

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND FISHING AMONG THE BASAMIA IN UGANDA

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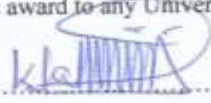
**A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE DIRECTORATE OF RESEARCH AND
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FOR THE AWARD OF A MASTER OF ARTS IN RELIGIOUS
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OCTOBER 2025

DECLARATION

I, **Wafula John** hereby declare that this dissertation entitled "Indigenous Spirituality and Fishing among the Basamia in Uganda" is my original work, and it has never been submitted for an academic award to any University or other higher education institution.

Signed.....



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APPROVAL

We certify that this dissertation entitled "Indigenous Spirituality and Fishing among the Basamia in Uganda" by **Wafula John (23/U/GMARS/1398/PE)** has been under our supervision and that it meets the requirements for the award of a Master of Arts in Religious Studies Degree of Kyambogo University.

Signed.......... Date 18/10/2025

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Signed.......... Date 20/10/2025

Ass. Prof. Kuloba Robert Wabyanga

DEDICATION

I dedicate this piece of work to my family, for its moral, material, financial, spiritual and academic support towards my life and education. May the almighty God whose empathy outshines that of man recompense you plentifully.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to thank God and every person who contributed towards the success of this study. Special appreciation goes to my supervisors Dr. A.P Isiko and Ass. Prof. Kuloba Robert Wabyanga for their unwavering academic and moral guidance that has driven me to this success, my dearest wife Kirabira Amina for her financial and moral support, and my senior brother Wanyama Fenekasi Were whose contribution in this study has been immeasurable. I am also very grateful to all my respondents who provided data and rich insights that have made this study significant.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AIR:	African Indigenous Religion
ATR:	African Traditional Religion
ATS:	African Traditional Society
BMU:	Beach Management Unity
FAO:	Food Agricultural Organization
FGDs:	Focus Group Discussions
IIED:	International Institute for Environmental Development
NEMA:	National Environmental Management Authority
UNEP:	United Nations Environmental Program
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational scientific and Cultural organization
UPDF:	Uganda Peoples' Defense Force

ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate relationship between Indigenous Spirituality and fishing activities among the Basamia in Uganda. It accordingly investigates how spiritual beliefs, rituals, and other cultural practices traditionally shaped and sustained the fishing activity which is currently facing a number of challenges. To analyze such a relationship, the study was guided by three specific objectives; to investigate the Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices associated with fishing among the Basamia of Uganda, to analyze the centrality of the Basamia Indigenous spiritual traditions in sustaining the fishing activities of their area and to analyze the changes in fishing activities and their impact on Basamia Indigenous spirituality. Guided by a qualitative research approach, by use of phenomenological and ethnographic research designs and an interpretivist paradigm, the study used purposive sampling and snowball sampling techniques to select participants like fishermen, mongers, boatswains, boat makers, owners, elders and religious leaders. Information was obtained through interviews, focus discussion groups, and observations. Content, thematic and narrative methods of analysis were used to bring out the real relationship between fishing and the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia. The findings of the study revealed that fishing among the Basamia was connected with their indigenous spirituality; through the observance of several beliefs in God “*Nyasaaye*”, deities like “*Were*” ancestral spirits “*Emisaabwa*” and the impersonal force “*amaani*”. Among the Basamia, the fishing activity was guarded by a system of restrictions and limitations in form of taboos, totems and performance of rituals “*emisiro ne mikholo cho'bunaabi*” like boat investiture rites “*ohukwisira eryato*”. These taboos and totems built more respect for the ecology (the lake and its inhabitants) and rendered the fishing activity sustainable. However, due to the forces of change in the fishing methods, gender dynamics and environmental pressures, most of these protective indigenous spiritual practices and beliefs have been disrupted while others have been completely abandoned. The study concludes that understanding the spiritualities of a society and its connectedness to fishing is vital for culturally grounded and sustainable fisheries management. The study advocates for the integration of indigenous community based sustainable practices and knowledge systems rooted in spirituality with the contemporary development policies and conservation frameworks as a means of supporting the revitalization of the declining fishing ecology.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1.1 Introduction

Fishing is one of the most crucial economic activities which are transversely carried out by numerous societies of the globe living around water bodies. It is an indigenous activity whose origin in Africa can only be traced since the settlement of these African societies in such interlacustrine areas. Throughout generations, this economic activity has influenced the lives of the fishing African communities, by providing food, facilitating local trade, and inducing their spiritual life experiences (Mike, 2016; Ibale, 1998; Nunno et al., 2015). Being such a crucial activity, the African fishers, endeavored to promote, protect, preserve and ensure its longevity and continuity in serving their communities. The success of this African motive was facilitated by the unique African indigenous sense of spirituality, a religious facet or ideology which established a connection between the physical world and the spiritual domain. This belief made the African people to come up with several spiritual traditions which guided their use of the natural environment.

It is however unfortunate to note that these sustaining indigenous strategies have been ignored by the current generation, something that has menaced the destruction of their hereditary activity. Worst of it all, scholars who could have attempted to save the situation have found themselves busy with other literatures far from exploring about the spiritual dimension of fishing. For instance, scholarship has been much more preoccupied with the economic dimension of fishing, comprehensively deliberated on; with the spiritual proportions that sustain the fishing practice receiving little scholarly attention (Bene & Friend, 2011; Brummet & Williams, 2000; Jul-Larsen

et al., 2003 and FAO, 2018). It is worth noting that the available scholarships on fishing as a spiritual action have predominantly engaged with famous coastal and island fishing societies, ignoring the small inland fishing communities like the Basamia in Eastern Uganda. This opens a strong and deep growing scholarly need for this phenomenon.

This study is therefore inspired by the desire to increase on the scholarly engagement which exists in the intersection of indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia. At the same time, the changing dynamics of fishing marked by modernization, environmental pressures, and shifting gender roles raise critical questions about the continuity and transformation of spiritual practices. By exploring these dynamics, this study contributes to filling a knowledge gap, enriching the discourse on African indigenous spirituality, and offering insights into the cultural resilience and adaptation of fishing communities in contemporary Uganda, contribute towards the understanding and affirmation of the theory of spiritual ecology and reinforce sustainability of the environment and the fishing activity through a religious and spiritual lens.

In contract with the theory of spiritual/religious ecology, I endeavor to show that the Basamia indigenous spirituality was and is still paramount in sustaining their entire ecology and the fishing activity in particular. However, as an insider who holds emotional and cultural ties to the indigenous spirituality surrounding fishing, I was sincerely aware of the possibility of my personal bias. To maintain the integrity of this study, I decided to bracket my own suppositions by consciously separating my personal experiences from the participants' narratives during data collection. Particularly, I achieved this by positioning myself as a listener rather than debating or affirming the participants' answers, even when they shared views that sometime deviated or resonated with my own familiarity respectively, I focused on drawing out the deep meanings through probes rather than reinforcing or playing down their views.

Besides the general introduction and background, a literature review and the methodology for this study are presented in chapter one. Chapter two discusses the general world view and understanding of the Basamia indigenous spirituality, from where a description of their Spiritual beliefs and practices distinctively associated with fishing are presented in chapter three. The sustainability of these spiritual traditions towards fishing has been addressed in chapter four. The fifth chapter offered the changes in the fishing practices of the Basamia and how they have impacted their indigenous spirituality. Chapter six finally offers the conclusion and recommendations which illuminate that fishing is one of the activities which are formed of both economic and spiritual dimensions, thus reflecting profound significances which are worth the attention of scholars and environmental activists. Lastly providing several approaches through which the fading indigenous spirituality in the fishing activity of the Basamia can be merged with the modern methods of conservation.

1.1.2 Background to the study

1.1.2.1 Historical Background

Fishing is one of the most shared activities carried out by many African societies who among others include the Basamia. Through the historical roots that go back to centuries, the fishing practice in this society has been passed on from generation to generation. With the presence of fish bones and Shellfish in the South of Africa, archaeologists provide that fishing in Africa dates for over 100,000 years. Archaeologists further claim that the activity started at a time when the inhabitants started moving next to the coastal areas (Sereno et al, 2008). The fishing activity is originally African while it has been subjected to a variety of changes in form of innovations from different foreign groups. The Basamia ethnic group with particularity is strategically located along

the interlacustrine region, along Lake Victoria and River Nzoia bordering Uganda and Kenya in the West. Fishing, therefore, remains a mutual and widely practiced activity among the Basamia.

Indigenous fishing communities inclusive of the Basamia, developed and used different traditional or local extraction methods to harvest various species of fish (Kamanyi et al., 2006; Garrod, 1961). These techniques were integral with respective cultures. For example, they used small daggers, beach seines, cast nets, traps, baskets, poison and hooks among others. Fishers carefully selected extraction techniques depending on the species of the targeted fish, the fishing season, volume of water and size of the water body. For example, it was very hard for one to use hooks to extract silver fish (*Obuduba/omena*) and haplochromines (*efulu*), but baskets would do that well. In the same way, fishers on small water bodies or inlets called for the use of elementary methods like hooks (*amalobo*), permanently planted cages (*ehwira*) while those on big water bodies needed papyrus baskets (*emikono*). It was not until Captain White House R.N introduced the use of nets (*enjero*) in the period between the late 1898 and 1908 (Garrod, 1961). At first, these nets were made up of cotton material which was fairly sustainable but were later replaced by the current unsustainable nylon ones. Since then, nets have been the widely adopted method of fish extraction on Lake Victoria. Indigenous fishing communities in Uganda, namely the Basamia regularly extracted native species like Silverfish (*obuduba*), Catfish (*oluyoko*), Lungfish (*esidonge*), Mudfish (*emonye*), a variety of the Haplochromines known as ‘Efulu’ by the Basamia and Tilapia commonly known as “*Engeke yo’saamu*”. Nile perch “*Embutta*” has also become a common extract since its introduction in the waters of Lake Victoria in the 1960s by late Hon. John Babiha, Minister of animal resources by then. When extracted in big numbers, the indigenous Basamia preserved their catch by use of local methods, mostly sun drying and smoking. The tendency of deep frying and freezing are contemporary.

The indigenous Africans carried out artisanal fishing, that is, for food and local trade while a few engaged in the activity for recreation. This has qualified many to describe African indigenous fishing as one way of hunting for prey (Jeremy, 2021; Awal et al., 2024; Asche et al., 2020; Adim, 2024; Mike, 2016; Ibale, 1998; Nunno et al., 2015). Between 1898 and 1908, the level of fishing was directly measured by the substance demand and ability (Gerrod, 1961; Kamanyi et al., 2006). Therefore, the activity enabled indigenous fishers to get food rich in proteins and effectively participate in local trade with their neighbors for goods they could not produce like animal and iron products. Indeed, a large population of Africa including the Luo people of Kenya and the Basamia in both Western Kenya and Eastern Uganda consumed fish, accompanying it with bread made out of sorghum, millet and the stuff ended up becoming their staple food, thus resonating with the works of Adeyeye & Oyewole (2016); Quintana, & Horton (2014) which provided that fish became one of principal meals of several fishing societies of Africa.

Besides the economy, fishing also provided social cultural support in Africa (Nakiyende, et al 2023). It bonded community members, especially during fish drives that were organized and conducted by different fishing communities in respect to their culture. For instance, the Tembe-Thonga of South Africa who lived along the Pongolo flood plain found on Northern Zululand (Heeg & Breen, 1982). This twelve-monthly social occasion was constantly executed when berates connecting the river had started to withdraw expressly after the rains. Such social events of fish drives were not only confined among the Tembe-Thonga but spread across many African communities such as Shangaan of South-Eastern Zimbabwe (Jubb, 1967). Among the Baka fishing community, women didn't only conduct fishing for substance reasons but also used it as a social aspect which could help in informal education and conflict resolution. They organized for Dam and Bail fishing in the absence of their husbands and had elders talk to young ones about sex and

other social issues (Dounias et al 2016). Such cultural aspects embraced by the fishing communities created social cohesion among the practitioners.

Remarkably, fishing among these African indigenous communities was more than a livelihood; it was a practice deeply intertwined with spiritual observances. Rituals, taboos and prayers accompanied fishing activities, reflecting beliefs in protective spirits, ancestral guidance and moral conduct. These practices ensured sustainability, social cohesion, and respect for the environment. By examining these expressions, this study seeks to understand how indigenous spirituality shapes and sustains community life.

1.1.2.2 Contextual background

The fishing practices in Africa as a whole and among the Basamia in specific has taken a diversionary twist due to both human and ecological factors including over fishing, pollution, introduction of new fish species, changing fish patterns and seasons, changing water levels, climate change, the intrusion of the foreign Western ideologies among others (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawo, 2015 and Sarfo, 2023). Indigenous spirituality has been weakened and is sparsely evident in fishing communities, the fishing practices are largely determined by the new technology, foreign beliefs, and modern administrative systems among others (Amaze, 2024, March and Sibusiso, 2013). For instance, there have emerged new extraction gears and methods like nylon nets and use of chemical poisons, modern fishing management structures like the Beach Management Units (BMU), fishing cooperatives, aqua culture, new preservation techniques like refrigerating and deep frying. Most of these new systems pay less or no homage to the traditional spiritual customs and have consequently damaged the ecology resulting to reduction of the fish stock and destructing of the cultural and spiritual facets of these Africans. Besides, there has

emerged another type of fishing known as industrial fishing in Africa today. This type is purely commercial and lacks any feature of subsistence. The people involved in this type are either employers who seek profits or employees earning salaries and wages at the end of the contracted period (Kabba, 2023).

Notwithstanding the above, fishing remains the primary source of income for the Basamia living along the waters of Lake Victoria and Nzoia River. Indeed, natural resources remain critical and fundamental to rural peoples' livelihood across sub-Saharan Africa, regardless of the environmental threats (Obiero, 2022). This means that the fishing activity is still a cornerstone in the lives of the present-day inhabitants; it is still the main source of both income and proteins to the African people (Jeremy, 2021; Asche, et al. 2020; Ibale, 1998). Fishing activities continually contributes a biggest percentage of the livelihood of the African folks. It employs many individuals with a variety of jobs from where big populations earn a living, for instance the fisher men, the skilled preserving laborers, and mongers. For this reason, African countries contemporarily recognize fishing as an industry. In Uganda, the industry employs around two million people and contributes 1.6% of the country's GDP (UNEP, 2020). For such fishing communities, there are always no other better alternative activities that can generate income (Nunno, et al., 2015).

Similarly, fishing continues to provide the biggest percentage of food which is rich in proteins to many societies of Africa. Fish provides cheap and nutritious food than meat since the former is more rich in animal proteins than the latter (Awal, et al (2024). This fact misguided Adeyeye, & Oyewole, (2016) to guilt themselves for being too general when they erroneously asserted that eating fish in Africa is not refrained by religions like it is the case with beef, dog meat and pork, yet there are many societies in Africa that refrain the eating of some species of fish, for instance the Basamia. It is worth noting that subsistence and artisanal fishing still exists; for instance

artisanal fishing contributes over 50% of the total Africa's fish production hence over numbering the industrial fleets. For Ugandan case, artisanal fishing contributes 80% of its total catch, although the scientists assert that it is carried out by the illiterates and the unskilled fishers (Ssekabira, 2015; Jeremy, 2021; Nunno, et al 2015; Wright, et al 2023; Awal, et al; 2024, Asche et al. 2020; Kabba, 2023; Adim, 2024; Sereno, et al 2008; Ssekabira, 2015, Opondo, 2016).

Regardless of the continuity of some indigenous facets of fishing in Africa, the economic horizon of fishing currently outweighs the spiritual one (Nunno et al., 2015). Contemporary spirituality in the African fishing communities is a nexus of indigenous spiritual traditions and new religious beliefs and practices, an act of syncretism. Since the integration of the two spiritualities has not yet produced sustainable fishing practices (Sussy, G. et al., 2012; Abiona & Abioje, 2021; Sarfo, 2023; Nweke, 2020; Peter, 1993). The focus of the study was based on establishing how the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia in Uganda symbiotically influenced their fishing practices. This aligns with the current scholarship in the field of Religious studies whose attention has been drawn on proving that religious beliefs and practices are fundamental aspects capable of maintaining the ecology (Knut, 1996, Macy & Molly, 1998). The study focuses on the Basamia, one of the minor societies of Uganda which have been ignored by scholars in the discussion of religion and the ecology, thus giving this field of knowledge an impartially well-adjusted approach and data to enrich on its understanding.

1.1.2.3 Conceptual perspective

In this subsection, I explain concepts as deployed and related to the understanding of indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Uganda. These concepts include indigenous spirituality, fishing and sustainability. Spirituality is a complex and multidimensional concept,

largely understood as the human pursuit for meaning, connection with the sacred high power, divine being or transcendent reality, and engagement with values that transcend material existence (Tusasiirwe et al. 2022; Olupona, 2015). It encompasses aspects of religiosity, mysticism, and personal growth. Unlike in the western contexts, where spirituality is often linked to institutionalized religion, this study approached spirituality from an African indigenous perspective, focusing on how the community of the Basamia in Uganda integrates spiritual beliefs into their daily lives, particularly through fishing. In the African indigenous perspective, spirituality is rooted in a holistic world view with a belief that the sacred and the secular are interrelated, that is, all elements of nature inhabit spirits and therefore have an impact on each other (Adofo, 2016; Marumo & Chakale, 2018).

Africans believe that humanity is not an isolated being or reality, rather one which is surrounded by a number of other natural elements that bond with it, depending on the value that man attaches on them (Sussy, et al. 2012; Obiero, et al. 2023). African indigenous spirituality therefore, is an acceptance or feeling among the African people that all things in the universe have an impact of control on each other by use of the spirits (Marumo, & Chakale, 2018; Tusasiirwe et al. 2022; Masango 2006). The entire creation which surrounds man is interconnected in the sense that every single creature has somewhat relationship with the other. With ability to either influence or be influenced by the other in several ways. The interconnectedness and influence of the universal creatures is a result of the existence of two realms, that is, the spiritual (invisible) and physical (visible) possessions. This means that the whole universe and its elements usually described as “natural” actually possess both the physical and spiritual realms that combine to make a whole element. It is then the spiritual side that plays the role of interconnecting with others in diverse arrangements. But since understanding the invisible twin brother of the visible is complex and

abstract, Africans usually press on what they can access and understand, that is, they contact the visible in order to get up on the invisible through beliefs, rituals and other related practices.

In support of the above, Tusasiirwe, et al. (2022) explain that spirituality plays the role of ensuring that there exists a connection between the natural environment and the invisible world. The social, environmental, political, economic, religious and cultural connection influences the way individuals interact with the natural world through beliefs and performance of rituals. This is what constitutes the African people's cosmology - the Afro-cosmology, that is, the African grounded world view or understanding of humanity and the entire cosmos/globe/universe. (Marumo & Chakale, 2028; Sussy et al., 2012). This means that the African indigenous spirituality is somewhat a religious phenomenon designed by the African world interpretations, situation, environment, necessities, difficulties and ambitions.

John S.Mbiti argues that this African indigenous rationale is a religious one with attributes to the sacred, yet applied in all African experiences (Mbiti 1989). If the African world view is a religious one, yet man is at the center of the view and the world through creation, I would then have confidence to comprehend man as the most religious creature. No wonder, out of all creatures, man acts as the priest who connects the rest of the creatures with the sacred being, sets apart some other places as sacred and places of worship and put restrictions on the consumption or use of some other creatures, and sets them apart as sacrifice or offerings, man speaks to nature, he listens to it and attempts to create harmony with the rest of the creatures. Therefore, human beings are naturally spiritual and have the duty of making the rest of the universe spiritual. Man is the master of the religious piece of the universe.

To guarantee a fruitful relationship, this belief resulted into the establishment of taboos and totems which act as social-cultural and religious exclusions/limitations to a particular grouping of people, place or time (Leveque, 2003; Colding & Folke, 1997 as cited by Obiero, et al., 2022). Taboos are practices which are performed repeatedly following a specified order in form of rites, ceremonies, or other set of cultural acts. They are filled with codes or symbols that aim at appealing to the sacred for a given purpose or reason (Nunno, et al., 2015; Leveque, 2003; Adjei & Sika, 2019). Such taboos and totems proved to be virtuous in ecological stability and admiration of the divine realm. It was up on such a background that this study has endeavored to investigate the convictions and restrictions that are observed by the Basamia in their fishing activities to honor the water spirits for successful fishing expeditions. The performance of rituals is yet another facet of indigenous spirituality which was explored in the study because it impacts the fishing practices of the Basamia.

This study has therefore investigated the petitions, offerings, dances and any other practices observed by fishing Basamia. Indigenous spirituality is passed on from one generation to another through myths, legends, songs, proverbs, folktales, and riddles among others. These numerous stories presented in various formats are key in creating cultural norms, values, traditions, attitudes and the general way of life of a given group of people (Nweke, 2020). This study explored the stories that attempt to explain the existence of the water bodies and the fish and give justifications for different beliefs and practices performed by fishers. According to Ibanga (2022), this angle of understanding Indigenous spirituality is a traditional theoretical approach which puts emphasis on aspect of transcendence and supernaturalism with common themes including beliefs and practices, taboos, symbols, totems, ancestry, incarnation, reincarnation, metaphysics, witchcraft, destiny, death, the soul and deities.

The aspect of indigenous spirituality is hereby discussed in relation to fishing. Away from the common-sense understanding which limited fishing to only extraction, this study used the term in line with the indigenous consideration which undertakes the activity as a rounded practice that includes related events oscillating from selection and preparation of the extraction gears and methods, conduction of catching expeditions, manipulation of fishing tools, actual extraction, selling, preservation of fish and fishing grounds and finally the use of the catches for either food or medicine. This means that the study investigated the phenomenon inclusive of pre, during and post fishing actions related to their multifaceted social cultural and spiritual life experiences and desisted from relying on the modern, scientific, literal, deductive, exclusive and lacking attitude of the term. Additionally, this study was conducted under the motivation that indigenous spiritual traditions are crucial in warranting ecological sustenance (Sussy et al., 2012), and their defoliation calls for immediate consideration from all kinds of people including scholars. In this respect, ‘ecological sustenance’ is applied to denote the ability of an ecosystem to maintain its indispensable functions, biodiversity, and productivity, over time. This development involves preserving natural resources, ensuring the balance of ecological processes and supporting the well-being of both human and non- human life through conservation of biodiversity like protection of fish species and habitants, sustainable use of natural resources like fishing without depleting stocks, ecosystem resilience or ability to recover from disturbance like climate change or pollution (Hundoe, 2021).

Therefore, this study used the term ecological sustenance to investigate how fishing practices and indigenous spirituality helped to maintain the balance of the riverine ecosystem. In accordance to Shorter’s (1974) proposal, this study never used the term traditional to refer to past or medieval concepts that are passed to the young generations without reformations, rather dynamic

impressions which shift regularly depending on the social political and economic settings, implying that the culture of the Basamia including its spirituality is not static. So to avoid the challenges of this nomenclature or expression (traditional), the study frequently used the term ‘indigenous’ to potentially substitute traditional.

1.1.3 Statement of the problem

Among the native Basamia, fishing was deeply intertwined with indigenous spirituality, expressed through ritual performance, observation of taboos, and other symbolic practices that guided both livelihood and community identity. These beliefs historically directed when, how and where community members fish, fostering sustainable practices and reinforcing social cohesion. However, in recent years, the Basamia have experienced significant changes in fishing practices due to commercialization, modern technologies, and shifting gender roles, including increased participation of women in fishing. These changes have disrupted traditional fishing patterns and their symbiotic spiritual practices, hence raising questions about whether indigenous spirituality tied to fishing has persisted, weakened, or transformed. Despite fishing being central to both Basamia cultures, and spiritual life, scholarly attention to how spirituality is lived, negotiated, and redefined in this changing context remains limited. While there exist studies on the interconnectedness of spirituality and fishing, these have concentrated on large and familiar societies especially those around the western coastline like the Akan (Fante) of Ghana, Akebu of Togo and Ijaw of Nigeria (Jeremy, 2021; Awal et al., 2024; Asche et al., 2020), there exists scanty literature about the indigenous spirituality and fishing among small inland communities like the Basamia. This gap in understanding poses challenges for cultural, and identity preservation, sustainable ecological or resource use, and the continued social relevance of indigenous beliefs. Addressing this gap is crucial for both academic knowledge and community development.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the fishing practices among the Basamaia are connected with indigenous spirituality, shedding light on the ways cultural and spiritual beliefs shape livelihood and community life.

1.1.4 General objective of the study

To analyze the interconnectedness between indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Uganda.

1.1.4.1 Specific objectives

The study was guided by the following specific objectives;

- i. To investigate the Indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices associated with fishing among the Basamia in Uganda.
- ii. To analyze the centrality of the Basamia Indigenous spiritual traditions in sustaining the fishing activities of their area.
- iii. To analyze the changes in fishing activities and their impact on the Indigenous spirituality of the Basamia.

1.1.5 Research questions

The study was guided by the following specific questions;

- i. What are the indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices associated with fishing among the Basamia in Uganda?
- ii. How central are the Basamia Indigenous spiritual traditions in sustainable fishing of their area?

- iii. How have changes in the fishing activities impacted the traditional spirituality of the Basamia?

1.1.6 Scope of the study

To warrant a clear understanding of the tricky connection in the middle of indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia of Uganda, the researcher carried out investigations which were limited with in a specific subject matter and discipline, in a definite geographical location, but devoid of a precise epoch.

1.1.6.1 Geographical scope

The study was conducted in the Basamia selected inland communities found in Namayingo district. Among them included Maruba, Bugali, Busiro, Lugala, Bukana, Buduma, Bukewa and Bumeru. These communities are located along the shores of lakes Victoria, River Nzoia and other streams. Despite the fact that the Basamia are predominately found in Busia District, these geographical spaces of Namayingo, a cosmopolitan district were selected because such a setting provides a unique opportunity to examine how the Basamia cultural and spiritual practices are maintained and negotiated in a multiethnic environment, offering insights into cultural resilience and adaptation. More still, these communities own rich cultural and spiritual traditions linked with their freshwater fishing activities. This spiritual connection is a rich area of study, showcasing how they view the natural environment and its role in their daily lives. As shown in *figure 1* below, these inland communities lie along the lakes edge. This illustrates their geographical proximity to the fishing zones which are central to the way of life of the Basamia. The inclusion of this map is intended to provide a visual understanding of the physical location, distribution of the study sites, and provision of a broader spatial context of this study.

A MAP OF NAMAYINGO DISTRICT SHOWING THE AREA OF STUDY



Figure 1: Map showing the study Area

Source: Author's compilation with technical assistance from a geospatial expert

1.1.6.2 Content Scope

This study whose focus is on indigenous spirituality and fishing activities of the Basamia was limited to three aspects; investigation and analysis of the interconnectedness between Basamia Indigenous spiritualities like beliefs, rituals, taboos and fishing practices; analysis of the significance of the Basamia Indigenous spiritual traditions in sustainable fishing and exploration of the changes in fishing activities and how they impact the Indigenous spirituality of the Basamia.

1.1.6.3 Time scope

This study focuses on the period from the late 19th century, when the arrival of Christian missionaries and other foreign influences such as colonial administration, new forms of education, and modernization began shaping life in Eastern Uganda, through to the present. These encounters introduced new cultural and religious worldviews while concurrently disrupting, challenging and transforming indigenous practices. By situating the analysis within this timeframe, the study is able to examine how the fishing spirituality of the Basamia has persisted adapted, or shifted in response to these external forces as well as more recent dynamics such as technological change and evolving gender roles. This scope thus provides both historical depth and contemporary relevance to the exploration of fishing and spirituality.

1.1.7 Justification of the study

The study uncovers the intricate relationship between indigenous spirituality and the fishing activities of the Basamia in Uganda. It has been unfortunate that scholars have always loved to discuss the ecological and economic significance of fishing with little efforts being spared for deliberating on the spiritual phenomenon. Where the spiritual significance has been labored about, case studies from minor inland societies like the Basamia have always gone missing. This has created imbalanced literature, anthropological and theological gaps since the spiritual details of such societies tend to remain unrecognized. It is up on such a ground that this research attempted to study the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia and provide information about their social, economic, cultural and religious life style. In so doing, the anthropological and theological gaps have been narrowed through documenting the unique cultural and spiritual traditions of the Basamia which have had great influence on their fishing activity. Since indigenous spirituality of

the Basamia, their ecology (lake) and their fishing activity is at risk of destruction, due to modernization, globalization and foreign management systems', documenting these beliefs and practices now is crucial before they disappear.

Instead of generalizing on the concept of spirituality across the entire economies of Africa, this study provides a detailed observation on fishing and helps in expanding the knowledge of African indigenous spirituality and enriching on the small existing literature of the Basamia. The study shows how the fishing practice is not only an economic activity but one which is imbued in the worldview of the communities' reproducing values, cosmology and moral codes. The study investigated on the different spiritual beliefs and practices which influence the fishing practices, how they promote sustainability and the fishing changes which have impacted the spiritual experiences of the Basamia.

1.1.8 Significance of the study

The findings of the study provide information that support cultural understanding and preservation initiatives. On one hand, it offers insights about how indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices influence the fishing activities of the Basamia in Uganda and how the fishing activities themselves influence their indigenous spiritual life on the other hand. Understanding this connectedness makes the Basamia and the rest of other Africans to obtain a deep gratitude of their cultural legacy and uniqueness. Compatibly, documenting these facts will help in preserving these spiritual traditions like beliefs and practices related to fishing. From this documentation, the strong cultural heritage will now be disseminated from one generation to another and avoid its frustrating erosion.

Besides, the documentation makes great theoretical contribution by providing information that enriches many academic fields like anthropology, sociology, environmental stewardship and

religious studies. It enriches scholarship on African indigenous religions by examining fishing as a site of spirituality, an area often overshadowed by land-based practices in existing literature. It expands the conceptual understanding of how spirituality is embedded in economic and ecological activities, thereby contributing to the growing field of spiritual ecology. Studying it among the Basamia in Uganda provides fresh ethnographic data on indigenous beliefs and practices that have received little attention, thereby fixing a notable scholarship gap in Ugandan and African studies. Certainly, the study will be a source of literature review and a ground for arguments to future scholars studying about topics related to the above-mentioned disciplines.

Similarly, the documented cultural knowledge is of great value to the policy makers and implementers in the fishing sector. The documented spiritual traditions and other cultural realities inform them about the sustainable fishing practices that venerate cultural and spiritual standards. This offers a spiritual and cultural sensitivity to the fisheries policy makers who may consider them while designing policies. This is because the fishing communities in Africa have experienced a lot of changes due to racial mixture, civilization, westernization, modernization, globalization technological advancement and science. This study helps to find out how these changes have impacted on the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia and their fishing activities and offers recommendations or strategies on how these impacts can be curbed to ensure both cultural continuity and ecological sustainability, particularly in the fishing area. This helps the policy makers to come up with ways through which these changes can be harmonized with the traditions to ensure sustainable fishing on the waters of Namayingo Districts.

Nevertheless, the study has an economic contribution to the society. As earlier highlighted, fishing is one of the most common and vital economic activities of the African people, Ugandans and the Basamia in particular. The activity in its place is a critical income for countless African

populations. Investigating about the unworldly magnitudes of fishing delivers an all-inclusive opinion of its economic, social and cultural significance, facilitating to strategize extra authentic growth programs. The study highlights the role of indigenous spirituality in sustaining livelihoods, promoting environmental stewardship, and shaping community values.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

1.2.1 Introduction

Fishing is one of the most crucial economic activities that have constituted a livelihood of the Basamia in Eastern Uganda and western Kenya. Like any other African society, the Basamia interwove their fishing with spirituality. They carried out fishing in accompaniment with spiritual beliefs and practices which are said to have been ecologically sustaining. Unfortunately, these are being replaced by the modern practices which instead deplete the waters and consequently affect the economy of the fish population. In this section, the researcher explains the theoretical frame work and dives into the rest of scholarly domain, extracts, analyzes and reviews the existing literature that relates to fishing and spirituality. This helped to establish secondary data which inclined analysis and clearly established a base for documenting the imbued relationship between fishing and spirituality among the Basamia.

1.2.2 Theoretical frame work

The study was underpinned by the theory of religious/spiritual ecology, a framework advanced by scholars such as Kinsley (1995); Macy (1998); Sponsel (2012); Najr (1965); and Tucker & Grim. These proponents emphasize the interconnectedness of spirituality, culture, and the natural environment, showing how religious and cultural worldviews shape ecological behavior and environmental stewardship.

The theory of spiritual ecology endeavors to explain the relatedness of religion or spirituality and the environment, thus matching with the topic under study. It is a recent aspect of scholarship in the field of sociology, anthropology, environmental management and religious studies (Laurel &

Keller, 2007). According to Leslie, (2010), the study of the relationship between religion and human ecology started in 1950s and has attracted the attention of scholars in many disciplines. He asserts that currently; scholars prefer calling it spiritual ecology rather than religious ecology with a view that the term spirituality is more inclusive than the institutionalized religion. Spirituality encompasses both formalized and localized beliefs, practices and personal or societal experiences with the natural world yet religions are in most cases only limited to the formal spiritual institutions.

According to the theory, there is a spiritual aspect to all issues related to conservation, environmentalism and earth stewardship (Berry, 1988; Suzuki, 2002; Francis, 2015 and Tucker & Grim, 2016). Therefore, there is need for inclusion of spiritual elements in contemporary nature conservation work like awareness and engagement in ecological issues should be based on religion and spirituality. However, there is no agreed origin of the theory of spiritual ecology although some scholars trace it back to the works of the late 19th Anthropologist and philosopher, Edward, B. Taylor (Leslie, 2010). According to Leslie (2010), the aspect of spiritual ecology (the current understanding) is a product of the works and contributions of a variety of current scholars, including Kinsley (1995); Macy (1998); Sponsel (2012); Najr (1965); Tucker & Grim, 2016 among others.

One of the assumptions of the theory is interconnectedness and interdependence. On one hand, the theory of spiritual ecology states that spiritual beliefs and practices significantly shape and guide how societies interact with their natural environment and have them managed (Botero, 2014). They influence environmental practices and enable sustainability. For instance, some of the fishing beliefs and rituals that honor water deities/spirits have the ability to influence the fishing sequences. The theory therefore predicts that societies that possess entirely strong spiritual

connections to nature will definitely involve in more sustainable practices. On the other hand, the theory believes that the natural world with its elements is filled with the spiritual meaning and is always at the center of all religious practices (David, 1995). Nature embraces spiritual implication, natural elements like forests, rocks, animals and water bodies and others are sacred or reverend and deserve respect and reverence. This therefore means that in case of any alternation in the natural environment, the spiritual practices are most likely to shift.

Affirming its position, the theory asserts that most of the indigenous ecological practices are based on spiritual beliefs which promote sustainability and adoration towards nature. For example, the rituals and beliefs inculcate principles of stewardship by directing emphasis on individual and society moral obligation for managing natural resources' sustainability (Macy & Molly, 2014). This guides in formalizing of environmental practices like dictating fishing seasons or techniques to guarantee ecological steadiness. This principle addresses a spiritual obligation, duty and responsibility to preserve and protect the natural environment. The theory however believes that spiritual traditions like beliefs and practices have the ability to adapt and remain resilient in the face of environmental changes (Bauman, 2014). Spiritual myths, beliefs and practices can avail conditions for understanding and reacting in response to the ecological challenges. This therefore helps in the maintenance, continuity and identity of such a practicing society. Rituals, beliefs and doctrines transmitted from one generation to another encourage cultural values, norms and connections to the environment.

