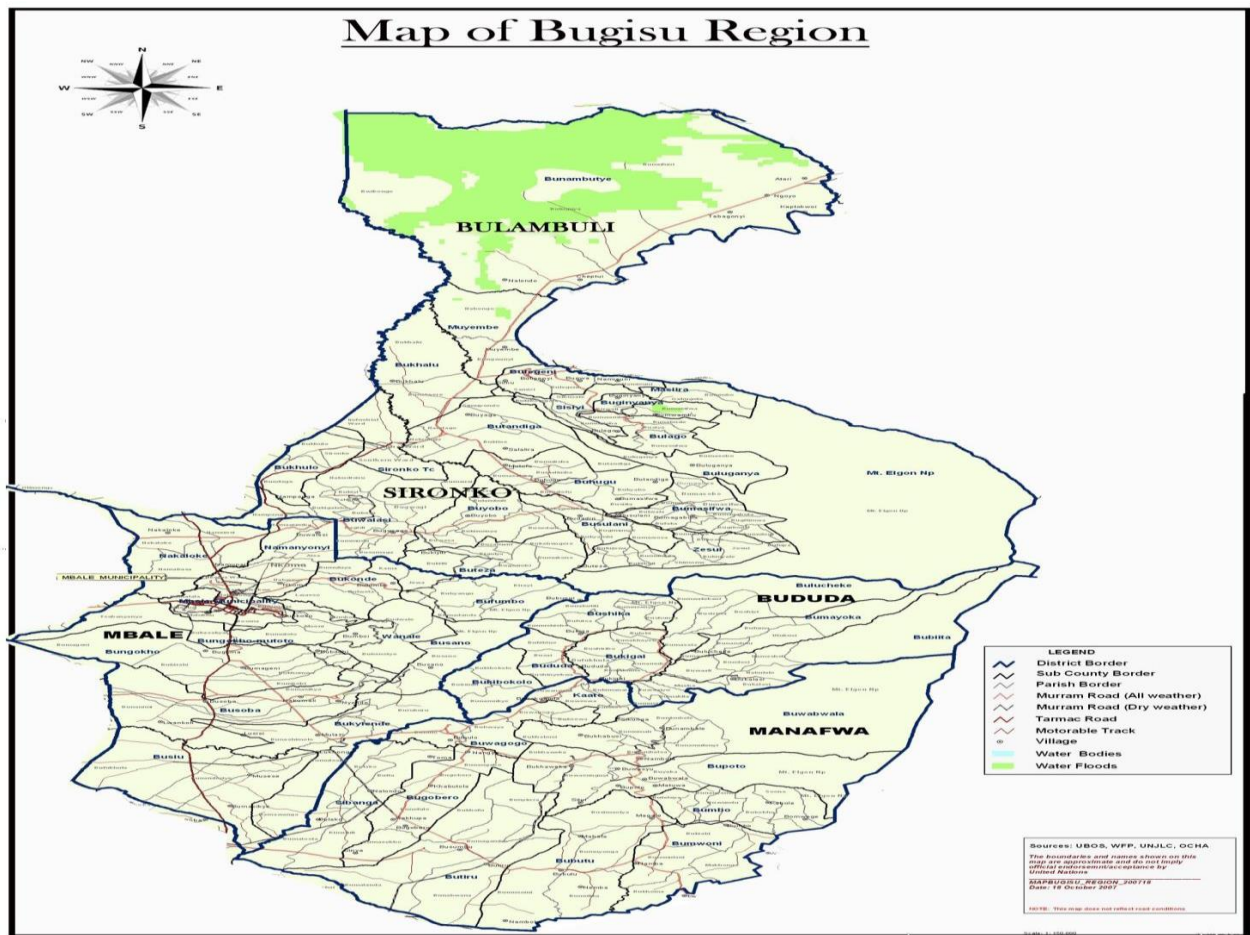
This research further provides historical information on how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served the way they were. Consequently, this study essentially generated data to address the knowledge gap on what the contemporary foods preferred by the Bagisu were and why there was relative permanence in these particular choice foods amidst fundamental changes in others. The study investigated the food preference determinants and the descriptive procedures involved in the preparation of choice cultural foods in the study site.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilles Fumey, Peter Jackson and Pierre Raffard, Food Cultures and Spaces, Anthropology of Food, No, 7.2011, p.22



Equally significant are the data generated which focused on the way choice foods were served within the cultural setting of the Bagisu in different situations from the pre-colonial and colonial periods to post colonial periods in Bugisu region as shown in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.1: Map of Bugisu Region, Uganda**

### 1.1 Background to the Study

Globally, Culture refers to the ideas, customs and social behaviour of a particular people, which defines their perceptions, beliefs, traditions, preferences and choices. Culture includes all of the ideas and beliefs that Africans have articulated over time and, thus understanding culture is essential to understanding a people and their history<sup>2</sup>. Such cultural attributes

<sup>2</sup> Toyin Falola, Steven J. Salm. African History and Culture Before 1900 second edition. Durham,NC: Carolina Academic Press. 2019 P.41

might also be shared by people in a specific geographical place or where they freely enjoy their cultural preferences. Culture is also referred to the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and the historical practices that characterize an institution or a community culture focused on the bottom line of the set values shared by people.

Food culture is the collective habits, rituals, beliefs, values lifestyles and practices around producing, procuring and in taking food.<sup>3</sup> . Food defines people and shapes the way people live and feel. It affects their identity and their culture. Thus, the choice foods such as maleya (bamboo shoots), peas, meat, ground nuts, millet, ‘Kamatoore’ (bananas), ‘makila’ (smashed beans) and ‘bubwooba’ (mushrooms)

The above foods are important because were prepared, served and the cultural attachment placed on them. About specific types of food for different community practices suggests that there was cultural significance for diverse choices of foods, which this study explored in an attempt to understand the food culture of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda.

## **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

While earlier writers/scholars looked at food in areas of anthropology, food and nutrition, biology, catering, home economics among others, the study investigated makes a historical account concerning the changes and continuities of the traditional foods among the Bagisu in Mbale district given the key studies which have been conducted on cultural traditions<sup>4</sup>, identity heritage practices<sup>5</sup> and general description of Bugisu foods<sup>6</sup>. However, they have

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<sup>3</sup> Rwnogoga Deo. Why regional Tier Form of Decentralization Governamnce.books. google.com.UK,books Page.129

<sup>4</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D. For the Land and culture of Bamasaba, Ibid, p.21

<sup>5</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, The Bamasaba Tribal History, Penguin, London, 1952, pp.22-24.

<sup>6</sup> Mafabi David, The Bagisu food in perspective. *Daily Monitor*, Sunday April 22, 2012, Ibid, p.7

scarcely addressed the centrality of the Bugisu food culture. This research highlights the significance of food in all traditions, practices and identity ceremonies as part of establishing ethnic identity relationships for harmonious societal existence. Nevertheless, the scholars who have addressed central aspects of the Bugisu's traditions and food culture have not explored the historical factors which explain what the cherished foods were, why these important foods were prepared the way they were and the historical forces which account for the way the foods were served. Besides, while there have been some major continuities and changes since the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras, no study has comprehensively addressed these historical issues and how these have affected establishment of cultural identity among the Bagisu of Uganda.

Despite the relative stability in Bugisu cuisine, changes have been identified in the people's food culture. There is also evidence for relative consistency in food choices over generations in spite of the 21<sup>st</sup> century modernization forces, there is a trend for new food varieties that are gradually being served along with the traditional choice foods over the years.<sup>7</sup> The body of knowledge hardly addressed these phenomenal issues, clearly suggesting the need for research in this area to produce a comprehensive historical account about the food culture of the Bagisu. Thus, the scholarly vacuum in the factors explaining what the cherished foods were, why these important foods were prepared the way they were partly formed the study rationale. Besides, the need for a historical account on the way the Bagisu foods were served and the logical explanations for continuities and changes in food traditions from pre-colonial to the present further supported the rationale for undertaking this study.

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<sup>7</sup> Mafabi David, The Bagisu food in perspective. *Daily Monitor*, Sunday April 22, 2012.

### **1.3 Objectives of the study**

#### **1.3.1 Main objective**

The main objective of the study was to explore the history of food culture of the Bagisu during the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial periods.

#### **1.3.2 Specific Objectives**

1. To Examine the food culture of the Bagisu focusing on the preferred food choices from pre- colonial, colonial and post colonial times.
2. To establish how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served in a historical context.
3. To account for some changes in particular choice foods over time in Bugisu cultural setting.
4. To explain the continuities of the particular food choices from the pre-colonial.

#### **1.3 Research Questions**

- i. What food was considered to be cultural among the Bagisu with reference to the preferred food choices from pre- colonial, colonial and post colonial.
- ii. How and why the choice cultural foods were prepared and served the way they were?
- iii. Why were there some changes in particular choice foods over time in the Bugisu cultural setting.
- iv. What foods have continued on over time in Bugisu cultural setting.

### **1.5 Scope of the study**

#### **1.5.1 Geographical scope**

The geographical focus of the study was Bugisu sub region located in Eastern Uganda. This region is a home to all the six districts of the historical Bugisu District, which was part of the

17 districts of Uganda at independence in 1962<sup>8</sup>. It currently comprises of Mbale, Sironko, Bulambuli, Manafwa, Bududa and Namisindwa which share the same cultural heritage. With this consideration, the study envisaged that all shades of opinion, knowledge levels, interests, cultural inclinations and sensitivities about the food culture of the Bagisu were adequately represented in the whole region. It should be noted that all the six districts of Bugisu share the same history, however, for representation purposes; the study purposively selected Mbale District being the oldest and the mother district in the Bugisu. Thus Uganda colonial authorities carved Bugisu and bukedi districts out of Mbale district in 1954, isolating Mbale town as a separate entity.<sup>9</sup> Hence Mbale was the first district to be created then followed by Sironko in 1999, Manafwa in 2005, Bududa in 2006, Bulambuli in 2009 and Namisindwa in 2017. Hence qualifying Mbale to be the mother district of Bugisu.

### **1.5.2 Content Scope**

Conceptually, the study focused on the Bagisu food culture and explained how and why the particular cultural food preferences have remained over centuries, factors which explain some changes, how these foods have been prepared and served in a historical perspective. The study concentrated on exploring the history of Bugisu's food culture which primarily focused on food heritage connections, beliefs, and experiences specific to the Bagisu and their specific food items, food system, cuisine, cultural identity and ethnicity linkages. The scope of the study stretched from the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial period mainly to document a historical account of Bugisu food culture explaining why there were changes and continuities in the people's culture.

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<sup>8</sup> Gideon S. Were, *The Bagisu and Their Past: Some Notes on Their Legends about Creation, The Origins of Death, The Economy of Their Ancestors And The Phenomenon of Kintu*, *Transafrican Journal of History*, Vol. 11 (1982), pp. 184-195, p.184.

<sup>9</sup> Khanakwa Permella 'Gishu political identity and the fight for Mbale in late colonial the journal of African History volume 59 pg 3

### **1.5.3 Time scope**

The research on food culture covered a period from the pre-colonial period up to the post colonial period. The pre-colonial period in this study represents centuries of shared identity and heritage patterns of culture, centre of which is the people's food<sup>10</sup>. It is believed that the centuries' old elaborate practices provided occasions for strengthening sharing cultural heritage food<sup>11</sup>, inculcating expected behaviour, strengthening relationships, establishing societal peer structures and passing on beliefs to young people in Bugisu's cultural traditions from epoch to epoch in history. The study undertook to investigate the food culture of the Bagisu which was climaxed in 2010, when officially the 'Umukuka Cultural' Leader for the Bagisu was installed<sup>12</sup>. The study considered that the election and instalment of the 'Umukuka' cultural leader in 2010 strengthened the cultural identity of the Bagisu which has been sustained up to date.

### **1.6 Significance of the study**

This study is anchored in the scholarly debate that continues to explore the criticality of people's food culture in the establishment of cultural relationships and ethnic identities that overall, contribute to harmonious societal existence from generation to generation. In other words, this historical debate examines the linkages of people's food culture as part of the integral historical facts that form part of the glue for society's lifestyle.<sup>13</sup> The study, therefore, adds to this debate by contributing key historical aspects that relate to the fundamental ways that describe how ethnic identities choose their cuisine, the essential

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<sup>10</sup> Ursula Nafula. 'Kamarofu ka kuukhu' African story Book Initiative, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2014, p.39.

<sup>11</sup> Ursula Nafula. 'Kamarofu ka kuukhu' African story book initiative, Ibid, p.43.

<sup>12</sup> Mafabi David, What does a new king mean to Bugisu? Bugisu Chiefdom, *Daily Monitor*, 22 September 2013,p.11.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Fumey, Peter Jackson and Pierre Raffard, Introduction: Food Cultures and Spaces, *Anthropology of Food*, No. 7, 2011, p.44.

reasons they consider for those selections and how these connect to the wider society. In the context of food culture as an academic subfield of endeavour, the theoretical significance of this research is immense because it produced pertinent information that allowed historians to tell the whole story of the Bagisu as far as their food identities are concerned.

In addition, the significance of the study lies in its relevance as it provides historical interpretation of the ‘why’ and ‘wherefores’ for choice food, how they were prepared and served the way they were among the Bagisu. Besides, the study provides an account of the historical scholarly information on the underlying factors that explain the continuities and changes in the food culture of the Bagisu. These historical aspects are similarly vital to help tell the whole story of Bugisu’s culture. Again, the considered view is that the research makes a scholarly contribution that emerges from an empirical investigation of food heritage, how it cements people’s culture and plays a role in building a strong harmonious society. Overall, the study also enriches the existing body of knowledge specifically on the Bugisu’s food culture and how it establishes and sustains the ethnic relationships in the wider society. These facts are important to history researchers and professionals in related fields such as anthropology as a basis for further academic knowledge creation.

### **1.7 The Cultural Transformation Theory as a theoretical Framework for the study**

Key theories have been advanced to clarify on the historical role of food culture in society. This study adopted the rationale of the Cultural Transformation Theory<sup>14</sup> (CTT) which locates identity societal processes among the factors that explain the sustainable cultures, including that of food, in driving society forward.

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<sup>14</sup> Eisler, Riane. *The Cultural Theory Transformation Theory*. Harper One, New York, 1987, pp.38-45

The cultural transformation theory suggests that societies in earlier centuries used to follow a “partnership model” of evolution. A partnership model involves community-oriented partnership systems designed to conserve societal cultures in well-ordered and predictable patterns mostly driven by informal cultural forces within society. The case of the cultural practices among the Bagisu, specific of *Imbalu* ceremonies<sup>15</sup>, present the best example. However, over time, theorists argue that perceptions give way to the contemporary “dominator model” of progress or retrogression.<sup>16</sup> The cultural transformation perspective was first advanced by Riane Eisler, a renowned cultural intellectual.

Riane’s propositions have significant implications for cultural relationships. The scholar views society as entangled in a web of cultural relationships<sup>17</sup> that make it function as a whole for the efficient achievement of the public good. The public good in the conception of the current study refers to the cultural and heritage practices that involve vital food rituals whose significance is to establish identity relationships necessary for harmonious societal existence. The scholar argued that the cultures and subcultures in society were subject to strong forces<sup>18</sup>, some clearly understood as emerging from within society itself, while others were brought about by transformative historical events.

It is further affirmed that societies exist on a partnership-domination continuum, an inevitable societal development which builds or erodes cultures with the passage of time as understood in a historical perspective. He argues that the passage of time ushers in transformative

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<sup>15</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Penguin, London, 1952, Ibid.p.37

<sup>16</sup> Eisler, Riane. *The Power of Partnership: Seven Cultural Relationships and Transformations for the Societal Good*. California: New World Library,1971, p.49.

<sup>17</sup> Eisler, Riane, 1987, opcit p.34.

<sup>18</sup> Eisler, Riane, 1987, opcit p.43



cultural aspects, sometimes in the positive or negative directions, often times in unequal measures. Waseem<sup>19</sup>, another cultural scholar affirms that the species or players in societal cultural linkages are in most cases responsible for the movement away from the former partnership orientation to responsible for maintaining cultural stability to a more domination orientation by powerful entities in society such as men, cultural institutions and governmental interests<sup>20</sup>.

Accordingly, the scholar insists that people and institutions in the cultural transformation towards societal cultural dominance are more powerful in this process, making transformative decisions that guide the rest of society's cultural behaviour. The cultural transformation theory similarly believes that there is historical evidence of another type of society where all individuals are equal and is possible<sup>21</sup> particularly those societies where nearly all individuals comply with the expected cultural expectations regardless whether they are aware of underlying transformative forces or not. Lastly, the partnership perspective centres on an open, equal arrangement where all societal players are more or less responsible for continuities in cultural heritage or collectively driving or transforming culture in functional or dysfunctional directions<sup>22</sup>.

The cultural transformation theory was selected as appropriate for this study for several reasons. First, within the conceptualization of food cultural transformation, the theory helps explain the continuities in the food culture that are perceived to have existed for centuries

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<sup>19</sup> Waseem Mohammed. *Influence of Community Players on Cultural Transformation*. Oxford University Press, Cambridge, 2001, p.62.

<sup>20</sup>Waseem Mohammed, Opcit, 2001, p.54

<sup>21</sup> Nilsson, William. *Relevance of Cultural Relationships*. New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1989, p.81.

<sup>22</sup> Eisler, Riane. Harper One, New York, 1987, Ibid, pp.49.

before colonialism. This explanation makes the food cultural history of the Bagisu more comprehensive and credible in analysing the people's identities and ethnic interests<sup>23</sup> and its role in the creation of discreet identities as well as the contribution to building a harmonious society. Second, evidence suggests that there have been changes in the food culture of the Bagisu. The cultural transformation theory helps in placing these changes in the contexts of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial realities in order for historians to fully understand the food culture of the Bagisu.

Recent years have witnessed both continuities and changes, some considered internal within Bugisu. For example, there are widely cherished foods whose significance has held firm from generation to generation. This proposition is within the cultural transformation theory. The same theory plausibly explains the factors that account for the changes in the Bugisu's food culture where individuals, Capitalistic Cultural Institutions and government have moved to commercialize the culture of the Bagisu. All these implications demonstrate that the cultural transformation theory was relevant to guide the exploration of the study.

## **1.8. Literature Review**

### **1.8.1 Introduction**

The study reviewed available literature on food culture at different levels for diverse periods. Key scholarships were studied at the global, African and Ugandan history levels consciously focusing on food culture. Three general trends in the literature emerged. First, one vital finding was that while there were abundant relevant literature sources, most of them clearly aimed to analyse archaeological, public health, socio-economic, political aspects, nutritional

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<sup>23</sup> Amone Charles. We are strong because of our Millet Bread: Staple Foods and the Growth of Ethnic Identities in Uganda. *TRAMES*, 2014, 18(68/63), 2, 159–172, p. 161.

relationships as well as the linkages between food and culture. Secondly, the literature considered most relevant to food culture and food production activity which needed to be added on the academic analysis. Three, most of the literature found in the relevant category was full of food descriptions from different areas, cuisine considerations, procedures and lifestyle analyses. Most of these scholarly works of Wamoka, Wangusa and Wepukhulu plus many others, needed to shed more light on the factors that accounted for historical continuities and changes in food culture at different levels of analysis.

### **1.8.2 The justification for conducting the study from the pre-colonial period**

The available body of literature indicated that it was prudent for the current study to begin its analysis from the pre-colonial. According to Wamoka, Wangusa, and Wepukhulu<sup>24</sup> post that the land and culture of the Bagisu predates all modern historical occurrences. The scholars add that the Bagisu's heritage and cultural rites have from time immemorial been celebrated without a break right from the first legendary man called Masaba<sup>25</sup>. Thus, it was determined that the analysis in this study should begin from the pre-colonial era since some of the existing literature backed the claim that the culture of the Bagisu, centre of which is food, is traced back to Kintu, the first man<sup>26</sup>. Whereas According to Wangusa (1987), Mundu and Sera who emerged from the hole on Mt Elgon produced two sons Masaba and Kundu. Masaba remained in Bugisu and Kundu (called Kintu by the Buganda) the ancestor of the Baganda, was believed to have disappeared to Buganda were he died from. Hence the Bagisu and Buganda are brothers from the same man Mundu who originated from Mt. Elgon. So to

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<sup>24</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu, 2008, Op cit, p.12

<sup>25</sup> Gideon S. Were, The Bagisu and their Past: Some Notes on their Legends about Creation, the Origins of Death, the Economy of their Ancestors and the Phenomenon of Masaba, *Transafrican Journal of History* , Vol. 11, 1982, pp. 184-195, p.187.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p.185

the Baganda Kintu was the first man while to the Bagisu it was Masaba. One of the questions for the study, therefore, revolved around the issue of authenticity. To what extent was it true that the food culture of the Bagisu existed for centuries long before colonialism? What traditional foods were cherished and accordingly associated with the ethnic and identity ceremonies, what has changed in the preferred traditional foods and what has continued on and still embraced as cultural? All these questions were positively answered and tied to the need to create a cultural bondage of ethnic identity which cemented the heritage relationships among the Bagisu for the larger good of society.

Secondly, the periodization of the current study was planned towards the pre-colonial era, colonial and post colonial. The food culture of the Bagisu was mixed up during the colonial era due to various forces that comes in during that period. However, the culture values become more significant after installation of the cultural leader.

Previously the Bugisu political institution never had a king as people were led by either clan elders or chiefs. However, in 2010 in August, the *Umukuka* (king) Mr Wilson Wamimbi, 75, Uganda's former High Commissioner to Canada, was elected cultural chief of the Bamasaba by representatives of the 26 Bamasaba clansmen, at a ceremony that took place in Mbale Municipal Chambers<sup>27</sup>. This marked a new trend of the Bugisu cultural institution, which for good academic reasons also begins another period of scholarly analysis on the food culture of the Bagisu which has continued on from the pre- colonial where societies were led by clan heads.

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<sup>27</sup> Bugisu chieftdom, David Mafabi: Daily monitor- What does a new king mean to Bugisu? 22 September 2013, p.5

In comparable fashion, the literature on food culture and its significance largely highlighted food descriptions with scanty references to the sacredness of choice foods in respect of the Bagisu. Relevant literature, for instance, outlines a number of foods and cuisines<sup>28</sup> mostly relating it to *Imbalu* cultural ceremonies.<sup>29</sup> In this regard, key descriptions identified in the available literature have involved the various types of Bagisu foods since the pre-colonial period. The major foods among these include *Kamatoore* (matooke), *bufukye* (cassava) smashed together with beans or with sweet potatoes, *kamankunyu* (yams), *buulo* (millet), *inyama* (meat), *malewa* (bamboo shoots), *makila/magira* (pounded beans or peas) and *bumegere* (mushrooms)<sup>30</sup>. In line with the shortfalls in the existing works prior to this research, however, the study highlighted the choice foods identified.<sup>31</sup> This research, mainly analyses the deep associations of the Bagisu food culture, commonly displayed during cultural ceremonies. The emphasis put on the food considered mostly the cultural significance among the Bagisu and the factors why that food was cherished in light of the societal prerequisites for harmonious and orderly lifestyle.

The study considered the factors that accounted for the changes and continuities in the cherished cultural foods which were in equal regard interested in how the choice was prepared. The considerations involved in how the choice foods were served in the context of the need to create and cement cultural relationships among the Bagisu's harmonious

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<sup>28</sup> Mafabi David, The Bagisu food in perspective. *Daily Monitor*, Sunday April 22, 2012, p.7.

<sup>29</sup> Placid, J. and Wotsuna Khamalwa. *Identity, power, and culture: Imbalu: Initiation ritual among the Bamasaba of Uganda*, the University of Michigan, Breitunger, 2004, p.17-34.

<sup>30</sup> Wamimbi D. Johnson, *The Traditional Foods of the Bagisu*, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2014, pp. 12.19.

<sup>31</sup> Wonekha Failoza, 76 years old, a respondent interviewed in Manafwa District identified bananas, millet, meat, bamboo shoots and beans as the most commonly cherished foods at the heart of the food culture of the Bagisu.

existence in society constituted important historical information. The gap in the literature in the Uganda case was particularly in regard with inadequate analysis as far as the role of food culture in terms of food choices, how they were prepared and served among the Bagisu. In addition, the analyses that existed before this research did not establish everything on the cultural relationships through food culture.

On the basis of gaps in the analysis on food culture and its role in forging sustainable cultural relationships in society, this study further took the view that research in this area was timely. Besides, the cultural theory and food as explained in this chapter and utilized to guide this study generally confirms the scarcity of literature on the significance of food culture in the context of societal order and stability<sup>32</sup>. Whereas the existence of a deeply-rooted food culture among the Bagisu is a firm reality dating many generations back. Not much previous research existed before this study, especially in relation to the significance of such a culture to society.

Moreover, in spite of the scholarly inadequacy in as far as food culture is concerned, feedbacks received from the research site for this study demonstrate that food culture, chiefly hinged on choice foods, had survived for several centuries in the area during the pre-colonial era. There are also some scholarly accounts<sup>33,34</sup> which support this view, highlighting the functionality of the food culture among the Bagisu long before the pre-colonial era.

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<sup>32</sup> Lustig, Midas Wills. *Intercultural Competence Interpersonal Communication Across Cultures*, 7th ed. New York: Pearson, 2013, p.15.16.

<sup>33</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Penguin, London, 1952, pp.44-51.

<sup>34</sup> Placid J. & Wotsuna K. Identity, power, and culture: Imbalu: Initiation ritual among the Bamasaba of Uganda, 2004, p.41

Thus, the gap in scholarly knowledge which existed in the body of knowledge on the food culture of the Bagisu was historical information at the core fabric of society's cherished socio-cultural identity relationships. Heavily relying on the cultural theory, the present study addressed this gap, in relation to the food cultural significance to society as presented in this chapter. Central to the gap that this research addressed scanty scholarly information that was considered central to the historical narrative for the food culture of the Bagisu and the factors of the specific choice foods, their unique preparation and the serving details. Besides, there were similar levels of scarcity of historical information on vital ways that describe how Bagisu choose what food to produce, buy, prepare and eat as shaped by their shared cultural beliefs. The inadequate academic information on food culture in respect of the Bagisu suggests that the food choices, the unique processes of preparing such food and the relevant rationale for these cultural decisions would not have been available for the historical record. Furthermore, the cookery features such as the peerless procedures, techniques, practices, key cuisines and the associated specific cultural meanings<sup>35</sup> for composing a complete history of the Bagisu food culture.

For centuries, the Bagisu have been involved in identity in holding regular cultural identity ceremonies, centre of which are choice foods. While much academic analysis has been focused on much more on these cultural traditions, the place of food in these practices had not yet been explored. Indeed, the vast majority of studies had until this study, been devoted to exploring the general culture revolving about the *Imbalu*<sup>36</sup> yet for anyone to constitute a comprehensive history of the Bagisu, their food culture has to be wholesomely explored. In light of this background the current research was undertaken to construct a historical account

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<sup>35</sup> Warde, A, *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary antinomies and commodity culture*, Sage, London, 1997, p.57.

