

**IMBALU RITUAL OF THE BAMASABA OF EASTERN UGANDA:
A POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN BIBLE HERMENEUTICAL
PERSPECTIVE**

BY

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DECLARATION

I, **NAMBUBA JULIET WABWIRE**, do declare that the content of this research work is proved as my own authentic work and has never been published by anyone in the academic sphere

Signature,.....

Date:

APPROVAL

We, the supervisors declare that this PhD thesis titled ‘Imbalu Ritual of the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda: African Bible Hermeneutical Perspective; has been done under our supervision and is ready for submission to the Directorate of Research and Graduate Training in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Religious Studies of Kyambogo University

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Signature:

Date:

DEDICATION

This piece of work is dedicated to my husband, Wabwire Stephen who is so fascinated with the Bamasaba traditional ritual of Imbalu. To the Nambwira family that has been torn between tradition and Christianity in these matters of Imbalu. Specifically, to my late father – Reuben Nambwira who was not able to see this book, but had literally drifted between these two paradigms of tradition and Christianity, which laid a foundation into my desire for this study; and to the contemporary Bamasaba Christians who are determined to illuminate the Bamasaba Imbalu ritual with a Christian entity.

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ABSTRACT

The Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda forms part of the initiation ritual that ushers one into manhood through non-therapeutic circumcision. In recent times, the practice has been challenged for ethical, educational and social reasons, while proponents use biblical antecedents to give credence to their practice. The research is situated within the persistent tensions of the colonial and missionary encounter, which historically framed Imbalu as an evil practice and antithetical to Christianity. The study investigates a hermeneutical perspective of the historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual, assesses the colonial challenges and community adaptations and aims to develop a post-colonial theological framework that engages both biblical and Imbalu for an appropriate ritual. The study engaged hermeneutics as an interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach with an ethnographic paradigm. Primary data collection involved interviews, non-participant observation, secondary document analysis and a narrative critical analysis of the bible texts on circumcision. Findings reveal that Imbalu embodies profound theological themes that resonate with core biblical narratives. They indicate that Imbalu remains deeply situated within social identity, intergenerational knowledge, and communal cohesion. The Bamasaba negotiate post-colonial tensions through ethical moderation, adjustment of timing, and selective engagement with Christianity-a perfect illustration of cultural agency in practice. A post-colonial hermeneutical approach enables a dialogical interplay between scripture and ritual, balancing ethical reflection with cultural continuity. The study concludes that constructive engagement between African traditions and biblical hermeneutics can generate culturally coherent and ethically responsible practices. Recommendations stress a hybrid framework that integrates ritual symbolism, health safeguards, ethical consent, and pastoral guidance to support communities negotiating tradition and modernity while conserving both cultural heritage and Christian ethical insight.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction

The study focuses on the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba of Uganda: in light of postcolonial African Bible Hermeneutic Perspective. The aim of the study is to congregate a dialogue between Imbalu ritual as the oral text and the biblical written text using an African Bible Hermeneutic lens. This is to resolve a more relevant framework suitable for a largely Christian population in a traditional setting. This chapter explains the Etymology and Contextual Meaning of Imbalu, Background to the study that constitute the Historical Background of Cultural Circumcision, Theoretical and Contextual Backgrounds respectively. It also states the Problem Statement, Objectives of the study both the general and specific objectives, research questions, scope of the study pivoting around the content and the geographical scope of the area of study, Justification of the study and Significance of the study. The study is geographically and culturally situated in the Bugisu sub-region, which constitute Mbale, Manafwa, Sironko, Bulambuli, Bududa and Namisindwa districts.

1.1 Etymology and Contextual Meaning of Imbalu

Imbalu was so named in the Lumasaba language of Uganda, etymologically associated with a sharp cutting knife traditionally used for a range of utilitarian purposes such as cutting down trees, harvesting, and protection (Nandala, 2002; Makwa, 2010; Khamalwa, 2018). The knife embodies strength, precision, and hardiness—characteristics closely associated with masculinity and chauvinism survival in Bamasaba society. Imbalu consequently, transcends its dictionary meaning as an implement, to becoming a forceful cultural metaphor. It represents ritual male circumcision,

a cut in which the knife severs the foreskin from the male organ, marking manhood from boyhood (Walakira, 1983; Baker, 1992; Kivoi, 2015).

Beyond its literal application, the term Imbalu also acts euphemistically to denote the male organ itself, forming relational symbolism between the organ and the knife. This lexical pair points to the importance of the ritual in the formation of male identity in society (Wepukhulu, 2024). Either the stigma of the ritual incision referred to as Imbalu or Imbala based on dialectical variations; is a sign of cultural membership and adulthood (Heald, 1989). The careful scrutiny by the community of the surgical outcome, also known as Imbalu *ingene* "the genuine cut," attests to the importance of adhering to standards set by tradition, reflecting a social requirement for authenticity and continuity.

The rigidity of the ritual metaphorically addressed as akin to "fire" (*Imbalu Mulilo*), conjuring not mere physical suffering but a culturally valued type of "willful pain" both endured and celebrated (Khamalwa, 2018). This ordeal is a rite of passage, imparting a lasting psychological and societal factor declaring the initiation's readiness for the responsibility and privileges of society (Audrey, 1956; Watsusi, 2014). The intrusion of older peers in conditioning young boys physically and emotionally for this trial—via advice, traditional melodies, and metaphorical instruction—depicts a mature intergenerational dynamic that ensures the usability of the ritual in contemporary times (Mulyanyuma, 2022; Wepukhulu, 2023). The process known as *Khukhwingila* Imbalu ("to enter the Imbalu circle"), which sounds phonetically similar with the broader Bantu stem -ingila, and popularized in Kiswahili language as *ingia* or *kuingia* to mean entering. The underlying implication of '*khukhwingila*' is that the entrant is initiating into another domain of manhood (Mbiti, 1992; Makwa, 2010).

It is a ceremonial act of symbolic transition from youth to adulthood, symbolizing a social and religious initiation into communal life. The circumcised male (*umusaani*), admired as strong and responsible, as opposed to the uncircumcised (*umusinde*) still a boy in terms of status (Heald, 1989). These reflects the manner in which cultural identity and ritual gender construction, marking belonging and exclusion. Scholars like Gollaher (2001) identify circumcision rites across the globe as being greater than physical actions—they are portals to inclusion in community and social approval. Imbalu for the Bamasaba is greater than an individual rite of passage but a social one that authorizes positions in society and confirms group values. More than a male experience, is the symbolism in the ritual and entails the social expectation of circumcision for all males, and will often affect marriage and social relationships (Khamalwa, 2018; Wangusa, 1987). Refusal or failure to perform it results in marginalization, a witness to the power of the ritual to promote cultural conformity and social unity (Thando, 2009; Wanyenya, 2013).

Nonetheless, Imbalu ritual is not bereft of complexities and contestations, especially when considered under the post-colonial theory and human rights discourse of the present time. Colonial encounters disrupted long-standing cultural practices across Africa, typically deeming rituals like Imbalu as being in some way backward or against Christian morality (Ngugi, 1938; Bediako, 1996; Dube, 2012). Colonial legacies introduced ambivalence towards the traditional rites, generating modern tensions between upholding culture and modern ethical dilemmas like bodily autonomy, consent, and health risks (Gruenbaum, 2001; Brady, 2011).

Post-colonial scholarship invites a decolonizing hermeneutic, one that supports reinterpretation and critical engagement with traditions like Imbalu in a manner attentive to cultural sovereignty while being sensitive to contemporary rights-based critiques (Mbembe, 2001; Mudimbe, 1988).

This is in contrast to reductionist descriptions presenting such rites as solely harmful or oppressive, instead of their being embedded within identity, community resilience, and intergenerational continuity (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997; Oyěwùmí, 1997). Simultaneously, it calls for adaptive ritual reforms that include health education, voluntariness, and gender sensitivity without weakening the underlying basic cultural meanings (WHO, 2020; UNFPA, 2021).

The complex symbolic and performative aspect that is frequently obscured in simply biological or anthropological accountings is highlighted by the imbalu focus of this study, especially the ceremonial dances and cultural protocols between *Isonja* and *Inemba* (Watsusi, 2014; Nzita, 1997). The study carries out new research on how rituals organize sociality and spiritual worlds among the Bamasaba by looking at the *Kiminiongo kye Imbalu* (ritual rules) and *Kimisiro kye Imbalu* (rites). The research also brings to the fore the necessity of copious ethnographic scholarship that connects local narratives with global debates regarding rites of passage, manhood, and cultural rights. The postcolonial dimension reclaims Imbalu as symbolic, moral and communal rather than purely physical or Pagan.

In short, the Imbalu ritual is a complex practice at the crossroads of tradition, identity, belonging and power and a significant site for debates of cultural preservation, discourses on modernity, and human dignity. By appealing to authoritative scholarship in African studies, anthropology, post-colonial theory, and human rights, the worldwide intelligibility of such rituals is enforced beyond naive traditionalist-progressivity dualities. This rich vision is necessary in order to craft policies and scholarly observations that are sensitive to the culture and honor both the heritage and new ambitions of the Bamasaba and their conformity to Christianity and other such similar communities worldwide.

1.2 Background to the study

The background to the study occasions the historical perspective, which covers the origins of Bamasaba and their Imbalu rituals in relation to the social-economic and cultural aspects as expounded by different scholars. It also covers the theoretical background that expounds the varied theories engaged in the study. Then the contextual background that views the concerns of earlier writers and their trends of argument, navigating space to the current study.

1.2.1 Historical Background of Cultural Circumcision

Historically, numerous cultures all over the world in Asia, America, Australia and Africa notably practice Circumcision. To Bolnick, Koyle and Yosh (2012), the position outside Africa range from a place of medical benefit usually under the choice of the parents; in the United States and Great Britain, it reflects “essential no medical benefit/parental choice” to “no medical benefit/physical and psychological trauma/parental choice” in the Netherlands. Recent evidence suggests that in areas such as sub-Saharan Africa, where HIV rates are extremely high, there is aggregate advocacy to circumcise many males as a remedy to HIV control (Hansjörg, 2006; Anwar, 2010; Mugamba et al, 2021). The practice is shared by several societies as grasped from both historical and biblical chronicles (Elliot, 1992; Kiprop, 2019). The exceptional societies such as the biblical philistines, the East African Nilotic Hamites, are notably ridiculed as uncircumcised boys (Wangusa, 1987, 2007; Laderman, 2003).

There is seemingly a general resemblance of the practice of circumcision in all of Africa. According to Wagner (1949), all areas of Central Africa, Inland East, inland Southern Africa running from southern Sudan and the Lakes Region to Southern Africa, groups in Zaire, most

groups on the coast of the east and south perform it on males though for diversity of reasons. The East African Ethnic groups, which constitute of the Luhya, Kikuyu and the Masai of Kenya and Tanzania, the practice is formal where tribal beliefs, practices, culture, religion and history are taught to the youth who are on the verge of becoming full-fledged members of society (Marck, 1997; Scott 1998).

The Bamasaba out of four tribes in Uganda (Kalenjin-Sabeans of Sebei, Baamba and Bakonzo) formally undertake this ritual publically. Bamasaba are an ethnic group of people who belong to the vast Bantu family, that live along the western slopes of Mount Elgon, also called Mount Masaba in Eastern Uganda. Their origins are quite unknown but traditions carried over generations point to Egypt (Misiri) and Ethiopia as the traditional cradle land where several dispersions took place (Were, 1982; Mong Bay, 2010). Meanwhile Nabundere (2010) asserts that, Bamasaba are part of the Bantu-speaking peoples that originally lived in what is now southeastern Nigeria and the adjacent regions of Cameroon. Their migrations are believed to have begun around 1000 BCE to 500 CE in larger Bantu migration, and being primarily agriculturalists, they settled at the fertile slopes of Mount Elgon (Roscoe, 1984; Marret, 2022).

Meanwhile oral stories popularly allege that the ancestors of the Bamasaba are Mundu and Seera that emerged from the hole on the top of Mount Elgon. It is alleged that they produced two children Masaba and Kundu. Kundu found his way into central Uganda, while Masaba remained at the Mountain and alleged as the immediate founder of the Bamasaba group, but also the initiator of their cherished cultural ritual of Imbalu. The theory states that Masaba laid a marriage proposal to a Kalenjin woman who tasked him to circumcise and there after all his male descendants followed suit (Wawomola, 2009; Khamalwa, 2018).

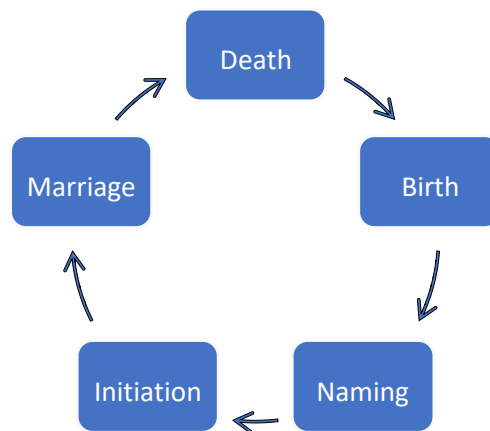
Other tales attribute Masaba's task to circumcise to have come through a divine instruction and all males after him undertook the exercise up to date. The practice is believed to have originated centuries ago and has been practiced within the community for generations. It also noted that wherever place the Bamasaba were attached to, such as Egypt, Ethiopia, Nigeria there is an element of circumcision (Were, 1977; Scott, 1998; Maret, 2022). The Bamasaba are so intimate and inseparable with their mandatory 'Imbalu' cultural practice. Imbalu ritual covers numerous and elaborate rituals and practices embedded within to make up for the whole practice (Nandala, 2002; Naleera, 2008; Khamalwa, 2018).

This study concentrates on seven major practices or rituals between the first introductory dance of *Isonja* and the last induction dance of *Inemba*. Any obstacle against the performance of the mandatory practice, tantamount to insolence and conflict (Khanakwa, 2019). It is appropriate among the Bamasaba, to apply force to unwilling or cowardly members to fulfill the compulsory obligation. Even a corpse of a male member of age who had dodged the rite has to be circumcised before burial to thrust aside misfortunes and to avert the 'spirits of circumcision. It is abominable, in the Bamasaba thoughts for a man to be buried uncircumcised, as it would constitute a disequilibrium in the life journey. Among the burial rituals of the Bamasaba, include a thorough examination of a corpse, to authenticate circumcision status, or else the victim be rejected by the ancestors, and therefore affect rebirth (Wawomola, 2009; Khamalwa, 2018).

Imbalu is a tough procedure that prepares the young for the wrath of the future such as building a family, going for war and the like (Heald, 1989; Akpomovie, 2010). According to the African cosmological view of life, Imbalu as an initiation ritual takes the third stage of growth (Mbiti, 1992; Wabwire, 2024). Mbiti sketches out life cosmology consisting of five stages namely; Birth,

Naming, Initiations at puberty, Marriage and lastly Death. To an African, the dead are not dead but they are reborn in the newly born, named and initiated all over again (Mbiti, 1992; Meintjes, 2000). Rituals are prevalent in all the five Meta life stages in the African thought patterns.

Figure 1: The Five Meta Life Stages in the African Thought Patterns, by Mbiti - 1991



In Africa, life is theological and philosophical and it is important to emphasize the importance of rituals in the African cosmology. No stage of human existence is just by chance, but purposeful and interlinked in a cyclic relationship with other stages. Following the works of John Mbiti, life is continuous, and its cyclic nature makes it difficult to determine its beginning or its end, which makes life spiritual and divine. The inter-linkages in the ring of life enhanced by appropriate rituals are prevalent in all the five Meta life stages in the African thought patterns. Imbalu constitute an important entry point to other stages, and initiates people to participate in various capacities in other fundamental rites of passage like marriage, death, birth and naming (Chapman, 1974; Mbiti, 1992; Ndeke and Masya, 2017).

Apart from initiation into adulthood, the ritual serves as a sign of identity of the newly initiated, identified as full-fledged men ready to take on family and society responsibilities. Mbiti (1992), supported by Makwa (2010), asserts that initiates are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. Henceforth allowed to shed their blood for their country and plant their biological seeds for the next generation to emerge. Leadership both family and societal awaits them, as they build and maintain social cohesion in society and the ancestors (Sabet, 2012; Omukunyi, 2022). However, controversies arise concerning Imbalu in light of the Bible and the postcolonial Christianity in the ritual procedures, giving way to outstanding criticisms. Main areas of controversy include attached nudeness, violence, vulgar language, sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, school dropouts, early marriages, unnecessary economic constraints and poverty. This propelled the researcher to engage Post-Colonial African Bible Hermeneutics to navigate a suitable acceptable format in a largely Christian population of the Bamasaba.

During the colonial period in Africa, European powers exerted significant influence and disrupted traditional African practices and beliefs. The Colonial rule of the British in the late 19th century in Uganda, including the Bamasaba territory, often sought to challenge indigenous customs and impose European values, including Christian religious practices. From a Post-Colonial African biblical hermeneutical perspective, scholars examine the impact of colonialism on indigenous traditions and explore ways in which biblical interpretations can reclaim and affirm these African cultural practices. The Bible used to criticize the African cultures in cases of opposing attitudes and contrasting views as African cultures equally criticize the unrealistic biblical tendencies and strike a balanced point, which is the aim of this study.

1.2.2 Theoretical Background of the Study

Post-colonialism is anchored firmly within the Critical Tradition, especially its later 20th-century development through Cultural Studies and Post-structuralism. Its roots lie in the Frankfurt School's project of analyzing hegemonic powers of domination (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944 - 2002). Post-colonial theory extends into the imperial and colonial spheres, taking up directly Foucault's Michel (1972) discourses on discourse and power, and Jacques Derrida's (1976) on deconstruction. Researchers such as Edward Said (1935-2003), Achebe (1930–2013), Bhabha Homi (1994), and Gayatri Spivak (1988) helped to establish post-colonial theory. It became a framework for analyzing the long-lasting effects of colonialism on politics, social-economic, culture, identity and psychological aspects on formerly colonized societies. It is heavily influenced by Subaltern Studies (Guha R, 1982), and anti-colonial thought currents such as Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961) and Ngũgĩ 'wa' Thiong'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986). In the intellectual ancestry, it is sympathetic to the Postmodernism critique of metanarratives but resistant to Universalist Enlightenment narratives of progress and civilization. Researchers such as Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Spivak (1988) theorized post-colonialism as a distinct field of Cultural Studies in terms of hybrid identities, cultural resistance, and politics of representation. This employs instruments of criticism cultivated in Europe to challenge Eurocentric dominance of knowledge-making and cultural discourse.

African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) belongs to the Tradition of Contextual Theology, a school of thought that believes that theological reflection needs to address a specific cultural, social, and historical context (Bevans, 2002). It is also a close intellectual relative of Liberation Theology, particularly in its concentration on the poor, oppressed and marginalized (Gutierrez, 1973), but

differing in that it places African cultural resources—oral tradition, proverbs, initiation rites, and cosmologies—at the point of interpretation (Ukpong, 1995; Adamo, 2001). African biblical hermeneutics, as outlined in this theoretical framework, aims to reinterpret biblical texts in a way that respects and engages with African cultural practices. It focuses on the interpretation and understanding of the Bible within the diverse cultural, social, and historical contexts of African communities (Kalu, 2008; Adamo 2001). Cultural specificities in African biblical hermeneutics involve a deep appreciation for the rich and diverse cultural heritage of African communities. This includes recognizing the oral traditions that shape the African cultural landscape and promote social justice (Dube 2001).

In biblical studies, African Biblical Hermeneutics is part of the Inculturation Hermeneutics school of thought, which emerged partially in reaction to Euro-American dominance in exegesis, and partly as a move by African scholars to reconcile Christian Scriptures with indigenous African worldviews (Oduyoye, 1995; West, 2016). It also tries to place the Christian message in local cultural backgrounds (Oduyoye, 1995), but with a critical perspective toward oppressive dimensions of tradition such as patriarchy, marginalization based on gender, and exclusion of vulnerable people. Its methodological roots lie in Reader-Response Criticism (Iser, 1978), but it develops the latter to embrace communal, culturally inscribed rather than atomistic, individual readings. In this way, African Biblical Hermeneutics situates itself within a world turn toward plural, non-Western theological epistemology that legitimize the authoritativeness of multiple interpretive communities.

In recent scholarship, Post-Colonial theory and African Biblical Hermeneutics intersect into what is termed as Post-Colonial Bible Hermeneutics. It is a new school hybrid that addresses decolonial critique head-on with biblical interpretation (Sugirtharajah, 2012). This school operates at the intersection of Decolonial Thought (Mignolo, 2007) and Contextual Theology, bringing together political readings of power and cultural recovery strategies of African hermeneutics. It provokes the colonial missionary legacy of imposing European interpretations of Scripture as well as questioning local traditions under a biblical gaze with a perspective toward forming justice, inclusion, and cultural wholeness. Scholarship in this field is apt to engage ethnographic theology, participatory Bible reading, and cultural-linguistic analysis in taking its place among Latin American and Asian global South theologies, but with distinctly African epistemic roots. In the dynamics of Imbalu, this intersection is a pinnacle of analytic field space in which the ritual enactment can be interpreted as simultaneously a site of continuity of culture, theological re-interpretation, and resistance to colonial and neo-colonial erasure of identity.

The place of Post-Colonialism and African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) in the broader intellectual geography is a reflection of their distinctive but complementary genealogies. Post-Colonialism has its roots in the genealogy of Critical Theory, with its lineage traceable to the Frankfurt School and its critical examination of power, ideology, and social domination (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944). It continued to evolve under the auspices of Cultural Studies—particularly that of the Birmingham School—and the intellectual tradition of Post-structuralism thinkers like Foucault Michel (1972) and Jacques Derrida (1976), who were concerned with discourse, deconstruction, and the provisional nature of meaning. It reached its culmination in post-colonial theory as proposed by Edward Said (1978), Homi Bhabha (1994), and Gayatri Spivak

(1988), with their preoccupation with deconstructing Eurocentric discourses, reclaiming subaltern agency, and undermining hybrid identities in the former colonies.

At the same time, African Biblical Hermeneutics is theological and from the Contextual Theology school. This school believes that theological reflection must originate and remain effective for the concrete realities of specific communities (Bevans, 2002). ABH is informed by Liberation Theology (Gutierrez, 1973), which places emphasis on the preferential option for the poor and the oppressed, but diverges in placing African cultural resources—initiation rituals, oral traditions, proverbs, and cosmologies—at the foreground of interpretation (Ukpong, 1995; Adamo, 2001). It also draws from Inculturation Hermeneutics, which tries to place the Christian message in local cultural backgrounds (Oduyoye, 1995), but with a critical perspective toward oppressive dimensions of tradition such as patriarchy, marginalization based on gender, and exclusion of vulnerable people.

This confluence of the two traditions to form Post-Colonial Biblical Hermeneutics, applies the political, cultural, and epistemological critiques of post-colonial theory to biblical interpretation directly (Sugirtharajah, 2012; West, 2016). This analysis turns to how missionary Christianity, as a colonial project, affected African biblical interpretation, often replacing native readings and practices. Simultaneously, it encourages the recuperation of cultural agency through the request for readings that appropriate African identity and refuse colonial impositions and negative local mores. In Imbalu's case, this crossroads is an analytically fertile ground: it allows the ritual examined not simply as anthropological curiosity or cultural artifact, but as a location of continuous theological practice, cultural preservation, and opposition to historical omissions. This

holistic approach situates the research within an internationally relevant, interdisciplinary field that extends across the humanities, theology, and post-colonial studies.

1.2.3 Contextual Background of the Study

Scholars across the globe have focused on the Imbalu rite, a cultural initiation ceremony practiced by the Bamasaba in Uganda, because of its symbolic, cultural, and social significance. Initiation rites mark a young person's transition into adulthood. It is globally studied as a transitional ritual that frequently represent cultural identity and communal solidarity (Turner, 1969). Such rituals have a general form, as highlighted by Van Gennep's (1909) concept of rites of passage: separation, transition, and inclusion. The symbolic connotations of initiation procedures frequently generalized in international literature, ignores the complex sociopolitical and economic ramifications of particular rituals like Imbalu. This disparity emphasizes the necessity of context-specific research that looks at how cultural traditions and modernity interact.

Initiation rituals are connected to the maintenance of social cohesiveness and cultural heritage preservation in Africa (Mbiti, 1991). Initiation ceremonies are a means of passing on cultural values and knowledge to the next generation among the Kikuyu of Kenya and the Xhosa of South Africa. Despite these commonalities, little is known about the precise purposes and significance of Imbalu in relation to other rites of a similar nature throughout Africa. While Xhosa circumcision is well documented in terms of health risks and cultural resilience, similar research on Imbalu have mostly overlooked its changing role in the face of urbanization, globalization, and shifting views towards traditional practices.

Imbalu is a long-standing custom in Uganda that not only marks a boy's entry into adulthood but also strengthens the Bamasaba sense of group identity (Were, 1967). Research emphasizes the social and spiritual aspects of the ritual, including the group preparation and festivities that take place before the event (Heald, 1999; Khamalwa, 2018). There are unanswered questions about the ritual's economic effects, such as how it affects local tourism and how it creates job opportunities in associated cultural businesses. Nevertheless, little is known about the difficulties the practice faces, its effects on the modern population such as the influences brought in by modern education and religion.

Through the lens of Post-Colonial African Bible Hermeneutics, this study critically examines the Bible's use as a colonial tool by examining the dialogical interaction between the written biblical texts on circumcision and the oral tradition of Imbalu, a cultural circumcision ritual among the Bamasaba. African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) places biblical interpretation within African traditions and cultural frameworks, as the Post-Colonial theoretical framework challenges colonial power dynamics and their enduring influence (Bediako, 2008; Nkomazana, 2015). However, how these two worldviews—tradition and biblical texts—interact within the unique cultural setting, is not sufficiently explored by current studies. Without thoroughly participating in a comparative debate that bridges the oral tradition, research has mostly concentrated on the sociocultural relevance of Imbalu or the widespread use of the Bible as a colonial tool.

In the framework of Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics, the idea of "hybridity" encourages a critical discussion between the deeply ingrained African cultural customs, like the Imbalu rite, and the hallowed Christian writings. The challenge encountered by the Bamasaba Christians, who represent a hybrid identity of embracing Christianity while also honoring their

ancient cultural customs—particularly the Imbalu circumcision rite—is key in this study. There is a big void in literature right now because of this community's hybrid nature, which exists in conflict between Christianity and traditional African culture. Few studies have looked at how to integrate Christianity and African cultural practices, as most research focus on conflict between the two, or how traditional behaviors get modified to conform to Christian beliefs.

There is still a lack of knowledge regarding how Imbalu and the changing Christian identity within hybrid African communities intersect. Despite the fact that substantial scholarship has examined the Imbalu ritual from a variety of angles, including its function as a rite of passage (Nzita, 1997), a symbol of communal identity (Heald, 1989), and its impact on masculinity and gender roles (Khanakwa, 2019). Few scholars have critically examined how the ritual, specifically in the context of Bamasaba Christians, negotiates its place alongside Christianity, especially in light of the post-colonial. Scholars such as Khamalwa (2018) and Ong (1995) have examined its historical and mythological heritage. The theological ramifications of Imbalu as it relates to biblical teachings and vice versa in the contemporary world require more investigation.

There is still a lack of research examining how the intersection of African theological perspectives and modernity specifically affects the evolution of the Imbalu ritual within hybrid communities, particularly among the Bamasaba Christians. Even though scholars like Mwaura (2008) and Nsubuga (2008) offer insightful analyses of the difficulties faced by African theologians and the Imbalu ceremony in post-colonial and modern contexts. Few studies critically examine how modernity and Christianity converge within the Bamasaba community and how the Imbalu ritual is being adapted in ways that both honor traditional beliefs and integrate Christian teachings.

Nsubuga (2008) discusses the effects of modernization on Imbalu and Mwaura (2008) discusses the evolution of African biblical interpretation. In light of post-colonial African theology, more investigation is required to examine how the Imbalu rite is affected by the changing dynamics of cultural, theological, and social change and how these changes are managed in hybrid communities. Investigating how African customs, such as Imbalu, are being reinterpreted or preserved in a contemporary setting while remaining relevant for younger generations juggling their cultural heritage and Christian religion is made possible by this research gap.

While Nzita (1997), Kiyangi (1995) and Khamalwa (2018) provide comprehensive analyses of the Imbalu ritual, focusing on its cultural significance and its adaptation to modern influences like globalization and urbanization, there remains a noticeable gap in research that directly addresses the intersection between the Imbalu ritual and biblical interpretations, particularly in the context of duo communities. Nzita's (1997) work focuses on the stages and cultural importance of Imbalu, while Kiyangi (1995) and Khamalwa (2018) discuss its role within Bamasaba society without considering the potential tensions or synergies between the ritual and Christian teachings, especially from a post-colonial African biblical perspective. This study attempts to close a breach in literature by examining how these scholars' perspectives on Imbalu relate to or diverge from Christian biblical teachings, especially in communities like the Bamasaba Christian population.

The challenges faced by the Bamasaba, particularly in relation to the Imbalu rite, are reflected in Kato's (1975), condemnation of the imposition of foreign theological frameworks on African situations and support for a theology grounded in African cultural reality. Guta (2017) highlights the importance of African cultural practices in guiding the interpretation of biblical texts. These scholars prefer to concentrate on either culture interpretation or biblical texts individually, even

though they offer critical views on the opportunities and limitations faced by Afrocentric theologians, notably in balancing cultural practices with biblical principles. The weakness in their study is the absence of a comprehensive analysis that critically looks at how biblical interpretations and African cultural practices—like the Imbalu ritual—interact in hybrid societies, particularly in light of post-colonial African biblical hermeneutics. This study offers a distinctive contribution, reconciling colonial superiority and Bamasaba cultural inferiority in a fair discussion.

In line with larger initiatives to integrate African cultural practices within theological reflection, Zondi (2011) promotes an inclusive hermeneutic approach that acknowledges the significance of diverse cultural perspectives in interpreting Scripture. Similarly, Shumba (2014) highlights the ways in which customs affect our comprehension of the Bible and argues for a hermeneutics that considers these cultural traditions. Aderibigbe (2014) highlights the larger tendencies in contextual theology in Africa by examining how cultural settings might be included into biblical interpretation. However, rather than concentrating on a single rite, these investigations highlight the broader relationship between biblical texts and cultural practices. The study intends to examine the reciprocal link where the ritual speaks back to the Bible and vice versa. The insufficiency in these works is the absence of a thorough conversation between a single, localized cultural practice—the Imbalu ritual—and the biblical texts. This study offers a unique perspective that hasn't been thoroughly examined in the body of existing literature, allowing for a deeper understanding of the Bamasaba community's particular context and how their traditional practices— of the Imbalu ritual—both inform and are informed by the Bible.

The study aims to develop a hermeneutic framework that balances both the oral cultural tradition of Imbalu and the written biblical text, acknowledging the overlap between Christian ethics and

African ethics, particularly in areas such as justice, freedom of expression, and communal rights. Previous studies have analyzed the ethical dimensions of African cultural practices and biblical teachings; there remains a gap in creating a theological framework, which integrates these two distinct worldviews into a coherent and balanced approach, particularly in the context of the Bamasaba ritual practices. The lack of an inclusive hermeneutic model that respects both the oral traditions of the Imbalu ritual and the biblical ethics in such a way that it harmonizes these influences for an acceptable framework that can be widely applied, prompts this particular study.

This study's emphasis on balancing perceived cultural conflicts and upholding shared values, while recognizing the ethical principles embedded in both African and Christian traditions, offers an opportunity for deeper exploration and practical application in religious and cultural contexts. Colonial missionaries who introduced Christian ethics as a critique of traditional practices have brought the Bamasaba dedication to preserving their cultural heritage—exemplified by the Imbalu ritual—under intense scrutiny (Purvis, 1909). Although the Imbalu ritual gives the younger generation a sense of responsibility and belonging by passing down cultural knowledge and social norms, its interpretation through the lens of African biblical hermeneutics is misunderstood.

Despite the fact that African biblical hermeneutics aims to engage African cultural practices through biblical text interpretation, there is insufficient research on the specific appropriation of Imbalu as a ritual within this framework. The research gap is in creating a hermeneutic model that not only addresses the similarities and differences between biblical and Imbalu teachings. But through the Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutical lens, looks out for a profound connection between the biblical concept of circumcision and the Imbalu ceremony of the Bamasaba people. Influential intellectuals like Fanon (1925–1961), Said (1935–2003), Achebe

(1930–2013), and Thiong'o (b. 1938) helped to establish post-colonial theory, which became a framework for analyzing the long-lasting effects of colonialism on politics, culture, and identity. African biblical hermeneutics, as outlined in this theoretical framework, aims to reinterpret biblical texts in a way that respects and engages with African cultural practices.

Either the majority of the material already written has been on the wider incorporation of African traditions into biblical interpretation or general post-colonial reviews of colonial narratives. There is also lack of a detailed post-colonial interpretation of the Imbalu ceremony in relation to the biblical circumcision idea. This study aims to close this gap and offer a hermeneutical framework that reconciles tensions between Christian theology and cultural identity by critically examining the interactions between these two traditions. This will ultimately result in a more nuanced understanding of post-colonial African theology.

The empirical investigation of post-colonialism explores the political, economic, cultural, social, and psychological ramifications of colonial control on societies (Sugirtharajah, 2012). Researchers like Bediako (1996) highlight how colonialism changed languages, cultural practices, and knowledge systems in colonized cultures, frequently giving preference to Western frameworks. This criticism goes beyond Eurocentric prejudices in academic fields, leading to demands for knowledge of decolonization and the promotion of different viewpoints (Zondi, 2011). Additionally, colonized peoples' agency in recovering their cultural heritage and opposing oppression highlighted by post-colonialism (Kato, 1975). The practical application of post-colonial theory to particular cultural practices and their interaction with colonial narratives has received little attention, despite the fact that its implications for culture and knowledge systems have been the subject of much discussion. The Imbalu ceremony of the Bamasaba people analyzed

using the Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutical lens, closes the gap by questioning colonial narratives that have shaped how African traditions are investigated, in connection to biblical themes.

The significance of interpreting the Bible via the prism of African cultural, historical, and social contexts is an emphasis of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH). ABH, which sprang out of the larger theological decolonization movement, aims to harmonize Christian doctrine with African customs and experiences (Mugambi, 1986; Zondi, 2011). The recognition of African cultural distinctiveness and the creation of interpretive frameworks that complement native customs and worldviews are essential components of this strategy. While ABH has examined many facets of biblical interpretation in relation to African traditions, there is still a gap in its application to particular cultural rituals, like the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba. This study fills this gap by analyzing how ABH can mediate between the Imbalu ritual and biblical teachings, proposing an interpretive framework that balances these traditions while navigating the tensions between cultural heritage and Christian faith. It challenges Eurocentric interpretations of the Bible and promotes a contextual understanding that resonates with African ways of engaging with texts.

The rise of African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) is intricately tied to the broader intellectual and cultural movement in African theology that seeks to develop interpretations of the Bible that are authentically African and critically engaged with Christian traditions. Historically, colonial Christian missions imposed Western biblical interpretations that often disregarded African cultural contexts, leading to disconnection between the Christian faith and African realities (Bediako, 1930–2008; Mbiti, 1931–2019). In the post-independence era, African theologians have sought to reclaim African identities and integrate cultural insights into biblical interpretation, fostering a

theology that reflects the lived experiences, traditions, and values of African communities. While this movement has provided significant contributions to contextual theology, there remains a research gap in applying ABH to specific African cultural rituals and practices, such as the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring how ABH can mediate between the ritual and Christian biblical traditions, proposing a framework that aligns African cultural practices with Christian teachings in a balanced and culturally sensitive manner.

A conversation between biblical texts and African cultural expressions is promoted by African Bible hermeneutics. This entails investigating how African cultural values, tales, and customs are reflected in biblical themes and storylines. It aims to establish a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the biblical text and the lived realities of African communities by identifying areas of convergence and divergence (Dube, 2001; Ekeh, 2008; Shumba, 2014). In the African context, it aims to create interpretive frameworks that are pertinent, significant, and transformative. The Bible as an African accepted text is antagonistic to African cultural customs such as female circumcision, patriarchy, and the exclusion of women, children, and persons with disabilities.

In order to develop theological frameworks and concepts that empower the oppressed, the Bible is used to examine specific African cultures (Musimbi, 2005; Guta, 2017). In order to provide a new understanding of biblical texts, Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics integrates post-colonial theory with African cultural, historical, and social settings. This method challenges biblical interpretations from the colonial era and aims to create readings that are representative of African identities and experiences. The idea is an apparatus that views the Bible as a cultural artefact. It focusses on biblical critique within the sociopolitical framework that has silenced the African voice as a minority (Dube, 2001). Decolonizing the oppressed people and their customs,

like the Imbalu rite in this study, is the strategy's ultimate goal. In an effort to achieve African cultural justice, this has drawn African Bible scholars to lead the way in African biblical hermeneutics (Mugambi, 1987; Bediako, 2004; Rukundwa, 2011).

Among the Bamasaba, the Imbalu rite is unquestionably a beloved cultural practice. Since the beginning of time, it has continued to be a valued part of their customs. Another important cultural practice in the Old Testament is circumcision. The Bamasaba have used the biblical foundation to defend their cultural Imbalu in the post-colonial era. Imbalu proponents claim Biblical approval of the ritual and decreed as an indication of divine decision (Mugambi, 1987; Bediako, 2004). The Abrahamic circumcision customs linked to the patriarchs and Israelites of the Bible in the Old Testament, as documented in Genesis 17:9–14, Exodus 4:25, Leviticus 12:3, Deuteronomy 10:16, and Jeremiah 4:4, serve as the foundation for this study.

This study uses African Biblical Hermeneutics (ABH) to analyze the biblical theme of circumcision and the Imbalu ritual. According to ABH, biblical interpretation must take into account the African sociocultural environment in order for the Bible to interact with African customs and worldviews (Bediako, 1930–2008; Mugambi, 1936). This method incorporates African cultural narratives and perspectives into a biblical framework while reading a few Old Testament texts through an African lens, going beyond Western-centric biblical exegesis. The study attempts to resolve conflicts and overcome the historical biases of Western interpretations, which frequently positioned African traditions as inferior, by contrasting biblical and African perspectives. The study of how certain African cultural rituals, like Imbalu, might be interpreted in dialogue within a biblical framework is still lacking, despite a great deal of discussion on contextual theology and ABH. This study seeks to bridge this gap by combining biblical teachings

with African cultural practices, presenting a comprehensive hermeneutical framework that honors and preserves both traditions.

Additionally, this conversation is based on the cultural parallels between the Old Testament and traditional African worldviews (Bosch, 1991; Thiessen, 2011). There is still a research deficit in critically examining the socioeconomic ramifications of rites like Imbalu within a biblical framework, despite the body of knowledge on African Biblical Hermeneutics. Considering the ethical and sociocultural issues raise, the relevance of both biblical circumcision and the Imbalu ritual in the modern era into doubt. Similar issues with the Imbalu ritual, such as brutality, coercion, and socioeconomic consequences, are found in biblical examples like the violent circumcision event in Exodus 4:24 and the forced mass circumcision in Joshua 5:1–9. Notwithstanding these difficulties, both customs are highly valued in culture and society, providing advantages like rites of passage, identity development, social cohesiveness, and hygiene.

In order to create a fair and useful strategy that tackles moral dilemmas while maintaining cultural integrity, this study finds it necessary to compare biblical circumcision with the Imbalu ceremony in the context of modern culture. How biblical ideas can direct the development of Imbalu customs to adjust to contemporary circumstances without losing their cultural identity is a research gap. This comparison would provide information for developing an impartial framework that guarantees a continued applicability and sustainability in dealing with modern issues.

1.3 Problem Statement

Imbalu male initiation ritual stands as a foundation of cultural identity, social cohesion, and spiritual significance for the Bamasaba of Uganda. However, historical encounter with European colonialism and missionary Christianity precipitated a profound ideological and theological crisis regarding this practice. Missionaries equipped with a Eurocentric and biblical hermeneutic, reduced Imbalu to pagan cutting and condemned it as evil, ignoring its cultural theology. This colonial discourse created a persistent clash for the Bamasaba people especially the Christianized traditional, forcing a synthetic choice between their cultural heritage and their Christian faith—a schism that continues to resonate in the post-colonial era. Often, Bamasaba in the post-colonial setting, faced with such cultural controversies would turn to the Bible for answers. As Musiiwa (2001), would ask, “Is circumcision in the Bible?”, and in the bible, Imbalu is validated. Notwithstanding its traditional significance the ritual is subject to persistent critiques even in the contemporary society that is modernizing rapidly, primarily due to its association with socio-economic challenges, including early school dropouts, adolescent promiscuity, violence, and poverty (UBOS, 2021; UHRC, 2017; Watsusi, 2014; Wanyenya, 2013). The practice has also been overly politicized and there have been attempts to ban the ritual, labeled as backward and barbaric (The East African Article October 2017). Such attacks on Imbalu has only fueled defensive counter opposition to modernity and Christianity (Welbourn, 1965). Many cultural conservatives, irrespective of religious orientation, education and socio-economic status, Imbalu is their cultural heritage, and they would often ignore critical responses to any ills. It is from this perspective that the current study is anchored, to interrogate Imbalu and biblical circumcision practices from a Postcolonial African biblical hermeneutic in a tripartite framework to generate a meaningful theological framework for acceptable sustainability.