The theory of spiritual ecology was used to clearly demonstrate the interconnectedness and interdependence of indigenous spirituality and the fishing practices of the Basamia in Uganda. It helped to show how spirituality expressed through rituals, taboos and beliefs with the fishing practices among the Basamia shape each other. Its tenets helped in investigating about the different

spiritual beliefs and practices which regulate the perception of the fishing grounds and the rest of the fishing practices of the Basamia. It was used to establish how these spiritual traditions promote sustainability and how the fishing ecology on the other hand impacts the spiritual life of the Basamia. This is because the summative claim of the theory is that there is a symbiotic relationship between religion/spirituality and the elements of the natural environment.

The theory was applied in establishing the resilient spiritual traditions like beliefs, myths and rituals which are persistently influencing the fishing activities in this changing world. In the same way, the theory was useful in analyzing how the established resilient spiritualities help the fishermen to adapt with and remain resistant to environmental changes like reduction in water volumes and scarcity of certain fish species. Correspondingly, the theory enabled the study to establish the spiritual traditions which have been swept away due to ecological destruction and how this has impacted the fishing sector. This is because the advocates of the theory assert that spiritual traditions can avail conditions for understanding and reacting in response to the ecological challenges. Accordingly, the theory assisted the study to explore the specific principles, values and norms that the Basamia indigenous spiritual traditions inculcate and are well positioned for sustainable fishing. The theory asserted that societies that possess more spiritual beliefs and practices may end up being sustainable with adoration towards nature through inculcating principles of stewardship like self and society moral obligation for managing natural resources (Macy & Molly, 2014). The approach provided by this theory offered a multidimensional understanding of the imbued relationship between spirituality in the fishing practices of the Basamia.

Whist the theory of spiritual ecology provides a rich ground upon which the connectivity between fishing and spirituality among the Basamia can be investigated, it also faces certain crucial

criticisms by scholars hence calling for careful application of the theory in the study. To start with, the theory is critiqued for romanticizing or idealizing spiritual beliefs and practices as entirely harmonious with nature (Grim, 2001). It overlooks the fact that these spiritual traditions are complex and diverse, contrasting from one society to another. This homogenization/overgeneralization may not be accepted because some of these spiritual traditions at times may not line up with modern conservation goals (Sponsel, 2001). Therefore, the account that all indigenous spiritualities are eco-friendly is not a reality since most communities usually develop them for survival and to ensure economic benefits which may not prioritize sustainability.

Others still argue that spiritual ecology unlike other ecological and anthropological studies lack scientific accuracy as it bases its assertion and explanation on the spiritual faction without empirical data hence being rendered subjective (Harris, 1979 and Taylor, 2001). By so doing, the theory overlooks the role of social, economic and political power dynamics in shaping environmental practices. This makes its legal definition and applicability by policy makers quite difficult. The ambiguity of the term spirituality is yet another challenge for spiritual ecology. The term is open to diverse interpretations by different cultures, religions and individual perspective. This made it hard for the researcher to distinguish the spiritual actions from the ones which are not, hence making it challenging in the conduction of the study.

To ensure a compliant study, I clearly accepted the complexity and diversity of the spiritual traditions of the Basamia by indicating that they are dynamic and all of them may not align with modernity. I endeavored to show where they have ensured sustainability and where they have failed. I also tried to be objective enough by listening to what the community deliberates about the matter to get the impartial response from a variety of respondents like religious, political and

fisheries leaders rather than generalizing them, I finally endeavored to conceptualize spirituality in relation to fishing in the conceptual background to avoid misinterpretations during the study.

The spiritual/religious ecology theory has presented a vigorous lens through which the elaborate connection between indigenous spirituality and the ecology can be comprehended. Its significance to this research is based on its emphasis on the inviolability endorsed to natural resources and the spiritual ideologies controlling their use and preservation. Whereas the theory offers a robust footing for understanding the spiritual proportions of fishing among the Basamia, this research improves the discourse by relating it contextually, testing its strength against lived truths, developing practices, and internal social-cultural dynamic forces within an African fishing community (the Basamia).

1.2.3 Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs and Practices Associated with Fishing

The explorations in the introduction subsection provided that the entire life experiences of the African indigenous people are coiled with the phenomenon of spirituality. The social, cultural, political, religious and economic affairs of the African indigenous people took place as motivated by the interconnectedness of the spirits and the natural environment. The same explorations reported that the African indigenous spirituality is observed, manifested and defined through beliefs which resulted into establishment of taboos, totems and the performance of rituals as perceived by various societies. Such facets helped in ensuring that there exists a balanced, harmonious, peaceful and desired productivity of the natural elements. This subsection is therefore destined to ascertain the beliefs and practices which were imbued with the fishing activity in Africa (spirituality and the fishing practices);

While discussing on the aspect of beliefs associated with fishing, it is worth noting that the entire spiritual experiences of the African indigenous people rotate around the belief in the existence of various spirits, that is, the spirit of God, deities, ancestors and mythical powers that inhabit natural elements and ensure interconnectivity and interdependence. The spirits have imbalanced powers that need the observation of some beliefs, taboos, totems (prohibitions), and performance of rituals to harmonize them and ensure pinnacle productivity and peaceful co-existence (Olupona, 2015; Amaze, 2024; Omotoye, 2011; Magezi, & Magezi, 2017; and Nweke, 2020). In a broad-spectrum, these are the same beliefs that influence the indigenous fishing activities among the African fishing communities.

Indigenous Africans believe that the fish habitants like oceans, seas, lakes, rivers, wetlands, swamps, pool and ponds, the fish species, the fishing gears and vessels like traps, hooks, baits, nets, baskets etc. the fishers (fishermen), the fish market places, the consumers among others, are sacred because they are occupied or inhabited by those spirits and powers (Nunno, et al., 2015; Opondo, 2016; Leveque, 2003; Adeji, & sika, 2019 and Issifu, & Diawo, 2015), for instance among the Akan of Ghana and other tribes in the entire West African region, the sea is inhabited by a god known as “Nana Bosompo” that is, a god that lives on a large mass of water plus many other lesser gods like “Maame wata”, “Nana Bokwa” and the Whale, as stated by Adeji, & sika, (2019) and Obiero, et al. (2022). In fact, other African societies believe that the water bodies or some of the fish species are Gods or spirits that manage total fishing actions, hence making them pure and sacred. For instance, some societies in Ghana believe that the Whale is the sea God and cannot be eaten by the sea fishers or else they are punished with sickness and death (Adeji, & sika, 2019 and Obiero et al., 2022).

Most indigenous African fishing societies believed that these spirits which own the waters are actually the parents of the fish and other non-fish creatures that are desired by the fishers (Dounias, E. et al., 2016). It is upon this parenting status that some Africans identify the seas as fathers (inhabited with a male spirit) and use this to justify the gender dynamics experienced in the fishing industry, that is, only males go for actual fishing exercises. On the contrary, others argue that the seas are mothers (inhabited with a female spirit) for they produce the fish; a duty fathers cannot carryout. However, others believe that the seas are neuter, that is, without any gender; they are simply water bodies inhabiting aquatic life (Adeji & sika, 2019).

They believed that the inhabiting spirits could get happy or annoyed depending on the conduct of the concerned people like the fishers, buyers, consumers among others. When happy, they would bless the fishermen with successful fishing expeditions and abundant catches. While annoyed, they would express their emotions by closing the lake with winter meshes, causing drownings, poor catches and other catastrophes (Obiero et al., 2022). To maintain a good and balanced relationship between the fishers, the water and fish spirits, indigenous Africans came up with taboos perpetuated by totems and demonstrated by rituals to approach each of the mentioned fishing requirements with a lot of care, veneration, respect and protection. For instance, many African fishing societies respected the gods of the lakes, worshiped them, and consulted the oracles before fishing expeditions/voyages were made (Nunno et al., 2015; Opondo, 2016). This is because they believed that the permission and blessings to catch the fish was given by the spirits, the respected owners of both the waters and the fish.

According to Dounias et al., (2016), the fishers would in turn offer the spirits with human blood which could be obtained by the spirits themselves; such sacrificial spirits in most cases inhabited the crocodiles. Among the Luo fishers of Kenya, the first fish to be caught would be offered to the

gods of the waters by the chief fisher known as “Mwasia” as said by Opondo, (2016). This kind of adoration given to the water gods denied fishers full ownership of the lake, an attitude which is sustainable, they believed that the lake belonged to a God and not them. The idea of asking for permission before fishing and thanks giving reduced the number of fishing voyages and cries about over fishing were unheard off. It is up on this background that scholars have applauded that this approach of the indigenous African fishers was and remains the most ecologically sustaining method in the fishing industry of Africa (Obiero et al., 2022; issifu & Diawo, 2015). Consequently, while discussing the beliefs and practices associated with fishing among the indigenous African fishing communities, we will be in other words discussing the taboos, totems, and rituals related to the fishing activities. Although scholars present a decent understanding of the spiritual beliefs that relate to fishing, they hardly explain how such beliefs have been reshaped by modernization, environmental changes and economic pressures, this study labored to investigate and fix this gap.

To ensure effective and efficient observance of these beliefs, different indigenous African fishing communities designed a number of taboos and totems. They appeared in form of regulations, prohibitions or restrictions (dos and don'ts) that controlled the fishing gears, fish species to be caught, the time and date for fishing, the fishing grounds the methods of extraction, the selling, consumption and any other use (Leveque, 2003). In support of the same, Colding & Folke, (1997) as cited by Obiero, et al., (2022), observed that taboos are classified into; segmented taboos which regulate resource exploitation, temporal taboos that regulate the access to resources for a given period, method taboos that check on the methods of exploitation, life history taboos which regulate the exploitation of species that are at a given stage of life, species taboos that measure the use of certain species and habitant taboos that regulate the access and use of resources. These regulations

were followed with concern by the fishers simply because they were protected by spiritual prohibition that all fishing grounds were under the power of the gods/goddesses (Ibale, 1998).

For example, there are some tribes in Africa that do not eat some species of fish because of their beliefs (Awal et al., 2024). In Uganda for instance, Nile perch (*Embuta*) is not eaten by many people who believe that it causes sores on the body of the consumer. Whether the reasons are healthy related, linked to its strangeness, lack of cultural heritage with the African people, European attachment or its predatory nature, researchers have not been clear. This research however endeavored to establish these facts. In Uganda still, the Banyakole-Batoro do not eat fish with a belief that they are frogs of the lakes and not healthy for food (ibid). The Baganda do not eat lungfish because it looks like a snake and its fins look like breasts of a woman (ibid). In the same way, Leveque (2003) provides that, the Lokele of Central Africa refrain from eating small phraclolemidea for it holds blood just like human beings. Most of the fishing communities in Western Ghana refrained from catching, killing and eating Whales because of the belief that they were the spirits of the seas. One who dared to eat needed ritual cleansing presided over by the priest after offering a prescribed sacrifice. These people respected dead whales in the sense that they would organize for decent burials for Whales found dead. The burials were followed with special performances like libation to find out from the spiritual world about its death and if possible, avenge (Adjei & Sika, 2019).

Other species are not eaten by the lactating mothers with a belief that they cause occasional sicknesses to the fetus; the sole fish that has no fins was not eaten by adult men for it would make them sexually ineffective. It was believed by the Lokele if the unmarried girl eats a butterfly fish, she would certainly fry into marriage illegally. Other species are used as drugs e.g. among the Songola-Enya, a small fish (amphilidae, *Belonglanis tenius*) is medicine that helps to boost men's

sexual vigor because its flesh is solid like a log. Charm medicine got from catfish provides power for one to paralyze his/her opponents. The leather like skin of puffer fish prevents people's skins from contracting wisps and blades (ibid).

In most African indigenous fishing societies, women are not allowed to go for fishing or even tamper with the fishing vessels or gears. They are also not allowed to access specific islands, if they did, it's believed that the wrath of God through lightning would strike them (Ibale, 1998 and Adjei & Sika, 2019). Women dominated the post-harvest activities like preserving and selling. For instance, the Baka women who are allowed to carry out fishing were meant to do it on specific fishing grounds, with certain extracting gears and methods and for particular fish species but not the same with men. They were amusingly supposed to be escorted with their young boys. They were also not allowed to take active participation in the fish related rituals and celebration (Dounias et al., 2016). The reason behind the gender prohibition has been explained by various societies differently; some claim that women are seen as bad omen and therefore can't join the fishing voyages, others that women are jealous people and this character cannot manage the paradoxical fishing practice, yet others claim that women may experience menstruation process yet the menstrual blood is an abomination to the sea gods, and makes them unclean and pollutants to any fishing ground (Adjei, & Sika, 2019). Unfortunately, the prohibition applies even to the pregnant mothers who don't experience menstruation. This has made many to disregard the indigenous reasoning because under normal circumstances, the pregnant mothers rarely menstruate. This has been left unanswered by many scholars and this study excavated out responses over the matter. Many societies prohibit women from eating certain fish species (Ibale, 1998; Nunno, et al., 2015).

Traditional fishing Africans usually put various bans on fishing, either on the entire fishing exercise for the whole community for days, weeks or months (seasonal) or on the fishing of certain

species and from certain fishing grounds (Leveque, 2003). For instance, the fishing people of Accra stop fishing for a period of one month to prepare for the “Homowo” festival (Nunno, et al., 2015). The fishing people of Ivory Coast found in the coast are allowed to extract fish from May and end in October without fail (Amaze, 2024; Adjei & Sika, 2019) provided that it was a taboo for the fishing communities of west Ghana to extract fish on a Tuesday of every week for it was believed to be a sacred day set apart for the sacred beings like crocodiles, catfish and pythons. The gods of the sea would punish whoever did not abide by the instructions by causing autism to their children. It is said that this neural disorder was very common in the fishing communities of Ghana, caused by the angered spirits. For the Karanga fishers of Zimbabwe, Wednesday was the sacred day of the week (Nche & Ogar, 2024). In relation to that, Subba et al., (2020) professed that those who violated the Tuesday fishing bans would see what humans are not meant to see not until they make sacrifices. Humans are only capable of interacting directly with the matter, but if they interact with the spiritual world, then it must be under the guide of the spirits, but with such circumstances of disobedience, the humans would be abandoned only to suffer the consequences of being stubborn.

Sex was taken to be an impure act which the spirits of the waters didn’t like to associate with. Therefore, sex was forbidden from the fishing, gears, vessels and grounds. Anyone who engaged in sexual intercourse was not allowed to interact with any fishing related equipment or access the fishing ground. Such a person needed to first go through ritual cleansing for him to rejoin the fishing group. Adultery made the impurity worse, especially if the husband of the adulterous woman got to know about it. Him and the gods of the water bodies would get angry and curse the fisherman. To avoid the consequences of disobedience, the Senegal fishers didn’t allow any married man on the canoes or fishing voyages, fishing remained an occupation of the single youths,

only to retire at marriage (Ibale, 1998; Adjei & Sika, 2019 and Obiero et al., 2022). Any other impurity or curse obtained from elsewhere would constrain a fisherman from contacting the fishing ground and the fishing equipment. This is because the spirit inhabited fishing grounds are pure and relates not with any form of impurity. Violation of such taboos would result into punishments from both the leaders like chief fishers, chiefs and the sea gods. Among the punishments would include paying fines, offering sacrifices for cleansing , being denied good catches by the gods, getting lost on the seas, being affected by diseases, getting generational curses and drowning to death due to accidents.

The Luo indigenous fishers forbid the use of lemon and soap around the fishing grounds. They were taken as pollutants of the fishing grounds and that they would kill fish (Opondo, 2016). According to, Subba et al., (2020), the wearing of slippers and the cooking of fish around the fishing grounds were not allowed. Like the soap and lemon philosophy of the Luo these would also scare the fish away. The same reason made the Senegal fishers to ban the putting on of red clothes. Those in Benin and the Sakana of Ghana were refrained from whistling or making any noise of the like while on a fishing expedition (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawwo, 2015). However, such restrictions pose challenges to the scholarly world, as to whether these regulations and prohibitions were driven from the religious grounds or not. The study definitely tailored in here to establish the truth.

To strengthen the relationship between the waters, fish, and fishers, ensure keen adherence to the taboos and other beliefs, African elders designed the concept of totems. As we may already hold, African societies are subdivided into clans, each of them holding relationship with certain animals, birds, fish, plants, trees, Rock, river, lake or circumstances which inhabit spirits of their historical and cultural heritage (Sussy et al., 2012; Issifu & Diawwo, 2015). It now becomes a duty of every

clan to protect its totem animal or object for generations through myths, legends, proverbs, folktales, riddles etc. Societies that belong or adhere to a certain totem feel connected with it and proud to identify themselves by its name as their pet name; it gives them a sense of identity and belonging. It is forbidden for one to use his totem for food or any other use rather protects it. Failure to do that, the person may have his body swell, get cursed or even be killed. This is one of the concepts that confirm the African world view of the existence of spirits that inhabits the natural elements and the need for them to connect with individuals (ibid).

As it concerns the fishing practice, some fish species and other aquatic animals are seen as sacred because of the history they have with specific societies and therefore taken as totems depending on their story (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawwo, 2015). For instance, the Dogon people of Mali adore the catfish; it is used when performing initiation ceremonies or rites. Many tribes in Mali believe that the catfish helped one of their great ancestors to cross the river as he was attempting to run away from his enemies. For the Akan natives of Ghana, the catfish is so influential in aiding the fulfillment of one's desires. They therefore offer to it and in turn ask it to fulfill their requests. These groups respect the catfish to the extent that they forbid even cultivating around the rivers where they think the species resides to avoid killing them. When they are found dead, they are mourned for and given decent burial like that of a human being. For Instance, in Bo-bo-Dioulasso of Burkina Faso, hundreds of catfish were found dead due to pollution from the industrial areas and they indeed conducted for them a burial more decent than that of human beings (ibid) .

Among the Sankana, the killing of frogs and pythons is forbidden. Like the Dogo, the Sanakan believe that the python helped their ancestors to escape their enemies who were chasing them. Their myth provided that the python miraculously turned into a big log, across the river and their

ancestors used it to cross the river, hence fleeing their enemies (the slave raiders); this was a god act from the python. It is therefore believed that whoever dares to kill or eat the python, it can come back to normal while in the stomach and cause one's death (Issifu & Diawwo, 2015.). Because of this, many pythons have been preserved and reproduced in the Sankana caves, people visit them for worship. In the same way, the Sankan believe that the frog helped their ancestors to locate the source of water at a time when they felt thirsty during migration. Their myth provides that as their ancestors were desperate of water, the frog from nowhere jumped to one of them and again jumped back to its initial place, trying to look for it, they discovered a water point. This made them happy with the frog and since then forbid its killing and eating, they even refrain from using water sources that inhabit frogs (Issifu & Diawwo, 2015.). This preserves not only the frogs but also other aquatic creatures like fish.

The Talensi people of Tong-Tengzuk and the Bakwena of Botswana believe that the crocodile is also a human being like them though in a different form. This is because the crocodile is one of the animals that their great ancestors use to appear and interact with the living through incarnation, so it is one of them and killing or eating it is seriously prohibited. Consuming it is equated to either human murder or cannibalism and can cause terrible suffering to the victim and the entire family or community. When found dead, they are given decent human-like burial. (Issifu. & Diawwo, 2015). This belief helps them to refrain from some fishing methods like poisoning which cannot harm the totems, hence covering up the other aquatic creatures like fish. Despite illuminating on the taboos and totems that relate to fishing, the evolutionary aspect of these spiritual traditions has not been fully addressed by this literature. This study therefore endeavored to establish how they have been challenged by the contemporary context and found out whether they are still relevant to the fishing communities of the Basamia.

Among the rituals performed for the water deities by the fishing African indigenous communities which includes the consultation of oracles in specific periods, (Nunno et al., 2015; Leveque, 2003; Adjei & Sika, 2019), the conduction of festivals or ceremonies accompanied with sacrifices, offering of the first fruits, libation, prayers to inaugurate new boats among others. These were conducted both at the start and end of the fishing trips or season's, which is to launch the fishing bans and the lifts (Amaze, 2024). The fishers of West Africa performed fishing rites known as the Bakatue festival in every August to ensure bumper harvests throughout the fishing seasons. According to Tour Nigeria, (2010) the Nigerian fishers of Kebbi state annually perform the Argungu festival every February, a month that marks the end of the farming season and the start of the fishing period. It takes place for four days with sport displays, traditional Kebbawa entertainment and fishing competitions in Meta Fedan River. During this festival, sacrifices are offered to the spirits of the river for permission and cleansing to ensure that it's safe for the activities. The sacrifice is presided over by "Sarkin Ruwa" the hereditary custodian of the river. This sacrifice sends away the crocodiles but entices fish to come closer. Women are only allowed to sing traditional songs but not competing. This ritual is always performed to seek for success from the water spirits.

The Luo fishers of Kenya cleansed their fishing vessels/canoes before the start of the fishing voyage. According to OPondo (2016), the leader of the fishing voyage known as "MWasiamar" would hold water into the mouth and then after some minutes spray it on the canoe while praying for success during the exercise. The fishing communities of Western Ghana offered sacrifices to the gods and spirits that were believed to have inhabited the water bodies like "Nana Bosompo", Nana Bokwa, and the whale. They sacrificed to them monkeys known as (Efuor) as thanks giving for protecting the fishers and the entire community. The sacrifices were made once in a year under

the headship of religious leaders like the chief, elders, priests, and the chief fisher (Adjei & Sika, 2019). The Ghanaian god of the water is unique from those of most African societies that ask for domestic animals, like cows, goats, sheep, and poultry.

In conclusion, the above literature upholds the existence of rich spiritual customs such as taboos, totems, and rituals associated with fishing across African communities. While these studies offer significant historical and cultural understandings, many of them treat these traditions as residues of the past, with inadequate consideration to their perseverance or transformation in contemporary situations. This study seeks to fill this gap by exploring the continuities and evolving expressions of such indigenous spiritual practices among the Basamia today.

1.2.4 Indigenous Spiritual Traditions and Sustainable Fishing

In support to Obiero et al., 2022; Sussy et al., 2012; Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Amaze, 2024 and Nche & Ogar, 2024) the spiritual components that have been discussed (taboos, totems and rituals) are wonderful avenues for ecological protection, conservation and sustainability. This is because these spiritual traditions are in actual sense prohibitions that have secure punishments to the ones who dare to violate them. They regulate the use of natural components by inculcating fear among individuals about the consumption of certain species of animals and plants, stones, trees etc. and the exploitation of resources like mountains, lakes, wetlands, swamps, forests, caves, grooves etc. The taboos and totems for example have a lot of dos and don'ts which consequently help in controlling the relationship between the individuals and the entire environment hence causing harmony. These natural elements are pronounced as sacred by clan elders, indigenous religious leaders, deities, ancestors and God. The declaration may depend on the fact that such elements of nature are so good for supernatural residence, religious worship and therefore out of bound by the

people (Sussy et al., 2012). Others may be denounced because of the bad history with the society. For instance, it might have resulted to the death of one of the great ancestors of the clan or tribe. Such are denounced because they have the ability to harm the living members of the society as well, by making them unclean/unholy, causing diseases and sicknesses that may lead to death. Issifu & Diawo, (2015) affirms that the Sankan and Tongo-Tengzuk communities of northern Ghana have successfully conserved and managed their natural resources through the use of totems and taboos.

The performances of the rituals are always composed of the use of the flora and the fauna. So to ensure that such elements are available for the continuity of the rituals, they find worth in protecting them. Some places have been set aside for the performance of such rituals and cannot be destroyed at all. More still, during the performance of rituals, there is a lot of teaching that is done to the participants/ practitioners i.e. about how to protect the spiritually important fauna and flora (Sussy et al., 2012).

The feeling that all natural elements are filled with spirits among the Africans indirectly communicates that everything that exists in the natural environment has life and therefore deserves care, protection and respect. They believe that life is simply the essence (spirit) in the object, (Sussy et al., 2012). This belief is exceedingly sustainable but in sharp conflict with the scientific explanation which is too anthropocentric in nature and environmentally destructive. The scientific concepts of living and non-living things, those that have the senses of feeling, emotions, pain and happiness, to me is anthropocentric and have brain washed many to influence their handling of the environment. This biased mind is the root cause of all environmental depletion. Individuals without concern destroy the elements of nature thinking that they are non-living and only designed to meet the desires of the living.

Specifically for fishing, the spiritual components delimited fishers to develop specific fishing tools and methods that would fit in the demands of the spiritual realm; they demarcated for them the species to be caught, the fishing grounds, the time, market and consumption etc. They also tamed their behavior and conduct to fit in the system though with innovations (Obiero et al., 2022). In support of the same, Issifu & Diawo (2015), and Miller (2004) provided that, the International Institute for Environmental Development (IIED) confirmed that the African cultural beliefs and traditions are environmentally friendly. They are embedded into their ethical norms and capable of regulating their interaction with either part of the natural environment, or its entire structure for as long as they are interested in it or they have value for it.

Although other scholars provide that indigenous African knowledge of fishing and the entire ecology is anthropocentric, basing on the fact that they place man at the center of natural existence and depend on the fauna and flora for economic, social and religious sustenance, the African spirituality made up of the Ubuntu ethics that includes all creatures, believes and practices in form of taboos, totems and rituals indicate otherwise. Whereas the literature presents the sustainability of indigenous spiritual traditions, their adaptation to the modern pressures, the extent to which their loss has impacted the ecology and comparisons between societies that have maintained their beliefs and those that have lost them in levels of ecological maintenance is still under discussed. This became the focus of this study for purposes of establishing these facts.

In summary, obtained scholarly work extensively praises indigenous spiritual customs connected with fishing for supporting environmental and societal sustainability. These customs, through beliefs, taboos, totems, and ritual limitations are distinguished for checking against extraction, guaranteeing reverence for nature, and nurturing communal accountability. Nevertheless, plentiful of this literature inclines to produce their sustainability without analytically observing which

particular practices remain sustainable in the expression of communal, ecological, and economic contexts. This research addresses that inadequacy by cross-examining the definite sustainable practices against those whose capability alternates due to particular situations within the fishing framework of the Basamia.

1.2.5 Changes in Fishing Activities and their Impact on Indigenous Spirituality

Despite the fact that the African indigenous knowledge of spirituality is natural and well known for its ecological friendship, stewardship, conservation, protection and sustainability, all documented literature and evidence displays that there has been a shift in the recent generations from indigenous artisanal fishing to artificial and industrial fishing which have left the rich water related ecology exploited beyond repair. This has been followed by the introduction of depleting methods of fishing mostly by the chines and Europeans like Arup from Norway who introduced new tools like gill nets around 1905 that have neither spiritual nor environmental connection (Awal, et al., 2024). Although others claim that the introduction of modern methods boosted the production rates of fisheries from around 60,000 tons in 1950s to around 150,000 by the 1990s (Ibale, 1998), they substituted the need for indigenous gears and practices like rituals that might have detained symbolic and sanctified meaning, hence leading to a steady dispassion from spiritual traditions connected to fishing. Being efficient minded, the new practices result to over fishing practices which end up affecting the sacred waters hence fluctuating the connectivity between humans and their natural environment.

The idea of division of labor was applied in most fishing communities of Africa, i.e. in most communities, men carried out actual extractions as women carried out the post-harvest activities like selling and preserving (Nunno et al., 2015; Opondo, 2016). Even the Baka Women who are

said to have participated in actual extraction would not mix with men on the same fishing expedition; they also used specific extraction techniques, caught specific species, went fishing on specific fishing grounds and were meant to be escorted by their young boys for assistance (Dounias, et al., 2016). This means that men dominated the fishing activities. However, evolutions and innovation have introduced new fishing practices like aquaculture where women are now carrying out actual extraction. There are certain rituals which were presided over by women by virtue of their inactive participation in the actual extraction. However, their full and direct participation does not only violate the indigenous rules set by the elders and spirits but also makes the performance of certain rituals either adapted or completely diminished and devaluates some beliefs associated with the fishing gender roles.

Scholars agree that the once lucrative fishing practices of Africa have suffered great destruction, distortion and eventual decline due to a number of factors (Jeremy, 2021; Awal et al., 2024; Wright, et al., 2023; Ward & Stanford, 1979; Asche et al., 2020; Adim, 2024; Mike, 2016; UNEP, 2020; Ssekabira, 2015; Leveque, 2003). This decline has left a number of people staying around the water body shores in chronic poverty and its related challenges, suffering from food insecurity that results to nutritional and health complications, speed erosion of their cultural knowledge and heritage and decline of the indigenous spiritual belief, all risking their livelihood. Scholars reach an agreement that one of the ultimate challenges widely agreed upon is the truth of over/excessive and illegal fishing. Although the concept of “over” and “illegal” fishing is a challenging one, due to its relativity, it still remains an issue of conversation in the field of fishing. The two aspects have been triggered by the use of the previously discussed modern, selfish and non-discriminative methods and the deliberate disregarding of the traditional techniques, knowledge, laws/restrictions

and leadership (Ibale, 1998). The changes in the fishing practices that impact indigenous spirituality has been caused by a number of reasons some of which include;

The coming of foreign fishing communities or migrant fishers as Mike, (2016) calls them, like the Japanese, Chinese and Europeans altered the tide of fishing in Africa and left the whole industry on its way rolling to its grave yard (extinction) (Ohujunwa, et al., 2021; Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Amaze, 2024; Sarfo, 2023 and Nweke, 2020). They introduced a new type of fishing known as industrial fishing which is too extensive and technological (Leveque, 2003). The new type downplayed the traditional artisanal approach and left many who survived on the longstanding style jobless (Kabba, 2023). Its high demanding nature resulted into the introduction of both highly productive but destructive methods of extraction which then ended into an increase in excessive and illegal fishing in Africa. This is because the new type over commercialized the practice and damaged it beyond repair. Although these scholars over emphasize ecological and economic impact of these modification, it is probable that this shift had great influence on the indigenous spirituality of the African fishing communities like the Basamia. This study therefore focused on establishing this truthfulness.

This capitalistic approach of the non-natives made them to introduce new predatory species commonly known as Nile perch with an aim of increasing productivity and profits but with less care about the destruction of other species (ibid) which finally have been only left in the African myths and legends, songs, folktales, riddles and perhaps their proverbs. Since most African communities that lived around the water bodies had attached strong relationships with certain fish species in form of totems, the introduction of new hunter species like Nile perch has correspondingly left the African cultural and spiritual heritage in a destitute condition. Their young ones have no knowledge about their totems for they have been eaten up by the new species. Since

some communities had spiritual attachments with certain fish types, the introduction of new ones might have forced them to amend or abandon some of their beliefs and rituals due to the absence of some of the native species which have been extinguished by the new ones. The study endeavored to establish this fact from the primary data which was be collected from the Basamia fishers.

The invasion of new religions overran the African cosmology and distorted the indigenous understanding of the African people who viewed the universe as one filled with spirits (Ohujunwa et al., 2021; Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Amaze, 2024; Sarfo, 2023; Nweke, 2020). The Arabs introduced Islam whereas the Westerners brought Christianity. These two foreign religions challenged, disfigured and undermined the African religion and spirituality. They didn't see anything good with AIR and therefore bastardized, tainted, and preached against it, due to their presuppositions. They labeled it as demonic, archaic, satanic, impure, evil, witch craft, ancestral worship, juju, primitive, fetish, polytheistic, paganism, idolatry, sorcery, savage, barbaric etc. (Amaze, 2024; Omotoye, 2011; Isidore, 2017; Kizito, 2022). This kind of description denied ATR social recognition, stigmatized the practitioners who then resorted to secretive worshipping and this scared the young African generations of the time. Others began went mixing the beliefs and practices of their new and old religions. Fishers for example started moving with charms and other protectors as well as making prayers to God, writing biblical quotations on the boats, carrying holy water and anointing oil and cross scapulars etc. (syncretism) while on fishing voyages. This led to the rise of a new spirituality whose description is somewhat complex (Sussy et al., 2012; Abiona & Abioje, 2021; Sarfo, 2023; Nweke, 2020; Peter, 1993). They discouraged indigenous medicine and reduced the spiritual value of plants and animals like fish hence killing the growth of African techno- culture. Unfortunately, the doctrines of the new religions which Africans chose to adopt

were not environmentally protective like those of AIR. They were instead anthropocentric, giving man dominion over all creatures of the sea, land and air (Genesis 1:26-31).

The high rate of poverty has pushed people to disobey the spirits that inhabit the water, and that is how they have managed to deplete it through over and illegal fishing. These conditions have resulted in the increased violation of the taboos and totems. For instance, Obiero et al., (2022) provides that because of the poverty that exists among the women in the Luo areas of Lake Victoria, the concept of forbidding sex among the fishers has been violated. There has emerged a tendency known as “Jaboya” which literally means transactional sex between fisher men and their female customers. Due to reduced fish stock, fish is now on high demand; fishermen made advantages of this situation and started demanding for sex from their female clients if they were to sell them their catches. Bailey et al., 1999 as cited by Obiero et al., (2022) states that this tendency (Jaboya) has been the reason behind the high spread of HIV/Aids on the shores of Lake Victoria.

The intervention of the government into the fishing industry has in the same way impacted the indigenous spirituality (Opondo, 2016; Omotoye, 2011 and Amaze, 2024). The commercialization of the industry by the foreigners made it a profitable sector hence attracting the government for revenue. With deep interest to control the industry for taxes, governments, without concern have been designing policies and planting fishery management authorities through concerned ministries and other governing bodies in form of regulations and restriction to control the extraction levels and techniques. Unsuitably, their efforts always fail to recognize the indigenous leaders like the chief fishers yet in most fishing communities, the societal leadership proceeds from that of fishing. These leadership changes have led to disruption of the indigenous beliefs and practices since the new leaders are always not familiar with the norms of the society where he/she serves.

Government officials usually come up with restrictions on the size of the mesh, nets, size of the fish, limits on the catching of some species etc. however their reasoning in most cases does not satisfy the fishers (Nunno et al., 2015).

Relatedly, there is still lack of co-ordination and consultation between the political wings (government) and the indigenous local systems. The government comes up with policies and projects that violate the traditional knowledge (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu, & Diawo, 2015). According to Sarfo, (2023), this is not merely lack of coordination but factual religious discrimination and persecution of ATR. Current governments help the foreign religions in demonizing AIR; they criminalize and prosecute those who practice AIR publicly. Their constitutions don't respect AIR; they pretend to acknowledge its existence as a religion but do not recognize its beliefs and practices like sacrifices. The same constitutions have left all the powers in the hands of the state and not religion. They decide for religions on what is good and bad, thereby nullifying some of its beliefs and practices. (Sibusiso, 2013). Even when they are aware of the role the indigenous systems can play in environmental conservation, the policy makers have been very reluctant in incorporating them with the modern strategies which they also know that are independently ineffective. For example, the system of aquaculture has killed the communal sense of the African people, replaced it with individual ownership and pushed away the role of indigenous leaders in controlling the fishing grounds. This was implemented without the engagement of the local indigenous leaders.

The influence of formal education which emphasized the western culture at the expense of the African way of life led to many changes in indigenous fishing and the declined native spirituality. It resulted to the emergency of science, technology, modernization, industrialization and secularization in the fishing sector of Africa which in several occasions doesn't match with the

African ways (Sussy et al., 2012; Omotoye, 2011; Sarfo, 2023; Idowu, 1973). For example, the scientific innovations of aqua-culture do not fit in the Culture setting of Africans; it has encouraged women to engage in the extraction of fish, something that was a taboo in most of the African indigenous societies (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawo, 2015). According to Amaze, (2024) and Nweke, (2020) Africans have adopted the western tendency of recognizing and valuing the profane/material at the expense of the spiritual/sacred which is now taken to be irrelevant (secularism), i.e. they value money, profits, development but careless about the demands of the divine. This approach opposes the indigenous African spirituality and world view which attached a lot of relevance to both the spiritual and the natural/material/mundane reality. That is why today, Africans use dangerous fishing methods and kill what was regarded as totems by their ancestors reclaim wetlands and swamps which were used as cleanse centers and spiritual inhabitants etc. and end up exhausting the ecology.