<sup>36</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D., 2008, Ibid, p.39

to explain the food culture of the Bagisu. The research focused on food choices of the Bagisu, how they prepared them and why they served them the way they did, what changed and what was continued on up to date. Ultimately, the significance of the research was to explore the process of establishing cultural relationships to cement the people's identity in Bugisu from the pre-colonial to date.

### **1.8.3 The global perspective of food culture**

The review on food culture noted that there were significant perspectives in the relevant category of literature which implicitly contributed to this study. First, as the history of humanity, is above all, a composition of histories of movements and mobility, the food generational movements, their products and know-hows have entailed transformative processes impacting on local cultures and consumer tastes. In a study conducted in the US on the underlying assumptions for food choices<sup>37</sup> suggests that over time, the evolving cultures, interests and tastes also come to affect entire regional economies as well as social and people's dietary considerations.

Secondly, the US study further indicates that, food culture becomes a powerful tool for understanding people's historical ways of living, celebrating, accepting or rejecting new ideas on cherished foods mostly basing on nutrition and dietary considerations. Missing in this literature is how the identified foods are prepared and served in diverse locations<sup>38</sup>. In addition, studies at the international level on food cultural issues had little on a local Uganda context and most of them hardly cited food cultural issues despite wide citations of a

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<sup>37</sup> Haughton, Boyle, Gussow, J.David, and Dodds, Jr, An Historical Study of the Underlying Assumptions for United States Food Guides from 1917 through the Basic Four Food Group Guide, J. Nutri, Ed., 1987, **19**(4): 169-75.

<sup>38</sup> Gilles Fumey, Peter Jackson and Pierre Raffard, Food Cultures and Spaces, Anthropology of Food, No.7, 2011, p.22.



diversity of cuisines in different parts of the globe. In any case, neither do most studies at this level cite Uganda nor the underlying factors explaining why people make specific food choices in a cultural perspective. On the basis of this analysis of global level studies, It was observed that there was a general gap about the historicity of these variables, specifically relating to food culture. This academic gap particularly became apparent in the analysis of the history of the food culture for the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda.

Although a number of scholars explore relevant issues that make contribution to the subject of food as a cultural aspect, there are still gaps in the literature. Specifically, Murcott<sup>39</sup> and Techoueyres<sup>40</sup> make a great deal of analysis on food culture. Murcott, for example, examines the cultural significance of food and eating from global experiences shared in a conference setting. On the other hand, Techoueyres studies the central aspects that relate to local food, the flexible nature of culture as well as food production issues at farm level. The review of these accounts however suggests that they concentrate on describing food processes and what importance is attached to different foods in terms of nutrition. One challenge with these studies is that the historical aspects of these analyses are not indicated. In short, these studies fell short of central aspects of the current study such as the underlying factors behind the choice foods in a historical perspective.

Most global level studies, just like the US and the global conference proceedings-based research describe the process that diverse cuisine go through to achieve appropriate or recommended dietary and nutritional standards. Hardly do these studies develop into what historically caused the players involved in food processes to choose the foods they did basing

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<sup>39</sup>Murcott, A. The cultural significance of food and eating. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society*,41(2), 198, 203-210.

<sup>40</sup> Techoueyres, Isabelle, *Local food between nature and culture: from neighbour farm to terroir*. Interview of Laurence Bérard, 2007, pp.68-72.

on cultural perspectives other than nutrition and dietary considerations. Therefore, the gap in the existing body of knowledge needed to be addressed and the current research became apparent. The current study filled this gap in knowledge on food culture and its significance to society using the cultural transformation theory as discussed in section 1.6 of this study.

There are other scholars who have taken profound interest in the history of food culture and its importance in society at the global level. The most relevant studies are those conducted by Robin Brigand and De Garine<sup>41</sup>, Warde<sup>42</sup>, Grignon<sup>43</sup>, Goody<sup>44</sup>, Gilles Fumey<sup>45</sup> as well as Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen<sup>46,47</sup>, amongst others. Important to note is that these scholars have made significant efforts in tracing the food cultural aspects in their works and highlighting various levels of historical developments in their analyses of diverse food aspects. Nonetheless, the global approaches to their studies has made their respective scholarships largely generalised, and therefore, not adequately comprehensive to cover and help to guide the exploration of local perspectives such as those focusing on food culture among the Bagisu on which this study focused. Moreover, some of these scholars hardly analysed the food aspects in historical terms and in other cases do not make firm references to

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<sup>41</sup> De Garine, I. Lweis, Food, Tradition and Prestige, In Food, Man and Society (Eds D. Walcher, N. Krechmer and H.L. Barnett), Plenum Press, New York, 1976, p.77.

<sup>42</sup> Warde, A, *Consumption, Food and Taste: Culinary antinomies and commodity culture*, Sage, London, 1997, p.56.

<sup>43</sup> Grignon C. and Grignon Chazan. Long-term Trends in Food Consumption: a French Portrait, *Food and Foodways*, 8(3): 151-174.

<sup>44</sup> Goody, J. *Cooking Cuisine and Class Study in Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1982, p.253.

<sup>45</sup>Gilles Fumey, Peter Jackson and Pierre Raffard, Introduction: Food Cultures and Spaces, *Anthropology of Food*, No. 7, 2011, p.33.

<sup>46</sup> Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen, Conflict, Food Insecurity and Globalization, *Food Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (Food Cult Soc)*, vol.2, No. 19, 2006, pp.34-46.

<sup>47</sup> Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen, *Food Movements and Migration*, Allen and Unwin, 1999, p.45.

food culture. Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen discuss the key factors that may change food tastes, among them migration, but do not expressly discuss food choices which is part of the current study themes<sup>48</sup>. On the other hand, Grignon and Grignon<sup>49</sup> raises the issue of food consumption patterns, comparing the longevity of consumers' steady interest in some foods across the globe. These scholars further observed that by the time the Industrial Revolution set in around the beginning of the 18th Century, much of the food consumption patterns which were already established in parts of Asia, Europe and North America did not change as a consequence of this phenomenon. While their finding is relevant to the current study for the purposes of analysing continuities in food culture, their argument at the global level remains with less substantial context to the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda.

In his study on cooking cuisine and class that adopted a sociological perspective, Goody<sup>50</sup> noted that before the days of refrigeration, cuisine in most areas studied would go bad, making the perishability levels of the food . Undoubtedly, throughout this scholar's account, there is scanty historical attention to food cultural issues which is needed to tell a comprehensive history of the food history of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. This is one of the gaps this study filled to in examining the history of food culture of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda.

There are other global perspectives of food culture analysed which however have not examined the factors responsible for the changes and continuities in food culture. While Water<sup>51</sup>, for example, argues that ancient societies such as China, Greece and the Old Roman

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<sup>48</sup> Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen, 1999, *Op. cit.*, p.18.

<sup>49</sup> Grignon and Grignon, *Ibid.* 8(3): 151-174

<sup>50</sup> Goody, 1982, p.253.

<sup>51</sup> Walter, Aaron, *Food Assets, Food Heritage and Rituals: A Historical Perspective*, Sage Press, 1956, p.27.

Empire were closely associated with unique food cultures as early as 6000 BC, these cultures were largely confined to institutions such as the military. He adds that old accounts show differences between the food cultures of the armies in old societies, which was often quite understandable given that these armies used to move a lot around across continents. Whereas Walter's account is a significant historical academic piece, it does not explain the reasons why there were differences in food culture between the main populations and their armies. This alone is a factor that highlights a gap in this literature since it does not provide comprehensive historical analysis of food culture in old societies in a global perspective. Moreover, his discussion of food culture around the world in old societies does not the underlying factors which influenced the continuities and changes in the food cultures of the societies studied.

The study on British<sup>52</sup> cuisine is also relevant to this discussion. This study explored the various considerations that informed the processes for the diverse cuisines in British society. Alan's view of the cuisines is that there were uniquely British values and tastes which informed the processes for preparing the traditional foods. Whereas these are perspectives likely to apply to the current study, the differences in the contexts between the British and Ugandan societies remains a key factor in why there remained a gap in the literature. Besides, the British study explored the preparation of the cuisine preparation, leaving out the considerations for choice food selection and consumption issues.

Similar criticisms apply to Friedberg scholarship<sup>53</sup> which relied on clinical samples of obese people in industrial societies such as Germany, Sweden and France. She argued that there

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<sup>52</sup> Alan Wade, *Imagining British Cuisine: Representations of Culinary Identity in the Good Food Guide*, *Food Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, June Vol.19, No. 2, 2009, pp.109-221.

<sup>53</sup> Suzanne, Elizabeth Friedberg, *Ambiguous Appetites: A Modern History*, Heinemann Press, 2010, pp.46-49.

was a strong relationship between ambiguous appetite from specific choice foods the people got addicted to and obesity. However, while there is an aspect of choice foods that Friedberg mentions, the historical analysis is not adequate because her context was concealed which would clearly be different from an open society where individual's food choices are not controlled at all. In addition, the aspects of food culture are not analysed in a free environment in her study.

Therefore, the present study was conducted to establish whether the observations made in the food discourse at the global level were also valid in the specific case of Bugisu, Eastern Uganda. In addition, clearly the factors forcing influencing food cultural continuities and changes were not fully exhausted in regard to the global level literature.

Further a central perspective notes that humankind has been immensely involved in a long-interconnected process of food culture, based on deeply-held cuisine items, beliefs, knowledge and practices specific to inhabitants has emerged.<sup>54</sup> This view takes these historical aspects of the global food system as profoundly integrating cultural traditions and identities tied to diverse geographically located ethnic groups. Thus, for thousands of years food cultures have developed around the world closely reflecting the interests and values of different socio-economic patterns as related to peoples' traditional ceremonies, nutritional needs, medicinal considerations and industrial purposes.<sup>55</sup> The synopsis of this history, as predominantly reflected in Wamoka, Wangusa and Wepukhulu's work suggests that food cultures around the world are as old as human civilization and the significance of these

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<sup>54</sup> Roman R.D. Sebastian, *Food as cultural Heritage and Food Globalization processes*, Uppsala: Netherlands, Anders Press. 1987, p.19.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. Roman R.D. Sebastian, p.21-23.

cultures is the contribution they make to harmonious societal existence.<sup>56</sup> Thus, the body of knowledge in the global food systems, their linkages to cultural traditions and food-based identities disclosed a knowledge gap to which academic consideration needed to be paid. This is particularly in respect of the fact that available accounts on food and culture highlight the deep connection between food traditions and ethnicity but without highlighting key foods and cuisines that might have existed in diverse historical traditions.

Indeed, in respect to available evidence in Africa, there are clear scholarly limitations at this level. For example, a study of the Guidar of North Cameroon<sup>57</sup> describes food as an influential tool that recognized and reinforced cultural and business linkages between the Guidar as well as the neighbouring ethnic groups. The study further explains that during cultural ceremonies such as traditional wedding, death celebration, funeral entertainment, naming ceremony and group circumcision, the Guidar collectively consumed diverse food items that established and cemented cultural relationships among them. In the final analysis, food also aided in forging business associations between the Guidar and Moundang, Massa, Tupuri, Bamileke from Cameroon and ethnic groups from Chad. In other words, just like at the global level, there was a scholarly gap on ethnic groups' food culture and cemented cultural relationships among these groups for orderly human existence.

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<sup>56</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D. For the Land and culture of Bamasaba, p.19

<sup>57</sup> Forka Leypey & Mathew Fomine, Food as a linking device among the Guidar of North Cameroon In Anthropology of food, No. 2, 2009, p.33.

#### 1.8.4 Examination of Food culture in the African perspective

The current research covered the pre-colonial period, the colonial period and post-colonial period. To comprehend the history of food culture in Africa, there should be a thorough analysis of the pre-colonial era, colonial and the postcolonial period. This is because all the three periods provide a background for properly analysing the continent's food culture.

Beginning with the pre-colonial period, Osseo-Asare<sup>58</sup> reports that the food culture in Africa varied from area to area, with millet, sorghum, corm (maize), bananas being most common for starch in East Africa. He adds that around 1000 years ago, merchants from the middle East settled on the East African Coast, introducing some foods such as rice with spices<sup>59</sup>, cloves and cinnamon which influenced indigenous foods. This is the situation that the British and the Indians found when they came several centuries later. These groups introduced more new foods such as Indian spiced vegetable curries, lentil and chapattis. Unfortunately, these foods too do not add to the current discourse which partly focused on establishing the factors underlying the selection of choice foods.

The scholarly work of Crawford Young<sup>60</sup> suggests that production, exchange, consumption and distribution processes that also included foodstuffs were clearly embedded in the functioning of society. On the basis of these ideas, one can argue that the pre-colonial period was well organized with the exchange processes based on barter trade among communities.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup>Osseo-Asare, F. *Food Culture in Sub-Saharan Africa. Food culture around the world*. Greenwood Press, 2005, p.45-49.

<sup>59</sup> Osseo-Asare, Op cit. 2005, p.43.

<sup>60</sup> Crawford Young, *The Postcolonial State in Africa: Fifty Years of Independence, 1960–2010*, University of Wisconsin Press, 20 Nov 2012, p.46.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid . p.12.

The colonial era in Africa took root in the continent from the 1700s, but for most African countries from the 1800s<sup>62</sup>. One relevant study for this historical era was carried out by McCann<sup>63</sup> who argues that colonialism introduced many foods, leading to some changes in the African dietary patterns. He adds that over the last millennium, most of which time Africa was under colonialism, food played a major role in the establishment of heritage and identity networks, which, amongst other factors, contributed to the growth of urbanization and emergence of trading centres in some parts of Africa.

Whereas these are strong academic perspectives that contribute to the discourse on African food cuisine enrichment, the contribution to food culture which the current study analysed does not come out. The work of Crawford<sup>64</sup> agrees that colonialism led to the beginning of urbanization and light industrialization which thrived on the continent's food security. Crawford, however, adds that colonialism introduced cash crops which essentially competed with food crops. There was therefore a need to examine the effect of competition between the introduced cash crops and the foods that supported the food culture in the study site. In addition, while vital, the facts presented in Crawford's work do not contribute much to the food culture discussions. There are other scholars such as Njogu, Ngeta and Wanjau<sup>65</sup> who discussed the link between ethnic diversity and food culture in Eastern Africa. While largely focusing on opportunities and challenges, the scholars point out that ethnic identity in the

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<sup>62</sup> Osseo-Asare, Op cit. 2005, p.43

<sup>63</sup> McCann, James C., *Stirring the Pot: A History of African Cuisine*. Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press, 2003, p.79-80.

<sup>64</sup> Crawford Young, 2010. Ibid. pp.14-17.

<sup>65</sup> Njogu, K.; Ngeta, K.; Wanjau, M. *Ethnic Diversity in Eastern Africa: Opportunities and Challenges*. Twaweza Communications. 2010, pp. 78–79.



region have largely maintained their food cultures over long periods, in some cases, maintaining the same cultures across centuries.

These scholars provide the examples of corn (maize), millet and sorghum in East Africa which have lasted for centuries despite colonialism. Again, while this is authentic academic contribution to the debate on food culture, it falls short of the key objectives of the current study. This research was interested in the history of cherished foods, how and why they were prepared the way they were and the way these cultural foods were served among the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. In any case, the key foods identified by the scholars are different from the cherished foods in the site of the current study.

In addition, it should be noted that while the scholars mentioned in this discourse have provided pertinent information on food culture, they scarcely investigated the factors that account for food cultural continuities and changes nor the specific chronological food cultural developments. The latter would be important in the discussion of the Bagisu's comprehensive history as far as food culture and its relevance in their society is concerned. Moreover, the food developments discussed during the colonial period are treated in general and food cultural information appears as a postscript. Further, Uganda is not mentioned anywhere in the given food cultural developments; making the academic knowledge gap for the study much clearer.

According to Jeremy Rich<sup>66</sup>, colonialism introduced negative policies which were designed to undermine African participation in politics, business and social life. In his analysis, the ensuing resistance against these policies led to hunger and consumer protests in colonial Africa, leading to business and social unrest. His analysis brings out the specific case of the

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<sup>66</sup> Jeremy Rich, *Hunger and Consumer Protest in Colonial Africa during World War I: The Case of the Gabon Estuary, 1914-1920*, Longman, London, 2007, p.4.

Gabon Estuary during World War I where civil disobedience led not only to food shortages but also political instability. In one clearly relevant analysis to the present study, Jeremy observes the following:

*“Mostly due to the disruption of international trade brought by the war, French military efforts to attack the neighboring German colony of Cameroon increased, with climatic fluctuations, and government plans to extract taxes and manpower from rural Gabonese communities. All these dynamics interfered with local food supply networks. Mpongwe towns people in Libreville had long purchased rather than produced most of their food. Unable to compete with government efforts to favor soldiers stationed in town for food, consumers struggled to obtain food from 1916 to 1920”<sup>67</sup>.*

The above extract is a clear case of how historically colonialism and war have affected food culture in Africa. However, the main point is that while this literature highlights the historical food disruptions, this obviously undermines people’s food culture. Unfortunately, the scholar does not bring this fact out clearly yet it was central to this study. More relevant to the study is the discussion on some of the factors that are likely to influence continuities and changes in food culture such as unfair policies under dictatorial regimes and war. The current study analysed the extent to which such factors could have affected food culture among the Bugisu of Eastern Uganda.

On the other hand, scholars have also investigated food culture in Africa during the postcolonial period. Mosley Damian<sup>68</sup> is one intellectual who devoted his investigation to the effects of colonialism to food culture in Africa. The scholar’s analysis concentrates on the

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<sup>67</sup> Jeremy Rich, *Ibid.*, 2007, p.48.

<sup>68</sup> Mosley M. Damian, *Breaking Bread: The Roles of Taste in Colonialism. Food Culture and Society: An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*, September 2004, 7(2):49-62, pp.51-53.

centrality of bread in the food culture of the Senegalese people. The scholar suggests that colonialism changed people's tastes to the extent that a meal without bread which was introduced during the colonial era is incomplete. He adds that the hold over bread taste from colonial times is today more popular than ever, its demand extends to the rural interior of Senegal<sup>69</sup>. His investigation indicates that a Europeanized breakfast now reigns in the sub-Saharan lands that barely produce any of the products needed to make bread during the postcolonial period. This investigation shows that due to changes introduced early in the colonial period, people's food culture has changed, with the effects of this shift seen today during the post colonial period. However, the issue with this literature was the extent to which such colonial era food tastes affected the food culture of the Bagisu, the core focus of the present study.

Pertinent post- colonial research on the food culture debate was also conducted by Forka Leypey & Mathew Fomisne in Cameroon during the postcolonial period<sup>70</sup>. In this research, the investigators explain food practices as a powerful device that established identity relationships as well as commercial linkages among the Guidar of North Cameroon themselves on one hand. On the other hand, the cultural and business connections conducted around food were utilized to bring together the Guidar and the neighbouring ethnic groups, in dynamics that highlighted the significance of food culture in society. In addition, the study also points out that during cultural ceremonies such as traditional wedding, death rituals, memorial rites, naming ceremonies and peer circumcision, the Guidar jointly consumed a diversity of foods which formulated and sustained cultural connections among them for the good of society. Finally, in the Cameroon study, one key information relevant to the current study is that food also helped in establishing strong business connections between the Guidar

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<sup>69</sup> Mosley M. Damian, 2004, *Ibid*, 7(2):49-62, p.57.

<sup>70</sup> Forka Leypey & Mathew Fomine, *Op cit*, No.2, 2009, pp.22-25.

and Mounding, Massa, Tupuri, Bamileke from Cameroon and the Sara from the Republic of Chad, a neighbouring country. The Cameroon study is rather relevant to the current study, especially on the value of food culture to society.

The challenging aspect to find appropriate literature to link to the specific choice foods, why the particular food were selected, how they were prepared and served, was the interest of the current research. Overall, there was silence on the systemic factors that account for changes food cultures, particularly looking at changes in choice foods, how they are prepared and served. This discussion, therefore, suggests the need to carry out national studies that make it possible to understand the key issues in the food culture discourse. Thus, the history of the Bagisu food culture is the effort in this direction.

### **1.8.5 The Bagisu food culture in a national perspective**

The historical realities that obtained in the rest of Africa during the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial eras are also true in the case of Uganda in respect of food culture of the Bagisu. Also known as the Bamasaba, the Bagisu celebrate their culture closely tying it with their food values<sup>71</sup>. While some scholars consider food culture as an expression of societal nourishment choices, historians have broadened the term by relating it to ‘an accumulation of layers and breaks in history’ that provide insight into peoples’ principles, beliefs, customs and associated practices on food as shaped by a multiplicity of forces<sup>72, 73</sup>. However, Gilles and other researchers who investigated food cultures and spaces largely do not explore such forces and how they influence food cultures.

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<sup>71</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D. (2008). Ibid p. 19

<sup>72</sup> Gilles Fumey, Peter Jackson and Pierre Raffard (2011) Food Cultures and Spaces, Anthropology of Food,.Ibid p.24

<sup>73</sup> Kyeyune, Pastor Stephen, Shaping The Society Christianity and Culture, Centenary Press, Nairobi, 2012. P.5

Bugisu, like the rest of Uganda was at first under the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC) which ruled the Uganda protectorate on behalf of the British imperial government from 1890 until 1893. It was, however, the British Protectorate Government which introduced cash crops in the rest of the country, including Bugisu. While it could be argued that such cash crops directly competed for time and other resources with food production, their overall policies seem not to have affected the food values of the Bagisu. The food of the Bagisu was very instrumental in the construction of the Bugisu cultural history. The heritage linkages of the Bagisu and their food culture are emphasized by some of the central practices which historically form part of Bagisu culture such as circumcision (Imbalu), marriage and cultural leadership ceremonies<sup>74</sup>. From a historical point of view as noted that, ‘’whenever each of these cultural practices is being celebrated, there is normally special food prepared, signifying the exceptional significance attached to food culture among the Bagisu’’<sup>75</sup>. This study was carried out mainly to find out which foods were cherished and the factors that account for this special status of the food selected for the occasion, how and why it was prepared and served.

In a study conducted in Bugisu it was found out that there was immense cultural significance attached to the foods identified for the diverse occasions and the relevant ethnic Bagisu rites of Eastern Uganda were similarly tied to the larger cultural values of the people.<sup>76</sup> This study further notes that among the Bagisu, food was a central component whenever every ceremony, ritual or rite was being undertaken, sometimes eating before, during and after the cultural ceremonies. What is missing in this research are the ways in which this food was

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<sup>74</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D. 2008, Ibid, p.23

<sup>75</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D. 2008, Ibid, p.27.

<sup>76</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Penguin, London, 1952, p.51

prepared, the factors that determined the cultural cuisine and how the foods were served, what changed and what continued on related research<sup>77</sup> further notes that during cultural ceremonies such as traditional naming events, weddings, bereavement, funerals, celebrations and initiations people were served diverse food items considered culturally pertinent with each of these ceremonies. The challenge with this study is that it does not show which foods were served on which occasions and what they meant culturally. The current research focused on these details in order to complete the food cultural history of the Bagisu in the selected period.

Another point these scholars<sup>78</sup> make is that the foods selected had the purpose of establishing and strengthening cultural relationships among them, a point also shared by Murcott<sup>79</sup>. Masiga and Nandudu conclude that rituals centre of which were select foods also supported the founding and healing of relationships between and among relatives or neighbouring communities where strained relations in the society existed. In all, these scholars affirmed that special food for such occasions would be served<sup>80</sup>. This study was focused on establishing the food culture of the Bagisu within the perspective of the major cultural ceremonies and festivals among the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. The academic gap in this study relates to the lack of specificity of the special foods, the explanations given for the choice foods and the appropriate cuisine for each of the cultural practices. The latter was important in order to be able to tell a comprehensive narrative about the food culture of the Bagisu.

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<sup>77</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., *The Food, Bagisu Traditions and Cultural Rites*, Heinemann Press, 1977, pp.33-34.

<sup>78</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., *Ibid.*1977, p.35.

<sup>79</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., *Op cit.*1977, p.30.

<sup>80</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., *Ibid.*1977, p.39.

There are studies which have investigated the historical significance of training young members of society about food preparation activities at different ages. One key study, for example, revealed that every girl perceived to be ready for marriage was taught how to prepare *makila* first before she could be recommended for marriage<sup>81</sup>. While this finding indicated that the food culture of the Bagisu covered all ages as well as all genders, it simply pronounces itself on only one choice food, reality that fell short of the objectives of the current research.

However, beyond the training in food preparation given to girls, the study also interested in the cultural forces which determined the choice foods, on what occasions the foods were prepared and how they were culturally served. Thus, in a historical perspective this research examined the food culture of the Bagisu, the cultural factors which explain why particular foods were preferred over others and generated information why these cultural oriented foods were prepared and served in the context of the Kigisu lifestyle.

A study by Cohen<sup>82</sup> discussed the national culture, but also specifically alluded to the significance of the Bagisu culture. The study focuses on Uganda's pre-colonial period, examining among other things the political set up of the area which was essentially without centralized administration. Cohen observes that although the Bagisu did not have centralized political authority, they fairly compensated this inadequacy with centralized culture based on *Imbalu* rituals or circumcision held every other even year, which had the impact of cementing the cultural identity of the Bagisu. The relevance of this literature to the present study cannot be questioned<sup>83</sup>. Nonetheless, it barely sheds light on the current study's interest in finding

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<sup>81</sup>Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D., 2008, Ibid, p.21.

<sup>82</sup> Cohen, D. The Combing of History in Uganda's Pre-colonial period, Heinemann, Nairobi, 1994, p.14 .

<sup>83</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., 1977, Ibid, p.44.

out the food culture of the Bagisu during the pre-colonial era. Other gaps related to the study which the study filled have been identified with the fact that the references Cohen's study makes to the culture of the Bagisu are too general as the focus is much more on national level rather than on Bagisu.

Another relevant study focused on the culture and customs of Uganda where Kefa<sup>84</sup> discusses the current state of Ugandan society during the postcolonial period with heavy references to culture of the Bagisu, among others. He observes that although with largely rural ethnic groups, Uganda's cultural groups were experiencing the pull of urban centres<sup>85</sup>. Kefa's work adds that while the changes brought about by Western influences bear on practically every aspect of people's lives, there was evidence of gradual cultural erosion in most communities. This work<sup>86</sup> provides examples from the country's major ethnic clusters to explain traditional culture and adaptations to modern life in religion, gender cultural roles, courtship and marriage, initiation rites, work celebrations, education, family life as well as birth and death ceremonies.

The study overall provides the essential insight into the factors likely to influence the continuities, transitions and changes in the food culture of any of the ethnic groups in Uganda discussed in this work. However, since the references to these changes were not clear to Bagisu and food culture, this created a gap that this study filled.