1.4 Objectives of the study

The objectives of the study constitute both the general and specific objectives as seen below

1.4.1 General Objective

To analyze the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda through a Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutical lens in view of constructing a suitable theological framework

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To establish a historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda.
2. To assess colonial challenges to the Imbalu ritual and the Post-colonial community adaptations in Christian contexts.
3. To develop a Post-colonial theological framework that engages both biblical and Imbalu for an appropriate ritual.

1.5 Research questions

1. What is the historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda?
2. What are the colonial challenges to the Imbalu ritual and the Post-colonial community adaptations in Christian contexts?
3. What Post-colonial theological framework does the interaction between Biblical and Imbalu provide for an appropriate Imbalu ritual?

1.6 Scope of the study

The scope of the study pivots around the content therein and the geographical boundaries of the area of study

1.6.1 Content scope

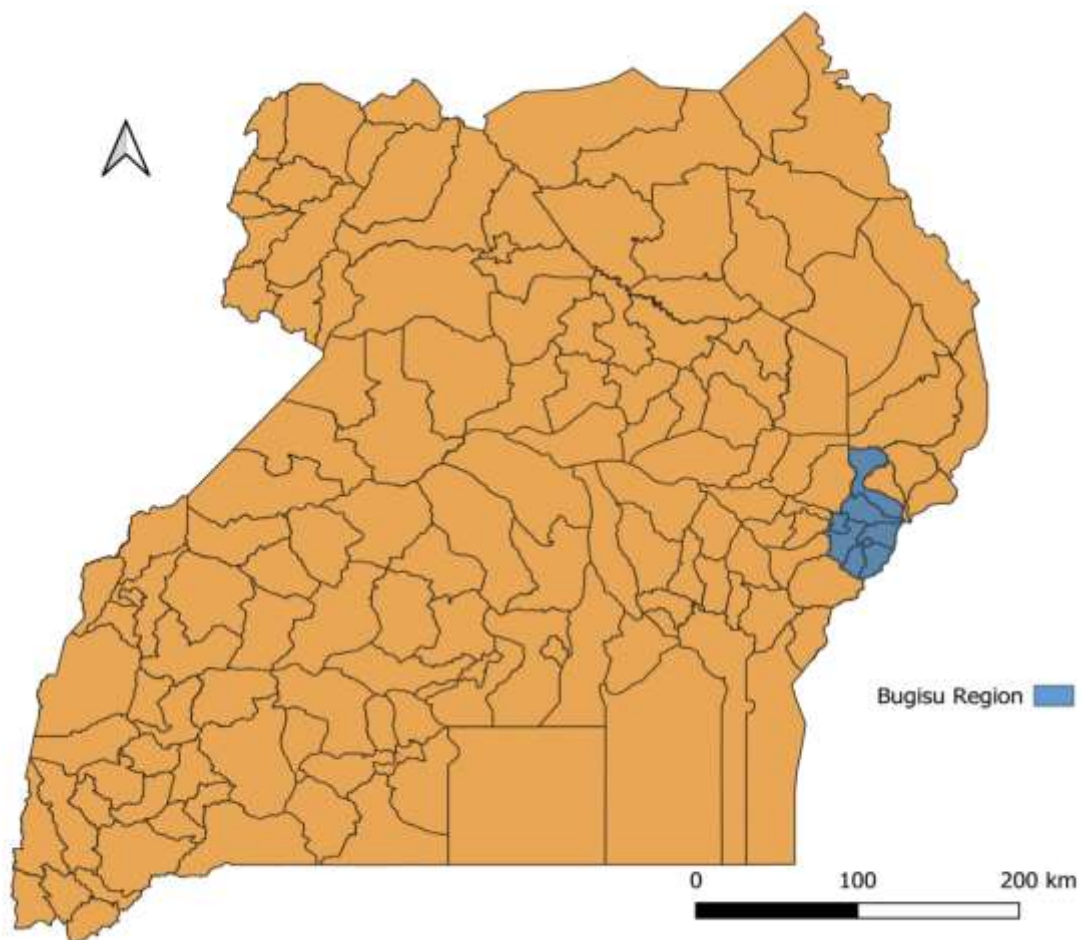
The researcher examined the historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba of eastern Uganda, assessed the colonial challenges to the Imbalu ritual and the Post-colonial Community adaptations in Christian contexts, and to develop a Post-colonial theological framework that engages both Biblical and Imbalu for an appropriate Imbalu ritual to form the Content scope.

1.6.2 Geographical scope

The study was carried out in the so-called Bugisu sub region of Eastern Uganda. The region was chosen because it exercises an obligatory formal and elaborate traditional ceremony of Imbalu with numerous rituals, circumcision being its climaxed portion. It is an area of my acquaintance for a period of five decades and have identified with the regional cultural conflicts especially from the Christianized Bamasaba. Over 15 years of church ministry in the region, has exposed me to deeper encounters and experiences of controversy, especially those who identify with Christianity. They are seemingly at the cross roads of how to undertake the ritual appropriately. Diverse attempts have occasionally been undertaken to solve the conflict but with little success. Much as several other places carry out circumcision, they may encounter diverse challenges that have not come to my attention.

Categorically, the dilemma in the Bugisu region especially the Christianized lot propelled me to carry out research in this area, well aware that, accessibility to the desired information would be certain and a little easier as an insider. However, a disclaimer in this context indicates that, while the study focuses on Imbalu practices, among Bamasaba selected communities in the five clans, it does not claim to represent all variations within the wider Bugisu sub region.

Figure 2: The Bugisu Sub-Region



This region comprises of three *tsinda* (lineages), of the Bamasaba, emerging from the sons of ancestor Masaba namely; Mwambu, Muubuya and Wanale. These constitute the six districts of

Bugisu sub region namely; Namisindwa, Manafwa, Bududa, Mbale, Bulambuli, and Sironko. The whole region shares the same ethnographic characteristic tendencies as an ethnic group. It comprises of 26 clans that make up the cultural institution of the Bamasaba locally referred to as *Inzu' ya Masaba*. All these 26 clans revere the Imbalu ritual, though the intensity differ from one clan to another. Allegiance is paid to the same ancestral descent under one cultural tribal leader “*Umukuka*” and a common cultural site *Mutoto*.

A clan leader chairs a clan. Out of the 26 clans, specifically five clans were chosen for the study picking one clan from each district namely; Bumbo/Bumwoni clan in Namisindwa district; Bulucheke clan in Bududa district, Buwagogo clan in Manafwa district, Bungokho/Bumutoto clan in Mbale district and Buwalasi clan to represent Bulambuli and Sironko districts. All the three lineages were represented in the selected five clans. These clans in the current setting represent the different sub counties in the Bugisu sub region.

1.7 Justification of the study

As a rite of passage, that incorporates identity formation, social cohesiveness, and moral education, the Imbalu ceremony has great cultural and spiritual significance for the Bamasaba people. However, as Uganda's socioeconomic situation changes, this custom is criticized for linking to issues like poverty, adolescent promiscuity, and school dropouts. The Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2021) reports that male pupils in Mbale Districts is scaled to 35% absenteeism rate during Imbalu seasons, with over 20% of them quitting school permanently as a result of the social and financial pressures involved. Imbalu rites are responsible for 7% of documented incidents of ritual-related violence, according to the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC, 2019),

underscoring the pressing need to address its negative effects. These figures highlight the need for a critical analysis of the ritual in order to balance its cultural significance with modern needs.

A distinctive framework for reinterpreting the Imbalu ceremony in a way that balances biblical principles with African customs provided by postcolonial African biblical hermeneutics is key. Scholars that support decolonized theological views that harmonize indigenous practices with biblical teachings include Mbiti (1969) and Sugirtharajah (1998). Themes of identity, change, and moral growth are common to both biblical circumcision and Imbalu, offering chances for cross-contextual understanding. Nevertheless, there is still much to learn about the possibility of redefining Imbalu in a biblical context. This study aims to offer a critical analysis that addresses the socioeconomic ramifications of the rite while honoring its cultural origins. A well-rounded strategy like this can support the creation of workable, neighborhood-based models for maintaining Imbalu as a significant and advantageous custom.

The ritual's cultural and social significance has been the subject of numerous studies (Wanyenya, 2013), but its reconstruction via a postcolonial African biblical hermeneutical lens has received less attention. Instead of seeing biblical texts and African traditions as overlapping frameworks that can enlighten and enrich one another, the majority of scholarship regards them as distinct entities. Additionally, there is a deficiency of empirical studies on workable solutions to the socioeconomic problems facing the rite while maintaining its cultural significance. This study bridges up and provides a contextualized methodology that blends cultural authenticity with sustainable development goals by comparing biblical circumcision and traditional Imbalu.

The quest for authentic identity and reclaiming the narrative of suitability prompted this study. For generations, African realities like Imbalu have been interpreted through a colonial, missionary

lens, often labeled as pagan and evil. This study is an act of intellectual and spiritual decolonization of culture and faith, by defining the people, the rituals, God and seeking a theology that advocates maintenance of one's cultural roots as a source of divine revelation is worthy studying. The Pastoral and community concern of a real-life faith of my community is an engine behind the study. How a young Mumasaba male today reconciles his Imbalu initiation with his church activities and sacraments such as baptism, needs a response from such a study? Therefore creating a healthy African hermeneutic is to provide a theological framework for community wholeness that offers the people freedom to be both cultural and Christian.

The study moves beyond theory to practice, as many texts on post-colonial hermeneutics remain theoretical. This study provides a concrete, gritty case study, of applying theory to a specific, living tradition, showing how it actually works on ground. It challenges hegemonic theologies of dominance of Western theological frameworks, decentering the theology and demonstrating Post-colonial theological reflection emerging from sources other than European. Imbalu with its deep themes of masculinity, community, pain, and transformation offers a profound contribution to theological anthropology. It is offering an African perspective on redemptive suffering, resilience, and rites of passage that can dialogue with Christian concepts, that provides a healthy model of identity that is not individualistic but fundamentally relational and communal. The study is global as bringing a deeply African perspective into the global academic conversation, enriches the entire field of theology. The study indicates that a truly global, universal theology must be woven from diverse cultural threads. This work becomes a dynamic resource for theologians all over the globe, and even the West seeking to decolonize their own contexts.

1.8 Significance of the study

As a rite of passage for young males into maturity, the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba, a well-known cultural tradition in Uganda, has great significance. However, given its current consequences, particularly in light of its socio-economic difficulties, a reassessment desperately needed. The importance of this work resides in its capacity to provide a complex understanding of the ritual by fusing biblical teachings with indigenous customs from a Postcolonial African Biblical Hermeneutical standpoint. It can be graded Significance of the study should involve; Theoretical, Methodological and Policy/Practical significances

This method enables a comprehensive understanding of Imbalu that addresses its detrimental effects, like school dropout rates and adolescent delinquency, while honoring its cultural heritage. In the eastern area of Uganda, where Imbalu is practiced, school dropout rates are 35% higher than the national average, with 20% of male pupils quitting school because of taking part in the Imbalu ritual, according to the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (2021). This study seeks to present a balanced perspective, suggesting strategies to ameliorate these issues without eliminating the ritual's cultural importance.

From a wider social standpoint, this research challenges Eurocentric interpretations that have traditionally marginalized African cultural practices, thereby contributing to postcolonial African theological thought. Scholars like Mbiti (1969) and Sugirtharajah (1998), have pointed out that postcolonial African biblical hermeneutics asserts that African identity and faith may coexist peacefully by attempting to integrate Christian principles with African traditions.

African theologians have long argued for biblical interpretations that speak to African realities, and this study will further explore how these interpretations can address the socio-economic challenges associated with the Imbalu ritual. Additionally, this study will add to the conversation on decolonization of knowledge by promoting African-centric theological frameworks that both analyze and uphold the significance of indigenous rituals like Imbalu (Bediako, 1991).

This research offers a forum for workable answers to today's sociocultural problems. The study fills a knowledge gap about how religious frameworks can influence the development of cultural rites by concentrating on the junction of religious values and cultural behaviors. There is a dearth of study on the similarities between biblical circumcision and Imbalu in terms of addressing identity formation, community cohesion, and moral ideals; most current studies on Imbalu concentrate on the social and educational effects. According to the UHRC (2019), a lack of appropriate direction and interpretation of the ritual's intended aim is the root cause of many Imbalu-related problems, including sexual promiscuity and violence. By comparing biblical circumcision with Imbalu customs, this study will close this gap and provide suggestions for an inclusive framework that can meet both socioeconomic and spiritual demand.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0. Introduction

This chapter deals with the various literature reviewed on the historical and cultural contexts of traditional circumcision, majoring on the Imbalu ritual. It entails the practice and significances of circumcision overtime and identifying forces that play for and against it. It presents colonial challenges to Imbalu ritual that had traditional ceremonies exposed to colonial authorities and their imposed Western norms at the expense of tradition. Then community adaptations in the Post-Colonial, striving to maintain basic cultural significance as well as ensuring a Christian stand is undertaken. The conversation between the biblical text and the oral text of the cultural ritual is undertaken to develop a Post-colonial theological framework that balances between tradition and Christianity respectively.

2.1 Historical and Cultural Context of Traditional Circumcision

Circumcision, as a cultural practice, is widespread across various regions, including Asia, America, Australia, and Africa, with its significance varying based on religious, medical, and cultural contexts (WHO, 2007). For many ethnic groups, such as those in Central Africa, Southern Africa, and parts of East Africa, circumcision serves as a rite of passage, symbolizing the transition from boyhood to manhood, across generations (Mwashambwa et al., 2013; Zakke, 2020; Wepukhulu, 2024).

However, the Bamasaba ethnic group, located in Uganda, specifically practices circumcision as part of their Imbalu ritual, which carries unique cultural meaning. While the cultural and religious implications of circumcision have been explored broadly, there is limited research examining the Bamasaba specific interpretation of the ritual and how it relates to their identity, societal roles, and engagement with broader national and religious discourses. Research is needed in comprehending how Imbalu practices influence contemporary socio-economic challenges in Uganda, especially concerning education and social behaviors, and how the practice can be reconciled with global health standards and religious interpretations of circumcision. This research addresses this gap by examining the ritual through a Postcolonial African Bible Hermeneutical lens, considering both the African cultural worldview and the influence of Christianity.

Despite the growing body of literature on circumcision and the Imbalu ritual, there remains a need in comprehensive studies that examine the intersection of Imbalu with Postcolonial African Biblical Hermeneutics and its contemporary socio-economic impacts. While works like Audrey's *The Bamasaba: A Study of the Social Structure of a Nilotic People* (1956) and Foster and Freedman's *Rites of Passage: Adolescence in America 1790 to the Present* (2018) provide insightful perspectives on the ritual and its societal significance, they focus primarily on cultural or theoretical frameworks rather than directly addressing the implications of the practice in the context of modern challenges, such as education, lawlessness and public health.

Additionally, studies like Falola's, *The Politics of Tradition: Continuity and Change in Northern Nigeria* (1993) offer comparative insights on how traditional rituals adapt to socio-political changes but fall short of addressing how these rituals can evolve in a postcolonial African context, especially under the influence of Christian doctrines and their intersection with local customs.

There is a need for focused research that critically evaluates Imbalu through African Biblical Hermeneutics, considering both its cultural heritage and its impact on contemporary issues facing the Bamasaba, to provide a nuanced understanding of its role in modern-day Uganda and potential pathways for its transformation.

While circumcision remains a significant cultural practice in many African communities, including the Xhosa and Ndebele in South Africa, its role and implications in the context of globalization, colonialism, modernity, and human rights have become increasingly contentious. Studies like Mvan Vuuren et al. (1999) and Thomas (2004) highlight the ritualistic aspects of male circumcision among these groups, and Tsetselelani (2017) explores the role of initiation schools in preparing young people for adulthood. There is still need to critically examine how these practices intersect with contemporary challenges, such as human rights concerns, the influence of Western medical perspectives, and the impact of modernity on traditional rites. More research is needed to explore the tension between maintaining cultural identity and adapting these practices to align with evolving global norms, especially in light of the legal and health implications of circumcision in post-colonial African societies.

The practice of circumcision among East African ethnic groups, including the Luhya, Kikuyu, and Masai of Kenya and Tanzania, serves as a formal rite of passage where tribal religion and history are imparted to youth transitioning into full societal members (Marck, 1997; Mwashambwa et al., 2013, Wepukhulu, 2024). While the ritual is widely practiced, it raises significant ethical, religious, and cultural questions, particularly among Christian communities who are often caught between traditional beliefs and Christian teachings. Despite the widespread nature of this ritual, there is a deficiency of comprehensive research exploring how these communities reconcile their cultural

practices with religious convictions, particularly in the face of globalization, human rights debates, and the influence of modernity. Further research is needed to explore the intersection of religious beliefs, cultural identity, and the socio-political implications of circumcision within these communities, especially regarding Christian responses to traditional rites of passage.

The Bamasaba Imbalu ritual, as a complex cultural ceremony, involves much more than the physical act of circumcision, encompassing a series of steps that signify the transition into manhood, including early preparations, the circumcision surgery, purification ceremonies, and the final "*Inemba*" dance, which symbolizes the elders' passing of masculine power to the initiates (Makwa, 2010; Khamalwa, 2018; Zakes 2020). However, in the post-colonial era, the authenticity of this transition into manhood is questioned, particularly in relation to the actual outcomes versus its perceived significance (Wanyenya, 2013, Kauffman, 2022; Anthony, 2021). There is a need for research that critically examines the evolving social and cultural meanings of the Imbalu ritual, considering how it aligns with or challenges contemporary notions of masculinity and identity in the face of globalization, modernity, and shifting societal values.

The conflict between process and product in the Imbalu ritual has drawn attention to its cultural and social implications in the post-colonial era. Nabunya et al. (2017) explored the social and cultural significance of the ritual, conducting interviews and focus group discussions with various community members, including adolescent boys who had undergone the ritual, their parents, and community leaders. The study found that the Imbalu ritual is considered as a key marker of manhood, deeply rooted in the traditions and culture of the Bamasaba, and viewed as a purification rite that brings individuals closer to their ancestors, while also earning them personal honor and

respect in the family and community (Lawal 2017; Morgan, 2023; Awonyinka, 2022; Chireh, 2021). However, how the ritual can be integrated within a postcolonial African Biblical Hermeneutical framework, considering its socio-cultural impact while addressing the contemporary challenges of modernity, human rights, and shifting definitions of masculinity is lacking. These calls for further research that examines how African Biblical Hermeneutics can enhance the ritual's cultural meaning in the context of postcolonial challenges, offering a fresh lens to reconcile tradition with modern values.

Wamimbi et al. (2016), Mulumba (2022) and Ouma (2021), explore the economic and social impact of the Imbalu ritual, revealing its significant contribution to local economies by stimulating business activity and fostering business partnerships among community members. Similarly, Turyahabwe et al. (2020) highlights the ritual's role in promoting social cohesion and community identity, both of which play a key role in broader social and economic development. However, these studies do not adequately address the perspectives of all community members, particularly the Bamasaba Christians who face a dilemma between preserving traditional practices and reconciling them with Christian beliefs. There is a deficiency in understanding how the Imbalu ritual can be re-interpreted through a postcolonial African lens to better accommodate the evolving views and concerns of Bamasaba Christians while maintaining the ritual's cultural significance.

Kimani and Mwenda (2018) emphasize the complex relationship between traditional cultural practices and socio-economic development, highlighting how certain practices, such as female circumcision, can act as barriers to development, especially for marginalized groups like women and girls. These practices have attracted both local and colonial criticisms due to their harmful impacts on women's health, education, and economic opportunities. While the study underscores

the need to examine cultural practices in terms of their effects on development outcomes, it does not fully address how such rituals, including male circumcision practices like Imbalu, can be adapted or reformed to foster more inclusive and equitable development across social, economic, cultural, and spiritual spheres. So how male initiation rituals align with contemporary views on human rights, health, and development, particularly in the context of Bamasaba communities, to promote holistic and sustainable development, calls for research.

Omukunyi (2022) offers an inclusive analysis of traditional rituals, focusing on the significance of the Imbalu ritual in shaping identity and belonging within the Bamasaba community. Similarly, Savet (2012) and Tette (2020), highlight the role of such cultural rituals in fostering social cohesion and unity. Both studies primarily focus on the positive cultural aspects and the social relevance of these rituals, with limited exploration of the colonial criticisms that shaped their evolution, such as those raised by Purvis (1909, 1910). While Omukunyi and Savet address the cultural and social importance of the Imbalu ritual, there remains an issue of analyzing how this traditional practice can coexist with Westernized and Christian values in a modern context. Research is needed to explore how Imbalu ritual can be adapted or reframed in ways that reconcile traditional African beliefs with contemporary human rights and religious doctrines, addressing both the challenges and opportunities for integration in a globalized, multicultural world.

Ntonzini et al. (2018) discusses the heated debate surrounding the traditional male circumcision of Ulwaluko among the Xhosa of the Eastern Cape, where there are two distinct camps: one supporting the continuation of the ritual and the other advocating for its discontinuation, citing its misalignment with contemporary realities. This dilemma mirrors the challenges faced by the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba, where there are increasing dissatisfactions, controversies, and

calls for a reassessment or cessation of the practice in light of modern societal changes. This growing tension necessitates a study that explores the potential for a relevant enhancement and integration of the Imbalu ritual that respects both traditional values and contemporary human rights, cultural expectations, and religious beliefs. A comprehensive analysis is required to examine how such traditional practices can evolve or be adapted to ensure their continued relevance, inclusivity, and acceptance in the 21st century.

Gwata (2009) and Peltzer (2010) highlight that among the Xhosa of South Africa, traditional circumcision is a rite of passage referred to as "going to the mountain" or "going to the bush," involving a journey of solitude and seclusion aimed at preparing young people for adulthood. Similarly, the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba faces similar criticisms, particularly regarding issues like nudity, inexpressible pain, poor treatment, and rudimentary practices. This calls for a study to develop a reasonable theological standpoint that addresses the intersection of tradition, modernity, and human rights, ensuring that the ritual aligns with current societal expectations while preserving its cultural value. There is lack of research that seeks to reconcile these challenges through a framework that respects both the cultural heritage and contemporary ethical standards.

Babikako et al. (2019) highlight that the Imbalu ritual has both positive and negative psychological effects on adolescent boys, with benefits including increased self-esteem, confidence, and a sense of pride in their cultural heritage, while negative effects include fear, anxiety, pain during the circumcision, and the potential complications. The study underscores the importance of emotional support from family and community members to improve the boys' psychological experiences. Research is required to explore the integration of such emotional and psychological support while maintaining the ritual's cultural integrity and aligning it with contemporary health practices.

The tension between colonialism and tradition, particularly regarding the Imbalu ritual, underscores a significant cultural conflict in post-independence Uganda (Mugisha, 2021, Namasake, 2022). Following Uganda's independence, the ritual emerged as a symbol of resistance against colonial legacies, although its practice has faced challenges due to the imposition of Western values, especially around health, consent, and gender roles (Kenyatta, 1973; Makumbi, 2022; Auma, 2021). While some aspects of the Imbalu ritual have been modernized, the ritual still faces controversy particularly from Christian communities (Nannyonjo, 2015).

Despite efforts to balance tradition and modernity, the debate continues regarding how best to navigate these cultural shifts. A key gap in research lies in understanding how to reconcile the preservation of cultural heritage with the evolving demands of public health, individual rights, and religious perspectives, ensuring that the Imbalu ritual remains relevant, inclusive, and acceptable to all segments of the community. This calls for an in-depth exploration of how to integrate traditional practices with modern societal values without compromising cultural significance.

2.2 Colonial Challenges and Post-colonial Community Adaptations

The twofold themes of colonial challenges to African rituals and post-colonial community adaptations, occupy scholarly works. The practice of Imbalu, as a traditional circumcision rite of the Bamasaba of Uganda, serves as a profound case study for examining the collision between African indigenous cultural systems and colonial theology. It lays a foundation for the subsequent post-colonial quest for identity and meaning. From a postcolonial African Biblical hermeneutical perspective, Imbalu becomes more than a cultural ritual; it is a text. This oral text was fiercely contested during the colonial era and has been reinterpreted and re-appropriated in the post-colonial period (Fashole-Luke, 1986; Sugirtharajah, 1998).

The colonial encounter presented a fundamental challenge to Imbalu, primarily through the intertwined forces of missionary Christianity and colonial administration. Scholars highlight how the European hermeneutic was imposed, using the Bible to delegitimize African cultural practices. Missionaries, operating with a hermeneutic of bias, read the Bible as a text that regarded and quashed African rituals as pagan (Wimbush, 1993; Ndung'u, 1997; Lombard, 2006). Biblical Key texts such as Genesis 17, which authenticates God's covenant with Abraham, were weaponized against Imbalu. Biblical texts often cited, not to draw parallels, but to highlight difference. Scholars like Mugambi (1995), and Dube (2001), have argued that missionaries presented Christian circumcision as a spiritual sign of a covenant. This was in blunt opposition to the physical, tribal and painful nature of Imbalu, seen as a rite of physical endurance not faith.

Post-Colonial Biblical African Hermeneutics aims to challenge Euro-centric tendencies and affirm indigenous African cultural practices that were marginalized during the colonial era. It offers a platform to reinterpret biblical texts in ways that resonate with the lived experiences of African communities (Fashole-Luke, 1986; Sugirtharajah, 1998; Dube, 2001, 2012). This framework analyzes colonial legacies, challenges Western-centric biblical interpretations, and seeks to empower marginalized communities by integrating African cultural identity with biblical teachings. However, a research gap exists in exploring how this hermeneutical approach can specifically address the integration of traditional rituals, such as the Imbalu, into contemporary biblical interpretation, while also reconciling potential conflicts between indigenous practices and modern religious views, particularly among Christian communities.

Dube (2012) reviews the colonial theological framework imposed on African contexts, advocating for the restoration of a theology that directly address the needs and concerns of African

communities. Bediako (1995) challenges the notion that African cultural identity and Christianity are inherently at odds. Bosch (2006), Gurnik, (2020) and Keller (2021) emphasizes the necessity for the gospel to evaluate and transform tradition, aligning it with the core tenets of Christianity, and discarding incompatible elements. The Bible has been widely spread and read in Africa for centuries, but Eurocentric approaches to biblical scholarship have often attempted to de-Africanize the text, positioning Western interpretations as universal. Afrocentric scholars argue that the resurgence of African culture coincides with the end of colonialism, suggesting a need for a more culturally relevant interpretation of the Bible (Bosch, 2006; Chester, 2005; Robbins, 2014; Volf, 2016).

Mwaura (2008) highlights the crisis faced by African theologians in developing an independent African Biblical Hermeneutics within the post-colonial context, emphasizing the need for a framework that resonates with African cultural experiences. Dube (2001; 2012) has significantly contributed to the decolonization of African cultures and practices, advocating for the amplification of African voices, including scholars and local communities, to shape the interpretive process. Dube's work focuses on reclaiming indigenous cultural practices and traditions within a Christian context, aiming to create more relevant and inclusive biblical interpretations (Mbiti, 2007; Teleki, 2011; Gurnik, 2020; Keller, 2021).

Mbiti (1991; 2007) stresses the importance of contextual and cultural interpretations that speak to the realities of African communities (Robbins, 2014; Volf, 2016). A research gap however, exists in exploring how African Biblical Hermeneutics can further integrate African cultural practices, ensuring that interpretations not only honor indigenous traditions but also provide practical solutions to contemporary challenges within African societies, such as the conflict between

modernity and tradition in religious practice. Additionally, further investigation is needed into the role of African biblical interpretation in fostering social justice, cultural identity, and community empowerment in post-colonial Africa.

The engagement with the Imbalu ritual by the Bamasaba community in the post-colonial era is an example of a dynamic negotiation through which tradition, modernity, and religious transformation are constantly made. Imbalu has traditionally served not only as a rite of circumcision but as an elaborate matrix of socialization, moral instruction, and communal identity formation, inscribing in a codified way what it means to make the transition from boyhood to manhood within Bamasaba cosmology (Watsusi 2014; Heald 1989). However, the encounter with Christian missions and colonial governance ushered in a profound tension: indigenous ritual practices that were often discursively framed as incompatible with Christian morality. Thus placing communities in a position where they felt compelled to defend, negotiate, or resist external judgments (Bediako 1996; Mbiti 1992).

The layering of history has generated multiple forms of adaptation. Some parts of the community have pursued syncretic practices that align elements of the ritual with biblical symbolism. This include situating circumcision as a covenantal act in an order of thought analogous to the biblical precedent in Genesis 17, while others have rejected any Christian reinterpretation of the practice, believing it to be inimical to the authority of the ancestors and an erosion of communal identity (Musiiwa 2001; Dube 2000).

The adaptive strategies of the Bamasaba are, therefore, both pragmatic and theological. Scholars such as Sugirtharajah (2002) and Katongole (2011) argue that post-colonial African communities

engage in what can be termed a "hermeneutic of retrieval," wherein local epistemologies and symbolic practices are recovered and reinterpreted in dialogue with biblical texts and contemporary ethical standards. In the case of the Bamasaba, this has entailed ritual innovation, temporal adjustment of initiation seasons to align with schooling, and selective incorporation of Christian liturgical elements without undermining core cultural meanings (Wepukhulu, 2023; Mulyanyuma, 2022). It is within these negotiations that ritual elders and Christian leaders act as mediators, ensuring that Imbalu remains socially relevant and responds to important moral and spiritual questions posed by the local churches. Such a mediatory function underlines the capacity of African communities to enact what post-colonial theorists like Mudimbe (1988) have termed the "agency of the colonized": the ability to reinterpret imposed frameworks with a view to safeguarding cultural integrity and self-determination.

Critics, however, emphasize the persistence of ethical and social tensions. Public health scholars and human rights advocates undergird their advocacy with an emphasis on bodily integrity, informed consent, and risk reduction, often framing these as non-negotiable standards. The WHO (2021) and UNFPA (2021) support such a view. These kinds of perspectives have been received by some community members as external meddling, which risks imposing Universalist moral norms on a culturally particular practice. Anthropologists such as Gruenbaum (2001) and Brady (2011) argue that, interventions which do not heavily invest in the local cosmologies or ritual logics will never achieve sustainable compliance. Community responses thus have been selective negotiations: reforms that make initiates safer and/or promote education are accepted, whereas those perceived to threaten ritual meaning or communal authority are resisted. In so doing, they

reveal a sophisticated capacity for balancing cultural continuity with ethical modernization and epitomize the principle whereby cultural adaptation is neither linear nor unidirectional.

Theologically, the intersection of Imbalu and Christianity presents a larger post-colonial challenge. How indigenous ritual frames can be meaningfully integrated into a theological discourse that has been shaped by colonial readings of the Bible. African biblical hermeneutics provides both methodological and ethical tools for this engagement. Scholars like Dube (2001) and Bediako (1996) contend that reading Scripture through African epistemologies allows communities to reclaim authority over sacred meaning and moral guidance and further situates Imbalu as a lived theological practice rather than a mere cultural artifact. This approach has resulted in the production of locally developed catechetical materials, sermons, and pastoral guidance that recognize the ritual's covenantal importance while encouraging voluntary participation and ethical responsibility. Such initiatives represent what post-colonial hermeneutics has termed "interpretive hybridity," whereby local communities negotiate tension between inherited religious structures and indigenous ritual logic without uncritical syncretism (Sugirtharajah, 2002; Katongole, 2011).

The Bamasaba experience adds to the pool of knowledge in global debates on ritual, identity, and theology by illustrating the way post-colonial communities exercise interpretive agency in complex socio-religious landscapes. The scholarship emerging from this case underlines the fact that ritual continuity need not be inimical to ethical and spiritual reform, and African communities can produce locally anchored, theologically vibrant frames that speak to cultural heritage and contemporary societal challenges. Moreover, it is a challenge to simplistic dichotomies between tradition and modernity, in which such community adaptation is a dynamic, dialogical process that

involves negotiation across generational, religious, and epistemic lines. Such insights have broader implications for international scholarship on rites of passage, inculturation, and post-colonial religious hermeneutics, offering models for culturally tuned ethical reform in other societies negotiating similar tensions between tradition and contemporary moral imperatives.

Ekeh (2008) argues that colonialism created a division between the "primordial public" and the "civic public" in African societies. The primordial public representing pre-colonial social formations and cultural practices, while the civic public embodies the modern institutions and ideologies imposed during colonial rule. This division has fostered a complex relationship between indigenous traditions and external influences, shaping the cultural dynamics and public life in African communities, including those of the Bamasaba people. Ekeh's analysis highlights the lasting effects of colonialism, emphasizing the need for a comprehensive understanding of the dual nature of public life in post-colonial African societies.

The study calls for an integrated approach to analyze how both primordial and civic elements coexist and influence social realities. However, there remains a research gap in exploring how these dual identities and the interplay between indigenous practices and modernity can be reconciled in a way that allows cultural traditions, like the Imbalu ritual, to adapt and thrive in the contemporary socio-political landscape. Further research is needed to develop frameworks that integrate both aspects of public life and offer practical solutions for maintaining cultural relevance in the face of globalization and modern societal pressures.

The emergence of African Independent Churches (Wimbush, 1993; Ndung'u, 1997) is a response to this need for a more relevant and localized biblical hermeneutic. Despite these developments, there remains a research gap in exploring how Afrocentric biblical interpretations can effectively

merge with traditional Christian teachings to offer a more holistic understanding of faith, culture, and identity in contemporary African contexts. Further research is needed to create a framework that integrates indigenous African cultural practices with biblical interpretation, ensuring that both are mutually reinforcing rather than conflicting.

The Imbalu initiation, as an integral part of the Bamasaba tradition, remains steadfast in its practice despite rising opposition, particularly from Christianized communities, which creates a tension between cultural and religious identities (Papu, 2006). This tension gives rise to a “double life” for individuals who attempt to navigate the demands of both Western-influenced Christian doctrine and indigenous African traditions. Lombaard (2006) analyzes the hermeneutical approach that relegates the Bible to a static, colonial tool, failing to acknowledge its potential for engagement and adaptation within indigenous contexts. This study explores how to reconcile the transformative aspects of cultural practices like Imbalu with the Biblical narrative, allowing both cultural traditions and Christian teachings to coexist harmoniously, hence bridge the gap between indigenous traditions and Christian doctrines, leading to a more contextual and relevant biblical interpretation within African communities.

2.3 A Conversation between Biblical and Imbalu for an appropriate ritual.

The Imbalu ritual, a significant cultural practice among the Bamasaba, has been the subject of extensive scholarly debate, particularly when juxtaposed with biblical circumcision, as a covenantal sign and identity marker in the Bible (Genesis 17:9-14). African scholars like Dube (2001), Mbiti (1991), Kanyoro (2005), and Kuloba (2014) advocate for a post-colonial African biblical hermeneutic that emphasizes the centrality of the African context in biblical interpretation. Dubeela's (2000) principle, which asserts that before the biblical text can engage with local

context, it must speak on its own terms, offers an important lens for examining the tension between traditional practices and Christian influences. Rituals are re-read alongside the Bible to forge resilient practices, suitable for hybrid identity.

There is a gap in studies that specifically examines how this hermeneutic can be applied to the integration of Imbalu within the Christian faith, and how both the cultural and religious significance of circumcision can be harmonized in a way that respects the theological and cultural imperatives of both traditions. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring how the Imbalu ritual can be interpreted in light of both African cultural heritage and Christian biblical teachings, aiming for a reconciliation that upholds both traditions.

Circumcision holds significant cultural and religious importance within both Jewish and Muslim communities, symbolizing identity and covenantal belonging (Elliot, 1992). In the Bible, circumcision is portrayed as a vital ritual, from the life-saving act of Zipporah in Exodus 4:24-26, to the requirement for Passover participation in Leviticus 12:3, and the commandment in Joshua 5:2-9 for circumcision before entering the Promised Land. As biblical theology progresses, the focus shifts to the spiritual circumcision of the heart, as advocated by the prophets and most of the New Testament scriptures (Bowen, 2008). While these biblical references highlight both the physical and spiritual aspects of circumcision, a gap exists in literature regarding the intersection of traditional cultural practices like the Imbalu ritual with biblical teachings, especially concerning how both the physical and spiritual dimensions of circumcision can be harmonized. This study aims to explore how a balanced model can be developed to integrate both the physical practice of circumcision in the context of African traditions and the biblical message of spiritual transformation, addressing the tension between these two perspectives.

Gollaher's (2000) study provides a comprehensive historical and cultural examination of male circumcision, highlighting its enduring significance across various societies, including ancient Israel, where it served diverse purposes ranging from hygiene and disease prevention to symbolizing religious identity. The practice's obligatory nature is common across several cultures, particularly in Africa, where it has maintained its cultural relevance. The intersection of biblical teachings on circumcision and the African traditional practice, particularly in contexts of the Bamasaba Imbalu ritual, remains underexplored. The balance between biblical and African interpretations of circumcision is crucial, as both cultural and religious aspects demand thoughtful integration. This study aims to address the gap in literature by exploring how the biblical and African circumcision practices can be harmonized to offer an amiable ground suitable for both.

Machoni et al. (2022) examine how the Abagusii community, influenced by colonialism and Christianity, navigated the transformation of their traditional practices, particularly focusing on the institution of male circumcision. The study highlights the decline of circumcision's cultural significance due to the diffusion of Christianity and colonial ideologies, which reshaped the community's identity and cultural practices (Ondigi, 2018). While Machoni's work provides valuable insights into the intersection of colonialism, Christianity, and traditional practices, there is a gap in applying this framework specifically to the Bamasaba community and their practice of Imbalu. This study aims to fill this gap by evaluating how both Christianity and the Bamasaba cultural practices of Imbalu can be harmonized, seeking an appropriate model that respects both traditional and biblical perspectives.

Sugirtharajah (2006) explores the intersection between Christianity and local cultures, delving into the dynamics of hybridity and syncretism that arise when these two forces meet. He emphasizes

the importance of reading the Bible from the perspectives of marginalized communities, challenging traditional interpretations that have often silenced these voices. He analyses the role of Christianity in cultural imperialism, particularly how the spread of Christianity during colonial times often resulted in the suppression of indigenous cultures and traditions. This framework allows for the reclamation of agency by these communities and promotes social justice by reinterpreting biblical texts in ways that align with their cultural realities. However, there is a gap in specifically examining the relationship between Christianity and traditional African practices like the Bamasaba Imbalu ritual. This study seeks to explore how Christianity can coexist with and potentially transform Imbalu, a practice with deep cultural significance, in a way that respects both faith and tradition.

Ranger (2007) explores the role of indigenous cultural practices in Africa as forms of asserting identity, resisting colonial narratives, and preserving continuity with the past. He underscores how African cultural theologies, including initiation practices, have served as vital tools for resistance and cultural liberation. Similarly, Erlank (2017) examines the tension African Christians face in reconciling traditional practices, such as male initiation, with evolving Christian identities, quoting the ongoing debate in Xhosa communities about whether circumcision aligns with or contradicts Christian teachings. While both studies address the intersection of tradition and Christianity, there is a gap in exploring how the Bamasaba, who embrace both traditional practices and Christianity, navigate this tension in a manner that is both respectful of their cultural heritage and religious compatibility. This study seeks to fill this gap by investigating how the Bamasaba balance their cultural initiation rituals with the tenets of Christianity, providing insights into a potential model for negotiating the intersection of traditional African practices and Christian values.

2.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, different scholarly works have been engaged to analyze the history and the cultural social economic aspects of the Bamasaba and their cultural ritual. In addition, scholarly views on post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics and its conversation with tradition, to come up with a resultant model accomplished. The ritual has been interpreted in relation to the identity, societal roles, and engagement with broader national and religious discourses of the communities in question, comprehending how Imbalu practices influence contemporary socio-economic challenges especially concerning education and social behaviors, and how the practice can be reconciled with global health standards and religious interpretations of circumcision. Considering a gap how these rituals can evolve in a postcolonial African context, under the influence of Christian doctrines and their intersection with local customs as potential pathways for its transformation is key in the study. An exploration of the tension between maintaining cultural identity and adapting these practices to align with evolving global norms is needed, especially in light of the legal and health implications of circumcision in post-colonial African societies. How these communities reconcile their cultural practices with religious convictions, particularly in the face of globalization, human rights debates, and the influence of modernity is paramount, and how it aligns with or challenges contemporary notions of masculinity and identity in the face of globalization, modernity, and shifting societal values is a requirement. Conflict between process and product in the Imbalu was contentious; so an examination of how African Biblical Hermeneutics can enhance the ritual's cultural meaning in the context of postcolonial challenges, with modern values was target, in respect of both the cultural heritage and contemporary ethical standards. This gives a firm foundation for analysis of findings and the consequent resultant model given the ongoing discussions.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, the methodology employed to gather data for this dissertation is discussed. These include the research paradigm, research approach, research design and area of study, study population, sample size, various sampling techniques and the tools of research used to gather data. I further discussed the various approaches used while analyzing data for the study. Lastly, the ethical issues observed while gathering data were discussed; which included some of the constraints (limitations) faced during the fieldwork.