The invention of modernization has made Africans to disrespect the indigenous knowledge with regard for the modern awareness and consideration, which in turn has left the rich African culture, religion, spirituality and environment disadvantaged (Adjei & Sika, 2003; Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Sarfo, 2023; Idowu, 1973). For instance, there has been strong violation of the taboos and totems that formerly regulated the indigenous economic activities in Africa hence resulting to over and exploitation of resources. For instance, Ibale (1998) provided that the participation in the fishing exercise has increased with the joining of women. About 20% of the fishing community in Uganda is composed of women, who may not be doing actual extraction but Owen boats, nets and therefore employ over 63.2% youths (Obiero et al., 2022; Opondo, 2016). This inclusion of women has therefore increased on the extraction rates hence depleting the fish habitants.

The origination of modern technology and globalization turned what was previous sacred to elements of tourism attraction and money making (Amaze, 2024 and Sibusiso, 2013). The emphasis put on the aspect of living in “one global village” through trade and technology has exposed Africans to many other cultures, values, norms, and traditions, some of which are incompatible with the African ways which rotate around spirits. The trans-communication through social media, common markets, academic scholarship, business partnerships, grants and aids and entertainment has increased on the African secularism as opposed to spiritualism. The role of elders and other religious leaders in passing on the indigenous fishing knowledge has for instance been limited to media platforms. (Sarfo, 2023). According to Kizito (2022), media and entertainment groups have continued to demonize African systems in relation to its religion e.g. the European Hollywood, the Nigerian Nollywood, Pentecostal churches and other performing clusters can never be forgiven when it comes to madding the African spirituality as witch craft, evil and savage. This kind has by far distracted the continuity and spread of African spirituality through their religion.

Accordingly, the summative and prevalent fishing problem which has now kept African indigenous ways under threat is the negative attitude which Africans adopted from the factors aforementioned. It is very unfortunate that up to date, there are compromised Africans whom Kizito (2022) described as “average” who have remained in the foreign concoction about the African wholeness. (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawo, 2015). They look at Indigenous knowledge as something of the past and one which is incapable, static and inappropriate in their generation. They wish to identify themselves with the modern religions, cultures, values, norms and practices etc. This view affirms the symbolic interactionism theory which states that social behavior is dynamic depending on the interactions which such a society engages in (Main 2023,

November). As Herbert Blumer (1969), one of the strongest proponents of this theory suggest, thus, “societal meanings are created by society”, indeed the value that Africans previously had for the sacred reality was now diverted to money due to their interaction with the foreigners. Believes in form of taboos, totems, rituals and gods made no meaning to the Africans but trade, profits and money did have value.

With the above factuality, there has been serious loss of the indigenous knowledge, one which is made up of oral tradition passed on through proverbs, rituals, believes, taboos and totems etc. This has been due to the changes which avoided all the above and dysfunctionalized the traditional leaders who would have passed on the system (Sarfo, 2023). Those who have attended Western education have done little to document the indigenous African realities, in their discussion; they conceptualize AIR within the dominating religions like Christianity and Islam, hence leaving its pure history un recorded. As analyzed, the changes were caused by the coming of the foreigners with new religions like Islam, Christian and colonial Europeans and western education, modernization, technology, globalization, urbanization, population explosion, poverty, democracy, discrimination and persecution of AIR (Obiero et al., 2022; Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Sussy et al., 2012; Sarfo, 2023). This has attracted the attention of many people, Governments and other concerned agencies to come up with strategies that can help in curbing this tragedy. The international community in particular has been on the preface of ensuring the success of this course.

Like other scholars emphasize, Opondo, (2016) consents that the lake is not merely a source of livelihood but also a profound and authentic heritage that should be conserved, especially by the fishing communities such as the Luo, Basamia and Suba who associate with the Lake with bottomless cultural artistic and religious meanings. These people have always valued the lake for

its endowments since it serves both ritualized and economic purposes. Unfortunately, the expressions found in the literature indicate that modern fishing practices and management strategies have failed to work up to the people's expectations. They are simply imposed on local people who even fail to treasure any meaning in them, yet when joined with the traditional ones can yield better results. It has worked in various places like Ghana and can still help other African countries. Therefore, to avoid basing on modern techniques which simply cause mistrust, fear and suspicion between the officials and the local fishers, the two should be merged. When combined with the traditional ones, the locals will feel involved in the policy making and will therefore own, speak and advocate for strategies to ensure sustainability of the fishing practices.

Whilst most of the African Spiritual Ecologists affirm the decline of African spirituality, they as well demonstrate some hope about its persisting existence (Sibusiso, 2013; Peter, 1993; Shorter, 1991; Isidore, 2017; Nweke, 2020; Sarfo, 2023; Abiona & Abioje, 2021; Tusasiirwe et al., 2022; Ohujunwa et al., 2021; Obiero et al., 2023). They indicate that African Traditional religion and all its elements are resistant and didn't merely die out in the hands of the foreigners with their destructive innovations. The religion basically declined out of shock but it is busy picking up its former space to influence and incline a big number of African lives both in Africa and in the diaspora. For instance, the African understanding of the universe is still influenced by the belief in spirits and personified power as manifested in the increased use of indigenous medicine, performance of indigenous African rituals like circumcision, sacrificial offering, naming of children, adoration to taboos and totems and respect for cultural and indigenous religious leaders etc. by Africans whose parents forcefully became Muslims, Christians plus the typically African Indigenous religious adherents, giving all of them identity as a people of the great black landmass. This reality has proved that AIR is a dynamic religion which can adopt with any prevailing

situations. As a living religion, it has been able to stay with and influence the so called dominant religions of the world like Christianity and Islam more than any other traditional religion elsewhere in the world, hence disappointing the missionary prediction which alluded that upon the introduction of Christianity, AIR would stay for a small while and finally be completely eradicated/extinct (Sarfo, 2023).

It is therefore important to note that African indigenous spirituality can never be described as something of the past but one which is alive, being handed over from one generation to another. Even though it is described as “traditional”, it cannot be taken as a fossil, incompetent and stationary (Sussy et al., 2012). It is interesting to learn that AIR is now recognized by the academic world as an area of scholarship, it has been adopted by many universities both in Africa and outside, departments of ATR have been established in such high learning institutions and many people have graduated with degrees of all categories from these colleges. (Omotoye, 2011). With such a character, i believe it is very easy to get an African away from an African but it is impossible to draw Africanisms from an African.

To ensure overall preservation of the indigenous spirituality of Africa as well as its contribution to the ecological sustainability, scholars have suggested that the African people should embrace their own culturally based Religion rather than mimicking the demeaning misconceptions of the foreigners. To achieve this goal, Muramo & Chakale (2018) proposed that African countries should incorporate the concept of spirituality in the education system, so that the young Africans do not fall victims of the European misinterpretation and misguidance. This will help in mind set change about African spirituality and consequently lead to environmental conservation through developing attitudes of care, protection and stewardship for nature. Again, since the claim that the modern ways instituted by these changes are exceptionally destructive is improper. Many scholars

have advocated for an inclusive approach where the indigenous knowledge systems can be married with the current ones to come up with a holistic method that can maintain our environment protected (Obiero et al., 2023). However, this study focused on establishing how the changes in the fishing practices have impacted on the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia fishers in Ugandan, an aspect which the existing literature does not give ample attention, as scholars tend to deliberate on how the changes have impacted the fishing practice its self, an economic oriented analysis.

Therefore, the works above highpoints an extensive collection of variations in the fishing sector such as modernization, religious changes, and ecological dilapidation that have expressively disturbed both fishing practices and indigenous spirituality. Whereas these scholarships accurately underscore peripheral forces, predominantly western effect, as principal drivers of alteration, they tend to undercut internal and locally rooted influences. This generates a slit in understanding how African-based dynamic forces like climate change, population pressure, local markets demands, or shrinking community obedience, also contribute to the destruction of spiritual traditions. This research seeks to plug that slit by disparagingly exploring both peripheral and internal forces influencing the makeover of indigenous spirituality among the Basamia.

1.2.6 Conclusion

Following the above evaluation, African indigenous spirituality is a concept which informs the entire African world view and inclines the African interaction with elements of the universe. This understanding posts that the entire universe is jam-packed with spirits. This indigenous consideration has been in control of the political, social and economic activities of all Africans through its facets like beliefs in form of taboos and totems and practices like ritual, ceremonies,

festivals, and sacrificial offerings etc. This instilled in Africans a sense of respect, care, protection and adoration towards nature through threats and warnings. Most spiritual ecologists have considered this approach as supportable, and eco-friendly. Unfortunately, there is great decline and loss of this sustainable knowledge system and correspondingly excessive loss of the environment due to changes which damaged Africa from the time of the arrival of foreign groups like the Asians and Europeans.

Even though scholars have endeavored to explore about the indigenous spiritual traditions that influence fishing, the intergenerational differences in these spiritual traditions have not been given sufficient consideration. Most scholars present the indigenous spirituality in fishing as an aspect of the past which has been wholesomely carried on by the contemporary fishers. This is doubtable because traditions are adoptive in nature. This study therefore strived to discover if there are any continuities or discontinuities which have been realized across these transitions. Scholars have also praised these spiritualities for being holistically sustainable. Such induced knowledge is subject to validation through scientific research because some of the indigenous spiritualities might have been destructive to the ecology. This study therefore attempted to investigate about some of the traditions which were ecologically constraining. Concerning fishing changes that impact indigenous spirituality, the exiting literature lacks focus on the internal factors. Scholars provide that most changes are to be blamed on the external factors like the coming of foreigners, advancement of technology and globalization. This study however struggled to balance and establish fishing changes which are blamed on the internal factors so that we avoid hanging on the external factors for centuries even after the departure of colonial rule.

Besides, this review has in general terms established that the concept of African indigenous spirituality in the field of fishing has predominately been deliberated on by scholars from West

Africa; little content has been retrieved about spirituality and fishing among the fishing communities of Central, North, South and East Africa. The content from West Africa is also dominated by communities from the coast and little about the inland societies. With the guide from the theory of spiritual ecology, this research made an effort to reduce these gaps by exploring and documenting the Indigenous spirituality and the fishing activities of the Basamia, a small inland society of Eastern Uganda, sub-Saharan East Africa.

1.3. METHODOLOGY

1.3.1 Introduction

This study aimed at exploring the connectivity between indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Uganda. This included investigating about the spiritual beliefs and practices that control the fishing activities. To understand such a relationship, a qualitative research methodology was adopted. Data collection involved ethnographic methods, including, participant observation, interviews and Focus Group Discussions. This approach helped the study to obtain both the symbolic and experimental aspects of spirituality that relate with the fishing practices of the Basamia. This section acts as a blue print to this research for it provides ways or styles and attitudes through which the questions that this study attempts to answer are encountered.

1.3.2 Research Paradigm

This study whose concern is to explore the meanings, beliefs, and lived experiences surrounding fishing and indigenous spirituality among the Basamia was motivated with a philosophy of interpretivism. It believes that a social phenomenon or reality can best be understood from the perspectives of the actively involved people (Bryman, 2016; Cresswell & Poth, 2018). For example, it is only from the Basamia community that one can understand how the fishing practices of same people are imbued with spirituality. Knowledge from another society though on the same aspect cannot be used to understand the uniqueness of the Basamia. The paradigm focuses on the subjective interpretations and meanings that people attach to their experiences, deeds, and social settings inform of firsthand knowledge (Kernevio, 2007). Therefore, according to interpretivism, research should focus deeply on comprehending the social aspect using participants' perspectives, their subjective daily life experiences, the meaning attached and how they interpret them. The

paradigm is opposed to positivism which believes in objective and generalized knowledge obtained through scientific rigor. Such a paradigm, whose emphasis is on measurement and prediction, would not be used because of its inadequacy in addressing the study's core objectives of understanding spirituality as embedded in social and cultural contexts.

Interpretivism advances that reality is not an entity, rather a social construct got through interactions and perceptions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). For instance, the acceptance that beliefs and practices have an impact on fishing is a socially constructed reality/knowledge among the Basamia. It therefore privileged participants' voices, cultural narratives and symbolic practices as valid knowledge. According to interpretivism, Knowledge is subjective because we get it from various individual experiences and interpretation to get the meaning. It stresses that reality is not the same in all circumstances, places, time and space; rather it is based on the social historical and cultural context upon which it takes place (Schwandt, 2000). For instance, the documented literature about the connectivity between fishing and spiritual among the coastal communities cannot be used to idealize on what happens among the inland communities like that of the Basamia.

To gain such subjective and interpretive knowledge, interpretivism advocates for active participation of researchers. It states that an outsider researcher may not come to the exact meanings that the people in the community attach to certain societal aspects through interpretation (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Therefore, the researcher should co-construct with the people those meanings. Similarly, interpretivism advocates for the use of qualitative research methods such as ethnography, phenomenology, interviews, participant observation, Focus Group Discussions and narrative analysis in order to get deep societal insights (Bryman, 2016).

By use of this paradigm, the study was able to subjectively understand how the Basamia in particular perceive and practice their spiritual traditions in relation to fishing activities in their area. For example, how they perform rituals related to fishing and how they comprehend the role of such rituals, taboos, totems, myths, spirits in relation to fishing. Using the pro-interpretivism approaches like active participation, and other qualitative methods, the study endeavored to investigate the nature and meaning of fishers' lived experiences and actions. This means that the philosophy helped in exploring how the Basamia fishers came up with fishing regulations and restrictions on the fishing methods, grounds and seasons. To achieve this, the researcher actively interacted with the fishermen, mongers, boatswains, elders, boat builders, fisheries and religious leaders through in-depth interviews and FGDs and obtained information subjectively, following the actual meaning and understanding of the Basamia fishers. To effectively follow the guidance of the philosophy, the researcher during analysis, applied a narrative method which without any form of intermission presented the respondents expressions and experiences, to offer the actual relationship of indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Uganda.

Although, the paradigm is challenged by some scholars for being too subjective because of its focus on people's perspectives and researcher's participation which results to biased analysis and conclusions (Altheide & Johnson, 1994; Wills, 2007; Guba & Lincoln, 2005) and difficult in generalizing data for a broad spectrum application (Cohen et al., 2018), the study endeavored to be reflective about this influence and reduced on the bias by bracketing off the researchers assumptions , providing a thick description to enable generalization and handling ethical concerns which could arise due to his close participation. This ensured depth, contextual richness and cultural sensitivity in analyzing the intricate relationship between fishing and indigenous spirituality of the Basamia.

1.3.3 Approach of the Study

This study adopted a qualitative research approach that was descriptive, explanatory and narrative in nature. According to Cresswell (2003), explanatory research is the best when studying under researched topics like the phenomenon under study. As maintained by Neuman (2011), qualitative research is appropriate for studying about the lived human experiences, behaviors and experimental meanings like indigenous spirituality in fishing activities of the Basamia in Uganda. Indeed, this approach enabled the study to obtain rich and in-depth data about the multi-faceted phenomenon of indigenous spirituality and the fishing practices of the Basamia in Uganda. Like stated by Neuman (2011), this approach of research gave this study an opportunity to apprehend not only the what, but also the why and how facets of the Basamia indigenous spirituality and fishing, a social aspect under study. Although this approach was time consuming as it called for detailed analysis, it enabled the study to triangulate and consider the participants' perspectives to capture details in an extreme description and get subjective experiences which aids our deep understanding of the imbued relationship between indigenous spirituality among the Basamia in Ugandan.

It was a field study research because according to Babbie (2011) and Neuman (2011) Weinreich, (2009); Worthen & Sanders, (1987), it is compatible with the qualitative research approach. The researcher immersed himself into some Basamia fishing communities of Uganda previously mentioned to get first hand/raw data. For this case, the researcher himself was a data collection tool for he was used to obtain data.

1.3.4 Research Design

The study took on both phenomenological and ethnographic research designs. The ethnographic research design is compatible with the qualitative research approach which this study adopted. This design focuses on studying and understanding people's culture, behaviors, and social interaction within their natural environment (Hamersley & Atkinson, 2019). This is suitable with the research topic which investigated the intricate relationship between indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia of Uganda. By this design, I immersed myself into the Basamia fishing community to interact with fishers and generated a holistic understanding of the Basamia indigenous spiritual fishing practices and the meaning that are attached to them, by the help of FGDs and participant observations.

The ethnographic research design emerges from interpretivism which emphasizes that reality is subjective and formed by individual's interactions with their world. Likewise, Ethnography immersed the researcher in the community to interact with the community through observation and interpret the cultural, social and spiritual practices from an insider perspective. This research design is unfortunately critiqued for perpetuating particularization, biased interpretation and violation of ethical guidelines, due to its contextual nature, subjectivity and cheering of the active participation (immersion) of the researcher respectively (Murchison, 2010; Fetterman, 2019). However, to manage such short comings, the study focused on the key fishing related rituals and beliefs to avail rich data that can be generalized and used for policy making, kept a reflexive journal and established a rapport with the Basamia fishing community to minimize on the contextualization, subjectivity and ethical violation.

The study also adopted a phenomenological research design since it is compatible with the previously discussed ethnographical design. A phenomenological research design focuses on discovering and understanding people's lived experiences and the meaning they assign to those experiences (Creswell, 2013; Moustakes, 1994). This design therefore aims at understanding the central essence of the shared experiences across individuals of a given community, and revealing insights into how people interpret their experiences. This helped the study to focus on developing a methodology which can enable the investigation and comprehension of the Basamia spiritual fishing experiences and the meanings that are assigned to them. The design emphasizes the reduction of the researcher's bias by encouraging bracketing off the researchers' preconception (epoche). Through deep reflection and use of narrative analysis method, the investigator attempted to suspend his biases and present the participants authentic experiences about their indigenous spirituality and the fishing work. The study further used qualitative data collection methods like in-depth interviews and FGDs and later had a thick description with an aim of identifying the universal themes.

Like ethnographic designs, phenomenological research designs align with interpretivism because the two focuses on the subjective understanding and meaning that people attach on their lived experiences. They are contextual based, in terms with qualitative methodology and values participant opinions. However, scholars disparage phenomenological design for its subjectivity and hardship in generalizing its findings because of its focus on individual meanings and interpretations and the researcher's analysis (Finlay, 2008; Langdridge, 2007). Nevertheless, as the design demands, the investigator bracketed off his presuppositions and engaged participants in in-depth interviews to get 'depth over breadth' whose value exceeds simplification.

The study adopted the two research designs in order to come up with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between indigenous spirituality of the Basamia in Uganda and their fishing practices. In this case, ethnographic research design provided the holistic view of the Basamia about how fishing is interwoven with the spiritual traditions like beliefs, rituals, taboos and community dynamics. Whereas the phenomenological design fitted in by providing individual understanding of the spiritual traditions and the role/meaning that they attach on these traditions, such individual insights could not be revealed in the ethnographic broader observations. The combination helped in the triangulation of the methodology and this availed detailed data for narrative and thick descriptions.

1.3.5 Study Population

The study population included; the active and retired Basamia fishermen who carries[d] out the actual fish extraction; chief fishers and boatswains who lead the fishing voyages; fish mongers who deal in the buying of fish directly from the fishermen and sell them to final consumers; canoe/boat owners who in most cases become the employers of the fishermen; boat builders with both spiritual and practical knowledge of boat making and other elders who are presumed to be having in-depth knowledge about the fishing practices of the Basamia. Indigenous religious leaders including chief priests and priestesses also constituted the study population for they are informed on how the fishing practices among the Basamia are embedded in spirituality. They are also opinion leaders whose views hold sway in the community. This study population included both youths and the old, male and female participants with expertise in respective gender-based pre-fishing, fishing, post-fishing, marketing and consumption activities. The selected target population was in line with interpretivism which emphasizes that a societal phenomenon like fishing can best be understood from the perspective of the people who are actively involved in it. Therefore, it

provided rich and in-depth data which provides a comprehensive understanding of the Basamia indigenous spirituality and fishing.

1.3.6 Sample Size

This study did not specify a certain number of participants because it was focused on obtaining deepness over coverage, through the provision of rich and detailed understandings of the Basamia indigenous spirituality and fishing. The sample size of this ethnographic research which aims at getting expressive information for thick description and appropriate understanding but not meeting a particular number of participants therefore depended on the theoretical saturation; it kept advancing until the new data no longer offered further awareness. It emphasized the quality of the engagement between the researcher and the participants against the quantity of respondents. In effect, saturation was attained after engaging with a total of 44 participants. These included 14 active and retired fishermen, 04 chief fishers, 04 boatswains, 05 mongers (both male and female), 03 boat owners, 05 boat builders, 06 elders, and 03 indigenous religious leaders selected from the inland communities of Namayingo district. This allowed for satisfactory deepness and multiplicity of perceptions while aligning with the interpretivist paradigm of the study.

1.3.7 Sampling Methods and Techniques

The study used purposive sampling with both criterion and snowball sampling techniques to select participants who have expertise in fishing and the indigenous spiritual life of the Basamia. Under the criterion technique, participants who meet specific criteria or features (those who are conversant with the Basamia indigenous fishing and spiritual experiences), proficient of impressively contributing to the study like active fishers, canoe owners, boat makers, boatswains and chief fishers were selected. Additionally, under the Snow ball, the initial participants who were

key local figures like Beach Management Unit chairpersons, within each of the fishing communities that constituted the study area would refer the researcher to others they believed held relevant information about the indigenous spirituality and fishing activities among the Basamia in Uganda. It helped the study to obtain experts like elders, and indigenous religious leaders who are not easily located but have the lived experiences of fishing and indigenous spiritual attachments.

1.3.8 Data collection methods and tools

Three qualitative research methods and a variety of conforming tools of data collection which suit well with the research paradigm of interpretivism and the adopted research designs of ethnography and phenomenology research designs were used. These methods included participant observation, interviews and FGDs. While the tools included observation checklist, interview guides, Focus Group Discussion guides and cameras.

1.3.8.1 Interview Method

The study used the interview method to collect information about the indigenous spirituality in the fishing practices of the Basamia. This involved detailed personal interface between the researcher and the participants including retired fishers, chief fishers, canoe owners, elders and indigenous religious leaders who provided a deep understanding of their experiences, the meanings embedded in those experiences and how they influence their lives. The method was however resource intensive and time consuming. For instance, traveling to interview some participants who were in distant places like Busiro and Buduma was costly in terms of transport. Reaching some of these places needed expensive boat voyages, at times taking the whole day for one interview. In certain occasions, I covered significant distances only to find that the anticipated respondent was unreachable due to fishing programs or other community responsibilities, hence necessitating

follow-up visits which led to sudden travels or postponement. During interview sessions, respondents often diverted to cover irrelevant aspects which could not help in answering any of the set research questions, bringing them back on track would take me a lot of time. Such situations made the process to call for more resources and time, than earlier planned for. However, focus was put on key aspects of the study like beliefs, practices and their impact on fishing to minimize on the time and resources used. To achieve this, an interview guide having questions on the Basamia Indigenous spiritual traditions was developed, (see appendix one). The interactions were then stored by the use of a camera, a digital recorder and note taking for effective follow up and analysis. These tools were crucial in ensuring exactitude, deepness and consistency in data collection. The digital recorder for example allowed me to capture interviews verbatim that further preserved the respondents' tone and emotion. The camera helped in recording the key natural and figurative basics of the fishing environment like boats and sanctified plants. This supported later elucidations and triangulation of unwritten information.

1.3.8.2 Focus Group Discussion (FGDs)

The study also used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) to gather shared opinions, investigate common experiences, and obtain the vigorous interactions that individual interviews could not certainly expose. Given the communal nature of the fishing activities among the Basamia, where beliefs and practices are held and carried out collectively, this method predominantly proved appropriate. I conducted a total of three FGDs: two with fishermen, each consisting of five participants and one made up of four male elders. This method helped in relating the participants' experiences and proved vital in revealing the communal dimensions of indigenous spirituality linked to fishing. In several cases, arguments and divergences rose, specifically on the processes of ritual performance and justification of female related taboos. However, such debates often led

to unprompted clarification, reflective attention, and the evolvement of diverse perspectives, thus enriching the information and allowing me to prove and triangulate perceptions more efficiently. Unfortunately, lack of privacy to one's spiritual life made some participants hesitant and replied in ways they believed were anticipated or socially acknowledged rather than providing candid explanations of their experience. Sometimes, I decided to use projective questioning by reframing sensitive inquiries in a third person form (for example, How do fishers in your area express their belief in God?) which enabled them to express personal opinions and experiences indirectly. A Focus Group Discussion guide was developed, (see appendix two) and interactions were stored by use of a camera, a digital recorder and field notes for effective follow up and analysis. These tools were essential in time management, ensuring correctness, depth and consistency in information collection.

1.3.8.3 Participant Observation

The study also applied full (overt) participant observation. Focus was put on the behavior and actions of fishers, indigenous religious leaders and on the social artifacts related to fishing and indigenous spirituality especially the rituals. Together with a certain fisherman, I visited a spirit medium, took part and observed a rejuvenation ritual which intended to cleanse him and revive his fishing ability (*enaabo*), that had been debilitated by the fishing curse (*esubi*). I respectively helped to arrange items under guidance, sang traditional spirit-invoking songs and observed ritual speeches and performance, but without interfering in sacred acts reserved for initiated fishers. This provided rich and accurate information which was not compromised by the respondents' bias. However, this immersion and participation exposed me to interpretation bias, when I idealized what I experienced during the ritual on my previous religious understanding. For instance, at first I perceived the sprinkling of blood on the fisherman as basically an act of cleansing, but later

revealed through further interviews that it also meant spiritual “feeding” to the spirits to reinstate the strength of the fisherman. I therefore started to critically bracket myself by running field journals and memos in which I recorded my own reactions, expectations and interpretations immediately after ritual events. Later, I returned to them during analysis to check whether my versions aligned with what participants exposed. An unstructured observation protocol containing key observational aspects like rituals procedures was developed to avoid off-tracking, (See appendix three), a camera and a digital audio recorder were also used to capture and document key sacred fishing objects like the model boat, (see figure 5) and ritual performance that deepened the descriptive details of my findings.

1.3.9 Validity and Reliability of Research Tools

Pilot testing of the instruments of data collection was carried out to establish whether they are capable of getting relevant information for the study or need to be improved. This pilot was conducted on the retired fishermen of Maruba fish landing site because of its simplicity of access and the researcher’s prior relationship with several community members, which eased initial engagements. However, the outcomes of this pilot exposed some insights concerning the research tools, necessitating for review. For instance, various interview questions in the interview and FGDs guides were found to be too general, ambiguous and time taking, prompting the need for reshaping to enrich clarity and single-mindedness. In addition, it helped evaluate the flow and sequencing of questions to avoid monotony and lassitude during lengthier meetings. These modifications enhanced both trustworthiness and clarity of the tools. The pilot also provided a truthful estimation of the time needed for interviews and FGDs averaging 45-50 minutes per meeting. This estimate informed the planning of discussions during the actual study, ensuring that adequate time is apportioned without distracting participant engagement. Besides, use of both various data

collection and analysis methods (triangulation) like interview, FGDs and participant observation together with thematic, narrative and content analysis, was also employed. This approach helped the researcher to cross-verify findings by relating information attained from diverse sources and situations. For instance, stories collected through interviews were cooperated with logically evolving debates during FGDs and were additionally validated by observed rituals. This condensed on the risk of bias to ensure that the information replicated a complete and reliable understanding of the connectedness of Indigenous Spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Uganda.

1.3.10 Data analysis methods

The qualitative data analysis methods were used to turn the qualitative information obtained from the field into meaningful insights. The methods included content analysis, thematic analysis and narrative analysis.

1.3.10.1 Content Analysis

The study used qualitative content analysis to systematically analyze the information obtained from the interview notes and observation notes with focus put on identifying particular features or patterns arising in there. By use of this method, the raw narratives, taboos, rituals, and symbolic practices were manually organized and categorized into manageable units of meaning. This involved open coding, where recurring concepts such as “taboo”, “ritual”, “gender roles”, “ecological practice”, and “spiritual sanctions” were identified from the field data. These codes then reproduced trends like perseverance or deterioration of particular spiritual beliefs and practices, generational variances in compliance, and gendered perceptions on spiritual implementation. These helped to establish how indigenous spirituality is sustained, confronted, or renovated among the Basamia in Uganda. The adaptability of this method aided by manual

qualitative coding helped the researcher to inductively come up with categories and patterns directly from participants stories without depending on multifarious soft wares. This enabled codes to be grounded in the cultural and linguistic distinctions of the Basamia fishing community. Despite this strength, the method proved to be reductive in the sense that it tended to splint stories into isolated codes and categories, which risked eliminating the cultural and contextual depth of the information. For instance, during analysis, spiritual rituals such as rejuvenation of fishing powers were coded focusing on actions like offering, and sprinkling of alcohol (*opiida*), without entirely taking the symbolic meaning, expressive atmosphere or spiritual explanations embedded in participants' experience.

1.3.10.2 Thematic Analysis

The study also applied thematic analysis to come up with a comprehensive understanding of the intricate relationship between the Basamia indigenous spirituality and fishing. After establishing codes like taboo", "ritual", "gender roles", "ecological practice", and "spiritual sanctions", they were grouped into broader categories and themes like "beliefs associated with fishing", "spiritual practices linked with fishing", " changes in fishing and the Basamia indigenous spirituality" and "spirituality and sustainable fishing" which reflected shared meanings and patterns. The identified themes helped in the easy understanding, interpretation and presentation of information in a more logical and chronological manner. Through this method, the large data collected from the field was analyzed with more ease. However, this method failed to attend to the sentiment, structure and relational context of participants' lived spirituality. For instance the entire stories given about the punishments of the water deities (*esishuhira banaabi*) were reduced to a thematic label of the belief in deities, thus losing some of the vital religious insights. This short coming necessitated the use

of narrative analysis, particularly during interpretation, to cover the temporal, symbolic, and affective depth of such accounts.

1.3.10.3 Narrative Analysis

The study also applied the narrative analysis method to overcome the short comings of the thematic method by capturing the stories, myths, and personal accounts through which the Basamia articulate their spirituality in fishing. Under this method, the researcher identified, analyzed and interpreted field narratives collected mainly through in-depth interviews and FGDs where respondents shared lived experiences, ritual accounts and symbolic interpretations. These primary narratives were transcribed, coded thematically and interpreted to uncover how meanings are constructed and transmitted within the community. They were naturally presented throughout the entire presentation and discussion chapters. This aimed at bringing out the clear and definite understanding of the Basamia in regard to their indigenous spirituality and fishing. This method was capable of bringing out the lived experiences of participants, their perspectives, feelings, behavior and meanings attached to indigenous spirituality in the fishing activities of the Basamia in Uganda. For example, a participant expressively narrated a time when he registered poor catches after casting nets for so long because of sleeping with a woman whose vital force was incompatible with his. These emotional indications were not just content but critical gestures of the importance and seriousness participants bestow to spiritual customs. However, the interpretive complexity of this method due to the nonlinearly narratives of the participants often mixed with personal beliefs, communal history and allegories necessitated the use of other methods like thematic analysis for balance and clarity.

The three methods enabled the study to develop different levels of meaning in the information. The content analysis helped in the identification of patterns like common words and symbols related to fishing and spirituality. In return, the thematic analysis came in to identify and explore the themes with focus put on meanings and relationship existing in the ideas. The narrative analysis lastly provided individual stories and experiences to capture the participants' meaning and world view. Using these three methods gave this study a comprehensive understanding of the connectivity between fishing and the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia.

1.3.11 Challenges during the Research Process

This study was challenged with the attainment of a diversity of indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices due to different contexts of the respondents. Although the study was only carried out among a singular fishing community of the Basamia in Uganda, whose culture, tradition and spirituality would seem to be similar, there existed differences especially in the beliefs and rituals observed and performed by different clans or people of a more specific fishing community. Each sub-community among the Basamia, like clans and fishing grounds had somewhat distinctive customs, beliefs, rituals and other indigenous spiritual traditions tangled to their fishing experience. For instance, whereas there were clans whose children didn't eat fish before the performance of an inauguration ritual, others didn't have such a ritual. In the same way, various fishing grounds of the Basamia possess different spirits (*ebikenyi*), each with quite different demands in form of restrictions and regulations which govern specific grounds. This made generalization of the information very difficult and challenging. However, with the ethnographic research design, participants from a wide range of clans and fishing grounds were engaged in detailed interviews and active participation by use of FGDs to attain multiple perspectives and

deep understanding of the phenomenon. This approach enabled the study to attain rich information which allowed for identification of common patterns as well as meaningful distinctions.

Besides the contextual variations, the study suffered from diversion of focus from spirituality to economic aspects because of the nature of the topic of study. Fishing is virtuously an economic activity in Africa, Uganda and among the Basamia in particular, hence making the livelihood of many people across the landmass. Discussing it in relation to spirituality posed a big challenge. The economic part of it tended to overshadow the spiritual dimension due to participants' perspectives yet this was not the focus of the study. To manage this, the researcher concentrated on artisanal fishing so that the economics aspect does not distract the respondents from spiritual facets. Artisanal fishing only emphasized local subsistence fishing which has limited interest with trade and other economic strands.

The study was also limited by the effects of the changes that have taken place in the fishing practices and indigenous spirituality among the Basamia in Uganda. These changes caused additions and deductions on the norms, customs, values and policies of the Basamia and this affected the participants' deliberation on the traditional insights about the Basamia spiritual beliefs and practices. The participants could give somewhat biased responses in favor of the modern ways which are in their context, perspective and understanding. This might deny a comprehensive understanding of the study. For instance, many respondents especially the so-called staunch Christians misinterpreted the topic of study for witch craft and were not willing to contribute towards such a "malicious" phenomenon. However, the study used FGDs to involve both youths and elders and traditional religious leaders who would give balanced responses about fishing and spirituality among the Basamia in Uganda.

The study was limited by restricted access and acceptance within the fishing communities of the Basamia. This is because the topic has an economic, cultural and, spiritual understanding which seemed to be private and secretive to individuals. This composition challenged several groups of people during interviews and focused discussion groups. Some were not willing to reveal their spiritual and cultural life to an unfamiliar person. The involvement of Government through the Uganda Peoples' Defense Force which has terrorized the fishers intensified on this challenge. It made the respondents more skeptical, mistrustful and suspicious, to give me information concerning fishing. They took me for a government spy who wanted to secretly search for illegal fishers and hand them over to the scary UPDF. To ensure successful data collection, the researcher sought permission from the responsible authorities for accessibility. I sought for local authorities' consent and permission to undertake this study (see appendix four). I also got an introductory letter from the university for credibility and easy acceptance by the community (see appendix six). Additionally, a familiar person to the society could escort me to meet the respondents for introductions, most of these were either local or fisheries leaders. This would give the respondents courage to share their fishing experiences without fear, mistrust and suspicion.

1.3.12 Ethical considerations

Several ethical considerations were observed to ensure a dutiful study that not only benefits the involved communities but also builds integrity and its own reliability.

The ethical principle of informed consent of all participants was observed. Official permission from community leaders and participants was obtained beforehand. A consent form was designed for the participants to sign so that they contribute to the study from an informed ground, (see appendix five). The participants were also informed about the purpose of the study and its

implications to the community. Additionally, different categories of people including the male and female, youths and elders, active and retired fishers and religious leaders were fairly involved. This helped the study to fully observe and consider the research ethical principle of justice, fairness and equality. The information obtained from all the categories of participants was given equal respect and consideration in the process of data analysis.