Again, missing in the literature is the thematic presentation of empirical information on how food culture measured as choice foods, changes in such foods, how the preferred food items

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<sup>84</sup> Kefa M. Otiso, *Culture and Customs of Uganda*, Greenwood Press, 1 June 2006, p.68

<sup>85</sup> Kefa M. Otiso, *Ibid.* 1 June 2006, p.68

<sup>86</sup> Kefa M. Otiso, *Ibid.* 1 June 2006, pp.71-73



have been prepared and served from the pre-colonial, the colonial and postcolonial period, the final benchmark of this study.

#### **1.8.5.1 Factors for changes over time in Bugisu cultural setting**

A number of pertinent analyses have been carried out on how food culture has been shaped by diverse factors over the centuries measured from the pre-colonial period to the present. This analysis becomes important since the factors in question have over the years affected the Bugisu food culture as seen from the way the different ceremonies are conducted, especially the role of food<sup>87</sup>. Vitrally important are the traditional foods normally understood to be part of the cultural celebrations which have changed over the years.

Scholars in this area suggest that the changes which have occurred in food culture over time have normally been the function of political, ecological and environmental or geographical factors. Accordingly, quoting the experience of postcolonial Uganda.<sup>88</sup>

The overall societal governance is often subject to nature, resulting in consequences that may affect culture. Reid provides an example of local food producers that acquire negative attitudes in the community, leading to abandoning it. The scholar examines the political, economic, and social history of Uganda, providing a unique and wide-ranging investigation of its politically stormy and dynamic past. Reid identifies core points in Uganda's history, emphasising dramatic political and social change in the pre-colonial era, especially during the nineteenth century. He also examines the continuing repercussions of these developments in the colonial and postcolonial periods affecting agriculture, food production, disruption of social processes an economic hardship.

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<sup>87</sup> Magoola, Sebby. The culture and ceremonies of the Bakenye on the floating islands of Lake Kyoga, B.A. Unpublished dissertation, IUIU, Kampala, 1994.p.41.

The factors identified by Reid in the process of cultural disruption in Uganda remain general in his analysis. That is why this study filled this gap by undertaking further research to unearth the factors that affected food choices, how they were prepared, how they were served as well as the reasons for making those decisions in the context of culture. In addition, Reid does not analyse the factors that accounted for change in tastes, change in cuisines and ways of serving the choice foods which this study was interested in.

Similarly, a group of scholars agree with Reid pointing out that political factors whose consequences often appear in form of state policies, where the production of some foods are emphasized or less accentuated, can make a significant change in some types of food items associated with traditional practices<sup>89, 90</sup>.

There are also perspectives scholars add suggesting that nature in form of vagaries of weather, inauspicious environmental changes and climate change over the years, are other material forces likely to affect food species, their quantity and access leading to overall changes in food culture of a given people.<sup>91</sup> Some research in this area pointed out that the epochal changes which affect food culture are not only confined to political and socio-economic forces. They pointed out that since culture evolves the material elements in its celebration are also likely to change. In other words, there is a possibility for the cultural ceremonies where special food is served to change<sup>92</sup>. Similarly, the evolution of culture also means that there is likelihood for changes in foodstuffs for the celebration of cultural

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<sup>88</sup> Richard R.Reid, *A history of Modern Uganda*, Cambridge University Press, 2 Mar 2017,pp.33-37.

<sup>89</sup> Stephen G. Bunker, 18 Jun 1991 Ibid. p.89.

<sup>90</sup> Rucker, R, Mafabi, D.W., and Masiga, D.O., Op cit, 2001, p.50.

<sup>91</sup> Wamoka W.M. Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D. For the Land and culture of Bamasaba, Ibid. 2008, p.39.

<sup>92</sup> Biglan, Anthony, *Changing Cultural Practices: A Contextualist Framework for Intervention Research*. First Edition, Context Press.1995, p.304.

practices, especially where there are substitutes or where individuals in the community spearhead massive changes in the introduction of special foods. For example, fast foods have been accepted in society, without analysing their impact on food culture in a historical perspective<sup>93</sup>.

Related results in the discourse on food culture indicate that such changes in food culture have been happening in different developed and developing countries with a wide range of effects on the larger cultural practices<sup>94</sup>. Nonetheless, *makila* remains one of the traditional cuisines that are still treasured among the Bagisu. In his analysis on how food is used for ethnic identification in Uganda, Amone<sup>95</sup> argues that food experiences that people have are first encountered in their homes although these later are subject to diverse changes despite the high degree of perpetuation from the first food experience. Amone<sup>96</sup> he further argues that food making and food consumption experiences from one's ethnicity are taken as the most essential in disrupted circumstances of the historical journey of culture since it is not static.

### **1.8.6 The continuity of food over time in Bugisu cultural setting**

Among other various types of food of the Bagisu since the pre-colonial period, the four identified types were deeply associated with culture, thus *Kamatoore* (bananas), *malewa*, (bamboo shoots), *makila/magira* (pounded beans) *bubwooba* (mushrooms)<sup>97</sup> were Central to

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<sup>93</sup> Weiss H, Polonsky J. *Male Circumcision: Global Trends and Determinants of Prevalence, Safety and Acceptability*, London: Heinemann, 2007, p.67.

<sup>94</sup> Biglan, Anthony, *Changing Cultural Practices: A Contextualist Framework for Intervention Research*. Ibid.1995, p.309.

<sup>95</sup> Amone, C. We are strong because of our millet bread: staple foods and the growth of ethnic identities in Uganda *Trames*, 18(68/63), 2, 159–172.

<sup>96</sup> Amone, C. 2014, 18(68/63), 2, 159–172.

<sup>97</sup> Lominda Afedraru, The cultural aspects of food, music and celebration. *Daily Monitor* Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, pp.7-8.

the current study was to examine the historical factors that influences the continuities from era to era and the changes which in some cases changed the cherished foods from over the course of time. This research however, based its analysis on the four cherished foods, identified in the literature as the most common<sup>98</sup>. These foods comprised bananas, bamboo shoots, beans and mushrooms. The emphasis was put on what food was culturally significant, among the Bagisu, the considerations on why that food was cherished and how it was prepared and served over time from the pre-colonial period why there are changes in the cultural foods and what has continued on to date.

Today there are still traditional foods that have been carried on and highly cherished among the Bagisu. For example *maleya* has been a unique delicacy eaten for over 3,000 years. There is scanty information on how the Bantu-speaking tribes in the Eastern Mountains have also adopted the dish and whether this acceptance is for cultural purposes<sup>99</sup>. However, available data suggested that for those that love attending ceremonies including circumcisions, weddings, academic graduations and others where buffets are served, the party is not complete unless *maleya* is served<sup>100</sup>. Hence the traditional delicacy has continued on up to date.

*Kamatoore* is also one of the staple foods in Bugisu, identified as preferred judging on the frequency of its consumption. Fields of banana plantations were owned by every homestead right from the pre-colonial era and during the pre-colonial period to the present<sup>101</sup>.

### **1.8.6.1 Conclusion**

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<sup>98</sup> Mayamba, J. Have your beans a different way. *Sunday Monitor*, November,18, 2012.

<sup>99</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, (1952). *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Ibid p.23.

<sup>100</sup> Marocco, Mukiibi and Nsenga. *Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes*. Ibid. p.12

<sup>101</sup> Wamoka W.M. Wangusa T and Wepukhulu, Ibid. 2008, p.29.

In the final analysis, despite the relative stability in Bugisu cuisine, changes have been identified in the people's food culture. In addition, while there is evidence for some relative consistency and continuity in food choices over generations in spite of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century modernization forces, a trend for new food varieties that are gradually being served along with the traditional choice foods over the years, has emerged. This includes Bagisu food choices which have been replaced, served in combinations with other foods or becoming rare on the cultural menus, contrary to tradition. Although central in the Bagisu cultural ceremonies such as *imbalu* or circumcision, cultural leadership rituals, marriage and death rites, some food preferences are fading off. The latter changes also suggest consequent modifications in the ways these foods are prepared and how they are served within the Bagisu cultural context over the years right from the pre-colonial era. These food cultural realities among the Bagisu have received empirical interest among scholars<sup>102</sup>. Indeed, recent evidence confirms that food in Bugisu is at the epicenter of culture, with choice foods being served at significant cultural festivals, food preparatory training given to girls before marriage while *imbalu* candidates are served distinctive food before and after the ceremony<sup>103,104,105</sup>. However, questions still remained unanswered especially about the link between the food culture of the Bagisu and the relevant cultural ceremonies as well as the historical importance of specific foods within the Bagisu culture.

These changes and what they mean for cultural festivals and ceremonies at which are prepared and served needed a scholarly analysis in a historical perspective. It was therefore

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<sup>102</sup> Weiss H, Polonsky J. Male Circumcision: Global Trends and Determinants of Prevalence, Safety. 2007, p.71.

<sup>103</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D., Ibid, 2008, p.21.

<sup>104</sup> Marocco, I., Mukiiibi E. and Richard Nsenga. *Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes.* pg. 12

<sup>105</sup> Placid J. & Wotsuna K. *Identity, power, and culture: Imbalu: Initiation ritual among the Bamasaba of Uganda*, 2004, p.41

the unexplained changes in some preferred foods that the research empirically analyzed with a focus on cultural forces which explained continuous preference of particular foods, factors for some changes in food preferences over others and why these cultural foods were prepared and served in the way they did as part of Bugisu culture.

Overall, most researchers who have investigated issues related to food culture have focused more on describing the cuisine values and identity relationships, analysis of old practices and heritage tied to ethnic groups, the geographical settings, the methods used for diverse cuisine in different places at the global, Africa and national level. Again, it was observed that the literature which existed before this study, concentrated on how the diversity of foods introduced in different historical periods. While some academics have contributed to the analysis on food culture in a historical perspective, their focus has not been on Bugisu sub region of Eastern Uganda. In all cases, little scholarly effort has been spent on investigating the factors explaining what influenced the food culture of the region. Moreover, those factors that played a role in the continuities and changes over time from the pre-colonial era, during colonialism under the British Protectorate Government (BPG), and the postcolonial period. These gaps in knowledge about food culture were filled by the current research.

## **1.9. Research Methodology**

### **1.9.1 Introduction**

This section presents the methodology and techniques used to collect data of the history of the Bagisu food culture and its empirical contribution to harmonious societal existence. The precise study design, research population, sampling and other key methods elements are analyzed in this section. Scholars describe research methodology as a procedure normally taken to conduct research or analyzing relationships in major variables in order to create new

knowledge, facts and establish linkages<sup>106</sup>. There are other scholars<sup>107, 108</sup> who have pointed out that research methodology is the systematic and logical study of the principles controlling the investigation concerned with research questions posed on issues an individual want investigated in a given setting.

Research design is the outline which provides adequate and systematic investigation of a research problem. In other words, it is through credible methodology that individual researchers are able to meet the objectives for their studies. The research design for this study involved making guided decisions how the adopted procedures were going to be applied in the setting to achieve the study objectives of the food culture of the Bagisu.. Consequently, the research design understood as a general procedure for this research was used for conducting the investigation on the food culture of the Bagisu in a historical perspective.

### **1.9.2 Research Design**

This research used a case study research design based on a qualitative approach. Based on case study design, this strategy was used to essentially enable the realisation of the study aims. The latter were essentially to investigate the factors that accounted for the choice foods of the Bagisu, how they were prepared and why they were served the way they were. In the perception of Denzin and Lincoln<sup>109</sup>, this research design possesses strengths such as allowing document review and field research through the use of interviews, photo (plates) and other procedural interventions that can simplify analysis and explain the food culture of the Bugisu as a case studied. Encouraged by the above supportive characteristics, this

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<sup>106</sup> Bryman, Ambrose and Burgess, R. Gareth. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Routledge, 1994, p.65.

<sup>107</sup> Creswell, J. W. *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, London: Sage Publications, 1994, p.9

<sup>108</sup> Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. 'Introduction: The Discipline and Practice of Qualitative Research', in Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Eds.). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: London, 2000, pp.1-18.

<sup>109</sup> Denzin, N. K. and Lincoln, Y. S. *Ibid.*, 2000, pp.1-18.

research made use of these positive aspects to consider relevant online and printed texts, take relevant plates, observations, graphs and interview respondents who were considered appropriate sources of the data for the research.

According to Bryman and Burgess<sup>110</sup>, a case study research attempts to answer immediate questions about a current state of affairs such as the need to reconstruct the Bagisu history of food culture. The scholars further explain that a case study design includes research that provides exploratory data about the specific variables being examined. Qualitative methods were also adopted both for data collection and analysis. The qualitative methods were used to give explanations of the events (across the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods).

### **1.9.3 Study population**

The study population consisted of cultural leaders, (both women and men) who were deeply involved in Bugisu culture as well as elderly people and opinion leaders. These included the Prime Minister of the *Umukuka* of Bugisu and representatives of the *Umukuka* in the region. The elderly people and opinion leaders were included in the population to provide factual historical information for different historical eras due to their age and standing in society. Elderly people were considered based on the rationale that by virtue of their longevity of life, they were in a position to provide historical data about the Bagisu's food culture.

Opinion leaders were included in the study population because they were expected to be in a position to provide generalised data about food population. On the other hand, members of the Bamasaba Cultural Institution (BCI) were involved in the population of study because they were the units of analysis or the main focus of the study as they were the official custodians of Bagisu culture, including the food culture of the people. The latter were thus,

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<sup>110</sup> Bryman, Ambrose and Burgess, R. Gareth. Op cit.1994, p.61.



expected to be more resourceful as far as eliciting data on Bagisu food culture needed to accomplish the study was concerned. Population estimates for the area studied in the current research have been established in the most recent national census. According to Uganda's 2014 Housing and Population Census, statistics indicate that Bugisu sub region has an estimated 8000 households. In addition, Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) 2014, shows that Mbale District's population is estimated at 428,800, Manafwa, the biggest rural district at 178,500 and Bududa District's population is approximately 173,700<sup>111</sup>.

#### **1.9.4 Sample size and selection**

Since a qualitative approach was employed in this study, Amin<sup>112</sup> advises that the requirement of selecting a sample that is statistically representative of the study population does not apply to it, but a saturation point is required where the study collects information until it is felt that adequate data has been collected. Thus, i reached the saturation level of the required data after interviewing 46 respondents, entailing 20 *Umukuka* cultural leaders, 11 elderly people, 5 opinion leaders, 10 youths. Cultural leaders were more because the study was about them as they provided factual information on the food culture of the Bagisu as known from generation to generation.

All the respondents were selected using convenience sampling. It is important to note that according to Francis<sup>113</sup>, convenience sampling is a non-probability sampling procedure that allows identification of respondents in line with specific features that include suitability (have

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<sup>111</sup> Uganda. *Uganda 2014 Housing and Population Census Abstract*, Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), Kampala, 2014, p.15.

<sup>112</sup> Amin, M. *Social science research: conception, methodology and analysis*. Kampala: Makerere University Printery, 2005, p.43

<sup>113</sup> Francis, Ether. 'Qualitative Research: Collecting Life Histories', in S. Devereux and J. Hoddinott, (eds.). *Fieldwork in Developing Countries*. Harvester Wheat sheaf, New York, 1992, No.2, 86-101, p.97.

factual information), availability, accessibility and willingness to participate in a study. Convenience sampling was used in this study to select respondents who were suitable, available, accessible in Bugisu region, and were willing to be interviewed to provide the data on the Bagisu's food culture.

### **1.9.5 Data sources**

Both primary and secondary sources of data were used in this study. Primary data sources included the selected respondents, that is, the Bugisu cultural leaders, elderly people, opinion leaders, youths, as well as observation and palaeography. Secondary data sources consisted of online sources and printed sources, which included relevant history documents and manuscripts.

### **1.9.6 Data collection Methods**

This study applied three methods for data collection on the food culture of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. The method employed as mentioned above are described in details as follows:

**Documentary review:** This method involved data collection from pertinent online sources and printed sources. Data was collected from the online source using mainly Libgen book search, Bookfi.org and Google Scholar academic search engines for journal articles, textbooks, and other online manuscripts that were relevant to the main theme of the study. In addition, data were collected from printed sources by visiting libraries and archives to identify manuscripts that covered food culture and related subjects. The academic resource centres visited comprise Kyambogo University Backleys Library, Makerere University main library (Africana Section) as well Mbale public library. The archives from which relevant documents were identified included the Mbale Heritage Centre.

**The Interview method:** According to Bryman and Burgess<sup>114</sup> the interview method is employed to collect data from all the selected respondents in a face-to-face setting because of its flexibility and providing researchers with the ability to collect detailed and systematic qualitative data<sup>115</sup>, as happened in the process of collecting data on the food culture of the Bagisu. Its flexibility allowed the study interview respondents according to their levels of literacy. With this flexibility involved, respondents who knew English were interviewed in English while those who did not know this language were interviewed through an interpreter who used the *Lumasaba* language. It should be noted that Lumasaba has different dialects, especially that particular one from Bukusu can't be easily understood by the badadiri. For all the interview held, an interview guide which had been earlier designed and approved by the university was used to guide the interviews in a systematic manner. The questions used to conduct the interviews were designed according to the objectivities of the study. Appendix A shows a copy of the administered interview guide.

Before conducting any interview, prior arrangements were made to select and train two research assistants on a range of issues, including understanding, requesting interviewers to be photographed and recording. This was intended to equip these assistants with questioning skills as well as how to write down crucial responses in the course of an on-going interview. Further effort was made to seek permission from the Chairpersons of the Local Council One (LCI) of the localities visited.

On securing the permission for the interviews, the chairperson was requested to guide the researcher identify appropriate potential respondents with characteristics earlier mentioned, specifically the members of the Bamasaba cultural institution, elderly, opinion leaders and the

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<sup>114</sup>Bryman, Ambrose and Burgess, R. Gareth. Op cit.1994, p.55.

<sup>115</sup> Henning, E.; Van Rensburg, W.; Smit, B. *Finding your way to Qualitative Research*, Van Schaik Publishers, Pretoria, 2004, *ibid.* p.98.

youth in the study site. At least 18 years were considered long enough for any respondent to have acquired knowledge about the history of food culture for the Bagisu.

### **Focus group discussion**

**FGD is a technique where a researcher assembles a group of individuals to discuss a specific topic<sup>116</sup>**

This method was used in the field to access information from different respondents, thus male & female at the same time.

People were gathered from Bugisu who are working from Mbale district were contacted and also shared their views on food culture. The respondents shared their perceptions attitudes and beliefs on the questions about the food culture of the Bagisu. The group members comprised of both the youth middle aged and the elderly so as to give a comprehensive argument from all the participants in regard to the choice foods, changes and the continuities of the food culture of the Bagisu. The administering guide helped in getting the information from the respondents.

In most cases, with the help of the chairman, interviews were held on the first visit. However, there were few occasions when respondents rescheduled the interview appointments to a later date and time. All the responses to the questions asked during the interviews were recorded using my recorder. Notes were also taken, making use of notepads earlier secured by both the researcher and the research assistants to record responses which were considered crucial about the food culture of the Bagisu over time, from the pre-colonial period. The researchers noted down all the important issues in the interviews for the purpose of comparison before data analysis. A number of plates have been presented to demonstrate what practically took

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<sup>116</sup> Cornwall & Jewkes, 1995. 11 January 2018

place during the research process as plate 1 illustrates. An interview with Mr Kangala James 74, Umukuka representative about the historical perspective of the Bugisu food culture.



***Plate 1.1: I conducted an interview with Mr. Kangala James a representative of Umukuka in Mbale on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2019.***

In another practical research engagement portrayed in Plate 1.2, I was in an interview session with one of the opinion leaders closely involved in *Imbalu* ceremonies, Mr Kuloba Milton, 66 years, where he explains the significance of choice foods for *Imbalu* candidates. In these ceremonies a lot of special food is served to *Imbalu* candidates before and after circumcision.



***Plate 1.2: Shows when I was conducting an interview with Kuloba Milton, 66 in Mbale District. On 16<sup>th</sup>-12-2019.***

In another interview was held in Mbale District, as shown in Plate 1.3, I was with my assistant conducted an interview with an elderly man Walimbwa Juma, a 90-year-old in Namakwekwe Mbale



***Plate 1.3: I was with a research assistant conducting in an interview with elder Walimbwa Juma 90 on (25<sup>th</sup> August 2019).***

I also had an interview with Eunice Nangoye and she demonstrated how beans were prepared to make Makila a traditional meal which was eaten at cultural functions such as marriage.



*Plate 1. 4. In an interview with Nangoye Eunice 70, demonstrating the process of preparing makila for a special occasion such as a naming ceremony (25th August 2019).*

This study also collected data from youth with the objective of finding out from these respondents how they had perceived the changes in Bagisu's food culture. The interviews also aimed at finding out the youths' changing food values as influenced by a diversity of factors. Plate 1.4 portrays an interview with a youth, Wesonga Michael, 24 years old involved in making and selling chapatti in Bungokho Mbale District.



*Plate 1.5: Interviewing Wesonga Michael, 24 at his Chapatti making stall, Bungokho, Mbale District ( 30th August 2019)*

The study adopted a Gender Sensitive Research Approach (GSR), that is, research that takes into account gender, and pays attention to the similarities and differences between men and women especially in terms of food cultural roles. For example, in matters that involved slaughtering animals (such as in Plate 1.5) special occasions. On the other hand, in the preparation of *Kamatoore* (cooking bananas), *Gonzowa* (roasted bananas for *Imbalu* candidates) *makila* (beans) and generally most of the cooking, it was the gender role for women. These details were carefully observed during data collection. Generally, the significance of the GSRA was for helping to measure the extent to which the different genders participated in the Bagisu food culture.

**Observation:** This was another method used to collect primary data. It involved observing features relating to food preparation and serving, processes that were understood as part of the food culture. Phone cameras were used to take most of the photographs. Photographs



were employed to reinforce the data collected through interviews. Plate 1.5 is presented below.



*Plate 1. 6: A group of four men Wangutusi Yunus, Magomu Paul, Wepukhulu Juma and Masaba slaughtering a goat for a special occasion of cultural marriage ( 3rd September 2019).*

**Focus Group Discussion method:** Focus group discussions were organised for the selected the elderly and youthful respondents at their homes and places of work. In each case, effort was made to first solicit the respondents' willingness and cooperation to participate in the FGDs<sup>117</sup>. Each FGD membership was constituted according to the age of the respondents. In other words, FGDs for the elderly were held separate from the FGDs of the youth. This strategy ensured the collection of varied responses while helping consolidate points of consensus on the food culture of the Bagisu. For each FDG, respondents were asked questions and their responses recorded in a highly interactive conversational setting that allowed them to corroborate each other's responses, thereby enriching and validating the data they provided<sup>118</sup>. The FGD was organised with the help of the LC1, Mrs.Lona Watasa. This was carefully organized to ensure that they were conducted in a cost- and time-saving

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<sup>117</sup> Henning, E.; Van Rensburg, W.; Smit, B. 2004, *ibid.* p.103

<sup>118</sup> Henning, E.; Van Rensburg, W.; Smit, B. 2004, *ibid.* p.104.

manner<sup>119</sup>. For each FGD, the focus was on giving respondents an opportunity to offer data about the food culture of the Bagisu. Plate 1.6 portrays the FGD.



*Plate 1.7: FGD in Namatala Mbale District, (4<sup>th</sup> December 2021)*

### **1.9.6 Data processing and data analysis**

All the data collected from interviews, FGDs and document review were compiled together for processing and analysis. Data from observation and photography was also carefully incorporated. Data processing involved sorting (removing inconsistencies) and editing the data according to the main themes of the study, which were derived directly from the objectives of the study. The narrative method was used to analysis the data. As explained by Elliot Jane<sup>120</sup>, this method was applied by transcribing interview responses and data collected

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<sup>119</sup> Henning, E.; Van Rensburg, W.; Smit, B. 2004, *ibid.* p.104

<sup>120</sup> Elliott, Jane. Using narrative in social research: Qualitative and quantitative approaches. London: Sage., 2005, p.98

from document review, editing them for completeness and accuracy where necessary and quoting them verbatim into the text of the study as demonstrated in the chapters that follow.

### **1.9.7 Ethical Considerations**

I obtained an introductory letter from Kyambogo University introducing her to the respondents. Upon advice obtained from fellow researchers, this letter was first presented to the Chief Administrative Officer for Mbale District for approval of the field research. At his office, advice was given to the effect that a copy of this letter should be submitted to the office of the Resident District Commissioner for coordination purposes. Advice was further given that there was no need to provide copies of the same letter to other districts in the same region. Overall, the letter helped to put confidence in the respondents that the study was meant for purely academic purposes. In addition to that, respondents were assured that confidentiality and privacy would be highly observed.

### **1.9.8 Constraints**

There was biasness observed from some respondents who thought that the information given would be taken and used to implicate them. This resulted into time wastage as it took long explaining intentions of the study. There were some incidences where some respondents expected money at the end of their participation while others wanted money before they could participate in the exercise especially respondents from the rural areas. This caused reluctance in having them participate. However, this was mitigated by assuring them that the research exercise was purely for academic purposes but not for profit making.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### THE GEOGRAPHY AND THE HISTORY OF BUGISU

#### 2.0 Introduction

Geography is imperative to history because it can so often explain ancient events or put them in a special context that makes them more understandable, just as one of the objectives of this chapter is, Iofa adds that a recognition of geographical concerns into the exploration of academic subjects along chronological lines into ancient, medieval, and modern research questions was very pertinent to strengthen methodologies<sup>121</sup>. Indeed, Iofa stresses the importance of the geographical approach<sup>122</sup> in order to comprehensively understand not only historical facts but also their linkages to present-day realities.

A closely related argument is made by another scholar<sup>123</sup> who posts that any human phenomenon is normally intricately linked with its spatial relationships and its geographical context. In his analysis, the history of any people can only be meaningful and be logically sensible if the place or environment in which the people live or lived are considered in their geographical setting<sup>124</sup>. These central ideas have immense significance to the investigation of human history. In short, these key ideas confirm the interconnectedness of disciplines as well as the fact that history does not take place in a vacuum. This is, indeed, a realization that history is contextualised within its geographical setting in order for one to effectively

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<sup>121</sup> Lloyd, Ye. Iofa. On the Significance of Historical Geography, *Soviet Geography*, 1963, 4:1, 3-12,

<sup>122</sup> Lloyd, Ye. Iofa, *Ibid.* 1963, 4:1, 3-12.

<sup>123</sup> Broek O. M. Jan, The relations between History and Geography. *Pacific Historical Review*, 10, 3(1941), pp.321-325, p.321.

<sup>124</sup> Broek O. M. Jan, 10, 3(1941), *Ibid.* p.325, p.326.

appreciate a given reality. The history of food culture for the Bagisu is not an exception in this regard as it is given its full meaning by its geographical connections to places. The major objective for this chapter was, thus, to look at the geography of Bugisu and its neighbourhood as a way of developing the comprehensive geographical context which directly or indirectly influenced the food culture of the Bagisu. The chapter analysed Bugisu food context partly by focusing on geographical issues comprising the physical space or location, physical appearance, climate, soil, migration and settlement. These factors influence food production which in a way likely determines the extent to which people are able to access their food choices, how they are prepared and why they are served the way people might choose to do or as culture demands.