3.1 Research Paradigm

The study is premised on Hermeneutics as an interpretivist paradigm. Interpretivism aims at understanding subjective meanings and lived experiences of people within a given social context. Hermeneutics on the other hand aids the interpretation of lived experiences and social texts such as rituals, rites, behaviors and theologies. According to Peter Winch (1958), the purpose of knowledge in the humanities and social sciences is to interpret the meanings people give to various actions. This distinguishes them from the natural sciences whose role is to predict the causation of phenomena using positivism as a philosophy objectively (Giddens, 1982).

This study uses post-colonial bible hermeneutics to interpret and integrate indigenous cultural practices with biblical interpretation. The framework aims to bridge the gap between the biblical text and lived experiences of African communities. It highlights ways in which colonial powers

used selective interpretations of the Bible to reinforce their authority, suppress local cultures, and impose their religious and cultural norms on colonized communities.

Hermeneutics, positioned within the interpretivist paradigm, suits the study as the Imbalu ritual sits at the intersection of indigenous cultural practice, colonial and missionary history, and contemporary religious identity. This paradigm provides the philosophical and methodological foundation to engage with the multiple, layered, and often contested meanings embedded within the phenomenon. Imbalu is not a static object but a dynamic, meaning-laden social practice; it cannot be measured, but interpreted through a specific hermeneutical lens. This mirrors the hermeneutic circle, where understanding the whole practice of Imbalu is informed by its parts (the rituals, songs, symbols) and vice-versa. The paradigm will also help in understanding multiple voices, and allow the researcher to explore different interpretations of Imbalu held by various actors, such as elders, initiates, parents, Christian clergy, Postcolonial subject and so on. A hermeneutic paradigm thus justifies the method of "reading" the cultural horizon closely and interpreting its deep meaning, alongside the colonial horizon into what Gadamer labels as "fusion of horizons" (Hans-Georg Gadamer, 1999).

3.2 Research Approach

This study used a qualitative approach whereby observation, interviews & discussion were significant. Qualitative in the sense that data obtained was more narrative through holistic inquiries carried out in the natural setting from well-versed persons and, interactions, as viewed by the researcher. Data collected was descriptive in nature, expressed in non-numerical terms. Through descriptive data analysis, thematic patterns emerged, illuminating how external forces gradually reshaped the pivotal cultural institutions.

Qualitative methodological approach in this research focuses on understanding the societal human behavior of the Bamasaba, their experiences and social phenomena from a subjective perspective. Unlike quantitative methods, which seek to measure and analyze numerical data, qualitative research emphasizes depth and context, often exploring the "how" and "why" of the Imbalu ritual by these ethnic group. The approach emphasized the participants' perspectives and experiences as they went about their ritual in their cultural settings; how they involved themselves in the ritual, songs sung and type of dances and words spoken. Contextually, it aimed at understanding phenomena within their specific social, cultural, and environmental contexts; through the collection and analysis of non-numerical data, basing on the posture of the participants. The approach is flexible and aims at acquiring rich, detailed data by using interviews, observations, and open-ended surveys to gather comprehensive insights. It aimed at gaining a deep, contextual understanding of the ritual and its adaption to the circumstances of operation.

A qualitative approach is capable of uncovering the required deep, nuanced, and subjective realities at the heart of this inquiry. The questions generated in this topic are inherently qualitative, which demand rich, descriptive data about lived experiences, cultural symbolism, historical memory, and contested identities. A qualitative approach is specifically designed to gather and analyze this type of data. The Imbalu ritual as a complex tapestry of symbols, emotions, actions, and community values, require this approach to allow the researcher to produce a deep description of the phenomenon. Description beyond surface occurrences but deeper into the intensity of the dances, the lyrics of the songs, the conversations among community members, the anxieties and pride of the initiates, and the spiritual ambiance. This depth is essential for any meaningful hermeneutical analysis, as the oral text of the ritual, suitable with a qualitative approach.

3.3 Research Design

The study engaged an ethnographic design, where a part of the ethnic group and their ritual of Imbalu was studied. Ethnographically, the practices, beliefs and attitudes of the people were observed and shared. The observed and shared information was analyzed, described and explained. The ethnographic design necessitated an established rapport with informants and close interaction that enabled me to get their views and experiences on the Imbalu ritual. This prompted the researcher to immerse herself in the cultural context, engage with participants, and capture rich and nuanced data. The design aimed to understand the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the ritual as well as the broader socio-cultural and historical factors that shape those interpretations. By establishing relationships with community members, the researcher gained their trust and obtained informed consent that ensured practices observed and interpreted in their normal and casual settings.

Ethnographic design allowed the researcher to ground the hermeneutical analysis in the thick, lived reality of the culture. To develop a Postcolonial African Biblical Hermeneutic of Imbalu requires a deep, immersive understanding of the ritual as a lived experience within its cultural and ethnicity. It helps to understand Imbalu as a total cultural phenomenon, produce a deep Hermeneutical analysis, center an insider perspectives, reveal the tensions and negotiations in a Postcolonial context; this allows a perfect alignment with the selected paradigm and approach respectively.

Under this design, I had prior fieldwork preparation, through the period of research to acquaint myself with some of the existing ethnographies of the Bamasaba. As an insider, language was not a problem and immersing myself into the field of study immersion to access emic concepts was without much queries. I obtained a formal letter from Kyambogo University, Department of

Religious Studies, for permission to carry out this research. I formally talked to the leadership of the cultural institution, who in turn gave me another introductory letter to the different clan leaders as an approval to carry out this research in the Bamasaba community. I build rapport with my informants and convinced them to give information freely, as it would not be used for any other cause but write a book.

To assess Biblical circumcision, a qualitative design of Narrative Content Analysis method was adapted. The question asked is whether Imbalu as practiced among the Bamasaba can apply and practiced in the Christian community as an acceptable ritual, or whether the Christian community should rule against any form of continuation of this traditional rite or have it modified. Under Content Analysis, the research looked at biblical views on circumcision as it occurred in biblical times and established a valued evaluation of these aspects. Narrative Content Analysis applied to research on Biblical circumcision in the context of the Bamasaba Imbalu tradition, offered a proper way to examine the meaning and significance of circumcision as a cultural practice; its biblical roots and how the narrative surrounding it is constructed and interpreted in the context of both religious and cultural identity herein.

Themes, patterns and meaning of bible circumcision in relation to the contemporary Imbalu of the Bamasaba was undertaken. The research design of content analysis allowed room for the prospective dialogue between Imbalu and biblical circumcision respectively. Whereas ethnography design used interviews, observations, focus group discussions and documentary analysis, the narrative content analysis used narrative critical analysis to have African Bible Interpretation lens view both traditional culture and bible culture for appropriation of the study.

Through participant observation under this design, the researcher worked closely with the clan leaders and individuals recommended to offer necessary overview support in the specific clans especially during the ceremonial period of August and December 2022. Individuals were selected in consideration to their general vigilance, role and established rapport with the people. The study was set in five clans of the area of study and there was need for permission and acquaintance with the various clan leaders as I literally navigated through the clans in the two circumcision seasons; as a cross check to former experiences. The firsthand experience provided unique insights into the ritual's performance, symbolism, and social dynamics. These meant to understand the meanings, interpretations, and experiences of the ritual as well as the broader socio-cultural and historical factors that shaped those interpretations.

Concerning African Biblical Interpretation, the researcher aimed at interpreting biblical texts through an African cultural lens. The biblical circumcision texts such as Genesis 17:9-14 was viewed from an African context of Imbalu. This method emphasized the unique historical, social, and religious contexts of African communities, seeking to make biblical texts relevant to contemporary African experiences as the marginalized communities. Biblical texts were analyzed, interpreted to draw relevancies, contrasts and lessons to the Imbalu ritual. Genesis 17:9-14, 23-27 that describes the origins of biblical circumcision in the flesh; Exodus 4:24 brutality of circumcision; Joshua 5:9, circumcision of all the un-circumcised were analyzed. Then Deuteronomy 10:16, Jeremiah 4:4, Romans 2:28-29, Acts 15 and Mark 1:4-5 which present a second edition circumcision of the heart and a conscience-based ideology was engaged. Ethnography allows observation and documentation of this entire process, understanding how each part contributes to the whole. This aligns perfectly with the hermeneutic circle in the paradigm, of understanding the whole ritual through its parts and vice-versa.

3.4 Area of study

The study was carried out in the so called - Bugisu sub region of Eastern Uganda. The region constitutes the contemporary six districts of Mbale, Bududa, Manafwa, Namisindwa, Bulambuli and Sironko districts with Mbale city at the center. This area was chosen because it experiences a mandatory cultural practice of Imbalu throughout the whole region much as the intensity differs from one place to another. Intensity in this case refers to the strength, power or concentration of the ritual that differs from one district and clan to another. For the degree of intensity in Bududa is so high with associated practices flared up, while in Namisindwa it is low and mild, meanwhile Manafwa experiences average ceremonies.

The region is comprised of three lineages (*Tsinda*) namely; Be-Wa-Mwambu, Be-Wa-Mubuuya and Be-Wanale. These are the three alleged sons of ancestor Masaba (Mwambu, Mubuuya and Wanale). These constitute the 26 clans that make up the cultural institution of the Bamasaba institution (*Inzu' ya Masaba*). All these clans pay allegiance to the same ancestral descent under a common cultural site (*Bumutoto*) and elder (*Umukuka*) with a cultural cabinet of ministers that coordinate the affairs of the cultural institution.

Five clans out of the 26 clans were selected for study and these would be representative of their respective areas. These specific clans selected from all the three lineages, considered the degree of intensity in carrying out their ritual proceedings. Variations are eminent among the different clans as some clans are so zealous of the ritual, while others are casual and quite reluctant. These selected clans comprised of all categories; the zealous, the casual and mediocre in ritual performance. The first selected clan was of Bungokho-Mutoto from Wanale lineage. This clan was selected to represent Wanale lineage because the clan inhabits a historical place where Imbalu is inaugurated

every even year at Mutoto Cultural Centre. Bungokho-Mutoto was an effectual representation of the lineage as it portrays a high-scaled version in comparison to the other clans with quite trivial experiences in matters of ritual intensity in this lineage.

The second clan was Bumbo clan of Mubuuya selected out of the two clans situated along the Kenya Uganda border. It was selected because they circumcise their young at a much lower age as low as 12 years compared to other clans in the region. They use light gargets for the Imbalu dance, distinct from other clans. The clan represents a low mild/relaxed format, similar to their Bukusu neighbors across the Kenyan border. Their format is distinct and not widely spread in the Bugisu region. The third clan of Bulucheke was selected among the clans situated in the mountainous areas, at the slopes of Mt Elgon. In these clan candidates grow much older before getting on board for the Imbalu ceremony. They also use heavy gadgets placed on their thighs, heads and hands. These represent a high, extreme intensity of carrying out the ritual that is uncommon in the other clans.

The fourth clan selected was Buwagogo which undertakes an average practice, a mediocre type of Imbalu; higher than the second and below the third. All these three clans above belong to the same lineage of Mubuuya; but the differences in procedure is so distinct, ranging from low, average and high. This provides room for study to find out reasons for variation in intensity. On addition, the three areas where the three clans were selected, speak outstanding varied dialects of Lubuuya within Mubuuya. The reason for the variations and procedure becomes a fertile ground for research.

Lastly and fifthly, Buwalasi clan was selected as an effective representative of the Mwambu lineage. In this region, the ritual has rocketed to using modern gargets of the drum and candidates

decorated with beautiful linen, which is different from other clans in the two former lineages. The five clans were selected because of the different cultural reasons and they formed a distinctive area of study. These clans are also representative of the different districts of the Bugisu sub region.

3. 5 Study Population

The study concentrated purposively on the Bamasaba as an ethnic group in their different categories namely, initiates, parents, religious leaders, cabinet members of the cultural institution, clan leaders, community elders, opinion leaders, specialists and ritual leaders such as; surgeons, song leaders, beer blowers, smearers, black smiths, medicine men, fortune tellers and lastly Christian congregations. The study also targeted Health institutions, specifically District Health Offices, hospitals, health centers and an educational institution, which all together formed the study population.

Initiates were selected from both school going and non-schooling categories; those who underwent traditional format, clinical, or Christian, were all considered to provide views on the contentious ritual. These initiates were readily available and much interested in the discussions, and even willing to be recorded without queries. This group was reflective as they stood in both traditional culture and western or modern paradigms. They were able to provide their opinions on the two cultures that strengthened the thought line of this study. Queries of how traditional cultures affect life in general were discussed and fitted in the required responses of the study. The non-schooling initiates were predictably on the verge of creating families and undertaking community responsibilities as expected and required by society and their responses were significant in the study.

Male and hardly female parents were selected to provide information as interviewees given the patriarchal family systems and societal male chauvinism. Fathers are significant stakeholders in the cultural programming and celebrations of the Imbalu ritual. They determine the type of circumcision undertaken, they help prepare the initiates and plan for hosting the program. They therefore bear the budgets of the function on their shoulders. Parents stand at the center of the ritual and usually feel a great pinch both social-economically and psychologically. They would as such share their views and opinions on the general undertaking of the treasured ritual of Imbalu. Their responses were strengthened by observations and community stories spoken and shared.

Women voices were silent in interviews but openly audible, given the male centered nature of the ritual. While Imbalu is centrally about the transformation of boys into men, this is incomplete without the multi-faceted participation of women. Observation indicated women as active agents, moral guides, and cultural custodians in the name of mothers, sisters and dancers. Mothers, aunts, and grandmothers socialize children into the culture, through stories, songs, and proverbs, and they build anticipation and a sense of duty in their sons. During public festivities like dancing processions, celebrations, taking care of the initiates, their roles are highly visible, vocal and spectacular. Their comments and experiences were openly accessible for an ethnographer. I missed single headed families as sons were lost either in extended or maternal families.

I limited my scope to three main Christian denominations across the region that practice the Imbalu ritual and therefore their leaders targeted; these were Anglicans, Catholics and Pentecostals. Denominations vary in their responses to traditional rituals. For instance, Anglicans and Catholics prefer to serve both tradition and Christian faith; yet Anglicans are more inclined to faith than

tradition compared to the Catholics. Meanwhile, Pentecostals are faith bound, condemning tradition in almost every way.

Religious leaders selected from the Anglican Church targeted the Diocesan Bishop of Mbale and the retired Bishop of North Mbale Diocese, who served as a cabinet member on the cultural institution, but represented the Christian faith in the two northern districts of Bulambuli and Sironko. Then one archdeacon from a famous region of Bududa in culture affairs was chosen to provide deep information about faith and culture. These were chosen because they oversee the greater part of the church in the Bugisu region, and they are acquainted with the merits and demerits embedded in Imbalu. They are also knowledgeable of the written text and were able to relate Imbalu to bible circumcision, offering a platform for African Biblical Hermeneutics functionality.

From the Catholics faith, a Reverend priest was selected, who also served as a cabinet member in the cultural institution of *Inzu ya Masaba*. Catholics are quite silent about the big outcry of drunkenness associated with Imbalu, which is a big brawl to other faiths. They are at peace with alcohol and the habit is tolerated in this religious affiliation. Their Christian celebrations such as baptisms and weddings are graced with drinking celebrations. The leading priest sufficed to provide data on the traditional culture of Imbalu, Bible/Christian circumcision and the varied scholarly historical arguments concerning the ritual.

One Pentecostal Bishop in the Bugisu region was chosen to give Pentecostal views regarding Bamasaba Imbalu and Biblical circumcision concurrently. Pentecostals are charismatic Christians who hold scripture as the real word of God and have nothing to do with unscriptural events such as the Bamasaba Imbalu. They declare and subscribe to the working of the Holy Spirit and allege

that Imbalu rituals are a hindrance to spiritual revival in the region. This Bishop or overseer provided required data concerning their congregational views about the traditional Imbalu versus biblical circumcision. The results were representative, given the fact that the bible is their sole benchmark. During Imbalu inaugurations, prayers are said by overseers from different religious sects to reflect the inter-religious movement. This include Anglican Bishops or representatives, Catholic Priests, Bishops or senior pastors from the Pentecostal forum and a Sheikh from the Muslim sect. this points to ownership of the ceremony by all, but also a sign of cultural respect to faith issues. This makes the topic under study more critical as the two cultures move alongside each other.

Among the cabinet members of the cultural institution, I specifically selected *Umukuka* 11, as the overall of the cultural institution and the Minister of Culture and ethics. These two leaders had rich information about Bamasaba Imbalu and they were directly concerned with the cultural issues at Mutoto cultural center. *Umukuka* as the chief overseer of Bamasaba and their rituals had the responsibility to shape the Imbalu ritual to an expected level as stated in the Bamasaba cultural anthem. The responsibility to shape the ritual falls directly in the docket of Minister of Culture and ethics. The cultural institution generally coordinate issues of Imbalu administratively, with the Ugandan government and other cultural institutions elsewhere in Nigeria, Kenya and Bamasaba in diaspora. These provided information required and had records of the Imbalu ritual and its proceedings.

Five clan leaders heading the selected five clans were targeted because they represent their respective clans within the clans and without in the cultural institution. They oversee cultural activities in their localities as scheduled by the cultural council and implement the resolutions

decided on by the cultural council. They are custodians of information in their clans and their clansmen on cultural issues consult them. They convene clan meetings in cultural and social economic matters as need arises for the smooth running of their clans. Five clan leaders used in this study were that of Bungokho/Mutoto, Bumbo and Buwagogo, Bulucheke and Buwalasi clans respectively.

Three Community Elders, specifically those circumcised before the Ugandan independence were selected. These elders either witnessed or received first-hand information from their parents and their communities about the missionary adjustments of Imbalu. This group spoke about Imbalu *ye-bazungu* (Imbalu of missionaries) and Imbalu *Ingene* (real Imbalu) which was traditional and preferred by the Bamasaba. They were selected to supply data on the impact of colonialism on Imbalu and varying models in the olden times and in the contemporary society; which information was required in this study.

I also selected opinion leaders, enlightened men and quite knowledgeable about the Imbalu ritual, from both oral and scholarly work. They held very rich information on Imbalu and displayed an unquenchable interest in the ritual; and can be described as cultural diehards that speak for and advocate for maintained dynamics of Imbalu. They are highly educated and guarded with both historical and social economic information required in this study. Opinion leaders are ardent that the ritual is under attack and needs mitigation. They used both societal tales and scholarly work, including the Biblical information to present their arguments. They were purposively selected throughout the area of study to get information that was representative of the ritual in the region.

Ritual leaders were selected to provide information in their specific fields of expertise. These included Isonja trainers (*Batendekhi*), Song leaders (*Ba-Namyenya*), Beer blowers (*Bafuwi*) and

smearers (*Baakhi*). These are active participants in the ritual and take leadership roles at different times in the ritual proceedings as indicated below;

- ***Isonja* trainers (*Batendekhi Be-Sonja*)**

These men of age train intending candidates in innovative and excellent dance that rhymes with the musical tunes. It is an acquaintance exercise to get familiar with the new gears and outfits such as thigh bells (*Bitsentse*), head gears (*Bulubisi*). These have a rich knowledge of *Isonja* and its significance to the incoming generation and society.

- **Song leaders (*Ba-Namyenya*)**

These are men of innovation, talent and skill in formation of songs and rhymes. They lead songs and they are usually leaders of their specific dancing multitudes. They must be acquainted with family lineages, history of the clans and current affairs to bring out educative music. They constitute their music with exhortations, warnings and celebrations.

- **Smearers (*Baakhi*)**

These clansmen are selected to initiate the mantle of manhood to the incoming young lot of men. They are judged on their integral life in society, with the assumption that they contaminate the initiates with good and not bad. They smear the incoming with yeast (*Kamamela*), severally before circumcision takes place. Animal chime smeared to them by the one who offered the animal as a sign of commitment to the knife. Lastly, the sacred soil smeared at the sacred swamp by an acquainted leader in this field, as a last ritual to the courtyard to face the knife.

- **Beer Blowers**

After the sacred swamp, the blower takes over to direct the way of the initiate to the courtyard for circumcision. Blowing takes a specialized person, assumed to chase away the bad omen and ensure safety of the initiate up to the place of operation. Beer blowers are judged on their integrity in society; they should stand in a place of being upright and carry the audacity to scare and chase away undesirable disasters.

Apart from ritual leaders, traditional specialists in different cultural fields were purposively selected to provide information in their areas of specialty. These group included Surgeons (*Bakhebi*), Black smiths (*Ba-baasi*), Medicine men (*Ba-saawu*), and fortune-tellers (*Ba-booni*) as key stakeholders in the Imbalu ritual.

- **Surgeons (Ba-khebi)**

These are naturally skilled men girded with sharpened knives to cut off the foreskins of the males in society. They are *Bakhebi* for plural and *Umukhebi* for singular and they were selected to provide data concerning their adaptability to their work as surgeons. There is no formal training for *Bakhebi*, but they claim to be possessed by spiritual powers to do the Job. They provided information on the cultural objects in their custody especially on the appropriate usage of the circumcision knives. These were specifically men as women were exempted in the traditional setting. Though some women are impelled to do so, they are silenced with cultural actions such as holding the knife or cutting something like a cloth or being dressed with herb called '*Libombwe*' to arrest the promptings.

- **Black smiths and Craftsmen (*Ba-baasi & Ba - ruuka*)**

These are architects of some of the gadgets used in the Imbalu ritual. Black smiths do not receive any vocational training but they are skilled in making thigh shakers, headgears, hand bangles and circumcision knives from iron implements of several kinds. Observation shows that, specific clans are endowed with the art of blacksmithing, and find themselves carrying out this role with ease. Meanwhile craftsmen make head gears from the said Columbus monkeys, animal skin overthrows ‘*tsisumbati*’ worn by elders made from animal skin, calabashes ‘*tsisesi*’ for taking local beer. They make gourds for blowing beer and beads as dancing costumes made out of wild seeds. In the recent past, artisans have come up with an invention of the modern drum locally known as ‘*Kadodi*’, as a ritual catalyst.

- **Medicine-men (*Ba-saawu*)**

This group included both men and women that provided suitable treatment for life ailments including medicines for Imbalu associated disorders. Basic medicines provided in this ritual include, ‘*Ityang*’, herb that stirs up the boy’s appetite for Imbalu, ‘*Inguwu*’ herb applied to the wound and a calming herb of *libombwe* that is used on the fainting initiates. These medicinal herbs made by medicine-men, were served to the recipients as situation guaranteed. These provided information that enhanced the Imbalu ritual.

- **Fortune Tellers (*Ba-booni*)**

These are specialized in detecting situations by use of various frequencies, known to them. For instance, fortune-tellers examine the inner parts of a slaughtered animal and assess the findings in relation to the initiate. If the findings indicated a problem, then the elders present acted in haste to

mitigate the situation. Medicine men were contacted, surgeons informed and elders offered needed counsel as song leaders got into it with soothing and warning rhythms. These specialists work hand in hand for the success of the Imbalu ritual. These provided tangible information in their specific areas of involvement, which information was required in this study.

- **Institutional Interviewees**

The District Health Officer (DHO) of Mbale district to represent other DHO's in the region was interviewed. This officer had information on the contemporary reactions spearheaded by different groups, the health sector taking a key role. A DHO is a champion of health in the district and had the capacity to offer advice in matters of justified health in relation to the Imbalu and circumcision respectively. The senior surgeon in-charge of the main theater in Mbale Regional Referral Hospital (MRRH) was selected as a government referral unit that receives many Imbalu culprits and keeps health records required for this study. Bufumbo Health and Namatala Health center were selected because they are usually chosen to take on government health plans in the region, in as far as clinical circumcision was concerned.

A School head teacher of Bulucheke SS was purposively selected to provide information between Imbalu and the welfare of formal education. The head teacher would be representative of the rest of the head teachers in the area of study since all schools run according to the same regulations and programs, and the results would be representative. Secondly, Bulucheke SS lies in a region where the cultural ritual is so vigorous and highly celebrated. The targeted head teacher provided information relating to Imbalu and the welfare of the formal education as a banner to the futures of the learners. This would be subsidized with the learner's particular responses as initiates of the ritual. These responses were recorded and assessed accordingly. On addition, records of academic

results and success stories and their effects on the learners were availed by the school administration as data needed for this study.

3.6 Sample Size

The sample size constituted of 55 persons, composed of 10 initiates, 10 parents, 05 Religious leaders, 02 Cabinet Leaders of the Cultural institution, 05 Clan leaders, 03 Community Elders, 04 Opinion Leaders, 06 Traditional Specialists, 05 Ritual Leaders 04 Health Officers and Workers and a School administrator.

Table 1: Sample Size of Participants in Category and number

No	Group and Category	Method of Selection	Selected No.	Data Collection Method
01	Initiates	Purposive	10	Interviews
02	Parents	Purposive	10	Interviews
03	Religious leaders	Purposive	05	Interviews
04	Clan leaders	Purposive	05	Interviews
05	Leaders - Cultural institution	Purposive	02	Interviews
06	Community Elders	Purposive	03	Interviews
07	Opinion Leaders	Purposive	04	Interviews
08	Specialists	Purposive	06	Interviews
09	Ritual Leaders	Purposive & Snow ball	05	Interviews
10	District Health Office	Purposive	04	Interviews
11	School Administrator	Purposive	01	Interviews
	Total		55	

3.7 Sampling Methods and Techniques

This study engaged three sampling methods or techniques to gather data namely, purposive sampling and snowball sampling.

3.7.1 Purposive Sampling

I purposely selected individuals based on their potential to provide specific, relevant, and diverse perspectives related to my research questions. Selected informants were culturally, medically and biblically acquainted with knowledge on Imbalu and circumcision. These selection was based on their association and performance in this cultural ritual. I intentionally selected initiates and parents, who stand at the center and make up for the ritual. Senior religious leaders with special knowledge of the bible as well as culture. Community elders, given their long-lived experiences in culture but also with the colonial history. These would provide a balanced comparison between Imbalu and circumcision and provide a platform for Colonial intervention against Imbalu. Persons immersed in the ritual such as ritual leaders and specialists like surgeons, smearers, black-smiths were purposely selected to give their long-lived views.

Purposive sampling is used because my research questions entailed meaning and interpretation, not frequency or distribution. Participants needed to be accessed with specific knowledge and experience, to provide the needed data. This particular sampling allowed for the intentional inclusion of diverse viewpoints to build a robust, multi-faceted understanding. It took defining the participants, identifying specific criteria (roles, experiences) and then sought out individuals who represent the range of perspectives within those criteria.

3.7.2 Snowball sampling

Snowball is a strategy of using the known informant, linking you to other knowledgeable informants well known to him. This technique was so supportive in the process of gathering the required data, by using the known and familiar contacts as a stepping-stone to reach other significant informants previously unknown to me. This method was practical in dealing with cultural specialists in the region. The clan leader of Bumbo, whom I was well versed with, introduced me to the men in his clan that were in charge of the more sacred and secretive places. The clan leader of Buwagogo connected me to the medicine man and blacksmith of the clan, and the Black smith of Bungokho connected me to his fellow Blacksmith of Buwalasi clan, which helped to build a trusted network of participants. This trend was helpful as it unfolded itself to respondents with valuable information required for this study.

3.8 Data Collection Methods and Tools/Instruments

Data Collection Methods used in the research study included; Interviews, Observations, Focus group discussions, Documentary analysis, Photography and Recording, and Personal Experience as an ethnographer. Alongside the Data collection methods, there were tools or instruments used in this study to get the needed data. This included Interview guide, observation guide, a camera and a recorder used by the ethnographer.

3.8.1 Interviews and Interview guides

Interviews were not just a tool; but also my primary conduit into the inner world of my participants. Interviews allowed me to understand why and what it feels like to support or reject Imbalu. Interviews uncovers the personal narratives, emotions, spiritual conflicts, and resolutions that

constitute the "lived experience" of the ritual, thus. In other words paying specific attention to non-verbal communication and documentation in the study. It uncovers internalized postcolonial, construct meaning with the participants through dialogue, empower participant voices and be able to gather narrative data core for hermeneutical analysis

Both formal and informal interview methods were engaged, with formal context scheduled for 20 - 60 minutes. Some conversations were recorded on paper while others were audio-recorded. Semi-structured interview guide with a set of open-ended questions and themes to be covered was set, in accordance to the objectives of the study. These questions required explanatory answers, so the respondents explained themselves in accordance to the knowledge and the question asked. An orderly discussion was organized and open-ended questions offered free interface with the informants. However, freedom to follow interesting tangents, probe responses, and change of order so long as the information was serving the set objectives. This was perfect for exploring complex unclear cultural rites behind the scenes. This approach was beneficial in tracing the life history of the ritual: Particularly with elders, who exposed the evolution of Imbalu across their lifetime, providing a generational perspective on postcolonial change.

In-depth interviews with key stakeholders were crucial for understanding their perspectives, beliefs, and interpretations of the ritual in relation to Bible circumcision. Interviews also examined the influence of colonialism on the ritual and thus provided a platform for discussions on the significance and relevance of Imbalu ritual. These discussions shed light on how the ritual relates to broader issues of bodily integrity, cultural identity, social transformation, community cohesion, individual autonomy and how it communicates with the Christian community.

Informal interview guides were in form of casual conversations with mediocre groups of informants. However, the researcher had in mind the purpose of the study and asked questions in line with the general purpose of the study. Nannyonga, (2005) labels these interviews as “conversational interviews”. Conversational interviews were convenient as they portrayed casual interactions between the researcher and the respondents. These interviews equally applied best during moments of observation. The responses were more of reflex and done anywhere within the area of study, such as churches, schools, Mutoto kiosks and in people’s homes. The interactions were more conversational and assisted with guidelines to fetch the required information as attached in the appendix.

In interviews, I maintained appropriate eye contact, as direct constant eye contact with elders or authority can be challenging in the African setting. I occasionally looked away respectfully, meanwhile nodding slowly in approval and a sign of acceptance to the ongoing conversation. I allowed participants time to think and reflect to come up with profound insights. Meanwhile reading their non-verbal cues, for instance if a participant looked down or becomes quiet, then I could gently probe with a simpler question, or suitable comment, with a smile as a way maintaining the conversation but in line with the objectives. I got informed consent for recording, including audio recording, which captures the exact words, tone, pace, and emotion, allowing being fully present in the conversation instead of anxiously writing. Meanwhile brief jottings of key phrases or powerful quotes was done for later explanation and expansion. Both objective descriptions and reflective comments were recorded and analyzed, then information transcribed and coded as research data

3.8.2 Non-Participant Observation and Observation guides

Non-Participant observation was another method used in this study. I engaged in immersive fieldwork within the Bamasaba community to observe and analyze the events surrounding the Imbalu ritual. Specifically, December 2020, August and December 2022, and August 2024 were periods of formal observation as Imbalu unfolded progressively. Meanwhile observation and encountered experiences had been ongoing since time past. Four intentional seasons of Dec 2020 and 2022 and August 2022 and 2024, provided room for deliberate experiences used to cross check, information received over time. The potential events and places for observation formed a part of the participant observation guide as a key tool under this method.

Events observed were; *Isonja* dance, ongoing Imbalu dances during visits to different homes and places and the *Inemba* dance. Circumcision on the courtyard and the Post circumcision rituals of Purification (*Khusabisa*). Words of exhortation, warnings and ongoing conversations were carefully noted, and themes formulated in line with the study. Different spots and places, such as, *Isonja* grounds, Mutoto cultural center, Sacred swamps, Courtyards for circumcision spots and *Inemba* grounds were observed keenly. These locations had undeniable content of ingrained cultural symbols and therefore favorable to offer more distinctive evidence needed in this study.

In observation, the researcher captured the complexities of the ritual meanings, interpretations and explored the interplay between cultural practices and religious beliefs. This methodology facilitated a nuanced understanding of the ritual and its significance within the broader socio-cultural and historical context of the Bamasaba people. Information was keenly received, analyzed and fitted in the respective themes that facilitated the study.

3.8.3 Documentary Analysis Method

Under this method, three distinct documents related to Imbalu and circumcision in different respective fields were analyzed. The three documents were; the Provincial Rites of the Church of the Province of Uganda that describes Imbalu Christianized liturgically, the Bamasaba constitution that hint on the cherished Imbalu ritual and a response to the colonial responses to the Imbalu ritual and modern adaptations focusing on clinical circumcision that entails itself with the safe male voluntary circumcision for all males.

i) The Provincial Rites of the Church of the Province of Uganda

This Anglican Church document has amalgamated Christianity and traditional Imbalu. The church has come up with a Provincial Liturgy for traditional rites Imbalu inclusive. This document has Christianized Imbalu by replacing traditional singing with Christian Hymns and songs, spending quality time in form of worship, counseling, listening from various recognized speakers rather than tracing relatives. Then culminated by circumcision on the final day with the priest's blessing. The surgeon circumcises the candidates in the name of the father, the son and the Holy Spirit. The distinction between bible infant circumcision and Christian teen circumcision leaves a big gap for interrogation. Church of Uganda's position is to Christianize culture and free people's conscience from whatever curtails them.

ii) The Constitution of the Cultural Institution - Inzu Ya Masaba

Imbalu, circumcision of males of society, is largely wide-ranging in the cultural constitution of the cultural institution of *Inzu Ya Masaba*. One of the objectives of the constitution of the institution according to article 3.3 is to preserve, regulate and oversee the culture of circumcision among the

male Bamasaba. Article 3.12, *Inzu Ya Masaba* is customarily to administer a fund for the promotion of cultural development of the Bamasaba, Imbalu being at the center of it. The cultural institution is mandated to promote networking with other cultural institutions, ensure good working relations that will affect their cultural ceremonies positively, an issue mandated in the cultural anthem of the Bamasaba. The cultural house is to ensure a cultural streamlining of culture to suit the needs and expectations of the cultural people.

Apart from the 54 members of the general assembly, the institution has a cultural council, a Governing Board and a secretariat headed by the secretary general responsible for the administration of '*Inzu*' as stipulated in Article 7.5.1. Meanwhile, the Organizing/Publicity Secretary is responsible for mobilizing all Bamasaba to support and recognize the importance of Bamasaba culture for the well-being of Bamasaba communities. The organizing secretary elected by the constitution is the Master of Ceremonies at the official functions such as the inauguration of Imbalu ascribed in article 7.5.3. Imbalu ritual at the heart of Bamasaba peoples, and Mutoto at the heart of the Bamasaba community, celebrated and revered Imbalu mandatorily without compulsion.

Religious leaders pray, cabinet leaders draw the ritual program, clan leaders offer direction, specialists take on their specific roles, as parents, initiates and participants drive their ritual to the end. While visiting quests for instance, in the inauguration ceremonies of August 13 2024 at Mutoto cultural centre was witnessed by His Royal Majesty, the King of Nigeria, King of Waluya from Kenya, Paramount chief of the Aflao tradition in Ghana and Osei Tutu the King of the Asante. All these cultural leaders graced the inauguration, adding weight and excellence to the cultural ritual and the cultural institution.

iii. Church Missionary Society (CMS) and Imbalu of the Bamasaba (1890-1960)

This document presents an analysis of the portrayal and reaction of the Imbalu male circumcision ritual among the Bamasaba (Bagisu) of Eastern Uganda in the archives of the Church Missionary Society (CMS). The primary lens is to understand how the CMS used its textual and ideological power to construct Imbalu as a problem to be solved, and the consequences of that construction. The key documentary theme is a binary of heathen paganism versus Christian civilization. The 1908 field report from a CMS missionary in Mbale describes the ceremony as a hyperactive display, with a deafening noise, chaotic dancing and an immense physical suffering of the initiates. The language is saturated with words like primitive, disturbing; stripping of its cultural meaning and relevancy of the traditional ritual in a traditional setting.

Documentary analysis provides the historical, textual, and ideological context that grounds and enriches this ethnographic fieldwork. Documentary Analysis accesses the Historical and Colonial voices and encounters. The analysis visualized the Bible as a used document of power and resistance; and contextualizing cultural symbols and narratives. Triangulation strengthened the validity of the findings. Documents provided a second source of data against which the information from interviews and observations was re-checked.

3.8.4 Photographs, Recording and Recorder

I utilized clear pictures already taken by the Uganda Tourism Board of candidates, dancers, celebrations at Mutoto Cultural Centre and other significant incidences like *Isonja* dance. These pictures were used for emphasis and clarification of ideas concerning different rituals such as the packed Kadodi dance, exhortations of the candidates; all these helped in compilation and analysis

of data. Recorders were used as tools for getting emphatic shared information as data and a cross check of the already acquired information concerning this study.

I also used former -recorded materials produced by the Bamasaba Cultural Board, specifically from the years 2014 – 2024, a period of 10 years of information. The year 2014 was specifically a turning point in the Bamasaba culture, when *Umukuka* 1 handed over the cultural institution to the guardianship of the church by dramatically handing over the Keys of *Inzu ya Masaba* to the Bishop of Mbale Diocese. Therefore, the institution and its cherished ritual were handed over to the church. In the year 2018, a special seat of *Umukuka* was placed in the St Andrews Cathedral Church Mbale, as a sign of collaboration and Church ownership of the cultural practices. These makes the topic more relevant to come up with a most suitable model that accommodates even the Christian population in the Bamasaba traditional ritual.

The recorded materials were transcribed on paper in word format and the information received from one year would be re-checked with information from another year. Recordings included speeches by different state leaders, religious leaders and cabinet leaders especially during the inauguration of the Imbalu ritual. This enhanced my understanding of the proceedings and the significance of the ritual as cherished by the cultural fathers, examined and observed the trend of culture as a representation of tradition in its current state.

3.8.5 Personal Experiences

As a Mu-Masaba woman, who belong to Bamasaba community and affectionately treasure culture, my personal experience of over 45 years with the Imbalu ritual greatly informed the research method in this study. My maternal grandfather was a custodian of Imbalu gourd (*Uwesanda*),

which I occasionally interacted with. The different dilemmas I have met concerning the ritual have always prompted me to ask a number of questions pre this research; this has turned out as data suitable for the study. I have participated in the ritual since childhood and I therefore have a muted rich data with me. I grew up in Bubutu/Bumbo, worked in Bubulo Bungokho for 2 years; in Bududa/Bulucheke for 10 years, in Buwalasi for 7 years; interacting with the bare ritual of the Bamasaba. I married in Bumwoni and now staying in Bungokho, continuously enjoying the ritual proceedings. All these encounters have given me quite basic valid data in this research.

Supportably, different scholars assert that, “indigenous scholars’ knowledge is worth including in scholarly studies since it is knowledge acquired over a long period of time”. For this matter, a scholar with accumulated experience can be qualified as an informant who can even quote him or herself (Nannyonga 2002, 2005). For these reasons, my experiences qualify me as an ethnographer to supply data for the Imbalu proceedings needed in this study. Apart from being a traditionalist, I’m a staunch Christian, a secondary school teacher of Christian Religious Education and an ordained, priest of the Province of the Anglican Church of Uganda of Mbale Diocese. I have heard and observed controversies from my audiences concerning the traditional culture in effect to Christian living. As a bible teacher, I strongly believe the written text of the bible, and I have severally encountered interrogations about Imbalu and the church way of life. This has often challenged my Biblical appropriation of the ritual, and bargain a balanced spot to satisfy both cultural and Christian persons of this region.

Yet as an ethnographer, I bracketed myself to avoid preconceptions, biases, and prior assumptions as a way of minimizing the distortion of data interpretation. Bracketing in the sense that I deliberately set aside my former assumptions, beliefs, and preconceptions about the phenomenon.

I aimed at creating a space where the meanings of the Bamasaba can emerge on their own terms, rather than being filtered through my own framework. However, not as locking my biases away completely, but making them visible, both to myself and the reader, and be able to account for them. Prior the field research, I interrogated my biases and assumptions and wrote down the possible prompts. I cultivated a beginner's mind by asking questions, based on passive listening, then recorded the data fully and fairly and later analyzed. Conflicting ideas between the described and personal reflected data was re-checked from the informants for further analysis.

Given my long experiences of interaction with the Imbalu ritual, I was deliberate that other people's ideas were treated with utmost respect. Their ideas were essentially needed for an objective paper. Moreover, there was a lot more found to be operational behind the Imbalu scenes revealed in the research findings, unrevealed to me before. To ensure objectivity, I made sure that the accepted way of analyzing and presenting the collected data was followed. Data collected was coded and categorized according to the formulated themes; then analyzed, discussed and presented as research findings.

3.9 Data Analysis, Interpretation and Discussion

Data was collected in phases, purposively using interviews, observations and experiences. The samples were categorized into eleven groups namely; Initiates, Parents, Religious leaders, cabinet leaders, community elders, clan leaders, Ritual leaders, opinion leaders, traditional specialists, health workers and an educationalist. Data collected from them was coded and categorized under themes that arose from the most repeated responses. Gaps in interviews were supplemented by information from scholarly work. Some rituals were found to be emphatic in some places and taken lightly or even missing in other areas; while a few uniformly performed. The analysis brought out

a hierarchy of events in the intensity of their importance. Different stakeholders such as parents, surgeons, medicine men identified the significances of Imbalu and challenges embedded in it.