Besides, confidentiality and privacy of the information given by the research participants was ensured. This ensured that the secrecy of the participants and their sensitive individual information is not misused. The names of the respondents are not mentioned in this thesis. I instead used the respondents' category like fisherman, boatswain, and elder among others. In respect to environmental ethical considerations, the study will have a positive impact on the environment of study. This study fostered environmental well-being and stewardship through its findings and recommendations. For example, the researcher put efforts on finding out how the Basamia indigenous spiritual beliefs and practices can contribute to the sustainability fishing ecology. In the recommendations, the study proposed how the changes can be harmonized with the traditional knowledge to preserve the ecology.

CHAPTER TWO

UNDERSTANDING THE BASAMIA INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

2.1 Introduction

Understanding the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia is significant in grasping the deeper meaning behind their intricate correlation with fishing and other natural resources. The indigenous spirituality is not simply a set of religious beliefs but a holistic lived worldview that shapes their social behavior, moral values, and ecological interactions. At the core of this spiritual organization lies a strong link between the visible and invisible worlds, where ancestors, spirits and sacred forces influence everyday life (Adofu, 2016). This chapter therefore provides a general overview of the key features of the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia, including their cosmology construed from the belief in God, ancestral presence, spiritual taboos, totems, ritual practices, and sacred cosmology. By discovering these comprehensive spiritual details, the chapter sets the foundation for understanding how fishing is not merely an economic activity, but one which is deeply implanted in spiritual meaning and traditional connections.

2.2 Who are the Basamia?

The Basamia are a small ethnic group that belongs to the Bantu. They predominantly occupied the Eastern part of Uganda and Western Kenya, around the shores of Lake Victoria and River Nzoia, up on their settlement in East Africa. Given their small number, they are only found in present-day Busia districts of Uganda and Kenya and some parts of Namayingo district. They have a root from the declined kingdom of Nabongo Mumia of the Luya known as Wanga Kingdom. Traditionally, the Basamia lived in clan-based communities (*Oluya*). Members of the clan (*Abaluya*) were governed by a clan head, usually an elder who held substantial roles in preserving

the customs, land tenancy, and indigenous beliefs. Each clan lived in a specific geographical location — village (*Oluhkongo*) with a definite security furrow space (*Olukoba*). Culturally, the Basamia preserve gorgeous customs that embrace music and dance (*Owaaro*), oral literature (*enomani*) and inimitable ritual practices connected to marriage, death (*Olunhganyo*), and most significantly for this study, fishing and water bodies. Their indigenous spirituality is implanted in a world view that recognizes ancestral spirits (*emisabwa*), sacred natural sites (*esabo/amasabo*) and a moral order sustained by taboos (*emisiro*) and ritual obligation. The Basamia are known for their deep connection to fishing as both a livelihood and a way of life because of their location along the water bodies. One of the respondents restated that the lake (*enyaannja*) forms a central part in the economic, social, and spiritual existence of the Samia. Despite such an acknowledgement, the practice which holds their cultural heritage has kept declining because of disbandment of the indigenous spiritual traditions which previously maintained the activity. To this fact, the future of the cultural inheritance of the Basamia only lies in the hands of the academia to document it and be used by the impending generations. Understanding who the Basamia are; socially, economically and spiritually, is critical for construing their beliefs and practices around fishing. Their identity is intimate with the spiritual cosmologies that govern how they relate to nature, the society, and the invisible world. This background provides the basis for studying the endurances and alterations in their spiritual worldview explored in this section.

2.3 Cosmology and Worldview of the Basamia

The Basamia embrace a deeply rooted cosmology that offers a holistic understanding of the universe composed of both the physical, (material, profane or mundane) life, nature and the spiritual realm. Their worldview is therefore established on the belief in the interconnectedness of all things that exist in the universe or cosmos that is, human beings, animals, the rest of natural

elements like plants, mountains, lakes, rivers by the spiritual power or forces of the creating God, deities, ancestors, other spirits of the unknown dead people, who don't belong to the participant's family or clan and the resulting vital forces. Therefore, fundamental to the cosmology of the Basamia is the acceptance in the being of "*Nyasaaye*", the Supreme Being (God), regarded as the creator, controller and sustainer of life. The belief in such a supreme being/spirit is a common belief among the African people, deliberated on by several scholars (Marumo, & Chakale, 2018; Masango 2006).

From indigenous time, the Basamia community believed that there is a God who took on the creation work and put in existence all the things that fill it, he is therefore considered to have brought to being those that were not previously in reality, by his immeasurable power. One of the elders during an interview provided that the Basamia equated God's creating efforts with production and named him "*Nyasaaye*", attributing him to a placenta "*esaaye*" since he was able to "produce" the creatures of the universe, the same way animals and human beings do. *Nyasaaye* is believed to be omnipresent and benevolent, yet distant, often approached through intermediaries such as the arch spirit, deity or divinity known as "*Were*", ancestral spirits (*Emisaabwa* or *Ebikenyi*), nonfamily spirits (*Amayembe*) or other traditional religious figures like priests, prophets, diviners among others. These spirits are believed to have inhabited all natural elements since they don't have the physical abode. This is what makes them complete or holistic that is, with their physical or material structure and the spirit which gives them the essence. However, since the universe is full of these natural elements, this means that the entire universe or cosmology possess spirits, that is, the world is filled with spirits, contained in every object that occupies space.

Therefore, in the Basamia worldview, the visible (material) world is inseparable and properly linked with the invisible (spiritual) realm. The two are not seen as separate realities but as layers

of existence that influence and respond to each other. This cosmology yielded the cause-and-effect philosophy (*Haluhola/Halureta*) among the Basamia. According to them, whatever happens in the natural setting is interpreted and understood in a religious or spiritual dimension. For instance, illness, success, misfortune, and natural events are not only interpreted through physical causes but are also understood to carry spiritual significance. For example, one of the respondents explained that a failed harvest or poor fishing season (*esubi*) is viewed as a sign of spiritual imbalance; perhaps due to the neglect of a ritual, a breach of a taboo or simply caused by those who have the power to manipulate and influence the operation of other natural elements through witch craft (*eloko*). While responding to this, an elder stated that among the Basamia, death of an individual cannot just be explained naturally, it must also have a spiritual cling which justifies it. This explains why the Basamia attend funerals in big numbers, not only to send off the deceased but also to discern what caused his death (*omanya olumbe*). In the Same way, occurrences like wind whirls (*Esifusye*) are not just natural happenings but spiritually construed as movements or visitations of the ancestral or other evil spirits. This similar with what Ikechukwo, (2019) established about most indigenous fishing communities of Nigeria.

In accordance to the works of Mbiti (1991), the Basamia undertake the natural world in specific as spiritually alive. For instance, lakes, rivers, trees, hills and forests among others, are not simply environmental features, but spaces that are inhabited by spirits and therefore function as sites of divine power. Lake Victoria (*Siita makoli*) alone has a number of sacred places both on the shores and in the water, which are spiritually connected. The huge stone in Lake Victoria Known as “*Suumba*” is one of the most popular spiritual site where most Basamia go for indigenous spiritualism. While some of these sacred elements are used by all Basamia and other tribes, others are for specific clans. For example, the “Bamanyi” clan venerates a certain tree known as

“*Ademba*” for it is believed to have inhabited many of their ancestors. Due to spiritual inhabitation of such natural elements, they become sacred realities. These sacred landscapes are treated with reverence, adoration and approached with caution and respect. Certain natural elements are believed to communicate messages from the spiritual world through dreams, signs or the behavior of animals. For example, dreaming about snakes among the Basamia is considered a sign of calamity. The Basamia conceive snakes as cursed animals thatd never portray success. However, this is due to the changes which have been advanced by the new spiritualities of the foreign origin as deliberated on by Sussy et’al (2012).

Whereas birds like hens (*Engoho*), are considered very powerful and often used in rituals as sacrifices for cleansing evil, seeking for victory, thanking and evoking ancestral spirits, others like an owl (*Ehirihihi*) is a sign of death. The appearance of an owl around a home stead especially with its menacing sound alone communicates death. Likewise, certain caterpillars especially those with mixed colors on their body (red and black) known as “*esibihibihi*” communicate death to the living upon their appearance. They communicate that you have lost a dear one or specify that you or your dear one will die sooner. To avert such calamities, the Basamia always bury these caterpillars or else deaths have to resultantly occur. Indeed, during naming rituals, the Basamia use hens to determine the ancestor who will be named after. This means that their ancestors can speak, communicate or manifest through these hens, hence rendering them spiritually alive. Additionally, hens, insects like hoverflies (*enyungunyi*) and the blinking of the upper eyelid spiritually communicate that an individual or a home stead will get visitors. For instance, when chickens look at each other for a while, a hoverfly insistently follows someone by his ears, and or experience a spontaneous blink of the upper eyelid for some time, it implies that such a person or home-stead will receive visitors soon. This belief among the Basamia is also evident in their

customs especially oral literatures like folktales (*eminaye*), which present natural elements like animals, tress, lakes and human as spiritually strong elements which can incarnate and take on another form. This aligns with the findings of Olupona, (2015) which presented oral tradition as the most crucial device for storing and passing on indigenous knowledge to young generations.

The Basamia cosmology also emphasizes balance and harmony between the individual, the community, and the spiritual world. Upholding this accord involves observing rituals, exaltation of ancestors (*emisabwa*), and following moral and communal norms (*esambo*). The disturbance of this balance through greed, disrespect, or disregard for tradition can result in personal or communal misfortune in form of rear but deadly sickness, natural calamities like prolonged droughts, famine or death. As such, spirituality among the Basamia is not confined to formal religious occasions but is embedded in the routines, relationships, and environment of daily life of the Basamia. This explains why the Basamia like other African communities believe that most people with mental problems, especially autism (*esibori*) either failed to respect their elders, especially biological parents (*abebusi*), uncles and aunts, only to be cursed or violated the spirits' regulations and procedures of ritual performance (Opondo, 2016) .This is because the Basamia believe that all the creatures of the universe contain some powers or force given to them by their inhabiting spirits, capable of sustaining their own existence and the survival of other creatures as well. However, they believe that this power contained by either spirits or natural elements is different in magnitude, efficiency and effectiveness. The power can be either good or bad depending on its origin or source, purpose or how it has been used by others. For example, the powers of the transcendent Supreme Being (*Nyasaye*) are greater than that of the arch spirit “*Were*” which also dominates that of ancestral spirits and others. In the same way, plants, animals, human beings and other creatures, hold powers which are greater or lesser than others. Whereas some possess compatible powers

which can combined with others to yield success, others have incompatible ones and cannot collectively operate to influence victory (*ehira*). This explains why the Basamia refrain the sharing of marriage beds since this can cause impotence and infertility to any of the parties with less powers.

It was up on this ground that the Basamia believed that animals like dogs were not good to meet while heading for a venture, in the same way other people especially women or men who were named after female ancestors were also looked at as people of less and incompatible powers. Certain behaviors and conducts of individuals also possessed powers, for example sitting on a cooking stone had powers to punish the individual or the parents who didn't groom the children, and the mothers' breast would swell. This is what brought in the sense and need for balancing and harmonizing the powers or forces held by certain elements of nature and behavior. In regard to this understanding, the Basamia endeavored to establish a good relationship with their fellow humans, the animals and other creatures through good conduct, establishment and observance or Taboos, totems and performance of certain rituals for a balance. This tamed their social behavior and approach towards the natural world. In case one accidentally violates these establishments, he/she is meant to be cleansed by some herbs known as "*amanyasi*".

These discoveries do not only enrich the African indigenous collected works to ensure balance but also proves beyond doubt that Africa is a society in its real sense (it is homogenous). This assertion is based on the fact that the cosmology and worldview of the Basamia positions itself in the wider understanding of the rest of the African societies, most of which have been studied by numerous scholars (Issifu & Diawo, 2015; Sarfo, 2023; Adofo, 2016; Mbiti, 1991). Overall, scholars who have deliberated on the indigenous spirituality of Africa which includes the Basamia indicate that the religiously inbuilt Africans view the world as a double-sided inseparable reality formed of both

the physical and the nonphysical elements, the physical is made of the visible material body while the divine is in form of the invisible spirit. This is a reality to all things that exist in the cosmos with limitation to none, including the newly artificial items like vehicles, furniture, houses, roads, and utensils. Logically, this points out that the Africans therefore see the cosmos as space filled with spirits (Marumo, & Chake, 2018, Sussy, et al. 2012), and this consequently tames their interaction with the rest of the world. This created a feeling of connectivity among the Africans towards other creatures and among them with a deliberate acceptance that even where the element has a different body, what joins them is the spirit which most of them share. In regard to this, Tusasiirwe, et al. (2022), provided that African spirituality basically plays the role of ensuring that there exists a connection between the natural environment and the invisible world. Precisely, they added that this social, environmental, political, economic, religious and cultural connection influences the way individuals interact with the natural world through beliefs and performance of rituals. This means that the African indigenous spirituality is a religious one designed by the African world interpretations, situation, environment, necessities, difficulties and ambitions.

This deeply relational worldview provides a powerful lens through which the understanding of the Basamia's interaction with their environment and livelihood activities, including fishing can be stationed. It explains why many of their activities, behavior and conduct, are not simply forms of labor or physical interaction with their immediate environment but spiritual practices tied to blessings, taboos ancestral permission, and respect for the elements of the universe. To maintain this complex worldview, the Basamia established a number of beliefs, and practices in form of taboos, totems, and practices grounded in their myths, legends, proverbs, and other traditional transmission methodologies. The following subdivision of this section explores specific spiritual

practices and beliefs that stem from this worldview and continues to shape the identity and life of the Basamia.

2.4 The Role of Ancestors and Other Spirits in the Spiritual World

Among the Basamia, ancestors (*Emisambwa*) are considered an essential part of the spiritual world. According to them, death does not dissolve a person's bond with the living; instead, transforms the nature of relationship from a physical dominated connection to a more spiritual based association. This is because their deceased members continue to play an active role in the social economic and political wellbeing of their lives, families and communities. Ancestors are believed to watch over the living from a distance, providing blessings and offer guidance especially in times of crisis or decision making, especially to those who strive to live according to the set norms, values and traditions of their clan. According to the Basamia, ancestral spirits are the souls of the clan of family members who died with a clean record that contribute to the mightiness of their family of clan without any regard to the age at which one died. This is why they could even establish totems restraining from associating with any natural element that could have caused the death of any member of the family irrespective of the age. The difference in accordance with the age at which the ancestor died was only followed depending on the mission to be performed, for instance heavy and turf spiritual tasks like cleansing of evil powers, fighting against witch craft and naming the newly born babies as a way of setting their entire life destination was only done by ancestors whom they were assured of dying at an elder age. This is because according to the Basamia, the power held by any creature may be determined by its age, young natural objects are considered to have less power than the grown-up ones. That is why the indigenous Basamia didn't allow elder brothers to spend a night in the cottages (*esiimba*) of their young ones, to cause spiritual challenges (*ehira*).

The ancestors (*emisabwa*) of the Basamia like other spirits (*ebikenyi*) can be happy, pleased or annoyed depending on the conduct of the living members of the family. Inevitably, the right conduct of the living through the observance of set rules, regulations and respect for restrictions followed by careful performance of rituals would make the spirits more powerful and happy yet the reverse would affect their force and consequently make them annoyed with the living. To ensure a bountiful relationship between the living and the ancestral spirits, the Basamia carried out ritual offerings of food, local brew and animals. Such ritual offerings ignited favor, protection, and forgiveness from ancestral spirits. While responding on this matter, an elder provided that disregarding ancestral expectations or neglecting rituals was held as an act of disrespect and could lead to spiritual consequences such as illness, misfortune, poor harvests among others. To reduce the gap between the ancestors and the living, ancestors would be named (*okulikha*) in newly born children, weapons, hunting, agricultural, pottery and fishing gears after these spirits. In this way, the spiritual and physical worlds are deeply intertwined. Indeed the health and general welfare of one often depends on respect for the other.

It was therefore up on the needs and requirements of the ancestral spirits that the social, cultural, economic and religious regulations, restriction in form of taboos and totems were established. Rituals were also performed to ensure that spirits are not only happy but ready to influence and guide victory. Besides ancestral spirits (*Emisambwa or Ebikenyi*), other natural deities like “*Were*” and spirits (*Amayembe*) and the supreme spirit (*Nyasaye*) also inhabit certain natural creatures and places like sacred groves, lakes, and anthills. Individuals or families consult spiritual mediators like traditional prophets (*abalakusi*) or elders (*abahulundu*) to interpret signs, dreams, or unexpected events that are believed to have been spiritually caused. A chief fisherman while responding on this aspect said that such places are always named after these respective spirits. The

Basamia who operate around such areas conduct themselves in accordance with the demands of such spirits. For example the “*Sumba*”, a big stone in Lake Victoria was named after the spirit “*Sumba*”. Being a one eyed spirit, fishers are not allowed to extract from the malfunctioned side.

The trust in the existence and role of the ancestral spirits also known as spirit beings among the Basamia is grounded on the acceptance that man like other creatures is not made up of the physical matter only but with a component of the spirit usually referred to as the soul. This aligns with what most scholars present about African spirituality, (Amaze, 2024; Nweke, 2020; Knoetze, 1993). Given their pre-death world experiences, they are believed to play a mediatory role between the living and the gods or the Supreme Being. Although some African societies believe that ancestors include the spirits of the deceased family or community members who had lived a successful life with a positive impact on the family or community, and those who experienced a gentle and natural death at a ripe age, the Basamia pay respect to even those who die ruthlessly, females and the young, provided their spirits remain influential. Nevertheless, the tasks carried out by an elderly and male ancestor are quite different from those of the female and young ones.

When it comes to the manifestation of these ancestors, the Basamia believe that “*emisambwa*” can take up the body of other elements of nature namely, native trees like “*omutuba*”, “*omutumba*”, water pools like “*Neteme*” found in Lunyo, and animals like leopards “*engwe*” but not snakes or their enemy totemic elements. According to one of the respondents, snakes were used by evil spirits and were identified by witches and night dancers (*abalosi*) who possess such malicious powers. Africans appeased such creatures, gave them food and drinks and other sacrifices to build a good working relationship with these ancestors. Mistreating them in any way could cause unbearable suffering to the individual and the entire community. Their visits are believed to be either out of good will that is, to bless the community with rain, good harvest, good healthy,

fertility, good children, victory in war and successful fishing expeditions or out of anger with delinquency to punish them with curses, defeat, poor harvest, barrenness, bad mannered children, and poor health death due to misbehavior.

The idea that their ancestors usually take up the form of other natural elements especially those surrounding the places where they were buried, results to a feeling of connectivity between them and the said natural elements, with willingness to protect and care for them, a concept we are terming as African indigenous spirituality (Omotoye 2011). The minor differences in here does not challenge the previously presented African homogeneity but simply indicates that as Africans adhere to similar spiritual and cultural norms, values and traditions, these are implemented somehow differently by diverse societies due to small variances in the natural environments from where they are brought up. These different natural elements which are inhabited by different spirits formulate quite different circumstances which then inform ancestors in the formulation of regulations, and restrictions. Thus, calling for diverse styles of operation among different African societies. Therefore, African belief in ancestors descends from the main African world view and cosmology which consents that the world is filled with spirits, one of them being ancestral spirits (Olupona, 2015; Amaze, 2024).

2.5 Rituals and Ceremonies in the Basamia Spirituality

Like the ancestral spirits, rituals and ceremonies also occupy a dominant place in the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia, acting as significant expressions of connection between the physical and spiritual worlds. These practices mark imperative life changeovers, search for spiritual fortification, and affirm communal distinctiveness. Through such rituals, the Basamia sustain harmony with their ancestors, beseech blessings and uphold moral and cultural order.

Among the utmost substantial rituals include those that convey key stages of life, such as birth rituals for the mother (*oyemulusa*) and the new born (*okhutusa*) and naming (*Okulikha*), marriage rituals (*okeka*), and death rituals and conducted in various phases and at different intervals of time. These rituals exist right from birth and through from the immediate time of death like “*odudumya*” and “*omukulukha*” up to the last phase when the soul of the deceased is honorably sent to the world of the dead and join the ancestral band “*Olunganyo*”. Each stage is seen as a channel not only in the social sense but in the spiritual passage of an individual as well. For instance, at birth elders, mostly grandparents may implement particular rituals to welcome the newborn and strive for ancestral blessings, protection and general welfare for the whole of their life time provided they do not violate the set social, political, economic and religious norms, values and traditions. Marriage rituals are habitually used to prepare the young people to take on social and spiritual obligations within their society.

The Basamia borrowed this initiation rituals and ceremonies to all their political, social and economic activities especially those that were being carried out for the first time or by a new practitioner. While deliberating on the same, an elder explained that the same way the Basamia initiate their newly born babies to the world and named them after ancestors, they also ritually inaugurate and named new farming fields, new fishing, farming, hunting, pottery and iron working tools, fishing gears or equipment’s before they are allowed to start fishing. The new practitioners in many of those activities were also meant to be introduced and spiritually welcomed. They therefore conducted replica initiation rituals to the whole lot of new effects, including new seasons and new leadership. This would invoke the ancestral spirits to bless, provide and protect the tools, participants and their activities. Besides the initiation rituals and ceremonies, the Basamia also conducted cleansing and protection rituals and ceremonies to both humans and their social,

political, religious and economic activities to reawaken their efficiency and effectiveness; especially in reaction to actions which are believed to have spiritual disruption among the living. Likewise, protective rituals containing herbs, figurative acts, or spiritual manifestation are carried out before trips, plating seasons or fishing expeditions.

Spiritual intermediaries such as elders (*abahulundu*), customary healers (*abalesi*), or spirits mediums (*abahingi*) regularly preside or guide the performance of these rituals. Their awareness and expertise are got from the hereditary wisdom and spiritual involvements, empowering them to understand signs from the spiritual world and recommend proper actions. These figures play a critical role in preserving the spiritual healthiness of individuals and the entire community. All rituals are performed during the evening or early morning time because of the belief that the ancestral spirits to whom they perform these rituals are always awake and on duty starting from the late times of the day like at the eleventh hour until dawn, from when they now go mute, sleeping or resting during the whole day. That is why the Basamia abstained from going to the known and likely sacred places like forests, big tress, water points, and mountains during noon time: to avoid distracting the spirits from resting. Violation of this rule would attract individual or communal punishments until they apologize through prayers and sacrifices. It is also the reason why the traditional healers (*abalesi*) operate in the evening and night hours, not because they are ashamed of their religion as most scholars assert. Even before the coming of foreign craft, rituals and other religious indigenous activities were carried out during these late and early hours for efficiency and effectiveness.

Community based ceremonies serve to build and strengthen social bonds, sustain communal uniqueness and restore the relationship between the Basamia and the spirits. Occasions such as communal sacrifices, seasonal festivities and reunion rituals are avenues for restarting ties with

ancestors and strengthening shared values. These rituals not only bring people together but also perform as reminders of the consecrated order that strengthens the life of the Basamia. In principle, rituals and ceremonies are not only central to daily life but are the very means by which the Basamia exist with the invisible forces which they believe impacts their entire lives. This understanding positions the platform for distinguishing how definite activities like fishing are also surrounded in ritual practice and spiritual connotation, as will be discussed in the chapters that follow.

Africans believe that the world realisms, both physical and spiritual have powers which are hierarchical in nature (Magezi, & Magezi, 2017). For instance, one object might have greater powers than the other i.e. God on the top, followed by the spirits then humans being animals, plants and other inanimate objects Nche, & Ogar, (2024). But even among the similar elements, one may still have more powers than others. For example, there are humans, plants, animals, rocks, etc. which are spiritually stronger than others, perhaps because of the different spirits inhabiting them. In this regard, take a look at people who approach fellow humans for consultations and awareness, they listen, and do as guided by them, without omitting any step. This kind of situation called for ritual establishment, design and performance in order to balance the powers and have them in harmony, and peaceful co-existence. In support of the above, Ikechukwu, (2019) stated that the concept of order and balance is the one that brings in the idea of rituals to ensure that there exists no imbalance. This aligns with the Spiritual situation of the Basamia which puts “*Nyasaaye*” on the top with more powers that resulted to the existence of deities like “*Were*” and humans from where ancestral spirits advance. The same expression also supports the practice of traditional healing where some animals like chicken and plants like “*Nasiyunya*” contain more powers that can avert even human curses or witch craft. The essence of rituals is embedded in the beliefs,

symbols, taboos, totems, values, tradition, norms, customs and traditions that manifest in the daily life experience of the people of a given society. Thus, in support to Sussy, et al. (2012), these expressions are vital in the passage of the phenomenon to other generations due to the fact that they encourage communication, a very serious aspect of transmission. For the small existing differences among the Africans, each of them implements the above expressions divergently. We can't consequently conceive that all Africans express the aspect all the same; different societies embrace their interconnectedness with the rest of the environment otherwise. This therefore denotes that besides making the ancestral spirit happy, the rituals are also used as a deductive or inductive measure that tries to balance the natural elements and the spirits that inhabit them. It also means that making them happy is another matching method than reduces the increased powers or force fumed by annoyance.

2.6 Taboos and Moral codes in the Spirituality of the Basamia

Among the indigenous spiritual setting of the Basamia, taboos, totems (*emisiro*) and moral codes (*esaambo*) function as dominant tools for regulating individual behavior and sustaining communal unity. These spiritual embargos are more than cultural standards for they are embedded in the belief that breaching them can upset ancestors, interrupt the natural balance, and or invite calamities upon persons and the wider community. The taboos recount on areas of sexual behavior, food handling, societal roles, sanctified times, places, persons and interaction with natural environment. For instance, many responded on this matter and provided that certain social, economic, political and religious activities are always outlawed during particular periods or definite people, like expectant women and illegitimate or uninitiated youths and spaces. Violations against these taboos are understood to lead to spiritual adulterations, leading to serious repercussions and penalties like infections, misfortunes, poor harvests and death among others.

Concession to elders and making of symbolic compensations are some of the necessities that the lawbreakers need to fulfill as they undertake cleansing rituals in order to reinstate balance between them and nature or and their inhabiting spirits.

Sexual taboos are predominantly important and are diligently knotted to concepts of cleanliness and reverence for ancestors. Sexual deviations like adultery, incest, sex before performance of definite rituals or sex in sanctified spaces is believed to damage not only the involved persons but the entire society. Such acts anger ancestral spirits who may resultantly remove their protections or fetch spiritual punishments. During an FGD, it was established that the most common individual punishments given by ancestors to humans who violate sexual regulations include infertility, bareness or impotence. Besides such sexuality related punishments, autism (*esibori* or *esiyingwa*) was also a common penalty among the Basamia who were believed to have violated the proscriptions. The Basamia also believed that such punishments may extend to other members of the family if not cleansed in time. They can follow up other young children of the family, only to become a common phenomenon identified with such a family.

According to the Basamia, moral conducts are strictly watched over and strengthened through spiritual responsibility. Senior members in the Basamia communities often act as ethical guides, understanding adversities as symbols of damaged taboos and abandoned obligations. The anxiety of spiritual consequences inspires the Basamia to have a sense of honesty, kindness, hospitality, stewardship and admiration for each other and for their environment. For example, stealing from another or disparaging an elder is not just socially judged but also perceived as spiritually hazardous since it can attract the fury of the ancestral spirits.

Similar to other societies across the continent and around the world, the Basamia perceived spirits as numinous beings without the physical abode. These spirits would therefore take on the material bodies of the natural elements round them. This made the Basamia to come up with protective taboos (*emisiro*) directly connected to those natural elements. For instance, respondents provided that cutting some tress, extracting any resource on some revered grounds, at an agreed time, by a disqualified person (female or young), or using banned instruments would call for punishments from the ancestors. These prohibitions replicate principles of ecological use and veneration for the spiritual wardenship of nature. In this manner, spirituality develops a form of conservational conventions towards the environment, directed not by transcribed regulations instead by transcendent significances. Such resolutions built deeply within the spiritual dimension of individuals and the whole community tends to attract a lot of meaning. Indeed, the Basamia treat these prohibitions as holy instructions set by their own loving, caring, protecting and providing ancestors. They are willing to follow them than the written or scripted laws which seem to have no similarity with their lived customs, norms and societal values. The persistent manifestation of taboos and moral codes prove that spirituality among the contemporaneous Basamia is not simply narrowed to spiritual places but dynamically shapes their entire daily life experiences including their ethics governed with the spiritually established norms, values and traditions. These standards are foundational for appreciating behaviors about fishing as several traditional fishing guidelines and practices are rooted in spiritual limitations and ancestral management, as the subsequent sections discover in further details.

The development of taboos, totems and moral codes further helps in harmonizing the relationship between individuals and the contacted natural elements so as to ensure fullness in productivity of the either lives (Marumo & Chakale 2018; Masango, 2006). This harmonization is very sustainable

to the environment because it mentors Africans to have a deep connection with the ecology and consequently refrain from destroying it. They learn to associate, care, protect, provide and ensure its continued existence. This is because its presence determines the quality of human life and survival, yet its depletion on the other hand means that human existence is at risk of either poor quality life or even total extinction.

The African world view of spirits bestows a lot of respect to nature with adoration to hills, forests, mountains, rivers and lakes (Sussy et al., 2012). Indeed, for Africans, the conservation of the environment does not yield from the enforcement of laws alone, like our governments are erroneously practicing. It is rather realized from the spiritual and social responsibility, restrictions and regulations which are highly followed in order to avoid punishments from the spiritual world. The sustainability of natural resources is therefore linked with spirituality in one way or another. For instance, the infertility of the soil, droughts, diseases and many other natural calamities take place when humanity fails to protect the spiritually oriented natural resources. Destroying sacred trees, rocks, animals and destruction of sacred worship places like shrines and forests usually meet spiritual disappointment that later results into ecological changes.

2.7 Gender and Spiritual Roles in the Spirituality of the Basamia

Within the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia, masculinity or femininity of an individual or other natural elements including animals, birds, plants, lakes, rivers, mountains, forests, week days among others play a substantial role in defining spiritual obligations, freedoms and forms of partakers. Among human beings, males and females are allocated dissimilar responsibilities, although most of them usually complement each other within the spiritual and ritual life of the Basamia community. These disparities are molded by their cultural norms, organic issues, and

ancestral customs but they affect how each sex interrelates with consecrated knowledge, ritualistic expertise and spiritual places. Amazingly, elements which secularism considers being neuter, the Basamia societies classifies them into male and female. There exists no neuter element among the indigenous Basamia, a component is either male or female. Being a patrilineal society, they believe that the male creatures hold more power than the female and therefore capable of performing quite different and higher spiritual, political, economic, and social responsibilities. In this regard, they assign varying spiritual tasks for male or female trees, water sources, mountains, rocks, anthills, animals, birds, grooves, and days among others.

For instance, an elder during an in-depth interview explained that there are some health disorders or evil powers which male medicinal plants can not heal while the female plants of the same species can rectify and the reverse is true. For instance, there is a plant locally known as “*efunyi*”. This medicinal shrub exists into two different species which the Basamia have categorized as male and female. The male species is only capable of healing impotence cases among men while the female species cannot. It can however help on increasing the female sexual abilities. The secularly neuter elements are classified as male or female basing on their physical outlook or fecundity. Elements that have similar features like those of women or looks like them were considered female. For example, trees, rocks, and water bodies that have features that imaginarily resemble breasts of a woman, or any other likely female body parts were considered female while those that didn't possess such were taken as male. Again, elements whose productivity and propagation were considered high especially among trees, were situated as female while those whose propagation and productivity was low or completely inattentive were taken to be male.

Among the Basamia, men are always seen as the guardians of communal ritual headship. Elders, chiefly senior men preside over rituals, dedications, libation, sacrificial offering, payers and

devotions to the ancestors and mark crucial decisions during rites such as initiation, naming, or conciliation rituals. They also perform as mediators between the family and the spiritual authorities such as seers, herbalists or medicine men, especially when assessing on problems that upset the entire family or clan. To this effect, most of the traditional religious leaders among the Basamia are men. A few women who are interested in joining the job find hardships in convincing the society about their abilities. Even where they are trusted, there are some tasks they cannot execute as they are required to refer them to the male experts. For instance, they cannot officiate at the last funeral rite also known as “*Olunganyo*”. The role of the male elders as spiritual spokesmen is intensely entrenched in patrilineal customs, where ancestry and inheritance are drawn through the male line. Therefore, the Basamia gender-based taboos also effect sanctification of places and affects communal contributions in some ritual performance. For instance, women are usually forbidden from being present or leading definite rituals while experiencing their menstruation, a situation seen by numerous African societies together with the Basamia as spiritually superficial (Ibale, 1998; Adjei & Sika, 2019). At the same time, females are dominant to rituals connecting to fertility, family comfort, and rites of path for females such as those related to marriage. It was the indigenous Basamia women who used to sing and dance during traditional marriages.

Nevertheless, females are not totally excluded from spiritual purposes. Their roles are correspondingly vigorous, though usually performed in more home setting and behind the scenes. For example, women are liable for organizing and preparing ritual places, giving figurative materials like special foods and herbs, and observing taboos during complex stages like menstruation, delivery, or death. In most cases, grownup women particularly widows or grandmothers may also have spiritual power and perform as advice-givers, care takers or mentors of ancestral customs within a household or clan. Women can also work as spiritual vessels,

predominantly in spirit dispossession rituals or restorative practices where the spirit selects to connect and communicate by use of a feminine body. Such women can obtain sizable esteem and be consulted as mediums or fortunetellers (*abalakusi*). While their roles are always restricted to explicit practices of spiritual manifestation and may not often convert into official ritual administration. Therefore, despite the gender founded partitions, there is a strong gratitude of interdependence. In fact, the accomplishment of any spiritual act usually needs collaboration between men and women, even when their roles are dissimilar. Moreover, as social variations continue to redesign sex roles in the wider community, there are signs that spiritual role too are becoming more unsolidified, with added women raking on headship positions and disconcerting older limitations. However, comprehending these gendered spiritual roles provides understandings not just on the organization of the Basamia religious life but also on how spiritual authority is troubled in relation to gender and varying practices like fishing as it is deliberated on in the later sections.

The description on gender roles is one of the taboos set by Africans to ensure that their beliefs, some of which have been mentioned above are observed keenly. These taboos appear in form of regulations, prohibitions or restrictions that controlled the contribution, involvement and general conduct of the African women. These regulations were followed with concern by all women basically because they were protected by spiritual prohibitions to avoid the wrath of the gods/goddesses (Leveque, 2003; Colding, & Folke, 1997; Obiero, et al. 2022). For example, there are some tribes in Africa that do not eat some foods because of their spiritual consequences (Awal, 2024; Ibale, 1998). This indicates that apart from the general taboos that limited the conduct of all people, like the sex related restrictions of adultery, incest and respect for sacred spaces, some of the African taboos were established along age, positions, and gender and seasons etc.

2.8 Conclusion

While the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia has proved unusual permanence particularly in its essential beliefs about several spirits including ancestors that play a vital role in their daily lives, the spiritual nature of the environment, and the necessity for ritual harmony, it has also progressed in reaction to social, economic, and religious variations. The effect of prescribed education, Christianity, contemporary supremacy, and unstable gender roles has led to adjustment of certain practices, some taboos are less firmly observed and certain rituals have misplaced their communal importance. Nevertheless, various rudiments of the spiritual worldview remain irrepressible, usually amalgamating with novel power in total. Despite the changes, Basamia indigenous spirituality remains key in shaping their understanding of life, distinctiveness and livelihood. It is not narrowed to the former but actively remains and adapts through contributing guidance in daily choices and public practices. This chapter has provided a synopsis of the footing components of the Basamia indigenous spirituality. The succeeding chapter builds upon these beliefs and practices and expresses it in the context of fishing, a livelihood that, for the Basamia, is not simply an economic doing but deeply spiritual.