## **2.1 The Geographical set up of the study Area**

The geographical set up of the study site is closely integrated with old traditions and events, some of them are legendary. The Bagisu are perceived to have geographically originated from Mt. Elgon. It is generally believed that the Bagisu are descendants of the legendary Maswahaba who travelled from the Ethiopian Highlands. The Bagisu reportedly moved through Kenya, specifically past Lake Turkana to present day Sironko, settling around the geographical area which is currently known as Bududa in the geographical Bugisu sub region<sup>125</sup>. The Masai of Kenya are believed to be the ones that introduced the culture of circumcision among the Bagisu as this is said to have been a condition for the legendary Maswhaba to marry their daughter.

Bugisu is a geographical entity is one of the 10 districts which existed at Uganda's independence along with the country's then kingdoms in 1962. The other districts include Acholi, Bukedi, Karamoja, Kigezi, Lango, Madi, Sebei, Teso and West Nile. It is important

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<sup>125</sup> Wamoka W.M. Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D., op cit. 2008. p.8.

to note that the geographical demarcation of the district as an administrative unit came with the colonial government shortly before Uganda's independence<sup>126</sup> in 1959.

The current geographical entity of the study area is the district of Mbale, because it was the first district of the Bagisu and the dominant language spoken is lugisu or Lumasaba. Further, current evidence suggests that irrespective of the Bagisu who live in Bugisu region or beyond, the culture and traditions of the people run deep in their veins and will be subjected to the cultural traditions whether they agree with all of them or not<sup>127</sup>.

### **2.3. Location of Bugisu Region**

Current information indicates that Bugisu region is located in Eastern Uganda. This geographical location is indicated on the maps below. The significance of the location, a geographical feature, is mainly linked with the suitability of the study area with the objective of assessing whether it is adequately strategic to support the production of food. It is important to note that food is an essential requirement for fully assessing the food culture of the Bagisu in a historical perspective.

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<sup>126</sup> W. A. Crabtree, The Languages of the Uganda Protectorate, *Journal of the Royal African Society*, Vol. 13, No. 50, Jan., 1914, pp. 152-166.

<sup>127</sup> Wamoka W.M. Wangusa T. and Wepukhulu J.D. 2008, Ibid. p.26.

The location of the current districts as shown in Figures 2.1 affirms this region's location.



*Figure 2.1: Location of Bugisu region in Uganda*

*Source: Uganda districts at independence in 1962.*

For the sake of clarity, two maps have been presented to show the geographical location of Bugisu region in Eastern Uganda. While the region is indicated with an arrow in 2.1, it is further marked N0.7 in Figure 2.2. There's a coordination of three districts that is to say, those for Bududa District are  $1.0030^{\circ}$  N,  $34.3338^{\circ}$  E, Mbale District:  $1.0784^{\circ}$  N,  $34.1810^{\circ}$  E, while those for Manafwa District are  $0^{\circ} 49' 0.0012''$  N and  $34^{\circ} 22' 59.9916''$  E.

#### **2.4. Research Site Information on the Selected Districts which was part of Mbale before**

The study specifically explored study site information for the selected districts. In as much as the study was conducted in Mbale district, the geographical information in regard to location of these other region districts was thought key to exploration of the history of the Bagisu culture. Each district information is presented below.

##### **2.4.1 Bududa as a district of Bugisu region**

Created in 2006, Bududa District's geographical information on location shows that the coordinates of Bududa town are  $01^{\circ}00'36.0''$ N,  $34^{\circ}19'54.0''$ E, further indicating that its latitude is 1.010011 while its longitude:34.331663. The district also borders with the slopes

of Mount Elgon, situated on its south-western, and located about 36 kilometres, by road, south-east of Mbale, the study area and about 260 kilometres by road, north-east of Kampala, the capital city of Uganda.

The major interest in the Bududa was to analyze the likely effect of the recent landslides on the food culture of the Bagisu living in this geographical area because maleya the bamboo shoots are also got through bududa during the season of kamaleya and the disasters caused in the area can be a cause of scarcity in supply hence affecting the stability and continuity of the food culture .

#### **2.4.2. Manafwa as sub region district of Bugisu**

Created in 2005, Manafwa District was part of Mbale District. The total surface area of the district is estimated at 602.1 square kilometres. In addition, Manafwa District is located near Mount Elgon National Park, and just on the border between Uganda and Kenya. With its focus on agricultural and infrastructural development, the district was well positioned to support the food culture of the Bagisu<sup>128</sup>. It is further noted that with the establishment of the district, plenty of new developments, services, and jobs have been launched in the towns of the District. The study was interested in assessing how these new developments might have affected the food culture of the Bagisu in this area.

Mbale District as a study site

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<sup>128</sup> Wambede Williams. *Manafwa's Development strategy is based on Agriculture. Globefeed.com. Retrieved 19 March 2020.*



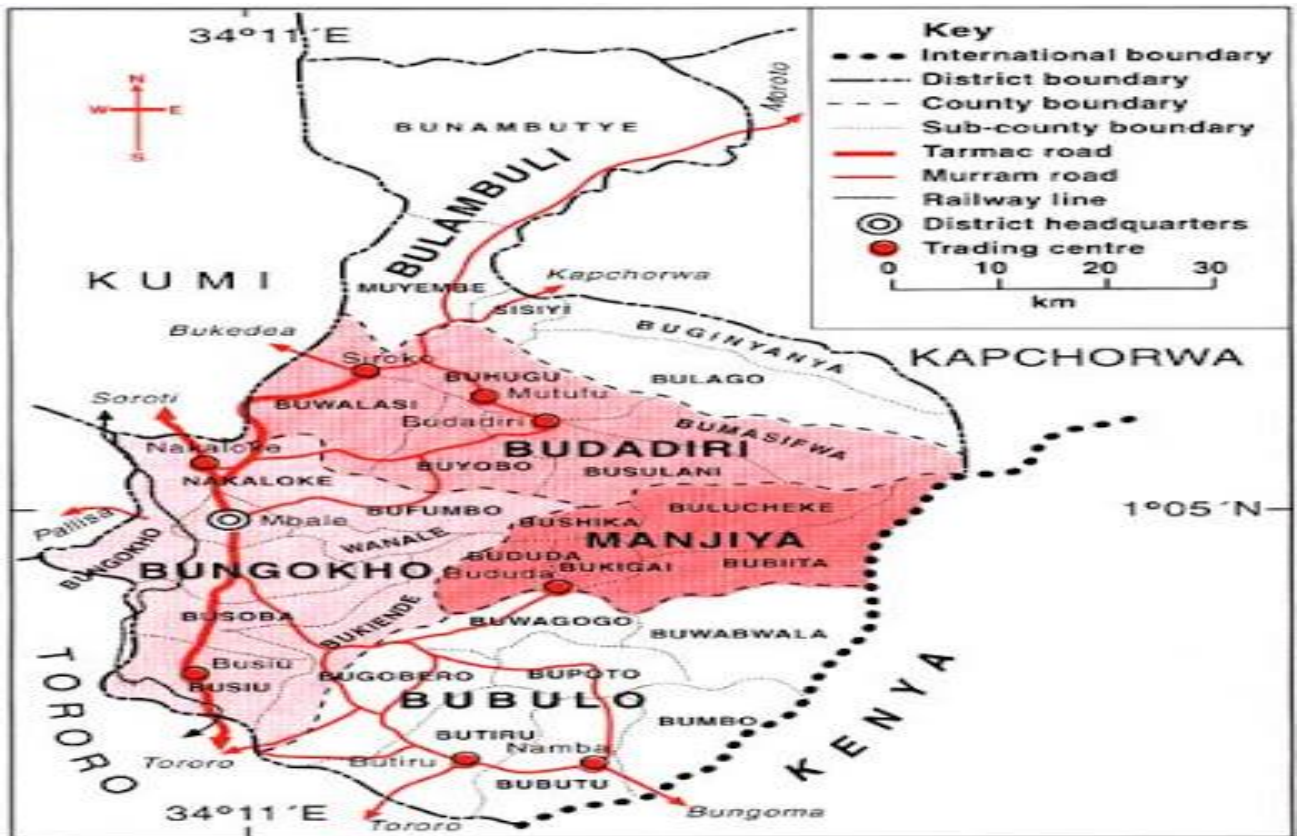


Figure 2.2: Map of Mbale District

## 2.5 Physical geography, drainage of the study site and food production

The physical geography of the district supports production of agricultural commodities, including cash and food crops. The region is characterized by fertile volcanic soils and cool humid climate supported by Mt. Elgon. Besides, the latter mountain is the source for many small water sources found all over the region<sup>129</sup>. Consequently, socio-economically, the Bugisu sub region has from the colonial period been known to be a key coffee producer. However, along with cash crops, the area produces a lot food that include cooking bananas, millet, yams, ground nuts, sweet potatoes, and bamboo shoots from Mt. Elgon<sup>130</sup>. Thus, it can be argued that the physical geography of the study site supported food production as a basis

<sup>129</sup> Ring, Uwe. The east African rift system. *Austrian Journal of Earth Sciences*, 107(2014), p.3.

<sup>130</sup> Ursula Nafula. *Ibid.*, 2014, p.34

for thriving food culture for the Bagisu. Bugisu sub region is made up of different geographical features, including Mt. Elgon, one of the top tourist attractions in the region, punctuated by rocks, basic surfaces covered by short grass and visible and visibly fertile agricultural lands. In the opinion of Uwe<sup>131</sup>, this environment is ideal for successful agriculture<sup>132</sup> and other related socio-economic development activities.

The drainage system of this area is made up of a water stream that originates from hot springs located at the top of the Mt. Elgon which is also part of the down ward slope of the of the mountain that ends on the Kenyan side of the border as shown in Plate 2.1.



***Plate 2.1: Showing Mt. Elgon, Bugisu region***

The mountain, as a key geographical feature is part of the eco system that supports the region's agricultural productivity. In other words, the mountain directly or indirectly supports food production in the region, which is a core ingredient of the food culture of the Bagisu.

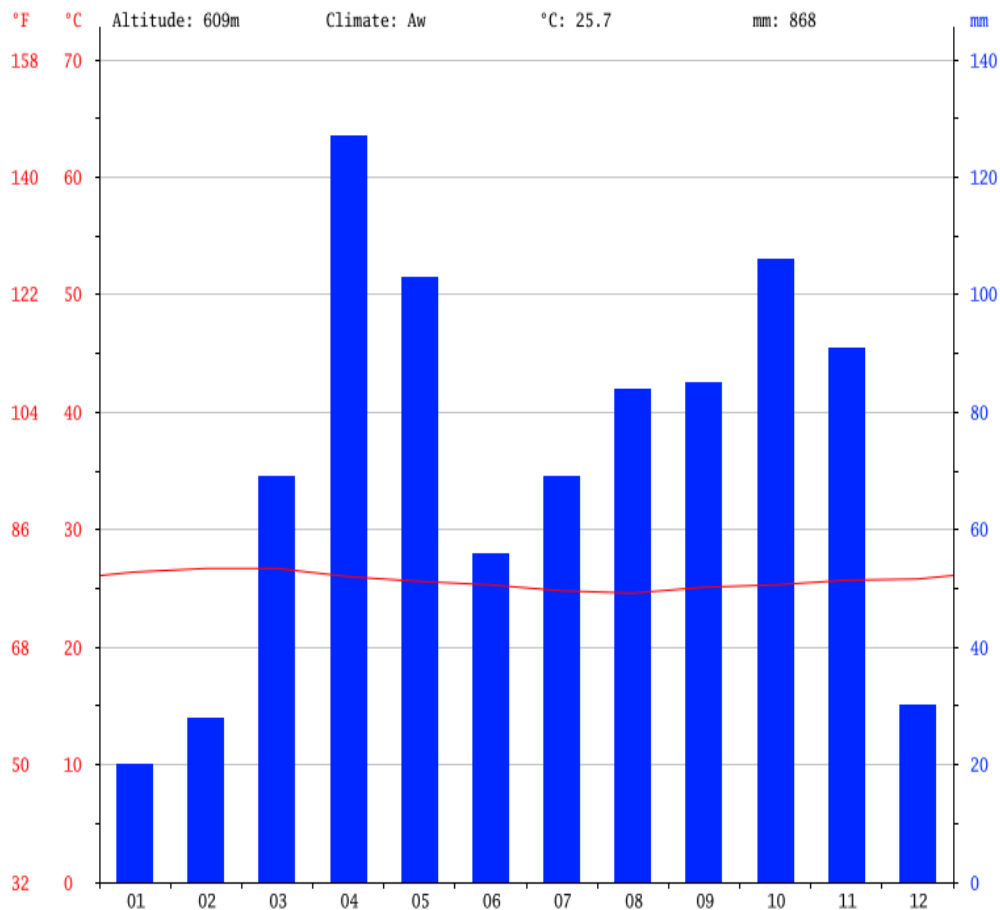
## **2.6 Climate, Soil Composition and Vegetation**

Bugisu region receives rainfall that is more than what is received in areas adjacent to it such Bukedea and Kapchorwa. The area's annual rainfall pattern is summarised in Graphs 1.

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<sup>131</sup> Ring, Uwe. The east African rift system. *Austrian Journal of Earth Sciences*, 107(2014), p.3.

<sup>132</sup>Ursula Nafula Ibid.



**Figure 2.3: Annual Rainfall Pattern of Mbale district.**

Source: Climate Data Organisation<sup>133</sup>

The right hand axis of Figure 1 indicates the amount of rainfall received from January to December plotted from 01 to respectively. Rainfall is depicted by bars and the line that runs through the bars indicates the area’s temperature. A critical analysis of the lengths of the bars reveals that the driest month of region is January (01), which gets 20 mm of rainfall. Most precipitation falls in April (04) whose average is 127 mm. This rainfall is adequate to support agriculture. It is therefore not surprising that much cultivation and livestock keeping takes place in this region, not even at the subsistence level.

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<sup>133</sup> Climate Data Organisation. Retrieved 25 August 2019 from <https://en.climate-data.org/location/783590/>

Brooks, Neil Adger and Mick Kelly<sup>134</sup> observed that although the migratory groups mentioned above were coming from different directions, they lived in peaceful coexistence because there were no reasons to warrant resistance or conflict against each other. All the groups were still exploring new areas, looking for where to settle and for survival. None of the groups was aware of the resources that existed in the territory to which they had migrated, and their respective numbers were still so small that they could settle in any area without causing pressure on land and other resources there.<sup>135</sup>

## **2.7 Economic activities of the region**

The Bagisu were essentially subsistence cultivators, hunters, gatherers and herders.<sup>136</sup> However, they were encouraged by the steady rainfall, the Bagisu became real farmers, embracing cash crop production when it was introduced by British colonialists. The economy of the Bagisu heavily relied on farming systems. Of the total area of Bugisu under cultivation in 1990, 36% was under perennial crops. In addition, of 0.48 thousand hectares under perennials about 0.113 thousand hectares under bananas while 0.25 thousand hectares were under coffee<sup>137</sup>. There are also a few households involved in subsistence cattle rearing. Besides, there are also plenty of small livestock such as goats, sheep and poultry as noted that; 'The Bagisu grew their own food, cash crops and kept small livestock on a subsistence scale<sup>138</sup>. Thus, agriculture in Bugisu became very significant as an economic occupation for many from the pre-colonial era.

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<sup>134</sup> Brooks, N., Neil Adger, W., Mick Kelly, P. The determinants of vulnerability and adaptive capacity at the national level and the implications for adaptation. *Global Environmental Change*, 2005, No. 15, pp.151-163.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Richard R. Reid, *A History of Modern Uganda*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2 Mar 2017, pp.17-18.

<sup>137</sup> Rucker, R., Mafabi, D.W., and Masiga, D.O., Idid. 2001, p.44.

<sup>138</sup> Richard R. Reid, 2 Mar 2017, p.21.

## **2.8 Conclusion**

The significance of geography to historical investigation has been reiterated in this chapter. A point was further emphasized about the relevance of geography in historical analysis as well as the interdisciplinary of the two broad areas, important for completely understanding the history of a place. In general, this chapter has further explained the geographical environment that defined the study site not only in terms of location and climate but also in terms of the economic activities of its people, the Bagisu. The analysis had two major aims, firstly to explore how the Bagisu people came to settle in this area and the activities they carried out to support their livelihood. Secondly, to assess the linkage between the people's geography and historical activities as well as how these elements support the food culture of the Bagisu. The chapter indicates that Bugisu is located in a geographical location that receives adequate rainfall, one factor that supports the production of adequate food and hence support for the people's food culture. On the other hand, the combination of the supportive climatic and soil conditions, two key elements of geography, help in the understanding of the food culture of the Bagisu in a historical perspective

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE FOOD CULTURE OF THE BAGISU DURING THE PRE-COLONIAL TO THE POST COLONIAL PERIOD

#### 3.0 Introduction

The history of food can be traced back to millions of years ago when human beings first made innovations for securing their food through gathering, hunting and later settled agriculture.<sup>139</sup> With direct contributions to harmonious societal organization, the world over humankind has created a diversity of cuisines, cookery arts, mainly accomplished through a variety of ingredients, procedures and nutritional dishes.<sup>140</sup>

Right from the pre-colonial era, the culture of the Bagisu was closely tied with the legendary first mugisu, Masaba, who was perceived to have emerged from Mt. Elgon deep during this ancient period. There are, however, other historical accounts which argue that the Bagisu migrated from the Ethiopian highlands before they settled in present-day Bugisu region many centuries during the pre-colonial period<sup>141</sup>. The Bagisu identity that was mainly celebrated with *imbalu* (circumcision) naming, and marriage ceremonies was traced back to the demand by the Masai who, in line with their culture, conditionally demanded that the first mugisu ancestor to be circumcised before he could marry their daughter. It is important to note that cultural celebrations among the Bagisu are deeply associated with choice foods which have deep cultural Significance not only in the way they are prepared, but also the way they are

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<sup>139</sup> Katz, Solomon, *The Encyclopedia of Food and Culture*, Scribner, University Presses of California, revised and expanded edition, 2003, p.4

<sup>140</sup> Regmi, Anita (editor). *Changing Structure of Global Food Consumption and Trade*. Market and Trade Economics Division, Economic Research Service, USDA, May 30, 2001, p.9.

<sup>141</sup> Wamoka W.M, Wangusa T and Wepukhulu J.D. 2008, Op cit, p.8.

served<sup>142</sup>. Most scholars argue that the centrality of the Bagisu heritage and ethnic ceremonies closely serve the purpose of establishing and cementing cultural relationships among the people for harmonious societal existence<sup>143,144, 145</sup>.

A broader view is provided by Biglan<sup>146</sup> in his reference to the necessity of ethnic rites driven by male members as cultural custodians of societal values. However, the pre-colonial history of food culture indicates special food choices were deeply associated with the Bagisu culture<sup>147</sup>. This chapter largely deals with food preferences, why these specific food choices were in the framework of culture among the Bagisu right from the pre-colonial period to date. As different societies had different preferences due to the prevailing conditions, for example the

Bagisu from north had diverse taste of foods from those of south Mbale. That's to say those of north had a different climatic environment which dictated their choice food. The examination of these historical issues helped to comprehensively document the food culture of the Bagisu hence bananas were grown in Wanale hills unlike in Busiu where they instead grew millet because it was more conducive on the rocky ground which also never received reliable rains<sup>148</sup>. The chapter focuses on the fundamental factors explaining the genesis of the

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<sup>142</sup> Placid J. & Wotsuna K., 2004, op cit. p.3

<sup>143</sup> Wangusa, Timothy. Op cit. 1989, pp.11-12.

<sup>144</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, Op cit, 1952, p.6.

<sup>145</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., op cit.1977, p.13.

<sup>146</sup> Biglan, Anthony, *Changing Cultural Practices: A Contextualist Framework for Intervention Research*. First Edition, Context Press, 1995, p.41.

<sup>147</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., Ibid.1977, p.49.

<sup>148</sup> Nambozo Regina, 78, elder from Busaano, Mbale District on 4 January 2020

food choices, the key issues in the continuities of some key choice foods, and explanation for the changes in Bagisu food culture with special focus on the pre-colonial period.

### **3.1 The Food culture of the Bagisu from the Pre-colonial Period**

Food has from time immemorial been central to the culture of the Bagisu. There are different accounts that attempt to explain the food culture of the Bagisu in a historical perspective. While most respondents were unable to put a date to specify when the food culture of the Bagisu began, most responses suggested the food culture of the Bagisu was as old as the Bagisu themselves. Arguments were made to the effect that what is currently known is that when a Bagisu child is born up to when they die; there are choice foods that have their origins in the pre-colonial period<sup>149</sup>. This view agrees with that made by Masiga and Nandudu <sup>150</sup> who authoritatively state that the food choices of the Bagisu are part of the profound ethnic heritage of the Bagisu with roots in the origins of Bagisu society and cultural values. This view locates the beginning of the Bagisu food culture with the origins of the Bagisu deep into the pre- colonial period. In addition, most respondents interviewed described a consistent story that revealed the centrality of food in the culture of the Bagisu, how elders sat on one of the slopes of Mt. Elgon and agreed that for the good of society, there would be different choice foods for a diversity of Bagisu rites and ceremonies<sup>151,152</sup>. The narrative again corroborates with the history of Bagisu's migration and settlement, and the food choices made for different occasions.

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<sup>149</sup> Wasukira Lazaro, 91 years, interviewed at Bungokho, Mbale District on 9th January 2020

<sup>150</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., Ibid.1977, p.62

<sup>151</sup> Wanyenze Luzabeti, 89 years, interviewed at Bushikori Parish, Mbale District on 9th January 2020.

<sup>152</sup> Nambozo Regina, 78, elder from Busaano, Mbale District on 4 January 2020.



Furthermore, the above stories narrated by respondents on the origins of the Bagisu culture were in agreement that the legend about the origin of special foods as had from generation to generation been relayed to them through oral tradition as noted by Nafula<sup>153</sup>. Her assertion is that, quite often African history is mainly passed on from one generation to another through oral tradition or storytelling<sup>154</sup>. Thus, the story of Bugisu food choice origins is firmly traced in the pre-colonial era was steadily recounted in such a way that it confirmed the beginning of Bugisu food culture. The most detailed account on food choices was provided by an 88-year-old Nandudu Sarah of Wanale Sub County in Mbale District, in the following terms:

My great grandfather told me that the beginning of food choices was started by our first ancestors who came from the north and settled here, sat on the northern slope of Mt. Elgon to decide on different types of foods for diverse occasions thousands of years ago. In fact they made many more decisions to guide on the lifestyle of the Bagisu.<sup>155</sup>

The above narrative reveals that the Bugisu food culture begun with the conscious decision on special foods by the first ancestors. Sitting on Mt. Elgon, the Bagisu ancestors made decisions about different foods for all the Bagisu cultural heritage of which *Imbalu* was the most sacred as further affirmed by a respondent in Mbale<sup>156</sup>.

It is widely known here that the food we eat for the different occasions such as naming, circumcision (*Imbalu*), marriage, death and funeral ceremonies were decided upon by our

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<sup>153</sup>Ursula Nafula. Ibid, 2014, p.39.

<sup>154</sup> Ursula Nafula. Ibid, 2014, p.43.

<sup>155</sup> Nandudu Sarah 88 years, Mbale District, interviewed on 9th January 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Wasukira Lazaro, 91 years, Ibid.

revered elders as life begun here in Bugisu. This is a story which I have told my children and as was also told as child by my grandmother with whom I grew up for many years of my life<sup>157</sup>.

The fact that decisions on choice foods are attributed to Bagisu ancestors when the Bagisu as a people were still in the process of settling in the study site suggests that the food culture of the Bagisu predates many known historical events, estimated to have existed for 3000 years. Hence, it can be concluded that the food culture of the Bagisu is much older than most heritage celebrations in Uganda.

The above view is widely supported by the existing body of knowledge on the food culture of the Bagisu. For example, scholars highlight the history about 'Maleya' which they note to have been a unique delicacy, prepared and consumed for over 3,000 years, and how the Bantu-speaking tribes in the Eastern Mountains had also adopted the dish for cultural purposes for many generations<sup>158</sup>. In addition, there are other scholars who suggest that for those that love attending ceremonies including circumcision ceremonies, birth, naming, weddings, academic graduations and death, where buffets are served, the party is not complete unless maleya is served<sup>159</sup>. The original cherished foods among the Bagisu for diverse ceremonies identified as included, millet, yams, bamboo shoots, game meat, mushrooms and later varieties of bananas which were prepared and served in different forms depending on the occasion<sup>160</sup>. According to Wanyenze<sup>161</sup> most of the other choice foods

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<sup>157</sup> Nandudu Sarah 80 years. Ibid.

<sup>158</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Ibid. 1952. p.23.

<sup>159</sup> Marocco, Mukiibi and Nsenga. *Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes*. Ibid. p.12

<sup>160</sup> Wanyenze Luzabeti, 89 years. Ibid.

currently similarly considered as traditional food were introduced generations later, but all of them before the arrival of British colonialists. The cherished foods introduced in later generations comprised; corn, *bufukye*, *makila*, *kamaleya*, *kumushelekhe* and *shinoko*<sup>162</sup>. Maleya is the choicest cuisine among the Bagisu, prepared and served on almost all cultural events<sup>163</sup>.

Narratives recorded in Bugisu sub region by the current study suggest that the food culture of the Bagisu became a powerful tool for understanding the identity and values of the Bagisu from way back in the pre-colonial period. Just like other cultural practices of the Bagisu, food was very instrumental in identifying their culture. In line with this finding, narratives indicate that among the foods cherished by the Bagisu, four particular foods were identified with the historical cultural significance. These include bamboo shoots, bananas, smashed beans and mushrooms which were prepared to signify exceptional significance attached to food culture among the Bugisu<sup>164</sup>.

### **3.2 Examining Food production, preparation and consumption (how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served)**

Bugisu has been traditionally known to produce an abundance of food, some of which is served at traditional festivals which were at the Centre of culture right from the pre-colonial era<sup>165</sup>. Right from the pre-colonial times, food production for general consumption was

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<sup>161</sup> Wanyenze Luzabeti 89 years. Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Kangala James, 74, *Umukuka* Representative for Mbale interviewed on 16 December 2019

<sup>163</sup> Kangala , Ibid.

<sup>164</sup> Wanyenze. 89 years. Ibid.

<sup>165</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, (1952). *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, p.17.

produced with different parts of the region known to be associated with a diversity of foods. The significance of the colonial period in relation to food production was the introduction of cash crops such as coffee. The colonial period was not only important for the introduction of cash crops, but also how the emphasis on these crops by the colonial state impacted on food production. The study was particularly interested in the ways these factors influenced the production of the choice foods, essentially known for use during traditional ceremonies. This interest of the study was especially generated by scholarship which suggested that with the emergence of the cash crops during the colonial period, there was gradual reduction in the amount and quality of foods<sup>166</sup>. Thus they focused on four cultural foods, namely *malewa*, *Kamatoore*, *makila* and *bubwooba* that the Bagisu most frequently used during cultural practices.