My field notes and interview transcripts were coded systematically to identify recurring themes to characterize the findings. Themes included transition into adulthood, Courage, Community, Ancestral Blessing, Conflict with Faith, Missionary Adjustments, Community Adaptations, Reclamation and Reconstruction. Thematic analysis used to analyze data in this study, was appropriate since common themes and patterns in the interviews were identified. Thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting, as a tool within qualitative data. I used it in a constructionist way, exploring how themes about Imbalu are constructed in a postcolonial context. It provided a systematic way to manage, organize, and extract meaning from this large, dataset and helps to move from descriptive observations to interpretive analysis, which connects to this broader postcolonial theme.

After categorization, the received data was presented and described accordingly. The discussion then based on the common themes placed under specific research questions as set in the consequent chapters. My ethnographic data expressed in rituals, stories, and symbols are the primary text; then brought into dialogue with the horizon of the Bible and postcolonial theory. Then ethnographic account weaved together, the description of the Imbalu ritual, direct narratives and participant voices, my reflexive commentary as a researcher and hermeneutical argument of Post-Coloniality.

3.10 Ethical Considerations for the Study of Imbalu and Post-Coloniality

In conducting research on the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba within the framework of post-colonial African Bible hermeneutics, it was imperative to uphold ethical considerations to ensure respect

for the cultural sensitivities and rights of the community. Firstly, obtaining informed consent from participants was paramount before the conversations to acquire the required data began. It involved providing clear and comprehensive information about the nature, purpose, and potential risks and benefits of the ritual, ensuring that participants understood their rights and could make voluntary and informed decisions about their participation, based on a clear understanding of the research. To ensure consent, I introduced myself to the participant(s) with all humility, introduced the topic and set an invitation for them to be participants in the interview process. I also explained the outcome of this interview in producing a document that entails an important part of Bamasaba heritage. Building trust and rapport with community members was essential, as it ensured confidentiality and anonymity to protect participants' privacy. They were assured that their identity would be kept confidential; even the audio recordings would be stored securely. Prior the interview, the respondents had to know and appreciate that their participation was voluntary. In case they had any questions, I would allow them ask and would respond accordingly. Meanwhile, verbal consent not written was used throughout this research process.

Cultural sensitivity and respect was significant; I distanced myself from information that participants or the community deemed inappropriate to share. I explicitly stated that I do not wish to violate any taboos or sacred trusts. Formal permission was sought not only from Kyambogo University but also from relevant cultural gatekeepers, such as the *Inzu Ya Masaba* (the cultural institution) and the local clan leaders. Their guidance was respected throughout the process. I committed to sharing the findings with the interested community members. I was willing to give back to the community where my expertise was required in the years 2018 to 2022, in a moderate circumcision model that amalgamated both traditional and Christian aspects, to cater for the Christian Bamasaba and economically strained persons.

Additionally, considering the deeply ingrained cultural significance of the Imbalu ritual, the researcher approached the community with respect, and sensitivity. Loosing temper was far away from the researcher, even when nagging comments were often thrown. I deliberately created a research mind-set shift earlier on that I would not look at comments as personal attack but as data and cultural communication. I had a support system that I would fall back to for comfort and rightful counsel. I established clear boundaries during the informed consent process, of what I can do and cannot do and observed it throughout the research. I was readily willing to express a simple, heartfelt apology that can repair any intended damages. Discipline was part of me as a good ethnographer, and I interpreted any friction as part of the rite of passage of my research journey.

The researcher navigated power dynamics carefully, recognizing and mitigating any potential for exploitation or coercion, particularly when working with marginalized groups within the ritual circles such as women and youths. So inclusive sampling was used, whereby the study intentionally included a diverse range of voices, often marginalized in historical and cultural narratives, including the voices of women, youth, and those who incidentally hold critical views about Imbalu; these voices were respected and treated with utmost appreciation.

Furthermore, ethical considerations extended beyond the immediate research context to encompass the dissemination and utilization of findings. The researcher upheld principles of cultural sensitivity and integrity in the interpretation and presentation of results. Avoiding misrepresentation or distortion of the community's beliefs, practices or experiences was at the center of the researcher's mind. The responsibility to contribute positively to the well-being of the community was key in the research that concern a cultural people. This was through sharing research findings in accessible formats, providing feedback and opportunities for community

engagement, or advocating for the recognition and preservation of indigenous cultural practices. This ethical research had a commitment to promote social justice, respect, empowerment and autonomy of the Bamasaba, recognizing their agency in shaping the research process and outcomes. Some stakeholders demanded payment before offering their responses, but this was amicably handled. Long journeys throughout the area of study was hectic but purpose safeguarded endurance until the end.

3.11 Ensuring Trustworthiness

To ensure trustworthiness of this qualitative study, I engaged the criteria of Credibility, Transferability, Dependability, and Confirmability. Credibility that is an internal validity ensured that the study accurately describes and interprets the experiences and realities of the participants. This was achieved through prolonged and persistent engagement, using multiple data sources, methods and theories to crosscheck my findings (triangulation). It demonstrated that the findings arise from the data and the participants' experiences, not from personal biases and preconceptions. I also engaged peer debriefing, where I occasionally discussed my findings, and dilemmas with other researchers, to challenge personal assumptions and interpretations, meanwhile, I continued to account for my influence on the research.

Transferability an external validity was achieved by providing a thick description that allows others to judge the applicability of the findings to another context. I described the phenomena's and their context in such rich, detailed, and granular terms that a reader can easily understand what it really means. This allowed them to adopt if the findings of my study can be transferred to another similar context. Meanwhile dependability (Reliability), stretched to imagine if another researcher repeated the study in context, and if they would find similar themes. To ensure this, I kept a record

of every step of my research process. This included interview transcripts, detailed field notes, copies of documents, data analysis records, potential themes, notes on how I advanced them, methodological notes, to help follow the process from raw data to conclusions and verify that it was systematic.

To ensure confirmability or objectivity, I did triangulation by using multiple sources of evidence to support a given theme. A record of findings were carefully kept and this would show how I arrived at the various interpretations and allow the reader to perceive if the conclusions are grounded in the data. It aimed at ensuring that the data is driving the conclusions, not the researcher. By implementing these strategies, the research moved from being a compelling story to a scholarly contribution, whose conclusion is derived from the data.

CHAPTER FOUR

HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL CONTEXT OF THE IMBALU RITUAL

4.0. Introduction

This chapter gives a description of the Bamasaba culture, which pivots around the Imbalu as a treasured ritual, which is a gist of the study. Before attempting to look into the cultural and historical contexts of the ritual, a prelude of the origins of the Bamasaba, as a people of the ritual, is essential. Both oral and written records indicate that the origins of the Imbalu ritual among the Bamasaba is intertwined with the origins of the Bamasaba as a people. Before undertaking on the ritual, it is justified to look at the ethnic group as a substantial pre-requisite, before presenting the findings related to the specific objectives of the study. The people preceded the ritual and cultivated both the cultures and rituals that aligned to the beliefs of their community. The origins specifying the different theories and notions that explain the roots, the language and the religious-social order of the ethnic group are trailed in detail. Then the pattern of culture in its cultural contexts and later historical as set in the first research question.

4.1 Origins of the Bamasaba

Divergent theories and explanations both within and without have been up to explain the emergence of this ethnic group. Oral myths and stories backed with written literature indicate two myths or theories of emergence. The Bamasaba also called the Bagisu, derive their origins from the said ancestors whose qualities and roots the ethnic group subscribe and labelled. On addition to the two main oral myths or fables that locally describe the origins, there are also external records

that attribute the origins to three main sources namely; Abyssinia (Ethiopia), Egypt, and West Africa (Nigeria), as indicated in the appendices.

4.1.1 Oral Ethnic Myths on the Origins of Bamasaba

Bamasaba also referred to as Bagisu, have allied myths that explain their emergence in their identity as the Bagisu or the Bamasaba. A few respondents aligned their history to Mwambu nicknamed Mugisu the son of Masaba, from whom their collective name ‘Bagisu’ is derived. The name Mugisu is alleged to be foreign, a nickname given to Mwambu by the warrior group of Masai for his outrageous courage. C. Siango clarifies how Mwambu reported to have rescued his herds of cattle single handedly, from the Masai who had captured them. In reward for his courage, the Masai gave him a bull called ‘*Ingisu*’ where the name Mugisu is coined, then Bugisu and Bagisu respectively (December 5, 2022). These forms the first myth to explain their emergence, which concur with written literatures of Were, 1982; Kibicho 2001 and Sibiya, 2014.

The term Kigisu derived from Mugisu is used to denote that which belongs to the Bagisu people. One can talk of Kigisu language, Kigisu music, Kigisu dances or Kigisu culture. The generic term Gisu (Gishu), has been used by scholars like Turner (1969, 1973), Suzette Heald (1982), to refer to the Bagisu people, their region, language, or culture. One community elder said that the word Kigisu has been watered down to mean local or non-important, increasing the community preference for being Bamasaba (December 1, 2022). Observation shows that, the ethnic group is captivated with anything of courage, and feel gorgeous identifying with Mwambu a hero of courage. This courage is to be manifest in the braving of the Imbalu Knife by the Bamasaba males. Nevertheless, Mwambu’s story is discredited within the community as referring to a single lineage, but not the complete ethnic clutch.

Majority of the respondents conformed to the myth that Bamasaba are descendants of Masaba the son of Mundu; which means a person in the Bantu languages. The pronoun 'Ba' means 'people of', so the name 'Ba-masaba' means 'people of Masaba', a label preferred by majority of the people. This tradition believes that Muntu (Mundu) was the first man to live on Mount Elgon, but as the population increased they moved down to the lower regions, although some say that it was the eruption of Mount Elgon, then an active volcano, that forced them to move downwards. Based on similarities in language and culture, scholars suggest that the Bagisu may have once been part of the people inhabiting the Nyanza region of Kenya (Beierle, 2004).

Beierle suggests that the ethnic group was first forced into the foothills of Mount Elgon by attacks of the Nandi. Two factors prevented them from expanding into the plains at this point: the continual raids by the Teso, and the fact that the land on the plains was less favorable for their type of agriculture. Expansion, therefore, was northward into the territory of the Sebei. Later, with the pacification of the area by Europeans, the Bagisu began to move down and settle on the plains (LaFontaine, 1959; Beierle, 2004). This myth is supported by several other myths of the Baganda and Basoga, including several independent writers concerning the Bamasaba origins.

The '*Mundu* and *Seera*' myth has so far remained the most popular ethnic folk story and foundational theory for explaining the origin of the Bamasaba; which also links the ethnic group to its popular ritual of Imbalu. The ancestor is said to have come out of a hole in the ground at the top of the mountain, an indication of might and power (Mulyanyuma 2nd, 2022). Other oral stories conceded that Mundu also referred to as 'Shindu' came from the direction of Ethiopia via Kenya's Rift Valley before settling on the Mt Elgon region. While others assert that Shindu to mean

‘something not well known’ came from the sky and transformed into Mundu concurring with Wangusa, 1987; Beierle, 2004 and Wawomola, 2009.

Tradition stories allege that Mundu and Seera produced two sons- Masaaba and Kundu, Masaba being a hunter while Kundu being a herdsman. Some informants allege that, Mundu, is the father of all the people all the way from Mt Masaba up to Buganda. They are all Bamasaba.... J. Musila and A. Mulyamyuma consented on this theory. “According to us Bamasaba, Mundu is the one who begot all people up to Buganda. From time immemorial in this particular region, we have always eaten the same food as our ancestor Mundu. These are millet, bananas, beans, yams and honey. We even speak similar languages with shared words and phrases. This group believe that Shindu who became Mundu, begot a son called Masaba, to whom the Bamasaba owe their name and origins (Decemer 1, 2022).

A. Mulyanyuma alleged that, Shindu was Kundu the second son of Mundu, who went down to Bukedi where he begot a man called Mukedi. Then he moved to Bunyolo (Bunyoro) where he begot Munyolo. On his return journey, he went to Buganda, around Kampala, where he begot Muganda, his last son. Thereafter he simply disappeared and believed that his grave never been identified. May be he was eaten by animals. This theory is seconded by Were, 1968 and Fontaine, 1959. The tale categorizes all the Bantu neighboring the Bamasaba to have emerged from the same source, displaying similarity in language but with divided lifestyles as linked to Masaba and Kundu (December 12, 2022).

Were agreeably, asserts that the Bagisu legends relate to the Baganda and Basoga clans that are traditionally associated with Kintu and the Mount Elgon origins. The Bagisu traditions pertaining to Kintu (or Shindu) strongly show that this man (Kintu) was the same person who later moved to

Busoga and then to Buganda, where he founded more lineages or families. Some mention is also made of his adventures in Bunyoro and Bukedi where he founded additional families. In this case the sources suggest that Kintu left Bugisu and travelled to Bunyoro through Bukedi; from Bunyoro moved to Buganda where he died or disappeared, having founded some new families.

The relevance of the Bagisu legends about Kintu in relation to the famous Kintu legends of the Baganda and Basoga, ally with the clans of the general area of Mount Elgon. One of the Buganda legends ascribe that, Kundu Masaba's brother married Nambi the daughter of 'Gulu' (god of heaven). Nambi's brother Walumbe (sickness) visited the couple and killed their children. Kundu popularly referred to as 'Kintu' moved southwards and became the ancestor of the Baganda (Were, 1968). In support, Namayanja (2013) presents the Baganda origin myths in the story of Kintu, considered as the "first man" and the ancestor of all Baganda. She narrates Kintu's journey from the east to the Buganda kingdom, where he establishes his rule. This gives an intimate blood relationship between the Baganda and Bamasaba as grandchildren of Masaba.

Were (1968) states that, "About thirteen or fourteen of the present clans of Baganda, claim to have come with Kintu the Baganda hero, who is credited with the centralization of the state. He is said to have originally come from the Mount Elgon region via either Bunyoro or Bugishu, Budama and Busoga. The Basoga specifically claim that, their original settlers were later joined 'by others from the Mount Elgon area, led by either Kintu or Mukama, who eventually crossed over into Bunyoro. To date Bamasaba have a saying that whoever is fearful of the circumcision knife should migrate to Bunyoro. An elder Siango said that, Bunyoro is preferred for a wallop because it is the most distant Bantu society, suitable for a hide out as the cultural hand searches out to circumcise the uncircumcised members of society (December 5, 2022). Bamasaba

cultural conformists' attribute the disappearance of Kundu, later known as Kintu to the fear of the 'circumcision knife' that had been introduced by his brother Masaba. After perceiving that Masaba his elder brother had circumcised, Kundu was so terrified that he moved westwards and disappeared never to be seen again.

To this day, Kintu is claimed to be the ancestor of the Baganda, tales that apparently agree with the Bagisu and Busoga fables. The hypothesis based on the Baganda and Basoga traditions, is broadly confirmed by the oral sources of the Bagisu. The Bagisu legends are a superb example of the far to which the crosschecking mechanism can be effective to studies based on oral tradition, such as the case under study. Therefore, the relatively better known as Baganda-Basoga traditions become an anchor in their attempts to understand the Kintu phenomenon in Ugandan history and in a way give a platform for the history of the Bamasaba, seconded by several writers such as Were, 1969. The Baganda tales attribute the foundation of their kingdom Buganda to a foreigner who came from the East in search of greener pastures for his cow. He reached Lake Muwawa, which is the present-day Lake Victoria and settled there, which later became the core of Buganda.

These myths are deeply imbued with themes of human agency, the role of the divine, moral order, and the creation of political institutions, which are quite visible up to date. Namayanja (2013) suggested that, original myths serve not just as stories of the past, but also as tools of cultural reinforcement and identity construction. They literally help the communities to define their place in the world, especially in relation to their neighbors. These myths also serve as foundational narratives that guide social behavior, political organization, and cultural practices, in form of social norms, moral codes, and leadership ideologies.

In the Baganda and Bagisu myths, the figures of Kintu and Masaba are also, symbols of the ideal leadership, both divine and human, mandated to maintaining balance and societal order. Even in modern Uganda, these myths continue to hold significance, influencing cultural events, societal norms, and political discourse. The paper suggests that understanding these myths can also help in appreciating how myths function as a social adhesive, particularly in how communities maintain their collective identity in the face of globalization and modern political challenges (Namayanja, 2013).

The community elders narrated that, Masaba the son of Mundu was so pre occupied with his hunting expeditions at the mountain so much so that the mountain renamed after him as “Mount Masaba”, to which the cultural group proudly ascribes their identity as ‘Bamasaba’. A Mulyanyuma asserts that although the Gisu call themselves Ba-Masaba, Masaba being their reference for Mount Elgon, the term commonly refers to all the people living on this mountain. My findings showed that some Sabinyas from Sebei share in the name of Masaba that is associated with Mount Masaba for their dwelling. The word Masaba traditionally refers to mean a mountain and this group refer to themselves as a people of the mountains.

Bamasaba Community stories are narrated that Kundu’s brother Masaba married Nabarwa a Kalenjin and they produced three sons namely; - Mwambu, Mubuyya and Wanale and one daughter called Nakuti. The three sons of Masaba form the three major ancestral lineages locally known as *Tsinda*. *Tsinda* is plural and *inda* in its singular, which in the literal Lumasaba language means ancestry, descent or lineages. The three lineages (*tsinda tsitaru*) of Bamasaba constitute the 26 clans that make up the cultural institution of the Bamasaba. These 26 clans are much

pronounced that even in Mutoto cultural center, 26 homes are established in reverence of the different clans.

Beierle asserts that, less was known of the inhabitants of Mount Elgon before the 1890s when the first European-Gisu contacts took place. It is supposed that the Arab and Swahili trade routes passed through the Gisu territory long before the late nineteenth century; however, no contact was made because of the fear of the viciousness of the Bagisu. History records that by 1900, a party of Baganda, led by Semei Kakungulu, was sent under British authority to pacify the eastern province of Uganda, the Bagisu region inclusive. By 1905, the region came under effective British control, although periodic resistances seldom erupted against the Baganda who took over control of the area until 1910.

It is recorded that, in 1913 Bagisu chiefs were appointed as junior administrative agents replacing the Baganda, although senior administrators were still Baganda at least until 1934 when the last Baganda agent retired. Bugisu was officially declared a separate district in 1923, with its headquarters located at Bubulo and then subsequently moved to Mbale. Bugisu was united with Bukedi District in 1941, but retained its own District Native Court and Native Administration Treasury. In later years, Pallisa and Bugwere were added to the district, which then was known as Mbale District. It was administered as Mbale District until 1954, when it was further divided into Bukedi and Bugisu Districts (LA-Fontaine, 1959; Beierle, 2004).

4.1.2 Historical Migrations of the Bamasaba

Apart from the traditional Myths, there are three main external alternatives to explain the migration waves in history concerning the origins and spread of the Bamasaba. Hypothesizing this statement,

with the three main sources of Abbysinia (Ethiopia), Egypt (Misiri), and West Africa – Nigeria, findings attached the migrations mainly to Ethiopia, then to Egypt, and hardly to West Africa, while the majority were not acquainted with the historical migrations. Enlightened Bamasaba attributed this claim to mainly two theories that link the Bamasaba to Ethiopia and Egypt but hardly to West Africa. The Bamasaba have a mystery of being linked to the Biblical Jews, given the shared mystery of circumcision; and this mystery is shared by both Egypt and Ethiopia, subscribing their influence to Jewish circumcision.

Bamasaba generally assume a link to the Ethiopian Jews and anything Jewish, animates them. Egypt is considered as a possibility of their cradle-land because of the presence of Jews in the land times back in history. The sect of the ‘Bayudaya’ – Jews, situated at the immediate slopes of Mt Elgon, at the Semei Kakungulu hill, claim Jewish origins. They assert their emergence from the Ethiopian Jews and their life and Circumcision based on the observance of Biblical Judaism. How far this idea is true, calls for a deliberate research to ascertain the connection between the Bamasaba and the Bible Jews. The Bible presents a calm practice, a calmness encouraged by the colonial missionary, as opposed to the elaborate ritual of the Bamasaba.

Traditions carried over generations also point to Egypt (Misiri) as the traditional cradle land where several dispersions took place. The theory suggests that the Bantu peoples may have descended from or been influenced by ancient Egyptian civilizations. It proposes that migrations from the Nile Valley and surrounding regions contributed to the spread of Bantu-speaking populations throughout Central, East, and Southern Africa driven by a variety of factors including agricultural expansion, population pressure, and environmental changes (Diop, 1974; Were, 1982; Bernal, 1987-2006).

Bantu is a common term used to refer to over 400 different ethnic groups of Africa stretching from south of the Sahara Desert to South Africa with similar languages, Bamasaba inclusive. This popular version shows that they originated from present-day Egypt, migrating downward gradually into the East as far as southern Africa. It is said that by 1500 BC they had reached the great Central African rainforest. By 1000 B.C, a major new population epicenter was near the Great Lakes of East Africa (Scott, 1998; Lima, 2004). These people got the name 'Bantu' because of the similarities noticed in their languages. La-Fontaine (1959) asserts that, the plural prefix "ba" preceding the tribal name means "people"; the prefix "bu" refers to their "country"; while "lu" preceding the name refers to their "language" (Were, 1971; Maret, 2022). For example, Ba-masaba are a people, Bu-masaba refers to their land and their culture, while Lu-masaba to their language.

Were (1977) links Bamasaba to the Bantu speaking people who live in Eastern Uganda, that are connected to the larger Bantu migration patterns. Ethnographic and linguistic studies suggest that their migration into what is now Uganda occurred over several centuries before settling in the mountainous regions of Eastern Uganda. Nabudere (2010) offers a central context for understanding the Bamasaba people within the wider Bantu historical account. He traces the roots and routes of the Bantu migrations to Cameroon, which began around 1000 BCE and continued over centuries. The migrations were influential in spreading Bantu languages, their culture, and agricultural practices across a considerable portion of Sub-Saharan Africa.

Meanwhile Ehret (1999) asserts that by the first millennium, the ancestors of the Bamasaba originally came from Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and proceeded to settle on Mount Elgon. They were established in the area between the Kavirondo Gulf and Mount Elgon, and are said to have spoken a language related (but not identical) to Kalenjin but had vital contacts with the ancestors of the

Bagisu and Abaluyia. Newman (1995) supportably states that, Bamasaba came from Abyssinia where they migrated in different directions. They travelled through Ngai in Narok Kenya, where the Barwa Basebe live, went to Elgeyo in Kitale in Kenya. It was from there that they separated into a number of groups and travelled towards Mount Elgon, approaching it from the northern and southward.

Else (1998), likewise asserts that, the Bagisu originally occupied the plains around Mt. Elgon, as far as Abbysinia. Then they later moved to its slopes around the 16th century BC due to the attacks from the Maasai and Nandi tribes. Moreover, during the early years of colonialism, the tribe moved further north at the immediate slopes of Mt Elgon due to land constraints. This movement further sparked off territory conflict with the Sebei tribe, as recorded in history and retold among the Bamasaba folk stories.

Were (1971) considers that, the traditional evidence in the Bugisu region suggests that Bugisu was peopled from various territories. Evidence shows that the early immigrants into Elgon area, who gave birth to the Bagisu clans, were non-Bantu, especially the Nandi who came from the north in Ethiopia. Were (1982) however suggests that, the Bagisu were created and firmly established on Mount Elgon. This would seem to suggest that at least a section of the Bagisu have lived in the Elgon area for a considerable length of time. He describes the Bagisu as a heterogeneous community in whose veins flows Pygmoid, Bantu, Kalenjin, Ethiopian, and most probably Maasai blood.

Another theory is the westward dispersion of the Bantu-speaking peoples from the regions of the Cameroon Highlands and Nigeria. Ehret (2002), in his works, discusses the Bantu migrations and their spread across much of sub-Saharan Africa. He traces the movement of Bantu-speaking

peoples, often identifying the areas around the Cameroon Highlands as key regions for the initial expansion, eventually reaching West, Central, and Southern Africa. This significant historical and cultural migration took place over several centuries, starting around 1000 BCE to 1000 CE. This Bantu migration is believed to have begun in the area of modern-day Nigeria and Cameroon (Jordan (1986).

Jordan (1986) presents evidence from linguistic, archaeological, and genetic data that supports a migration path originating in the highland regions of Cameroon and spreading out through the forests and savannas of Central and West Africa. The first phase involved smaller groups migrating southwards and eastwards, around (1000 BCE - 500 CE). Environmental changes and population pressures likely influenced this movement. During the period (500 CE - 1000 CE), the expansion is said to have accelerated significantly. As they moved south into central Africa and further towards the east coast, they encountered and interacted with various indigenous groups. By around 1000 CE, many Bantu groups began to disperse westward into regions such as present-day Gabon, Angola, and the Congo Basin (Ehret, 2002).

Scholars consider the early Bantu communities as primarily farmers, and their agricultural methods enabled them to support larger populations (Jordan, 1986; Suzette, 1984). They assert that their migrations were often associated with the spread of agricultural practices, ironworking technology, and language. Therefore, they settled in various regions, adapting to different ecological zones, including forest and savannah areas. The Bantu crops included millet and yams, and the introduction of iron tools, which enhanced their farming efficiency. Ehret (2002) asserts that, their movements were driven by search for new arable land, trade opportunities, and social dynamics within Bantu societies. Culturally as they migrated, they brought with them their languages,

agricultural practices, and social structures, which significantly influenced the regions they settled in. This resulted in the establishment of vibrant cultures and communities across a vast region of sub-Saharan Africa, shaping the continent's demographic and cultural landscape (Ehret, 2002; Jordan, 1986; Laigle, 1997).

4.1.3 Three Lineages of the Bamasaba

Tradition has settled for three lineages that emerge from the three alleged sons of Masaba namely; Mwambu, Mubuuuya and Wanale. Inda ya Mwambu the first-born of Masaba constitute the nine clans settled in the north at the immediate slopes of Mt Masaba; popularly known as *Bewa – Mwambu*, which means ‘Of Mwambu’ or ‘Who belong to Mwambu’. These constitute majority of the Bamasaba found in the geographical present-day districts of Sironko and Bulambuli. Elders in the community ascribed this lineage be referred to as Bagisu, as they emerge from their direct ancestor Mwambu, who got a nickname Mugisu for his courage. This group is locally referred to as ‘*Badadiri*’ emerging from the large sub-county of Budadiri. D. Muzei, an elder from Buwalasi clan said that, the name Badadiri derived from their character of *Khu-dadira*, which means being forceful which is characteristic of this group. The nine sons of Mwambu are, Muwalasi, Muyobo, Musulani, Masifwa, Muhugu, Mulago, Muluganya, Muginyanya, Muyembe and Munambutye.

Inda ya Mubuuuya the second son of Masaba constitute another nine clans of the 26 clans of the Bamasaba. These are Muwagogo, Mugobero, Mutilu, Mubutu, Mumbo, Wabwala, Mududa, Mukigai and Mlutsekhe. Elders allege that Mubuuuya progressed southwards and became the ancestor of the people in the south and southeast, popularly referred to as Ba-buuya. Ba-buuya occupy the three current districts of Bududa, Manafwa and Namisindwa. Observation however shows that Babuuya migrated widely and mixed up with other lineages found in places like

Sironko, lower Bulambuli and some parts of Mbale district. Nevertheless, they remained intact as a separate people without mingling or absorbed by the people they came to.

The Bukusu are also a Bantu - people that stay across the Uganda Kenya border, whose customs are similar to those of the Bamasaba, popularly referred to as the Bamasaba across the boarder. Testimonies from the Bamasaba interviewed, reveal that the Bukusu or Babukusu are children of Mubuyya and fully belong to the different nine clans. Umukuuka 11 said that the Bukusu merely separated from the Bagisu by the colonialists at the turn of the nineteenth century, imposing colonial boundaries (Naleera, 2003). The Bukusu are vigilant in imbalu schedules, crossing over to participate in inaugurations every circumcision year. They are children of Mubuya well aware of the clans to which they belong. They return to simply fall back into their respective clans. In the Bamasaba constitution, article 4.1, five (05) Bukusu representatives are selected to be part of the General assembly, an organ of the *Inzu Ya Masaba*.

Then Wanale the last born of Masaba is associated with eight clans found in the central part of Mbale. They include the Bamasaba of central Mbale and the surrounding areas such as Busoba, Busyiende; Bukonde and Bungokho. Wanale bore Mungokho-Mutoto, Mungokho – Nambale, Wanale, Musoba, Musiu, Musiende, Mukonde and Munakaloke. They constitute the main district of Mbale, the mother district of the rest of the districts in the Bugisu sub region, including the region occupied by Mbale city. Wanale the last-born and Mungokho the last born of Wanale, with freshness of energies, are fronted to spark off Imbalu each year. A selected number of boys from this clan are circumcised at the cultural center of Mutoto; then the ritual flagged off to other clans as scheduled by the cultural leadership in accordance to the order of the different clans.

Table 2: Twenty-Six Clans of the Bamasaba

	MWAMBU LINEAGE – 9 CLANS	MUBUUYA LINEAGE – 9 CLANS	WANALE LINEAGE – 8 CLANS
Area	Sironko & Bulambuli Districts	Bududa, Manafwa & Namisindwa Districts	Mbale District and Mbale City
01	Ba-walasi	Ba-wagogo	Ba- bangokho – Ba-mutoto
02	Ba-yobo	Ba-gobero	Ba- bangokho – Nambale
03	Ba-sulani	Ba-tiru	Wanale
04	Ba-masifwa	Ba-butu	Ba-soba
05	Ba-hugu	Ba- mumbo	Ba- siu
06	Ba-lago/Buluganya	Ba-wabwala	Ba-siende
07	Ba-ginyanya	Ba-duda	Ba-konde
08	Muyembe	Ba-kigai	Ba-Nakaloke
09	Ba-nambutye	Ba-lutsekhe	

These names of places are derived from the sons of the different lineages and consequent clans, for example, Muwalasi, gave way to Bawalasi that stay in Buwalasi. Mugobelo gave birth to Bagobelo staying in Bugobelo respectively.

Incidentally, these clans have become major administrative centers that of late have been the ascribed sub counties or *tsi-gombolola* as locally titled. Apart from the recent subdivisions of tsi-gombolola into smaller units, the clans as major administrative centers meant a lot to the local people and their authorities. Umukuka Mushikori 11 alleged that the administrative centers silently announced the kinsmanship of the people in their settlements, as members of the same lineage.

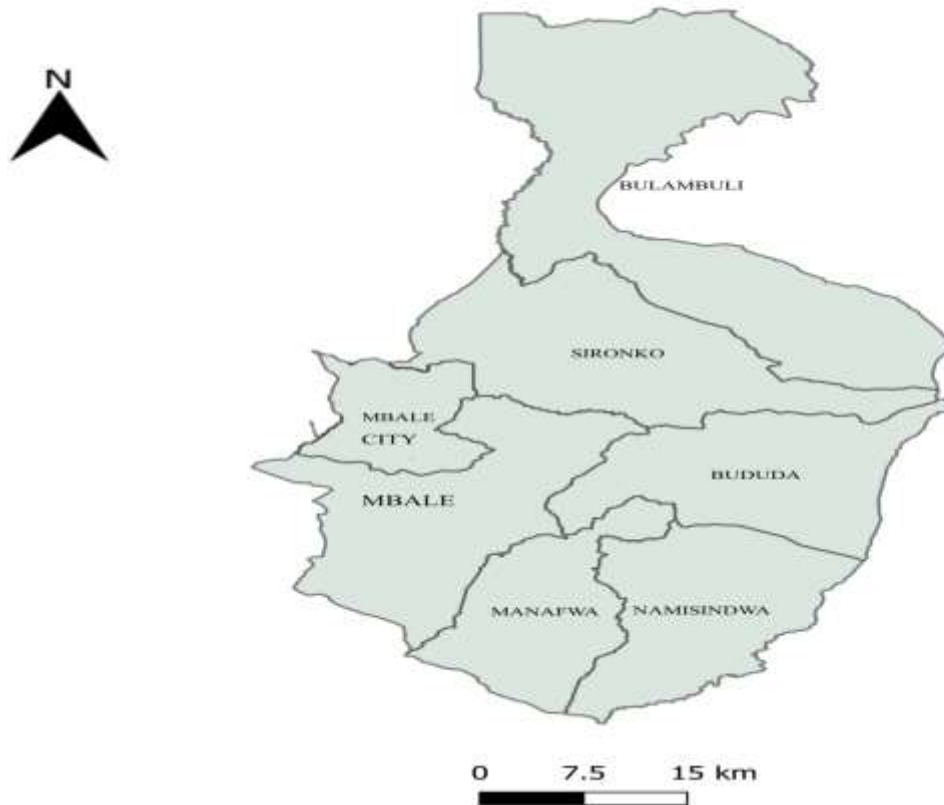
Figure 3: The Three Different Lineages of the Bamasaba



4.1.4 The Six Districts of the Bugisu Sub Region

Sub counties in turn constitute the six districts of Namisindwa, Manafwa, Bududa, Mbale, Sironko and Bulambuli districts collectively known as the ‘Bugisu Sub Region’. This kind of arrangement has continued, with the administration based on clan leadership. Even when contemporary leadership of LC’s was instituted, the Bamasaba old clan system of ‘Bukuka’ remained prominent and forth going, having the new administration blended in their former and ensured clan stability under their clan leaders.

Figure 4: Six Districts of the Bugisu Sub-Region



The Sabiny (Kapchworwa) to the north and the Bukusu (Kenya) to the east neighbor the Bugisu sub region. These two neighbors are referred to as men (*basani*) because they too undertake circumcision. While the Iteso in the West, the Karamajongs in the Northwest, and Japadhola in the Southwest along with the Bagwere and Banyoli in the South, are considered insignificant persons in the opinion of the Bamasaba; whether young or old because they do not undertake the circumcision ritual (Smith, 1968; Russell, 1975; Khamalwa, 2018).

Figure 5: Bugisu Sub-Region and Her Neighbours



Apart from the six districts in their given places of occupation, including Mbale city, Bamasaba due to various reasons have migrated to other parts of the country. They have settled in batches in Bugwere land, areas of Nakaloke, Kolonyi and Kabwangasi. In Busoga, Buganda, Teso, Sebei, Buikwe, Bukwa and he like. In agreement, La-Fontaine reports that, the census estimate in 1948 gave a figure of some 243,742 adult Bagisu men and women, of which 20,000 lived outside Bugisu District particularly in the Ugandan districts of Busoga, Buganda, and Teso, with small pockets of Bagisu living among the Sebei, chiefly in the Sipi and Bukwa areas. J Malemo and W Kunyu, described themselves as Bamasaba of Kayunga and enjoy transiting their young into manhood in the elaborate cultural ritual of Imbalu.

Immigrants assert that lots of Bamasaba in the different regions adhere to Imbalu. The Bamasaba in Kayunga, Tororo, Pallisa, Iganga and other places find themselves, sprouting out in their celebrations as the scheduled seasons for the Imbalu come forth. In some places, it has turned out as a cultural Galla or a tourist attraction to the people who enjoy watching and supporting the ritual. In 2018, following the landslides that killed and destabilized people in Bududa district, the government of Uganda resettled the victims in Kiryandongo district, in western Uganda. Umukuka 11 informed the masses that the Bamasaba in Kiryandongo were well settled alongside their heritage of Imbalu. “The ceremony is respected in the land, and purely supported by the local people, who were amazed of an entertaining ritual in their region” (December 6, 2020). It is alluded that whenever the Bamasaba trek, they carry along their cultural package. It is a general lifestyle, inseparable of the ethnic group.

It is in agreement with article 2.0 of the institution constitution that states, “All Bamasaba wherever they may be shall be members of the INZU and shall be represented through the 26 clans. This include the Bamasaba clan in Kenya ‘Babukusu’ (Bamasaba Be Kenya) and their descendants in the Diaspora who belong to the same clans. Therefore, wherever the Bamasaba are, they remain attached to their specific clans and submit to the leadership of the clan and the entire Bumasaba culture respectively.

4.2 The Social-Religious Setting of the Bamasaba Peoples of Uganda

The Bamasaba are a part of the Bantu - people widely spread across Africa. Their Bantu neighboring peoples include the Banyole, Bagwere, Samia, Baganda, Basoga and the like, but the Bamasaba stand out uniquely as a mandatory enthusiastic male circumcising group. D, Gimadu described them as a retaliating and proud people because of the undoubted uniqueness of their

cultural practice. Retaliating in the sense that they wish others to experience the very ruthlessness they themselves experienced. They count it joy when others go through the pain they themselves underwent at some point; expressed in the idea that society males must undergo the Imbalu ritual just like anyone else does (December 11, 2020).

Beierle considers the Bagisu to have a reputation for violence, while Heald 1989, describes them as a people quick to anger, making brawls frequent in the society. Observation however, shows that Bagisu men are quick to defend their circumcised state and in a way demonstrate their braveness and distinct maleness to the public. Umukuka 11 said that, Imbalu scales males among the Bamasaba to a place of superiority. This explains the art of male chauvinism in the region, as the aim of Imbalu, is to prepare and sharpen men into first class members of society.

Socially the Bamasaba lineage system is constructed on patrilineal descent based on the Father's descent. The father is the head of the home, the children and family properties all belong to the father for biological paternity, which is outright and unchallengeable. The fathers belong to smaller clans that are dependent on each other, locally known as '*Bikuka pl 'sikuka sg*' (Turner V, 1969, 1973 and Heald, S.1982). Bamasaba are a decentralized state based on different elders (*Bakuka*), presiding over smaller lineages within the different clan(s).

The Baganda who came as forerunners of the colonialists into the land of the Bamasaba, established their administrative units and systems in the areas of their advent. In his unpublished work (1980), J. Mungoma states that, Bamasaba administered their areas from bottom to top in extended families, *Bikuka* (clans), followed by *Butongole* (sub-parishes), then *Kimilukha* (Parihes), *Tsigombolola* (sub counties) and *Kamasaza* (counties), prevailed over by the secretary general as influenced by the Baganda chiefs. The secretary general, the treasurer and the Chief

Judge, were under the District Commissioner, who reported to the provincial Commissioner, accountable to the governor and eventually answerable to the queen of England. To ensure selective recruitment of more Protestants, the Bishop of the upper Nile was involved in the administration and consulted on matters of religion and recruitment (J, Mungoma, 1980).

J. Mungoma writes that, after independence the 1962 constitution allowed institution of kingdoms and cultural societies to choose their leaders who would in turn be eligible to vote for the prime minister of Uganda. The Sebei chose their Kingo, the Banyoli chose their Ssenkulu as the Bagisu chose their Umuhinga (King) Jonathan Buyi Mungoma, who had been a member of Legislative council (Legco), as the first Umuhinga of the Bamasaba from 1963-1967. This was short lived with another constitution made in 1967, and Uganda made a republic and Kingdoms banned from operation. Meanwhile cultural and traditional settings were encouraged to date.

The government of Uganda, led by President Yoweri K. Museveni encouraged traditional and cultural leadership in the 1995 constitution. In 1997, B. Washitwaya imposed himself as the leader of the Bamasaba but lacked support from the societal opinion leaders and instead caused confusion. Meanwhile the Bamasaba looked to their former Umuhinga as their tentative leader. In 2010 as stipulated in the constitution, the Bamasaba came up with Umukuka 1, His Highness Umukuka Weasa Wilson Wamimbi from Wanale lineage as the first Umukuka of the Bamasaba. C, Mungoma, an elder son to J, Mungoma said that, they could not have a king because it was clear that Bamasaba were not a Kingship, they simply needed an elected honorable elder to guide the institution and the community.

The idea of Umukuuka in operation as a central ethnic leader is therefore a contemporary cultural, political and economic venture. Concerning his election, article 8.2.2, clarifies that a committee

for the general assembly, makes wide and through consultations with all the Bamasaba clans and come up with the list of potential candidates and their qualifications and forward it to the cultural council. The council shortlists the candidates and make recommendations and submit to the general assembly for election. The candidate, who gets majority of votes, is declared winner and assumes the office of Umukuuka. This was done to promote the cultural heritage of the Bamasaba and their identity.

In his condolence letter to the cultural institution for loosing Umuhinga, Jonathan Buyi Mungoma in 2003, the President of Uganda stated that,

“A people without a culture are a people without a soul. Institutions like this of the Umuhinga, formal or informal help our communities to retain their souls. To lose one’s identity is a very serious matter and those who lose it, spend most of their time seeking its recovery. When traditional leaders were revived in 1995 constitution, some communities opted to have them back officially. The Bagisu on the other hand, decided to recognize their King informally as they had never lost him.”

C, Mungoma observes that the statements of the president woke up the Bamasaba to a formal institution. The government pledged full support of cultural institutions, and this explains the ongoing tension in choosing Umukuka, because everyone strives to enjoy the juicy benefits attached to the seat; but also tap into ethnic honors and government privileges directed towards cultural groups. Evidence shows that in the cultural institutions held in Mutoto every circumcision year, the government generously supports the scheduled institutional activities. These signals to a seat that is not only cultural and societal but ear marked by government. Umukuka as a cultural leader is visible and audible, thus strengthening the cultural setting within the nation.