CHAPTER THREE

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUAL BELIEFS AND PRACTICES LINKED WITH THE FISHING PRACTICES OF THE BASAMIA

3.1 Introduction

Fishing among the Basamia has for long been more than a commercial activity. It is profoundly driven in a spiritual frame work that directs connections with water bodies, fish species, fishing methods, consumption and the community relationships. The beliefs and rituals intertwined to fishing have traditionally played a central role in managing fishing activities, warranting harmony between the people and their environment, and reinforcing communal identity. These beliefs encompass sacred water bodies, fish species, fishing methods and gears, mongers and consumers, leading to the establishment of taboos, totems and rituals with a deep ecological understanding that aligns fishing practices with the community spiritual and cultural values. However, as fishing practices advance, due to environmental, economic, political and social modifications, the spiritual dimensions of fishing are also under going change.

As such, fishing among the Basamia is not simply a commercial action, it is a way of life profoundly rooted in the spiritual sense and traditional belief structures. The lake and its possessions are understood not only as physical objects but as supernaturally charged places administered by ancestral powers, taboos, and rituals. Essentially, fishing practices are conducted by a rich framework of native knowledge that appeals from the comprehensive African cosmology and worldview, values, and moral codes deliberated on in the preceding chapter. This chapter provides the spiritual beliefs and ritual practices that are embedded in fishing within the Basamia. It places interest on how certain beliefs and actions such as looking for ancestral authorization

before fishing, performance of cleansing rituals replicated in an intensely rooted worldview from which the spiritual and physical are interceded. The chapter also examines how the Basamia fishers comprehend victory or failure in fishing as a result of spiritual consideration or discrepancy.

3.2 Indigenous Spiritual Beliefs Linked to Fishing among the Basamia

The Basamia fishing communities have got numeral beliefs associated with fishing. These beliefs are common throughout the entire community. This is because all the Basamia are attached to fishing practices in one way or another. If not involved in the actual extraction, then maybe in the leadership, preservation, selling, or at least consumption/eating of fish. What may differ from one clan to another or from one fishing ground to another may be the practical part of it like ritual performance, taboos and totems.

These beliefs were constructed by their forefathers and have kept influencing their fishing life to date. Despite a number of changes in environmental, economic and social spheres, the Basamia have been resilient and are adoptive to these variations. The beliefs are attached to the entire fishing cycle and practices including gazetting, maintaining and use of fishing grounds, preparation of fishing gears, selection and induction of fishing voyages, actual fish extraction, fish handling and management, selling, preservation and consumption. Spiritual beliefs connected to fishing include the belief in the power and influence of God (*Nyasaaye*), divinities/ deities like “*Were*”, ancestral and spirits of other dead persons outside their families(*emisambwa* and *amayembe*), and the personified force (*amaani*) also known as impersonal, vital force or life essence towards the fishing activities. The proceeding subsections describe these beliefs and endeavor to explain how they influenced the fishing practices among the Basamia.

3.2.1 Belief in Nyasaaye – Overall Controller of Fishing Activities

Indigenous Basamia fishers believed that *Nyasaaye* - the highest spirit and also known as the creator espouses influence and power on all aspects of the fishing cycle. For example, *Nyasaaye* is the creator, provider and sustainer of fish and fish habitations. *Nyasaaye* is also believed to have influence over all materials used for making fishing gears including boats, baskets and the fishers. The Basamia believe that the lake and all its possessions were produced by *Nyasaaye*. The Basamia strongly believe that their God also known as *Nyasaaye* is the maker and owner of the lake and all that is inhabited. This belief in *Nyasaaye* as creator and owner of the vast lake predates their ancestors. The Basamia ground this belief on the big size and greatness of these natural water bodies which constantly provide them with the means of survival throughout generations but without latent. To them, it is only *Nyasaaye* who has such outstanding powers to hold to such a reality.

In regard to its size, the Basamia refer to Lake Victoria in particular as “*esiita makoli*”, denoting to the fact that even the eagles (*Amakoli*), one of the greatest birds of the air cannot fly over it crossways. Such a description points to the power of the maker (*Nyasaaye*) and the greatness that the lake holds as a portion from its creator. The extraordinary happenings of the lake, like the automatic opening and closing of some fishing grounds (*Emyaalo*) by use of the water plants (hydrophyte or macryophyte) make them to assent the direct influence of the *Nyasaaye* (God) on the lake and its activities. Such happenings sustain the Basamia’s belief that the lake was created by *Nyasaaye* who therefore owns it, with power to open or close some of the fishing grounds at his wish, though depending on the conduct of the fishers operating there. The belief in the creation, ownership and control of the lake by *Nyasaaye* made the Basamia fishing communities to adore the lake and its habitants with a belief that such creatures share some powers of their creator. They

therefore established and observed a number of practices in form of taboos, totems (*emisiro*) and rituals (*emiholo*) in order to create an operational link between them and the creatures of the water. This is because the Basamia believe that such habitants share something in common, with their creator that is, the spirit of God and His sacredness.

The feelings that Nyasaaye's connection and influence over his creatures has never ended shaping the way fishing Basamia interact with the lake, fish and other aquatic possessions. They approach the lake with a moral-like approach characterized with principles of respect, fear, protection, care, reverence, stewardship and interdependence, thus managing the level of aquatic extraction. The Basamia believe that success in fishing depends on the will of this creating power. This belief situates fishing activities not just as physical jobs rather as an act that hangs on divine motivation. One fisher explained that even with all preparations done early in the morning, a catch may still fail if *Nyasaaye* does not will it. Such opinions highlight the divine lens through which the Basamia understand natural processes, where God's kindness controls the product of human sweat. This shows how the fishing practices of the Basamia are integrated with their sense of spirituality. It shows that the divine is neither distant nor disconnected but closely involved in everyday subsistence activities.

3.2.2 Beliefs in Deities of the Lake and Fishing

Besides the belief in *Nyasaaye*, indigenous Basamia believed in deities, as charged with the duty of shaping the fishing job. These deities are known as 'spirits of nature' or 'gods of nature'. In addition to the belief in the over-all Basamia deity known as "*Were Hagaba Achari*", who unlimitedly supervises the role of other lesser deities and influences the entire life experiences of all the Basamia, they also believe in the existence of other deities responsible for controlling other

minor spirits inhabiting the same components of nature. For example, the Basamia believe that the lake is filled with spirits ranging from the arch spirit known as “*Esishuhira’ banaabi*” or “*esoke*” - the deity of the water, to other spirits of the dead (*ebikenyi*) which may either be good (*emisabwa*) or evil (*ebihyeno*). These spirits have unlimited impact on the activities that take place on the water bodies, fishing inclusive. However, the Basamia believe that each water body has its own arch or “greater” spirit that oversees the supremacies and roles of other “lesser” spirits around it. These great spirits are believed to have been created by *Nyasaaye* himself to help take control of his creatures including lakes in a way that is sustainable. These spirits execute their sustaining duties with a lot of force. They end up killing the fishermen, destroying their fishing gears or closing the landing site with water plants.

For instance, Lake Victoria’s arch spirit is known as “*esishuhira banaab* or *esooke*” (the spirit that dislikes fishers) because of its destructive nature. One of the retired Basamia fisherman explained that Lake Victoria’s arch spirit “*esoke*” hates violation of fishing related restrictions and unsustainable fishing practices. Whenever fishers happen to practice unmaintainable fishing that violate the taboos of the lake, for example polluting the lake with maize cobs (*ebidunduya*), extracting fish from prohibited fishing grounds and during restricted hours, *esooke* gets angry manifested through strong irritating sound, strong water waves, storms and frequent rotation of water plants. In some cases, those found in the lake may not survive death.

This arch spirit is however loved by the lake and its inhabitants – fish, other reptiles, and the water plants which all respond with joy upon its manifestation. The inhabitants’ excitement is grounded on the fact that, such divinities are sustainably oriented and worthy to be admired by the natural elements. The fish and other water inhabitants welcome this spirit by jumping in space in adoration to it. However, due fear, no one can think of entering the water to trap them. While others insisted

that this spirit does not manifest itself to people physically instead through the rapid movement of the aquatics, storms and sound, some explained that it keeps changing its physical revelation. At one time, it can appear as a large rock covering the water, yet on the other round, it can seem to be a large threatening animal covering a big space of the water.

The Basamia personify this spirit as having physical features like other creatures, only that because of its menace, one cannot have the stance to look at it. Such deities are taken to be the owners of the waters, the fish, water plants and other occupants of the waters. It therefore means that these arch spirits are naturally meant for a good course (they're good spirits) though they manifest in a scary manner. The arch spirit ensures spiritual and ecological control of nature and more specifically the lake because it tames the behavior and conduct of the fishermen in their interaction with the water bodies and fishing grounds. To ensure a good relationship with the deities, the Basamia established various restrictions that ensured sustainability of the lake. This was done through prayers, sacrifices and offerings to the spirits. However, this understanding shapes sustainability not just as a current preservation notion but as an intensely spiritual responsibility deep-rooted in ancestral understanding. It also replicates a moral conservationism where environmental care is knotted with divine discipline and societal responsibility. This finding reveals how indigenous spirituality plays a regulatory role in natural resource use, shaping behavior in ways that support ecological balance, thus in a straight line, this finding inform that fishing among the Basamia is widely linked with indigenous spirituality.

3.2.3 Belief in the Influence of Spirits of the Dead upon Fishing

The Basamia believe that there are spirits of the dead (*ebikenyi*) that inhabit the waters and some of their fishing gears especially boats. Among these spirits are the ancestral spirits (*emisambwa*)

and spirits of other humans who died on the waters or in a specific fishing community (*amayembe*). The Basamia believe *emisambwa* are good spirits unless angered by the nasty ways of their descendants. In happiness, ancestral spirits ensure bountiful catches of the appropriate fish species. When infuriated, ancestral spirits can destroy one's ability to catch fish. For these reasons, the Basamia fishers name their fishing gears like nets and boats after their ancestors for; protection, good catches and provision of fish of all kinds. Such spirits give the fishing gears ability to even speak in case of any danger to alert the fishers. Under their protection, the ancestral spirits can immobilize the boat - refuse it to sail when it has detected a threat in the impending fishing expedition.

This belief is grounded on the acceptance that man like other creatures is not made up of the physical matter only but with a component of the spirit usually referred to as the soul. The Basamia ancestral spirits therefore, have the ability to bless, protect, guide and lead or curse the living members of society depending on how they conduct themselves. One of the fishers explained that the spirits of those who fished before are still in influence, if they are defied or ignored, fishing expeditions can't be successful. The idea that the ancestors take up the form of other natural elements especially those surrounding the places where they were buried results to a feeling of connectivity between them and the said natural elements, with willingness to protect them.

However, for the other spirits of the dead which are not ancestral (*Amayembe*), some are purely evil (*ebihyeno*) irrespective of the conduct of the fishers. Notwithstanding the good behavior of the fisher, these bad spirits are believed to be the major causes of accidents on the lake, poor catches and other inconveniences associated with fishing. These bad spirits are believed to be manipulated by the sorcerers to witch and cause harm to the fishers and other people in the fishing communities. It is further believed that such spirits were souls of the people who died in the waters,

but they were neither retrieved nor accorded the necessary ritual by their family members. Consequently, these spirits out of frustration keep roaming on the waters trying to express their dissatisfaction and revenge upon those in their surroundings. One of the fishers explained that spirits of people who died on the lake and were not ritually collected are very dangerous to the fishers.

However, the Basamia believe that just like ancestral spirits some of the spirits of the dead can be good or evil depending on the conduct of the people in the community. They can bless with good fishery (*enaabo*) if they fulfill the requirements or curse with poor harvest (*esubi*) if the living are conforming or disobedient respectively to the spiritual instructions. For instance, a spirit known as *Suumba* which inhabited a big stone in Lake Victoria, in the waters of Namayingo district, is believed to have had one functioning eye (symbolized by another small stone on the sides) while the other was malfunctioned. Up on inhabiting this stone, it is believed to have restricted fishers and other sailors to only operate on the sides of its functioning eye and never to cross to the other side of the malfunctioned one. Whoever disobeyed this instruction to fish from that side would definitely overturn and drown to death, and the body would not be seen. This is because that side of the stone was so deep with constant storms and ragged gravels beneath, all caused by the powers of this spirit. However, those who would respect the guidelines and operate on only the permitted side would catch a lot of fish without any hindrances.

In the same way, there are spirits of the dead that are said to be on Maruba fish landing site on the stone of “*Aluboryo*”, named after one of the greater fishers and the initiator of this fishing ground -the late John Aluboryo. These spirits restrict fishing in the night hours. These spirits are believed to manifest in a buzz dialogue, making it too scary to fish near the *Aluboryo* stones. The scary human-like buzzing dialogue is believed to cause accidents to those who attempt to fish near the

stone in the late night. Sometimes the spirits punish violators by mysteriously carrying away their essentials like food. However, to those who go in the appropriate time, they are blessed with heavy catches. Elderly Basamia identified a number of such spirits that inhabit different places on Lake Victoria, some of these places are found on the water of Namayingo district (as previously mentioned) while others are found on the water of other neighboring districts in Basoga and other parts in Buganda region. It is fascinating to note that most of the fishing grounds among the Basamia are named after these dwelling spirits. For instance the spirit of *Sumba* that inhabited a hug stone in Lake Victoria made that fishing site to be named after it.

The Basamia believe that some of these spirits inhabit other reptiles like crocodiles, monitor lizards, snakes and sometimes land creatures like goats. In turn, such animals are respected by all people who conduct their businesses along such shores. For example, the lizards found in Nabaga are not supposed to be beaten by any one; least one may be confined on the shore for rest of his or her life time. Some of these spirits abominate contacting with other natural items like beans, roasted potatoes, bananas and women for they are taken to be unclean. Following these set of regulations results into blessings, in the form of good catches while violating them is devastating to the fishers. This belief resulted in the consecration of some shores and fishing grounds which are treated as sacred, and consequently used for the worship of the spirits. They are declared out of reach to fishers, thus helping in the preservation of fish breeding grounds and elevation of fish stock in the accessible grounds.

3.2.4 Belief in Inherent Mystical Power of the Lake and Its Inhabitants

The Basamia believe in the inherent mystical power (*amaani*) inhabited in lake itself and its inhabitants. The fishing Basamia believe that every creature of the universe, lakes and fish

inclusive has got its peculiar power that manages its own existence and its interaction or synchronicity with the rest of the world. This power is believed to have been bestowed to each creature by *Nyasaaye* upon its formation. However, this mystical power keeps increasing or decreasing on its efficacy depending on its interaction with other elements of nature and the inhabiting spirits like deities and spirits of the dead persons. The life force differs from one creature to another depending on the age, gender, natural build up, status, expertise and time etc. It is this force that sets one creature apart or different from each other, every single one capable of functioning differently and influencing the life of the other variously. This life force plays a big role in the fishing practices. The Basamia fishers believe that the lake and its waters own certain powers that can impact every activity that takes place on it. The fishermen revealed the complex nature of the lake. The lake is presented as an entity with power of providence and improvidence depending on one's relationship to it.

As a spiritual entity, the Basamia believe that the lake has likes and dislikes which the living ought to observe. For instance, one fisherman narrated that the lake hates and does not associate with those who have saving mentalities. It usually falls in affection with those who are luxurious or “*big spenders*” as contemporarily known, those who use whatever they have obtained shortly and go back for more. In emphasis, another one explained that those who go in the lake to fish with an aim of achieving greatly (get wealth) may not be successful, it is only those that have no serious vision that the lake offers the fish always. This affirms the fact that the lake has its own power that governs its relation with its users— fishers. This belief was the origin of fishing extraction investments where the rich with substantial capital engage the poor to extract the fish and get paid. The poor fishers are believed to extract heavy reaps of fish from the lake as their aim is not accumulation of too much wealth.

In regard to the lake still, one of the retired fishers explained that the lake hates investing in it any form of capital obtained from either selling land, especially if it is ancestral or selling a living animal, unless if it is a sacrifice, least you make losses or even cost your life and the lives of those working for you (*Abanyampara*). This means that its powers are incompatible with such bloody investments. The Basamia also hold the belief in the power of the lake water itself, with capability of performing mystical-supernatural functions. For example, it is believed that the lake waters have power to cleanse it of impurities, heal sicknesses, offer blessings or curses depending on one's relationship with it. Good usage of the lake bestows upon the practitioner blessings and the reverse is the possibility. Lake water is used by traditional healers as medicine for their patients. To the Basamia, lake water is indeed medicinal, enabling the solving of several sicknesses and life challenges.

In the same way, stones found in the lake (*ebyema*) are used in the performance of spiritually related roles. The spiritual functions of the lake stones vary from clan to clan and healer to healer. It was customary for each homestead among the Basamia to have a stone for the arch spirit Were, which were picked from the lake. These stones performed several spiritual related duties in the homestead. Stones in the lakes (*ebyema*) were believed to be inhabited by lake spirits and fishers were prohibited from fishing around them. In the same way, all the stones which were in the lake (*ebyema*) were taken as places out of bounds for fishing since they were believed to have inhabited lake spirits. Fishers would sail and extract around or near them but not on their spot. Violating these restrictions is believed to provoke misfortune, including poor catches or accidents on the water. Figure 2 below presents an illustration of such a sacred stone. While the stone at present appears to be on the land due to substantial decrease in water intensities, it was traditionally waterlogged in the lake and acknowledged by the fishers as a spiritually sensitive site. This

ecological variation has uncovered previously secreted sacred features, but community acuity of their spiritual implication remains unbroken. The spaces between the stones act as hiding and breeding spaces for fish. This explains why the fish stock around such places is big as compared to other areas in the lake. Even when the fish population is big, fishers were traditionally not allowed to sail or extract from there due to spiritual inhabitation. Besides spiritual justifications, the ragged nature of these stones rationally cannot support boat sailing; the belief is therefore preventive in another sense. Those who accidentally sail upon them constantly wreck and drown.



Figure 2: The nature of stones (ebyema) adored by fishers

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

Relatedly, plants in and around the water are respected because of the supposed mystical power they have. Some of the plants are believed to have the ability to bless a fisherman or monger to extract much fish or sell the fish respectively. However, some of the plants are believed to have the power to curse someone's fishing expedition with no catch. Certain plants are held to possess cleansing and protective powers, especially against misfortunes believed to be caused by curses or witchcraft. For instance, a plant known as “*Nasiwunya*” (See figure 3 below) which traditionally

grew around the water bodies and is believed to have powers that can ritually cleanse one's fishing gears assumed to have been spiritually interfered with. The cleansing ritual of this plant involved washing the fishing tools with decoctions made from this plant, accompanied by specific prayers and guidelines given by an elder (*omuhulundu*) or traditional healer (*Omulesi*). This plant can overturn the intentions of those who want to bewitch fishers, not to catch fish. One of the boat makers provided that the same way *Nasiwunya* wanders to dominate the surface, it can help to check and cleanse all corners of the fishing gears, to enable it catch fish. This means that the mystical power held by elements of nature are determined by their structural set up and natural characteristics.



Figure 3: A plant (Nasiwunya) which is believed to have cleansing powers of fishing gears

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

The Basamia believe that some of these plants growing in or around the water bodies (water plants) are spiritually linked with the fish in the sense that their life forces are common to each other. This is because the two elements of nature are believed to have been created at ago and therefore shared

the same life force from their creator (*Nyasaaye*). While not all of these plants grow inside the water, many are found along lakeshores, riverbanks, and wetlands—environments considered sacred and spiritually connected to aquatic life. For example papyrus (*amadutu*), though rooted in the soil only grows in these moist, liminal spaces and is therefore treated as part of the sacred “water plants”. This explains why they use papyrus leaves (*ebidutu*) to fasten caught fish. They refrain from using drier mainland plants especially, banana fibers for fastening the fish. Using some of these non-water plants reduces one’s spiritual influence that aids in catching fish. Those who fail to observe this often miss (*osubwa*) whenever they try casting their nets for fish.

However, the Basamia believe that other interior plants have powers that can influence fishing, but only as charms. Some of these plants may be found on the main land for example, “*omulandira*”. In order to attract a large catch of fish, the Samia fishers fix charms made out of such plants on their boats and nets to ignite spiritual favors for large catch. They commonly refer to these charms as “aerial” since they have a spiritual force that helps to attract the fish into their fishing gears. *Figure 4* below presents such a charm, secured at the front of the fishing boat. The charm is encased in a metallic cover and fastened onto the bow of the boat, usually on a cloth decoration— an area considered symbolically significant as it “leads” the boat. To ensure that the tiny charm appears, the plate was zoomed and the whole part of the bow and the boat was not captured. While its physical form looks simple, its spiritual significance is intense – demonstrating a layer of supernatural provision invoked before embarking on a voyage. Such charms are often prepared by elders or traditional healers (*abalesi*) and their use reveals the deep interlinking of belief and fishing practice among the Basamia.



Figure 4: Charms put on the boat to increase on the fishing ability

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

The fish of the water are considered powerful creatures as well. Different species, sizes and status of fish (fresh or preserved) possess different powers used for various functions in the fishing community. Some of the fish species and sizes are considered to be sacred with ability to ignite blessings when used in ritual. While some other species are taken to be symbols of bad omen. According to the Basamia, fish species like *Emonyne* (mad fish) and *oluyonko* (cat fish) are believed to carry bad omen to fishermen. Fishers believe that having *emonye* and *oluyonko* as the first catch (*omwiso*) on the fishing voyage would make the whole fish expedition (*esubi*) unsuccessful. There is a popular belief that those who specialize in extracting these two species end up living a desperate life with family instability and a weak brain power also known as (*esibororo*). However, species like tilapia are signs of blessings and luck. This presents a diversion from the Dogo people of Mali and the Akan of Ghana who adore the cat fish as a sacred species (Obiero, 2022). Since leprosy was considered a punishment from the gods for violations of the social and spiritual norms, eating some fish species like *esembu* was considered dangerous. This was not only because of its fattish chemical composition which would intensify on the dreading of the skin but also its evil-

like life force which fixes a persistent feeling as opposed to self-examination and purification. This would make the spirits to continue punishing the victim.

On the other hand, dried fish are taken to possess medicinal power, capable of curing sicknesses like measles, skin rushes and increasing sex power among men. Besides the spiritual inclination, dried fish is rich in calcium and capable of averting skin related sicknesses. Catching small sized fish, especially Nile perch (*abuga*) or any species which are deformed was a self-invitation of misfortune. Important to note is that the very first catch (*omwiso/esibero*) of the fishers was considered to have more powers than the rest, this catch was meant to be eaten by the fisher himself, so that he gets his blessings back to himself. Selling it to another person would mean selling your own blessings. The Basamia further believe that it would be very dangerous if an evil person landed on someone's first catch, as it can be used to bewitch and spoil the fisher's future catching ability.

3.2.5 Belief in Mystical Powers of Fishing Gears

The Basamia also believe that the fishing gears possess spiritual-mystical power. These among others include fishing nets (*enjero*), baskets (*emikono*), hooks (*amalobo*) and boats (*eryato*). Some have greater and compatible mystical forces that can neutralize the spiritual power of the lake, fish and their inhabiting spirits, whereas others may have less and incompatible power. The ability to yield heavy catches depends on the mystical power held by the fishing gears. Fishing gears which possess greater mystical forces have the ability to overrun the mystical power of the lake and the fish to yield fruitful catches. Similarly, those that possess compatible powers have the capacity to result into good catches. By compatibility, it means that the mystical power of the fishing gears and those of the lake, or the fish match appropriately with each other and allows for a fruitful relationship without repulsing. However, fishing gears that possess less and incompatible powers

find resistance from the mystical forces of the lake and, fish. Such resistance spiritually interrupts the ability of the gears from attracting and catching fish plentifully.

Nonetheless, it should be noted that just as the creatures share the power of their creator God, these gears are made by people, most of whom are experts in different fishing activities like initiating new fishing grounds, preparing fishing gears, actual fish extraction and preservation among others. Therefore, the power held by these gears like boats and nets depends on the powers of the maker, the owner, or the fishers who will use them. If the boat maker (*omuduusa wamaato*) and net architects (*omusokia wenjero*) possess less or incompatible mystical power with the lake, fish, boat owner or the fishermen, then the gears may not do a good job. However, if the maker has a greater force which is compatible with all those parties, then fishing will be fruitful. Such makers get to be known in their entire fishing communities as perfect and fortunate hence getting many customers as compared to the former. This account pointed to the fact that even individual persons have their mystical power which has great influence on the success of their fishing activities, like extraction, preservation, and selling of fish. Fishers who have great and compatible powers with the lake and fish often register heavy catches and are literally considered by others a being luck. This logically means that those who register regular poor harvest are considered unlucky simply because they possess either less or incompatible mystical forces with the lake and fish. That is why Ikechukwu, (2019) guided that there is need for balancing these powers by use of rituals and other practices, something that the Basamia fishers observe.

While explaining on these mystical or personified power retained by individuals, respondents reported that the success of every fisherman depends on his luck. In fact, the Basamia fishers have a saying which goes that, “every fisher catches what belongs to him” (*omunaabi adira eyaye*). If one is not lucky, he can cast his nets in an area and fail to catch any fish, yet when another

(considered to be lucky) comes, he catches a lot from the same place. This means that the fish belonged to the later by virtual of his luck made up of his mystical power. However, this luck is determined by one's life force though influenced by a number of factors including the compatibility with other mystical powers, conduct, and behavior. This is the reason why some fishers hesitate meeting certain people, male or female while preparing for their fishing voyages.

The Basamia are also selective on who they sell their fish, who steps in their boat, who touches their nets and other fishing gears. This is because they are not sure of their force, whether it is of fortune or not, whether they are stronger than theirs or whether they are compatible, to influence their fishing ability (*enaabo*). This also applies to the mongers too, who are selective on who they meet in the morning while heading to the fishing ground/fish landing site, from which fisherman they buy their fish, who they meet as they go to sell their fish, the place where they will sell from, who touches their fish baskets and how their fish will be preserved, prepared and consumed by the consumers. It is astonishing to learn that members of the community have already identified and can tell one who is compatible with them from those who are not. This is because of their experience and long interaction with such persons in the community.

It is up on this ground that most of the fish mongers would situate the people they believed were fortunate, to meet them or to buy their fish first before other customers would. The Basamia embraced the practice of generosity which involved giving or sharing their catch with those they considered being fortunate. This was meant to create a strong interpersonal bond to enable them tap more blessings. The Basamia believe that being generous to expectant and newly delivered mothers and fathers or the elderly would ignite a greater and blissful life force. These categories of people would therefore be given fish with no pay. The believe in the impersonal power is the greatest factor behind the behavior of fishermen and the establishment of fishing related

restrictions in form of taboos, totems and other rituals put in place to ensure a balance between the life force of all the items involved in the fishing practice.

Unfortunately, some evil people use this power to practice witch craft (*oloka/odoola*) and cause harm to others, a common practice among the fishing communities of the Basamia. Some evil persons use other fishers' gears in witchcraft to destroy their fishing proficiency or cause accidents while on the fishing expeditions. The Basamia however believe in the powers of traditional healers (*abalesi*) with ability to disband the witchcraft upon the fishers. They symbolically use model boats (*eryato rya akhabonero*) – a miniature representation of a real fishing boat, kept within a shrine or any other sacred place (see figure 5). It is used for consulting the spirits about someone's' fishing ability (*enabo*) and have it increased in case witchcraft has interfered with it. The powers of these traditional healers (*abalesi*) help them to identify other plants, animals or other items that have greater force than the ones used by the sorceress.

Figure 5 shows a model boat observed during fieldwork at fisher's shrine. This representative boat is believed to act as a spiritual replacement of the actual boat or the fisher's career. During ritual performances, the healer may spiritually cleanse or launch the model as a way of withdrawing curses or misfortunes believed to have affected the actual fishing gear or the fisher themselves. The power of the model lies in its symbolic connection with the actual boat—it becomes the object through which ritual relocation and redistribution of spiritual energies occurs. The Basamia believe that by working through this small-scale representation, misfortune can be redirected or neutralized without needing to physically operate the actual boat on the water. The use of a boat underlines the symbolic significance of the boat as the spiritual carrier of fortune and success to the entire fishing activity.



Figure 5: A model boat in the shrine, used for presenting the fishers plea to the spirits

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

Among the Basamia, fishing is interwoven with a rich spiritual context fixed in four chief beliefs. At the centre of their worldview is the belief in absolute creator God (*Nyasaaye*) who is perceived as the final donor of fish and the guardian of fishing actions. He is assisted by the numerous deities like *Esishuhira banaabi* connected with water bodies and natural forces which are reverend, each believed to impact the richness and victory of fishing. The spirits of ancestors (*emisambwa*) and the broader society spirits also perform a vibrant role, giving safety, control, and at times conveying annoyances when taboos and customs are abandoned. Lastly, is the belief in essential or personified force that supports the whole fishing work. Fishers acknowledge that victory and survival rests on upholding spiritual stability with the hidden energies that sustains nature. These intersected beliefs establish that fishing among the Basamia is not just an economic doing, but a sacred arrangement with the spiritual world.

The belief in the existence and influence of Naysaaye (God) in the fishing activities among Basamia lines up with Mbiti's (1990) wider contention which provides that in African traditional

religions, God is in existence in all facets of life, including work and nature. While the understanding of the Basamia also bring into line what Masango, (2006) and Sussy, et al. (2012) presented in their respective works; indicating that all indigenous Africans across the continent believe that their creator has no form and therefore often takes the formula of any of his creatures; injecting his likeness in them in form of his power, this belief contradicts with that of the Abrahamic religions which stresses that its only man that shares God's likeness and attributes (Genesis 1:26-27). This resultantly indicates that the latter belief puts man in the pinnacle of creation while the former negates such assertions, and instead reveals that all creatures are divinely worthwhile and central to the existence and wellbeing of another.

In accordance with the spirituality of the Basamia, Mbiti, (1989) indicated that the moral conduct that individuals have towards nature was established by God himself, violating them therefore means that one is actually violating the one who institutionalized them (God), and this comes with a lot of punishments related with low productivity, political instability, sickness, epidemics, and barrenness. Such sustainable moral codes which constitute the African spirituality are found in taboos, values, norms and culture of different groups of the African people. Even when Africa is a composition of a variety of societies, each with its way of life, there is something in common among all of them, that which makes them one person, and that is the sacred feeling of the creation (Amaze, 2024). This is the first and the most influential belief common among the Basamia (Africans) up on which the understanding of their indigenous spirituality is established.

In the same way, the belief in the sustenance of deities like “Were” and “*esishuhira banaabi*” among the fishing Basamia brings into line what Olupona's, (2015) provided when he explained that the godly created deities, gods or divinities are closer to God in command and hierarchy either because they were created by God himself or created the universe with Him. This is because they

tend to take on the duty of sustaining what God put in place. They claim the nourishing role which has been widely known for God the Creator; through several attributes that have been formed, defining Him as the sustainer of life. Again, the explanation about the manifestation of Lake Victoria's Arch spirit (*esishuhira banaabi*) of the fishing Basamia approves the opinions made by Tusasiirwe, et al. (2022); Essien (2023); Karamagaze (2014) that these spirits manifest in wind, storms and other natural occurrences. This continues to set them apart as more special spirits unlike the lesser ones like the ancestral and others spirits that reveal themselves to the living people by use of animals like snakes, birds, chicken, and cats. Due to their strong force that is next to that of God, they can only carry themselves through strong natural forces like wind, storms and earthquakes.

The acceptance of the Basamia in the influence of ancestral spirits, with a belief that they are good unless angered by the nasty ways of their successors aligns with what was stated by Knoetze, (2019) and Peter (1993). The Africans have ancestors which keep watching over them at a distance only to reward them with blessing whenever they do well and punish them whenever they deviate. Indeed, when it comes to fishing among the Basamia, their ancestors watch at a distance because they don't even associate with fish direct but can help their living members of the family to excel, truly watching and working from a distance. This belief system supports the notion that fishing victory is not only practical or periodic, but also spiritual, reliant on harmony with the invisible world. Offerings, prayers, or modest acts, before casting nets were defined as a way of understanding these spirits and seeking for their kindness.

3.3. The Basamia Indigenous Fishing Taboos

The fishing communities of the Basamia have established restrictions and regulations in form of taboos and totems to balance and manage the influence of spirits and the life force, also known as the vital power. This is because the management of such forces would endorse the success of all fishing activities carried out on a particular fishing ground. The bountiful nature of these restrictions necessitated the presence of leaders ranging from the local fishing ground headship to the wider community governance. Among these taboos and totems include those that tame the administration of various fishing grounds, performance of various fishing activities and, description of different fishing roles carried out by various categories of people divided long clan, gender, age, marital status and many other factors. This kind of arrangement inclined the selection and preparation of fishing gears, organization of fishing voyages, actual extraction, selling, preservation, management and consumption of fish among the Basamia. This form of disposition ensured ecological balance and created moral order. Although most taboos associated with fishing are common among the Basamia, some of them are relatively diverse as their observation keep altering from one clan or fishing ground to another.

3.3.1 Gender Related Taboos

The fishing Basamia desisted women from actively participating in certain fishing practices especially actual extraction. This fishing activity is preserved for only men since they have greater mystical powers, are strong hearted, pure and energetic to execute the tedious and fear-provoking fishing activities. Such features make the male Basamia better options for fishing, than women who are naturally weak and whose life force keeps abating because of the menstrual blood. According to the indigenous Basamia, the life force is the innermost spiritual force that enables an

individual to connect with and influence the spiritual realm of the natural elements. Men are seen as having stronger mystical resilience and with the capacity to withstand the spiritual risks that accompany fishing. Additionally, women are considered physically weak and less suited for the demanding and sometimes dangerous nature of lake fishing, which involves long hours, unpredictable weather, and physical endurance. In response to this gender dissimilarity, one respondent explained that women have weak bodies and souls and cannot manage the complexity of the lake which is full of scary moments. In further justification, other respondents explained that apart from the menstrual blood which is periodical, all women are like lakes, because they produce water from their genital organs which makes them undesirable by the spirits of the lake. In fact, the Basamia through their indigenous proverbs referred to women as lakes (*omuhasi mwalo*), simply because they discharge water. This means that the female-water discharge like menstrual blood makes women impure and not fit for engaging in a spiritual imbued activity like fishing. The extension of the restriction to the water discharge explained why all women at all times were not allowed on the fishing voyage.

Due to these reasons, women were not allowed to step in the lake water or even come into contact with any fishing gear and passenger vessels. Violation of this restriction brought spiritual punishment upon the offender including persistent poor catches (*esubi*), death by drowning, experience of constant blood flow of the woman and closure of the fishing ground. Women were not allowed to pick fish from the boat or from the mongers' basket. They were only allowed to access the inland fish landing sites to sell their flour, grains and firewood to the fishermen and get fish in return. They were not permitted to go to islands because this would mean sailing in boats, something which was not acceptable. Women were not allowed to access the Island because the fishers' lifestyle was marked by nudity and cultural freedoms that were deemed inappropriate for

women's presence, according to indigenous value systems of the Basamia. While in the islands, they were always naked since there were no markets for clothes, no proper accommodation and other basics of life were not accessible. Therefore, women majorly participated in the post fishing activities like preservation, selling and eating of some species of fish.