*Maleya* grow in the wild in the eastern part of Uganda around Mt. Elgon, located in Bugisu sub-region of Eastern Uganda. *Maleya* is either prepared as fresh shoots or is smoked and dried for preservation. It was originally eaten as food and later on as a sauce when mixed with ground simsim (sesame seed) or peanuts<sup>167</sup>. Missing on the *maleya* details are the forces that led to the changes in the ways *maleya* was prepared and the cultural events on which it is served. Moreover, the periodization of such changes remains unclear.

The *maleya* was cherished because it grew from the foothills of Mount Elgon in eastern Uganda which is intricately linked to the history of the Bagisu people and the food they eat. Many Bagisu believe in the legend that the first Mugisu man, Masaba, emerged from a cave on the slopes of Mount Elgon where the raw material for *maleya* grow wildly and widely.

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<sup>166</sup> Cohen, D, (1994). The Combining of History in Uganda's Pre-colonial period, p. 221

<sup>167</sup> Marocco, Mukiibi and Nsenga. Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes. pg. 12

Thus, Mt Elgon was and still is the pride of the Bagisu, because of its attachment to the history of the Bagisu.

*Maleya* is the most prominent dish among the Bagisu and is dried up by smoking. The *maleya* are dried above a fire place for about three days. They are then soaked in water overnight and when they become soft, the top layers are peeled off. The ' *maleya* ' were thereafter covered in water and boiled for about half an hour then the water was poured off.<sup>168</sup> For *maleya to be in* complete preparation, ingredients include *maleya*, water, ' *kumushelekhe* ' (rock salt), ordinary salt and peanut paste and salt are added and the sauce is simmered to acquire taste. The ' *maleya* ' sauce was served with either bananas, or millet bread. Whenever ' *maleya* ' was prepared the children would be so excited about the meal for it was equated to meat.<sup>169</sup> An indication that ' *maleya* ' was treated as a very special diet among the Bagisu.

When the meal was ready, the mother served the children from the same tray of food which was called ' *lulwelo* ' made out of wood and then the source ' *maleya* ' was served in a plate called ' *Shidago* ' this was made out of the clay. They sat on a mat made out of banana fibres and the father who was regarded as the head of the family was the only one who sat on a chair and food was put on a table<sup>170</sup>. This however, changed during the colonial era with the introduction of metallic plates, trays, and later plastic plates in the post colonial period.

The way of eating and serving order changed as well during the colonial and the post colonial periods where dinning tables were introduced especially among the families which attained colonial education. Hence all family members would sit on the dinning table unlike in the

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<sup>168</sup> Malewa as. a cherished traditional food of the Bagisu. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malewa>.

<sup>169</sup> Wanyenze 8 years. *ibid*.

<sup>170</sup> Wanyenze 89 years. *Ibid*

per-colonial. They embraced the western culture more and slowly substituted the traditional way of serving the choice food.

Despite the changes noted in serving of the maleya, it has continued to be a special delicacy and highly cherished among the people of Bugisu.

### **Kamatoore (bananas) as a culturally preferred food from the pre-colonial era**

Bananas or matooke are the green bananas, that is, *Mutuule*, *Imbululu*, *Gonzowa*, *kibusi likago* and also the sweet yellow bananas called kamarofu, the '*kamarofu*' were either got from small sweet yellow bananas (*ndiizi*), bogoya, Gonzowa (which was also eaten as matooke or bananas) purple big sized banana (*namonye*) and green bananas which were starchy (*kamamwa*).

The bananas were produced in plenty that a family would not eat and finish, so farmers could even sell off some banana bunches. As this is one of the most common foods, there are different ways to serve it, some typical ones being mashed with groundnut sauce (a type of peanuts made in to sauce), mixed with beans as *katogo* (mixed foods boiled together) or steamed in banana leaves. The issues associated with bananas as preferred food imply that the literature has concentrated on the pre-colonial and post-colonial experiences in the consumption of bananas (kamatoore) as a cultural food. Consequently, the cultural implications during this period are not well known. In addition, Placid and Khamalwa note that banana consumption in diverse forms has in recent years reduced and prices for the choice food are going up<sup>171</sup>.

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<sup>171</sup> John Placid & Wotsuna Khamalwa. (2004). Identity, power, and culture, Ibid. p.41

These were cut prior the cooking dates so that they could shed off the stains. There after they would peel them put in the banana leaves to steam for about 30 to 60 minutes, there it could be ready to eat. Kamatoore was served with either ‘Makila or maleya’.

The kamatoore was roasted preferably the type called *Gonzowa* and it was served with a roasted meat.

Besides the kamatoore which was prepared for food, the Bagisu also grew the bananas for ripes. These were called the ‘*kamarofu*’. The *kamarofu* (ripes) were either obtained from *Bogoya, mundiizi, Namonye banana* (the purple colour bananas) or the type of bananas called *kamamwa*<sup>172</sup>

### **Smashed beans “*makila/magira*”**

These were beans whose preparation and serving has a central connection with culture. This was a cultural source prepared in Bugisu, it was cherished among the Bagisu because of its traditional taste. *Makila* was made out of beans which were either fresh or dried beans added in rock salt to give it a traditional taste. It was left to boil for about forty five minutes and while the sauce is boiling a traditional three thronged stick locally known as *kumukango* is passed in the sauce in fast succession to even out the particles in the sauce. When that is done then the source can be served with banana plantain<sup>173</sup>.

It was eaten with either ripe bananas, or with Kamatoore, or any other preferred food as a meal. It should also be noted that traditionally, ‘*makila*’ was a sauce that was specifically

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<sup>172</sup> Ursula Nafula. ‘Kamarofu ka kuukhu’ African story book initiative, Fountain Publishers, Kampala, 2014, p.33

<sup>173</sup> Marocco, Mukiibi and Nsenga. Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes. *ibid.* p.7.

supposed to be eaten during dry seasons when vegetables are scarce. However, due to the changing trends today, some people make it be a popular delicacy irrespective of season.

### **Mushrooms (*bubwoba*)**

Since the legend about the first Mugisu man, *Masaba*, having emerged from a cave on the slopes of Mount Elgon, every food linked to this mountain is regarded cultural. Thus, as the source of a delicacy unique to the Bagisu people in form of white mushrooms, known as *Bumegere* in Bugisu, this choice food is immensely cultural. Traditionally, *bubwooba* were collected in the bushes where big ant-hills were found by married Bagisu women that hail from all over the Bugisu region for sauce in the homes<sup>174</sup>.

*Bubwooba* which grow on or near anti-hills are a delicacy and an essential element in the diet among the rural folk in this sub-region of Mt Elgon. This delicacy is shared for social prestige, as documented that eating is an activity regulated by social conventions and moral rules. The latter features emphasize how food and social prestige are interrelated, how food choices and eating habits are now conceived as linked to the phenomena of sociability and social binding norms<sup>175</sup>. But what the literature did not adequately explain, was how such conventions and rules over the years were marked by long periods such as pre-colonial, colonial and post- colonial affected the food culture of the Bagisu.

Among the Bagisu mushrooms were culturally significant in the way that were attached to the origin of the Bagisu because they grew on mount Elgon and every food linked to this mountain is regarded cultural and were believed to have a special attachment to the Bugisu culture.

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<sup>174</sup> Wangusa, Timothy. *Upon this Mountain*. London: Heinemann. 1989. P.37

<sup>175</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Penguin, London, 1952.



Dried mushrooms were pasted with ground nuts and added in *kumushereke* (rock salt) for a special taste. On the other hand, the fresh mushrooms were just boiled and were eaten either with cassava or Kamatoore.

However, in the post colonial era, mushrooms are commercialized because of the value found in them as said by Asenanth Byaruhanga that, mushrooms are a well-known and traditional delicacy in Africa, where most people get various varieties from the wild or where they grow randomly. But now many farmers are engaged in growing mushrooms in their home settings. These are grown mostly for sell and some people buy them because they are a very good source of proteins, minerals and vitamins, and it is possible to grow them in urban areas due to limited availability of land and space<sup>176</sup>.

While the details on the food preferences, the changes, food preparation and serving details make it appear as if there is adequate scholarly information on special foods and the celebration of Bugisu culture, however, current studies do not effectively capture the cultural significance of the various steps followed in cherished food traditions<sup>177, 178</sup>.

The geographical focus of the study was set on Mbale district, located in Eastern Uganda because it's regarded as the heartland of Bugisu due to its cultural significance for a place known as 'Mutoto' where circumcision is initiated every even year, before it spreads to the other parts of Bugisu region. With this realization, the study envisaged that all shades of opinion, knowledge levels, interests, cultural inclinations and sensitivities about the food culture of the Bagisu were adequately represented in the whole territory of the Bagisu.

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<sup>176</sup> Lominda Afedraru, *Daily monitor*, Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015.

<sup>177</sup> Mafabi David, The Bagisu food in perspective. *Daily Monitor*, Sunday April 22, 2012, p.9

<sup>178</sup> Lominda Afedraru, The cultural aspects of food, music and celebration. *Daily Monitor* Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, p.9

### 3.3. Explanations in the attachment of food to Bugisu culture

The cherished four types of foods identified in this research had a special attachment to culture. Bananas were a very special food in Bugisu where by every responsible home had at least a banana plantation. But then its important to note that bananas (kamatoore) were not the original food of the Bagisu in the pre- pre- colonial period as the Bagisu ate yams known as ‘masebe’, ‘bitolotolo’, ‘kamankunyu’ but when kamatoore was introduced in the pre-colonial, it was again highly treasured asserting that the ancestors blessed kamatoore for cultural attachment <sup>179</sup>

The significance of bananas among the Bagisu indicated the value which an individual attached to work, the ability of a man to produce food for the family and the ethnic identity where a person was deemed to have the true values of the Bagisu<sup>180</sup>.

‘*Nasaala*’, a type of banana was very special to the Bagisu who treasured it in almost every ceremony it was very much regarded among other types due to its cultural significance as suggested by one of the elders during the interview who indicated that ‘*Nasaala*’, a thin long fingered type of banana all depending on the soil fertility, mostly holds many clusters of about six to seven. In addition, she said at least every home in Bugisu planted this type of banana due its cultural attachment. This banana was believed to have originated from Mt Elgon slopes near a stream of water. This was the first type of banana in Bugisu and had a very special attachment to the Bugisu culture due to the fact that it’s originality was traced from Mt Elgon<sup>181</sup> it was also believed that the spirits of the ancestors were more appeased

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<sup>179</sup> Kuloba Milton, 66, opinion leader on cultural circmcission From Mbale district. Interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup>-12-2019

<sup>180</sup> Gidudu Alfred, 61, *Umukuka* Cultural Representative for Mbale, interviewed on 16/12/2019

<sup>181</sup> Wafula Cosmas 90, from Mbale District interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-11-2019 form his farm.

whenever 'Nasaala' was prepared especially on cultural events. Although other types were introduced, 'Nasaala's preference remained at the apex with other advantages attached to it, such as its ease of preparation i.e. soft to peel and delicious. This banana could either be eaten when cooked as food, roasted or as ripe, depending on the ceremony<sup>182</sup>.

Culturally, '*nasaala*' was roasted and eaten with meat by boys before and after circumcision. After circumcision, the surgeon referred to as '*omukhebi*' would come back after three days of circumcision to initiate the boy into manhood through the traditional ritual. Among the other items used was the roasted '*nasaala*' which was eaten with roasted meat. Culturally among the Bagisu, a man who was not circumcised was considered to be a boy and therefore, boys were not supposed to marry because it was an abomination for a boy to marry and produce children. For that matter therefore, roasted '*nasaala*' was given to a candidate to eat with roasted meat as a farewell meal from boyhood life to a man hood life were life was expected to be different.

Then after circumcision, nasaala banana was boiled and was not smashed it was served with boiled beef, goat meat or mutton depending on the one available. This meal was prepared and served during the ceremony of cleansing the boy and it was known traditionally as '*khusabisa umusinde*'. This was the ceremony which initiated the boy into manhood by the surgeon who circumcised the boy through sharing one banana as he ushered him into real manhood. The surgeon spoke words such as; "from now onwards, you have become a true Mugisu man who should not be a coward of anything, marry any woman of your choice and produce children, defend your family as man in case of any attack". This was done on the third day after circumcision.<sup>183</sup> An indication that '*nasaala*' was culturally significant in the history of

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<sup>182</sup> Meresi Buhule , 75, opinion leader from Mbale interviewed on 23<sup>rd</sup>-12-2019

<sup>183</sup> Kuloba Militon, 66, Ibid.

the Bagisu because the early Bagisu preferred it and so it became the trend to appease the spirits of their ancestors.

Besides this type of banana was used during the naming ceremonies of the Bagisu children. The naming of the children was done by the elders through sprinkling of brewed millet (buseera) and 'nasaala' was hanged up for ripes to be eaten with 'makila' (smashed beans), or boiled vegetables called 'isaka' which was bitter, because they wanted the child to be attached to the tradition of the Bagisu strongly just as 'isaka' was considered to be the strongest vegetables among others.

'Nasaala' was also roasted and eaten after trimming around the graves of clan members. This was mostly done by elders who also used the moment to talk to the dead whom they believed still lived in another world and, therefore, watched everything they did<sup>184</sup>. 'Nasaala' was preferred to be eaten during cultural events because it was good for ripes and when roasted it peeled off well and when cooked it was soft and delicious.

Another reason was that, it was believed to have been blessed by the spirits of the ancestors to be served during the rituals and during cultural events. 'Nasaala' was therefore, prepared to reconcile the relatives, who had misunderstandings. It was either cooked or roasted and the elders gave the two people who had wrangles to share one finger of nasaala to unite them and care for each other. Besides, it was also prepared and given to twins to share one banana when the babies had grown to the level of eating soft foods. This was done so that these children would be one and care for each other<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> Wesonga Yona 70, *Umukuka* Cultural Representative, Mbale district interviewed on 12/01/2020

<sup>185</sup> Wonekha Failoza. Mbale district. 76, at Mbale District, interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-01-2020

The other important type that was culturally accepted was called 'Imbululu'. This banana was preferred due to its uniqueness of taste. Its compact build up was used as a good test to identify a woman for marriage. It is a medium sized and compacted together on the clusters. The banana was culturally significant in the way that it was given to a girl whom the elders considered ready for marriage to unpluck the cluster from the bunch, if she removed a whole cluster without dismantling the bananas from the cluster, aunties of the girl or the mother in law-to-be would ululate and rejoice because the girl would be considered ready for marriage. She would, therefore, be seen in a position not to embarrass the parents when she gets married. All this was done at the boy's home in public before people, if she failed to remove the full clusters, then she would go back to her home because no man would marry a lazy woman who was seen as a failure or with a bad omen. This cultural practice was very serious and highly regarded among the Bagisu.

*'Imbululu'* was carefully cut, so that it could not fall down. It was believed that if it fell down and got dismantled, then the girl who cut it would not be firm in her marriage. Besides it would not be enjoyed as the usual banana because it would smell like soil. Besides the respondent suggested that Imbululu was put as taboo for the girls to be extra careful with the banana not to fall down so as to have a full intact bunch.<sup>186</sup>

The other important type of banana was likhako or likago which also had a lot of food cultural significance in the pre-colonial era. This type of banana was significant to the Bagisu in the way that it meant "testing". Once one harvested a bunch, it was upon such a person to ensure that he or she cuts clusters and shares with the neighbours at least as regards to the first bunch in the plantation. The first bunch was never eaten without sharing it because it was believed it would cause the whole plantation to perish slowly by slowly.

It was upon such considerations that it was culturally regarded as part of the kigisu lifestyle to eat with people, a process of establishing and cementing mutual ethnic heritage. It meant sharing with others what they harvested, thus, 'likhako'. However, as the field narratives suggested, there was misinterpretation emerging around 'likhako' where non-Bagisu interpreted the cultural practice indicating that the "Bagisu eat everything including people". The cultural food practice simply meant that they share with people' as Munialo, a key informant, clarified.<sup>187</sup>

On the other hand, sharing this banana also enhanced good neighbourhood in the community and was understood within the same context of establishing and cementing heritage relationships among the Bagisu largely for harmonious societal existence<sup>188</sup>.

'Kajele' also called nakaji was too yellow with small fingers and this was kept for ripes. Culturally it was used by the teenage girls to pull their cretonnes in preparation for marriage. It was the responsibility of aunties and grandmothers to teach their girls how to use the Kajele ripe banana or boiled while soft to pull the cretonnes because every girl who was ready for marriage this ritual was trained and went through this process first so as to enjoy sex and also impress her husband in bed.<sup>189</sup>

'Namunga' was another type of bananas which had very big fingers and was considered foreign. Narratives around this type of bananas indicated that fathers would tell their children not to eat this banana because it would make them barren. The field stories indicated that

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<sup>186</sup> Mutonyi Fazila. 57, from Mbale district, interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>- October 2019

<sup>187</sup> Munialo Fred. 86, cultural leader from Mbale District. Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020.

<sup>188</sup> Munialo Fred, Ibid.

<sup>189</sup> Buhule Meresi. 75, ibid.

because parents never wanted the children to eat the banana, they would scare them with potential barrenness because they believed that ‘namunga’ given its appealing size would be the most preferred type to the original ancestral choices also the elders had a fear that the younger generation would even use it to perform cultural events like circumcision, marriage yet historically there were particular types of bananas meant to perform particular cultural events as Masuba explained.

‘Makumbu’, is another type of banana which had threads in side and so was not good to serve to desired visitors. It was cooked with peelings due to its short stature. These were called ‘kamatsukuni’. Thus, it was eaten casually and mostly by men who were bachelors “basamali” and feared to peel bananas, this type never had any cultural attachment to it. <sup>190</sup>.

Mutuule or muruule, is another type which was said not to have been among the original bananas of the Bagisu. It was said by the key informant that it was imported from outside Bugisu later during the colonial era when intermarriages started in Bugisu. However, it was just eaten as food although it never had any cultural significance attached to it.

The same history applied to gonja which was also introduced later in the colonial era and it had thin fingers with about two to three clusters however today it has been blended with muruule and it yields more clusters. But it has no cultural attachment to the history of Bugisu cultural foods. This includes others types not mentioned here because they are believed to have come in later hence believed not to have cultural attachment. <sup>191</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Masuba Matayo 102, Key Informant from Mbale District. Interviewed on 3<sup>rd</sup> – 09-2019

<sup>191</sup> .Buhule Mersi, 75, ibid

## Bamboo shoots (Maleya)

Bamboo shoots were such a cherished delicacy because they are believed to have originated from Mt Elgon where the origin of the Bagisu is traced. The plant was well known to the Bagisu from the slopes of Mount Elgon before most other Bagisu got introduced to it as Gizamba narrated<sup>192</sup>. The plant was called maleya in real lumasaba.

The plant obtained its name as maleya because it was too long. As a long plant, it was used in reference of blessing someone thus: ‘...*uleye’owuhambeko ludega lwebamasaaba*’ meaning that may you increase, and grow high in whatever you do and touch the bamboo shoot of the Bamasaba! It was a wonder plant due to its multiple importance. Thus kamaleya was accepted as a cultural traditional because it would be easily got. Given the fact that once harvested and smoked it could be preserved for a year. This meant that anytime a cultural event was to be performed, kamaleya would be available whether in season or out of Season<sup>193</sup>. To the people of Bugisu such a delicacy with its attachment to culture was considered without any reservations. The young shoots were used as food (biilyo) in the pre-colonial to the pre-colonial period by the early ancestors before it was introduced as a source later in the colonial period up to date.<sup>194</sup>.

There were different types of kamaleya as narratives indicated. The up rooted maleya was called ‘mayeba’. These were boiled with rock salt to soften and to add flavour to them and was eaten by all family members and also was used on cultural events such as marriage to affirm that the marriage is a kigisu traditional without which it would not be a kigisu

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<sup>192</sup> Gizamba George, 69, *Umukuka* Cultural Official, Mbale District. Interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>- 02- 2020.

<sup>193</sup> Magino Peter, 74, from Mbale, mooni. Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>- 01-2022

<sup>194</sup>. Mugide Janifer,67, from Mbale Central Market. Interviewed on 30<sup>th</sup>-08-2019



traditional marriage. Besides the delicacy was a treasure in every home once prepared for a meal, children would be excited once they knew that maleya was to be eaten for supper <sup>195</sup>

When they were ready they added peanuts. The younger shoot was left to grow. When the bamboo matured, it was used in building as poles and fibres for tying building materials in house construction. People who built with bamboo poles felt original and real Bagisu as one respondent revealed<sup>196</sup>. He added that it was a real wonder grass because it was both used for food and other functions. For example, the Bagisu made the drinking straws called ‘tsitseke’ out of the maleya. They could further brew millet whenever it was ready, would be put in a pot for the elders to take in the evenings after work and on special ceremonies such as circumcision and cultural marriages<sup>197</sup>. This was an indication that bamboo shoots were very much treasured among the Bagisu.

As a special cuisine, maleya was harvested from Mt Elgon, far away from where people lived. The Bagisu could stay in the mountains for weeks during the harvest season. As narratives indicated, after harvest they could dry them by smoking them. The dried maleya were hanged in the kitchen firewood gallows purposely to serve in dry seasons and famine. They could be preserved for a year or more<sup>198</sup>.

Maleya was and is prepared during the cultural events such as marriage, circumcision and chiefdom initiation/ kingship. None of these functions would miss maleya because it was regarded as the true representation of the Bagisu origin since it was grown from Mt Elgon

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<sup>195</sup> Wambede Muhamudu from Mbale. Interviewed on 26<sup>th</sup>-11-2021

<sup>196</sup> Gizamba George. Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> . Wamboza Zadoki,82, from Mbale. Interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup>- 12-2019

<sup>198</sup> . Nambozo Sarah 60, From Mbale Umukuka representative, interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-09-2019

which was believed to have brought forth the first mugisu. For maleya to be served on each of the cultural events was because it gave the true identity of the traditional ceremony because it was considered to be the main and first traditional delicacy among the Bagisu given its trace found at Mt Elgon where the first mugisu is believed to have emerged from.

It was prepared and served mainly with millet bread and bananas because millet was culturally important in the way that it was one of the ancestral main food which was used during circumcision by making beer, smeared the candidate to be circumcised with the yeast all over the body as a requirement to be accepted by spirits to bless him as he prepared to be initiated into a man<sup>199</sup> It was prepared and served mainly with millet bread and bananas.

Beans *Makila* as a preferred cuisine among the Bagisu

Introduced during the pre-colonial period was also *Makila* as a culturally significant among the Bagisu. It was made out of cooked beans which were worked on from the grinding stone. The grinding stone was special because it was a traditional stone believed to have been invented by the first ancestors to grind millet for food. Elders took it up as a tradition to teach their younger girls how to grind millet, cassava, and beans extra on the stone. *Makila* was culturally special because it was believed that every girl who was considered ready for marriage would be able to prepare it as required traditionally.

*Makila* was culturally significant in that it was measuring a yard stick to gage as to whether a girl was ready to get married if at all she knew how to prepare *Makila* very well and could also preserve it for more than a week. Because among the Bagisu every responsible woman

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<sup>199</sup> . Nangono James 51, Umukuka representative from Mbale interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup>-12-2019

was supposed to have makila in her house for any emergence of a very hungry visitor or to be eaten as the first meal after garden work before preparing of lunch.<sup>200</sup>

It was therefore, the responsibility of every mother and paternal aunties to ensure that their girl child learnt how to prepare traditional *Makila*. Because every mugisu girl was supposed to know how to prepare *makila*.<sup>201</sup>

Makila was a test to the girls to prepare and ensure that it was preserved for over a week after it was cooked. Thus, girls were to prepare it from a pot after grinding and then rock salt was added to give it a traditional taste. In Bugisu, girls or women were trained to be very diligent in all matters of life including food preparations. A pot which was made out of clay in this case was important to be used in cooking food and fetching water so as to ensure diligence. Because in Bugisu careless women were not tolerated. Culturally, *makila* was prepared and eaten during the naming ceremonies where it was eaten with the banana ripes from nasaala. Also during the circumcision preparation i.e. dancing sessions *makila* was prepared once in big pots to serve people with much convenience for a week<sup>202</sup>. *Makila* was eaten with bananas, yams, cassava and any other preferred foods. What should be noted is that the preferred foods of the Bagisu were also eaten during dry seasons of planting and famines. It should be noted that makila was prepared as heavy gravy which one could not easily pour down. The grandmothers were very good at preparing makila and kept for the grand children to eat with ripe bananas. After garden work before meal was prepared *makila* was the

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<sup>200</sup> Wakhalwere Godfrey 55. From Mbale , Umukuka representative. interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-11-2019

<sup>201</sup> Mutonyi Regina 64, *Umukukaship* cultural official from Mbale. Interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10-2019

<sup>202</sup> Masuba Matayo, 102, key informant from Mbale District, interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10- 2019

immediate food eaten with ripe bananas to restore the exhausted farmers before anything else was done.<sup>203</sup>

Culturally the way makila was prepared in the pre-colonial period was not as it is done today, in that they first boiled it before it was worked on, on the grinding stone. In the modern era, it is fried, pounded then cooked in a pot or even a saucepan and then use a ladle to mix it up to be finer because today most women do not want to cook foods which take a long process to prepare.

Also intermarriages have also contributed to this change as the woman may not find it necessary to prepare in the real kigisu style. The mere fact that parents today don't even teach their children their real culture including the food culture, it is taken for granted and less interest has been there to explore more about the food culture of the Bagisu by the younger generation.

Mushrooms known as *bubwoba* was also a special dish among the Bagisu. This choice food is immensely cultural because of its preference on special occasions such as marriage ceremonies. Traditionally, *bubwooba* was collected in the bushes and around big ant-hills by married Bagisu women that hail from all over the Bugisu region for sauce in the homes. Women in Bugisu took it upon themselves that a real woman must always ensure that there was source in the house. This was part of the counselling they received from the elderly women before they got married. Hence picking mushrooms was part of the women's responsibility.

A key issue, however, is whether the married women activities have remained organized in this fashion as well as the women cultural significance of this gender control around

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<sup>203</sup> Woniaye Frank 45, from Mbale District. Interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10-2019.

bubwooba.<sup>204</sup> Mushrooms were in different types. For example, *bumegere* were small white mushrooms which grew around anti hills and grew in large numbers where women could pick even two full baskets. For effective, smooth social interaction and good neighbourhood, one who discovered where mushrooms were growing would call friends and then go very early in the morning to pick them. After collecting *bubwooba* the family members cleaned and then sun dried them until they were ready. The well prepared *bubwooba* would then be kept for special ceremonies and for special honoured guests.