Bamasaba have organized their *Bukuka* in a five years term of office rotationally, across the three different lineages - article 8.3. The first official Umukuka 1 Hon Weasa Wamimbi from Wanale lineage, Umukuka 11 Hon Mushikori from Muubuya lineage, and the current Umukuka 111, the Hon Mudooma from Mwambu lineage, and the cycle continues. C. Mungoma explains that, this rotational arrangement holds the Bamasaba in solid unity and remain accountable to one another. The prospects of the Bamasaba as a circumcising community with their culture is scaling higher both administratively and economically, he added. The general secretary for the institution mentioned that, proposals including advocacy for helping the newly circumcised in form of treatment and welfare is progressing well. This is to heighten and beef up the community cultural ritual consequently.

Religiously, the Bamasaba hold a religious worldview of ancestor worship, that represent a god who is a far off called '*Wele Khabumbi*' - God creator. Under *Khabumbi* creator, exist other departmental gods such as *Weele Nabende* – god of rain, *Weele Matsaakha* – god of the forest who is in charge of the sacred societal spots. J, Musila said that, the Bamasaba also believed in divine spirits that operated under these phenomenal gods such as the Imbalu spirit. The most popular revered being the *Nabarwa* spirit, by having all males mandatorily by matter of the covenant undertaking circumcision, alive or dead (December 1, 2022).

The ancestors are believed to be nearer and a part of the living families, never dead but living dead. They are emotional and could be pleased or displeased. The living ensured good relationship with the living dead, venerating them in sacrifices, libations, naming and performing societal rituals such as the Imbalu rituals. Ancestors honored as intercessors, mediating between divinity and

humanity and they have spiritual powers either to bless or curse the living. In initiation rites such as naming, circumcision, marriages, ancestors are invoked and consulted.

The name Wele' used for God even in the Lumasaba Bibles, Christian worship and confessions, revered as the sole creator '*Khabumbi*' of the whole universe. Tradition has it that, Weele lived up in the sky, as well residing on the Mountainous tops of Mt Elgon/Masaba. When the cloud was on the mountain, Weele was present at the mountain. These portrays affinity with the missionary religion, whose God lives in the heavens but also in the mountains (Exodus 19 & 20). These lay a strong foundation for the African Biblical Hermeneutical Perspective to operate more effectively. The missionary doctrine was embraced but resistance sparked off as it pushed beyond boundaries of the cultural setting especially in the ethnic historical and cultural ritual of Imbalu.

4.3 Historical and Cultural Context of the Imbalu Ritual

After understanding the Bamasaba as a people, this section entails the Bamasaba ritual as a response to the first objective that is the historical and cultural contexts of the Imbalu. The historical context constitutes the origins of the Imbalu ritual, and the foreign influences that interrupted the traditional ritual here and there. This preoccupies the second objective handled in detail in the next chapter. Meanwhile the cultural context entails Imbalu as a significant Rite of Passage, the extensive community involvement in the ritual, and its relevance in the contemporary Bamasaba community. Responses and findings to this Historical and Cultural Context of the Imbalu Ritual of the Bamasaba interfaced with the biblical written text using the post-colonial African Biblical lens.

4.3.1 Origins of Imbalu Ritual of the Bamasaba

Traditional myths reinforced by informants and scholarly works attribute the birth of Imbalu ritual to Masaba the son of Mundu and Seera his wife. Masaba is said to have been a hunter, my informants narrated that as Masaba exited to his hunting trips in the Mount Elgon region, he chanced a girl named ‘Nabarwa’ from Barwa, of Kalenjin descent, who was taking care of her father’s flock. Some informants say that Masaba was also taking care of the flock when he met Nabarwa. Whatever the case, given her beauty, Nabarwa captivated Masaba so much, that he suggested marriage to her. Nabarwa asked him to allow her go back and tell her father before any further steps.

Having approved to Masaba’s marriage proposal, Nabarwa and her father tasked him to undertake the ritual since it was an abomination for a Kalenjin to marry an uncircumcised man. Masaba consented and circumcised. Some people say that Nabarwa herself circumcised him, though several narrations are silent about Masaba’s surgeon. He then married Nabarwa; and this covenant of circumcision passed on to all the descendants of Masaba up to date (December 1, 2022). This is similar to the biblical story in Genesis 17:9-14, where God commanded Abraham to undertake circumcision and all his descendants as a covenant for all generations. In Genesis 17:23, Abraham took Ishmael his son, all who were born in his house and bought with money, and circumcised the flesh of their foreskins that very day, as God had said to him. One on one, instruction proceeded by obedience, led to the spread of the practice to the rest of these communities.

Brit milah (circumcision of the ancestors) is connected to Abraham called the father of the faithful, while Imbalu for *Bi-milla* is linked to Masaba the alleged father of the Ba-Masaba. The initiation turns out as a community affair, if they are to live in agreement with the authors of the rite.

Abraham and his descendants are covenanted to God, Imbalu as well is an African covenant, pre-missionary, forever carried out by all based on obedience to the 'Nabarwa' spirit of circumcision, alleged to watch over the covenant and pursuing the deviators of the ritual. The elders in honor ensure that all tribesmen of age, dead or alive mandatorily undertake the ritual to ensure loyalty, identity and membership. Force is applied, when free will fails, as equally recorded in Exodus 4:24, God took Moses by the neck to kill him until Zipporah did the circumcision then was he spared.

Another oral tale attributed the origins of Imbalu to a form of punishment extended to an immoral man. Summoned by the council of elders for stealing other men's wives, the punishment given to him was that of circumcision, but the measure scaled the culprit who became more powerful and admirable to women than ever before. The council of elders retaliated by circumcising themselves to compete favorably. This tale is scholarly recorded in the works of Wawomola, (2009) and Khamalwa (2018). Whether the allegation is true, C. Siango alleged that women approve of the circumcised men more than the uncircumcised, but he was not sure of the tale. Some members of the cultural board including the *Umukuka* 11 dismissed this theory, considering it as a mere weapon of intimidation to gratify the societal male chauvinism of the Bamasaba men against their non-circumcising neighbors (August 11, 2020).

Oral tales further indicate that the ritual must have stopped after the circumcision of the ancestor Masaba. Just as in Joshua 5:2-9, God commanded Joshua to circumcise all the males uncircumcised during their long journey in the wilderness, thereby renewing the covenant with God. C. Siango in agreement with *Umukuka* 11, and scholarly works, ascribe the revitalization of the ritual to Fuuya. During one of his visits, Aramunyenye, Fuuya's brother in-law, was upset to

find his sister's children terribly sick. After examining them, Aramunyenye discovered that the children were uncircumcised and consequently haunted by the spirits of circumcision from their mother's clan. Aramunyenye on consent from fuuya circumcised and nursed these children so well that they emerged out of convalescence into very healthy and strong young men (December 2, 2020; Khamalwa, 2018; Naleera, 2003; Nzita, 1997).

It is believed among the Bamasaba clans that, the first staff who revived Imbalu was in Bungokho-Mutoto. This partly explains the choice of Mutoto- Bungokho as the cultural center of the Bamasaba, Siango narrated that, "Mutoto is a distinct ground that countersigned the revitalization of the prodigious ritual" (December 2, 2020). Every circumcision year, an inauguration celebration is held at Mutoto involving ancestral appeasements of blood poured first by a handful of Mungokho Mutoto sons. Then the ritual continues throughout the 26 clans of the Bamasaba compulsorily.

4.3.2 Imbalu as a rite of passage

Culturally Imbalu is a rite of passage, changing from one stage to another. Turner (1960) defines rites of passage as procedure that accompany every change of place, state, social position and age. A state of transition as a process, a becoming, a transformation as a pupa changing to a moth. It is echoed all over time and space that Imbalu among the Bamasaba is transiting boys into men. All the community elders I interacted th established that the greatest aim of Imbalu is to produce mature men who can uphold the security and continuity of the Bamasaba as a people, scholarly supported (Were, 1982; Nandala, 2002; Kimera, 2006). Imbalu candidates were vetted by the elders into the year's exercise on the criterion of fitness and capacity. Boys had to grow to older teen age, to handle the programmed rituals of transition.

Umukuka 11 (2020), said that Imbalu is an exam, those who pass it well are highly celebrated, respected and a prestige to their families and clans. The initiated transit from the mother's garment of non-circumcision into the father's garment of manhood. The Clan Leaders of Bumbo and Buwalasi, compared the newly initiated to the species of trees, planted in homesteads locally known as *tsisola* plural, *lusola* singular. These trees are tall, strong, flexible and suitable for building, rearing, defense and carrying out cultural intricacies. Ritual poles are erected in courtyards (*tsikangu*) where sacrifices and libations are made from these poles. The boy is handed a stick (*indaari*) from *lusola* as he ascends the *lukangu* for circumcision. With all the rituals and exhortations, the initiates are to behave and act strong and mature as this homestead tree (December 6, 2020).

The initiates have to display high levels of responsibility, morality and eventually marriage status through counseling throughout the ritual. Umukuka 11 said this about Imbalu, "It crept into the Bamasaba society on grounds of marriage, and now continues as a defining cultural practice of climbing levels of maturity reflected in areas of responsibility and marriage". Khamalwa (2018) relates the word *khukambila* (exhortation) to the word *likambila* (the law). *Khukambila* (exhortations) are within the demarcations of the (*likambila*) law of the land. The Ugandan law advocates for responsible living and guards against vices of all kinds. At such a point, when criticisms seemingly crowd the ritual, it creates a platform where the *Likambila* (the law), has to audibly speak through the *Khukambila* (exhortations), to come up with a relevant model.

Commenting on the current contrary idling and moral decay among many initiated young men, Wolukawu the speaker of Namisindwa district, advocated for the restoration of the old cultural system of Imbalu. She said, the boys needed to experience the three original cuttings of the knife

to remove the spirit of familiarity and immaturity, which is accelerated by one mere cut of modern times. In support, Musila insisted that, Imbalu knife should not be modernized but be left in its originality for the young males to texture it culturally. This would in turn check their behavior and ensure morality suitable for the acquired adulthood (December 7, 2022). The dilemma is the indistinguishable difference between the circumcised and the non-circumcised. How best maturity can be measured through the Imbalu ritual in the contemporary Bamasaba society is significant.

4.3.3 Spiritual Significance of the Imbalu Ritual

My informants emphasized that Bamasaba entered a covenant with the Imbalu spirit through their ancestor Masaba, and therefore engaged into it mandatorily to justify their ancestral connections. Depending on the timing of the different clans, candidates are taken to the graveyards as sacred spots for relational purposes. For instance, boy(s) in Bumbo clan, advance the graveyards on the first day of brewing. While in Buwagogo, the visit is on the morning of the last day. It meant to connect with the ancestors for identity, relationship and braveness for the knife. Sacrifices made, blood sprinkled around in honor and veneration of the living dead. In places where a meal of plantains and meat are roasted; and eaten communally in assumed fellowship of the ancestors.

The initiates I interacted with said that they too believed their elders in an encounter spot with the dead. They are believed to work a great deal, under surveillance all day all night backing up the candidates. The chosen elder takes the boy(s) to the graveyards (*Khubilindwa*) to summon the spirit world of the ancestors to supply courage and strength to the candidates. At these places, words of assertion are spoken, sacrifices and libations offered for the welfare of the boy(s). The question is, whether these places are sacred. Do we find idols in these places? However anything

that takes precedence in one's life is regarded as idolized. However, given the extended Bamasaba family setting, it is an honor of their departed members.

Reports indicate that this ritual is fading away in some clans and regions. Some of my initiated informants expressed their failure to visit this sacred altar but still made it. Parents and initiates from Bumbo/Bumwoni, Bungokho/Mutoto and Buwalasi said the event is more psychological than spiritual or physical. In these areas, this ritual is optional and taken quite lightly. In Bududa district, clan altars are declining except for the family altars. This calls for further research to validate the significance of ancestors in the whole ritual of Imbalu. F. Kulosya, compared it to the Jerusalem and Rome religious pilgrimages undertaken by Christians, while Natseli discarded it as an idle and idol journey never to be embraced by the church that worships one God. The extent to which ancestors are engaged in the trends of Imbalu initiates is debatable and calls for study.

Apart from the graveyards, *Lukangu* (ritual pole) in the courtyard, is ornamented with the inner parts of the sacrificed animals mainly the liver, kidneys and the like. Sacrifices are performed at the spot where the boy(s) stand for circumcision, to seek braveness and minister courage to the candidate(s). Blood is sprinkled as a way of sanctifying the place signify a cleansing and a dedication of the young men. The theme of Blood is a bible thing that signifies life and dedication. In Leviticus 17:11 “For the life of the flesh is in the blood..., for it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul”. The New Testament celebrates the washing and atoning blood of Jesus in place of the Old Testament animal blood. Even in contemporary times blood solves the rampant DNA issues, it thus stands its ground as a fundamental element, representative of many solutions.

4.4 Community Involvement in the Imbalu Ritual

Bamasaba from all lifestyles, women and men, young and old, educated and uneducated alike scribble in the ritual basket of Imbalu. This study has analyzed the role of community involvement and their significances in the elaborate ritual. A. Kulosya likened the variety of practices involved in Imbalu to a school syllabus that guides the instructor and the learner in the teaching and learning process. Kulosya's opinion is in line with the traditional understanding that anything less the set rituals produced half-baked men, unworthy of any cultural consideration. This patriarchal understanding of life and individual identity is rooted in being a 'real man' '*umusaani burwa*' who has encountered a 'real knife' through 'real rituals'. After completion, '*umusaani burwa*' acquires respect, social acceptance and a sense of belonging to a particular cohort in the wider society.

Amidst varied rituals, this study has focused on seven significant rituals between the induction dance of *Isonja* to the gradational dance of *Inemba*. This include; inauguration, brewing, song, dance and merry making, visitations, cleansing and hatching ceremony. Several of my respondents, poured out their dislike on the bulky details embedded in the Imbalu ritual, coincidentally non-existent in the bible. ZwiWerblowsky (1997) points out that among the Jews, the occasion is performed by an observant Jew '*mohel*' trained in both surgical technique and Jewish law, in the presence of the father, god parents, other family members and friends. Appropriate prayers said, blessings declared, operation performed and eventual naming. A celebratory meal concludes the event, after initiating a member(s) into God's covenantal family.

4.4.1 Isonja Dance (*Khukhina Isonja*)

Pre – Isonja event has young males through teen age prepared on various fronts. The initiates narrated how their organs were thoroughly pre-inspected by their peers. Termites or sisal threads were used to cut off the thread like attachments locally known as ‘*Rurandasi*’, which made the surgeons work easier they said. They alleged that while grazing, they acquired skills of singing (*Khukhwibulula*), stylish dance (*Khukhina*) and making tangible marks on the ground (*Biruri*). Fruits such as *Tsimbunwe*, *Bikararambi*, *Kimikombe*; roots of *Bintsantsasi* and selected leaves were eaten to strengthen their zeal, muscles and maleness. Tutoring and mentorship is a Christian theme where mature Christians mentor the young believers into better ones. The theme of discipleship is important in making more disciples as Jesus did; one teacher who has produced many teachers, apostles, disciples and believers of the time.

The circumcision year opened with the boy’s announcement of his candidature; proceeded by gathering dancing costumes, composing songs, setting aside foods and elements for brewing drinks. One of the fabricators of *Bitsentse* (thigh bells or shakers), A, Watuwa, a black smith from Buwabwala – Namisindwa district said, it was real work to smash metals to coin *Bitsentse*. ‘That is why we prefer hiring than selling because we can never produce enough. Resources are rare, such as head gears (*Bulubusi*) made from the white monkey. So they are quite expensive once made, given the scarcity of the raw materials and the work involved” Muzei, an elder from Mwambu line age acknowledged the strenuous acquisition of such gardets, and said that his people just decorate themselves with modern ornaments of hankies, ties and lessors (December 2, 2022).

Elders engage the intending initiates for the year into an induction dance of *Isonja*. Talking to the in-charge of *Isonja* in Bufumbo – Bumadanda sub-county Mbale district, concerning lots of time

taken in the rehearsals; he had this to say, “It is an expedition of training the candidates to get familiar with the new gears and outfits of thigh bell shakers (*Bitsentse*), head gears (*Bulubisi & tsikwena*) and hand Bells (*Bireere*). But they are also trained in innovative singing and excellent dance that rhymes with the musical tunes” (May 6, 2022). This is similar to the formation and coaching of church choirs to boost the ministry of worship and praise. As churches choose to have choirs, local reports indicated that not all clans carry out this ritual, its non-existent in some places.

Observation and cultural reports indicated that *Isonja* is common in clans where candidates put on heavy costumes such as bell shakers on their thighs (*Bitsetse*) and expected to solo songs, and dance stylishly. These candidates grow and mature beyond sixteen years, in order to suit this type of dance and Imbalu. Consistent rehearsals by acquainted elders are carried out to produce a recommendable public dance. Clans that present younger candidates that use lighter hand bells and beads with song-leaders and do not practice this ritual. Among the Mwambu lineage in Sironko & Bulambuli districts, lower Namisindwa and Manafwa *Isonja* is non-existent. Records indicate that 14 clans out of the 26 actively practice this *Isonja* dance.

Mulyanyuma’s concept of *Isonja* music and dance concedes that elders and candidates converge to give meaning to the sacred event usually held in a revered site. However, five newly initiated boys (*Bafulu*) from Buwagogo, Manafwa district, indicated mixed opinions between non-schooling and schooling boys concerning this dance. To the non-schooling, this dance brought a sense of unity, competition, displaying talent and building confidence. G. Malere and his colleague were happy to have met other candidates to compete and improve on their dancing styles, being a public spot of entertainment. Meanwhile, three school going initiates were discontent, attributing it to a waste of time, tiring and without immediate results. They claimed to have participated

reluctantly, in respect of their elders. There is seemingly a growing gap in attitude between school going and non-schooling initiates in view of their priorities. The dance is superficially not spirit oriented but categorically preparation therefore voluntary and optional.

Figure 6: Isonja Dance



Picture by Uganda Tourist Board 2014

4.4.2 Inauguration of Imbalu Ritual at Mutoto Cultural Centre

This ceremony takes a full month of eating, drinking, and making merry, climaxed on an actual specified inauguration day in the first half of the month of August. On this day, all the 26 clans converge; guests invited from government, other cultural institutions and religious circles to grace the occasion. Mutoto Cultural Centre fills with multitudes of participants as Merry making, singing and dancing pioneered by the Kadodi drum takes on course. Addresses from different dignitaries

crowd the day. Then a handful of Imbalu candidates from Bungokho/Mutoto clan circumcised on spot and Imbalu flagged off to different clans as scheduled by the institution.

The inauguration of August 2014 experienced a historical shift of events, when Umukuka 1 handed over the Keys of the cultural institution of the Bamasaba to the Bishop of Mbale Diocese. Now, culture and church openly shook hands of partnership as Umukuka handed over the guardianship of culture to the church. In the same partnership, the seat of Umukuka was placed in St Andrew's Cathedral below the Bishops Cathedra (seat) in the year 2018, acknowledging submission and belonging. On his pastoral visit in June 2022, the Archbishop of the province of the church of Uganda appreciated the co-ordination between culture and church as inseparable entities. He cited Namirembe church that equally hosts the seat of the Kabaka of Buganda that has ensured cordial relationship between the two kingdoms – of Buganda and of God. He called upon the church in Bugisu to work and guide cultural events in honor of God not otherwise.

Bothered by long durations, Umukuka 11 said that, Bamasaba are so cognizant of their cultural year and spending 1 month out of 12 is worthwhile. He stressed that, it was a special time for the Bamasaba to fulfill their obligation of eating with people "*Khulya in babandu*". "As a cultural house, we wait on a "*Nakango*" bird to hatch, expectedly in early August then the ceremony is scheduled, he added. This explains the differing ceremony dates from year to year. For instance, in 2022, inauguration was on August 13, while in 2024, it was August 3. This calls for further research on the specific factors responsible for inauguration dates of the Imbalu ritual.

At inauguration, *Umukuka* gives stern warnings and counseling to the candidates for brevity and prestige. He extends his counsel to the key stakeholders and the community at large. His speech is full of counsel, exhortations and appeals for the candidates to stand their ground pay the cultural

debt and present maturity of purpose. Exhortations are a part of the Imbalu ritual, all through by all categories of people, directed to build stamina and morale of toughness to face the tough knife and rough life. The bible is full of exhortations, reminders, warnings and instructions to be adhered to by its recipients and readers. Isonja serves this purpose and marks a level of orderliness of a significant ceremony a virtue required by any formal system, organization or society.

The Bishop of Mbale Diocese however, admitted that he had got invitations at every inauguration, but never honored them because of the negativity expressed in the ritual. He prefers to delegate clergymen just for the sake of courtesy and relationship. “The one time I attended the inauguration in 2016, I saw no need and no space marked off for the church engagement in the ritual”, he said. The Bishop lamented about the high peak of drunkenness, immoral dances and songs and no sense of order and decency required of a societal ritual. “I do not like nor support such indecency presented in a societal ritual. We have buried people, hit down by Imbalu dancers, heard of sexual immorality, raping that I cannot be part of such ugliness”. He wished the leaders of the cultural cabinet as an institution come up with a by-law to streamline Imbalu and clean it up to suit a stable and sane community of the Bamasaba (October, 2024).

Figure 7: Inauguration of Imbalu at Mutoto Cultural Grounds



Picture by the Uganda Tourist Board 2014

Above is Umukuka' 1, Wilson Wamimbi Weasa seated at the traditional ceremony grounds to initiate the representative Mutoto youths into circumcision for the year 2014. Looking on is Musila J who serves doubly as a Member of Parliament in the Ugandan government, representing the constituency in Namisindwa district as well as an Honorable member of parliament in the cabinet of the Bamasaba cultural institution.

4.4.3 Brewing (*Khukoya*)

The ritual of *Khukoya* is two-fold; fermenting the drink but also smearing the candidates. It marks the beginning of the actual Imbalu stage. Done on the first day of the three days of the climax towards the actual spot of circumcision, it lays a foundation into which other many rituals commendable to the excellence of the final, are embedded. On this first day, initiated boys narrated

their experience to the stream with a small pot, while big pots saturated inside houses with plentiful of beers. Boy(s), move in company of an approved elder; and the candidate(s) fetch water with their hands, or scoop once with the pot. The pot placed on a bare head back home without looking behind or sideways until it is off loaded at the ritual pole. Community elders agreed that, attitudes of hard work, concentration and general skillfulness are incalculated into the young. They have to be portrayed with braveness on the day of circumcision.

The candidate pours the fetched water into another small pot containing dough (*tsimuma*), to produce a white stuff. Then the family or clan specialist smeared the candidate(s) thoroughly white, right from the crown of his head, face chest and feet (*Khuakha Kamamela*). J. Musila, appraised this and compared it to a biology lesson where learners are taught the proficiency of distillation in the likeness of practical laboratory experiences. The candidates get into practical lessons of processing the Bamasaba cherished beer drink '*Kamalwa*'. However, the question of how the traditional syllabus blends into a formal curriculum is an issue. The argument brings into question the value system of tradition in the face of the modern world and its changing dynamics.

S. Walimbwa observed the need for Bamasaba to scrutinize the empowerment pattern to rescue the in-coming generation from evident characteristics of mediocrity. This ought to be mitigated for relevance to ensure an expedient lot of men. How the two syllabuses of school formal and cultural informal can be reconciled is viable in this study. The boy's sisters not forgetting the mother and some other close relatives especially females and small boys will be near-by or summoned to be smeared white. I personally felt so gratified smeared white on my big brother's Imbalu ceremony in December 1974. The feeling is that you are standing in support of the candidate's cause and course. The closeness of the relative to the initiate is gauged by how much

yeast smeared on them. I needed to look white as a good identification with my brother. However, my father who had celebrated traditional Imbalu in the 70's eventually became Christian that he shifted to a Christian model free from brewing in the next decade of the 80's.

Concerning the significance of smearing the candidate(s) with yeast, S. Simiyu said, yeast is food, so the candidate is disposed as a meal to be consumed by the fire of the knife (August 1, 2022). In agreement, Khamalwa (2018) ascribed yeast as a substance that undergoes transformation and has the capacity to bring transformation. Yeast in this case is a facilitator that accelerates the mixture from unusable stuff on the first day into a desirable and strong drink on the third day; a process expected of the initiates into becoming relevant mature men of society. Therefore, the initiates are undergoing change, from an unnoticeable minor into a strong recognized adult.

However, in Mwambu lineage, this stage of smearing is optional and treated lightly. Initiates here have rocketed into use of modern appliances such powder and spared consumable food for the stomach. Meanwhile some Clan leaders asserted that smearing boys with the white stuff pushes them into a no man's land between the dead and the living. They are shifted into the appearance of ghosts, an indication that their help is no longer from the living but from the living dead (August 8, 2022). The literal killing of animals and pouring blood and smearing the candidates with animal Chime (*Buse*) is a serious signal of dying to self to arise as a required man; dying to self is a biblical aspect taught and expressed by in the gospels by Jesus in his earthly ministry (Luke 9:23).

Research findings from Bulucheke clan, Bududa district, showed that, the candidates are taken to Namasho sacred ground to allow candidates and their family grouping, friends, and well-wishers to rehearse, melodies associated with Imbalu. By responding to the songs sung by the candidate and surrounding him, builds morale, signals support and establishes a safety wall around the young

man. The crowd takes on voluntary dance with no need for supervision and encouragement, dragging in innocent passers-by by either words uncalled for or a little whip to join the group (Makwa, 2010). Makwa likened it to a communal classroom where members shared their history, identity and values that is similar to the Kulosya's perspective of a school syllabus. Both classes and syllabuses blend into each other and aim to produce lasting results and consequences.

Bamasaba Christians expressed dissatisfaction of escalated brewing embedded in this ritual. First, local beers intoxicate and people end up doing undesired stuff. One Roman Catholic informant urged that persons need to control how much to take, but other Christians expressed the challenge of self-control in the face of abundance. Nevertheless, the Bible encourages diligence (Ephesians 5:16), and condemns gluttony and drunkenness. Ephesians 5: 18 states, "Do not be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life ..." and Proverbs 23:20 says, "Do not carouse with drunkards and gluttons" NLT. Bamasaba literally spend months drinking and celebrating their culture, an idleness and gluttony disapproved by the bible. Nabulele, the Deputy Prime Minister in the Bamasaba cultural office on a radio talk show said 'We cannot afford to engage idling in Kadodi and making merry all through, we need to engage in other productive work as well, for better living'. Christians insisted that mixing a sane Christianity and an insane tradition full of drunkenness is discordant.

4.4.4 Song, Dance and Merry Making

a) Ritual songs

Imbalu ritual accompanied with songs that contain admonitions (*Khukambila*) and celebrations by multitudes, reflected in the cloud of witnesses described in Hebrews 12:1. Observation however

indicated that the songs sung were immoral and obscene in several cases. Elder C. Wekunya said that cultural songs were meant to be objective, educational and constructional. Objective in the sense that they appeal to the candidate's upcoming event and the future. Ritual songs were appraised for promoting excellence, entertainment and social cohesion, just as Christians converge to promote decent worship. Stern warnings, encouragements, and threats for the fearful characterize these ritual songs. The song leader (*Namyenya*) is supposed to be an innovator of ideas, creative, well versed with the tribe's history and current affairs.

It becomes problematic when the constructive singing turns out to be destructive and intimidating. Umukuka 11 said that redundant fellows have created room for obscene songs and talks that catalyze immorality, indecency and crime. The bible teaches about self-respect and good use of the tongue. Small as it is, it causes massive destruction compared to a small matchbox burning away a huge forest (James 3). Vulgar language and song is a pointer to recklessness, which characterizes the ritual and notably attracts criticisms and oppositions. The accompanying population incidentally engages in every form of careless talk and song. The Pentecostal Bishop said in no way could a people commanded to sing praise and worship to God the creator (Psalms 100, 150) entertain a tradition characterized with vulgarism.

b) Ritual dance

The original Kigisu dance is shaking of the shoulders as agreed by the community leaders. However, the modern preferred Kadodi drum has imported twisting of the waists, so seductively in rhyme of the drum. The initiates I talked to indicated a general taste for Kadondi. Weswa the owner of the drum from Bungokho Mutoto said that, the drum is composed of either five or four drums. The big drum (*ingoma ingali*) that gives concrete bass, medium size played with bare

hands (*iye kamakhono*), the basic drum that offers chorus beats (*simita*), one that sketches the straightforward melody (*indonyi*), and the smallest drum that offers an alarming melody (*khalangilisa*). The tender beats rally masses from all lifestyles, members and non-members alike, hiking morale. Apart from being costly, it is alleged to escalate immorality and crime, as multitudes trek, day and night. The bible teaches self-respect and condemns dishonorable and discreditable ways of behavior.

While observing, the dancing multitude of the Imbalu ritual at Namasho site in Bududa District - December 2018, I was astonished to see naked bodies of mature males among the dancing teams, including the said father of one candidate. Community elders attributed this act to sheer stubbornness and decayed morals. They agreed that the Bamasaba only treat the uncircumcised as children and left nude, but its shame for mature circumcised men to appear naked publically. The dancing group urged that public nudeness increased on the rate of productivity. It is yet ethically disgraceful for men of society to walk naked in the name of Imbalu. Elders agreed that, in Africa it is an abomination for a child to look on the nakedness of the father.

The bible equally records Noah's son who amusingly stared at the father's nakedness and was cursed, but the one who went backwards and covered him was blessed (Genesis 9:20-27). Such innovated insanities have to be stamped out for the ritual to thrive meaningfully. D. Gimadu, a former Bishop of North Mbale in agreement with *Umukuka* 11, clarified that a true culture cannot promote indiscipline when the candidates are exhorted into discipline and respect. A vulgar incident happened when the Imbalu dancers literally abused a passer-by and undressed her in public. Christian Bamasaba described such negative innovations as backward, uncultured and done by idle and disorderly lot of people.

c) Ritual Celebrations

Imbalu celebrations is characterized with lots of food – juicy eats, drinks, singing and dancing. However, observations and oral reports indicate rampant violence, immoral behavior, economic constraints and frequent accidents, undesirably surround the cultural ritual of the Bamasaba. My informants lamented on the protruding levels of violence, immorality executed, the poverty derived and grave accidents that create both a social and cultural gap worth discussing.

i) Violence

Violence is expressed in beating and harassing people by the roadsides, grabbing their properties, raping, destroying homesteads and institutions as the multitudes trekked on. Crime has mounted and treated as normal. Both the African philosophy of living dependently on each other is similar to the biblical set up that is full of one another. The Bible call on love for one another (John 13:34), forgive one another (Mathew 6:12), admonish one another (Romans 15:14), bear one another's burdens (Galatians 6:2), all these point to just treatment of one another. On the contrary, the RDC Bulambuli district lamented on the havoc done by Imbalu dancers. He cited an incident where three men raped a young girl of 13 years and completely upset her biological set up. In his sermon, the Bishop of North Mbale Diocese pointed out the high levels of indecency soiled on the lovely Bamasaba culture. He warned girls to refrain from provocative dance and dress; in order to attract descent treatment (December 14, 2022).

The RDC Manafwa district condemned the increasing deaths caused by circumcision mobs. On a Sunday evening of December 4, 2022, a senior labor officer Manafwa District Bukke Francis was clubbed to death from his motorcycle, following a slight knock of a careless dancer. His wife Lydia

Bukke watched helplessly as her husband sunk into the roadside ditch. During Bukke's burial the RDC's office reported other two victims beaten and maimed in the 2022 circumcision year. Ethically awkward inventions have cropped up, and this study is looking into ways of discarding unnecessary ills and re-echoed innovations, to match traditional culture with biblical and Christian ethics for a relevant balance. The Bible prohibits murder (Exodus 20: 13) and echoes love as a summary of the Bible law (John 13:13), and the greatest of virtues (1Corinthians 13:13).

ii) **Moral Depletion**

Celebrations a component of the ritual is alleged with tangible moral depletions in seasons of Imbalu. Men and women literally engage in public sex, openly in broad day light as people continue with the seductive dance of the drum. The participants cheer and chant on "*Lekha babandu basalaane*" meaning 'Let people reproduce and multiply'. Immoral living is sin against God and against self (Exodus 20:14, 1 Corinthians 6:18). Sex was created for honorable purposes, not for just fun or leisure. Immorality was categorized in form of leisure, rape, incest, fornication and adultery; all of these forbidden by God and therefore the Christian church. The African bible interpreters would not be amused at the act of turning a biblical Godly practice meant to be sacred and secret into an immoral and public leisure activity.

Young school- boys and girls are diverted from the normal trends of purposeful living into pre-marital sexualized lives, which completely affect their futures. Individuals mire themselves in mud and dirty waters like pigs, minding less of the hygienic and health hazards that come with such carelessness. Natseli the Archdeacon of Bulucheke assured the interviewer that for such reasons the Christian church will forever keep contrary to traditional Imbalu in all ways, because the boundaries of the ritual are indefinite. Such dissatisfactions from stakeholders, prompts a need to

come up with a balanced ritual, properly and intentionally dressed with an appropriate African philosophy and a Christian garment with clear boundaries of operation (December 4, 2022).

The elders acknowledged the rampant sexual activity as the boys acquaint themselves with song and dance. Reports indicated that several young men and women reportedly attribute their first sexual encounters during the Imbalu season of the year. Young women and men accompany dancing teams for support as colleagues, friends or relatives. Elders consent to the unavoidable alcoholic drinks excessively taken in these unsupervised groupings. The result is sexual promiscuities. No wonder these dances are usually during late evenings and nights escalating evil and wicked behaviors that are unbiblical and unethical, elders agreed.

One high school initiate wondered how such an indiscriminate immoral activity goes on without question by responsible stakeholders. Indecency and obscenity becomes typical to both young and old, Christians and non-Christians, men and women alike. As Courts (1980), notes that common sense and scientific evidence agree that exposure to erotica scenes increase sexual activity. Among the Bamasaba, circumcision period is leisure time, serious work comes to a standstill, government and private workers get holiday to dance off their young into manhood. Students and mature men impregnate young students, as the environment created offers room for sexual engagements. Young girls impregnated, while young boys arrested and put in jail and both sexes face unsuitable consequences that arise from immoral living.

One angry parents whose daughter had fallen victim, had this to say; “We are fed up of this whole thing, men are like dogs. They do not consider the fact that our children are still in school. They are as greedy as hyenas, this Imbalu be removed, because our children are at risk and we cannot ably protect them as they even run away from home without permission. I will not let this boy out

of prison so that we all lose” (May 6, 2023). Formal education for life is interrupted, in agreement with reports from Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS, 2021) that, “during Imbalu seasons, dropout rates among boys in the Bamasaba region increase with over 30% of boys. While the Uganda Human Rights Commission (UHRC, 2019), reports that, “ritual behaviors are linked to 5% of yearly adolescent pregnancies and school absenteeism in Mbale District”.

Clan leaders and some initiates consented that apart from the illegal sexual involvement, the initiates were culturally legible to a sexual affair after the healing process. These sexual pattern was a once affair ritual and never to be repeated with that sexual mate. Reports indicated that this ritual was fading away, but it was a requirement that as the initiate was on the verge of healing; he had to clean off the used soot, ‘*khukhwirusakho imbilu*’. Black soot is smeared to darken the sexual organ “*Isoolo Imali*” meaning the black animal and to facilitate the healing process. Initiates were therefore encouraged to have sexual intercourse within three months after circumcision as a clean-up procedure.

Four (4) boys of the ten (10) interviewed for this study consented that the threat was a bother and had to submit to what they regarded as traditional norms. Several traditional threats surrounded this belief such as, failure to have sex soon after circumcision the penis would remain soft, dirty and scary forever. The power of manhood would be affected if long times were taken without engaging in sex. Therefore, the young initiates were in process of performing this duty with young girls already cited for the same. Meanwhile six of ten rejected the idea and said that they would not succumb to traditional threats but would wait until they were ready enough to engage in sex. The clan leaders however confessed that such norms were naturally phasing out in these times of modernity and intense Christianity (December 2025).

Findings showed that young boys contend in a bid to show their manhood while the young girls felt privileged to be associated with the local circumcision heroes and eventually ended up in unplanned marriages. Wandawa the District assistant health officer said that, births increased after the circumcision season was over. The in charge of Bufumbo health Centre 111 said that, labor suites are busier with teen mothers in 9-12 months after the ritual. He also added that sexually transmitted diseases became common ailments of their patients after this period. An indication that a lot of sexual engagements and conceptions took place within the Imbalu ritual and aftermath babies born in greater numbers.

Responding to the on-going criticism of immoral aspect, one opinion leader supportably said that, the male sexual organ is to exercise its man hood roles, as functionality is determined at these occasional meetings. J. Musila rejected the criticism of connecting immoral life to Imbalu in what he termed as an empty assumption. To him, immoral living is within the heart but not in traditional ceremonies. He backed his argument with an observation that teen pregnancies were enormous in COVID time than ever mentioned in any circumcision period. District records indicate that, the year 2020 of COVID had the Imbalu ritual halted in its publicity, and this period registered the highest teen pregnancies than ever before.

Musila further cited the national and international romantic Nyenge Nyege dance of the year 2022 that directly and openly violated the public moral fiber. In agreement the minister of health the Hon Kawoya Khanifa (October 24th, 2022), while addressing youths in Arua on reproductive health, remarked that northern Uganda was having the highest teenage pregnancies in the country. Northern Uganda is free from Imbalu, but the pregnancy rates are overwhelming. The analysis on the major likely causes of rampant immoral living among the youths is worth analyzing. Whatever

the case, the escalated sexual engagement is a sure result of the Imbalu ritual, which is equally unbiblical and unethical and has to find a measure to enforce morality and sanity in society.

Emphasis is laid on the societal fact that several youths are intentional to get wives especially the non-schooling initiates of the previous year. The Bible describes marriage as an honorable thing that should be carefully undertaken. It shows how the Biblical fathers got wives to marry, and the missionaries hinted on the aspect of choice of searching for suitable partners and working for them, but not grabbing. Tradition encourages young men to get women as quickly as possible to produce more children for the continuity of the ritual. This phenomenon entirely interferes with the current school and employment trends needed by the school going. New trends situate one to front several requirements in place before picking a mate for marriage. One clan leader alleged that formally culture taught girls to consent to marriage suggestions or else would stand the risk of barrenness in the future. However, this was fading away in the face of western civilizations, he said.

Observation and given reports indicated that the ritual in itself was commendable but left room for augmentation to fit the divergent expectations of the modern times. Schools are liable to poor performance due to interruptions and cultural demands placed on the learners. The Deputy Head teacher Bulucleke, Wanamali, noted the low school turn up during the event and the resultant high school dropout rate after the event. “But we have done a lot of counseling to the boys and girls as well”. He preferred a ceremony that satisfies the needs of society without jeopardizing the prospects of future generations. It is thus the responsibility of each generation to ensure that the next one inherits an unmingled and quality natural, social - economic and cultural endowment.

The Bishop of Mbale Diocese despised the art of indiscriminate mixing of multitudes in a generation of many contagious diseases and sicknesses. He reviled smearing candidates with

smelly and unhygienic stuff, which he labelled as backward and unreasonable. Since Imbalu is not static but dynamic, Bishop appealed to the cultural house to Christianize or modernize the event to suit the majority of Bamasaba in this contemporary society, he said.

Figure 8: Crowds Singing and Dancing Imbalu



Picture by the Uganda Tourist Board 2014

iii. Depletion of Economic Resources

Celebrations have culminated into harvesting other people's gardens; practicing disguised theft in the name of culture. In December 2018, I witnessed a huge group of Kadodi dancers in Bududa district, each carrying a long sugar cane as a dancing stick upon their hundreds. As courtesy of celebration, the sugar canes were broken from someone's garden, an uncle to one of the candidates from Bumwalye parish without any permission or monetary terms. The effects were long lasting

on the deprived farmer. The men I interacted with condemned the act. The farmers expressed painful feelings upon the meddled crops, by dancers in their hundreds. Where the ritual should begin and end, is a question that concern scholars and leaders.

The bible condemns stealing “Do not steal” (Exodus 20:15). Resources are used thoughtlessly like, there is no tomorrow. Animals, gardens and stores are drained with no sense of food security. Observation shows that, Imbalu penetrates into the external and internal pockets causing famine and malnourishment. The in-charge Bubutu Health center in Namisindwa district attributed poor education standards in the region to food scarcity. Children go to school hungry and come back to a devastated hunger stricken home, in addition to scarcity of school dues.

It is common phenomena for the dancing crowds to track through gardens, of maize, beans, groundnuts, bananas and the like. In cultural centers like Mutoto in Bungokho, Namasho in Bulucheke, Nagwere in Bufumbo, the surrounding homes, institutions and communities stand a danger of being devastated. This has raised basic concerns that have directly affected the wellbeing of society and its members. The elders I talked to concerning this alarming condition regretted the lots of property lost. Natseli lamented that, it was hard to distinguish culture from insanity. The Bible hardly supports an activity that propels its people into a state of scarcity, anarchy and disorderliness; instead of the promised order, increase and abundance as expressed in John 10:10.