Respectively, it was taboo for Basamia women to eat specific species of fish. There were many fish species which were taken to be outside the female diet but preserved for only men. For instance, all snake-like species of fish like catfish (*Oluoyoko*), mudfish (*emonye*), *ehunga* and *esurubana* were spared for only men. Women were forbidden from touching, smelling, cooking and eating these fish species. Violation of this restriction would require a cleansing ritual for women. Therefore, men were required to prepare by themselves these specific species of fish using special cooking pots (*eyika*) and in specific places. In order not to profane the supernatural through contamination of fish with women, specific plates (*ebikaye*) were used to serve the fish eaten by the males only. Because these species were eaten by men alone, they came to be referred to as “the sauce of men” -*eryani ryabasacha*. These special fish species acted as superior meals to male visitors and ordinarily protected the image of men as a special gender in their patriarchal societies. Provision of these special fish species on the menu for guests was a gesture of welcome, greatness, acceptance, high notch reception and hospitality. The hosts would similarly feel great and satisfied that they have been able to show their guests respect and hospitality.

Although the modern attitude towards this aspect has often judged indigenous men for being greedy for these sweet species, the field work investigations about the same provided something different. Some of these species have an undesirable physical outlook and character which would infiltrate the look of their children in future. For instance, *esurubana* with its long mouth, *ehunga*, and *emonye* (mudfish) which look like snakes could gain access in the appearance of their children.

It was upon this fear that pregnant women were not allowed to eat *Esurubana* with its elongated mouth. This is because of the belief that these species hold stronger vital forces than women and could therefore affect them in such ways.

These species have an inner force which is sometimes capable of affecting even the male, especially those who may spend extensive time extracting them. They are generally species that are special and only men with a strong vital force can associate with them. However, it does not explain why the elderly women could not eat since they were not expecting production. Eating these prohibited fish species by women was punishable. For instance, wives and daughters could be flogged by their husbands or fathers respectively. Besides, such women could be mocked, isolated, and announced as confused gendered women, “one who is like men” (*hasaajja*). Such women suffered with singlehood as men feared to have them as their wives.

3.3.2 Age and Disease Related Taboos

Children were also subjected to the same kinds of taboos as applied to women in the Basamia society. This was because children like women were considered spiritually lesser. There are some species which children were prohibited from eating namely, *echachu* and “*ehunga*” which were instead preserved for the elderly. Although some respondents provided that these species have a network of bones which were dangerous to the young, it was explained by elders that the vital force (*amaani*) in those species were greater and capable of causing multiple challenges to the young ones. There are some species of fish which were also taken to be dangerous to people who suffered from various sicknesses. The most common were the lepers who were withdrawn from the consumption of *esebu/ssemutundu* and later Nile perch (*abuga*).

Logically, it has been thought that the chemical composition of such species was venomous to the lepers and could increase their disorder – cuttings on the skin. However, particularly for the case of Nile perch, it was established that the Basamia, just like other African fishing communities despised the Nile perch, a foreign species which caused extinction of their indigenous fish species like haplochromine (*efulu*), African tilapia (*engeke yosaamu*), *esembu*, *embwiru*, and *ebobo* which held a lot of their history, values, culture and spirituality.

Spiritually, most of these native species were renounced because they were taken to be cursed or inhabited by evil spirits. Eating them could therefore increase on the impurity of the sick. This was affirmed by a traditional healer who explained that people who suffered from such “erratic” sickness was impure or cursed. Besides consumption, children whose height could not stretch from one boat seat (*Enuma*) to another were considered not ready for joining the fishing voyages. Their life force was still small and could not much the complexity of the lake. At this stage the young male were equated to and treated like women, even though they could be freed to join the system upon fulfilling the requirements.

3.3.3 Clan and Fish Food Taboos

Fish food restrictions also applied to freshly delivered mothers (*manyuru/ omwibo*) among the Basamia. This however differed from one clan to another. For instance, the *Bamalenge* and *Badepi* clans restrain fresh mothers from eating any species of fish in the first three or four days after the birth of a baby girl or boy respectively. This explains why even their naming system differs from that of other Basamia clans which do not observe this restriction. Traditionally, the naming culture of the Basamia adores the first meal which the mother eats immediately after birth. This adoration is manifested through naming the newly born child after the meal. In regard to fish, the Basamia

clans like *Abenge*, *Abakangala*, *Abanyihodo*, *Abaryari*, *Abatabona*, *Abalundu* among others give their children names like *Mangeni*, in respect to the fish (*enheni*) in general if their fresh delivered wives ate fish as their first meal after birth. Others even go ahead and name their children with the exact species which the mother ate namely, *Hayoko* (cat fish), *Ofulu* (haplochromine), *Abuga* (Nile perch), *Odonge* (lung fish) and *Bobo*, *makanga* among others.

However, since the *Bamalenge* and *Badepi* clan restrain fresh mothers from eating fish, these names are not found among their children. The major reason why mothers in these two clans do not consume fish as their first meal after birth (*oyemulusa/okhwalihisa*) is the bad experience of their ancestors. This bad experience made the *Bamalenge* and *Badepi* clans to exclude themselves from the rest of the Basamia society which pays homage to fish. The elders of these forbidding clans provided that one of their great grandparents is said to have lost a mother and consequently a baby because of eating fish after delivery. The hungry mother was choked with a bone and suffocated to death; the newly born baby also had to die shortly because of the absence of the mother. This angered the *Badepi* and *Bamalenge* people, hence pronouncing that the fish had established a bad relationship with the people of these clans. They declared a regulation forbidding all their freshly delivered wives from eating fish as their first meal. Even after the three or four days, they have to be given herbs in form of charms (*amanyasi*) to cleanse the mothers before they can start eating fish. The belief was that the evil or bad relationship between the fish and these clans could be beaten with these charms made out of plants that carry more powers than those of the fish. Both the mother and the baby had to bathe these charms to be safe and escape the bitter experiences of their ancestors.

Related to the above, the newly born babies among the *Bamayindi* and *Balala* clans are not supposed to eat any fish species before they are ritualized and at a stage when they are able to sit

by themselves and with grown up teeth. While interacting with one of the elders of the *Bamayindi* clan, she informed me that at a time when the baby has reached the rightful stage of being ritualized (*Osindusya*); the aunt of the child is invited to preside over the ritual. Up on her arrival, the mother of the child prepares a tilapia (*Engeke*) the most liked species among the Basamia with millet, sorghum or cassava bread. The aunt then sits with the baby being ritualized, closed doors and shouts three times that “as for us *Bamayindi* we don’t eat fish, how did you begin!” (*Osindusya omwana*). After that the aunt begins to feed the baby as she also eats. This will set the baby to start eating fish throughout. If this ritual is not performed, the *Bamayindi* believe that the child will develop autisms (*esiboororo*). She testified that she has been invited frequently to conduct this ritual to her brothers’ children severally, but those who have ignored it have what she called “very useless children” with low brain power. She also highlighted that even to children who are not *Bayindi* by clan but were named after the *Bamayindi* (mothers’ ancestors) need to fulfill this ritual, or suffer the punishment of the ancestors as earlier stated. However, in case the child mistakenly eats fish at the neighbors’ place, the concerned people are not advised to shout in astonishment or fear, the consequences of eating before rituals are for those who do it deliberately under right conscience.

The reason why the *Bamayindi* and *Balala* established this ritual is related to that of the *Badepi* and *Bamalenge* group, only that for this case, it was the baby who was choked and died. The *Bamayindi* like the *Badepi* considered this an evil relationship which needed their children to grow up and be ritualized first before they begin eating fish to avoid the likely tragedy. Special with the *Bamayindi*, they completely refrained from eating the exact species which the baby was eating before it was choked “*Omufubu*”, a tilapia class with bluish scales around its stomach. The *Banyekera* clan does not consume a tilapia class known as *ekanga*. That is why the male name”

Makanga” given to children whose mothers ate this fish species as their first meal after delivering is not common in this clan.

Lastly is the *Abenge* clan which refrains from eating a snakelike species known as “*Ehunga*” also named “*Ebonehera ya Were*”. It is also believed to have caused death to one of their ancestors who out of shock drowned to death on seeing it, thinking that it was a snake. This therefore ended up becoming their enemy species and they don’t tolerate consuming it at any point. This means that even if fish is one of the most common and delicious sauce of the Basamia, it was not consumed by every person. Its consumption was kept under check due to its cultural and spiritual connections with the Basamia. This connection called for the balance which at several occasions needed cleansing by charms or ritual performance. Without such cleansing procedures, the future fishing abilities of the child would be affected. Additionally, the meal that the newly delivered mothers and babies eat is considered sacred among the Basamia. Mothers have to eat only those foods that are in line with the social-cultural and spiritual structure of the clan. This meal is believed to have a lifelong impact on the mother and the newly born baby. So they are always careful about this food.

The Basamia fishers were also prohibited from eating bloodstained animals like hens, goats, cows, sheep among others, when preparing and conducting fishing journeys only fish was the acceptable delicacy for fishers before they moved into the lake to fish. The lake spirits aborted anyone who ate blood-stained animals and went into the lake for fishing. This is because the lake spirits expect fishers to sacrifice to them those animals as sacrifice. Non-observance of this restriction would arouse the anger of the lake through its spirits to harm the fisher or any other sailor. As a sign of humility to the spirits of the lake, Basamia refrain from associating with all bloody animals while in preparation or conducting any activity associated with the lake. It is up on this ground that the

lake does not allow fishers to invest any capital obtained from a blood animal. For instance, selling domestic animals like cows, goats and chicken to buy fishing gears, like nets, boats, and oars is prohibited.

3.3.4 Fishing Prohibitions to the Basamia Spiritualists and Mediums

Nonetheless, fishing activities including actual fish extraction, preservation, selling and consumption of fish among the Basamia was prohibited from individuals who were inhabited by the family or clan ancestral spirits (*owemisambwa*). This taboo was so strict especially to those who had not yet legitimately or officially launched and ritualized these spirits to welcome them at home (*ohwingisa emisabwa*). Such ritualized Basamia would qualify to become spiritualists or traditional leaders at the beaconing of the spirits. They became mediums of ancestral spirits enabling them to perform extraordinary acts in society. Such spirits did not associate with the fish and therefore this category could not be consumed. They were not even allowed to eat any food prepared from a sauce pan that has ever prepared fish. They developed a high sense for fish in that they could feel its aroma from a distance and be able to identify the species. Eating fish was taken to be a disobedience of the ancestral spirits and was punishable by either reducing on the brain power and or the life essence. While some spiritual mediums provided that they are not totally allowed to consume fish for the whole of their lives, others explained that after legitimization, and ritual cleansing by use of charms, they can eat some species or status (fresh, smoked or smoked) of fish after being directed by the spirits. This inconsistency among the Basamia respondents continued to affirm that there exists a lot of discrepancies among the Basamia, indigenous spirituality, especially in their fishing activity. Most of these disparities were noticed among divergent Basamia clans.

3.3.5 Sex Taboos in Fishing

Sex was yet another forbidden act among the Basamia who went fishing. Sex was considered an atrocity since it involved a deep interaction with women who were taken as a curse or bad omen. Women were even restricted from accessing the island or joining the fishing voyages. The spirits of the lake disliked women and anyone who engaged in sex with the women. Men who engaged in sexual intercourse were to stay away from the lake for seven days on the main land, in addition to undergoing other cleansing rituals. Admission of such a man on the fishing voyage before his cleansing and seven days restriction attracted punishment from the gods of the lake. To maintain cleanliness and harmony with the gods of the lake, newly married men were restricted from fishing for some time. The leadership on the fishing ground led by “*Gabunga*” would not allow such persons for at least seven days before coming back. It was expected that during the restriction period of the newly married men, fellow fishermen provided fish to their families at no cost. Restriction over sex among the fishing Basamia was because of its spiritual attachment. According to the Basamia, sex is more than a physical entertainment. It is a spiritual connection through which a man and woman share their life essence. The Basamia believe that sex leads to the sharing and replication of the soul between the woman and the man, yet that of the former has less fishing abilities. Throughout the field study, sex was out spoken as an abomination.

However, other respondents expressed limitations to this sexual restriction. For example, the influence of deviating against the sex taboo on fishing depended on the individual woman that one slept with. Respondents argued that if the woman’s force was compatible with that of the man, then the fishing activity could thrive, only to fail if it is not. One of the fishers evidenced that he has two wives, however, each time he spends a night with one of the wives, he misses to catch fish or yields poorly. But whenever he sleeps with the other, the next day’s fishing activity goes on

magnificently. So he makes sure that he sleeps with the latter every time he has plans of fishing the following day. This means that the essence of the fisher matched (*bakwaana*) very well with that of the latter wife and not the former. Relating to the works of Ibale, (1998); Adjei, & Sika, (2019); Obiero, et al. (2022); Opondo, (2016) and Subba, et al. (2020), this is one of the most common taboos among most fishing communities of Africa. This denotes that across the African continent, the status of women was commonly perceived, something which logically reflects reliability about the allegation.

3.3.6 Restrictions and Regulations on Fish Handling

In addition, there were a number of restrictions and regulations which were related with the ways of treating, managing or handling the caught fish. These restrictions applied to the fishermen, mongers and the consumers. The restrictions tamed the relationship between the fishing community and the fish themselves. For Instance, fishers, mongers, and consumers of fish are not allowed to carry fish by its tail but the head especially in the eyes or its middle part. It is believed that carrying it by its tail destroys one's ability to catch more fish in future, since the tail is the last part of the fish. The tail is therefore construed as bad omen yet the head with its ability to guide the fish is taken as a blessing. The fishermen and mongers are advised to eat the head and not the tail. It is believed that the head of the fish possesses good powers, capable of infusing the fishers' catching ability, yet the tail possesses evil powers that do the reverse. One of the mongers explained that a fisherman can even slap a fish monger with his oar (*engasi*) if he dare carries his catch by the tail. In line with the above, the Basamia fishers believe that the back bone of the fish has the ability to communicate to the fisherman, whether he will be successful in his next expedition or not. This is determined by the style upon which the bone lands on the ground when

the fisher is consuming fish. If it lands by its shape ends, (standing still) “*okhwema*” it’s a sign of blessing but if it lands flat (falling), “*okhukwa*” then the chances for missing will be high.

According to this taboo, it is portrayed that even if the whole body of an element possesses powers, its different parts within have distinctive competences. This knowledge brings into line the skill of medicine men that may use different parts of the same element to perform different duties. For example, a medicinal plant may have its leaves perform different roles from those of the barks and the roots; a medicinal animal in the same may have its far play different roles than when its blood is used for sacrifice. More related to fish, the Basamia believe that the blood of fish is a mark of success for a fisherman, the more the caught fish bleeds the bigger the success for the next trip and the inverse is factual.

3.3.7 Taboos on Fishing Gears

With regard to management of fishing gears, the Basamia prohibited any person from sitting on the bow (*Ewanga*), staking the oar (*engasi*) by its sharp end of the blade (head) in the ground and inverting the basket (*ofuniiha esidayiro*) used for drawing water from the boat. These acts were forbidden because they were considered to have a negative effect on the powers of those gears. Since the bow plays a big role in helping the boat to cut the water and move forward, some people have logically claimed that the indigenous Basamia simply wanted to have it safe through such restrictions. However, it is spiritually known that the bow as one of the most important parts of the boat has its special powers that can be affected by the conduct of the people using it. For instance, sitting on it, especially when the fisher is not sure about the vital force of the one sitting (lawbreaker), whether it is compatible or not, caused alarm. For the case of the oar (*engasi*) and the basket (*esidayiro*), staking (*ofumitta*) and inverting (*ofunikha*) them respectively involved an

act of overturning, this is seen as an act of pouring or having the blessing closed up or left stake in the ground. Therefore, these gears were handled with a lot of care, sometimes as sacred objects which would affect fishing and other roles as assigned by the practitioners. Proper management of these gears would result to heavy catches whereas poor handling would lead to poor catches.

3.3.8 Other Fishing Prohibitions Related to Ordinary Lifestyle among the Basamia

The Basamia held other prohibitions about fishing which were not directly linked to their spirituality but helped to conserve and protect the fishing related activities as an honorable profession. These include avoidance of alcoholism, smoking, whistling and hooting prohibited on particular fishing grounds. Others were prohibitions of use of soaps, detergents and perfumes around the fishing grounds. While others related to emotional disturbances like fighting and annoyance among others. These unlike the previously discussed, were enforced by community leaders. On alcoholism, fishing community leaders had authority to stop any person who was drunk from joining the fishing expedition. This is because alcoholism was and is characterized by fatigue, which can easily cause danger to the whole fishing voyage. Therefore, during the fishing mission and actual extraction, fishermen were not allowed to take alcohol or any other substance that could drop their conscience and energy. Instead, they were required to be sober and to their full capacity. Apart from destructing one's conscience, smoking and whistling were prohibited because of the belief that the two acts could invite both storms and evil spirits that cause accidents on the lake. While proving this fact, an elder made reference to the traditional Basamia women who invited the wind to assist them in the winnowing of their grains. He therefore affirmed that whistling and smoking was great causers of accidents and this explains why they were retrained.

The Basamia fishing communities also forbid the use of soaps, detergents and strong perfumes around and away from the fishing ground. It was believed that such perfumes would disrupt the scent which attracts fish to the fisher, and the fishing gears as well. This would then result to poor catches since the fish would be able to detect the perfume and run away from the trap. Fishermen were encouraged to use charms of natural plants instead of the strong perfumes to cleanse their fishing gears every time they would detect that they're dirty. They would also restrain from the use of soap for bathing and washing fishing clothes. One of the retired fishers testified that he resumed using soap for bathing and washing hands after retiring from the fishing activities. This has grown to develop a belief among the Basamia that soap is to be avoided when washing their hands after a fish meal in order to ignite the fisher's extraction ability and the mongers' selling power.

The Basamia also prohibited fishermen from getting annoyed, fighting and involvement in any kind of issues which would bring about unstable mind of the fisher. The fishing Basamia believe that the lake through its inhabiting spirits have feelings, they can be happy or annoyed. It is up on this ground that the Basamia also forbid going to the lake or for a fishing expedition when one is annoyed or emotionally disturbed because the lake spirits hate adverse emotions. In case one enters the lake when he is emotionally upset; the lake punishes such with death through accidents or poor harvests. Therefore, whoever had a misunderstanding with one of his closest people, relatives or friends was not allowed to go fishing, to avoid the would-be consequences. A boatswain exposed that this could be one of the reasons why women were not allowed on the islands and in the fishing expeditions for they are so cautious about raising such negative emotions. Fighting was an abomination among the Basamia indigenous fishers, and whoever dared to indulge in such acts was expelled permanently from operating on that specific fishing ground. In some cases, the fisher

would be banned entirely from the activity. These measures against such errant fishers were intended to avoid collective punishment upon the whole fishing community by angered spirits of the lake. Otherwise, such punishments would be manifested in form of accidents, death or barren catches. The indigenous fishing Basamia refrain any stranger from involving himself in any lake related activity, be it fishing or just swimming. It is believed that the evil lake spirits love claiming the lives of new dwellers than the common societal figures, especially those whose history holds no fishing experiences. Such individuals are not allowed to go fishing in order to avoid any harm to the visitors. During the field study trips, my observations included joining fishing voyages; however, some fishermen turned down my request claiming that I will be risking my life.

The findings on fishing taboos among the Basamia show how spirits endeavored to tame the behavior of their living members. It also explains that the peace, and good behaviors enjoyed by the indigenous Basamia fishing communities were not simply results of their own mentoring power but also an impact of the spiritual understanding. This finding also affirms that the values, norms and traditions of the indigenous fishing Basamia just like other African communities are driven from their belief in the existence of the ancestral and communal spirits and the imbalanced vital force which inhabited all elements of nature. To have such forces balanced and appease the spirits, such restrictions and regulations were established so that their fishing activities remain fruitful.

It is important to note that, the concept of fishing taboos among the Basamia also aligns with Magezi, & Magezi's (2017) assertion which marked that Africans believe that the powers in the natural elements are imbalanced since one creature may be privileged with more powers than another. They point out that according to Africans, world realities, both physical and spiritual have powers which are hierarchical in relationship with others that is, one object might have greater powers than the other. In emphasis, Nche, & Ogar, (2024) also elaborated that even among the

similar elements; one may still have more powers than others. This affirms that the fishing activity among the Basamia is entirely based on their sense of spirituality which is not only concerned about oneself but also about caring for the existence and goodness of others through balancing.

Taboos associated with fishing among the Basamia symbolize an intricate spiritual system meant to protect consensus amongst humans, nature, and the divine. These taboos spread to numerous facets of the fishing procedure, counting from sacred limitations on fishing grounds, which are occasionally measured as spiritually strong regions kept for specific rituals or seasons. Handling of extraction equipment, too are matters of taboos, necessitating ritual cleansing or constraints on their usage to avert spiritual impurity. Some fish species are preserved by taboos due to their historical, figurative or ancestral implication, and extracting them could attract bad luck. Correspondingly, definite classes of fishers, like women, children, or the uninitiated traditional religious leaders, face taboos confining their admission to fishing actions at specific times or in certain places. Time based taboos also control fishing period, bring into line human activities with divine schedules that respect spiritual desires, producing seasons and natural measures.

Lastly, eating taboos administers who may consume specific species of fish, usually connected to age, gender, or ritual standings. These taboos do not simply attend to religious purposes; they also accomplish serious environmental roles, preservation of fish populace, controlling public contact to properties, and supporting social unity done through spiritual restraint. Though, the taboos establish a sophisticated indigenous comprehension of sustainability, intensely interwove with their spiritual worldview. The case of the Basamia looks different from that of the indigenous Banyakore and Batoro who holistically banned eating all fish species, disguising them as frogs of the lake (Awal, et al. 2024; Ibale, 1998). He approves the previous assertion which denotes that the common beliefs that are found among the Africans are expressed or practiced somewhat

differently between diverse African communities depending on a variety of factors which are not limited to their environment, rationale and perception.

For instance, it is proven by several scholars that almost all African communities retrain women from actively and fully taking part in social, political, economic, and religious aspects of life (Ibale, 1998; Adjei, & Sika, 2019). However, the perception or reason held for such restriction differs from one society to another. Thus, different reasoning may result to divergent constraints adapted by these African societies. When it comes to the gender of the lake and other natural resources, different communities established dissimilar criteria; as others like the Basamia gender all elements of the universe, others may render them neuter (Adeji & Sika, 2019).

Indeed, the lengthy interface between the Basamia and fish established a strong connection between the two. They are so connected to the extent that the Basamia name their children after fish or after particular species. This pays homage to their land and ancestors who experienced the fish in the same way. This is because some of the names among the Basamia are given following the first meal that the newly delivered mother eats. Besides the naming, some of them composed their clan praise slogans (*ohwelaya*) in regard or with adoration to the fish e.g. the *Abenge* clan praise themselves through the haplochromine (*efulu*) as “*Adangi fulu buyuke*”. The indigenous Basamia fishing communities learnt of the fish and got reliable knowledge about these aquatic species; their ecology, different classes, their behavior, breeding format and place, movement style, body formation, their food, chemical composition and their otherworldliness among others. They based on this familiarity to compare their community structures, values, norms and spirituality to choose the species which they would associate with depending on their characters – which ones to eat preserve or avoid entirely. Some of the relationships were based on the experiences which the Basamia have with some of these species.

Although Most of the experiences were bad, this concept indicates that the Basamia have a strong bond with the fish, which is unforgettable, only being transmitted from one generation to another throughout centuries. These cut across many Basamia subgroups or clans. For instance, there are a few clans among the Basamia that completely refrain eating certain fish species, yet others restrict the consumption of fish while at certain stages of life due to their historical experiences with these fish species. These very experiences gave them the ground up on which the rituals were designed to ensure that the fishing Basamia balance their powers with those of the lake and its possessions.

Whereas many taboos in Basamia fishing communities are enclosed in spiritual realm, they concurrently work as instruments of preserving social discipline, unity and safety. The prohibition of drunk or emotionally unsteady individuals from joining fishing voyages was not only about spiritual contamination but also about upholding concentration, collaboration, and mutual well-being of the fishers. In this sense, taboos replicate implanted social codes for suitable behavior within communal labor schemes like fishing, guaranteeing members' psychological and physical preparation for the challenging and uncertain work environments like the lake. For instance, although fishers always attribute boat accidents and meager catches to unhappy spirits responding to alcoholism or smoking, such beliefs can also be construed through a communal health and safety lens. Alcohol damages organization, decision-making, and response time, which are vital for traversing erratic lake environments.

Correspondingly, smoking may disturb respiratory effectiveness and attentiveness. In high-risk situation like fishing, especially during night voyages or in stormy water, alcoholism expressively increases the possibility of drowning, and injury through miscalculation. Thus, although spirits are quoted as insulted by these actions, the practical consequence like the decrease of mental and

physical ability, explains the prohibition even from a logical outlook. Additionally, emotional instability—mainly annoyance is a common risk element in decision-making under stress. On water, where decisions must be well-timed and shared, an annoyed fisherman may repel group decisions, misunderstanding signs from nature or act thoughtlessly. Among the Basamia, the elimination of annoyed persons was not only spiritualized but worked as a protection against rash and dangerous conduct. So annoyance taboos work both as spiritual rationality and a practical protection drive. Therefore, outside the fear of spiritual retribution, these proscriptions strengthened normative conduct necessary for communal survival, teamwork and protection.

3.4 Rituals that Sustain Fishing among the Basamia

To ensure proper balancing of the powers instigated by the creating authority, sustaining deities, ancestral spirits and the vital forces, the Basamia performed a number of rituals throughout the fishing practice. These rituals are performed from the time of preparing fishing gears, preparation of fishing voyages, during actual extraction and after extraction. They perform these rituals frequently specially to protect the fishers from the danger of the evil spirits. These fishing rituals are performed with the offering of sacrifices, petitions and prayers to the supernatural, consulting of the traditional healers, libation, veneration and dedication among others. The fishing rituals have been categorized into commencement, rejuvenation, cleansing and sending off the fallen fishers and fishing gears like boats and nets as untaken below;

3.4.1 Ritual of Initiation into Fishing – *Ohwingisa Omunaabi*

For commencement, the fishing Basamia ritually initiate new fishers into the new career spiritually. This ritual is known as “*ohwingisa omunaabi*” – ushering in a new fisherman. This ritual was carried out to ensure that the new fisher is cleansed off the evil supremacies (*embowo*

mbi) that he could have obtained through his previous interactions with the rest of the natural elements. The ritual also helps to balance his natural life force with those of the lake, fish, fishing gears, mongers and fellow fishers. Once performed, this ritual sets the fishers for only successful fishing expeditions, unless interrupted by other continuing internal or external factors. By internal factors, the Basamia intend to refer to the conduct and behavior of the fisherman himself in relation with the lake, fish, mongers, water spirits and fellow fishermen.

For the external factors, they refer to the works of the evil powers most of which are initiated by the wicked witches (*odoola/oloka*). Besides success, the ritual would act as an avenue where the new fisher would be introduced to the local fishing ground's leadership, headed by *Gabunga* and the rest of the fishers in that community; for official acceptance and recognition. The rituals would also be used to train the new fishers about the different aspects of fishing and creating a social bond with both lake spirits and fellow fishers. He would be briefed about the history, values, norms, Dos and Dots of that particular fishing ground to avoid violating both social regulations and the spiritual limitations laid by the gods.

During evening hours, when all other fishers of the fishing ground have gathered on the landing site, and when the spirits of the lake (*ebikenyi*) are awake, the *Gabunga* would introduce the anticipating fisher to the rest of the senior members who would also joyfully receive him with shouts of pleasure and immediately start on the training. They would for instance be trained how to hold the oar (*engasi*), how to swim (*osooga*) in case of an accident and how to keep the secret of the lake (*esyaama sye nyaanja*). For instance, when all members of the fishing voyage coincidentally see a dead body, they are supposed to sail next, knock it with the oar and warn it from following them. However, if only one person sees and the rest don't, he is supposed to keep quiet, thus keeping the secret of the lake. Nevertheless, as the training goes on, the most previously

initiated fisher would be organizing a meal composed of all available species of fish, prepared together. This would be accompanied with millet, sorghum or cassava bread. After the *Gabunga*'s introduction and training session, the entire fishing unit would commune for a meal to ensure that the bond between the new fisher and the senior members is cemented.

After the meal, the new fisher would be instructed by the *Gabunga* to carry the left overs in the cooking pot (*eyika*) on his head, with one half burnt wood or ember, mingling stick plus the oar. He then starts singing loudly to the spirits of that specific fishing ground that “it is my stomach that has brought me to get part of your wealth...!” (*enda yandetta ohulya emyandu...!*). They would sing while hitting on the boat by the oar and mentioning the name of the landing site, in adoration since most of them were named after their founding ancestors, like Aloboryo landing site in Maruba. This would be accompanied with the Basamia traditional dance known as “*Owaro*” in a way of introducing himself to the spirit, justifying his coming, adoring them, seeking for acceptance and success. The *Gabunga* would then tie a skull of the fish (mostly that of the catfish “*oluyoko*”) to glue the bond for seven days. After the seven days, the new fisher would take back the skull to the *Gabunga* and then enter the waters for successful extractions. They mostly used the skull of the catfish because it was known for having a greater essence more than other fish species.

The act was believed to transmit the mystical power, intelligence and aquatic flexibility of the catfish to the new fisher, mystically bringing him into line with the rhythms and needs of the lake. As demonstrated in figure 6, the catfish skull used in this ritual is cautiously well-kept and treated with veneration, underlining its cultural and spiritual implication in making the fisher ready and safe for successful expeditions.



Figure 6: A skull of the cat fish used in the fishers' inauguration ritual

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

Before this ritual, no one was allowed by the strict *Gabunga's* committee members to join any fishing voyage. However, if the fisher felt that his fishing efficacy had reduced, and believed that something wrong had happened to him, they now visited the traditional healers (*abalesi*) for consultation and help. In case the healer discovered that there was a certain problem in form of any evil force, or a good force that needed to be recognized, a cleansing ritual would be conducted. This would involve offering of either chicken (*engoho*) or goat (*embusi*) sacrifices to the spirits for cleansing the fisher. He would be given some charms, put in his body by cuts (*osandaka*), or placed on the fishing gears like boats and nets, to protect him from the influence of evil powers and rejuvenate his fishing abilities (*enabo*).

3.4.2 Rituals of Inaugurating Fishing Gears (*osobakira*)

The fishing Basamia found importance in spiritually setting their fishing gears for future work. Being a very important gear, the Basamia never pushed their fishing boats to the water before ritualizing them. This ritual was known as, *okhukomera* or *okhwisira eryato*. This was meant to

ensure that the evil spirits that could have inhabited the trees from which the timbers that made the boat were obtained be cleansed. While exploring about the reasons why the fishers conduct this boat initiation rituals, respondents explained that, trees like other natural elements obtain powers which need to be either recognized or alleviated to match the forces and purpose of the practitioners. They supplemented that some of the trees inhabit spirits of the dead, since several of them grew on tombs, yet others were used to commit evils like suicide. Therefore, such trees when used for making boats need to be sacrificed for, so that they plead with the spirits for forgiveness and to allow them use their trees for timber. This rests the spirits from being angered and causing harm to the fishers. Besides, this ritual introduces the new boat to the spirits and the lake for recognition, acceptance, and balancing of the powers held by the boat to match those of the lake, fish and fishers. A boat maker explained that if the boat is simply rushed from the maker to the waters, it is most likely to cause a lot of accidents because of the conflicting diverse powers of the natural elements and other spirits involved. This meant that the spirits of the boat might attempt to claim blood by its self, thus to avoid this; they conduct this ritual and officially offer blood to this boat beforehand.

After the boat maker (*omuduusa*) has finished making the boat (*eryato*), the boat owner would arrange for the ritual ceremony to initiate the new boat for the business. He would inform all members of the fishing ground from where the boat will operate, through the local leadership headed by *Gabunga* to gather and take part in the ritual. Upon the arrival of the boat on the lake shore, the boat maker would push the boat in the shallow waters from where the rituals would partake by its stern or helm (*okwisira esilumba*), he then enters in the boat, stepping it sideways (*oseena eryato*) to check and affirm to the gathering that the boat is well made, it balances on the water and is safe for use after ritual performance. At this point, the boat maker's duty would be

complete and was given chicken as payment. After this, another chicken or goat would be stunned or partly cut, at once and left to struggle for its life and later die in the boat (sacrificing for the boat, “*obakasa*”). The struggling would enable the gods to take the animals’ life by themselves and help the sacrifice to sprinkle blood throughout the boat. This sprinkled blood cleanses the boat. However, the direction which the sacrificial animal faces after death was a critical spiritual concern; it signified either success or failure. For instance, if the animal would die facing the east, it was taken to be a sign of success while the west was interpreted as bad omen.

After the death of the animal, a small piece of the skin would be cut and put on the boat. The body would be roasted and consumed by the attendants of the ritual. After offering the sacrifices, the Basamia could offer libation to the spirits that inhabit the boat through a process known as *Opiida*. Under this process, the clan leader (*omuhulundu woluya*) could hold local brew (*amalwa kubure*) and charms in the mouth and sprinkle them in the boat, as an offer to the spirits. The remaining local brew would be taken by the attendants of the ritual. The usefulness of elders in the sacrificial festivals of the Basamia is similar to many other African tribes especially the fishing communities in Central Africa as provided by (Adjei, & Sika, 2019).

They would then prepare a sport drive to test the boats capability. The new boat would be put in the middle of two working boats to compete sailing on a given distance. A sister to the owner of the new boat would sit on the front chair “*enuma yemberi*”, cheering it as she praises their ancestors, including those named after the boat. Upon anchoring on the shore, the sister would speak to the boat pleading with it to do only good to her brother, not cause accidents, but always register good catches, so that their clan at large is not humiliated and mocked by others. The other people on the shore would sing traditional Basamia weeding songs, those they would sing to the

girls who were going for marriage. This means that this ritual was equated to an act of sending a girl for marriage or for a serious undertaking.

It was up on this ground that most of the Basamia fishers named their boats after their clan names but in adoration to women and drew their totems on them. For example, if the boat owner is “*Omutabona*” by clan, then the boat will be named “*Natabona*”. The feminine clan names were also believed to evoke fruitfulness, nurture, and continuity, thus aligning the boat with generative forces of nature which are related to those of female gender, characterized with fertility, and the nurturing obligation. However, others went on and named their boats after their, arch spirit/deity (Were), adored ancestors, biological parents or wives but not children. Such fishers believed that the spirits of these ancestors would protect their boats from any threat like theft and accidents, and reinforce good catches. Such boats had the ability to speak, cry or notify their owners in case of any danger. In case these boats could no longer register good catches, the fishers could talk to these boats addressing them as their parents while pleading for provision like parents do to their children. The Basamia believe that they could hear and resultantly respond with catch heavily.

Owners of boats which were named after their parents could not leave them on the shores after getting worn-out, as this could be interpreted as an act of abandoning ancestors or parents when they grow old and ineffective. They could at least carry the backbone of the boat back home, to symbolize that they have taken back their ancestors at home. However, those who only named their boats after their clan names in regard to women, considered these boats to be girls who had been married or sent out on a permanent mission and could therefore not be taken back home, even after being worn-out. They believe that it is wrong in their setting to bring back a married girl back to her parents’ home simply because they are old or ineffective. Such boats would remain on the lake shores forever.

All the fish that could be caught by the new boat on its first expedition (*esabakira* or *omwiso*) would be given to the sister who played the role of cheering the new boat. If they were too many, she was the one to prepare them and serve all the attendants of the ceremony. This was meant to make her happy so that her “daughter” (the boat) would operate successfully. It was believed that if this sister (the boat’s aunt) was not happy, the “daughter” would not function vividly. In case the boat was not performing well, the sister would be invited to plead with it and conduct libation, by sprinkling local brew with her mouth (*opiida amalwa*) on the boat as a way of veneration. According to them, it would eventually work out. In case of any persistence, the owner would follow the procedure earlier on described about rejuvenation of the fishermen to revive the capabilities of his boat.