It was unacceptable for one to prepare fresh mushrooms for visitors because this meant that they were not valued at all. They liked the dried ones which they preserved by tying in the banana fibre and then hanged on the gallows of fire wood; these would be preserved for a period of six to twelve months. While cooking, they would put rock salt and after pest it with peanuts so as to give it a traditional taste. The essence of this was to leave the guests in wonder of the delicious meal as well as contribute to the established and cemented cultural relationships among them harmonious societal existence.<sup>205</sup>

Also *bubwooba* were dried and preserved for dry season where source was scarce and every responsible woman kept some in the house for such seasons.

A mother packed some bubwooba as part of the gifts taken for the daughter during her visit to see where her daughter got married.<sup>206</sup> Purposely to prepare for her husband and also to emphasise the point that every responsible woman was supposed to have mushrooms in her

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<sup>204</sup> Nangoye Eunice, 70, from Mbale, interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup> 08-2019 .

<sup>205</sup> Wamelile Sofati, 64, *Umukuka* Cultural Institution official from Mbale District. Interviewed on 31 January 2020.

<sup>206</sup> Dina Nabutsale, 60, *Umukuka* Cultural Institution official from Mbale District. Interviewed on 21 December 2019.

home, essentially to strengthen the marriage relationship. This delicacy was shared for social prestige, fostering marriage and ethnic ties as highlighted by scholars who maintain that eating is an activity regulated by social conventions and moral rules<sup>207</sup>. The latter features emphasize how food and social ties are interrelated, how food choices and eating were linked to socializing and a binding norm as the Bagisu celebrated their cultural heritage<sup>208</sup>.

There were many types of bubwooba ( mushrooms) identified by the Bagisu; others were prohibited for food for various reasons one major reason being that they would lead to death. Among them included 'naseeko'

Bumegere; these were small in size and white in colour, they commonly grew near the anti hills. These were very much treasured among the Bagisu as they were common to be found in most homes they were sun dried after picking them, mothers usually packed for their daughters when getting married and every woman was required to have some in her home. Nanseeko were also very white but were bigger than bumegere, these were very slippery even to touch. While the other types preferred for food included; *namusherepa* are brown, *lusukuma* have a big cap, grew near a anti hill and they were many in number and were so delicious to eat fresh, *lusolometsi* grew in cleared gardens, *baluba* have a yellow cap and a brown stem, *tuyutuyu* is red in colour, *namulunyi* and *indefee* these ones are bigger than *bumegere* in size these were brown and grew in trees, *Tendye* grew near wild fruits. *Uoou* grew in clusters in a walk away distance. *Nakyewa* grew in places where kraals were found.<sup>209</sup> They were also sun dried and preserved for dry seasons for food.

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<sup>207</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, Ibid., p.44.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.p.45

<sup>209</sup> Namono Elinah, 35. From Mbale Central Market. Interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

It is significant to note that among the food choices identified it was only bamboo shoots (Maleya) and bananas (Kamatoore) that did not change, were and are still functional on cultural events such as circumcision, marriage ceremonies and coronations. However, the rest such as makila and mushrooms have changed with time, in preference and preparation for instance, mushrooms are even grown genetically, besides, the environment has been tampered (cutting of trees forests) with which facilitated the growth of the mushrooms. Mr Musungu said that during the colonial period the growing of cotton and planting trees was emphasised in Bugisu of which mushrooms grew especially the type called ‘Butselemetsi’ however, with time, farmers lost the morale to grow cotton due to its tedious work involved yet the price was low so they diverted to the most paying foods such as maize, beans and others which affected the mushroom growth hence leading to the scientific mushrooms made today.<sup>210</sup> In the post-colonial period due to intermarriages and westernization of the African life style including the Bugisu food culture, foods such as makila have changed a lot in preparation. The elders have also dropped their cardinal role of guiding and educating the younger generation to maintain the traditional food culture of the Bagisu.<sup>211</sup>

### **3.5 Conclusion**

It can be asserted that all food that was eaten during special ceremonies such as circumcision, marriage, naming, burial rites and extra, had a significant meaning to the people of Bugisu and was embraced with respect in reverence to the ancestral spirits. Hence, the identified food as seen above was majorly to be eaten during the harvest and dry/ famine seasons. Cultural attachment on every identified choice was very significant in the food culture of the Bagisu as indicated. The information given above was from the elderly respondents who had the

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<sup>210</sup> Musungu Alfred 54. Cultural leader from Mbale district, interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

<sup>211</sup> Nyote Peter 35, Mbale district interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-09-2019

history of Bugisu attachment of food to culture. The different views established comprehensive and analytical information to justify the perceptions on food culture.



## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **TRANSFORMATION OF THE FOOD CULTURE DURING THE COLONIAL PERIOD 1890-1962**

#### **4.0 Introduction**

The previous chapter dealt with cultural considerations that explained Bugisu's food production, preparation and consumption at diverse occasions during the pre-colonial era. This chapter focuses on how colonialism influenced the food culture of the Bagisu during the period, specifically from 1890 to 1962 when Uganda secured her independence. The chapter begins the preferred food choices from the colonial times then analyses the coming of the colonialists to Bugisu region, not as the specific target end point but as an integral part of a targeted territory that later became Uganda. The analysis then brings out colonial rule's influence on the food culture of the Bagisu. The last part of the chapter examines how the colonial economic policies influenced along with other factors related with the people's food culture within the context of the need to contribute to larger good of societal harmony.

#### **4.1. The food culture of the Bagisu and the preferred food choices from the colonial times**

A number of studies have been conducted about food culture and ceremonial traditions among specific groups of people. Precisely, scholarly investigations maintain that with regard to food culture, the varieties of food preferred reflect not only the cherished foods for ethnic identities involved but also the geographical factors as well as the cultural importance of the food items in question. Moreover, current research has also established that food cultural interests make people more expressive about the food preferences they make and the reasons for which they identify particular food items, normally associated with the delivery of the

desired common good cultural outcomes for distinct groups of people<sup>212, 213, 214</sup>. Thus, since the significance of food culture associated with traditional ceremonies such as marriage, initiation rites, leadership and death rituals vary from country to country; current evidence suggests that conclusions reached about it in one context may not be valid and reliable in another. This is also true in the case of the Bagisu.

The studies found out that people's deep involvement in their traditions, normally marked by the special foods they prepared and served at these events and festivals signified their cultural values in diverse contexts. While this was an important contribution to this study, the study did not make specific references to key variables of interest. The debate in this category of studies further highlighted food cultural practices which come to light through specific traditions and celebrations associated with ethnic groups, but also as influenced by socio-economic variables in such a society. For example, Stephen Bunker's study<sup>215</sup> on the relationship between the state and peasants demonstrates that the political economy of the production is one factor which determines how many resources are available to citizens, and which they can devote to their private issues such as cultural demands. From the beginning, it has been argued that whatever cultural practices, big and small, will involve the celebration of food culture. Therefore, if people do not have adequate resources derived from the market due to high state taxes, for example.

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<sup>212</sup> Goody, J. *Cooking Cuisine and Class Study in Comparative Sociology*, Cambridge University Press, Ibid. 1982, p.253.

<sup>213</sup> Forka Leypey & Mathew Fomine, 2, 2009. *Ibid. p.17*.

<sup>214</sup> Murcott, Anne (1982). *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* 41, 203–210. Ibid. p.19.

<sup>215</sup> Stephen G. Bunker, *Peasants Against the State: The Politics of Market Control in Bugisu, Uganda, 1900-1983*, University of Chicago Press, 18 Jun 1991, pp.90-91.

Focusing on peasant struggles for market control over coffee exports in Bugisu from colonial times through postcolonial market conditions, the study<sup>216</sup> shows that these citizens acted collectively and used the state's dependence on coffee export revenues to effectively influence and veto government programs to their interests. Some of their interests included private celebration of cultural practices such as circumcision events, naming, marriage and death rituals all of which needed support resources. The only challenge with this contribution to the food culture debate is that it does not directly spell out the linkages to the current study.

For many ethnic groups the cultural role of food is very crucial. Food served, for example, had links among the family individuals, but also among their neighbours within the same ethnic group<sup>217</sup>. Culture in this sense serves as an instrument for starting and maintaining close relationships, peaceful relations and harmonious linkages amongst ethnic groups in Bugisu. Besides, during Bagisu cultural ceremonies such as the traditional marriages, death celebrations, funeral and mourning ceremonies, naming and circumcision rituals, the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda collectively served diverse food items. Such foods helped to establish cultural relationships among them during the colonial period. Further, Masiga and Nandudu<sup>218</sup>, similarly found out that food was very central among Bagisu of Eastern Uganda in articulating their cultural interests especially during communal ceremonies. Although this study addressed the link between food and culture, most of its findings unquestionably did not analyse the total setting of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda. In particular, it does not address the choice cultural foods, how they were prepared and served among the Bagisu. Therefore, this omission left a gap that needed more pertinent academic analysis.

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<sup>216</sup> Stephen G. Bunker, Op cit. 18 Jun 1991, p.88.

<sup>217</sup> Rucker, R, Mafabi, D.W., and Masiga, D.O., The Bagisu Culture in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Unwin Press, New York, 2001, p.55.

Focus on Uganda begins with the observation that it is not among the countries where the crucial link between food and traditional practices has been studied so far. Indeed, most of the studies examining this link show that food culture is a reality<sup>219, 220</sup>. In the case of the Bagisu of Eastern Uganda, there were several foods that were considered cultural for the Bagisu people. Among these foods comprised *maleya*, *Kamatoore*, *bubwooba*, *buulo* (millet bread), *bufukye* (cassava smashed with beans), *makila*<sup>221</sup>, *masebe*, *kamankunyu bikwa*, (yams), *shinoko* (fermented milk) and The *magungu* (pounded small bananas) which were thrown down by heavy winds<sup>222</sup>. challenge with the scholarship on Bagisu food is that it hardly adequately explains which preferred foods were earmarked for which ceremonies and, above all, the cultural significance of such foods.

#### **4.2. The coming of the British colonialists and agents to Bugisu sub region**

The British colonialists and their agents such as the trading companies took over the East African British Protectorate as a way of implementing the 1885 Berlin Treaty signed by European colonial powers.<sup>223</sup> This is the treaty which among other things sub divided the African continent, ceding control to different European powers with interests in this continent. By 1885, the Germans and the British had come to East Africa to regularise the colonial trade interests<sup>224</sup>. This was done through the first explorers and missionaries such as

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<sup>218</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., Ibid.1977, p.49.

<sup>219</sup>Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, Ibid, 1952, p.51.

<sup>220</sup> Masiga, E. and Nandudu L., Op cit.1977, p.45

<sup>221</sup> Mayamba, J. Have your beans a different way. Sunday Monitor, November,18, 2012.

<sup>222</sup> Johnson Mayamba, Ibid. p.5

<sup>223</sup> Were, Gideon S. *East Africa through a thousand years*. Longman, Nairobi, 1980, p.76

<sup>224</sup> Were, Gideon S. Ibid, 1980, p.76

John Ludwig Krapf and Johannes Rebmann, the Germans had come to East Africa as early as 1848 and were in the process of colonising this region.<sup>225</sup>

On their part, the British had developed interest in East Africa as a result of the exploratory expeditions which their opening explorers, travellers and missionaries to this region such as Shergold Smith and C. T. Wilson of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) had written about it. These missionaries had travelled in East Africa reaching as far as Buganda Kingdom where they reached in June 1877 and as far as the Ruwenzori Mountains, which Henry Morton Stanley had accomplished by 1888.<sup>226</sup> From these expeditions, these missionaries had concluded that this region was a viable economic zone, especially in terms of agriculture.<sup>227</sup>

The British, who had taken effective occupation of Egypt in 1882, feared that the Germans, who were already in East Africa, could advance inland from Tanganyika (mainland Tanzania as currently known) and ultimately occupy Uganda where the source of Nile River was. The British feared that the Germans would divert the Nile and prevent it from flowing to Egypt. Consequently, the British initiated negotiations with the Germans, which culminated in the signing of the Anglo-German Agreements of July 1890.<sup>228</sup> This agreement left Uganda under the British sphere of influence. Accordingly, British efforts to effectively take over Uganda and the neighbouring jurisdictions began that same year. Besides the desire to control the source of the Nile, the British wanted to exploit Uganda's agricultural potential, which had

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<sup>225</sup> Karugaire, Rubaraza Samuel. *A political history of Uganda*. Heinemann, Nairobi, 1980, p.55-56.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ward, Kevin. 1991. A History of Christianity in Uganda. From mission to church. In Z. Nthamburi (Ed.), *A handbook of Christianity in East Africa* (pp. 81-144). E. Arnold., London, p.86.

<sup>228</sup> Karugaire, R. Samuel. 1980. Op. cit., p.58.

been reported by the missionaries. The British further regarded the East Africa region as a latent market place for their manufacturing and industrial goods.<sup>229</sup>

Accordingly, led by William Mackinnon, the British reached Mombasa in 1888 and established a foreign office there under the auspices of the Imperial British East Africa Company (IBEAC). This company had already been headquartered at Zanzibar, operating in an area of about 246,800 square miles along the eastern coast of Africa, chiefly on behalf of the British Government.<sup>230</sup> According to Sir Gerald H. Portal, the British government had in addition granted the IBEAC the authority to govern this part of East Africa on its behalf, raise taxes from it, impose custom duties, and make treaties with rulers in the region to accept the British Protectorate<sup>231</sup>.

Portal notes further that through IBEAC, Sir William Mackinnon had been tasked to move into the interior of East Africa, particularly to Buganda Kingdom with a mission to establish the feasibility of British administration over this kingdom<sup>232</sup>. Mackinnon had been sent to work with Captain Frederick Lugard who was this territory's military administrator from 26<sup>th</sup> December 1890 to May 1892. Lugard scompelled Mwanga II, who was the Kabaka of Buganda then, to sign a treaty on 26 December 1890, granting powers over revenue, trade and the administration of justice to the IBEAC in the kingdom.<sup>233</sup> Mwanga had signed this treaty because Lugard had threatened to dethrone him following his failure to make a decision that would translate into neutralising religious power struggles. The latter conflicts

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<sup>229</sup>Ibid.

<sup>230</sup> Carlyle, E. I. and Galbraith, John S. 2004. *Mackinnon, Sir William, Baronet (1823–1893)*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, p.48.

<sup>231</sup> Portal, Sir Gerald H. 1894. *The British mission to Uganda in 1893*. London: E. Arnold., p. xxxvi

<sup>232</sup>Ibid.

<sup>233</sup> Kiwanuka, M. M. Semakula. 1971. *A history of Buganda*. London: Longman, p.109.

raged on for close to half a decade among Protestants, Catholics and Muslims in his kingdom.<sup>234</sup> Subsequently, the main mission of Mackinnon was to find out how best these struggles were to be defused to empower Her Majesty's government to establish an effective administration over the Kingdom of Buganda.<sup>235</sup>

Fearing that dethroning the Kabaka would gravely imperil the lives of the missionaries in Buganda, the Church Missionary Society mobilized £16,000 towards the expenses that IBEAC was incurring to maintain British administration over Buganda.<sup>236</sup> This money was meant to facilitate the company's operations till the end of 1892. Her Majesty's government also sent more funding to facilitate the cost of this administration for an extra three months after which a new commissioner would arrive in Buganda to replace Lugard who had been recalled for another deployment in Hong Kong.<sup>237</sup> All these are the background historical events that took mostly place in Buganda Kingdom before Bugisu sub region was brought under the British protectorate administration.

In extending British rule beyond Buganda, Baganda agents offered their services to the colonialists as administrators, a proposition which was attractive to colonial administrators. This opened the way for Baganda agents who went to different parts of the protectorate as local tax collectors cash crop-growing supervisors and labor organizers in areas such as Bukedi, Mbale, Teso, Kigezi and Bunyoro<sup>238</sup>. In other words, the cash crop growing as

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<sup>234</sup>Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Portal, Sir Gerald H. 1894. Op. cit., p.5.

<sup>236</sup>Karugaire, Rubaraza Samuel. .Ibid.1980, p.55-56.

<sup>237</sup>Ibid.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

introduced in Bugisu region was supervised by Baganda agents led by Semei Kakungulu on behalf of the British protectorate officials.

Thus, as cash crop growing took root in Eastern Uganda, the Bagisu who on average lived 5000ft above sea-level which ideal for Arabica coffee, they were found massively growing the crop in the region. Cotton is another cash crop which was grown in the lower plains spreading as low as 4000ft above sea level<sup>239</sup>. Bunker<sup>240</sup> adds that tobacco was another cash crop grown in the region by a small percentage of the population<sup>241</sup>. With reference to food crop growing in Bugisu during colonial rule, the Bagisu who were known to have grown bananas largely for food as one of the choice foods. However, they also specifically sold the cooking bananas to supplement the income earned from coffee, cotton and tobacco as they appeared to be plentiful which greatly contributed to the changes in the preferred food crops, thus affected the systematic continuity of the food culture .

What is important to note during this period is the relationship between cash and food crops in the Bugisu region. There are accounts of hectares upon hectares of land which were put under coffee, cotton and tobacco cultivation. While these cash crops fetched instant cash in exports, they had the effect of taking away the focus from food production to cash crop production, affecting the available food supply to the population. To some of these effects on food and the food culture of the Bagisu, we turn in the following sections.

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<sup>239</sup> Gideon S. Were, *Ibid.* Vol. 11,1982, pp. 184-195, p.187

<sup>240</sup> Stephen G. Bunker, *Op cit.* 1991, p.11.

<sup>241</sup> Stephen G. Bunker, *Ibid.* 1991, p.12.



### 4.3. Colonial Policies and factors affecting the food culture of the Bagisu

The colonial state policy with specific reference to Bugisu agriculture appeared to have changed very often from the beginning of colonial rule in Uganda. Indeed, this is confirmed by James<sup>242</sup> who argues that for some time Bugisu region had been declared waste land by the protectorate government until the 1930s. James notes that before the 1930s, the colonial government had only concentrated on the war against droughts and famines which badly affected the food sources of the local population. In agreement with this scholarly observation, one elder specifically remembers extreme famines that occurred in both 1905 and 1910 as he narrates that:

“My daughter, I remember stories recounted to me by my parents about the great famine that occurred soon after I was born before the great war among the big countries. Food was so scarce to the extent that people started cooking hides, skins and tree leaves which they had never eaten before. My father also told me that in some cases there were cultural ceremonies such as naming and initiation rites which had to be postponed due to famine. People were hungry for years”<sup>243</sup>.

This narrative indicates that there were factors which undermined the food culture of the Bagisu not only during the pre-colonial era but also during the colonial period. There were accounts which suggested that in the early decades of the colonial period, the colonial state heavily engaged in experiments, distributing agricultural seeds and testing the physical characteristics of the soils in Bugisu region.<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>242</sup> R.W James, “Land Tenure in Developing Countries. From Westernization to indigenization.” *East African Law Review*, 9, 1976,21:1-26.

<sup>243</sup>Wasukira Lazaro, *ibid.*

<sup>244</sup> R.W James, *Ibid.* 9, 1976, 21:1-26.

For example, James<sup>245</sup> contends that the 1910s and the 1920s saw the colonial establishment distribute seeds and carrying out a diversity of agricultural initiatives that unfortunately did not come up with positive outcomes in most cases. However, due to frequent famines during the early years of the colonial state, the authorities decided to adopt a comprehensive policy on Bugisu agriculture. The policy objectives were to increase cultivation, to demonstrate improved methods of crop production and to formulate strategies for curbing soil erosion<sup>246</sup>. Thus, in order to achieve these objectives, an Agricultural Officer was deployed to Mbale for the first time to spearhead government agricultural policy in the area.

The colonial government had a number of real outcomes that were envisaged from government interventions in the region to remedy the Bugisu food shortfalls<sup>247</sup>. In line with these colonial government expectations, the District Commissioner reports revealed that the factors for famine in the Bugisu region had been very clear for many years. He therefore suggested that the first objective of the policy would be to address the key issues that undermined food production in the region. From this revelation, one can argue that the inefficiency of the colonial government was one key factor which undermined the food culture of the Bagisu. The district commissioners' reports to the Governor are similarly echoed by accounts which pointed to the colonial government's failure in supporting the food production in Bugisu region. Accordingly, Watusi<sup>248</sup> laments that the Bagisu faced agricultural calamity after calamity, especially in famines, but the colonial government simply followed its interests which were essentially based in cash crops at the expense of the

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<sup>245</sup> R.W James, Ibid. pp.10

<sup>246</sup> Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen, Conflict, Food Insecurity and Globalization, *Food Culture and Society An International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (Food Cult Soc)*, vol. 2, No. 19, 2006, pp.34-46.

<sup>247</sup> Ellen Messer and Marc J. Cohen, Ibid. vol.2, No. 19, 2006, pp.34-46.

<sup>248</sup> Watusi Farrah, 67, cultural representatives Mbale District, interviewed on 17 November 2019.

people's food. From the agricultural challenges, especially related to food shortages, the colonial government realized that agricultural development focusing on both cash and food crops was to wholesomely look at development. It was after three decades of the colonial government that it was realized that no government initiatives would succeed until the region greatly improved its food stocks<sup>249</sup>.

During the period under consideration, implementation of colonial policy operated with a single focus on cash crops. In other words, the reality of agricultural production that turned out less food resulting in famine after famine during this period only shows the interests of the colonial government rather than the area being unproductive. Thus, the 1930s saw the revival of Bugisu's agriculture along which more food was produced, thus, beginning modest steps towards supporting the food culture of the Bagisu.

This strategic importance of more food production was soon to be seen in the new agricultural policy that was introduced with a specific focus for Bugisu region. In this new policy, it was required that the focus should also be put on food production. The increased food was not only good for addressing famines and supporting the food culture of the Bagisu but also for the overall health of the local economy<sup>250</sup>.

Evidently, in terms of the of agricultural production designed to increase food production, all policies and production processes remained typically unchanged in a large measure throughout the entire colonial period. The interest of the colonial government in Bugisu was not different from the rest of the protectorate. It was not in how much food was produced or how it was produced it was produced in terms of improved methods. Therefore, as long as the

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<sup>249</sup> Mungoma Mohammed 52, cultural representative of Mbale district. Interviewd on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020

<sup>250</sup> Watsusi. Ibid.

growing and selling of cash crop commodities such as coffee, cotton and tobacco were flourishing in the region, the British protectorate government was satisfied since this was the original focus that would enlarge Her Majesty's treasury. In the same way, so long as the food produced was enough to avert hunger and famine, the colonial government did not bother to change policy or introduce any other agricultural initiative.

Consequently, the British colonial policy on Bugisu agriculture and food production in particular did not contribute to improvement in agricultural technology for production until 1962 when Uganda secured her independence. Available accounts suggest that before the 1930s, the colonial government seemed to have been engaged not only with the war against droughts and famines; itself a result of neglect as well as engagement in pacifying the protectorate. Bunyoro Kingdom Agreement<sup>251</sup> with the British was, for example, signed in 1933.

#### **4.4 Factors for the continuity of food culture of the Bagisu**

From the foregoing accounts, it should be noted that the factors of continuity and change of food culture had a lot to do with the attachment to the Bagisu culture and the colonial government policy on Bugisu agriculture. In regard to the continuities, as long as there were rites of passage the Bagisu wanted to celebrate, there were choice foods which were considered an integral part of the process for cultural celebrations. Contributing to the narratives on the continuities of Bugisu food culture, it was argued that as long as a person was born a mugisu and was initiated into the cultural heritage of the ethnic group, any mugisu would know that there would never be any ceremonial rites which would be performed without prescribed traditional foods that had cultural significance<sup>252</sup>. For example, until today

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<sup>251</sup> Samwiri Rubaraza Karugire, Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> Wamelile Sofati, Ibid.

it still remains part of the marriage culture for a young lady eligible for marriage to display good knowledge of preparing *makila* as well as removing an intact cluster from a banana bunch known as *Imbululu*<sup>253</sup>. The marriage rituals of which the food culture of the Bagisu was and still is an integral part or has deeper meaning for Bagisu's food culture.

Among the key factors in the continuity of the Bagisu food culture was special attachment to the traditional food which most Bagisu developed from childhood. Narratives around this assertion suggest that the reason Bagisu food culture has survived from generation to generation was essentially due to the food attachment that Bagisu had developed for generations<sup>254</sup>. A common factor as per the narratives in the field was about the nature of traditional foods. The common view emerging from the data analysis suggested that since some of the treasured foods among the Bagisu was naturally available in the wild, the continuity of the food culture among the people was relatively easy since not all the cherished foods' availability depended on the market.<sup>255</sup> Among such foods widely cited comprise bamboo shoots, yams, mushrooms and some varieties of bananas and wild fruits; which were all culturally significant.

#### **4.5 Factors for change of food culture of the Bagisu**

Nonetheless, the research established that there was a threat in the continuity of the general culture of the Bagisu as per the findings in the research. The youth had a different view compared to the elders<sup>256</sup>, argued that the Bugisu culture was still acknowledged and cherished. The youthful respondents had other views expressed in their narratives in this

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<sup>253</sup> Munialo Fred. Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Munialo Fred. Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Makumbu Eria. Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Wanyenze Luzabeti.Ibid.

study. While they appreciated the identified food choices by their fore fathers, they also noted that such traditional foods defined their heritage and values<sup>257,258</sup>. The youth added however that change had been experienced among the Bagisu, with changing food tastes associated with modernity<sup>259,260</sup>. Specifically been identified in globalization as a factor undermining the traditional choice foods which promoted cultural heritage<sup>261</sup>. In addition, citing some instances where the Bagisu sacrificed food to the dead, most youth indicated in their narratives that modern Bugisu was more civilized compared to the pre-colonial and colonial periods which they perceived as demonic.<sup>262</sup>.

In contrast, elders explained the changes in food culture, reviewing the whole range of cherished food where they equally noted some changes in the food culture over the years from previous epochs, noting that food shortages stretching from pre-colonial era had undermined the Bagisu food culture. The elders explained that from the pre-colonial era, there were periods in history when famines would strike, affecting the adequacy of the choice foods such as cooking bananas, yams, potatoes, millet, beans and mushrooms. It was further explained that each time there were inauspicious environmental conditions causing food scarcity and starvation, this would affect food culture in a sense that some sensitive cultural practices would be carried on without the choice foods. The most memorable time such food shortages happened was during the pre-colonial period, estimated to be between 1700-1800<sup>263</sup>

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<sup>257</sup> Nabusayi Monic, 23 years, Youth from Mbale District interviewed on 7th January 2020.

<sup>258</sup> Namono Rose, 21 years, Youth from Mbale District interviewed on 16 January 2020.

<sup>259</sup> Namono Rose, Ibid.

<sup>260</sup> Nyote Peter, 35. Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> Nyote Peter 35. Ibid.