Parents and candidates are in a bid for a recent innovation of the Kadondi drum to impress the public and make themselves a name. Talking to M. Buyela, a Kadodi owner from Bufumbo – Bubyangu Mbale District, he said that the drum goes for an average of one (1) million shillings. It is quite expensive and most parents get it out of savings or sale of some property. He said that the more the money, the better the drum, the lesser the money, the lesser the melody. The drum

melody commended by many, attracts so many, and escalates crime as it collects indiscriminate multitudes acting irresponsibly, directly discounting on both societal and family resources.

iii) **Accidents -Motor, Natural and Surgical**

Many accidents have been recorded where dancing teams are torn to pieces by either fast-moving vehicles or vehicles that lost control. D. Gimadu called it sheer stubbornness and unethical to stick on the road and refuse to allow traffic mobility in the name of culture. The Deputy Headmaster of Nkoma secondary school, narrated how in 2014, a speeding bus that belonged to YY bus company lost control 6km away from the school and killed so many people. Of these that perished, five were students from the school of which three were from the same family. Onlookers and police reports indicated that Imbalu dancers remained arrogantly on the Mbale - Kampala high way, attracting a fatal accident.

The Ugandan News Paper of Monitor reported the death of two people and several others injured as a truck rammed into Kadondi dancers on Mbale – Tororo highway (September 4, 2022). Findings reveal that the recent Kadodi drum is so melodious, attracting vigorous dancing to never-hear the incoming vehicle. It was a terrible scene when a bus lost control smashing through the crowd and killing several people; dead bodies paraded on the road unbelievably, retorted the traffic officer (August 6, 2022). Informants attributed this to the recent innovation of Kadondi drum that submerges peoples thought in sweet melodies away from discerning danger.

An elder in Bududa district, narrated a story where landslides submerged hundreds of Circumcision Kadondi dancers at the slopes of Mt Masaba in 1978. Numbers of missing persons could hardly be established; families near and far kept realizing missing persons after the ritual period ended. Even the efforts to recover the dead bodies met with total failure. It was discovered

that the drum had moved long distances all the way from Sironko district. Residents reported how the melodious drum had collected dancers, all buried at ago. Dancers with rudimentary machines, have few numbers of relatives and neighbors that incidentally know and protect each other.

In addition, grave surgery accidents have continued to occur due to rudimentary unskilled workmanship. Records from Mbale Regional Referral Hospital indicate that in a period 2006-2012, 05 initiates have had their private parts chopped off, whole or half way and many experienced prolonged sickness, in the face of non-skillfulness, poverty, ignorance and carelessness. The local surgeons are in a rush to finish and get to other waiting candidates. However, B. Simiyu attributed such calamities to indiscipline of the candidate against elders, or witches and wrong-eyed fellows. Clan leaders said that these phenomena, usually checks the discipline of the youngsters and how they package themselves all around through life.

An Article in the New Vision (October 7, 2013) presented a story of Patrick Kizamba a 24-year-old resident of Masaka, Manafwa district suffering gangrene after his private parts being chopped off in forceful circumcision and necessitated plastic surgery to reconstruct his penis if possible. December 12, 2022, witnessed a scuffle after a young initiate in Lwakhakha at the Uganda Kenya boarder had his organ half way chopped. The incidence culminated into accusations, arresting the surgeon, others blaming the witches and bad-eyed fellows. The father of the candidate was accused to have uttered wrong statements against the boy, so some family members seriously hit him up, until onlookers rescued him. Mbuyiselo (2013) reports, recorded deaths of 19 initiates lost their lives in the years 2012-2015 in Eastern cape, on addition to thousands hospitalized, and hundreds of penile amputations (SABC Online, 08/07/2015).

Figure 9: Traditional Surgeons Display their Traditional Imbalu Knives



Picture by the Uganda Tourist Board 2014

Traditional surgeons (*Bakhebi*) admitted that they are possessed with special spiritual powers to circumcise the candidates, without training or any form of instruction. They are girded with zeal, haste, and extraordinary expertise to perform many surgeries with no or less blunders. One of them explained the process of realizing circumcision knives as immense, calculated and specifically designed. The blacksmiths offer preliminary expertise, but the traditional surgeons (*Bakhebi*) themselves, have a lot to offer. Ancestors are invoked concerning this instruments adorned with traditional medications, kept sharp and expressly stored for the appropriate need.

4.4.5 Visitating Sacred Places, Kinsmen, Friends, Maternal Uncles and Sacred Swamps

i) Visits to Sacred Places

Bamasaba honor their family and clan altars and worship places. In Buwalasi clan, candidates are supposed to converge at 'Lushengelo' a sacred clan forest to make sacrifices in honor of the clan ancestors and tribal gods. Concerning how serious sacred places were, the clan leader Buwalasi confessed that, some families have pulled away from this step and yet continue with the ritual normally. Gutaka circumcised in 2008 said, "I personally did not visit Lushengelo sacred altar for braveness, but stood extraordinarily firm in the ritual surgery". Visits to the graveyards is phasing out slowly but surely, in the face of Christianity and modernity. The revelation is, these visits acted on peoples' conscience concerning ancestral support and cohesion. In the midst of the biting economy, increasing modernity and Christianity, the ritual is contradictory and fading.

Clan leaders appreciated the need to keep in touch with the departed members of the family, but cautioned for conscious dealings. Whether the ancestors make a difference in the life of the candidates, fetched different opinions. This area calls for further research as it aroused numerous debates with my respondents. Bishop of Mbale Diocese in one of his sermons said, "What one chooses to believe, is what he/she experience, whether ancestors or God you will experience that". Biblical ancestors like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are honored, and God is referred to as God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the Jewish Ancestors. The overseer of the Pentecostal churches, clarified that, biblical ancestors are honored not worshipped, which is the desire of the Bamasaba Christians and moderns in their cultural setting.

ii) Visits to Kinsmen, Friends and Maternal uncles

People converge in multitudes, tracing their Kinsmen far or near, as kinmanship strengthened built cohesion and earned prestige. Visitation of the initiate to the maternal clan (*Ibwiwana*) is the final visit undertaken. It is specifically to a substantial brother of the boy's mother (*Khootsa*), who likely

benefitted from the bride wealth of the boy's mother. The aim is to receive approval and blessings of the maternal ancestors. Kutosi the leader of Buluchekhe clan said that, the maternal ancestors are special; they carry the mother's love in a male package. The uncle will provide a Juicy celebratory meal with a fortuneteller discerning through the intestines of the slaughtered animal to forecast the necessary signals. The importance of maternal uncles, surmises the strong contribution of a female child to a male child among the Bamasaba.

The uncle smears the young man with yeast, chime and beer gusted upon him as he admonishes and invokes the maternal ancestors for courage and blessings. Maternal uncles are seen as the most intimate well-wishers and able to offer defense against witches and bad-eyed men. The maternal uncle(s) take over charge of the boys remaining hours to his final cut. In Mwambu lineage, a maternal uncle is '*Maama*' a similar connotation for a mother in several Bantu tribes. Biblically Jacob found refuge at Laban's home a maternal uncle (Genesis 27:43-45), similar among the Bamasaba who advocate, for refuge at the maternal uncles. Chinua Achebe (1966) talks of the maternal uncles cautioning the boy among other things to protect his mother, and fight against the enemies of his mother's relatives; signifying the fundamental place of a mother and her people. Christianity still stands aloof at this ritual of smearing initiates with consumables and dirty stuff.

iii) Visiting the Sacred Swamp

Elders interviewed, attributed the ritual of smearing soil to scaring the fierce animal alleged to invade the candidate(s). The ritual mobilizes fierceness to encounter the fierce knife. The fierceness signifies the ability to handle difficult situations beginning with the aggressiveness to outcompete the fierce knife and future crudeness of life. Elders allege that, the spirits of Imbalu glow up the mud during this season, ready for use. The sacred swamp is sanctified every

circumcision year, to dedicate it back to sacred use. J, Musila, said that this phase signifies the exorbitant honor given to the land, connecting the potential users with the ancestral spirits, which amounts to relationship required in all systems of life. (December 6, 2022). The fact that the idea of a fierce animal stressed in this ritual is non-existent dilutes the ritual to a mere procedural event.

The beer blower, the man of the gourd (*Uwesanda*), strongly takes over from the soil smearer. The significance of blowing beer to scare misfortune and witches is questionable. The final appealing song known as ‘*siwooya*’ in Manafwa/Namisindwa meaning, a ‘convincing rhythm’; in Wanale referred to as ‘*Khuwantsina*’ meaning an affirmation of the candidates course, while in Bududa, it is ‘*Khuwotselela*’ meaning roaring the candidates into action, sets in. The ever-strange song pipes up, strange in the sense that it’s startling tone, scary, chilling villages and erasing happy moods for tension between life and death as the spot advances, which Christians describe as intimidation.

An illustration of the battle song that ascends the boy to the courtyard

Ooohoooo ohoo oho oohoo oho ohooohoo	Ok ok ok ok.....
Wangwe wamusiru warula -ooohooo	The wild Leopald has come out – Alright
Warula, ohoo Warula ohoo, Warula ohooohoo,	Has come out ok, come out ok, come
Warula ahaa Warula ahaa Warula ahaa eheee	Has come out ok, come out ok, come to
Aaaahaaa aha aahaaaaahaa ohooohoo	Ok ok ok ok ok ok ...
Noteremaka utsya ibumya ahaa	Fearing the knife you go to the Nilotic
Utsya ibunyororo, ahaa	You go to Bunyoro land ahaa
Utsya ibutooro ahaa	You go to Toro land ahaa
Aaaahaaa aha aahaaaaahaa ohooohoo	Ok ok ok ok ok ok ...

This song and other related elevated warbling continue repeatedly until the candidate(s) reaches the circumcision courtyard. The signaling limerick symbolizes the elders leading the boy to war against the invading furious leopard. This wild beast is a killer, so the boy must sign up to kill it or kill him. Observation strengthened by my informants emphasized the irresistible spirit behind this scary song that nerves all people from all lifestyles, old and young. Masses literally follow the ongoing song to witness the one-minute or less event of removing the foreskin. Elders said that this warrior song is to energize the candidate(s). The way must be so unpredictable to confuse the evil eyed and witches against the welfare of the candidate(s). *Uwesanda* clears off any form of misfortune and spells of witchcraft destined against the initiate(s). Candidates specifically descend the courtyard from an upward direction (*Isikingi*), and a descending (jump down) posture to the ritual spot (*lukangu*) for surgery to take place.

iv) Candidates at the Circumcision Ground

It is the climax of the event as the boy faces the literal fire of the knife. It is a critical spot of no retreat, no surrender labeled in this study as a ‘*Fefi*’ spot; ‘*Fear*’ or ‘*Firm*’ (FF). The expression ‘*Fefi*’ in the literal Lumasaba impulsive terminologies means a state of deliberate dying. In this context, it will refer to a candidate dying to self to outstrip a circumstance. Portraying any sign of fear, whether involuntary, such as trembling and blinking of the eyes, is straight away graded ‘cowardice’ and ‘womanliness’, appended with weakness of character as perceived by society.

Appropriate maleness of courage is celebrated as supreme, while culprits of fear are heavily penalized, beaten, scolded and humiliated. The conversation between God and Joshua in the book of Joshua chapter 1 is a talk of courage and no fear. Godly courage in this case is viable and reputable to serve the purposes of God in every way required. Biblically, courage is celebrated

while fear is condemned. These community measures of courage are emphasized and clean off the undesirable odors to set reputable standards and precedence for the in-coming units. Blood in Imbalu is contemplated as a tangible personal participation in the mystery of Christ's sacrifice. A physical badge that new life and redemption often come through the costly offering of oneself, pointing towards the ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

Figure 10: Candidates at the Circumcision Ground



Picture by the Uganda Tourist Board 2014

Success announced by the surgeon's whistle, sets the crowd into vibrant celebrations. Women led by the mother of the initiate respond instantly to the long-awaited whistle. Congratulatory songs of arresting the leopard are chanted in response to the men's former songs of dilemma concerning the invading wild leopard.

Women Celebration Song after Successful Surgery

Wanyala Wanyala	Thank you Thank you
Oh Yaya Wanyala	Oh Please Thank you
Wanyala Lukali	Thank you so much
Oh Yaya Wanyala	Oh Please Thank you
Wanyala Khuamba Isolo	Thank you for arresting the animal
Oh Yaya Wanyala	Oh Please Thank you
Ukulikhe isolo iyo	Congratulations for overcoming the animal
Oh Yaya Wanyala	Oh please Thank you
Wanyala Lukali	Thank you so much

A Congratulatory Song Sung in Namisindwa, Manafwa and some parts of Bududa districts

The above is a representative congratulatory song of arresting the animal that determined to hijack the candidate(s) life, but only scraped off the foreskin of the flesh. Earlier on, the Imbalu proceedings were compared to a hunting expedition against the crude beast that stops boys from ascending into elevated positions of leadership. Cutting off the foreskin labeled as a wild animal (leopard), assembles all sorts of jovial moments. Prolonged singing and dancing, as elders analyze and verify the given cut (Imbalu), the condition of the wound, the state of the circumcised and the general welfare of the environment. Circumcised candidates receive the necessary local medications including energizers and freshener drinks, all administered under the unquestionable authority of the executors and specialists of the ritual. It is a celebration of victory common in

churches. Believers who often celebrate the victory won at the cross and reflected occasionally. The pain of the cut and the joyous reintegration of the initiate can be read as a powerful narrative of death and new life, mirroring the Christian paschal mystery.

4.4.6 Cleansing Ceremony (*Khusabisa*)

After circumcision, purification (*Khusabisa*) of the initiate who is considered unclean and polluted with different complexities is done. He is forbidden from eating food with bare hands and sleeping in the main house until *Umukhebi* (surgeon) returns to purify him from impurities and the pouring of blood. The memorable ceremony meant for the third day ‘*sisyalukho*’ after circumcision, has lately changed even on the very evening. Research shows that the procedure is quite similar throughout the region. Beer is poured on the initiate’s hands, but of recent even water is used where an initiate does not celebrate beer. Here, the surgeon cautions the initiated to remember his name as the conduit of his transition from childhood to manhood. Cleansing is a key theme biblically connected to the blood of Jesus that ensures and emphasizes a cleansing for humanity.

S, Muyonga, likened the Imbalu surgeon to a contemporary examiner of the Uganda National Examination Board (UNEB) in relation to an academic candidate. A good examiner will give ample time to the student’s script for effectiveness of the final mark. Because he/she considerably determines the grades of the student. In agreement, the District inspector of schools in Manafwa district – J, Wasike, during the opening of schools for the year 2022, cautioned parents and learners on social media, to prioritize National exams. He advised parents to allow their sons circumcise either much before or later after completion of UNEB exams for any academic excellence.

The picture given is that both school and Imbalu carry an exam mentality, through teaching and learning process. Timing considered as the exam is set and done. Coaching extended as the candidate prepares and at a certain point left alone to sweat his way. Results are released and grades awarded, those who excel are celebrated, but those who fail face shame. Many contemporary young men and women who have not managed to gain grades tend to leave education, adding to the number of school dropouts. The inspector appealed to parents not to sacrifice the education of their children at the altar of an indefinite culture. Parents were asked to be considerate and allow their children to focus on the academic exams and later cultural.

Purification ritual entailed exhortations that constitute commands, cautions and guidelines. The surgeon introduces himself as a father who has birthed a son and has clothed him with a garment of manhood. He cautions him to behave himself as an adult, reverential to all ages as a requisite of his new rank. He hands the initiate his surgery knife, and warns him not to bring shame to the knife by way of misconduct. He also hands him a spear, a shield, an axe, a hoe, a drinking straw in a bamboo stick and lastly fire. All of these represent traits of courage to defend, preserve, work hard, clear the bushes, grow food, and to live a communal life. Fire represents the requirement to get a wife to cook food, light up the house, produce children and erase darkness in the home. Modernity is however questioning this trends that are contrary to modern trends of human rights and long durations taken in educational institutions. An adjustment is required within to ensure suitability, which is core in this study. This ethically viable as it sets one in the path of growth and ascendancy to levels of responsibility and accountability needed in all circles of life.

4.4.7 *Inemba* (Gradational Dance)

Inemba is the very last rite that marks the end of the scheduled ritual of the circumcision year. In several regions, on the eve of the *Inemba* dance, candidates undergo the Hatching Ceremony (*Khukhwiyalula*), which involves burning dry banana leaves locally called (*Kamasanza*) from where the label ‘burning *Lusanza*’ is derived. *Kamasanza* or ‘*Lusanza*’ are in some cases used as bedding for the newly circumcised (*bafulu*). It aims at disposing off the undesirable omen, which is associated with boyhood. Makunya asserts that, as the *lusanza* burns on, the *bafulu* hatch into new ranks of men. In this feast, the newly circumcised are incorporated back to normal family life after a considerable period of isolation. These beddings burn in a huge bonfire and the initiated keep vigil, singing, celebrating their accomplishments, ready to graduate in the *Inemba* ceremony

Findings reveal that, 15 clans of the 26 clans practice this ritual, while 11 clans do not. Parents stated that the ceremony targets a time of less activity, when people are quite free from garden work and have some time for leisure. It is often in a dry season that allows for good weather of three days’ open-air celebrations. The dance usually takes place at the end of December or beginning of January. It stages in different major centers that are convenient to many, because the entire newly circumcised that Khamalwa calls ‘*Batembete*’ are entitled to attend a reunion, meet relatives, friends and above all, enabling *Batembete* to meet their prospective marriage partners.

The *Batembete* dance with raised sticks, with their necks adorned with a creeping plant called *Libombwe*. The majestic sound of the drum influences their dancing movements as they wave the long sticks in the air. A big shout made in unison at the end of every song and stretch their sticks into one direction is significant. To adorn the ceremony, lots of local brew and abundance of foods are available for the people. Reports from elders indicate that people take advantage of the crowds

to make money from their snacks, foods and drinks. Life including culture is commercialized and time for free foods is history that ethically builds on the economic status of society.

Three clans out of the five selected clans under study undertake the *Inemba* dance, while two do not. The participatory clan leaders consider *Inemba* as a fully-fledged package designed to transit boys into adulthood. Contents include harmony, socialization and acquisition of authority to ‘handle’ manhood. Makwa (2012) argues that during *Inemba*, the initiates are handed masculine authority that he named as the, “robe of manhood”. At the *Inemba* dance the *Batembete* are incorporated into the hierarchy of men, on promotion ready to undertake new societal responsibilities. All the boyhood sticks and poles are symbolic and carefully preserved after assuming manhood, these poles are burnt and the initiate allowed to begin a phase of manhood.

4.5 Conclusion

Imbalu stands out as an undebatable ritual, assumed procedure to manhood. It is a covenant entered by the ancestors, highly revered and carried out mandatorily without excuse or delegation. Every male is destined to the ritual, alive or dead as long as he clocks the circumcision age. The ritual concerns all, but the invading Christianization and modernity has brought the rituals on the scale weighed by the lens of Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics if they ever stand the test of time as qualified by both the bible and African ethics. Ancestors are much involved and leaned upon for courage to manhood and future blessings, but its viability questioned. Colonial advancement forward challenges and criticisms against the ritual, and opens another scene that preoccupies the next chapter, which entails the views of the proponents and the current stand of events as far as the Imbalu ritual is concerned.

CHAPTER FIVE

COLONIAL CHALLENGES AND POST-COLONIAL COMMUNITY ADAPTATIONS

5.0 Introduction

The colonial struggle for African Christianity, presents a complex set of challenges that operate at theological, social, and psychological levels, for either integration or rejection of Imbalu among the Bamasaba. The core of the problem is the theological and hermeneutical challenges, how to interpret faith and culture. This chapter reflects specifically on the Colonial-era missionary theology that often created a strict dichotomy of Christianity and supposed Paganism. Since Imbalu ties to ancestral veneration and a spiritual worldview outside biblical revelation, it was categorically rejected as demonic and sinful. The colonial legacy included the influence of western religion and education, health and medicalization pressures, Legal and human rights discourses, urbanization and migration, commercialization and tourism, gender and modern identity, political manipulations, globalization and media exposure, environmental and economic pressures. This study concentrates on the colonial advancement into Uganda, specifically to the Bamasaba territory, and how they interfaced with the local cultures influence especially the Imbalu ritual. The British colonized Uganda in the late 19th century including the Bamasaba territory. A lot was experienced, including the attempts to undermine indigenous people and their cultures for their European thoughts and values. The missionary attempts to modify the ritual and the resistance paused are discussed herein. Despite the resistance towards European modifications, several members from within the cultural group have found it necessary to adjust the ritual accordingly. The dynamism of society demanded situational adjustments, apart from European ideologies, that have created debatable adaptations that surround the ritual as discussed below.

5.1 Colonial Advancement and their influence on the local cultures

History records that the missionary arrival in Uganda in about 1877, scaled high food and cash crops levels such as millet and maize. Coffee introduced in Uganda in 1908, found root in the higher regions, while cotton set in the plains of the country (Roscoe 1924; Suzette 1999). Elders of the community expressed how Arabica coffee flourished on the slopes of Mount Elgon, and the growers who included the Bamasaba greatly flourished. Stores locally known as '*tsisitowa*' established in every parish as storage and marketing centers. Here the village population exchanged their coffee and cotton for money (July 22, 2022). Fontaine (1959), records that other crops such as beans, yams, pumpkins, tomatoes, potatoes, and plantains cropped up. With a bimodal type of rainfall, the harvest was adequate and dependable. Bamasaba ascribe the vigilant and fanned cultural celebrations to the big yields and food adequacy in their communities.

Nevertheless, when it came to the Imbalu ritual, many disagreements were registered. To the colonialist, the communal and public celebrations of the Bamasaba were outwardly unpleasant that they described the people and the practices as 'barbaric' (Purvis 1910). Bamasaba were viewed as a people 'unpolished', partly attributed to their dressing that covered only their genitals, leaving men and women almost bare. Missionaries questioned what they described as naked bodies, associated with nudity. They regarded it as deprivation of privacy and violation of individual human rights, paramount for personal well-being (Wamimbi, 2007; Khanakwa, 2014). The Eurocentric interpretation of the colonial missionaries of Imbalu focused on bodily cutting rather than the cultural symbolic transition.

People in Africa lived and cherished communal life based on the African philosophy of humanity and community '*Ubuntu*' - a person for persons. This also explains why individuals lived in a free

extended family setting and freely extended celebrations. Observation showed that, education was communal; the whole community was involved in the education of the young ones. This was done through birth rites lessons, naming and puberty/initiation rites. Story telling, proverbs, riddles and taboos were major sources of training and moral formation to the young. Free mixing and interactions in the cultural community were a bother to European life and attempted to solve this by introducing Formal Education (Ngugi WA Thiong'o, 1986; Bediako, 1996).

B. Simiyu claims that their Christianized brothers in 'Muzungu' (European) schools were bouyanced and much interested in missionary ideas. He alleges that the missionaries advocated for these young Christian men to pick on young Christian girls for a marriage bond. This replaced the custom of parents and elders choosing marriage partners for their children. Simiyu insisted that communal living was very effective not only in choosing marriage partners but even in the payment of dowry for the bride (November 30, 2020). In support, clan leaders of Buluckeke and Bumbo, hailed the communal role of elders in the society. These would watch for any form of wrongdoing in individual homes and ensured peace and stability. Communal living ensured stability and unity as opposed to the contemporary marriages that are characterized by individualism and increased instabilities (December 4, 2020).

Missionaries began an advocacy for Women education and employment, which was in the beginning seen as unusual. C. Wekunya said that, women education brought societal changes as women began to take on public responsibilities in offices and public institutions. Missionaries condemned women mistreatment by men and women graded as humans' worthy of justice. Amidst such remedies, no significant remedy came up for the Imbalu ritual, mixed feelings and controversies continued rotating around it.

5.2 Church Missionary Society (CMS) and the Imbalu Ritual of the Bamasaba

About 1900, the first missionaries that belonged to the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) had reached Eastern Uganda to Christianize the region. The missionaries openly objected to the Bamasaba traditional practice of Imbalu in this context. J. Musila asserts that, Bamasaba had openly received the missionary message alongside their own, which partly defined their identities. Many of them became Christians, but at the same time, retained their cultural practices. This was still problematic to the colonials that defined it as syncretic; worshipping God alongside other gods (August 7, 2022).

Public and communal celebrations were offensive to the Colonialists who came from an individualistic background. Community elders argued that, Imbalu ritual based on vetting, had willingness of individual candidates in particular years. In addition, the Bamasaba were excited to dance their young men to their manhood in a public cherished affair. With their home experience, where circumcision was not a big deal, the missionaries were perturbed with the ruthlessness of the Bamasaba ritual. They saw the Bamasaba as callous, insisting on the importance of undertaking unnecessary pain publicly and uncompromisingly (Purvis, 1909).

Purvis records that, Rev. Crabtree and his wife arrived from Gayaza in Buganda into central Bugisu in January 1901. While at Nabumali, they established a mission station where they gave biblical instruction and taught reading, writing, arithmetic, singing and sewing. Purvis narrates that on their arrival, the seemingly rudimentary Bamasaba ritual hit the Crabtree couple. This urged these first two missionaries into an urgent need to evangelize the Bamasaba. They regarded the ongoing rituals as archaic and outwardly detested the practice. They therefore attempted to end such through evangelization, medicalization and Western education (Khanakwa, 2019).

By 1903, Rev. J.B. Purvis and his wife joined the Crab-trees with a mission to continue the evangelization project. Purvis was correspondingly precarious of the local customs in what he considered as witchcraft and sorcery. Imbalu was at the forefront of condemnation by the incoming foreigners. The British journal (1910) observed that whereas Jewish people had practiced male circumcision for religious reasons as far back as the Middle Ages or even earlier, most Europeans did not perform this practice until the nineteenth century when the medical establishment of male circumcision passed it as a hygienic procedure. Then later on as a 'cure' for masturbation and treatment for conditions local to the penis including *phimosis*, *balanitis* and *penile* cancer. Whether the colonialists condemned the ritual on a Bible hinge or social, the idea of nakedness and nudeness stood out in their criticism of the practice.

My informants hailed the missionary colonial tool of a Bible, and the task placed on them to learn reading and writing in order to serve as missionary partners. A reference is made of the famous Semei Kakungulu, pushed to Eastern Uganda, with an aim of spreading the new religion, while imposing Christian (European) thought line and values. By 1903, Semei Kakungulu had made roads in the East and established his headquarters at Nabumali where a church and missionary school started in the heartland of Masaba land. He planted trees, escalated crop production and activated the region worth of colonialism. At this point, the British government took over Mbale as an administrative Centre, witnessing a flow of colonialists in Mbale (Mazrui et al, 1991).

Imbalu became a contested ground between the local people and the Europeans but also among the emerging socially separated units of Bamasaba. C. Wekunya asserts that, some Bamasaba embraced European attempts to modify Imbalu, while others insisted on the traditional essentials

of braveness, pain and public mentality in socially significant ways. These debates saw Imbalu evolving from one format to another as a way of modifications to suit the colonial line of thought.

5.3 Evolution of Imbalu under the CMS

Following the negative responses from the incoming missionaries, Imbalu had to evolve from one mode to another in an attempt to suit the white man's taste. In their argument, the Bamasaba conceded their ritual in the face of external and internal opposition, as the missionaries and colonials message spread. Drawing on the societal archival records and field notes of previous researchers on Bamasaba cultural settings oral interviews, and the Masaba Historical Research Association (MHRA), the Bamasaba ritual encountered numerous criticisms attracting numerous modifications. These included Imbalu in enclosures, Imbalu medicalized, Imbalu adopted in formal education and Imbalu as a tool of ethno-nationalism.

5.3.1 Imbalu in enclosures

Community and cultural leaders, supported by Khanakwa (2019), said that in order to alternate against what the Europeans saw as the 'immoral' display of naked male bodies; the missionaries introduced the famous '*Bisagati*' (enclosures) in 1934. Enclosures were made of poles, sticks and dry banana leaves. This formed a kind of a curtain that made circumcision private and segregated from the attentive public as all people, men, women and children alike watched as the *bakhebi* (surgeons) performed the operation. Due to the strangeness of secreting circumcision candidates, the unit of men circumcised in 1934 were named as '*Banabizagati*' meaning, circumcised in enclosures (Purvis 1909).

Elders detested the idea of nakedness as community treats the uninitiated as children; they are still in a mother's cloth of a foreskin covering nudeness, so it is not a big deal and non-offensive. But when the foreskin is put away, then privacy of the mature is required. They also protested privacy of the new format, as witnesses were an in-separable essential part of the ritual, especially at the crucial juncture of transition into manhood. Elders advocated for a public show, arguing that real men expose their stamina to the world of elders including the living dead. Even still, Simiyu said that the people found means to witness the proceedings by either climbing trees or standing in strategic places to view. They could not allow a culture expressing abomination for a transition of this kind to be private and secretive.

5.3.2 Imbalu Medicalized

In 1938, missionaries' medicalised circumcision that equally provided privacy in the hospital without a public audience. Elders said that the model advanced to solve what the missionaries saw as 'enduring needless pain'. Yet to the Bamasaba, pain was a real deal, celebrated by culture. This format involved administering anesthesia and use of medical personnel and implements. This violated the traditional practice that cherished *Bakhebi* (local surgeons) and their traditional knives, held in contempt by the colonialists. Maziga the chairperson of *Bakhebi* in the region, supported by several parents and initiates, insisted that *Bakhebi* are the most appropriate to ensure a proper recognized hallmark of manhood in form of a certified circumcision cut - *Imbalu* or *Imbala* (August 11, 2022).

The colonialists adopted trained medical surgeons, rather than the treasured local ones. This was much contrary and a spot of open irrelevance and offense to the traditional Bamasaba in their local settings. Apart from privacy, pain and untrained personnel, the missionaries were objected to the

accompanying practices of sacrifices, ancestral worship and intoxicating beer drinking, both local beer *busela* and indali (Purvis 1910). Several elders insisted that beer drinking was a unifying leisure that facilitated the African philosophy of humanity and community. Culturally, in the absence of enough grain to brew beer, cultural ceremonies especially Imbalu were officially postponed. It is alleged that the change of conducting Imbalu in odd to even years followed the 1919 great famine that had the ceremony postponed to 1920 (Wamimbi, 2016; Khamalwa (2018). Yet to the missionaries, beer was a source of great evil in the country as echoed by Purvis.

The Cultural dance was blamed for being sexually provocative and promoted promiscuity. Community elders condemned change of dance from shaking shoulders to twisting waists in rhyme of a modern Kadodi drum. Medical circumcision came as what Khanakwa (2018) referred to as ‘the European ‘civilizing’ project’. Unpublished literature by F. Khabusi (1970), supported by oral information and scholarly work, reveal that the first instances of medical circumcision took place at Bubulo Health Centre in 1938, in present day Manafwa district, and spread to other health centers like Nyondo, Mbale and Bududa respectively. Both European and local missionaries urged parents in Masaba land to take their sons to hospitals for circumcision.

Elders were uncomfortable with a Circumcision that took place away from the ancestral courtyards (*khulwanyi*), something that was anti cultural. In hospitals boys had to lie down on wooden beds facing up in the ceiling, which was untraditional. This influenced the naming of the unit of all the males circumcised in 1938 as *Ba- Nalubawo* (derived from *lubawo*, ‘a piece of wood’). The medical anesthesia approach occasioned diverse responses; though some Bamasaba embraced it, several others rejected it entirely and actively voiced its disapproval. By this time, the ritual was transiting into the hands of the Europeans rather than the culturists themselves. Bamasaba

commonly called it ‘Imbalu *ye Bazungu*’ (circumcision of Europeans) instead of ‘Imbalu *ye Bamasaba*’ (circumcision of Bamasaba) or Imbalu *ingene* (real circumcision). This formed a common chant by oriented traditionalists, re-echoing Imbalu *ingene* and what they viewed as counterfeit (Khanakwa, 2018).

Information from interviewed Bamasaba elders confirmed that, those who welcomed medical circumcision did so because it offered an alternative to severe and painful experiences. They affirmed that in the 1940s and 1950s, some elders would advise boys who seemed likely to fear traditional circumcision to go in for hospital circumcision. To others it was less costly and much cheaper than the traditional circumcision that involved huge expenses associated with big feasts for the multitudes. However, promoters of traditional Imbalu predictably rejected medical circumcision because it compromised their understanding of the concept of the traditional ritual and its values (December 6, 2020).

Khanakwa (2018) in agreement with oral stories, assert that, medical circumcision created classes of men that threatened gender constructions of manhood and masculinities. Traditional Imbalu produced ‘masculinized’ men, while medical circumcision created ‘feminized’ men. Therefore, from the late 1930s onwards, it was not just the act of circumcision but the type of circumcision undertaken mattered. The Bamasaba traditionalists seriously doubted males circumcised in hospital, referred to as feminized men, women in labor wards and seen as a reproach to society and its norms. To them it undermined the core value of Imbalu for aimless circumcision. Courtyard Imbalu allowed elders to examine the scar to ensure that the operation was properly done. In case the cutting was un-satisfactory, there was room for correction to redo and fix the mistake, which was non-existent with hospital circumcision.

5.3.3 Imbalu adopted in formal education

The immense rejection of medical circumcision by the Bamasaba, forced the missionaries to consider a new anesthesia-free method. This was to be carried out in school premises (*Imbalu ye khumasomero*). Informants allege that these format completely distinguished schoolchildren from non-schooling ones. Under the new school format, school authorities' were mandated to observe the guidelines for the exercise. For instance, candidates were forbidden from performing the subscribed pre and post Imbalu rituals such as brewing, smearing yeast and chime and purification ceremonies. A Christian approach was adopted instead of the regarded 'heathen' procedures. Prayer dominated the ritual as a means of invoking boldness and blessings from the supernatural God. The trainee clergy were restricted from such pagan rituals for Christianized ones.

Three clan leaders appreciated the element of pain and proper cuts given in school premises. However, the elements of standing in the ancestral courtyards, having key stakeholders like maternal uncles and passing on responsibility missed out. C. Wekunya said that, a safety concern of the boy's exposure to 'evil eyed' people in non-ancestral grounds became an issue. Fear developed that witches could make the boys exhibit alarm and even fail to marry to have children in the future. By 1950, Khanakwa (2018) says that school circumcision had become increasingly unpopular because some candidates circumcised on school premises had displayed signs of fear, and the practice could no longer hold its stamina.

J. Kutosi describes a famous Nabumali culprit who kicked people around including the traditional surgeon '*Umukhebi*' to stop the operation. This was a cultural taboo, and the candidates' father had to pay a sizeable fine. He said that many boys fainted others held the surgeons and the progress line of the school format got on an undesired downward curve. Kutosi recalls that, the year he was

circumcised (1952) the Bamasaba raised a court case against the missionaries for belittling their traditional ritual. Bamasaba claimed that the missionaries were ignorant of their roots and ritual implications. They argued that the European missionaries should remove their heads and hands from Imbalu. The scheduled court hearing had the Imbalu ritual withdrawn from foreign hands back to traditional courtyards (December 5, 2022).

School circumcision was criticized for eliminating the Imbalu dance that psychologically prepared the candidates for pain. This format was viewed as a mere white man's game not worthwhile embracing. Elders agreed that songs contained lyrics that warned the candidates about the pain and the dangers of fearing circumcision just as praise and worship songs encourage, warn and strengthen Christians. In song and dance, elders assessed the forcefulness of the candidate's rhythms and alleviated any discords accordingly. *Ityang*, the chemical herb for stirring up the circumcision mood was ministered to set the candidates on vibe for the knife. Elders alleged that, the consecutive fear for the knife characterized in this option, had the missionaries abandon it.

Unpublished literature in Mbale town Library, in agreement with oral support, shares that in 1954 members of the African Local Government drew up a circumcision schedule in which only two days (18th and 19th August) allocated for the circumcision of all schoolchildren in the entire region. On the contrary, thirty-seven days (8th August – 14th September) were allocated for the circumcision of non-schooling boys (village boys), with each sub-county being assigned a specific date. Allocation of two days was a cautious move to confine them from engaging in the Imbalu rituals. The manuscript alleges that some parents grieved over the deprived benefits of courage and boldness gained from dancing and therefore the ability to withstand pain. In addition to this, the unifying ritual had turned into a discriminatory practice, separating school boys from village boys.

These violated the intentions of the ritual; to build a social brotherhood, especially among the cohorts circumcised in the same year.

According to Mbale Archives, ‘Regulations for Control and Improvement of Bugisu Circumcision Ceremonies (1958), the Bugisu District Council passed a by-law aimed at controlling and ‘improving’ the practice. The architects of the by-law reiterated the separation of the circumcision of village boys from that of schoolboys and banished the latter from joining in the village ceremonies, which included dancing, brewing beer and performing cultural rituals (1958). In an extreme contrast, the by-law provided for private circumcision of schoolboys either at hospitals, dispensaries and aid-posts or at their fathers’ homes. The format offered youths a variety of options to deviate and abscond from the treasured traditional mode of Imbalu. The by-law banned the use of force by creating a legal structure for admonishing victims of the law. This was theoretically a challenging headway of Imbalu, which involved the hunting down of cowards to avoid misfortune and even death to society members (Mbale Archives).

The archives record that in the presence of the by-law, in the 1960s; some men organized themselves and forcibly pursued the Imbalu defaulters. By the mid 1960’s, the numbers of defaulters were noted to be growing higher especially among those who had attained formal schooling. Unpublished Mbale Archival information, reveal a confidential, letter from Mutambo Veterinary Department to the District Commissioner, Bugisu, on 5 August 1966. In the letter the veterinary assistant in Mbale, reported that some chiefs were involved in forcing Bagisu men into circumcision and that he himself was a target of the circumcision enforcers. It read, “I am not circumcised myself, just because I do not see the importance of it and I have had local Bamasaba troubling me many times” (Mbale Regional Archives; Khanakwa, 2018).

Formal education had allowed its recipients to acquire civil service jobs and rendering the Imbalu ritual irrelevant to their adulthood tasks. Wekunya himself circumcised from hospital in 1966 at the age of 24, after graduating as a teacher and even after marrying a non-Mugisu girl. Yet traditionally Imbalu was not just a ceremony but also a cultural debt that graduated boys into men ready to take up family roles. This phenomena increased use of force in 1966 as many undermined the basics of culture for western education. Society hunted down all the uncircumcised and had them pay the cultural debt forcefully. The cohort of 1966 was named as *Ba-Muwambe*, meaning those caught forcefully to undertake the cultural ritual of circumcision. All suspects who claimed to concur with the European thoughts, against the local beliefs, were dragged into the ritual, thus bringing the traditional ritual back to its levelled cultural ground.

5.3.4 Imbalu as a tool for Ethno-nationalism

Archival information supported by Khanakwa (2018) asserted that Imbalu was crucial in events as the Ugandan colonial authorities separated Bugisu district, Bukedi district and Mbale municipality as a separate entity belonging to neither district. It became a political tool for scramble of the surrounding region, in the riots in 1954, 1956 and 1962 respectively. Wamimbi (1962), in his manuscript of the History of Bamasaba narrates that “On the eve of Uganda’s independence, as they pressed the colonial state to resolve their conflict with the Bagwere, some Bagisu ‘intellectuals’, including members of the Bugisu District Council used Imbalu to mobilize Gisu-wide support against foreigners. They intimidated the non-circumcising Bagwere by arguing that Bugisu land had boundary markers which could only be identified by *basaani* (circumcised men), implying that the uncircumcised (*basinde*) did not have the legitimacy to debate land issues.

Imbalu became a political tool that Bagisu ‘intellectuals’ intimately tied to ideas of land tenure” (Khanakwa, 2018). Wamimbi’s unpublished work (1962), states that Bamasaba forcibly circumcised Bagwere to restrain them from occupying what they considered as Bugisu territory. They assert that Imbalu gave the Bamasaba a platform of argument what Khanakwa labels as exerting ‘hyper-masculine power’ on non-circumcising neighbors. C. Wekunya supported by Khabusi’s unpublished work (1970) narrated that, right away from the beginning of conflict, D. Natoolo mobilized a team of men, loaded with landmarks, stones and ashes on his truck and planted them in the claimed boarder on several nights, as the case dragged in court. At the time of final judgement, the Bagisu men claimed that the only way to claim land among the Bamasaba was by evident land markers. The British presiding Judge, found long overdue land markers and declared the case in favor of the Bagisu. This is what Khabusi labeled as ‘Manly Maturity Moves’ that had the Bagisu prevail over the Bagwere.

The manuscript narrated that on the night before the Ugandan independence witnessed the Imbalu ritual evolving considerably. Mbale town was thoroughly terrorized and overcome with the ritual and its paint spread in all directions. Khanakwa urges that, these were a part of the larger struggle of defining a cultural institution, which set the Bagisu apart, from other multi-ethnic groups in the multi-ethnic modern Ugandan state. Imbalu was central to the construction of what she labels as ‘Gisu-ness’ or Masaba-ness in this context, and it provided a strong platform from which people voiced their grievances (2018).