This also means that the indigenous Basamia performed ritual cleansing of the fishing gears every time they would feel like they are reducing on their fishing abilities. The participation of women in this ritual creates a lot of fulfillments about the complementary role played by women in ritual performance and indigenous spirituality of the Basamia that were discussed earlier. In response to this concern, it was elucidated that, this act needed a woman because it was equated to a traditional wedding ceremony and that only sisters who were not in the menstrual period could be invited, least of that, the boat’s performance would be affected. Beyond this ritual, women were not entertained in the subsequent actual fishing practices.

3.4.3 Rituals for Drowned Fishermen

To maintain the efficacy of the lake, the fish, the fishing gears and the fishermen themselves, the Basamia carried out spiritual sendoff of fellow fishermen who died while fishing—downed in the lake. This was done to ensure that the spirits of the diseased do not remain lingering on the waters

to cause harm to others. It was believed that spirits that were not ritualized are the ones that always turn out to become evil. Therefore, to subdue this, the bodies of the fallen fishers were searched for, under the guidance of the *Gabunga*, and in all ways they had to find them. Sometimes the search for bodies called for the use of external powers deployed by the diviners (*abahingi*). The respondents stated that the Basamia fishing communities have experts who understand the numinous of the lake, for instance, they believe that the dead bodies oppose the direction of the wind, when it blows to the west, the bodies will float taking the East and vice versa.

Before the bodies were found, all the survivors were meant to remain on the shore. Going to their homes would mean taking the spirit of their fallen colleague(s) to their homes. When found, the body would be taken home for burial within the presence of the survivors. They were meant to witness the leave-taking of their colleague and wish him a farewell, prompting him not to follow them for they will be joining him soon. After, the survivors and the boat would be cleansed by a sacrifice of a hen to ensure that any stain of evil powers from the spirit of the diseased never shadows them. After burial the family of the diseased would get back to the lake and under the guidance of the traditional healer (*omulesi*) catch and bring back the spirit at home, into his grave. This ritual affirms the previous discussion which provided that the Basamia really believe in the existence of spirits which inhabited natural elements like human beings. As the body dies, the souls remain to influence the life of the living.

However, the hectic involvement of trapping the soul made some clans among the Basamia to stop burying the fallen fishers in their family burial chamber but on the lake shores. The boats which were used to carry the dead bodies or those that caused accidents were not supposed to anchor on the main shores. The fishers would clear another place on which they could anchor. The style of anchoring was also different; this time round, the boat captain (*omukobya*) would anchor using its

back side or a stern/helm (*esilumba*) instead of the bow (*ewanga*) like it is always done. This was meant to ensure that the main shore remains pure, stainless and safe for conducting all the fishing activities. It was established that the indigenous Basamia fishers also carried out rejuvenation rituals to cleanse their fishing grounds every time they realized that it was not working right for them. This ritual was known as (*ofumula omwalo*). The local Leadership led by *omutaha* and *Gabunga* would mobilize for resources from all fishers to buy a sheep for sacrificing to the spirits of the waters so that they can forgive their successors in case they wronged them.

3.4.4 Ritual Performance before a Fishing Voyage

Finally, before the Basamia fishers would set off for a fishing journey, they would conduct prayers to their God, asking him to bless them with heavy catches. Others would offer sacrifices in order to make the spirits of the lake happy and recompense them with good harvests. Others could venerate the lake, through conducting libation to the spirits, submitting diverse offertories among others. Many of them invited their ancestors to follow them on their expeditions by throwing some soils in the lake, picked from the place where the boat back-bone was fastening. This expression is in direct connection with what Opondo, (2016) stressed about the Luo fishers of Kenya who sprinkle some water on the lake to venerate their spirits. The beliefs, taboos, totems, and rituals associated with fishing among the Basamia were many, not only limited to the above. They were established long time ago by forbearers of this land and have kept guiding the judgment of the actions, conduct and behavior of the fishing communities. They have been laid down to the young generations through their proverbs, riddles, folktales and songs, though with some shifts due to the changes that comes with the new generations.

Important to note is that these rituals continue to diversify the fishing practices from a merely an economic activity as it is perceived by many, to an activity which is vital in boosting communal or societal attachment and bond among common members. This aligns with what Nakiyende, et al (2023) Nunno et al., (2015); Leveque, (2003); Adjei & Sika, (2019) provided in their work, affirming that several fishing communities of Africa conduct numerous rituals before during and after fishing exercises. Similarly, according to Tour Nigeria, the Nigerian fishers of Kebbi state annually perform the Argungu festival in every February, a month that marks the end of the farming season and the start of the fishing period. It takes place for four days with sport displays, traditional Kebbawa entertainment and fishing competitions in Meta Fedan River.

These indicates that the Basamia indigenous spiritual fishing rituals form an acutely deep-rooted spiritual background that does not merely manage the admission of persons into the fishing job but also maintains their continuous victory and revitalization within it. Instigation rituals spot the sanctified commencement of fishermen and extraction gears, signifying the reception of new members into the divine economy of the waters. Renewal rituals, on the other hand are central for reinstating strength and spiritual favor to both fishermen and their gears when prosperity deteriorates. Cleaning rituals moreover safeguards the elimination of spiritual contaminations, sustaining the pureness and efficacy of fishing actions. The rituals performed before setting for fishing voyages are crucial in ensuring that the fishing activity is fruitful. These rituals demonstrate the deep relationship that exists amongst spiritual welfare, communal practices, and ecological stewardship, hence crafting the basis for comprehending the wider indigenous spirituality that reinforces the fishing customs among Basamia.

3.5 Conclusion

The spiritual background that surrounds fishing among the Basamia institutes a deep and complex connection between the people, their environment, and the invisible forces they worship. The belief in the transcendent being, divinities/gods, ancestral and community spirit, and the vital force supports every aspect of fishing among the Basamia, offering both secular and sacred meaning or implication to what might then look as only an economic activity to people of this contemporary generation, especially those that hold to the western ideologies. The taboos associated to their fishing grounds, equipment's, fish types, times, and consumption helped not only to impose divine discipline but also to promoted environmental conservation and strengthened social order among the Basamia. Nonetheless, rituals connected with the commencement, rebuilding, and cleansing of fishing events replicated the society's continuous power and willingness to keep coherence with the spiritual world. These beliefs, prohibitions, and practices, therefore inform our study when it demonstrates that fishing among the Basamia was and is spiritually organized. It is dynamic, with numerous fragments that fit directly to each other. This consideration lays a steady base for the subsequent chapter which will focus on examining how these spiritual traditions of the Basamia help in sustaining the fishing occupation.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE BASAMIA INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE FISHING

4.1 Introduction

As earlier on pondered, fishing among the Basamia, is not simply a fiscal doing; it is a fundamental part of their spiritual and cultural distinctiveness. Their belief system connects the natural world, including bodies of water and marine life, with sacred meaning. Through a profound spiritual link with the environment, the Basamia have advanced supportable fishing practices that are embedded in respect, mutual benefit, and steadiness. The spiritual practices surrounding fishing are not only about veneration of the fish as sentient but also about upholding the health and permanence of the fish populations. Rituals, taboos and sacred trainings handed down through generations direct the Basamia in their connections with nature, warranting that fishing remains a sustainable activity that supports both their spiritual beliefs and their community's means of support. These practices demonstrate how indigenous knowledge systems knotted with spirituality; promote environmental stewardship and long-term ecological health.

4.2 Spiritual-Based Respect and the Creation of Fishing Seasons and Banns

Candidly, the indigenous spiritual beliefs of the Basamia associated with fishing established a stage up on which respect for water bodies and all aquatic lives was recognized. This respect was as a result of the tamed behavior, conduct and actions of the fishers towards their natural surroundings. For instance, the belief in the creational efforts of God, the existence of water deities, spirits and the vital force tamed the interaction of the Basamia with their natural elements – the lake and fish in this case. They considered themselves as simply stewards who were meant to keep the creations of God. Reporting on this matter, an elder explained that the lake has its owner,

(*Nysaaye*). Due to this consideration, the Basamia refrained from polluting the lake, and its possessions. For instance, catching the small sizes of fish were also considered to be young was termed as an act of destroying God's creatures. In fact, it was shame for any man to return from a fishing voyage with small sized fish. All fishermen took pride in catching big sizes and could be praised by others as those who possessed great life forces. To avoid the shame of catching small sizes, the indigenous Basamia kept shifting on the fishing gears depending on the seasons, during rainy seasons when the water level/volume has increased and dry seasons when the water was warm (*kaliro*). They used gears that were very selective, in order to trap only big sizes. This is because during these two seasons, a lot of fish including the small and young ones would be swimming on the near surface of the water. When the situations normalized, they would also change the gears and now use those that could with ease catch the big fish only. This is what partly resulted to observance of seasons and bans in the fishing practices of the Basamia in Uganda. This shows that instead of having very long and total stoppage against fish extraction, some of the fishing seasons and bans among the Basamia were instead directed to the fishing gears, depending on the climatic changes.

In response to the concept of respect for the creatures of God, the Basamia fishers would throw back the small sizes of fish which were mistakenly caught by their unselective gears back to the waters. Such small sizes had no market because even the consumers would not buy them. They created an undesirable sensation about catching and eating small sizes of fish. This is the major reason why they creatively came up with selective and sustainable fishing gears like permanent baskets (*Ehwira*), made of reeds planted in to the shallow waters hooks (*Amalobo*), movable baskets (*emikono*) or "*Amawuli*" and sometimes the use of natural poisons (*obutwa*) made out of plants like "*Omuluhu*". These poisons were not damaging to the fish and the entire marine life

unlike the biochemical ones used today. The natural ones on the contrary would simply paralyze the fish for a short period of time and get back to normal after a while. While they are paralyzed, the fishers could use this time to catch the big species that they desired and throw back the small ones. By these methods, the Basamia indigenous fishers didn't go fishing in deep water but sustainably caught fish around the shallow areas around the shores. This spiritual or sacred based respect made the indigenous Basamia to refrain from throwing peripheral materials in the lake. This explains why fishing during the start of the harvest season; when there was a lot of polluted materials emanating from crop husks was not allowed. According to the Basamia fishers, the most dangerous ones which the spirits of the waters didn't associate with were the maize cobs. This is because maize is a foreign crop without any spiritual or cultural association with the lake spirits.

During this time, People would withdraw from the lake and go back to their homes to conduct a ritual of the new foods known as *Ohweselula*, before they could return to the lake. This generated sustainable fishing seasons and bans that checked against the rate of extraction annually and supportively respected the fish breeding cycles. This aligns with what Dounias, et'al, (2016) provided when he rightly stressed in his literature that fishing in Africa was never a fulltime job. In fact, during this time, the indigenous Basamia would participate in other economic activities like farming or preparing their fishing gears like weaving of the baskets. This enabled them to establish a diversified system of sustenance that reduced pressure and over reliance or exploitation of one source.

This approach is opposed to the case today, where fishers exhaust the lake throughout the year, and without any supportive and alternative source of income. Additionally, the belief that some water spirits which inhabit some fishing grounds refrain the importation of some peripheral elements; which they believe are incompatible and impure to them also helped the Basamia to keep

their fishing grounds clean and uncontaminated with crops like beans, potatoes, *matooke*, among others. These kept the lakes spiritually and organically clean without polluted deposits; incomparable to the situation nowadays. In relation to what Sussy, et al. (2012) emphasized about the indigenous Kenyan fishers, the belief in the inhabitation of spirits made some Basamia dominated fishing grounds to be consecrated and declared out of bounds to fishers' access. Some were to be evaded during a specific period of time while others were completely banned from the fishers' entree. This helped to maintain such places which would now act as breeding places for the fish. This reinforced the maintenance of the fish stock generation. A case in point is the Sumba fishing grounds which were abstained due to the belief in the harsh spirits which could down fishers in that area.

In the same way, the belief that the stones of the water (*ebyema*) like *Aloboryo*'s stone in Maruba and *Sumba* are inhabited by spirits and therefore out of bounds to fishers, made such areas very critical in controlling fish extraction and maintaining the fish stock. While responding to this, fishers admitted that the fish population around the stones is higher than in other areas free from stones. They added that when a fisherman fails to catch fish from other places and tries to sail about the stones, they at least get something for food (*esibelo*). However, they only extract fish around the stone – some distance away from it but not upon it. The behavior of frequenting the lake for extraction and correspondingly increasing on withdrawal rate was checked against by the belief in the existence of spirits of the lake. These spirits didn't allow fishermen to spend long hours on the lake—especially in the night. For instance, the fishers were only allowed to carry out their fishing activities during day; when these spirits (*ebikenyi*) were resting (sleeping), tired from the nighttime burden. By late evening, they would be awake and didn't like any disturbance from the fishers. Fishers rushed to vacate the waters in time to avoid testing the ruthlessness of the

spirits. This partly explains why the expressions like “over fishing are contemporary, fishermen only extracted fish for a given epoch but not treating every period of the day as extraction time. To mark with concern, fishing with lights was not accepted, this lights would disturb the spirits somehow. This helped to manage the extraction rate and preserve the fish population or stock.

The belief that different elements of nature possess different vital forces with ability to influence the being of others was yet another sustainable credence scheme upheld by the fishing Basamia. While pondering on the same, one of the traditional healers explained that even among the spirits, there are those that are strong than others, and can stop their function, ability or affect them in one way or another. Lining up with this belief, there is numeral fish species which were preserved because of their good or bad vital forces, hence managing ecological balance. The belief that some species like mud fish and cat fish have somewhat evil spirits that can spoil ones fishing ability and have devastating effects on the fishers by disguise preserved their extinction. Few fishers were willing to patronize or specialize in the extraction of these species, thus rendering them the opportunity to survive up to date. This partly justifies why these species are to some extent rear in fish stalls as compared to other species which have been over extracted because they don't retain such petrifying powers.

In respect to this, the feeling that some mainland plants are incompatible with the lake and cannot be used for fastening fish preserved those plants from extinction. Only aquatic plants like papyrus were subjected in the fishing related activities. Although this in turn exerted a lot of pressure on these aquatic plants and led to their destruction, they reserved them from being encroached on by other plants which could overtake them by their diverse propagation systems. It is also attention-grabbing to ascertain that by this belief, the indigenous Basamia fisher men only utilized their locally available materials for making their fishing gears, like boats, baskets for catching and

carrying fish. This eliminated other elements that could pollute the lake. The same belief helped in preserving the stones found in the lakes because they were considered sacred.

Leaving alone the fact that these stones pose difficulty in exploiting them, the Basamia developed adoration for these stones and could not tamper with them. ATR practitioners only picked small particles of these stones for divination purposes. Although this would somehow exploit them, the rate at which this would be correct is outcompeted by the present quarrying systems. This has kept these stones in existence, acting as breeding and hiding places for the fish during warm seasons. The same arrangement with intent checked against accidents most of which were registered due sailing across these stones, since they are known for being too slick.

The behavior and attitude of fishers among the Basamia fishing communities was governed by the systems of belief. To take a case about the belief in the existence of the vital force, all fishers respected each other because they acknowledged that each of them had an impact on the life and being of another. This prompted them to consider others with dignity and sacredness since most of them would determine their success in fishing. This explains why they embraced the value of giving (generosity) to those whom they believed had good and attuned life forces that could undeniably influence their fishing ability. They gave the elderly, the expecting and postpartum parent's fish freely, thus preventing them from going to the lake. This behavior encouraged the elderly to retire from fishing early since their survival was well assured. By so doing, the number of fishers kept reducing day and night, thus the smaller the number of extractors, the lesser the quantity of the extract. The same belief limited on the market for fish, since fishers had a few people whom they would sell their fish. Only those whose vital forces well-matched the ones of the fishers would be sold fish. They were always mindful of who stepped in their boat, who bought

their fish and how would they preserve them. Once they were not sure of the person, they could not accept to sell him/her their fish.

This partly explains the reason why fishers could only fish or catch what was objectively enough for their designated clients. This respected the African discipline of extracting from the environment what is only sufficient for the society's survival as presented by Ogungbemi, (1997). It also justifies why most scholars have alluded that fishing among the Africans was not simply an economic activity but an integral part of their spiritual life (Bene & Friend, 2011; Brummet & Williams, 2000; Jul-Larsen et al., 2003 and FAO, 2018). Nonetheless, this act checked on the extraction quantity and preserved the fish hence ensuring a high fish population.

To keep the spirits of the lake happy, the fishers accredited the significance of self-responsibility in order to maintain the lake because the wrath of these spirits would sometimes castigate the entire community. Africans believed that the inhabiting spirits of the lake and other aquatic lives would either be happy or annoyed, depending on the conduct of the community members. This belief forced each and every fisher to sensitize one another; especially the young and new fishers about the restrictions of the lake like whistling, smoking and alcoholism. This sense of responsibility is a fundamental moral code that can cultivate a big space towards the struggle of ensuring sustainability of the lakes and the entire aquatic ecology.

The other aspect that most scholars have not expressed about, when discussing about how sustainable indigenous spiritual traditions are toward the aquatic ecology is the reality of fear. The belief in the existence of powers in general; from God, deities, spirits and the animated force conveys fear, obsession or phobia to the fishers, off-putting them from sailing on the waters in the night and behaving contrary to the complete instructions believed to have been given to them either

by the water spirits or their ancestors. The reality of fear required them to observe the restrictions and regulations established in form of taboos, totems, in order to escape the fury of these powers. Whether the idea was established from a negative ground, it was a key factor that sustained our ecology than when this reality has disappeared. For instance, acknowledging that the arch spirit of waters hates acts of witch craft, many forbid it basically to dodge his wrath. In the same line, fishermen preserved the other aquatic creatures like the monitor lizards which they believed were inhabited by the spirits of the lake, they feared beating or killing them because of the consequences such an act carried.

Indeed, the belief structures of the Basamia played critical parts in the formation of sanctified and cherished fishing grounds, the protection of particular fish species, other marine lives and the guideline for fishing activities through prohibitions and seasonal constraints. These practices were deep-rooted in the societal spiritual consideration that natural resources were donations from the greater authorities and therefore required to be preserved with respect and attention. Similar designs have been detected in other indigenous societies, where sanctity directed resource use and management, stimulating preservation through traditionally fixed rubrics. As numerous researchers have noted, such spiritually authorized practices not simply conserved environmental balance but also strengthened communal unity and a maintainable connection with the ecology.

Therefore according to the Basamia, spirituality did not merely appraise beliefs but transformed into noticeable maintenance approaches that protected fishing livelihoods for years. This is similar to what fishing communities in Ghana of West Africa and Kenya did as indicated by Nunno, et'al, (2015) and Opondo, (2016) respectively. Their beliefs also helped them to come up with sacred and respected fishing zones, fish species and creation of fishing banns and seasons. Divergent from these other African fishing communities, the fishing seasons and banns among the Basamia were

instead directed to the fishing gears and not total bans on the entire fishing practice like it was the case in most West, South and Central African fishing communities (Dounias, et'al, 2016; Quintana & Horton, 2014). This continues to affirm the uniformity of the African culture, tradition and religion but also pays respect to the unique elements that keep advancing in particular communities.

4.3. Spirituality and the Reduction on Fish Extraction and Consumption

Additionally, the demand, market or consumption of fish largely condensed due to the limitations that were attached on the fish eating related taboos and totems cherished by certain communities. This in one way or another regulated the extraction quantities and inversely helped to maintain the fish population and sustainability of some fish species, especially those whose breeding elegance was low. For instance, species which were not eaten by women experienced minimal extraction rates as compared to those that were consumed by all sorts of people. In the same way, diverse species which were respected or hated by particular tribes are not profoundly extracted. Traditional healers, postpartum mothers, and children in certain clans that desisted from eating fish also minimized on the extraction of more fish. This helped in maintaining the balance between these fish species and in various ways sustained the fishing practices to ensure its continuity and longevity.

The number of extractors among the Basamia was kept under check or scrutiny because of the beliefs and rituals that were involved in the fishing practices. The reduction on the number of fishing practitioners automatically meant reduction on the rate of extraction itself. By so doing, the reappearance of the term “overfishing” which has become more less a song among the recent stake holders of the fisheries industry was un heard of in the indigenous fishing communities of

the Basamia. For example, the women, newly married men, those who had engaged in sexual intercourse, those who had misunderstandings and traditional healers were not allowed to join any fishing voyage as devoid by their clan spirits or ancestors and the lake spirits/deities.

Again, those who were not ritualized and therefore not known by the local leadership (*Gabunga*), were not allowed conducting fishing and the same applied to strangers or foreigners for they were restricted from joining the fishing voyages. It was on this fact that the Basamia fishing communities would limit the number of extractors. Correspondingly, the propensity of illegal fishing was never a reality among the fishing Basamia, it is something which didn't exist even in their vocabulary. This means that the word has just been created recently in this generation due to the changes in the fishing practices. This is because all fishing activities among the Basamia just like in Ghana were permitted by their local leaders, (*Gabunga*) and were for this case never illegal (Nunno, et'al 2015). This legality would be attained at first through the conduction of new fishers' commencement rituals, followed by rigorous training sessions which were attended by all members of the fishing ground. This ritual would legalize the existence of the fisher without necessarily being registered with the higher government officials. Any form of illegality if it was to be there, would to be judged basing on the instruction/restrictions given by the spirits and or the *Gabunga*. Any person, who would violate the *Gabunga's* regulations, or the spirits' restriction, would be held accountable. The training sessions involved in the rituals imparted a number of skills to the fisher that he would apply to manage the aquatic elements of nature. It was these trainings that helped to minimize accidents and pass on the Basamia fishing ethics to the new fishers.

There was a lot of order maintained on the fishing grounds, something that further promoted the sustainability of fishing among the Basamia. The spiritually established restrictions against the use

of soap whistling, or hooting, taking of excessive alcohol and smoking kept the fishing grounds, protected from the dangerous pollutants contained in the soap and smoked items like cigarette, marijuana and tobacco, thus sustaining the lake and all aquatic natural elements. In the same way, some of these regulations kept fishers sober and fit for sustainable fishing and deliberately well-kept the fishing grounds conducive for the continuity of fish life. These restrictions also depict that the Basamia had in the real sense understood the fish species very well; as those which didn't associate with noise, and whose life was in endangerment with external compound substances. One of the respondents explained that noise scares fish; some can die or move to far distances where it is very difficult to extract from. This glorifies the indigenous spiritual traditions for skillfully maintaining the natural setup of the lake and its habitants.

For the reason that these beliefs and rituals were inclusive and complex, the Basamia fishers of Uganda elected their own local leaders to help in overseeing the observance and performance of the existing fishing ethical codes which were built in their beliefs and practices. The *Gabunga* and his committee were elected by all fishers of the shore capitalizing on their experience in the field of fishing. Customarily, this leadership consisted of elders and popular fishermen whom the fishing community trusted to be masters of the entire fishing job. They were in charge of guiding all fishing activities including preparation of fishing gears like the making of boats, architecting nets, organizing fishing voyages, presiding over all fishing related rituals, settling clashes among the fishers, punishing wrong doers through payment of fine, suspensions and expulsions and opening or closing fishing grounds if need arose. The leadership of the *Gabugas* was influential in sustaining the fishing practices. It was by their efforts that the fishing grounds were managed and maintained, restrictions were observed, fallen fishers searched and buried and behaviors promoted among fishers. These leaders were paid by every fisherman, by giving them fish for every

successfully voyage made. Such prime frontrunners were respected by their subjects so much because they themselves voted for them; they were considered their own and were typically one of the community members who understood the norms, values and culture of the people.

The Basamia indigenous spiritual tactics of sustainability aligns with those of the rest of the African fishing communities. According to the literatures provided by Ibale, (1998); Opondo, (2016); Subba, et al. (2020), Obiero, et al. (2022) and Issifu, & Diawwo, (2015), the African taboos, rituals, beliefs and election of fishing management teams regulated the extraction and consumption proportions. This sustainable managed to ensure the continuity and longevity of their fishing job. The spiritual customs of the Basamia meaningfully supported the restrained catching and consumption of fish resources. Through their adherence of intricate rituals, fishing activities were cautiously controlled, avoiding overfishing and extravagance. Some fish types could only be extracted at specific times by particular people or under exact settings, whereas consumption was equally overseen by spiritual procedures that limited who could eat specific catches and when. These restrictions certainly condensed the pressure on marine lives, supporting renewal and longstanding sustainability. Related findings are resounded in wider literatures on indigenous resources as a familiar but influential controlling structure, bringing into line human conduct with environmental rhythms. Among the Basamia, therefore divine power successfully controlled overexploitation, safeguarded the fishing viability and cherished their occupation throughout generation.

4.4 The Basamia Indigenous Fish Knowledge in Sustenance

Knowledge is the most imperative underpinning up on which human existence and survival is built. This knowledge acts as a plot for individuals to traverse their environment. Those who have

the understanding of the environment around them can unquestionably work, associate and live with them it. However, those that lack this knowledge will of course find the world a hard place to stay. In return, they will also make the environment a harder place for even other creatures to live. This will be simply because they do not apprehend how to deal with it. It is from such a stand of lack of knowledge of one's environment that destruction and unsustainability stems, that which has been evidently pronounced today, unlike in the past where people had knowledge of their own environment. Good for the indigenous Basamia, the collected data provides that they had and still have good knowledge and understanding of the lake, fish and other marine lives. They understand the different species of fish and their body composition. They can identify fish species by their movement on the water, what they eat, where and how they breed.

The skill of mastering the fish behavior is a common feature among traditional fishing communities (Saifur, 2001). Their relationship whether spiritual is constructed basing on this understanding. This is the reason why they treat or handle and attach different fish species dissimilar beliefs and practices. It is however vital for us to note that the transmission and continuity of these sustaining knowledge is only and only passed across generations by the use of this beliefs, in form of taboos, totems, and practices like the rituals. The elderly who already hold this information pass it to the young ones through oral methods like storytelling, as they try to justify why they treat different species the way they treat them, and training them through the ritual performance. This transmission greatly helped the young generation to access this knowledge and continue sustaining their environment sometimes consciously or sometimes without intent. This affirms the theory of spiritual ecology which alludes that nature and spirituality are like-minded and indeed influence each other in many ways of their existence and continuousness (Botero, 2014 and David, 1995).

Certainly, the native fishing knowledge of the Basamia establishes extraordinary sustainability, profoundly rooted in spiritual environmental and communal values. By inserting fishing practices within a sanctified background of beliefs, taboos and rituals, the Basamia safeguarded and regulated resource use in a way that valued natural successions and preserved environmental balance. This knowledge system highlighted control, patience and collective accountability, depressing greediness and irresponsible utilization of fish resources. Besides, it modified ecological variations over time through flexible spiritual understandings, permitting it to continue being significant throughout generations. Scholars studying indigenous knowledge elsewhere equally emphasize its sustainability, remarking that such systems usually attain what contemporary preservation efforts struggle with the harmonious combination of human sources of survival requirements with the protection of natural ecologies (Obiero, et'al 2022). Thus the Basamia indigenous fishing knowledge positions not only as a cultural tradition but also as a model of maintainable resource management born out of familiar spiritual construction with the ecology.

4.5 The Basamia Indigenous Spirituality in the Inverse of Fishing Sustainability

Carrying on the worries of the contenders and criticisms against the theory of spiritual ecology, “at times, the spiritual traditions are somewhat exploitative to nature” (Grim, 2001). The persistent belief in the powers held by some species and plants may transposition and instead increase on their consumption hence their extinction. For example, the belief that tilapia are good spirited species increased on its extraction and this partly explains why the native tilapia class (*Osaamu*) has reduced in favor of the newly introduced, species like Nile tilapia (*Tafu*), Nile perch (*Embutta* or *Abuga*) and other native evil spirited species like mud fish and cat fish. The belief that dried haplochromine (*Efulu*) can cure some skin disorders, measles and increas on the male sexual power may provoke fishers to over extract them. In regard to the charms, plants which the indigenous

Basamia believed to hold cleansing powers for fishing like “*Nasiwunya*” may suffer extinction due to continuous usage. Or the respect attached on the sacred water sources can hand over the other upland species to full utilization. For example, if the stones in the water are sacred, the ones which are out there will be quarried without limit.

However, it is worth noting that the extent to which this reality is evident remains too insignificant to affect our environment, since African indigenous spirituality rests not only in the fishing sector but to the entire life experience of the African people. The thinking that spirituality is unsustainable to the ecology because it places man in the highpoint of creation is not supported by the findings of this study. This is because the findings portray that all creatures, animals, plants and neuters objects, share the power of their common creator, can be inhabited by spirits of all sorts and have vital forces which can influence the being of another.

Besides the worries advanced by the critiques of spiritual ecology, the spiritual traditions somehow resulted to the rise of some awkward characters like witchcraft, magic and sorcery in the fishing practices. This act has somehow destroyed the natural operations of the lake. Some sacrifice human beings to their evil spirits, use items of the diseased like clothes, suicidal or ropes used in burying people and the soils picked from the grave. Those who use such evil spells are said to catch too much fish including the small sizes. Funny to learn is that such people restrain from consuming their own caught fish. The practice of defectively using these powers is condemned by people and if the local leadership would have learnt of this, such fishers would face the wrath of both local leaders and the virtuous spirits of the lake. This partly explains why the critics of the theory of spiritual ecology judged it for not matching the modern management strategies (Sponsel, 2001).

Large and by, the indigenous Basamia had no other strategy of preserving their fishing job apart from the application of spirituality and use of local and religious leaders. The set regulations in form of taboos and totems, plus complications involved in the rituals resulted into the establishment of fishing seasons, banning fishers' tools hence reducing on the extraction rate, reduction on the demand of fish (reducing consumers), preservation of some species and small sizes, blocking of some fishing ground, limiting on fishing time, preservation of breeding areas known as “*ebyeema*” limiting on the number of fishers, sustainability of some hydrophyte or macryophyte, use of the elective method of extraction, taming of the fishers behavior, attitude and responsibility, fear, sensitization of others, self-legalization/ registration of one's fishing, training of knew fishers and electing of leaders and maintenance of fishing grounds, avoiding accidents and imparting fish knowledge to the young generation among others did a great sustaining job. This caused tacit fish resource management through establishment of fishing rules /ethics (*enaabo*) that promoted communal consciousness and efforts in accountable resource use, environmental conservation and stewardship. This was achievable through providing valid and useful information that advances on our understanding of own bio-diversity ecology, and governance for human wellbeing. These beliefs can be categorized into those that protects the habitants like lakes, wetlands and rivers as sacred, those that protect the fish themselves and other aquatic natural elements and those that protect the use or exploitation of this resources.

4.6 Conclusion

The examination of beliefs, taboos, and rituals, which make the spiritual basis of fishing among the Basamia made it significant to explore how these spiritual customs keenly contributed to the sustainability of fishing as a livelihood. Spirituality among the Basamia was not simply theoretic, but was transformed into practical structures that administered human interface with the waters,

controlled fishing conduct and guaranteed environmental stability. This was done by the adherence to revered taboos, the communal organized fishing density on some grounds and fish types, averting exhaustion and overexploitation. Rituals supported social behavior, rehabilitated the spiritual efficacy of fishers and their gears, and conserved a dutiful connection with the ecology. The belief in divine and spiritual forces refined a profound sense of responsibility as fishers functioned not only for individual advantage, but with consciousness about the wider social and spiritual accountabilities. These indigenous approaches, entrenched in spirituality, consequently worked as a serious commercial, ecological, and communal purposes. However, this study also found it inappropriate to over generalize this kind of knowledge with assertion that indigenous spirituality among the Basamia was or is holistically sustainable. In certain situations, it worked against sustainable approaches and in one way or another depleted the environment as earlier presented in the preceding subsection. The most challenging one was their over reliance on specific fishing grounds and fish species which they claimed were fit for harvest and consumption by all categories of people in the wider market.

CHAPTER FIVE

CHANGES IN THE FISHING ACTIVITY AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE BASAMIA INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

5.1 Introduction

Despite the sweetness of the Basamia indigenous spiritual traditions towards the sustainability of the fishing practices, this study provides somewhat disappointing facts, when it revealed that the entire Basamia community has interacted with a number of newfangled concepts and ideologies that have ended up distorting their traditional experiences, knowledge systems and understanding of their own environment. In this very sense, the foreign ideas which infiltrated into the social, cultural and spiritual indigenous set up of the Basamia did not spare their prime source of livelihood (fishing). It was made crystal clear by one of the elders when he explained that the fishing practices of the Basamia have really changed. This pointed to the fact that the current trend of the fishing practice has taken a diversionary twist, ignoring what was established by their own natives, the forbearers of their land and accepted to be taken by the modern understanding which does not pay adoration or homage to the roles of the spirits, deities and the vital force, up on which conservational taboos, totems and rituals were established.

5.2 Roots Which Bred the Changes in the Fishing Activity

Besides the interaction of the Basamia with their fellow African ethnic groups like the Luo and Basoga, who considerably resulted to an internal dynamics within the Basamia instinctive spiritual traditions, their shift from the native ideology is believed to have been majorly facilitated by their interaction with the foreigners. These foreigners without veneration out lodged the African ways of networking with nature and emphasized their own outlandish systems. Unlike the intra-African

contact which enriched and diversified the Basamia spirituality, allowing for the sharing of ideas, practices, and beliefs within a cultural context, strengthening communal bond and contributing to a more vibrant spiritual life, the latter left the indigenous Africans (Basamia in Uganda) with only an option of accepting the disruptive transition which at the little end has exposed its weaknesses especially in the fight to realizing a sustainable ecology. The advent of the cross-continental foreigners like the Asians and Europeans considerably resulted to the mixing of the Basamia instinctive spiritual traditions. They entered Africa and immediately took part in many of the Africa's political, social and economic activities. These groups alleged to have come with civilization and modernization skills which at the end of the day left Africans only lamenting. Even when some used force to extend their new ideologies to the African people, others were welcomed and hospitalized by our forefathers, little did they know that, these visitors had not only come to adventure but also to stay. This move of permanent settlement is what pushed them to begin establishing themselves and attempting to change the African people with an aim of instituting an environment which resembled their former one. It is bothersome to study that they didn't what to convert and familiarize with the African settings, but instead decided to change the natives who were in their original societies; this was driven by the racial superiority complex which they partook.

With this plot, they started spreading their cultural systems of belief and faiths to the African people. Under the guise of spreading their religions, they belittled the African belief systems and rendered them ineffective, they soiled its reputation by informing the Africans that they had in actual sense got lost, taking advantage of a few targeted scriptures of the Bible (1 Corinthians 10:19-20, Deuteronomy 29:18, Joshua 23:7-8, 1 John 4:1-2). They emotionally and physically fought the African religion along with its spirituality, away from the lives of the East African

people including the Basamia in Uganda. Knowing that the African spiritual life was deeply established in all facets of life; their societal interactions and that of the environment, the new groups now pointed their weapons on rapturing the entire African way of life or culture. They introduced the western culture through formal education under pretense of eradicating illiteracy, as if without this destruction, illiteracy could not be eradicated. They now used this education to continue changing the young people who attended their schools, making them hate their own means of support. Through this education, they unscrupulously exposed the African children to their ways of understanding the environment, hence slaying the African one. They printed their systems with a lot of good names like modernization, civilization, technological advancement, globalization, with what they considered wonderful explanations for each, and stressing how this would help the Africans to develop.

Unfortunately, what they called development was denied by the findings of this research when one of the respondents said explained that the coming of the whites was in actual sense, a double edged scheme, which implemented development in its real sense, by one side and demolished it by use of another. Undeniably, the introduction of the modern ideologies like modern technology simply destroyed the African technology also known as Afro techno culture which had for so long sustained the Africa communities. They continued drafting more schemes that could transform the African people, environment and ideology to create an imaginary world on a landmass which could not support the scheme. However, even when Africans are still in Africa, some portions of their Africanism was robbed from them, they try to leave a mixed up life that is difficult to define. This is what makes the judgment that the Europeans to a certain extent were successful although not wholesomely.