<sup>262</sup> Musungu Grace. 20, From Mbale District, interviewed on 19 January 2020

<sup>263</sup> Masuba , Ibid.

when some people died of hunger as narrated from ancestors. Therefore, each factor such as; prolonged drought, famine and deprivation that affected the food available to the Bagisu constituted a factor in the change of food culture.

The next time serious famine occurred was during the first decades of the colonial period<sup>264</sup>. The years 1905, 1910 and 1917 were specifically mentioned as historical landmarks for famine during the colonial period. In the opinion of Masuba<sup>265</sup> part of the explanation for famines, and therefore, a factor in undermining the food culture of the Bagisu was in the mistake of sticking to a few cherished foods. This was one of the causes of famine during the first few decades of the colonial period. The narratives emphasized that the changes in food culture had underlying causes in the emphasis on particular foods and ignoring others. This, the narratives contended, led the Bagisu to start relying on foreign foods which had no cultural significance. It was further noted that later during the colonial period there was laxity which allowed other types of food from elsewhere. Thus, the new foods which were introduced in Bugisu such as rice, Irish potatoes and some grain varieties are seen as part of the factors for continued changes in the food culture of the Bagisu. The food identified should have not been based on other reasons which were regarded as not so important but rather it would have been majorly put on the basis of nutrition.<sup>266</sup>

Food was the center of the Bagisu culture; they never cared to use culture to develop. E.g. not until of recent in 2010 when the Umukuka was installed into leadership of the Bagisu that cultural practices of the Bagisu started to gain identity beyond the Bugisu borders.<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, Ibid. 1952, p.81.

<sup>265</sup> Masuba Matayo, Ibid.

<sup>266</sup> Musungu Grace.20, From Mbale District. interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup>- 01- 2020

<sup>267</sup> Wesonga Michael 24. From Mbale district, interviewed on 30<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

The way the food was prepared in the pre-colonial period must be innovated, we may continue to embrace the identified foods but we have to improve on them with the modern cooking methods so that even other tribes or cultures may appreciate and embrace our food. However, this idea was refuted by Ayubu the youth counselor in Mbale district, he said that the idea of the Bagisu cultural food is not meant to be embraced by non Bagisu because it does not concern them<sup>268</sup>.

The food culture was fading in Bugisu due to the different approaches of viewing and preparing the cultural food from the pre-colonial generation to the modern era. This issue raises the question of how the next generation will be able to pass on the food culture to other generations. Besides, food culture is not even emphasized today apart from the circumcision culture of which it is also mixed up and not followed properly as per the cultural requirements. Most parents take their children for circumcision in the hospitals and they circumcise them while they are still young. There is a fear of the true food culture to continue to the next generations with all what is taking place in families today.<sup>269</sup>

The original cultural marriage was also messed up with the new trends which have the divorce packages as well, this was not the case in the pre- colonial. It was an embarrassment for some young people to know that there were particular foods preferred in the pre- colonial period, because their favorite foods are not mentioned in the foods identified.

The narratives from the young respondents suggested that the house of the '*Umukuka*' might be the one to save the culture of the Bagisu including the food culture which had not been taken seriously by the current generation.

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<sup>268</sup> Mugoli Ayubu , 25, Mbale District Interviewed on 2<sup>nd</sup>-02- 2020

<sup>269</sup> Nashirio Amos. 45, opinion leader from Mbale District interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020



Some accounts from young people suggested that the food in Bugisu was dedicated to demonic spirits, hence the practices which were done after millet harvest where meat was roasted and millet bread was put in the four corners of the house to feed the ancestors and thank them for the good harvest before the family members would taste the first harvest. The young generation, therefore, viewed the food culture of the Bagisu as partly going back to the past which was not glorious<sup>270</sup>. This point was also emphasized by a religious leader who said that what their ancestors did in the past has greatly affected the current generation because they dedicated the Masaba land to demons and the food thereof.

#### **4.6 Interventions and changes in Food Cultural Restoration of the Bagisu**

Several initiatives designed to restore the food culture of the Bagisu had been undertaken with the aim of restoring this culture during the post-colonial period. Narratives from the field indicated that several prominent elders had gathered several times during the post-colonial period to chart a way forward on how to intervene in what had been perceived as erosion of a rich cultural heritage practices which had perpetually kept the Bagisu community together. The most pronounced efforts were undertaken at the beginning of the 1990s<sup>271</sup>. This meeting which was held at Mbale Municipal Council Buildings had agreed to hold regular meetings in this regard but whose follow up has been slow. The most recent intervention was in 2010 in the month of January when prayers were held in different churches to rededicate the food and the land of Masaba back to God.<sup>272</sup> It was said that the Bagisu had the best soils which produced good yields unlike the poor quality of the yields today. All this was as a

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<sup>270</sup> Wadada Nicolas. 28.ibid.

<sup>271</sup> Mary Namugongo. 75, Mbale district, 15<sup>th</sup>-12- 2019

<sup>272</sup> Walimbwa Juma. 90, Mbale district. Interviewed .

result of idol worship and prayers are still going on for Bugisu land so that God may have mercy and restore the glory of Bugisu said Pastor Wambi Deo. It is against such fears that one can imagine that indeed the continuity of the food culture is at a threat to continue smoothly to the next generation.

Besides the views given by the youth on the continuity of the food culture of the Bagisu, the elderly on the other hand gave their views. It was said that little has been done to ensure the continuity of the food culture, as more emphasis is put on the cultural circumcision today due to its popularity in attracting tourist attention and therefore earns them many benefits. So food culture in this case has not been popular especially to the young generation who are not aware of other Bugisu cultures<sup>273</sup>.

The view by the youth that the pre-colonial fathers contributed to the degradation of the soil fertility was objected, instead, it was argued that the current generation is still basing on the foundation which was put by fathers. Food culture is there only that people tend not to have interest in their culture. Kutoi agreed that it is the responsibility of the political institution (The cabinet of the Umukuka) to put up programs which will help to pass on the food culture and ensure that the Bagisu people embrace it. For example, there was competition organized in 1986 where a cooking competition was put up, particularly in preparing traditional cultural Bugisu foods and awards were given for the best prepared dishes, this program was started on by the leaders of then and many women registered to participate in the competition. The program was initiated but did not continue and yet if it was maintained up today many people especially the youth would go for it said one of the participants in the competition<sup>274</sup>.

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<sup>274</sup> Kangala James. 74, cultural representative from Mbale district. Interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup>-12-2019.

However the cultural institution through the house of Masaba ('Inzu ya' Masaba') started a program of educating the masses on the radio station of Open Gate in Mbale about the culture of the Bagisu including their cultural food every Friday. There's hope for the continuity of the food culture with such efforts put in.

It was also argued that the population by then was small yet they had a lot of land for farming which has since reduced. A farmer could utilize other pieces of land while the rest of the land rested, of which this would add the soil nutrients so that when the turn for utilizing it reached, it yielded very good crops. Unlike today, where the population is too high and there is almost no land to cultivate food. Where by the same piece of land are used season after season and the yields are very poor. This therefore poses a threat of the preferred food choices to continue to the next generation.

The cutting of trees today is another danger to the continuity of the food culture. Thus, mushrooms grew most in the pre- colonial and the colonial periods because trees were emphasized by the leaders then. One respondent said that the muvule trees which Semei Kakungulu spear headed to plant in Bugisu during the colonial period are the pride trees today especially in senior quarters of Mbale district .<sup>275</sup> The introduction of cotton growing in the colonial period was majorly to add the nutrients in the soil and this was equally a fertile ground for mushrooms to grow in the field. But today they claim that as much as cotton growing and processing for sale is very tiresome, it's price is not appealing to the local farmers. Instead, they have resorted mostly to growing other crops such as maize, beans, rice

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<sup>275</sup> Musungu Alfred. 61, Key Informant from Mbale District interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup>-12- 2019.

etc.<sup>276</sup> it should be noted that these very crops grown today are planted on the same piece of land year after year which definitely reduces the soil nutrients.

Inter marriages have also brought about changes in the food culture of the Bagisu. Before, the ancestors ensured that the marriages were culturally organized and the marriage partner was identified by the parents to know which family their child was marrying from so that the culture would be maintained. However, with the new trends which came in with modernization since the colonial period, people started to look further than Bugisu for marriage partners. Since then there was a linkage in the Bugisu culture as people started to copy in other cultures from different places and mixed them up with the Bugisu culture, thus food inclusive was mixed up.

Market influence contributed to the food preferences grown in Bugisu since the colonial period and the most desired cultural foods were compromised at the expense of what was highly demanded on market. For example when cotton and coffee was so much emphasized as cash crops, many people abandoned food crop growing and concentrated more on such cash crops. In fact the food crops grown also were determined by the market demand. That was why new types of bananas were introduced to suit the demand on market. For example, when bogoya was introduced, it gained market and instead farmers preferred it to nakaji and Gonzowa which culturally was meant for ripe bananas and eaten during cultural events such as naming of children, was replaced with bogoya because it was marketable. Such influences definitely indicate that the food cultural continuation is at a threat.

Freedom of Ugandans to live anywhere as per the constitution of Uganda also influenced the change of the food culture as people copy other cultural practices including food culture. As

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<sup>276</sup> Namaganda Mageret.79, Key Informant, Retired reverend, from Mbale district interviewed on 12<sup>th</sup>-12- 2019.

many people moved in Bugisu from other regions and of course came with their cultures which included their foods and definitely was incorporated with that of the Bagisu. Hence, the food culture was diluted compared to that of the pre- colonial society of Bugisu.

We cannot deny the fact that also most young ladies never wanted to prepare food which took long to be ready, such as makila, maleya etc. they wanted easy foods especially the town ladies in the colonial and post-colonial period preferred to prepare food of their choices unlike in the pre- colonial period where it was a prerequisite for any mature girl to prepare makila as a symbol of readiness to cook in her husband's home.

Also change of climatic conditions was another factor. The rains are not reliable hence the seasons were not clear. Mushrooms cannot grow in such conditions. As a result people had to come up with the new technologies of growing mushrooms genetically which taste definitely does not compare with the ones which grew in bushes, forests and gardens. This is even worse today because most young people do not even know the types of mushrooms which grew in Bugisu. This is so bad for the continuity of the food culture<sup>277</sup>.

In the pre- colonial period, the people used the locally heaped decompose manure to add the organic matter in the soil, however, years later the farmers apply the fertilizers which are full of chemicals in the garden which eventually destroys the soil nutrients. That is why it is hard to find the original black small beans of the Bagisu today. The food culture started to lose clear identity by genetically modifying foods like bananas, beans mushrooms etc. by the scientists. It is only a few people from the mountainous regions who still have the original bananas which have the natural traditional taste<sup>278</sup>.

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<sup>277</sup> Weswa Herbert 45, Key informant, opinion leader from Mbale District interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-January 2020.

<sup>278</sup> Mabonga Betty. 68, former Umukuka representative Mbale district, interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>- 11-2019

The soils used to produce natural fruits like guavas, berries of all category, in Bugisu they had their tomatoes they called ‘tsinyanya tsingisu’ tomatoes which yielded throughout the year and could grow tens and thirties on one stem. All these were destroyed later. The fruits such as papaws, mangoes, oranges extra, were very tasty and juicy unlike during the postcolonial period. They claimed that their culture brought up good disciplined children unlike later where the generation decayed up today. In the past said one of the respondents, that the way food was prepared and served there was a lot of honor given to it. For example no woman would peel bananas or any other food while sited on a chair, she would sit on a mat made out of dry banana leaves. Even funning the fire she would kneel on the mat, just as she would kneel on a mat while she served food to the rest of the family members. This is quiet un common to find today .<sup>279</sup>

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

In general, therefore, by the time Uganda secured her independence in 1962, both continuities and changes had been seen in the food culture of the Bagisu, which extended to the postcolonial period. The major changes were brought by the negative changes in the food culture of the Bagisu, as discussed above in the beginning of the colonial period. While the explanations for the continuities of the Bagisu food culture generally supported the significance of the of the people’s culture, the changes in the food culture negated the deep food cultural values which aimed at establishing and cementing cultural relationships among them for harmonious societal existence.

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<sup>279</sup> Mabonga Betty, 68 years. Ibid

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE FOOD CULTURE OF THE BAGISU DURING THE POST- COLONIAL PERIOD, 1962 TO DATE

#### 5.0 Introduction

The preceding chapter examined how the British colonialists extended their rule to Eastern Uganda, including Bugisu region. The chapter further discussed how initially the protectorate government did not have a significant influence on the livelihoods of the Bagisu, specifically putting emphasis on coffee, cotton and tobacco rather than food production. This strategic focus of the British colonial officials, there were recurring famines until 1930 when the colonial state re-organized its agricultural policy comprehensively providing for a food production component for the region. The colonial officials did not address the agricultural challenges of the region faced in the food production and transportation of food to those areas with acute shortage. This chapter provides a historical account of how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served the way they were in the postcolonial period. The chapter highlights the continuities and changes in food preparation and serving with a specific focus on the choice foods of the Bagisu, especially discussing the traditional food preparation processes during the postcolonial era.

#### 5.1 The continuation of food over time in Bugisu cultural setting

Among other various types of food of the Bagisu since the pre-colonial period, the four identified types were deeply associated with culture, thus *Kamatoore* (bananas), *malewa*, (bamboo shoots), *Makila/magira* (pounded beans) *bubwooba* (mushrooms)<sup>280</sup> were Central to the current study was to examine the historical factors that influences the continuities from

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<sup>280</sup> Lominda Afedraru, The cultural aspects of food, music and celebration. *Daily Monitor* Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, pp.7-8.

era to era and the changes which, in some cases, changed the cherished foods from over the course of time. This research, however, based its analysis on the four cherished foods, identified in the literature as the most common<sup>281</sup>. These foods comprised bananas, bamboo shoots, beans and mushrooms. The emphasis was put on what food was culturally significant, among the Bagisu, the considerations on why that food was cherished and how it was prepared and served over time from the pre-colonial period why there are changes in the cultural foods and what has continued on to date.

Today there are still traditional foods that have been carried on and highly cherished among the Bagisu. For example *maleya* has been a unique delicacy, eaten for over 3,000 years, there is scanty information on how the Bantu-speaking tribes in the Eastern Mountains have also adopted the dish and whether this acceptance is for cultural purposes<sup>282</sup>. However, available data suggested that for those that love attending ceremonies including circumcisions, weddings, academic graduations and others where buffets are served, the party is not complete unless ‘*maleya*’ is served<sup>283</sup>. Hence the traditional delicacy has continued on up to date.

‘*Kamatoore*’ is also one of the staple foods in Bugisu, identified as preferred judging on the frequency of its consumption. Fields of banana plantations were owned by every homestead right from the pre-colonial era and during the pre-colonial period to the present<sup>284</sup>.

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<sup>281</sup> Mayamba, J. Have your beans a different way. *Sunday Monitor*, November,18, 2012.

<sup>282</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, (1952). *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Ibid p.23.

<sup>283</sup> Marocco, Mukiibi and Nsenga. *Uganda from Earth to table. Traditional products and dishes*. Ibid. p.12

<sup>284</sup> Wamoka W.M. Wangusa T and Wepukhulu, Ibid. 2008, p.29.



## 5.2 Preparations for cooking Bamboo shoots (*maleya*)

In explaining how the bamboo shoots were prepared and their cultural significance or food hierarchy of the Bagisu, it was noted that the bamboo shoots grow wildly and widely on the slopes of Mount Elgon, providing an open opportunity for all people who wanted them to access easily<sup>285</sup>. This food was and has remained the most prominent dish among the Bagisu during the post-colonial period. Mount Elgon, from where the bamboo shoots were collected remained historically significant to the Bagisu during the postcolonial period as the area where the first man, Masaba appeared from a cave.<sup>286</sup> There was a myth associated with eating bamboo shoots in the prescribed way which started during the pre-colonial period and similarly continued during this era. The myth held that for the Bagisu, eating the bamboo cuisine was essentially making the eternal divine connection with the soul of the origins of Bagisu. It was believed that the celestial linkage between the origins of the Bagisu and the living people was a source of blessings, success and a long healthy life among the Bamasaba<sup>287,288</sup>.

After collection, the bamboo shoots were first of all dried up by smoking them above a fire place for a period of about three days during which they were believed to become more ready both for eating and conservancy<sup>289</sup>. In other words, according to the narratives in this research, the reason as why there was need to dry up the bamboo shoots was for cleansing, making them ready for further preparation in the process of immediate consumption as well

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<sup>285</sup> Lominda Afedraru, The cultural aspects of food, music and celebration. *Daily Monitor* Wednesday, 5<sup>th</sup> August 2015, p.9

<sup>286</sup> Mayegu, Andrea Kauka, *The Bamasaba Tribal History*, Penguin, London, Ibid. 1952, p.49.

<sup>287</sup> Masuba Wandudu Matayo, Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> Wanyenze Luzabeti, Ibid.

<sup>289</sup> Mafabi David, Ibid.22, 2012, p.9

as for preservation of the dry bamboo shoots. The latter process was itself culturally important in two perspectives. First, this was one logical strategy to ensure that there were ready bamboo shoots for immediate food preparation in the house whenever need arose, for example, if an impromptu visit was made by a relative or neighbour they needed to offer food to them. This was further noteworthy for any mugisu household as it was believed it was vital for one to be in position to offer culturally essential food to visitors in the home for hospitality purposes and being recognized as conscious of Bugisu culture. Second, it was believed keeping the bamboo shoots in one's household meant remaining in eternal communion with the Bugisu ancestors as they offered not only a theoretical but also a practical linkage between the living persons and the Bagisu ancestors.<sup>272</sup>

The shoots in dry form could be preserved for a very long time, ranging from about two to three years if the storage conditions were good. One of these conditions for good storage was ensuring the shoot were not kept in dump place where they would likely to rot as time passed on.<sup>290</sup> When shoots were properly prepared, they were then soaked in water for time that extended between 3-4 hours. The purpose of this procedure was to soften them for easy cutting and also to easily mix with other ingredients. Subsequently, when they became soft, the top layers were of the shoots were peeled off, remaining with the inner softer tissues that were believed to be not only very tasty but also nutritious when boiled.<sup>291</sup>

The ingredients for maleya complete preparation as Plate 5.1 shows, comprised the bamboo shoots and water which facilitated the cooking of the source stopping it from burning and facilitated the mixing of the source ingredients. Equally vital as ingredient were rock salt (*kumusshelke*) which was key in further softening the shoots and working as a catalyst to

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<sup>290</sup> Wamboza Zadoki, 60, cultural representative from Mbale. Interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019.

<sup>291</sup> Malewa as a cherished traditional food of the Bagisu. Available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Malewa>.

cook the source quickly. Ordinary salt and peanut paste were added so as to simmer the source to make it acquire a pleasant taste. The sauce was served with either bananas ‘kamatoore’, or millet bread, just as it had always been from the pre-colonial and colonial periods. Narratives around the continuity of bamboo shoots preparation suggested that this process remained consistent until today largely because if prepared differently, it would never yield satisfactory cuisine. In addition, the continuity in the preparation and serving of the bamboo-dominated meal had continued due its delicious taste. Unsurprisingly, the source was mostly eaten as a daily meal, and also never lacked on very special ceremonies such as traditional marriages, naming and coronation ceremonies of the clan heads and kings known as *Umukuka*’ celebrations which started in 2010. Plate 5.1 portrays some of the ingredients of the maleya.



Water

rock salt

dry maleya

preparation



Ready maleya

***Plate 5.1: Some of the Ingredients of Maleya at the preparatory stage***

There were several accounts provided on why the bamboo shoots were culturally meaningful in Bugisu cuisine. Central in explaining the importance of the bamboo source was the belief that the constant eating of the source was itself the act of self-renewal as the shoots were directly connected to the first mugisu, legendary known as Masaba, who many centuries ago

had emerged from Mt. Elgon where the bamboo shoots grew abundantly. It is for this reason that the Bagisu believed that bamboo shoots had from creation been blessed as the mandatory food for Bagisu to help keep the linkage among all the Bagisu and their ancestors<sup>292</sup>. Some of the ingredients of the bamboo shoots source also contributed to explain why they were prepared and served the way they were. It was, for example, believed that the pea nuts paste added to the *maleya* made men more sexually strong and healthy.<sup>293</sup>

### **5.3 Preparation of the cooking bananas (*Kamatoore*)**

The bananas were yet another culturally important food for the Bagisu that continued to be relevant during the postcolonial period. The preparation process for the Bananas, just like the *maleya*, began with the cutting of the food from the farm. For the bananas, it was particularly essential to cut them prior to the cooking dates so that they could lose the stains. However, more important than shedding off the stains was the myth associated with cutting the banana early. It was, for example, believed that cutting bananas and they stay overnight, was important to present them to the ancestors for blessing them overnight before they were cooked the next day<sup>294,295</sup>.

Thereafter, the previously cut bananas would be peeled then put in the banana leaves to steam for about 30 to 45 minutes, depending on the quantity put in the cooking saucepan. After the bananas were deemed ready, they could be smashed, put back on fire for further steaming to keep this food warm, soft and purposely to add more flavour. The bananas would be left on fire for about 30 minutes, but could be kept in this condition as long as was

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<sup>292</sup> Mugide Janifer, Ibid.

<sup>293</sup> Nashirio Amos, 45. Opinion leader from Mbale district, interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-01- 2020.

<sup>294</sup> Masai Alfred. 74, From Mbale district interviewed on 3<sup>rd</sup>-November 2019.

<sup>295</sup> Masai Alfred, ibid

necessary, depending on which occasion the bananas were being prepared.<sup>296</sup> However, the Bagisu could also prepare the food in banana leaves and then would serve it immediately after getting ready. The bananas were served with either beans (*makila*) or any other source prepared, depending on the occasion. It was one of the main delicacy meals of the Bagisu mainly because beyond the purpose of eating, availability of cooking bananas in a household was associated with one's level of success. It was, thus, believed that if one was not successful in life, they would never be able to grow their own bananas. However, due to their importance in Bugisu, the type bananas called *Gonzowa* were roasted and were served with roasted meat.<sup>297</sup>

Narratives from the field indicated that the cultural significance attached to roast *Gonzowa* bananas began with the realization that these bananas could only be tasty when roasted or served when ripe.<sup>298</sup> In addition, *Gonzowa* and roasted meat were the most realistically foods to be served on functions such as circumcision as they could be prepared and served quickly during the courses of those functions. Above all, the cultural importance of the roast *Gonzowa* was to symbolize the strength and versatility which would henceforth be associated with either the coroneted *Umukuka* elders or the circumcised young men who would be served with roasted *Gonzowa* before and after the circumcision cultural practices. The meat was seen as replacing the blood in the ritual.<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Mugide Janifer, Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Mugide Janifer, Ibid

<sup>298</sup> Ayubu, Ibid.

<sup>299</sup>Nashirio Amos, ibid

It was also discovered from the field narratives that bananas were very significant on functions especially marriages and coronations of heads of clans called the Umukuka celebrations. The key cultural significance was the belief that the food when cut and collected from the farm would be blessed by ancestors overnight before it was prepared the next day. Thus, the bananas served on several of the cultural functions are believed to have added onto the blessings that would be sought to consecrate those functions for the success and goodness as well as harmonious existence of society. Plate 5.2 shows a picture of a bunch of *Gonzowa*.



***Plate 5.2: Picture of a bunch of Gonzowa bananas normally served at cultural functions***

Besides, the cooking bananas which were prepared for food, the Bagisu also grew the bananas for ripes. These were called the ‘kamarofu’. The kamarofu (ripe bananas) were either obtained from *bogoya*, *mundiizi*, *namonye* banana (bananas with skins purple in colour) or the type of bananas called kamamwa. In preparing these bananas, Bagisu would cut them and keep them in a warm place where they would ripen quickly. The ripe bananas were mostly served as snacks before the main meals and afterwards as dessert. The cultural significance of these bananas was greatly associated with happiness, contentment and serenity that graced the occasion on which these bananas were served. Plate 5.3 portrays a bunch of *likhako/likago* bananas.



*Plate 5.3: Bunch of likhako bananas normally served at diverse functions*

#### **5.4 Preparation and serving of beans (makila/magira)**

Smashed beans (makila/magira) whose preparation and serving has a central connection with culture were other special foods in Bugisu lifestyle. This was a cultural source prepared in Bugisu, similarly prepared for special occasions. Beans were cherished among the Bagisu because of their traditional taste. *Makila* was made out of beans which were either fresh or dried added, normally prepared with rock salt. The reason they were prepared with the latter salt was to give them a traditional taste. Beans were left to boil for about forty five minutes to about an hour and while the sauce was boiling, a traditional three pronged stick locally known as *kumukango* (three thronged stick) was passed in the sauce in fast succession to even out the particles in the sauce as well as stop the beans from burning at the basement of the cooking pot. When that was done then the source could be served with banana plantain, maize meal or millet bread<sup>300</sup>. The beans were specifically understood as a cultural delicacy that complemented a diversity of Bagisu meals. The special cultural significance of beans was the association with skills that a young woman needed to have in order to make her

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husband happy and in order to make their marriage a successful one.<sup>301</sup> It was believed that if a woman knew how to prepare beans, her marriage would be a blessed one since bean source could be appropriately served with a number of cherished Bagisu foods. Thus, this explains why a woman who successfully prepared bean source would be deemed ready for marriage.

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Beans were also served with sweet yellow bananas, or sometimes served on ‘kamatoore’, or any other preferred food as a full meal. It should also be noted that traditionally, *makila/magira* source was specifically supposed to be eaten during dry seasons when vegetables were scarce. However, due to the changing trends during the postcolonial period, some people made it be a popular delicacy irrespective of season. In addition, there were changes associated with the post-colonial period where due to time and other resources, the Bagisu had started preferring quick cooking source to beans which take longer to prepare.

### **5.5 Mushrooms (*Bubwoba*) in the postcolonial period**

Mushrooms as a delicacy among the Bagisu was culturally significant in the way it was attached to the origin of the Bagisu. Like the bamboo shoots which grew on Mount Elgon, the mushrooms were also closely tied to the legend about the first Mugisu man, Masaba, who is believed to have emerged from a cave on the slopes of Mount Elgon. Consequently, every food linked to this mountain is regarded cultural and with the miraculous ability to link those

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<sup>301</sup>Namaganda Mageret. Ibid.

<sup>301</sup> Mary Namugongo. Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> Namaganda Mageret. Ibid.



who eat the mushrooms with the Bagisu ancestors whose blessings increase the nourishment of the consumers<sup>303</sup>. Hence Mushrooms have a special attachment to the Bugisu culture.

Dried Mushrooms were pasted with ground nuts and added in *kumushereke* (rock salt) for a special taste. On the other hand, the fresh mushrooms were just boiled and were eaten either with cassava or steamed bananas. However, mushrooms had been commercialized because of the value found in them throughout the post-colonial period.