The cultural presentations and displays of Imbalu were undeniable. Refusal to grant Bamasaba permission to hold this event meant denial of one of the Fundamental Human Rights as declared at the Uganda Constitutional Conference (Khanakwa, 2019; Bugisu District Cultural Board 2000).

The Bamasaba ethnicity intertwined with their traditional Imbalu provided a stage for ownership of the region with usurping a fresh significance that intensified ethnic patriotism. As Uganda was attaining freedom from foreign rule, Bamasaba or Bagisu were celebrating their freedom from foreign interruption off their cultural rituals, Imbalu in particular.

5.4 Post Independence Revival of Imbalu Ritual

After Uganda gained independence in 1962, there was a notable resurgence of interest in traditional cultural practices, especially the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba community. Uganda was now free from British domination, as the Bamasaba were free from missionary interruption of their rituals. Cultural diehards now bent on how to consolidate their ritual to ensure excellent progress. The ritual stood out as a powerful symbol of the Bamasaba heritage. It also served as a platform for reclaiming cultural practices suppressed during colonial rule. C. Mungoma said that, the election of the first Umuhinga (King) in 1963 had intentional ritual revitalization. The ritual inauguration took place, at Maluku DA, and later shifted to spacious Mutoto grounds in 1966 for strategized celebrations, but criticisms were also building up from the missionary traditionalists.

Elderly informants, who undertook circumcision before independence, shared that the ritual was backed on various fronts. Nannyonjo, J. (2015), asserts that in the 1960's and 70's, traditional leaders began organizing larger Imbalu ceremonies that involved heightened music, dance, and feasting. The gatherings were not only a celebration of the rite, but also a means to reinforce cultural identity within the community. Elders emphasized local government and community involvement in promoting the Imbalu ritual as a key cultural event in the 1990's. These groups helped to mobilize resources and publicize the importance of the ritual to foster greater participation, but there was a sluggishness emerging from missionary ideas (August 9, 2022).

As part of resurgence, educational and health, programs arose as a way of mobilizing massive community involvement in the ritual. Ndung'u, said that, Schools in the Bugisu region began incorporating lessons about local traditions, including the Imbalu ritual, into their curricula. This aimed at instilling a sense of pride and understanding among the youth about their cultural heritage. While the late 1990s and early 2000s, witnessed the introduction of health initiatives to promote safe circumcision practices alongside the Imbalu ritual ((Ndung'u, 2017). However, amidst criticisms from different stakeholders, revitalization could not take off as intended due to different views among the Bamasaba themselves.

Organizations like the Ugandan Ministry of Health in conjunction with local leaders ensured hygiene and safety, which helped modernize the ritual while maintaining its cultural significance (World Health Organization, 2009). The ritual seemingly came back in the hands of the locals in the name of their cultural heritage free from colonial influence, while the hybrid population stuck on Christianizing Imbalu. Documentaries and media features on Ugandan culture often highlighted the Imbalu ritual, highlighting its significance and practices. This increased visibility both locally and internationally amidst controversies and mixed feelings of Christianity (Mungereza, 2018),

The elders emphasized the need of facing the live knife publicly and without anesthesia, for proper attainment of maturity and public recognition. G. Wolingo born in 1942 circumcised in his grandfather's courtyard in 1956 shared that, aided circumcision was degrading and attracted a lot of scorn and belittling womanish nicknames, and a sure way of driving oneself out of community celebrations. "It was even better to die than to stand the shame of shying away from Imbalu for colonial options," he said. At the time of this conversation, Wolingo was a clan leader of

Basimaolya Bawanzala in a position he could have never enjoyed if he had deviated from the traditional Imbalu ritual, he confessed (December 7, 2020).

G. Wolingo reported that contrary to his own experiences, his young brother Walubengo born in 1944, circumcised secretly in 1962 at the hospital, literally spent almost his entire life in town. Walubengo survived with hospital circumcision because he was in the formal school of the *Muzungu* and spent most of the time in school away from the local community. Even after school, he qualified as a teacher and lived out of the Bamasaba community, teaching in the city free from cultural nagging. Historically the Bamasaba recommended a full-fledged cultural ritual witnessed publically on ancestral courtyards and free from anesthesia.

Meanwhile, the bible as a book of colonialism and its principles remained; several Bamasaba embraced it, believed it and owned its principles alongside their own. This scenario created three distinct parties within, namely, missionary, traditional and traditional missionary, who were both traditional and Christian. These three were holding differing views up to date. The missionary-based group believed in erasing traditional culture, the conservatives held to pure tradition, while the traditional Christians held on Christianizing tradition. The retired bishop of Mbale Diocese, Samwiri Wabulakha in his Christmas sermon 2022 at St Andrew's Cathedral Mbale said that "Imbalu must be Christianized to suit the interests of the largely Christianized Bamasaba community". He appealed to the cultural institution to ensure that Imbalu does not derail people but draw them closer to God, which is a reason for this study.

5.5 Post-Colonial Community Adaptations of Imbalu

Even after the overthrow of colonial domination and their immediate policies, Imbalu has remained contentious. Continued debates and criticisms have caused variations in perception and performance of Imbalu ritual up to date. There are literal camps that exist even in individual families, those against and those pro-the ritual. Numerous and different modifications have continued to arise as new philosophies continue hitting on society in the name of western civilization and escalating economies. The missionary aftermath is real and several local people feel more inclined to the missionary doctrine than their traditions. The effects of the cultural event on the social economic situations are visible in the contemporary society across the communities. The ongoing modifications are several and continually upcoming, they include the following;

5.5.1 Christian Circumcision

Elders in Namisindwa, Manafwa and Mbale districts, allege that Christianized parents in the late 60's and 70's were excommunicated from churches and fellowships when their sons participated in the traditional ceremonies of Imbalu. Those who avoided conflict played double standards by assigning their sons to the clans-men until the ritual proceedings got over. Several Bamasaba are still convinced about the missionary ideologies and they would prefer to circumcise their children in a Christianized manner. Such categories tend to prefer circumcision done at church premises or calmly in their own homes if done individually. P, Natseli, the Archdeacon of Bulucheke said that, anesthesia is just a pain reliever, as Panadol relieves headache and body pain. The people from a Christian background I interacted with insisted that, anesthesia be left to the choice of individual candidates and parents in the equation (December 21, 2020).

Observation revealed that, Christianized parents and persons detested the elaborate procedure of traditional Imbalu. The vigorous singing and dancing, alcoholism and obscenity accompanied in the ritual were detestable. Christians preferred calm procedures free from mobs and numbers with or without anesthesia. Though Christians A. Mulyanyuma and M, Mwalye head of laity of Mbale diocese, insisted that their sons have to calmly square the knife free from anesthesia in the ancestral courtyard (July 22, 2022). This indicated a kind of dilemma the Bamasaba Christians find themselves. Amidst the different opinions, and different attempts have been put in place to try to meet people's needs consequently in the present day society, such as these below.

5.5.1.1 Liturgical Circumcision Model

Due to increasing dilemma's and contentions especially by traditional Christians over Imbalu ceremonies, Bishop Tucker School of Divinity and Theology (BTSDT), Uganda Christian University (UCU) Mukono, in conjunction with some senior clergy among the Bamasaba came up with a liturgy in the order of service for carrying out traditional ceremonies, Imbalu inclusive. The theological school viewed and placed these exercise of Imbalu on the level of other church sacraments like confirmation and matrimony. The book entitled 'Provisional Rites of the Church of the province of Uganda (2013) is scripted down in an ordered service of praise, prayers, responses and blessings by the priest respectively and the eventual cutting off the foreskin.

The order of service appears in accord with the traditional three days of Imbalu preparation. The liturgy specifies day 1 as a day for prayer and counseling of the initiates by selected knowledgeable Christians and clergy. Day 2 set for prayer and literal preparation of the young initiates for the ceremony on the next day. Then day 3 for church service of family members, friends, Godparents, service leader, the priest and the Christian body constituting the congregation. Rev Namonyo one

of the designers of the liturgy said that, the new liturgy constituted about the cultural philosophy of transition, cohesion and identity. The adjustment meant to counter the several criticisms and responses to the alarming social-economic situations of society (December 3, 2020).

On the day 3, the book indicates a processional hymn for the candidates and the congregation. At the altar, the Godparents present candidates to the priest in reverence to the God of Abraham, in the Name of the father son and Holy Spirit. The leader then takes on the service as scripted down, in worship, intercessions, exhortations and encouragements in form of a short sermon. Liturgically, at the time of circumcision of a candidate, the circumciser has to proclaim, ‘I circumcise you in the name of the father son and Holy Spirit and the congregation respond with a loud Amen. Interludes of worship songs and celebration praise songs are to characterize the ceremony liturgically.

However, Personal observation and oral reports reveal that this format is still unpopular in churches and in the community at large. The Anglican Church as owners of the liturgy has not taken the task to popularize it. The book is quite uncommon, and those in possession of it are seemingly uninterested in the detailed ordered service. Even the copies given to Anglican educational institutions, archdeaconries and diocesan headquarters; are lying idle on bookshelves. The contemporary attitude that prefers oral to written remits minimizes the use of liturgy in churches more so in societal rites like circumcision.

The Bishop of Mbale Diocese of Mbale diocese claimed that the liturgy has never been inaugurated in the church leading to its unpopularity. He further tagged unpopularity to the general preference of oral to written, spoken and heard, not written to be read. Rev Namonyo apportioned unpopularity to lack of zeal by church leaders to expose their congregations to the same. Yet the

Christian church is still in dilemma concerning traditional circumcision in relation to their Christian walk. Majority of my informants shunned the liturgical model because of its detailed content. P, Natseli said, “The liturgy is written in English that makes it irrelevant and unsuitable in cultural ceremonies, which are typically in villages, where Lumasaba is paramount. Even in town setting, where English would be usable, many people detest reading and reciting, and prefer informal practices or digitalized programs. Christians said that, during ceremonies, people set themselves for celebrations and can only sustain short interventions of a prayer, short exhortation and a blessing. Given such arguments, the liturgy has stayed silent and non-implemented in the traditional settings of the time.

5.5.1.2 Christian Medical Circumcision/ Non-Liturgical with Anesthesia

This model is becoming more common and said to be more convenient and relevant to the users. My late father R, Nambwira, a professional teacher, after conversion into Christianity, circumcised all my five young brothers from home in the 80’s under this option. Yet in the 70’s he had opted for vigorous traditional Imbalu for his elder son. The health worker administered anesthesia from the house, then the boys brought out to the courtyard for circumcision in the years 1982, 1984 and 1986 respectively. Fewer invited witnesses were present on these occasions as the traditional ‘*umukhebi*’ did the surgery according to the traditional standards. This is what I equally did with my three sons in the years 2004 and 2006 respectively, combining the last two in the same year. Traditionally boys consecutively circumcise in accordance to their family age descending order. Modernity is prevailing over the cultural norms whereby if a younger one is willing, he can access circumcision leaving an older sibling still building capacity for Traditional Circumcision (TMC).

In this Christian Circumcision, Bamasaba still observe their traditional seasons of Imbalu. They engage traditional surgeons who cut the candidate(s) as required and treat their Imbalu or Imbala the traditional way of cleaning and bandaging wounds daily. This is opposed to purely medical circumcision where stitching of the wound is done once for all until healing is realized. The ceremony begins instantly in the physical circumcision and ends in a celebratory meal or even without. Some caregivers prefer circumcision of their children to be in the hospital than at home. H. Mabonga preferred his 12-year-old son assisted at hospital, to avoid gossip of neighbors' in case the boy cried for fear of the surgery and the horror accompanying the practice.

The Mbale Diocesan mission department has of late adopted this model and has made reasonable strides amidst cultural negative comments. Parents are mobilized for a scheduled date, either with a night prayer or without. Parents and concerned caregivers together with the boys gather at church premises in either the previous evening or the exact morning. Common phases include vibrant praise and worship, prayer sessions, counseling and short sermons of encouragement. Medical sensitization and instruction given to the boys and parents concerning treatment of the wound. Then the priest blesses the candidates and releases them for circumcision in a prepared facility.

Parents who chose this model said that they preferred it because it is less tedious, cheap and peaceful. It has the approval of the priest and above all God's blessings upon their children and families. This design has become so popular in the different regions of Mbale Diocese. For example, in the year 2018 January, the Mbale Diocesan mission team spread christiam/medical circumcision in five different parishes in Namisindwa district namely, Bubutu, Magale, Bukharere, Namboko and Maala Churches. Some resistance from the cultural institution sprung up, but the church program was unquenchable. December of the same year, the fire of church circumcision

spread considerably throughout the whole diocese. According to mission office reports, 16 churches hosted the ceremony and 997 boys got circumcised, duo in the year 2018 respectively.

The Christian church and Christian organizations like Child Development Centre's (CDC), popularly known as compassion international, are in high gear with this church standpoint. Reports from the Mbale Diocesan mission office, show a total of about 1452 boys circumcised at several diocesan churches in the period of 2018- 2022. The Diocesan Bishop J, Nandaah encouraged parents to embrace this format, which he labeled as an extension of the missionary work of the 1930's and 1940's. He beseeched the leadership of the cultural house to align Imbalu to the blessings of God. He (Bishop) referred to the Bamasaba Anthem that clearly pleads with God to preserve '*Umukuka*' so that he can put right the Imbalu ritual to serve the people appropriately (January 11, 2022).

5.5.1.3 Non-Liturgical without Anesthesia

Apart from Christian medical format, there are parents and youths who prefer Christian circumcision that is free from medical anesthesia. The overseer (Bishop) of Pentecostal churches in Namisindwa region revealed that the Pentecostal move of circumcision in the 1960s constituted of a night prayer, singing and drumming through the night, and then blessings declared on the candidate(s) in the morning and circumcision took place preferably in individual homes, or at church depending on the beholder of the ceremony. He explained that the practice died in the Amin ban of the Pentecostal movement in Uganda in the 70's.

Even when freedom of worship later revived, the format could rarely arise because it was only appealing to the Pentecostals and unpopular with other Christians especially those from

mainstream churches (Protestants and Catholics). He however regretted that the format had met with occasional frustration as some of the candidates expressed fear and panic in the process of surgery. It was an intolerable embarrassment to Christian families amidst criticisms from the elders. To them, the model had ignored the accompanying rituals that were crucial in inculcating the expected capacity to endure the great pain (August 8, 2022).

1n December 2020, Bukigai Child Development Centre (CDC) in conjunction with the Mbale Diocesan team organized a Christian medical circumcision at Bukigai (COFU) in Bududa district. As candidates were being prepared, a group of youths and their escorts came requesting for Imbalu at church without anesthesia, in the face of COVID 19 and its SOPs. The in-charge of the medical team G, Malema declined to their request. He explained that the medical exercise takes a longer time making it unsuitable for anesthesia free. Anesthesia free surgery is only suitable with the traditional way that takes a matter of seconds to accomplish. It was therefore impossible for the candidates to endure a medical anesthesia free exercise under a medical exercise.

At the medical surgeon's clarification, this group summoned a traditional surgeon who circumcised 14 teenage boys at Bukigai COFU in the priest's courtyard in a few minutes. Meanwhile the medical team pushed on with 42 smaller boys for some hours. At the end of the day, candidates totaling 56 circumcised at the same time, same church but under diverse models. These 14 boys also benefited from the church offers of first aid kit, soft drink and clothes for covering (lessors) given to all. To the parish priest, Rev Wabomba, this was an achievement of a peaceful church circumcision desired in the contemporary times as opposed to the hectic traditional arrangements (December 14, 2020).

The lessons to be learnt from the above incidence, is that the Bamasaba are at the cross roads of which way to take. Some people are nagged with the traditional model and looking for a format that retains the traditional Imbalu values but snatch them from laborious proceedings. The presence of COVID in 2020, which restricted the usual traditional pattern, gave a clue that circumcision can be done otherwise, in modes of silence, brief, simple and informal. Several boys undertook silent circumcision in 2020 following the SOPS of COVID 19. Four of the initiates said that they were ready to dance but the standard laws stopped them so they had to succumb. Five of them were comfortable that it turned out silent in respect of COVID 19 for their good and comfort (February 4, 2021).

Sometimes the young boy with or without the permission of the father engages a surgeon. An elder narrated a story of a father who rejected the son's move and sent away the surgeon. After which the boy attempted to circumcise himself and obviously, a surgeon was hurried back to finish the process. At times, stubborn boys who know the rigidity of their fathers, put herbs in their sexual organs causing swellings for urgent circumcision to be undertaken. Wondering why, the urgency both initiates and parents said that such boys come in touch with '*ityang*' a chemical that accelerates desire for Imbalu. The beauty of this format is that, it takes place in the family courtyard in the presence of family members and done by an approved surgeon.

In some instances, the parent agrees with the candidate and book the surgeon in homesteads usually at dawn before the neighbors get to know. Few key people like the maternal uncle and family members and few close friends notified to witness the function. The initiates of 2020, who took on this format, attributed it to the SOPS of COVID 19 and the underlying economic friendliness in the model. While the cohort of 2022, attributed it to economic and social benefits including their

personal and family spirituality that saves them from undesired physical baggage and the social - economic complications and constraints (February 14, 2023).

5.5.1.4 Bible Model - Eight-Day-Old Model and Heart Circumcision

A few strict followers of the Bible have chosen to copy the eighth day model as instructed to Abraham in Genesis 17:9-14, which has become a Jewish culture up to date. Observation and oral reports show that a few Bamasaba especially the sect of *Bayudaya* (Jews), found at the slopes of Mount Elgon ascribe to this format in their observance of Judaism, while others have deviated to adolescent model, including some Muslim Bamasaba. However, this model is contrary to the Bamasaba setting, where candidates transit into manhood, something impossible with an eight-year-old infant. The missionaries, who invaded the local ceremony, did not attempt to introduce this Biblical format shared by the Moslem world that circumcises their male at infant stage preferably 7 days after birth. This makes this model quite unpopular among the contemporary operations.

The Ugandan National Newspaper of daily Monitor presents, the All Saints Cathedral Kampala decision of circumcision as a non-required ritual by Christians. This reflected on the New Testament council in Acts 15 that rendered the ritual optional. The church's position was that, circumcision is a personal choice, since it is not a requirement for salvation or church membership (Monitor, June.12th 2018). This argument finds its roots in the advocacy of heart circumcision or spiritual circumcision, popularized in the Old Testament Prophets and Pauline writings of neither circumcision nor un-circumcision avails anything, but faith working through love (Galatians 5:6; Romans 2:28-29). On contrary, Church leadership in Mbale, accepts circumcision as a traditional

culture and cannot do away with it. Their earnest call is to Christianize Imbalu to accommodate the Bamasaba Christians who are at the crossroad (Bishops Mbale Diocese).

Oral stories and the church in particular narrate an episode of members of the real awakened fellowship in the 70's, in Namisindwa district who came up to discard circumcision in the foreskin in pretext of heart circumcision. It met disaster as their youths were circled and forcefully circumcised, an event of shame to those Christian families. M. Mwalye, a member of the real awakened fellowship argued that the current campaign of Safe Male Voluntary Circumcision for all males renders this format null and void. "Circumcision cannot be optional to the Bamasaba when their counterparts the non-circumcising tribes are encouraged by government to circumcise and guard themselves from the invading STD's" (July 22, 2022). Therefore, the Bamasaba have to circumcise at all costs, but the format adopted suitably is objective in this study.

5.5.2 Safe Male Voluntary Circumcision (SMVC)

SMVC is a deliberate national campaign for all males to circumcise medically as an attempt to control the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) pandemic. According to USAID (2006), the Ugandan National Strategic Plan (NSP) 2007/08–2011/12 recognizes safe male circumcision as a cost-effective HIV prevention intervention. Though it is acknowledged that it is not 100 percent effective but it has the capacity to alleviate the vice (Sabet, 2012). Much as this report largely concerned the less circumcising communities, it is alleged that the insensitive crude proceedings of the mandatory Imbalu among the Bamasaba has attracted this model to the Bamasaba community. This puts Bamasaba on the same footing for SMVC like her non-circumcising neighbors.

Unlike the traditional Imbalu ritual done by local surgeons, indiscriminate trained medical surgeons, non-Bamasaba and female surgeons all alike carry out SMVC. For instance, the director of SMVC in eastern Uganda under ‘BAYLOR’ an international body under USAID in 2022 was Charles Anywar from northern Uganda. Talking to Anywar about allowing Bamasaba surgeons as a preference to circumcise Bamasaba boys under this option, he said that, the government has trained all concerned medical team thoroughly for this work irrespective of tribe and sex. Anywar clarified that the organization does not select individual surgeons but health centers, so when a health center is selected, the trained medical staff is passed out with certificates of surgery ready for the exercise. The Bamasaba are not even preferred because some of them end up deviating from the medical standards for their traditional requirements, something anti-medical and anti-government, Anywar said (December 12, 2022).

This contemporary method of SMVC entitles every candidate to his own health kit with a personal surgery blade/knife, opposed to the TMC of using one knife for several candidates. The Mbale district assistant health officer, Wandawa emphasized what she termed as ‘One Knife (OK), one Candidate (OC) (OK for OC) Policy. “We are deliberately strict with the policy of one knife one candidate,” Wandawa said. This has become a song all through media, community sensitization meetings and all family platforms. She said that parents have to ensure that a fresh and clean knife is used for circumcision of their sons (November 28, 2020).

Sensitization and offering of refresher courses for the practicing surgeons is a vital ingredient. Sister Wandawa in the New Vision September 19, 2022 said that, “they have not yet got any cases of badly circumcised boys who require correctional medical attention as ever. Wandawa attributes it to intensive sensitization of the local surgeons and radio programs by the health department

targeting Imbalu candidates and their parents before the official launch of the Imbalu season. Wandawa says medical workers sensitize local surgeons about good hygiene to avoid the risk of tetanus and HIV. “We are strict with the policies of the Ministry of Health that ensure Hygiene, Health and safety,” Wandawa added.

The DHO is under the umbrella of international Health bodies like USAID, RHITES-E, out to advocate for the performance of SMVC even on the culturally destined Imbalu males. The Bamasaba healthy workers I interacted with highly commended the medical circumcision gadgets. The in-charge of SMVC in Mbale, gave a detailed content of a personal kit entitled by every candidate. A personal kit contained two scissors, a curved parallel for holding and the flat one for shaping. Then a surgical blade for cutting, a concept for arresting bleeding nerves, alcohol swap for cleaning the fore head, wire gauze for first treatment, a pair of gloves for the surgeon’s protective use, a drear for absorbing the blood, sutures for stitching, 10mls syringe for administering anesthesia and a plastic apron to be dressed on by the surgeon against dirt.

In the recent past, health teams has observed that as SMVC finds room in the communities even among the Bamasaba it is considered. There is a growing trust to allow the medical team to do the operation and collectively burn all the used up gadgets. Meanwhile the metallic gadgets are disposed away in the presence of the community. The medical team acknowledged the entire awareness of pending insecurity and assured the people of utmost protection and safety of their used up gadgets.

The in-charge surgeon of SMVC in Bufumbo health center in Mbale said that, SMVC under the ministry of health advocates for privacy of the initiates. Only three persons namely the candidate, parent and surgeon plus the dressing nurse have the entitlement to be present, which cancels out

the celebrated public mentality of the Bamasaba. He said that even when the Bamasaba are slowly but surely embracing this medical practice, they detest three things. First is privacy, two is laying the candidates down on medical beds for a surgery and thirdly allocating non-Bamasaba and women medicals to circumcise their sons. Their preference is that the procedure be public by a male ‘*Umukhebi*’ as the boys stand firmly straight even under the influence of the applied anesthesia.

How the two extreme demands from the ministry of health and the Bamasaba community are to be balanced, the in-charge said that in extreme cases, the surgical team have asked the ministry agencies to try to adjust to the community desire in order to win more to safe circumcision. He said that they can do the surgery in rooms with several people watching to prove wrong the several unfounded false allegations; such as mean scars given by the medical surgery which had put away several Bamasaba who demand sizeable scars. “There is so far a considerable approval of this medical model even among the traditional Bamasaba, due to approved scars, minimized pain, expenses and accidents. In contrast, traditional surgeons are always in a rush, with an assumption that they are spirit possessed, and hurrying to get to other candidates, thus exposing the exercise to risks of accidents and poor surgery.

5.5.3 Moja syo (One day and it is done)

A recent format has developed among the Bamasaba titled *Moja syo* for their convenience. The name *Moja Syo* comes from two distinct words *Moja* and *Syo*. *Moja* is Kiswahili to mean ‘one’ in this context one day, while *Syo* is a Lumasaba word that means over, finished or done. It therefore means that one day and Imbalu done. It is a situational type where the community is informally

responding to the circumstances of their time. No formal clan meetings resolved on these but individual families and persons dictated by circumstances arrived at these.

In *Moja Syo* people literally dance for one day or even a half day and circumcision takes place the next morning. The participants and recipients of *Moja Syo* format unanimously attribute it to high expenditures incurred in Imbalu traditional ceremony, amidst minimal and scarcity of family resources. I witnessed this arrangement in Bumwoni subcounty, Namisindwa district early December 2022. The young men began to dance on an evening and the next morning they circumcised. This format is slowly but surely spreading throughout the region in response to the wild economic constraints. My informants said that this model is spreading like bush fire from one family to another and from one clan to another. Words and criticisms come up in a faint voice, while conditions take on a very hoarse voice, Mulyanyuma said. You cannot urge with conditions and results therein; this offers Post colonialism a platform to enhance Imbalu as set in this study.

The clan leader of Bumbo/Bumwoni said that Bamasaba in his clan are culturally sensitive but economically drained. He personally supported *Moja syo* format among his clan as a solution to unnecessary expenditures. He said that the arrangement is stretching out to other clans and parishes given the indiscriminate economic hazards. Clan leader Bungokho said that, traces of *Moja syo* are creeping slowly into his clan and central Mbale region as a whole. It was cited in Nabumali and Nyondo Busyiende sub-county Mbale district in the month of December 2022. The concerned parents and elders have the young men spark off the dance on an afternoon and surgery done the next morning.

Parents, who preferred this model, attributed it to scarcity of food and grains for brew. This model allowed for one meal and concentrated night dance appropriate for such times of scarcity, they

confessed. The clan leader Buwalasi (2020) said that ever since time immemorial, people in Sironko and Bulambuli, do Imbalu for two days or less to check the expenses involved. Kutosi said in Buluckeke, dances happen only in the evenings to scale down the economic drains. Looking through the clans, the economic constraint turns out to be a big deal that calls for aberration from the set cultural norms and standards for affordable ones.

Reports and written records indicate that this scenario is ongoing among the Bukusu of Kenya, known as the Bamasaba across the Uganda Kenya boarder. The face of Imbalu initiation as a tradition in Bukusu land is becoming less vigorous as westernization is becoming more entrenched. Initiates no longer go round villages calling on all the relatives (Wanyenya, 2013). The reason is that the expenses involved and the energy entailed is unnecessarily enormous. Initiates simply call on one or two close neighbors or relatives and do not have to make long journeys to the maternal uncle for purposes of pomp. Wanyenya says that in modern times, slaughtering is ceremonial and exempted; cattle preserved for sale to cater for the initiate's school fees or for future marriage. He observes that the Bukusu these days regard schooling more important than circumcision, a true attitude with the contemporary modern Bamasaba population.

The parents of '*Moja Syo*' in the practicing sub counties of Mbale region equally pointed to the rising school fees and general inflation of commodities in the open market. The national newspaper of Monitor August 13, 2022, had an eye-catching headline, "From Lockdown to Inflation". The alarm in the paper was that surging prices are wiping out spending power. Noted was that inflation had proved more perilous to livelihood than the COVID lockdown. Yet education and family life remain as demanding and even more than ever. In this case, a wise parent has to cut off the less rewarding portions for rewarding projects.

Three initiates of *Moja Syo* appreciated the brief hours of Imbalu dance that saved them from three sleepless nights and frantic days. They were glad having exempted them from travelling long distances for unnecessary visitations. They said that relatives who had gifts for them could still give them as some had already done. They however regretted the hell of accumulated gymnastics imposed on them in that one night. One high school *Moja syo* initiate, Toiri lamented that he caught a terrible fever with awful body aches amidst pain of a fresh wound. “I thought I was dying as I completely weakened; and money for treatment was not forthcoming”. Toiri expressed a perfect hatred for a system where parents leave them in the hands of erroneous people torturing them through the night. The initiates upheld the system but wished a kind of regulated activity and elderly supervision put in place (December 22, 2022).

5.6. Conclusion

Historically, Imbalu founded on undoubtable foundation, guarantees total acquaintances and complete submission by the ethnic group. The Bamasaba associate glory to their traditional Imbalu ritual and discard any adjustments as advocated by the missionaries and the subsequent postcolonial modifications. Bamasaba diehards believe that Imbalu needs its openness, mandatorily expressed in numerous rituals to ensure spiritual and a mark both physically and psychologically. Community being dynamic has gone ahead to embrace different modifications. SMVC cutting across nations, surprisingly though haphazardly embraced by the Bamasaba, in reaction to the knocking hardships coupled with criticisms amidst surrounding unbecoming constrained circumstances. This study critically analyzes the Imbalu ritual using an African Biblical Hermeneutical lens, for a balanced Postcolonial theological model, discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER SIX

POST-COLONIAL THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

6.0 Introduction

This chapter considers a theological framework that engages both biblical texts and the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba of Uganda. The imperative for an African Framework arises from a historical problem of colonial legacy discussed in the former chapter. It is also based on cultural and theological dissonance and the search for authenticity. It entails understanding, interpreting, and practicing Christianity that is consciously and systematically rooted in African realities, thought patterns, cultures, and experiences. Approaches that aim at making Christian faith a home for African people, rather than a foreign import are applied. It aims at answering the question, what does it mean to be both authentically African and authentically Christian? Therefore, the core goal is to decenter Eurocentric models of theology and to construct a theology where African contexts are the starting point and primary subject, not an afterthought. This theological framework is therefore a decolonizing project that asserts both intellectual and spiritual agencies. It declares that African experiences are a valid and vital source for theological reflection and that the gospel, freed from its western cultural captivity, has the power to speak a unique, life-affirming, and transformative word to the African context. Therefore, how Imbalu can appropriately apt or misappropriate in the written text using a Post-Colonial African Biblical Hermeneutical lens is significant. By integrating this indigenous cultural practice into biblical interpretation, the framework aims to bridge the gap between the biblical text and the lived experiences of the traditional communities, and come up with an appropriate ritual suitable for a hybrid people, who are both Christian and traditional.

6.1 Imbalu Ritual, as an African Theological Ritual

For many Bamasaba Christians, the Imbalu ritual has historically been a source of spiritual and cultural conflict. This was framed by colonial and early missionary theology that demanded the traditionalists to choose between their faith and their heritage. However, a deeper theological exploration, informed by Post-colonial and Inculturation hermeneutics, reveals that Imbalu need not be an either/or proposition. It can instead function as a powerful connection where Bamasaba tradition and Christian faith meet, dialogue, and enrich one another. This integration is possible by re-interpreting the ritual's core elements through a Christian lens while respecting its traditional integrity.

The assertion of Imbalu as an African theological ritual is a declaration of a theological liberation theory that frees the Bamasaba Christians from the colonial imposition of a split identity. A situation arose in the African communities, where one must deny one's culture to affirm one's faith. By engaging in this integrative work, the Bamasaba Christians are more authentic and rooted better in their African theological settings than the western thought patterns. The ritual becomes a more profoundly incarnated expression of faith, one that speaks to the Bamasaba soul and it becomes a living confluence of tradition and faith, when carefully navigated.

It entails re-framing the foundation of the cultural ritual from a pagan rite to a cultural sacrament. Understanding of the ritual, traditionally as a sacred mandate from the ancestors, a covenant with the community and the lineage that ensures social order, fertility, and cultural continuity is significant. In Christian integration, this does not call for elimination but refurbished and elevated. Christian theology teaches that God, the creator of the universe is as well the creator of all cultures (Wilbur, 1995; Bediako, 1996; Gurnik, 2020). The ancestors' wisdom in instituting a ritual that

builds courage, responsibility, and community can be viewed as participating in God's general revelation through conscience and natural law. The ritual therefore, gets to serve as a cultural sacrament or a sacred sign through which God's grace can be perceived and activated within the Bamasaba cultural context (Mbiti, 1992; Idowu, 1994; Dube' 2004).

For this reason, elements that are contrary to theology and its demands ought to be minimized, renovated or discarded. However, findings indicate a symbiotic relationship, where the core components of Imbalu find powerful echoes in the Christian doctrine. Integrated meaning of the ritual would guarantee a re-oriented procedure to signify a triple covenant: with God, with the living Christian community (the Church), and with one's own people. This would absolutely match the biblical golden law of love and the African philosophy of *Ubuntu* – a person for persons; an ethical mandate of living in union with community and dependency on one another (Desmond Tutu, 2004; Mbiti, 1992).

While Baptism incorporates one into the Body of Christ, Imbalu can be a powerful rite of passage into Christian maturity. It emphasizes the specific responsibilities of a Christian man: to protect, provide, and lead spiritually in his family and community, embodying Christ-like sacrifice and courage. The physical pain, loss of blood, and seclusion period, would mirror the Christian paradigm of dying to an old self (the irresponsible boy) and rising to a new life (the responsible man). This can be related to Paul's theology of self-mortification, where he declares that: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me" (Galatians 2:20). This would guarantee, the initiated accountable to the community concerning their new attained levels of life.

The shedding of blood in Imbalu, rather than being attributed to a pagan act, can be contemplated as a tangible personal participation in the mystery of Christ's sacrifice. It becomes a physical

reminder that new life and redemption often come through the costly offering of oneself, pointing towards the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. The community's role witnessed in singing, dancing, and witnessing, reflects the Christian belief in the cloud of witnesses described in the bible (Hebrews 12:1) and the support of the Church community. The candidate does not undergo the ordeal alone but is upheld by the faith and prayers and well wishes of the living (the Church on earth) and, symbolically, the ancestors (the Church victorious or the departed saints).

Community elders however, acknowledged that, the traditional procedure as enormous, complicated and quite offensive to the Christian lifestyle. Pointing out to some rituals, they said that some of these were far-fetched, without proper meaning and significance. Some of which are ignored by other clans and yet still secure successful Imbalu undertakings. The Bishops of Mbale namely S. Wabulakha and J. Nandaah, expressed the need to streamline Imbalu and bring out the African philosophy free from unnecessary ills. They emphasized the need to Christianize the ritual, straighten it, remove needless corners, to suit the contemporary circumstances of hybridity.

In his speech the President of Uganda, represented by the state Minister for foreign affairs in the August 2024 Imbalu launch at Mutoto, urged cultural leaders and the rest of African leaders to eliminate any out dated cultural practices that hinder growth as advocated by science. The president; highlighted the irrelevancies of certain practices such as early marriages that need to be checked. “I call on traditional leaders to audit and eliminate backward and cultural practices that oppose scientific progress and argue parents to in-calculate moral values in their children” he said. Meanwhile the Minister of Karamoja, Hon Florence Nambozo, called upon the Bamasaba to purify their hearts and turn to God, just as they purify their bodies by circumcision (2024). This calls for a model that enables people to serve God and their society suitably and relevantly.

Indepth interviews with different respondents on how to Christianize and modernize Imbalu and make it suitable, revealed that some attached rituals ought to be minimized as they add little or no significance to the ritual. While a few diehards stuck on the ritual in its traditional setting, the majority concluded that maintain the ritual in a mode acceptable to the majority in the contemporary society.

6.2 Post-Colonial Lens and the Imbalu Ritual

This section guarantees a dialogue between Theology, Culture and Education; which relate to the meaning of manhood, faith, and knowledge in itself. It is a dynamic set of intersecting dialogues, each with its own tensions and potential for synthesis. Debate between theology and culture, is a dialogue over sacred meaning, pivoting on what is right and how a righteous life is defined. The dialogue between culture and education is the battle for the mind and future, while the dialogue between theology and education concern the negotiation of formation and worldview, a concern towards a kind of person these institutions aim to produce and the worldview they instill. Traditional theology is shaking hands with culture, and knowledge. Imbalu regarded as pagan is a community divine mandate, a command from the ancestors. It's never optional but an obligation; if neglected it is a sin against a community that teaches courage, discipline, and respect—virtues fundamentally praised by the Bible.

In drawing parallels with God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17), grades Imbalu as an African covenant, a pre-missionary, cultural form of a covenant with the divine. The outcome of this dialogue is that any move away from outright rejection towards a theological reclamation, where Imbalu is seen not as an opponent to faith but as a potential source for a uniquely African theology. Research findings from field data indicate the need for a model that is appropriate. The proposed

hermeneutical data emerges from voices that desire to be Christian yet cultural. Therefore, the most progressive outcome is the community to emerge from the intersection of these three dialogues as a faithful Christian, culturally sound and knowledgeably stable. It brings out the decolonial ideal: a person who can navigate multiple worlds without having to fragment their identity.

For this reason, rituals, practices found distracting and destructive in the face of Christian and African ethics, using a postcolonial lens ought to be upgraded or discarded, if Imbalu ritual is to remain meaningful and relevant. Findings suggested that the ritual in the contemporary demands of Theology, Culture and Education, need scrutiny by either omitting or making optional offensive and devaluing practices. Such rituals included, Brewing, Visits to Sacred Places, Vulgar ritual Songs Dances and celebrations, adjusted to suit the contemporary times and beliefs.

6.2.1 Limited Brewing

Bamasaba Christians expressed dissatisfaction of escalated brewing that intoxicates people into undesired actions and behaviors. Nevertheless, the Bible and African ethics encourage diligence against gluttony and drunkenness. Ephesians 5: 18, prohibits the act “Do not be drunk with wine, because that will ruin your life ...’ Proverbs 23:20 further restricts even association with drunkards, as bad company ruins good morals, “Do not carouse with drunkards and gluttons” Many Bamasaba literally spend months drinking and celebrating their culture, an idleness and gluttony disapproved by the bible and contemporary society that include Bamasaba Christians and sober minded moderns.

Findings indicate a need for a drastic reduction in the brewing of this local intoxicating drink. Brand Imbalu with modest drinking and present an impressive ceremony to the opponents both within and without. Uphold drinks that are refreshing and restoring but not intoxicating people to obscenity and crime. Excessive brewing affects food security that endangers the welfare of families in terms of school fees and other basic needs of life. Observation and findings showed less progress in education circles due to poverty and greatly affected family budgets. The aftermath of circumcision characterized by famine and varied scarcity, detrimental to family settings.

Smearing candidates with yeast for two or three days should be optional and elective. Buwalasi clan does not waste edible food on smearing candidate, or chime or soils. They simply scatter a little dust on them as a farewell to the knife, and reportedly score thoroughly high with the elaborate knife procedure. If all clans ascribe to the same ancestry, why then should some rituals be evaded successfully by these clans? The idea of rituals being optional or mandatory becomes an issue of discussion, in analyzing the realism of Imbalu and its associated rituals. Candidates can beautify themselves with modern scarfs for esteem and admiration, to await the programmed knife.

The Candidate's sisters in Buwalasi clan adorn the ceremony and make it communally celebrated. Female gender take the responsibility over their brothers (candidates), they dance together as a support pattern of encouragement. This contradicts the gender dispute scaled in other clans where women, the mothers are forbidden to come any nearer the Imbalu candidate(s). In some places, it is an abomination for women to take a leading role in Imbalu dances; all these have to be reconciled for the good and beauty of the ritual based on family and clan levels. The aim is to eliminate crime and disorderliness in form of immoral lifestyle and theft rampant in the traditional Imbalu event.

Limited hours of celebrations are preferred, to minimize encroachment on food stores and minimalize crime and associated evil. Already Sundays are exempted from schedule, aligning it with the Biblical principle of the seventh day of rest recorded in Genesis 1:30. The Chairman Board of the cultural institution said that, the schedule for the region is done in a way that the festival does not interfere with the normal school programs, nor church official service days. However, information and observation reveals that these schedules are violated continuously, as Bamasaba circumcise throughout the year. Checking out on circumcision time, and observing cultural schedules, saves time for work and boost up economic activities rather than encroaching on them.

Limited brewing and limited celebrations, the Bamasaba ought to front the treatment of initiates as priority. This would check several anomalies of leaving initiates on their own, with less or no care. Money spent in hiring the drum, making merry, affect the treatment of the initiated in many families. They suffer un-noticeably, groan un-attended to and develop sepsis and gangrene, situations undesirable. Parents mind public opinion and ignore the real gist of treating and caring for the newly initiated. Some initiates regretted the abandonment in terrible pain and isolation. Money spent on the Imbalu - practice and less or nothing on Imbala – the wound. This leads to prolonged periods of healing and restoration, creating an undesirable condition of stigmatization of their young men, affecting their individual lives and the negative hit backs on society.