A new factor in the changes involving mushrooms in the post-colonial period is the technology for growing mushrooms, also driven by the market and food security considerations. Mushrooms were a well-known as a traditional delicacy, where most people got several varieties of mushrooms from the wild or where they grew randomly. It was thus common during the post-colonial period to find many farmers engaged in growing mushrooms in their home settings especially beginning with the 1990s when market liberalization took firmer roots in the developing world. The mushrooms were grown mostly for sell and some people bought them because they were a very good source of proteins, minerals and vitamins, and it was possible to grow them in urban areas due to limited availability of land and space.

While the details on the food preferences, the changes, food preparation and serving details make it appear that there was adequate scholarly information on special foods and the celebration of Bagisu culture, current studies do not effectively capture the cultural significance of the various steps followed in cherished food traditions.

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<sup>303</sup> Nabaku Samwiri, 50, cultural representative from Mbale district. Interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>- October, 2019

## **5.6 Conclusion**

Given the ideas from the respondents about the food culture of the Bagisu, there's a clear indication that the food culture of the Bagisu was highly embraced among the people of Bugisu region in the pre-colonial period, however, later due to various factors which included degradation of the environment, intermarriages among others affected the systematic continuation of the food culture among the Bagisu which also affected their true cultural identity. However, the house of the Umukuka is working hard to restore the whole culture of the Bagisu including the food culture.

## CHAPTER SIX

### 6.1 Conclusion

This research examined the food culture of the Bagisu during the pre-colonial period era, with a specific focus on the factors for the preferred food choices and why there were some continuities and changes in particular choice foods under different periods. To further explain the food culture of the Bagisu, this study also analysed how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served in the way they were during the period under review. The genesis, factors, basis and traditions explaining why some choice foods continued and others changed throughout the period studied, were explored. Equally important was an examination of food traditions focused on how these foods were prepared and why they were served in the prescribed ways at the diverse cultural functions. Pre-colonial land use, resource production and barter trade had all been organized to promote beliefs, behaviours, values and other characteristics shared by the Bagisu, overall designed to rotate around their food culture. Overall, the findings reveal the origin of the Bagisu's food culture, specifically from the first man, Masaba, and how the preferred foods, such as bamboo shoots, mushrooms, and beans were divinely and intimately connected to the Bagisu ancestors.

The established heritage relationships, centre of which is the Bagisu. Food traditions, suggest that any sub regional development initiative should first focus on the changing Bagisu's cultural perceptions of food. Indeed, the main heritage and traditions that have been passed on from the first Bagisu generation to the present one is that the Bagisu ancestors sat on the northern slopes of Mt. Elgon and decided on the food choices for the diverse occasions among the Bagisu.

The findings furthermore, suggest that the preparation and consumption of the choice foods as prescribed was essentially having eternal communion with the ancestors who would

similarly bless the celebrants that partook on the foods served. It was the ancestors, the Bagisu believed, who revealed the process of preparing the food and which foods were supposed to be served in specific ways to diverse ethnic groups and age sets. The colonial period begins at this stage when all Bagisu traditions began and ended with food, with far reaching initiatives in the production structure and organization, in some cases, with adverse impacts on food production. Findings of the study have established that colonial rule beginning in 1890 did come with opportunities and setbacks for the food culture of the Bagisu. Moving on from their pre-colonial choice foods that included millet, pumpkins, bananas, bamboo shoots, beans and fruits, new crops were introduced. Maize which was introduced during the pre-colonial time by Swahili and Arab traders was similarly an old crop in the region.

Among the new food crops was cassava, sweet potatoes and groundnuts which were introduced to Bagisu region at the beginning of the 1920s. Droughts and locust invasions which had created acute famine conditions had quickened the introduction of these new crops in Bagisu from the middle of the 1920s. Thus, it can be argued that the major reason why the colonial government imported and distributed the new crops for planting in Bagisu was to avert famine which had ravaged the region for decades. Cassava and sweet potatoes in particular were referred to by the colonial government as drought resistant food crops which would help the Bagisu to overcome famine.

Therefore, while cash crops were introduced in 1800s, the Bagisu only saw new food crops introduced in the region after approximately two and a half decades. Consequently, the years after 1904 had seen massive planting of coffee, cotton and tobacco as cash crops. Together with cash crops, new methods of agriculture had been introduced mainly focusing on cash crop production. As the colonial period further took root in the country, the colonial state was basically exclusively focused on improving cash crop commodities that included; cotton,

coffee, tobacco and sisal. To the latter, colonial policy was most passionate and resolute because the income from these cash crops greatly worked in the protectorate government's interests. In other words, colonial policy simply emphasized the growing of cash crops rather than food crops.

Consequently, a situation developed where the Bagisu were unable to produce adequate food lasting them a season, to the extent that in the first few decades of colonial rule, some. Under these conditions, it can be argued that the food culture of the Bagisu was disrupted by colonial agricultural policy as a leading factor, essentially by putting more emphasis on cash crop production at the expense of food crop growing in Bugisu region.

However, it is important to note that it was not only a single factor which accounted for the recurring famines and the consequent undermining of Bugisu's food production, preparation and serving processes at the heart of Bugisu's food culture. One valid factor in the food shortages of Bugisu was the region's land tenure which had not changed during the early years of the colonial regime. It is worth noting that the Bugisu traditional land use was system of communal, with some of its negative consequences on food production coming from lack of or limited individual incentive for getting involved in opening up land for food production. It is noted that the clan led economy as far as land use was concerned did not change until the 1930s. Additionally, apart from inadequate government funding where government expenditure in agricultural development was found to be too little, there were natural disasters that hit the region. It was noted that natural disasters such as locusts and droughts led to untold severe food shortages in Bugisu between 1905 and 1920. Thus, the colonial government's intervention in the agricultural sector to help the Bagisu to increase their agricultural production between the 1920s and 1930s was inevitable for purposes of eliminating famine. Therefore, a combination of diverse factors undermined food production,

and thus, food culture of the Bagisu not only during the pre-colonial era but also during the early years of the British Protectorate.

The colonial government had a number of strategic outcomes which it had envisaged from official interventions in the region to remedy the Bugisu food shortfalls. But these initiatives were also designed to improve cash crop commodity yields. By the end of colonial rule in 1962, the Bugisu economy had changed in terms of the food landscape in a manner that sufficiently supported the food culture of the region. It is noted, for example, that while before the colonial period the Bagisu had planted millet and sorghum only, this situation had changed considerably to include the new crops by the end of the colonial period.

A thorough exploration of the colonial and the post-colonial periods reveals the continuities and changes in the food culture of the Bagisu. For the continuities, it was established that the rites of passage which the Bagisu went through where choice served, created a bond with the food culture of the Bagisu. Accordingly, since the food rites were an integral part of the process for cultural celebrations, continuity of the people's food culture was always guaranteed. It was further argued that as long as rites of passage ranging from birth, naming, circumcision, coronation and others followed the prescribed order as decreed by the Bagisu ancestors, the food culture of the Bagisu would remain intact since it simply constituted the life experience of any mugisu attached to the cultural heritage of the ethnic group. With specific reference to marriage, for example, ladies who were ready for marriage would be tested through several food preparation and serving it which were culturally significant. Some of these consisted of preparing beans which can virtually be served with many foods. Successful preparation of this source was therefore synonymous with marriage success and blessings from the ancestors to go ahead and engage in marriage.

Continuity of the Bagisu food culture was also spurred on by the special attachment to the traditional food which most Bagisu developed from childhood which supported Bagisu food culture to survive from generation to generation. The study further established that most of the treasured food for the Bagisu such as bamboo shoots, yams and mushrooms were naturally available in the wild, a factor that made the continuity of their food culture less dependent on the market. There were factors that threatened the continuity of the Bagisu food culture.

While the traditional food choices of the Bagisu were still recognized by the young generation, there was changing food tastes associated with modernity which were developing faster among the young people. Globalization was identified as a key factor which undermined the traditional choice foods which promoted cultural heritage by providing alternative fast foods, which were considered tastier in some cases. Moreover, some young Bagisu were not comfortable with the food culture of the Bagisu mainly because they felt that food in Bugisu was often sacrificed to the dead, a practice they perceived to be against the teachings of Christianity.

First of all, explaining how the bamboo shoots were prepared and their cultural significance to the Bagisu, it was established that the bamboo shoots grew wildly on the slopes of Mount Elgon. There was a legend connected with how they were prepared, believed to have been prescribed by Bagisu ancestors whose prescription is simply intended to bless those who follow the food preparation procedure. In addition, serving bamboo shoots in the prescribed way such as during most traditional occasions would simply be spiritually beneficial to those who were served. The central significance of the legend was that for the Bagisu. The bamboo cookery would basically be making everlasting devout linkage with the character of the origins of the Bagisu. In further explaining the importance of the bamboo source, there was a belief that the constant serving of the source was, above all, an act of self revitalisation as the

shoots were directly connected to the first legendary mugisu known as Masaba, who was believed many centuries ago that had emerged from Mt. Elgon where the bamboo shoots grew copiously.

On the other hand, bananas were also culturally significant to Bagisu food for culture. The process for preparing a banana meal began with the cutting of the food item from the plantation a day before cooking it. The cultural explanation for this practice was two-fold. One, it was for the purpose of shedding of the sticky corrosive liquid found in banana peelings. The second explanation was for acquiring a blessing from the ancestor as the cooking bananas stayed overnight before final preparation. In addition, there was a type of banana known as Imbululu whose cultural significance was similarly connected to marriage.

It was believed among the Bagisu that if a young lady was able to remove an intact cluster of bananas from a big bunch, then such a person would succeed in her marriage by likewise keeping it intact. The type of bananas known as *Gonzowa* was also culturally significant. This kind of banana was, however, especially prepared and served when roasted to male circumcision candidates who would again get served from the same food with roasted meat after the ceremony. The significance of the roasted banana was associated with convenience for the occasion. Much more culturally substantial, though, was its connotation with a ritual introduced by, Masaba, the first man in Bugisu according to legend. Legend observes that before Masaba got married to a Masai bride he was circumcised and went through the ritual of eating roasted bananas and roasted meat.

Beans were similarly culturally significant. Smashed beans (*makila/magira*) whose preparation and serving has a central connection with culture were other special foods in Bugisu existence. This was a cultural source prepared in Bugisu, similarly prepared for special occasions. The significance of the beans was mostly linked to their wide serving with



a variety of foods as well as provision of more opportunities for closeness with Bagisu ancestors since they were served more often.

On the other hand, mushrooms as a central source among the Bagisu was culturally significant in the way it was attached to the origin of the Bagisu. Similar to the bamboo shoots which grew on Mount Elgon, the mushrooms were likewise linked to the legend about the first Mugisu man, Masaba, who is thought to have appeared from a cave on the slopes of Mount Elgon. Accordingly, the mushrooms which have this connection as well were seen to have a religious connotation to them too.

It can be rightly asserted that the food culture of the Bagisu which was practiced in the pre-colonial period was actually fading out due to many forces that influenced it. While some were internal, others such as the effects from globalisation were external, and had been experienced since the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial periods. However, the commitment of the Bagisu to their food culture was the greatest factor for its continued existence as there appeared to be adequate cultural glue to the traditions of the Bagisu throughout the period of the study explored regardless of the forces for change analysed. The food culture stands a very good ground to be maintained alongside other Bugisu traditions such as birth, initiation or circumcision, marriage and death ceremonies since it was central to these cultural practices.

This narrative on the food culture of the Bagisu has fastened the academic discourse that continues to analyse the centrality of people's culture in the establishment of heritage relationships and ethnic identities. This account, thus, contributes to the understanding of how culture in its diversity contributes to the harmonious societal existence from generation to generation irrespective of historical period.

Accordingly, this historical debate examined the relationships between people's food culture as part of the integral historical facts that form part of the connections to society's lifestyle and their overall existence. Within the Cultural Transformation Theory framework, this investigation enhances the historical records by contributing ancient aspects that relate to the essential ways which explain how ethnic groups select their dishes, the essential reasons they consider for those choices and how these historical practices link to the wider societal good.

for food security considerations is a shortcoming in the food culture of Bugisu where cultural On the contrary, this food culture of the Bagisu has both internal and external threats that may affect its continuities, intermarriages have greatly affected it negatively, New technology in modernisation and market bananas are not marketable compared to the other new types which earn farmers more money, this poses a threat to the continuation of the food culture. Mushroom farmers are so engaged in growing mushrooms in their homes. Contrarily to the cultural mushrooms which grew up wildly.

The study also helps put the food culture discourse in perspective within its utility for establishment and reinforcement of cultural relationships for harmonious societal existence. In other words, the cultural traditions practices have to be emphasised such as circumcision (*imbalu*) among the Bagisu. Such cultural practices have a lot of rituals to be performed of which the preferred food choices such as roasted Gonzowa are very paramount for the candidate boy to eat.

Besides to uphold the food culture of the Bagisu, all the stake holders of Bugisu leaders thus; cultural leaders, religious leaders, political leaders should take it upon them to rebuild the institution of cultural practices of the people of Bugisu in order to give them that identity among others. First of all the language should be emphasised in schools, thus lower primary as per the new curriculum and also have educators on the local radio stations to emphasise the

point of culture among the Bagisu of which food is inclusive. Once the Bagisu love their cultural identity, definitely will be proud to embrace it all and hence the Bugisu food culture will continue to be passed on from one generation to another despite the forces that may dictate the change.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix I: The list of respondents

Buhule Meresi , 75, opinion leader from Mbale interviewed on 23<sup>rd</sup>-12-2019

Gidudu Alfred, 61, *Umukuka* Cultural Representative for Mbale, interviewed on 16/12/2019

Gizamba George, 69, *Umukuka* Cultural Official, Mbale District. Interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>- 02-2020.

Kangala James, 74, *Umukuka* Representative for Manafwa interviewed on 16 December 2019

Kuloba Militon, 66, opinion leader on cultural circumcision, Mbale district. Interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup>-12-2019

Mabonga Betty. 68, former *Umukuka* representative Mbale district, interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>- 11-2019

Masai Alfred. 74, cultural representative from Mbale district interviewed on 3<sup>rd</sup>-November 2019.

Masuba Wandudu Matayo, 104, key informant from Mbale District, interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10-2019

Mugide Janifer,67, cultural leader from Mbale. Interviewed on 30<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

Mugoli Ayubu, 32, Mbale District Interviewed on 2<sup>nd</sup>-02- 2020

Mungoma Mohammed 52, cultural representative of Mbale district. Interviewd on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020

Munialo Fred. 86, cultural Key Informant from Mbale District. Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020.

Musungu Alfred 54. Cultural leader from Mbale district, interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

Musungu Grace. 20, From Mbale District, interviewed on 19 January 2020

Musuya Grace.26, From Mbale District. interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup>- 01- 2020

Mutonyi Fazila. 57, from Mbale district, interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>- October 2019.

Mutonyi Regina 64, *Umukukaship* cultural official from Mbale. Interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10-2019

Nabaku Samwiri, 50, cultural representative from Mbale district. Interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-October, 2019

Nabutsale Dina, 60, *Umukuka* Cultural Institution official from Mbale District. Interviewed on 21 December 2019.

Nabusayi Monic, 23 years, Youth from Mbale District interviewed on 7th January 2020.

Namaganda Mageret.79, Key Informant, Retired reverend, from Mbale district interviewed on 12 December 2019.

.Nambozo Regina, 78 years, opinion leader from Bugobero Sub County, Mbale District on 4 January 2020.

Nambozo Sarah 60, From Mbale Umukuka representative, interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-09-2019.

Nambozo Zainabu, 40.form Mbale District, interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-10- 2019.

Namono Elinah, 35. From Mbale Central Market. Interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

Namono Rose, 21 years, Youth from Mbale District interviewed on 16<sup>th</sup>- 01- 2020

Namugongo Mary. 75, Mbale district, interviewed on 15<sup>th</sup>- 12- 2019

Nandudu Sarah 88 years, Mbale District, interviewed on 9<sup>th</sup>-01- 2020.

Nangono James 51, from Mbale, Umukuka representative interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup>-12-2019

Nangoye Eunice, 70, from Mbale, interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup> 08-2019

Nashirio Amos.from 45, opinion leader from Mbale District interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-01-2020

Nyote Peter 35, Mbale district interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-09-2019

Wafula Cosmas 90, from Mbale District interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-11-2019 form his farm.

Wakhalwere Godfrey 55. From Mbale, Umukuka representative. Interviewed on 4<sup>th</sup>-11-2019

Walimbwa Juma, 90,from Namakwekwe Mbale district interviewed on 25<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

Wamboza Zadoki, 82, from Mbale. Interviewed on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2019.

Wambedde Muhamudu from Mbale interviewed on 26<sup>th</sup>-11-2020

Wamelile Sofati, 64, *Umukuka* Cultural Institution official from Mbale District. Interviewed on 31 January 2020.

Wanyenze Luzabeti, 89 years, interviewed at Bushinyekwa Parish, Mbale District on 9th January 2020.

Wasukira Lazaro, 91 years, interviewed at Bungokho, Mbale District on 9th January 2020

Watsusi Farrah, 67, opinion leader in Mbale District, interviewed on 17 November 2019

Wesonga Michael 24, from Mbale District, interviewed on 30<sup>th</sup>-08-2019

Wesonga Yona 70, *Umukuka* Cultural Representative, Mbale district interviewed on 12/01/2020

Weswa Herbert 45, Umukuka representative from Mbale District interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-January 2020.

Wonekha Failoza. 76, Cultural leader from Mbale district. interviewed on 14<sup>th</sup>-01-2020

Woniaye Frank 36, from Mbale District. Interviewed on 11<sup>th</sup>-10-2019

## **Appendix II: Participant information sheet and consent form**

My name is **Nafuna Aidah**, a student from **Kyambogo University**. I am carrying out a research for my master's Dissertation, I am requesting for your kind attention and participation. All information you submit will be treated with utmost confidence and will only be used for purposes of this research.

The research focuses on The Food Culture of the Bagisu since the pre-Colonial period to 2010. This exercise will only take 30 to 40 minutes and the results from this study will be used in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the award of the degree of Master of Arts in History.

Regards

**Nafuna Aidah**

Do you consent to participate? YES

NO

### Appendix III: Self-administered qualitative questionnaire

Kindly answer the following questions as honestly and accurately as possible. The information given will be treated with a lot of confidentiality. Please do not write your name anywhere on this questionnaire.

#### SECTION A: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Gender

Male

Female

2. Location: Which region/district do you represent in the *Umukukaship*?

Mbale  Manafwa

Sironko  Bududa

Bulambuli  Namisindwa

3. What is your age range in years?

30 years and below  51 – 60 years  81 years and above

31 – 40 years  61 – 70 years

41 – 50 years  71 – 80 years

4. What is your highest level of education?

Primary

Secondary

Certificate

Diploma

Bachelor's Degree

Master's degree and above

5. What is your Cultural position/Job title in the *Umukukaship*?

Excutive member

Board member

Member

**Section B: Food culture of the Bagisu focusing on the preferred food choices**

1. Would you say you are aware of Bagisu food culture?

Yes

Somehow

No

Please explain your answer.

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2. In accordance to your memory or awareness as a senior citizen, what period of history would you say the food culture of the Bagisu began and flourished?

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3. In which period of history would you say the changes in the choice foods first occurred?

Pre-colonial;

Colonial;

Post-colonial or

Under specific regimes

(Specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Comment:

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4. What foods would you identify as preferred foods in the Bagisu food culture?

Malewa / Bamboo

Bananas (various types)

Magila

Comment:

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5. Why in your opinion, would anyone take the foods you have identified to be the centre of Bagisu culture?

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6. In what respects would you say the foods identified are culturally significant?

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7. Which occasions in Bugisu would you associate with any of the foods you have named above?

Circumcision time

Planting time

Harvest time

Please elaborate.

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8. What do you think are the factors responsible for identification of the preferred foods as being at the centre of Bagisu food culture?

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9. Which ones of these factors are the most significant? (Please explain your answer).

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**Section C: Examining changes in particular choice foods over time in Bugisu cultural setting**

1. Have you observed any changes in the preferred foods over the years?

Yes

No

Not sure

What nature of changes

At production or

Consumption level

Not sure

2. What changes have you seen in the choice foods over the years?

---

---

---

3. In which period of history would you say the changes in the choice foods first occurred?

Pre-colonial

Colonial

Post-colonial

Under specific regimes (Specify)

Comment

---

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4. In your experience, in which historical period would you say the changes in the choice foods were most pronounced?

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5. What forces would you identify as responsible for causing the changes in the food culture of the Bagisu?

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6. What factors would you say were most pronounced than others? Please elaborate.

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7. In your position as an elder or public official, what consequences have these factors caused in the food culture of the Bagisu?

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8. What interventions would you recommend if one was interested in the gradual restoration of the Bagisu food culture?

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9. Would you be aware of any forces likely to undermine Bagisu food cultural restoration?

Yes

No

Not sure

**Section D: Exploring how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served in prescribed ways**

1. Are you in position to explain how the Bagisu choice foods were normally prepared?

Yes

No

Not sure

Explanation (if yes)

---

---

2. Please explain why in your opinion these preferred foods were prepared the way they did.

---

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---

3. Would you please explain in which ways the food preparation steps were culturally significant?

---

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4. In your view, what forces supported or undermined the food preparation arrangements?

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5. In which historical period would you say these forces prominently appeared in Bugisu sub regional food culture?

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6. How were the preferred food items served from generation to generation? Please explain your answer linking it to the Bagisu food culture from epoch to epoch.

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7. What changes, if any, have taken place in the ways the choice foods are served? Do these changes improve or undermine the Bagisu food culture?

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8. On which cultural ceremonies were the choice foods served?

Circumcision

Planting

Harvesting

Please explain which foods were served to whom and why you think this was culturally important.

**Appendix IV: Focus Group Discussion Schedule for diverse Social Demographic  
Groups on the Food Culture of the Bagisu since the Pre-Colonial Period - 2010 (cultural  
leaders, elders, youth and food vendors)**

**Section A: Background information**

1. Location
2. Sex
3. Age in years
4. Highest level of education
5. Cultural position/Job title

**Section B: Food culture of the Bagisu focusing on the preferred food choices**

1. Would you say you are aware of Bagisu food culture? Please explain your answer.
2. In accordance to your memory or awareness as a senior citizen, what period of history would you say the food culture of the Bagisu began and flourished? Probe for food cultural developments during pre-colonial, colonial and post-independence periods.
3. Which period of history are you most familiar with in relation to the food culture of the Bagisu?
4. What foods would you identify as preferred foods in the Bagisu food culture?
5. Why in your opinion, would anyone take the foods you have identified to be the centre of Bagisu culture?
6. In what respects would you say the foods identified are culturally significant?
7. Which occasions in Bugisu would you associate with any of the foods you have named above? Please elaborate.
8. What do you think are the factors responsible for identification of the preferred foods as being at the centre of Bagisu food culture?
9. Which ones of these factors are the most significant? (Please explain your answer).

**Section C: Examining changes in particular choice foods over time in Bugisu cultural setting**

1. Have you observed any changes in the preferred foods over the years? Probe: nature of changes, whether at production or consumption level;
2. What changes have you seen in the choice foods over the years?
3. In which period of history would you say the changes in the choice foods first occurred? Probe: whether pre-colonial; colonial; post-colonial or under specific regimes.
4. In your experience, in which historical period would you say the changes in the choice foods were most pronounced?
5. What forces would you identify as responsible for causing the changes in the food culture of the Bagisu?
6. What factors would you say were most pronounced than others? Please elaborate.
7. In your position as an elder or public official, what consequences have these factors caused in the food culture of the Bagisu?
8. What interventions would you recommend if one was interested in the gradual restoration of the Bagisu food culture?
9. Would you be aware of any forces likely to undermine Bagisu food cultural restoration?

**Section D: Exploring how and why the cultural foods were prepared and served in prescribed ways**

1. Are you in position to explain how the Bagisu choice foods were normally prepared?
2. Please explain why in your opinion these preferred foods were prepared the way they did.

3. Would you please explain in which ways the food preparation steps were culturally significant?
4. In your view, what forces supported or undermined the food preparation arrangements?
5. In which historical period would you say these forces prominently appeared in Bugisu sub regional food culture?
6. How were the preferred food items served from generation to generation? Please explain your answer linking it to the Bagisu food culture from epoch to epoch.
7. What changes, if any, have taken place in the ways the choice foods are served? Do these changes improve or undermine the Bagisu food culture?
8. On which cultural ceremonies were the choice foods served ? Please explain which foods were served to whom and why you think this was culturally important.



## Appendix VI: Timetable

<b>Time/Month</b>	<b>Activity</b>
March 2019	Presentation and selection of the research topic
April 2019	Theoretic concept
June 2019	Literature review.
July 2019	Methodology
August 2019	Questionnaire development
August 2019	Compiling research proposal
September 2020	Typing the research proposal
September 2020	Pilot testing
September 2020	Data collection
October 2020	Typing the draft report
Novembers 2021	Defending/correcting
March 2023	Final draft submission

**Appendix VII: Researcher's Introduction Letter**



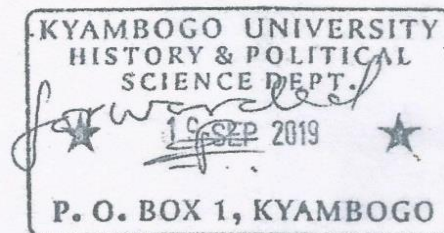
**KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY**

**P.O. BOX 1 KYAMBOGO  
KAMPALA-UGANDA  
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES  
DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND POLITICAL SCIENCE**

16<sup>th</sup> September 2019

**NAFUNA Aidah  
14/U/12967/GMAH/PE  
MA STUDENT**

Thru,  
The Head  
Department of History and Political Science



**APPROVAL OF M.A RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

This is to inform you that the Department of History and Political Science Graduate Committee has approved your Master of Arts (History) Proposal to carry out a study entitled; **"Food Culture of the Bagisu Since the Pre-colonial Period to 2010"**

You are therefore required to proceed with data collection to fulfill the dissertation writing.

Congratulations

Sincerely Yours

**Ojambo Robert (PhD)  
Coordinator  
Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of History and Political Science  
Kyambogo University**

Cc. Dean Graduate School  
Academic Supervisors

*Permitted to be done in the district*



**Appendix VIII: Summary of Breakdown of Choice foods and Cultural Significance in**

**Bugisu**

<b>Cultural food</b>	<b>Why preferred</b>	<b>Cultural ceremony where the food was served</b>	<b>How it was prepared</b>	<b>How it was served</b>	<b>When was it served</b>
Maleya	Had cultural attachment	Circumcisions	Boiling	On millet & bananas	Marriage
Kamatoore		Marriage	Roasting	Rosted meat, makila maleya	Circumcision, marriage, funerals
Makila		Naming	Smashed Beans	Ripe bananas	Naming children
Bubwooba		Funeral rites	Sun dried	Kamatore	Marriage

**Appendix VIX: Maps showing the s two districts of Bugisu Sub Region.**



**Map showing Manafwa district.**