Families need to plan for feeding of the initiates who at this time are patients. Fresh knives on fresh bodies, leaving fresh wounds, would necessitate fresh foods and a balanced diet to heal better and quicker. Several informants poured scorn on a situation where parents sell items-land or cows to cater for the entailed ritual. While parents lamented on lots of monies spent on their age sets

(*Bamakoki*), and their demand for a cultural entitled *Lubaka*, the circumcised lamented on lack of care after through expenditures. The initiate(s) are left tired and tied to nothing, these has to be adjusted and given priority in the new theological framework.

6.2.2 Minimize Visits to Sacred Places

Make visits to sacred places optional in the new framework. These places include family graveyards, clan altars, and sacred swamps. Christian Bamasaba sternly resist this ritual of visiting sacred places of the ancestors (*Imisabwa*), labelled as idolatry. The Bible warns against worship of idols and other gods in Exodus 20:1-3, which is in contrast with the worship of God the creator. The Archdeacon of Buluckeke contended that there was no way the Christian church can compromise with a ritual that honor gods and spirits that are different from the God of the universe, who is the Biblical God” (December 3, 2022).

My informants doubted the existence of sacred places locally known as ‘*Imisambwa*’ – world of the spirits. It was reported that several families and clans have evaded this ritual. For instance seven out of ten initiates interviewed, did not visit the sacred place of the spirits, yet they successfully made it through. There is an ongoing debate whether this idols or spirits exist. Christianity and modernity is erasing this ritual in the contemporary society, with a belief that this ritual is merely procedural and can as well be unrestricted.

Maintain the medical herb - *Ityang* to stir up the morale of the candidates for anger and hunger for the knife. Mwisaka a senior medicine man said *Ityang* is just a plant that makes up an urge boost. “It is like other situational boosts that are available to increase appetites and manhood levels respectively”. The initiates who had used *Ityang* said that this chemical was more vibrant on some

people than to others, possibly depending on the blood group. Nevertheless, the herb is worthy using and I would recommend that parents preserve it, lest it is lost as the population grows and land, as a resource over-utilized. The cultural elders should deliberately preserve it in its quarters to cater for the incoming generations of initiates.

6.2.3 Improve on Visits to Kinsmen and Friends

Visits to trace relatives be done on earlier booking and limitedly, to give ample time for the host to prepare. These Visits should be limited and allow room for candidates to rest. Candidates in Bulucheke clan said that they only move out in the afternoons. Visits should not be a big deal, but a time to visit a little and a time to relax a little. Strangers on the dancing team are likely to cause havoc, because they are un-known to other dancers. Community elders retrieved the olden days when those who escorted the candidates were members of the extended family, that took care of one another particularly the young ones. Makunya reminisces when every dancing team had a chairperson who had the responsibility to gauge who goes and who should not go with them. The elders advocated for restoration and strengthening of extended family ties, so that the families escort their own son(s) for care rather than exposing the young ones to dangers of rape and crime.

Wanyenya (2013) asserts that Imbalu in Bukusu land is equally becoming less vigorous as westernization is becoming more entrenched. Initiates no longer go round villages calling on all the relatives. The reason is that the expenses involved and the energy entailed is unnecessarily enormous. Initiates simply call on one or two close neighbors or relatives and do not have to make long journeys to the maternal uncle just for purposes of display. Slaughtering animals unnecessarily is uneconomical; they be preserved for sale to cater for the initiate's school fees or future marriage which are long term projects compared to an occasional spot of circumcision.

6.2.4 Vulgar Songs, Obscene Dance and Violent Celebration be avoided

From the initiate at the center, to the wider society, reinstate a moral fabric in the cultural ceremonies to ensure that African morality prevails. Community stakeholders need to sensitize the public against indecency, to promote the desired cohesion from this ritual. The cabinet of the cultural institution has to come up with a moral standard to govern the ritual throughout the Bamasaba community. Bishop Mbale Diocese said that the Ugandan law need to be evoked to work on stubborn culprits associated with vulgarism and violence that defame the Bamasaba culture. Vetting of who should be on particular teams, ensured integrity and therefore ought to be done as the dancing group goes out to visit relatives a far off, to ensure decency and accountability.

Educative songs be sung, songs that narrate clan genealogies and valuable elements of society. Informants and scholars assert that music and dance ought to enhance the emotional and cultural impact and provide a means of expression and celebration. Songs sung should be educative and foster a sense of community involvement and participation, and carry symbolic meanings that connect participants to their cultural heritage (Makwa, 2010; Kasita, 2013). Elder Wekunya said that contemporary songs need to address contemporary demands and needs of the young generation and society. Songs that build determination to finish school for schoolchildren, counsel about self-care, and community relationships; would erase space for vulgar communications charmed in the ritual.

Traditional songs and dances performed during the Imbalu should not only be celebratory but also serve as a form of storytelling and cultural expression. Dances convey important cultural descriptions and values with an educational role, teaching the younger generations about Bamasaba traditions and values. They therefore reinforce social bonds and communal identity that

play a role in maintaining the cultural fabric of the Bamasaba community. The new model should engage educative and constructive formats of music, including Christian music; giving no room for seductive dance and vulgar songs.

6.2.5 Moral and Economic Sensitivity

A neutral model is to be sensitive to the alerts and signals that promote morality in society. Values of honor, respect, integrity should occupy the recipients of the intended theological framework. There is need for self- respect at an individual level before extending it to others. For it is hard to give what you do not have and it is easier to give from a place of abundance. Members need to fill their hearts with values of kindness, loyalty to societal regulations not just societal performances. There is need to stick to the truth of the ritual, not what others are doing. From the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaks (Matthew 12:35). Members in their cultural garment are called upon to fill their hearts with precious attitude of love, peace, Joy, development celebrated by both the Bible and African ethics.

Morality emphasized in this model would save masses from unnecessary accidents caused by stubbornness and sheer excitements. Moral honor of other road users and participants would allow people an opportunity to exercise and enjoy their personal rights. Morality will ensure justice, upright living and respect of other people's lives. Respect is both Biblical and African, an acknowledgement of the inherent value and dignity of every person. This would free the cultural ritual from unbiblical trends of murder, rape, immorality, theft, vulgarism and obscenity and transform it into a descent and enjoyable practice.

Planning is a moral aspect of life. Families and persons have to celebrate reservedly, with a conscious and a plan for food security. The foods harvested must be budgeted through the different activities, beginning with family upkeep and its future maintenance. The idea of spending all harvested grains in brewing and cooking should be ancient. Expenditures should be done limitedly and wisely prior the ceremony, to leave the family without unnecessary debts or future scarceness of resources for family use.

Minimize high expenses made on the recent innovations such as hiring the Kadodi drum, for family investments. Kadondi no wonder kills the art of innovation made in music and dance. Kadodi multitudes smash gardens anyhow and carelessly, as gardens become dancing paths. Apart from the melodious tunes, the public outcry against Kadodi drum can be heard from afar, in areas of crime, destructions of property and promotion of immoral seductive dances.

The new model recommends a fall back to the traditional dances of '*Biyimba*' and '*Bitsetse*' for extended family groups chorusing to the solo singing of their candidate. Members are known to each other, and these checks out on the levels of crime and misbehavior. Here the candidate takes charge of his ceremony, which is a sign of ownership and proprietorship. Kadodi modern dance has of late crept through all celebrations both traditional and church, such as traditional marriage ceremonies, receptions of church weddings and the like. It pulls every one young or old, educated and uneducated to their feet. I suggest that the Kadodi rhythm be spared for occasional celebrations as Imbalu falls back to the original dances.

6.2.6 Entail Pain of the Knife

Enduring Pain is a Biblical teaching (1Peter 4:12ff), and fetches a reward. Christians are encouraged to persevere pain as a way of sharing in Christ's sufferings and will also share in his glory. Pain endured offers capacity to endure through life struggles and future hardships, typically set in people's life cycles. Just as women go through labor pains severally, males are to be encouraged to stand this God given pain once for all. The earth is full of painful spots and events, and if they cannot be avoided they should be endured. Before a man comes to his end, he has to go through many complicated painful endeavors. Males need to be comforted that Imbalu is not to destroy them but to scale them to places thought fitting by society. Comfortably, God instructed Abraham the Father of faith, to undertake circumcision.

The stage of initiation at puberty properly suits, as the adolescents are able to stand the fire of the knife and build character accordingly. This underpins the biblical format that guarantees males to circumcise on the eighth day. Genesis 17:12 – “ He that is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male throughout your generations, whether born in the house, or bought with your money from any foreigner who is not of your offspring”. Even in their discontent with the laborious Imbalu, the colonial missionaries did not suggest infant circumcision. The Bamasaba suitable initiation age only needs acceptable modification. Just as the distinctiveness of the Jewish circumcision marks a Jew as Jew and has the power to make a gentile into a Jew (Schwartz, 1990), the Bamasaba are aware of this sanction and severally allege their own in relation to the Bible God of circumcision as recorded in Genesis 17:9-14.

6.2.7 Exhortations for Excellency of Life

The programs of giving exhortations to the candidates at different stages is noble and essential. Apart from tapping into desired courage of squaring the knife, candidates are exhorted to uphold life virtues of respect, self-esteem, discipline and hard work, a means to proper societal living. The bible equally urges respect, self-esteem, discipline and hard work, qualifying the skills as both biblical and contemporary. For instance, *Umukhebi* hands the initiated male a Panga and a hoe as instruments of clearing, bushes digging the land, and ensuring enough food supply for his prospective home. The bible esteems a hardworking wife - Proverbs 31, a skilled servant – Proverbs 18.16, while a lazy man is compared to the hedge of thorns – Proverbs 15.19. Therefore, an initiation that passes on life values to the next generation is worthy practicing.

However, these exhortations must be revised in relation to the needs of the times. For example, it is currently necessary to hand school going boys, scholastic materials and exhortations for hard work at school than pointing them to the bushes and gardens alone which are quite minimal and quite inapplicable today. Exhorters and stakeholders must exhort relevantly, if the ritual is to remain relevant. The Words spoken to the young men need adjustment and revision accordingly. Apart from concentrating on marriage exhortations, elders need to tackle the holistic needs of an individual in the society. There will be a need to draw a curriculum that entails the needs of a contemporary youth and speak to them in line with these demands by relevant persons.

Today youths are lost in drugs and alcoholism; this would be an excellent forum to speak to them about living straight lives. The model advocates for vetting of surgeons used, because people can only give what they have. The traditional ancient surgeons only know that once grown a person gets married, procreate and expand the clan. They need to sensitization to talk about development

ideas of concentrated education and the rest of modernity and its positives, which must be embraced for contemporary right living.

Uncles, aunties, mentors, Christian leaders and well-wishers at this point of time, should also do deeper exhortations. Spiritual leaders and inspirational speakers be included in the programs of the new model. These would give the candidates a second thought of themselves; as they are rightly mentored into the logistics of church and modernity. The approach is that, the boys calculatedly graduate into adulthood with societal support and respect. These would ensure continuity and progress of the young people in all circles of church, culture and school. The suggested new model in this study is framed as ‘Bamasaba Christian Imbalu’ (BCI). The model strives to balance Bamasaba culture and Christian culture moderately.

6.3 Significance of a New Model

This suggested New Model, “Bamasaba Christian Imbalu (BCI), stabilizes the service to the Bamasaba in both their traditional culture and Christian culture. It serves the people who find themselves torn between two worldviews of Bamasaba tradition and Christian cultures respectively. It applies to the people who are perturbed with the biting criticisms and pitches against their societal ritual. A people who cherish Christianity and at the same time cherish their traditional culture. Their desire is to have their ritual progress steadily without being meddled in unnecessary cultural mud. A ritual that will stand aright without devastating the participants or the innocent lovers and onlookers of culture. The BCI Model is characterized with the following significances discussed below,

6.3.1 Graduation into maturity

The new model as discussed above, regard the ritual as a graduation into levels of maturity. The initiated procedurally build up a mature character away from immature thoughts and immature intentions. They ought to think soberly, creatively, innovatively and developmentally. Those in school should concentrate more and be able to achieve more and develop better. For they are no longer children but adults in tangible ways. They should assess and weigh out society situations and come up with sensible decisions. For instance, ideas of treating sex as a ritual for proper manhood, be evaluated and the truth maintained. Mature initiated men should delay marriage and first develop themselves instead of diving into unplanned early marriages. Society should ensure proper guidance and counselling to prepare and ensure that the young trend the path of maturity.

6.3.2 Discipline in its tangible sense

The men of the ritual should deliberately purpose to uphold discipline and right moral behavior. Circumcised men should be aware of the common wrongs and indiscipline's that derail people from normal life. They should be deliberate and thoughtful to distance themselves from such, as expressed in the various exhortations. Common of these include immoral behavior that has misled many into unplanned marriages, imprisonment, alcoholism, idleness, drug abuse that breed poverty and poverty in turn breed numerous crimes. Concerning such as these the initiated ought to push them out of their way and place themselves in places of discipline and recognizable morality.

6.3.3 Responsibility in society

The newly initiated should be accountable to society more so the parents and the immediate family into the wider community. People begin to look to them as sources of defense in case of trouble,

answers in case of questions and dilemmas, possible provisions in case of need and advice in case of confusion and need for direction. In other words, the newly initiated need to be alert, sober and watch out to acquire knowledge if they are to respond to personal, family and society needs.

6.3.4 Love of God and neighbor

The newly initiated should exercise love for the people around them, love for their community and therefore the love for their creator. As the bible states in 1John 4:8, that you cannot say you love God and you do not love the people you are able to see. The bible presents Love as a golden law and a summary of the bible. When one loves then he will be just to all and treat others with considerable decency. In a way, love will minister to the wellbeing of society and ensure a peaceful and stable society. At the altar of love for God, undesirable and indecent activities that tend to soil life and other people's lives become detestable and therefore pushed aside for excellent living.

6.4 Conclusion

An analytical study has shown that Imbalu as a ritual of the Bamasaba has numerous undesired entails, which contrast both Biblical ethics and African principles. These have graded the ritual detestable such as, visiting sacred places, excessive brewing, vulgar songs, language, dance and violent celebrations that lead to moral and economic depletion, motor, natural and surgical accidents discarded, to come up with a neutral post-colonial theological framework acceptable for a hybrid people. The recommended framework is an amalgam of a hybrid model that combines fundamentals of traditional philosophy and basic values of Christian culture fused into one healthy clean up, free from undesired and irrelevant cultural houseflies of tradition, chauvinism and outdated spirituality for an amiable and prospective ritual for all members of society.

CHAPTER SEVEN

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter sets to explore the overall executive summary of the study, conclusions and recommendations. The summary of the study is based on the three objectives of the study; the historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba, the response to the colonial challenges and Post-colonial community adaptations and lastly to develop a Post-colonial theological framework. Meanwhile conclusions and recommendations are presented basing on the findings from the research field of study.

7.1 Summary of the Study

This study set out to examine the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba people of Uganda through the lens of a Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics, in view of constructing a theological framework, suitable for the contemporary increasing Christian population among the Bamasaba traditional setting. The primary objective was to travel beyond the colonial and missionary-era interpretations that often dismissed African Traditional Religions and their practices as pagan and antithetical to Christianity. This research sought to re-read the Imbalu ritual not as a site of conflict with the biblical text, but as a locus of theological and cultural meaning that can delve into a constructive and critical dialogue with the Christian faith and come up with an acceptable model among the Christianized traditional.

7.1.1 Historical and Cultural Context of the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba

The study began by establishing the rich historical, cultural, social, and spiritual significance of Imbalu. Imbalu ritual is set as a holistic rite of passage that inculcates values of, maturity, courage, belonging, responsibility and ethnic identity through the involvement of the different embedded rituals. Elaborate rituals make a real man, transiting into a real Imbalu expected of society. It surpasses the assumption of the cultural ritual beyond an external circumcision, into inner significant attributes. It then probed into the cultural context of community involvement in the ritual, highlighting how the public or community involvement fans the traditional candle or switches it off in the face of westernization and contemporary modernity.

The theoretical framework of Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics framework empowered the study in questioning hegemonic readings, such as Genesis 17:9-14 -origins of biblical circumcision and Galatians 5:2-6 - circumcision based on the law, read by the early Christian missionaries with a pre-formed Western, cultural lens. This served the power interest of disassembling indigenous culture to replace it with a European-centric Christianity and colonial control. So Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics identifies and dismantles these views by: unmasking these Ideology for a neutral interpretation, recovering suppressed voices, promoting plurality, and vice-versa which is significant towards intellectual and cultural decolonization.

Imbalu the traditional biennial circumcision ritual of the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda is hermeneutically, an interpretive key to understanding Bamasaba concepts of manhood, courage and human progress in this cultural setting. It is far more than a surgical procedure; but a philosophical rite of passage that constructs manhood. It entails separation where the initiate (*umusinde*) separated from the community of boys and women. Through this initiation, he is held in-between phase, as neither boy nor man, but after the physical cut, and healing, he is restored

back into the community with new levels as a new man (*umusani*), with new rights, responsibilities and status. A man becomes legible and now free to marry, own property, and participate in clan leadership.

Historically, Imbalu anchors the community to its origins, and culturally reinforces core values of lineage, and ethnic identity. Mythically, the dominant origin myth presents Masaba the founding ancestor of the tribe, as the first person to circumcise. In the Pre-Colonial Era, Imbalu defined Bamasaba identity, distinguishing them from their non-circumcising neighboring tribes. The elaborate rituals ranging from the induction dance of *Isonja* to gradational dance of *Inemba* in this context, signified social cohesion, identity, and celebrated maturity. However, Imbalu has been opposed on different fronts, but the external pressure has often strengthened the ritual's role as a symbol of cultural resistance and ethnic conceit.

Culturally, Imbalu reinforces ethnic identity and binds the community together across clans and geographical locations, strengthening social bonds and shared values. It is a collective public affair, with the entire community participating; families host feasts, elders guide, men, women and children sing and dance, as age-mates dance alongside the initiate. The ritual demarcates gender and social roles, in the sense that it creates men who are brave and responsible, taking up leadership roles, while women as supporters and mothers who raise up the next generation of initiates. The biennial cycle creates a rhythmic pulse for the community and each new cohort of men ensures celebration of life, continuity, and the regeneration of the social order and survival of culture. It is a bedrock of social identity, cohesion, and a perpetual renewal of the Bamasaba people; a total social fact, representing the religious, legal, ethical, and aesthetic dimensions of their world.

7.1.2 Colonial Challenges, and Post-Colonial Community Adaptations

Assessing colonial challenges and post-colonial community adaptations through an African Biblical Hermeneutical Lens, indicates a significant suppression and stigmatization of community rituals during the colonial and missionary era. Rituals such as Imbalu in this context were framed as a pagan and barbaric practice. In the post-colonial period, the Bamasaba community in response have adapted and modified the ritual. A key adaptation involves using the tools of Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics to reclaim Imbalu by situating it within an African and biblical narrative, thereby asserting its cultural validity and spiritual significance in a contemporary, religiously plural context.

Colonial administrators and Christian missionaries particularly Anglicans and Catholics imposed a Western, bio-medical, and theological framework against Imbalu. The ritual proceedings were condemned for its perceived association with what they termed as pagan spirituality. Evil was cited in the African formats of public dance, attributed nudity, drinking and public braving of the knife, termed as unnecessary. Its integral role in a cultural initiation system that rivaled the authority of the church was criticized. Various attempts to ban, regulate, or replace the ritual with alternatives such as medical sanitized circumcision were introduced. These created cultural hostility and identity crisis among the Bamasaba in their cultural setting.

Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutics, questions the assumed superiority of Western interpretations of biblical texts on circumcision, recover the African subject and position Bamasaba and their cultural retention as valid and essential in the interpretation of the ritual. The study consciously read the biblical text from the perspective of the Bamasaba, seeking points of resonance and divergence to forge a theology that is both authentically African and authentically

Christian. Through this hermeneutical process, the study identified profound thematic parallels between Imbalu and the biblical narrative. These included concepts such as the covenant marked on the body, the theology of sacrifice and rebirth and the central role of communal memory, a cloud of witnesses and identity.

Post-Colonial Community Adaptation, serves as a response to the two extremes of either sticking to tradition or abandoning the contentious ritual. The community has engaged in a situational process of cultural modification and re-interpretation. Community theologians and elders draw parallels between Imbalu and the biblical covenant of circumcision in the Old Testament such as the Abrahamic covenant in Genesis 17. This hermeneutic does not simply imitate the missionary reading but challenges it. It argues that Imbalu is not pagan but a local African expression, with tangible origins, possibly divine as received by Abraham. Bamasaba as a people have a relationship with a pre-existing and valid covenant with a divine. It empowers the community of Bamasaba to practice Imbalu with resilience but in fear of God, and the ritual can act as a reconciliation of culture and their Christian faith within their cultural heritage.

Imbalu demonstrates that post-colonial adaptation is an active, creative process of cultural translation and by employing an African biblical hermeneutic, the Bamasaba community is empowered to interpret their own culture and the Bible, ensure continuity by providing a compelling theological rationale for the survival and flourishing of the ritual among a predominantly Christian population. Community adaptations indicate how African communities can critically engage with both their indigenous heritage and imported religious systems to construct a resilient, authentic, and self-defined identity in the post-colonial era, with a bible as a potential resource for cultural liberation not suppression.

7.1.3 Developing a Post-Colonial Theological Framework

A post-colonial theological framework is urgently needed to address this hybrid identity; believers who remain deeply connected to their cultural heritage. The traditional Christian theology often imposed during the colonial era, frequently marginalized African Indigenous Religions and worldviews, creating a state of spiritual dissonance. This framework moves beyond simple synthesis to decolonize Christian thought and create a new, authentic theology that validates the hybrid experience as a source of theological strength, not a problem for tackling.

The key principles of the framework, affirms hybridity as a normal theological location. It recognizes that living in multiple spiritual worlds is not a mark of theological impurity but a valid and rich location subject to divine revelation. The framework embraces hybridity and double belonging as a creative space for generating new theological insights. It intentionally recovers concepts from African Traditional Religions (ATR), such as centrality of community, veneration of ancestors, and holistic well-being as legitimate theological voices that can analyze and enrich Christian understanding. It employs a culturally grounded reading of the Bible with traditional eyes. For example, a cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12, through the lens of the living-dead – ancestors that are numerous and significant. It also challenges passages used to justify cultural oppression and at the same time analyze it to offer liberating re-interpretations for cultural identity that honor both faith and culture.

This framework aims to produce a theology that is liberating; a model that frees believers from the spiritual dilemma of choosing between their Christian faith and their cultural identity. One that is authentically African, and generates theological expressions, spontaneously rooted in the African experience but still bears a divine accessory. A model that contributes a critical voice to global

theological dialogue, challenging its conventions and expanding its possibilities. These decolonial framework empowers communities to construct a self-defined faith that distances suppression, but celebrates their identities, leading to a more holistic, inclusive, and spiritually resilient expression of Christianity, allowing space for a satisfied group that is authentically Christian at the same time authentically traditional.

7.2 Conclusion

The research demonstrates Imbalu ritual, a Post-colonial African Biblical Hermeneutical perspective as viable and essential for a truly liberated African Christianity. The Imbalu ritual, when viewed through this lens, ceases to be a problem to solve but a gift to be operated acceptably. The ritual captures a thoughtful indigenous theology of community, sacrifice, and covenant that predates and prefigures the Christian message in its cultural context. The colonial and early missionary attempt to sever the Bamasaba from this deep-rooted identity was a theological error stemming from a combination of the gospel with Western culture. By engaging in a critical and respectful dialogue between Scripture and the Bamasaba cultural text (Imbalu), this study has shown that faith in Christ does not require cultural extinction but rather redemption, purification, and fulfillment of authentic cultural values for real validity.

Therefore, the Imbalu ritual stands as a powerful testament to the fact that the word of God is not confined to the pages of the Bible but also active in the histories, struggles, and wisdom of people, articulated in their sacred rituals. A post-colonial reading affirms the Bamasaba right to own both their cultural heritage and their Christian faith in a non-conflicting harmony.

7.2.1 Conclusion on the historical and cultural context of the Imbalu ritual

The historical and cultural analysis of the Imbalu ritual of the Bamasaba people reveals it as the heart beating of Bamasaba identity, a complex and dynamic institution that has historically functioned as the primary mechanism for transmitting cultural values, structuring society, and connecting the people to their land and ancestry. The findings underscore Imbalu as an indispensable lens for understanding the Bamasaba worldview, centering on principles of courage, community responsibility, and the continuity of life across generations.

Therefore, the ultimate finding is that the significance of Imbalu lies in its enduring power as a bodily tradition. It has successfully navigated the pressures of modernity and external domination by adapting its form while preserving its core function: to manufacture true Bamasaba men. Even when the church within yet without disregards the need of circumcision, the church in Bugisu sub region sticks to the need to Christianize the ritual to be enjoyed by majority population of Christians. The ritual's survival and contemporary vibrancy are a testament to its deep cultural resonance and the agency of the Bamasaba people in insisting on the relevance of their heritage in a changing world. Conclusively, Imbalu remains the ultimate expression of what it means to be '*Umumasaba*', a resilient, courageous, and community-oriented individual, firmly rooted in a fulfilled and enduring history of Bamasaba.

7.2.2 Conclusion on Colonial Challenges and Post-Colonial Community Adaptations

The assessment of colonial challenges and post-colonial adaptations among the Bamasaba of Uganda reveals a profound narrative of cultural attack, resilience and strategic reclamation. The central finding is that the colonial and missionary project, which targeted the Imbalu ritual as a

barbaric foundation of Bamasaba identity, failed in its ultimate goal to erase the ritual. The roots of Imbalu were and are deepened far below into greater depths to be undone, anyhow. Instead, it unintentionally set the stage for a dynamic and innovative process of post-colonial adaptation, demonstrating the community's remarkable agency in the face of existing threats. The community engages a situational approach of refurbishing rather than the hypothetical and unsuccessful uprooting of the cultural ritual.

The colonial challenge was fundamentally to devalue and dismantle the ritual's socio-cultural and spiritual significance. However, the Bamasaba response in the post-colonial era has been a positive indicator to reassertion of meaning and maintenance of identity crisis. A significant finding is the community's use of the very tools once used against them, particularly Christianity and the Bible to fortify their tradition. By hermeneutically re-framing Imbalu through a post-colonial biblical lens, theological criticisms of the past were neutralized, modified and empowered, to come up with a neutral theoretical framework. The new generation is to embrace the ritual as a valid, even divine, component of their modern, hybrid identity.

So the story of the Bamasaba ritual is a powerful case study in decolonization as an active and thriving process. It shows that cultural survival is not about passive preservation but dynamic, strategic, and sometimes insubordinate adaptation. Imbalu has been maintained from a symbol of supposed backwardness into a resilient badge of identity, in the midst of modernity and Christianity. The enduring power of Imbalu today stands as a testament to the community's success in overcoming colonial challenges by writing a new, self-determined chapter in their own history of their own cultural heritage.

7.2.3 Conclusion of developing a Post-Colonial Theological Framework

The endeavor to develop a post-colonial theological framework for populations that inhabit both Christian and traditional spiritual worlds is beyond an academic exercise, but dives into a vital project of liberation, integration, and authentic self-definition. The findings reveal that such a framework successfully moves the conversation beyond the colonial bottleneck of syncretism into a place of accepted belief. Hybridity is looked at as a theological progress, creative and a generative locus of divine revelation.

The core achievement of this framework is its fundamental decolonization of Christian thought. De-centering Western theological norms and actively recovering the intellectual and spiritual sovereignty of indigenous worldviews, empowers communities to answer theological questions in their own terms. The framework demonstrates that concepts like the African philosophy of communal living of '*ubuntu*', the sacredness in creation and the ongoing role of ancestors are not obstacles to faith but profound resources that can deepen and expand Christian understanding, offering correctives to hyper-individualism and materialism of the modern world.

Finally, the development of this post-colonial theology is a pastoral and practical necessity. It provides an articulate path for believers to heal from the spiritual dissonance imposed by colonialism, allowing them to worship God as fully Christian but rooted in their cultural identity. The result is a resilient, contextual, and dynamic faith that is locally meaningful and globally significant. It stands as a testament to the enduring power of the human spirit to reconcile its diverse inheritances, forging a future where faith and culture are no longer odds, but are partners in the pursuit of truth, community, and the divine. This reflects a determined phase of a written cultural heritage, within a traditional cultural setting without shifting goal posts.

7.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed for the Christian Bamasaba community, the core concern in this study, Church leaders and the church in Bugisu region, theological institutions and the cultural institution of *Inzu Ya Masaba* – Cabinet Leaders

i) To the Christian Bamasaba Community

Christian Bamasaba Community, have to embrace other than reject the traditional ritual. They need to believe both sources of the bible for their Christianity and the cultural oral text for their traditional ritual. The two have to be reconciled and brought on board for inclusive performance. I would benchmark on Paul's teaching on self-consciousness, an idea supported by tradition. Tradition believes that personal conscious, the inner conviction is intimately right and upright in matters of life. Christian Bamasaba need to accept culture, alongside another wholly accepted culture and come up with a modest culture, doing all in the fear of God and respect for leadership.

A model that stands in the middle of the African Bible Hermeneutics and the Imbalu culture in light of African ethics that superficially match the Biblical/Christian Ethics be adopted. The model that takes off irrelevant innovations placed on it along the way, and incidentally bear no cultural significance but breeds confusion and disorderliness, creating contraventions and eventual hatred for the ritual. Rituals that are oppressive and intimidating to the people are to put away in the postcolonial lens. Most of these have incidentally attracted criticisms from both foreigners and these local people, with both Christian and cultural attitudes towards life. The new framework is to engulf both Christian and Bamasaba cultures in balance, applicable and relevant to both.

Bamasaba Christiam Imbalu (BCI) is the suggested model in this study as earlier discussed in chapter six.

ii) **The Local Church in the Bugisu region**

Church leaders should be encouraged to undergo sensitization on the cultural and potential theological significance of Imbalu, moving from a position of criticism to one of informed engagement. The church ought to develop a flexible inculturated liturgy and incorporate it in church services or blessings that acknowledge the Imbalu season, celebrating the values of courage and transition into manhood while framing them within a Christian understanding of spiritual maturity and commitment to Christ. Intentional regular dialogues between church elders and cultural leaders of the cultural institution (*Inzu Ya Masaba*) be organized by the church to foster mutual understanding and address any lingering tensions or ethical concerns surrounding the ritual.

The foundational ceremony of 2014, when Umukuka handed over the keys of the cultural house (*Inzu Ya Masaba*), to the Bishop of Mbale Diocese, and the seat of Umukuka placed in St Andrew's Cathedral Mbale in 2018, mandates the two parties, working closely together to clean up culture to suit Christianity as advocated by the church. Church preachers and overseers in Mbale have consistently re-echoed the need to "Christianize Culture". When the church speaks with one voice, communities are able to listen and the desired transformation takes place.

iii) **To Theological Education**

Curriculum Development towards African theological colleges and seminaries should integrate modules on Post-colonial Hermeneutics and the study of African Traditional Religions and rituals as primary sources for theology. The Imbalu ritual could serve as a compelling case study. This

would promote and encourage further academic research into other African rites of passage, such as female initiation rituals using similar hermeneutical models to build a strong body of African theology. The cultural ritual be adopted in the theological curriculum, to sensitize, warn and guide prospective church leadership in training and find a neutral position of culture in church.

iv) **The cultural institution of *Inzu Ya Masaba* and Cultural Leaders**

The cultural institution of *Inzu Ya Masaba* ought to systematically document the oral histories, songs, and symbolic meanings of Imbalu. Develop educational materials for the young population that explain both the cultural and a potential Christian interpretation of the ritual, strengthening their identity in a globalized world. This would both safeguard the community ethical underpinnings, critically reflect on and address any aspects of the ritual that may be harmful or have been distorted over time (e.g., excessive coercion, public drunkenness), ensuring that the practice remains a positive and life-affirming force.

The cultural institution should ensure Imbalu is held with descency and maintain its traditional gist. The institution should come up with bylaws that guard and guide the Imbalu celebrations. This would check on the undesirable innovations that attract opposition and rejection of the ritual. Cultural leaders need to look out for the cultural significance of the elaborate rituals and sieve out the innovated from the cultural. The cultural leader is to deliberately bend on a clean up venture of the ritual. The better the ritual, the better the relationship of culture and theology, a situation desired by community especially hybrid population. Conclusively, when the church speaks with a sole voice, communities take heed, raise up towards the call and desired changes follow suit.

“When theology meets culture in honesty, certainty and transformation follow.”

7.4 Recommendation for Further Study

- **Imbalu Ritual and Modern Trends of Technological advancement**

The Imbalu Ritual began in olden days and has endeavoured to maintain its ancient way, unable to suit the modern times. Dynamism of society is without limit or controlling factors; times have changed and continually on an about turn. What our grandfathers' saw in their time as they faced their direction can rarely be seen by the present generation. It is not pride per se but the specific spots where society has placed them, guarantees them to see what the fathers did not see and not comprehend what they saw. The different angles that the different groups are positioned, dictate what they see and what they carry. Trying to cope up with mere say – principally oral creates an expanse room for assessment. New opportunities have come up that are seemingly relevant and make tangible sense. The general worldview has ultimately undergone tremendous changes and the anchors of the ritual in the earlier times have consequently shifted.

Modernity has advanced new technologies, new moralities and human rights that advocate for advanced living. New technologies have advanced systems such as the cyber systems that offer tricks by matter of knowledge and its technicalities through situations. Tactics formerly achieved through initiation, whereby the initiated are qualified as brave and mighty fellows fit for war and protective roles, have consequently expired. Today there's even a shift to preference for young soldiers popularly known as 'Kadogo's' to mean young ones; who ably operate war technics better than their older counter parts. Advancement has had human rights engaged to preserve people's freedom from interference. Individuals have the freedom to choose what to do and what not to, which is contrary to the traditional cultural established ways. New moralities present ideas such as permissiveness, which advocate for personally proven habits challenging the cultural norm of community proven ideals.

The old laws and norms that governed society have dated out. The significance of status, determined by initiation, has been replaced by western education and trends of civility. Western education has exposed the educated uncircumcised to councils far beyond the traditional set ups, in which an uneducated circumcised man can never access. The uncircumcised educated males are mastering the circumcised uneducated with no room for debate or argument. Intellectual

landscapes have developed so greatly rendering several cultural aspects dysfunctional. Matters of health and personal hygiene, has of late changed general views about life. The presence of STDS, HIV and the current COVID 19 has created situations that call for rethinking. Modernity and its new technologies seem to suffocate cultural traditional rites that require a research to place traditional activities in suitable positions of society.

Modernity and technological advancement in particular is an answer o upcoming huddles and conditions such as COVID. Online programs, globalization and the world as a global village answers many things. A case study of Imbalu in the Bugisu region, in the Northern, parts of Sironko and Bulambuli districts, families and candidates have advanced to modern gardets away from the cultural attires spearheaded by tradition. Instead of smearing candidates with the popular white dough, modern powders purchased from shops are dressed on the initiates. Initiates are free from heavy gardets such as headgears, thigh shakers, animal skin, beautiful handkerchiefs, ties and impressive lessols tied around them. This eliminates training dances, outdated exhortations, for engagement in majestic modern dances. Inguwu the traditional medical herb is insufficiently effective compared to the modern medicines. Instead of holding to tradition and its scarce resources, crudeness and contravesies embedded, culture can adapt to the available technological advancements in this era of technology, while upholding the traditional values of society.

KEY RESPONDENTS (INTERVIEWEES)

Anywar – Director Safe Male Voluntary Circumcision, Eastern region, Uganda

Buyela Musa, Mbale –Kadodi Drum Owner, Bufumbo, Mbale District

Gershom, Rabbi Bayudaya Religious Sect, Semei Kakungulu, Bugisu Sub Region

Gimadu Daniel Bishop North Mbale Diocese and Hon member of Parliament of the cultural institution, Sironko District

Gutaka Yoswa, Clan leader, Buwalasi Clan, Sironko Districts

Kabanule – I/C Bumwoni H/C, Bumbo Namisindwa District

Kulosya F, Priest in the Roman Catholic Church and cabinet member of the cultural institution, Bulambuli District

Kutosi Joseph, Clan leader Bulucheke clan, Bududa District

Makunya Tito, ritual leader; Namisindwa District

Malema G. – In Charge Bufumbo Health Centre, Bufumbo, Mbale District

Mubuya Godwin, Cultural Institution at Mutoto Cultural Centre, Mbale

Murefu Joshua – Overseer Pentecostal Churches, Namisindwa District

Mwalye Moses – Head of Laity Mbale Diocese; opinion leader

Mulyanyuma Aaron, Lecturer Makerere University, Kampala, Opinion leader

Musila John, both Hon Member of Parliament in the Ugandan Government and Hon Member of Parliament in the cultural institution and

Muyonga, Hon Member of Parliament, Bulucheke Constituency; Opinion leader

Muzei Dison, Ritual leader Buwalasi clan Sironko district

Naandaah John Wilson – Bishop Mbale Diocese

Nambale Patiece, RDC Manafwa District

Nambwila Barnabas, Depuy CAO Namisindwa district

Namonyo Arphaxad -Archdeacon Nabumali Archdeaconry Part of the architects of Provisional

Rites Liturgy

Natseli Peter, Archdeacon Bulucheke Archdeaconry, Bududa district

Simiyu Shimanya Bulasio et al, Community elder Namisindwa

Siango Charles Wakwabubi, Mutoto Cultural Centre, Mbale District

Umukuka Mushikori, Cultural head Mutoto Cultural Centre, Mbale District

Wanyama Yoswa, Namatala Health Centre – Mbale District

Wabuyi Yekolamu, Clan leader Bumbo/Bumwoni clan, Namisindwa District

Wabusani Eriya, Clan leader Buwagogo clan, Manafwa District

Wanamali Sam, Deputy Headteacher Bulucheke SS, Bududa District

Wandawa Jenniffer– For District Health Officer Mbale District

Wasike Ruben, Traditional Specialist

Watulatsu Samwiri, a member of Parliament in the cultural institution of the Bamasaba

Wekunya Cornelius, civil servant and advisor to the cultural institution

Weleka George William, a civil servant as well as a medicineman

Wepukhulu Joshua, community elder, Buwagogo, Manafwa district

Wolingo Gideon, community elder, Bumbo, Namisindwa district

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APPENDCIES

APPENDIX 1: INTERVIEW GUIDE

A. Historical and Cultural Context of the Imbalu Ritual

- 1a. What are the origins of Bamasaba?
- b. What is your view of the scholarly aspects of waves of the migrations?
- c. What is their religious background?
- d. How did the Imbalu practice begin among the Bamasaba of Eastern Uganda?
- e. How is the Imbalu season, determined, scheduled, organized and received by the clans?
- 2a. What most important cultural rites accompany the Imbalu ritual?
- b. What is the significance of rituals in the Bamasaba community?
- c. What are the major benefits of Imbalu to the Bamasaba?
- d. What are the major challenges involved in the Bamasaba Imbalu patterns?
- e. How can these loop holes be mitigated?

B. Response to Colonial Challenges and Post-colonial Community Adaptations

- 3a. What influences did missionaries have on the traditional Imbalu ritual?
- b. What Challenges did they face in the resistance against the Imbalu ritual?
- c. Why did their attempts to modify Imbalu fail among the Bamasaba?
- d. What factors helped the Bamasaba to withstand missionary modifications of Imbalu?
- e. What are the Post-colonial community adaptations of the Bamasaba

C. Develop a Post-colonial theological standpoint

- 4a. How can a neutral point be attained between the Christian and tradition ways of carrying out male circumcision?

b. What other advice would you give to the Bamasaba Christians to ensure a constructive ritual in this contemporary time?

APPENDIX 11 OBSERVATION GUIDE

The researcher observed the following in as far as content and significance are concerned

- i) Languages or dialects spoken in different lineages
- ii) Social economic welfare of the people
- iii) Songs and Dance - *Isonja* the 1st dance and *Inemba* the last dance
- iv) Visits being made and Sacrifices offered
- v) Words for exhortation spoken, warnings and ongoing conversations
- vi) Inauguration at Mutoto and the associated activities
- vii) Circumcision on the courtyard
- viii) Post circumcision rituals – Purification, hatching and passing out
- ix) Adaptations of Imbalu in the Modern society

APPENDIX 111 PLAGIARISM

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IMBALU RITUAL OF THE BAMASABA OF EASTERN UGANDA:
A POST-COLONIAL AFRICAN RITE HERMENEUTICAL
PERSPECTIVE

BY
NAMBUBA JULIET NAMBUBA
BSC (HONOURS)
RELIGIOUS STUDIES & MISSIONS

THIS THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND
GRADUATE TRAINING IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF
PHILOSOPHY IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES OF
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DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES

21st October, 2019

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

The bearer of this letter: **Nambuba Juliet Wabwire (16/U/13974/GDRS/PE)** is a student of Kyambogo University pursuing a Master's Degree in Religious Studies.

She is conducting a research which is part of the requirements for the fulfillment of the award.

You are therefore requested to assist him/her with data collection.

Yours sincerely,

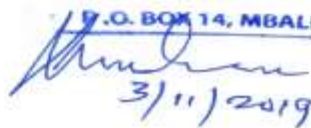

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