While westernization has played a significant part in transforming indigenous fishing practices, it is correspondingly imperative to be aware of the contributions of certain internal forces, both natural and socio-cultural within African communities, comprising of the Basamia. Such internal forces have also expedited or enhanced these changes. It is therefore vital to note that the impact of these Western ideologies has somehow been facilitated by the native or “within Africa” inclined factors like the change in the climate, with the shifts in the water levels that force the Basamia to come up with new strategies that can help them catch heavily. The reality of the increasing population in Africa doesn’t need to be over emphasized while presenting the force behind the changes that have taken place in the fishing practices, hence increasing on the extraction and consumption rates that exert a lot of pressure on the lake and its habitants, the fish. By this fact, it is faulty to align the entire blame of the fishing changes on the foreign ideologies and deliberately ignore the natural and social contribution of the Africans and their ecology respectively.

The reality about the wider shift of the African people – including the Basamia from their indigenous social, political, economic, religious and spiritual life style has been similarly evidenced in the literatures presented by numerous scholars, thus endorsing the results of this study. Jeremy, (2021); Wright, et al. (2023); Ward and Stanford, (1979); Adim, (2024); UNEP, (2020); Ssekabira, (2015); among others have presented related information on this phenomenon. In respect to the field of fishing, Mike, (2016) also emphasized on the coming of foreigner whom he referred to as migrant fishers as the major factors upon which others staged. These groups are said to have come with civilization and modernization skills which at the end of the day left Africans only lamenting (Sarfo, 2023; Idowu, 1973). However, differing with their providence, this study provides that not only Western driven factors are accountable for the fishing changes

that have impacted both the activity and indigenous spirituality. Most of these foreign based factors have been facilitated by the Afrocentric factors some of which have been earlier presented.

Therefore, the alteration of fishing practices among the Basamia has happened not in a void space but has been formed by an intricate interaction of both exterior and interior reasons. On one hand, forces such as modernization, the spread of dominant religions like Christianity and Islam, and the effect of western education have presented new worldviews that usually confronted or evacuated traditional spiritual considerations. On the other hand, African grounded facts such as climate shifts, unstable water levels, population evolution and the growth of profitable markets have additionally changed the fishing setting, hence motivating shifts in both technique and meaning. These native and international forces have altogether eroded some of the outdated arrangements that once made fishing a sanctified activity. It is up on this conditions that the particular themes below attempts to explore specific ways through which these modifications have impacted the spiritual traditions related with fishing among the Basamia.

5.3 Abandonment, Dormancy and Violation of the Basamia Indigenous Spirituality

Most fishing Basamia no longer follow their indigenous spiritual traditions; they have abandoned and are contemporarily lying dormant. For instance, the belief in the creation powers of God, the existence and influence of spirits and the life essence which had guided the interactions of the Basamia with the lake and its possessions have been questioned due to the influence of Christianity and formal education patronized by logic, reasoning, science and technology. The disbelief in these realities has killed the respect which the African people had for the lake, fish and other aquatic elements of nature. Resultantly, they no longer observe restrictions of the fishing time (during day), they are always on the waters all days and all times, both during day and night, and now by

the use of lights, something that was unacceptable in the near past. It is upon this background of distrust that the current Basamia don't hesitate to apply unselective methods of fishing which trap all kinds of fish whether small or big.

The indigenous practice of throwing back the small sizes of fish is now a condemnable surprise. The consumers eat all sizes however small they may be. They have lost the acceptance of their stewardship role and taken up an ownership perspective instead. They now own the lake and whatever belongs there, it's no longer the lake of spirits like it used to be. This has destroyed the sacredness of the water bodies which were formerly preserved place of worshipping the spirits of the lake for success and other victories in this distressing life. The formerly sacred and secretive areas are now used up and infiltrated by all sort of people, something that was outside the guide of the spirits. They have scoured those important places where other spirits would be sought. Such spirits are just hovering on the waters, annoyed and causing endless accidents to fishers and travelers. In fact, recent fishers now have the freedom to sail over the entire lake, extracting even from the grounds which were formerly out of bounds. This has exerted a lot of pressure on the water bodies and destroyed the former breeding places of the fish, hence reducing on the fish stock or population. This change results to a deepening dispassion from the spiritual structures that once formed the relationship between the Basamia and their fishing job.

5.4 The Evolution of Mundane Fishing Administration and the Displacement of Spiritualism

The involvement of the central government in the leadership of the fishing activities is one of the greatest shifts that the Basamia fishing communities of Uganda has ever registered. The modern government got attracted by the commercialized, industrial and profitable fishing sector which was invented by the foreigners. These governments started plotting ways of collecting taxes from such

a prolific activity and ended up establishing their own regulations and restrictions. These mundane regulations have so far not worked due to their incompatibility with the already existing culture, values, norms and prohibitions of the indigenous Basamia. The Basamia fishers stressed that unlike in the tradition, where the local people through their elected *Gabunga* would take responsibility of their own fishing behavior, the government of Uganda has denied them this long traced duty. They have come up with voluminous offices ranging from the ministry, regional, district, Sub County fisheries officers and fishing ground Beach Management Units (BMUs).

This modern leadership is less concerned about the spiritual traditions of the Basamia but only aims at fulfilling the instruction that are given to them by their top administrators or the law body, whose emphasis is felt not on the peoples' spiritual settings but on the renewed policies. This kind has rendered the indigenous beliefs to extinction, because traditionally, the Basamia fishers elected for themselves an experienced person, who had both spiritual and everyday knowledge of the entire fishing activities. They took it upon themselves to train young ones about the restrictions set by the spirits, dos and dots of the lake, behavior and other fundamental aspects associated with fishing. However, the modern leaders are instead busy with the work of establishing fisheries laws and witch hunting for those who have gone against them. The fishermen stressed that once came to the worst with the recruitment of the Uganda Peoples' Defense Force (UPDF) which they alleged for being too cruel to them, using at most "force" like their name states. While providing on the issue of new leadership, one respondent provided that the *Gabunga* never resolved an issue within the lake, all errors were handled on the shore, when the fishermen had landed. This is because they did not tolerate the behavior of aggressiveness on the water. However today, the fights on the water have become common.

Additionally, the fisheries officers who are appointed by government are in most cases strangers to the community. This means that they cannot enforce the promotion of the society's culture which they do not acknowledge. They are sometimes young inexperienced people who cannot pass on the indigenous knowledge to the young generations. Being appointed by the top officials somewhere else, these leaders usually lack cooperation with the fishers. The fishers on the other side never accept them as their own leaders, unlike the *Gabunga* who was respected by the fishers. The new leadership is looked at as a burden, people who have been sent to fail local fishers or to satisfy their selfish interests. This has done more harm towards the struggle for sustaining the lake than it was in the tradition. It is because of this decline that the commencement rituals which were being carried out by the *Gabungas*, to create a bond between the fishers and the entire marine life are sparsely performed among the Basamia fishers. In fact, few fishing Basamia conduct these rituals and, sacrifices.

The deep connection which such rituals would instill evidently lacks in the new fishers. This is clearly realized in their careless behavior towards the lake. This kind has left the sustainable indigenous Basamia spirituality in a motion of departure. In similar terms, this explains why Issifu & diawo, (2015), blamed all these shifts of power on Western imperialism which rendered the African leadership null and established their own political set up which was anonymous to the African people. This was followed by the establishment of constitutions, which hold modern laws that have less to do with the indigenous African legal systems. Unfortunately, these constitutions withdrew power from the local leaders and gave it to a few centralized administrators who have taken advantage of the local people. In accommodation with what Sibusiso, (2013) wrote, these constitutions regrettably respect not the African systems of spirituality that were paramount in the sustainability of the African environment, values, beliefs, and customs. By this exploration, it

clearly presents that the role of sustaining the lake and all its belongings lies not only on the written laws, government law enforcers but also on the free will, acceptance and acknowledgement of the fishing communities as based on their values, norms and traditions.

5.5 Extinction of the Aboriginal Species and Discontinuity of the Basamia Indigenous Spirituality

To worsen on the discontinuity of the Basamia indigenous spirituality, the species which were used for evoking ancestral spirits are nowhere to be seen. They have been consumed by the people of this generation. The intensive and unselective methods that are being used in the extraction of fish, like small sized nets and use of chemical poison has extinguished the native species which had connections with the Basamia and those that shared a strong history with this sub ethnic grouping. The tribes that respect some species as their totems would use them to evoke the spirits of their ancestors. Pronouncing such species, a spiritual setting would act as an introductory call of the people of a particular clan directed to their ancestors, for protection, provision and blessings. For instance, the *Bamayindi* clan would say “*Omufumu kusira*”, literally confessing that they refrain from eating that specific species. This would act as a wakeup call for the ancestral spirits to come over and rescue their descendant. However, this is increasingly becoming ineffective, for it is not applicable. It essentially makes no meaning/sense to confess to the spirits when in actual sense you have ever eaten the species; this means that the petition will not be effective.

For instance, many young people among the Basamia do not know their totems, this was evident from the arguments which rose during Focus Group Discussions on the topic of totems. This portrays that most of them may have eaten or will eat their totems without their consent. This makes them undesirable before their spirits. They can’t evoke them any longer until such persons

are cleansed. This simply means that most modern Basamia are not spiritually linked with their ancestors as it used to be since they no longer respect the totems which were set apart by their ancestors. This also makes them impure and unable to deal with their spirits. For instance, even those whom the ancestral spirits would inhabit and work through, end up associating with fish and discourage the spirit from inhabiting them. It is this violation that has even reduced on the number of traditional religious operators, hence rendering the religion and its spiritual set up slumber. Their fishing gears like boats and nets lack spiritual protection like it used to be, this has also increased on theft or pirating among the fishing Basamia, thus, destroying their indigenous practice which had for long sustained their livelihood.

5.6 Violation of the Gender-Based Restrictions and the Ineffectiveness of the Water Spirits

The participation of all sorts of people in the entire fishing practices among the fishing societies of the Basamia has negatively affected the efficiency of the Basamia indigenous spiritual traditions, not only in fishing but also in other aspects of human life. It was previously acknowledged by all practitioners in the fishing industry that women were not allowed by the spirits to involve in some crucial activities of fishing especially actual extraction or and access to the lake. The ancestral spirits and other spirits of the lake didn't like associating with the menstruating women who were considered people of bad omen and curse. Their menstrual blood would affect the smooth operations of the spirits on the water and could therefore cause a number of troubles.

However, due to modernism and technology, women have poured on the lake, busy conducting the pre-fishing, fishing and post fishing activities without any one stopping them. They are actually encouraged to work by the community and the leaders of the society some of whom are the leaders

of various fishing ground (Beach Management unity). They own boats, nets, employ fishermen and above all enter the lake for sporting and fishing. Some extract from their cages, established on the lakes, or from artificial pools, among others; through the Aqua-culture schemes. These impurities caused by women have affected the powers of the spirits, hence making them and the entire spiritual system ineffective to conduct their destined duties, of protection, preservation and provision for both the lake and the fishers. It is on this ground that the “song” about destruction of the lake cannot stop.

5.7 Increased Demand or Market for Fish and the Escalation of Witch Craft and Individualism

Relatedly, due to the scarcity of fish, triggered by the extensive extraction, population increase and resultantly creation of ready market, fishers have been forced to come up with ways of increasing their catching efficacy even after destroying the indigenous spiritual traditions which were ensuring this. Erroneously, they have ended up practicing Witchcraft under the guise that they are practicing what their forebears instigated. This practice has increased among the modern fishing Basamia simply because, that is how they interpret or construe the indigenous spiritual traditions. They have failed to differentiate between the two because of the influence of foreign religion like Christianity with its biased and subjective teachings, which keep defining African spiritual systems as witchcraft, sorcery and magic. This tendency of witchcraft has inaccurately replaced the indigenous spirituality. This is common today in the Basamia fishing communities and it has not only destroyed the activity to great heights but also replicated the original African indigenous sense of spirituality. With this evil practice, the efficiency of the indigenous spirituality has been left in camouflage.

By the findings of this study, the changes in the fishing practices have erased the African communal approach towards upholding their own ethics, values, norms and general cultures. Previously, this duty involved taking responsibility as a community to ensure that the society is rich in culture and safe place for living, to all individuals and the rest of their cherished natural elements. Today, the aspect is individual based, and every man has his own powers to choose and decide for himself about what his relationship with the environment should be. This individualistic ideology supports not the communal based indigenous African belief systems whose practical part was only designed for the society but never for a singular individual.

In regard to the tendency of witchcraft, a fish monger explained that witchcraft has taken over all fishing practices, be it selling fish in market places. This practice has by far destructed the smooth flow for the conservation of the lake. This is because most fishermen use witchcraft to increase on their extraction powers which end up in illegal fishing. With such powers, they extract all sorts and sizes of fish that comes across their fishing tools. Similar to this exploration, Omotoye (2011) and Kizito, (2022) presented in their respective works that it was by the biased and subjective teachings of Christianity that the African people misinterpreted African spirituality as witchcraft. This means that there is serious need for correcting the mindset of the African people through such studies.

5.8 Syncretism and the Fading of the Basamia Indigenous Spirituality

The truthfulness of decreasing the authority and efficacy of the indigenous spiritual traditions has been magnified by an attempt made by the fishing Basamia to mix African indigenous spirituality with their new, foreign beliefs and spiritualities. This has compromised the continuity of the original indigenous facet of spirituality, only to leave it in imitations. Through observation, it was

revealed that the current Basamia fishers now practice the two religions at the same time with an aim of increasing on the catching ability. For instance, they go for Friday or Sunday services for prayer or Salah, anointing and holy water for their success in fishing and then after visit the traditional healers for consultations and further help. To affirm this, most of the boats and other fishing gears of the Basamia, have charms fixed as well as biblical verses that evoke Jesus the chief fisherman (Luke 5:10) to intervene in there fishing hustles. They have pictures of the totemic animals that induce the ancestors to protect and provide for their gears as well as the picture of Jesus Christ, which insinuate their commitment to Christianity.

Viewing the photo in figure 7 below, it was revealed that the current Basamia fishers not only believe in the influence and impact of the ancestral spirits which were represented by the drawing of the totemic animal, and the clan indigenous praising phrases written on the boat “*Namuduma chusa chusa*”, which directly invokes the ancestral spirits in the sustenance, protection and provision for the boat and the boat owner, but also adores the power of the Christian Lord, Jesus Crist; in the same way represented by the drawing of Jesus Christ with a bowl of bread and a cup of wine habitually used during holy communion in traditional churches like catholic and Anglican denominations. Besides, there are writings which ask for the provision of the daily bread as quoted from the Christian Lord’s prayer. This indicated that they at the same time have full trust in the protection and providing powers of Jesus Christ and His father whom he once addressed as the provider of food in the famous Lord’s Prayer through which Jesus taught to his disciples on how to pray. Being their daily source of livelihood, (food), the Basamia fishers believe that the power of Jesus when called upon and trusted can enable them to have rich and profitable catches.

One of the fishermen explained that whenever he prays to Jesus Christ before setting off for his fishing voyage, the catches are always heavy; he therefore referred to Jesus as his chief fisher.

Besides, their historical background provides that most of the Basamia fishers living along the shores of Lake Victoria in Namayingo district migrated from Kenya, they therefore have adoration to both ancestral spirits of their forefather who lived and extracted on the waters of Kenya or and on the boarders around R. Nzoia and those that ever worked from the water of Uganda before them. This veneration of the two categories of spirits and adoration to the two countries therefore is symbolized with both Kenyan and Ugandan flags– replicating both mixture and the fisher's cross-border identity as seen in the figure below;



Figure 7: A boat printed on with a totemic animal, clan name, picture of Jesus Christ and the national flags of Kenya and Uganda

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

This syncretic approach has reduced indigenous spirituality to a weak position in the face of the diverse world religions which most practitioners consider to be strong, efficient and quick in response. In a similar way, Asarfo, (2023), pointed out clearly that the syncretic behavior of modern Africans has greatly contributed to the dropping of some indigenous beliefs and practices which end up rendering the religion powerless.

While interacting with one of the elders in the *Bamayindi* clan, which indigenously had to perform a commencement ritual for their children to start eating fish (*Osindusia*), she honestly explained that some *Bamayindi* currently take their children to church or invite Christian religious leaders to their homes to conduct a ritual prayer to enable their children start eating fish. This is in replacement of the traditional commencing ritual. In support to the same, she essentially guided that instead of leaving children to be affected by autism, it is better to take them to church if such people don't believe in the power of indigenous spirituality. Although many religious scholars mostly African Christian theologians like Mpagi, (2002); Nkoyoyo, (1998); Mbiti, (1990); Bediako, (1992); Madibane, (1993) and Maimela, (1991) have always welcomed this approach, as one which tries to bridge the new religion into the native one, the suggestion is unfortunately established on a Christian backing and not the purity of the native belief systems. Under no circumstances should there be any way through which an indigenous belief system should be fulfilled in a Christian setting. Under this fact, such recommendations are more susceptible to develop a spirituality of its own stature, one which is not African neither Christian, as earlier provided. A minority religion like ATR whose aptitude has been thrown into a religious dustbin must be kept unique for the people to see its significance; it cannot and should not continue working under cover, of other religions, as a mediocre. Nevertheless, this syncretic tendencies reveal the power of the aboriginal religion of Africa whose facets like spirituality are capable of traversing into the ones of the so-called foreign dominate religions. The sprinkling of holy water in the fishing boat at the start of the voyage is a true reflection of the nonfading qualities of African indigenous spirituality.

5.9 Continued Relocation from the Indigenous Spirituality to Secularism

Despite the fact that the indigenous Basamia fishers did not consider fishing as only an economic activity, rather one which directly relates with the spiritual aspect, their spiritual intent towards nature –the lake and its inhabitants has greatly deteriorated because of the changes which have transpired in the fishing sector. The indigenous spiritual approach towards nature as traditionally practiced by the Basamia proved the factuality of the spiritual ecological theory which emphasized the interconnectedness and interdependence of the spiritual traditions and the environment (Macy & Molly, 2014).

However, it is disparaging to note that the modern Basamia fishers have lived to oppose this reality. This partly justifies the high rates of environmental destruction especially in the lake. Today, most of the fishing Basamia are now more secular than spiritual. They're mundane and have less belief in the spiritual world. This explains why there is little care and concern for the aquatic species which their forefathers respected– as God's creatures, which possess spirits and the personified force. This secularism was in the same way blamed by Amaze, (2024) for causing devastating environmental destruction. Secularism withdrew the aspect of respect and fear that Africans previously held for their natural elements. Contemporarily, the Basamia fishers instead love and enjoy associating with what their ancestors hated. They're depreciating and openly oppose the spiritual decisions of their forebears all in the pretext of formal education, technology, modernization, increased population, urbanization and many others; with failure to uphold what was initiated by their forbearers.

To evidence the level of spiritual reduction which has taken place at the expense of secularism, the fishing boats of the Basamia are currently given number plates instead of the indigenous naming rituals of the boats. This shows no veneration to the creator and sustainers of the lake and

the fish in particular. One of the elders explained that number plates have no protective powers, like their ancestors had, they only serve one purpose (identification), yet their indigenous system of spiritually naming of fishing gears was multipurpose. This indicates the level of secularism that has taken over in the previously spiritually dominated fishing activities. Figure 8 presents a fishing boat at Sityohe landing site bearing a modern number plate, signifying the increasing alteration towards administrative and irreligious methods. This substitutes the previous aboriginal practices where boats were named after their ancestors as a divine form of protection—symbolizing a slow but steady destruction of Basamia spiritual distinctiveness in fishing culture.



Figure 8: Modern boats with number plates

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

This phenomenon partly explains why the Basamia African fishers have changed their behavior, they are no longer responsible for their own fishing grounds, rather push every demand for maintenance to the government. Their general conduct has spoilt the dignity of fishers, only to be known as the most ill-mannered people with all sorts of naughtiness. For instance, sexual

immorality which was unheard-of in the traditional period, due to the spiritual ban against sex and female participation is now the most pronounced in communities surrounding the lake.

For the case of Namayingo, it is ranked as one of the districts of Uganda with the problem of a high rate of early pregnancies and the Spread of HIV/AIDs because of the immorality around its shores of Lake Victoria. With such conditions, the consecrated spirituality of the indigenous Basamia, one which called for purity and holiness, has been violated and forced to stagnate. Without affecting the Basamia indigenous spirituality alone, these changes have resulted to the evolution of new terminologies which relate with fishing in a way of describing the conduct, behavior and relationship between the fishers and the lake with all its inhabitants. The terms include, “over” and “illegal” fishing. These two have become serious concerns and have ignited multiple reactions and responses from different fields including the locals, government officials, scholars and other stake holders in the fishing industry.

The loss of respect for the formerly restricted acts like sex was in the same way widely discussed by Opondo, (2016). While writing on the shifts that have taken place in the fishing practices of the Luo of Kenya, Opondo explained that the increasing rate of sexual immorality among the Luo fishers is the reason behind the high spread of HIV. This demonstrates the level of secularity and loss of the indigenous respected values and norms that guided the life of the African people. It also shows that behavior, conduct and values are the breeding places for spirituality or secularism in Africa. When the values of the people deteriorate, they become more secular than when they hold veneration for their norms and traditions. The more the fishing communities of Africa have ignored their values, the more they have tended to become secular.

5.10 Resilience of the Indigenous Spirituality of the Basamia

In regard to the changes that have taken place in the fishing related spiritualities, it is vital for future academics to learn that the African religion, from which the indigenous spirituality is built, is a very strong system whose permanent departure cannot be concluded by the pathetically structured ideologies of the foreign people. Even when it has had a widened negative impact on its longevity and continuity among the Basamia fishers, it is worth noting that this indigenous spiritual traditions have never been wholesomely burnished from the entire fishing experience of the people. Prospective features and marks of the life and existence of these transcendental traditions are widely spread throughout the behavior, actions and conduct of the Basamia fishers.

Out of the two major portions of the Basamia indigenous spirituality, namely beliefs and practices, the findings of this study indicate that it has been the horizon of practices that have been faced with a biggest rate of concession. This is because of the stigma that the foreign religions established into the African people with patronizing depictions. Very few believers perform rituals publicly for fear of being mocked, judged and condemned by converts of foreign religions for being archaic, not modern and still regressive. However, it is vital to note that the belief– as the most indispensable part of spirituality is still evident among the Africans. This is demonstrated by the few practices of the strong hearted Africans who mind less about what the reactions of the followers of other alien religions can have to say about their native and grooming system of belief.

For instance, even if the modern fishers don't conduct the boat commencement rituals as they used to do, they still have a belief in the influence of the spirits of their clans or and the powers found in their parents especially the mothers. This is why they still have boats written on their clan names in regard to women, names of their mothers and drawings of their totemic animals especially the

friend totems. These actions are grounded on the fact that such fishers still hold their belief in the existence, power and influence of their *Nyasaaye*, *Were*, ancestral spirits (*emisambwa*), other community spirits, blessing and cursing abilities of their parents and other people operating around them. Figure 9 shows a current fishing boat found at Busiro fish landing site inscribed with “*Mama Namangese*,” a clan feminine name, illuminating the resilience of the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia. Notwithstanding an increasing profane impact, several fishers remain loyal to the native practices of naming boats after ancestral, parents or clan uniqueness as a custom of spiritual linking, fruitfulness and safety.



Figure 9: A boat bearing the owners' mothers' name

Source: Author (Field data, 2025)

These writings and drawings are simply modern forms of dedication similar with the ones that the indigenous Basamia implemented when they would dedicate their fishing gears to their respective spirits through verbal naming. This presents evidence of the influential effects of native spirituality towards the new ones. They still speak to their boats particularly if they are not catching fish, they plead with whoever is written on their gears to have mercy on them and do the providence. In the

same regard, the modern fishers still have charms fastened on their fishing gears, although they currently hide them to avoid criticisms. They believe that those charms have the power to influence their catching capacity. While responding on the resilience of the indigenous spirituality, one of the elders explained that that up to date, fishermen have charms fastened on the flow of the boat, they are put down and covered by metallic covers using nails. Additionally, some fishing grounds found in the exposure of the Basamia fishers are still respected and venerated, areas like Sumba are still consecrated as areas of worship where a few believers who make up the 1% of the ATR go for prayers, ritual performance and sacrifices. Among the rituals which are still seriously performed is the funeral rite of the fallen fishing colleagues. After physical burial, the Basamia still ensure that they mystically collect the spirit of the deceased, something that affirms the continuity of the African belief in the existence of the spirits and their influence on the lives of the living people.

Even when some young Africans don't physically know their totems, the elderly Basamia who still hold value in them have already taught their children about them. However, this study has come to reveal that most of the forbidden species among the Basamia are not common species found in Lake Victoria; which is apparently the main fishing ground among the Basamia. Most of those species are common in Rivers linguistically known as (*Oluchi* or *siwo*). This is because the oral interviews revealed that indigenous Basamia traditionally lived besides and caught fish from River Nzoia which is located along the Busia borders of Uganda and Kenya. Therefore, most of them are not common and consequently not known to the young people, especially those that apparently migrated and live in Namayingo district along Lake Victoria. However, they have already been taught about some of these species and are responsively not ready to eat them. This

attitude depicts that the Basamia still have some hope in the efficacy of their native spiritual systems.

Similarly, it is worth noting that there are very many Basamia women, especially the elderly who still refrain from eating some fish species, the lepers, up to date still refrain from eating “*esembu*” and the Nile perch. The spirit that moves the so called African converts to draw the pictures of Jesus on their boats, write biblical scriptures /verses and take their children to church for prayers to avoid the effects of eating fish before rituals, getting “holy water for their boats, among others is enough to show that they still have the belief in the existence of God, the influence of spirits and the role of the vital force that guides the interaction of the Basamia and their environments. Although it sounds right for most respondents to insist that it is only in fishing where indigenous spirituality has persisted more than in other economic activities of indigenous Africa, others expressed a diversion when they indicated that, it is actually in fishing where most changes have taken place. The debate here stands on measuring the extent at which each of them have been evident. The factuality about the resilience of indigenous spirituality even in this contemporary society positions the theory of Spiritual Ecology in a righteous position. This is because the theory firmly believes that the spiritual traditions like beliefs and practices have the ability to adapt and remain resilient in the face of environmental changes (Bauman, 2014).

The results of this study align not only with the theory of spiritual ecology but also with the findings of other scholars who have frequently indicated that the African facets of their belief systems and spiritual settings have never been vanished. Sibusiso, (2013); Peter, (1993); Alyward shorter, (1991); Isidore, (2017); Nweke, (2020); Sarfo, (2023); Omotoye, (2011); Abiona & Abioje, (2021), presents facts about the resilience of the African indigenous religiosity and spirituality. This alludes that the indigenous spiritual traditions are elements which are inbuilt

within the people of Africa and cannot be drifted from them whatsoever. They are also continentally trusted, proved and accepted answers to all their questions that align with all their facets of life, including the most dynamic question of environmental sustainability whose attention have attracted the globe.

5.11 Conclusion

Categorically, exploring the fact that the Basamia indigenous spiritual traditions played a crucial role in ensuring the sustainability of their own environment– the lake and its inhabitants sends an encounter to the western ideologies. Revealing that in the era within which these ideologies are paid homage is the very time when the universal environment has also faced its worst management from human kind poses a lot of ecological questions about the Western approaches. It is vital to note that the current fishing ecology is worse than when what was termed as barbaric, witchcraft, sorcery and vanished directed ideologies were in full administration and governance. The evidence which is provided by Simon & Jansen, (2017) and Zhang & Wang (2019) that even the cradle from where the new ideologies came faces the worst environmental destructions signifies that the ideologies which were introduced in Africa were not consciously designed for Africa alone but are actually the very ones which operate in their societies to. Such particulars in general make the point very clear that the indigenous beliefs and practices have immeasurable powers and abilities in caring for the fauna and flora which was handed down to them by their creator, and have been sustained by the deities and their spirits. In affirmation of the theory of spiritual ecology, the sustainability of the natural environment symbiotically cared for the continuity and purity of the indigenous spirituality of the African people and the Basamia in particular.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. Introduction

This chapter provides a synthesis of the findings from this research on the indigenous spirituality and fishing practices among the Basamia in Uganda. It aims at highlighting the key insights gained regarding the relationship between spiritual beliefs, practices and traditional fishing approaches. It involves shedding light on the cultural significance of these spiritualities within the Basamia fishing community, stressing the sustainability of these spiritual traditions, and establishing the fishing changes which have impacted the Basamia indigenous spirituality. By drawing on the analysis presented in the earlier chapter, this conclusion will summarize the most important outcomes of the study in line with the research aims and questions and deliberating on the value and contribution thereof. Additionally, this chapter also reviews the limitations of the study and offers recommendations both for future research and potential actions that could support the preservation and promotion of the Basamia spirituality in the context of sustainable fishing practices.

6.2. Summary of Key Findings

This study set out to investigate the intricate connection between fishing and the indigenous spirituality among the Basamia of Uganda. It examined how spiritual beliefs, taboos, totems, rituals and cosmological understanding molded fishing practices, how these traditional foundations impacted towards the sustainability fishing and how contemporary variations have affected these customs. The research was conducted by the major aim of studying about how indigenous spirituality is rooted in the daily life of the fishing societies and establishing what is at stake when such spirituality deteriorates.

The results of this study, indicate that fishing is one of the most traditional or indigenous sources of income which have continued to influence and sustain the lives of very many Basamia up to date. This evidently designates that there is a strong link, or relationship between the indigenous spirituality of the Basamia and their fishing activities. This is dissimilar with other aboriginal activities like pottery, iron working and hunting which have been completely washed-out and taken over by the contemporary modernization, in form of industrialization and is therefore unheard of. This fishing activity was invented by their forbearers who started their extraction from Magogwe fish landing site, current day Majanji and along River Nzoia. They however used sustainable indigenous extraction gears and methods like, life-cages (*Ehwiira*), baskets (*Emikoono*), hooks (*Amalobo*) and natural poisons (*Obutwa*) extracted from the native plants like (*Omuluhu*) to catch their inherent and delicious species like Tilapia (*Engeke yo 'saamu*), mudfish (*Emonye*), catfish (*Oluyoko*), lungfish (*Esidonge*) and many other Hplochromine types among others. Due to the fact that the fishing practice of the Basamia was sufficiently sustained, the fishers used to register heavy catches which could not be disbursed at once. Given the short fresh span of the fish, with its frail body and organic configuration, the Basamia fishers preserved their catches basically through sun drying, smoking and drubbing them into flour or ash powder for longer preservations. However, these methods depended on the different species with their various conformations. As others required to be sun dried especially small sized species like silver fish (*Obuduba*) and less fated species like tilapia, some were supposed to be smoked especially big sized and fatty species like lung fish, mud fish, cat fish, among others.

The Basamia basically used fish for food in accompaniment with millet, sorghum or cassava bread (*Obusuma*). This became their chief (staple) food (*Obusuma ne'ngeni*) loved by all Basamia, especially those who were brought up within the Samia land. During this time, there was no vast

market for fish due to the small populations and the subtractions which were established by their spiritual and cultural norms. Nevertheless, the fishing practice was very vital to the Basamia society in a number of ways. Away from availing food or diet rich in proteins, fishing as an activity enabled the Basamia to accumulate wealth (*Emyandu*) and fulfill most of their societal responsibilities like paying dowry, taking care of their families, winning fame and popularity which later created way for political leadership positions. The practice also contributed towards the Basamia spiritual enrichment and many other privileges. However, the religious Basamia perceived this activity in the religious context and ended up establishing a connection between the two— fishing and indigenous spirituality. To have this connection maintained, they observed many spiritual traditions which continued to protect their job for innumerable years. These traditions like the belief in the existence, power and influence of the creating authority (*Nyasaaye*), deities/divinities like “*Were*”, ancestral (*emisambwa*) and other spirits (*ebikenyi*) and the vital force (*amaani*) obligatorily made them to come up with rituals and other practices to ensure a balance of these numerous forces for fruitful catches. This was because the indigenous Basamia believed that each of these powers varied in enormousness and could conflict with each other, only to jeopardize the activity. This belief was established on the fact that the powers like the vital forces were established within the natural elements like the fish, fishing gears, the lake, the fishermen, mongers and consumers. This caused discomfort and drove them to socially construct practices in form of taboos, totems, and rituals to ensure that there is a balance between each of them.

These beliefs and practices fortunately appeared in form of restrictions and regulations, dos and don'ts that kept the fishers' behavior, frequency of fishing, extraction rate, consumption rate, fishing durations and use of various non-aquatic plants, importation of pollutant materials into lake, and other human disorganizations like noise in check. It was this coherent religious system

that saved the economic activity of the Basamia in existence up to the modern times when it started flagging. This eco-religious or spiritual approach affirms the truthfulness of the theory of spiritual ecology which asserts that spirituality is a key factor for sustaining the ecology through its protocols and limitations. In return, the ecology or natural elements instituted in the environment are also a factor for the being of the spiritual traditions and their practices. This is because the fulfillment of these religious or spiritual beliefs and practices need the use of this fauna and flora. For instance, in evoking the spirits, and availing worship places or and items of sacrifices, offertory and libation. Consequently, this implies that the two aspects – fishing and spirituality cannot exist without the other. The African Basamia in Uganda understood this truth of existence and endeavored to strictly follow and apply these traditions. Truthfully conferring, this approach worked remarkably well for them; sustaining their fishing job for centuries, feeding their families, and taking charge of their other needs. Thus, the study underlines that indigenous spirituality among the Basamia worked as an approach of environment ethics, an unprinted code that administered sustainable contact with marine lives. Its degeneration is an indicator of the damage of a cherished traditional and environmental resource. Identifying and appreciating this system of awareness can amuse both cultural conservation struggles and present-day tactics for supportable natural resource administration.

However, with the incursion of the western societies and their ideologies, there was registration of change contrived through the introduction of new fishing gears and methods. The most destructive was the use of cotton and later the nylon nets which have caused all sorts of tragedy to the fishing exercise. These nets with their small sized snares started extracting what they falsely described as “heavy harvests”. They derogatively compared them with the use of what they contrariwise called insufficient methods and gears of the indigenous Basamia that could catch small quantities; little

did they know that they were exploiting the lake. They even imported foreign fishermen from their distant countries, those who didn't understand the social cultural guidelines of the Basamia. Even when they could recognize them, they were not ready to follow them, for they regarded them recessive and lacking. With their "high quantity" catching perspective, they also had to introduce new species of fish. They believed that these new species could increase on the fish stock due to their high breeding nature and consequently lead to heavy catching in the near future. These new species ended up overriding the native species which acted as food to the latter, yet the native species had a lot of spiritual and cultural connection and history with the Basamia. They sailed beyond the shallow shores of the lake with the use of motorized boats which continued to pollute the lake with the noise of the engines and emission of pollutant gases that have ended up destroying the lake habitants.

They followed this behavior with the spread of their new religions which extricated the African spirituality for their religious experiences and teachings – Christianity. This became the main reason for the reduction of the African feeling of reverence for the creating supremacies, and the influence of other powers. They further endorsed the establishment of central systems of leadership which found no importance in the local based leadership, which also consisted of the indigenous religious leaders. These governments which take no deference for the communities' social cultural spiritualities, have instead chosen to use a lot of force on the fishers, causing a lot of death and subsequent resistance from the locals, for they find no importance in the non-community appointees. This was closed up with the use of formal education which discouraged the use of the traditional methods and replaced them with modern systems which have now failed for years. They influenced the minds of educationist who have for this case conducted several research schemes, all recommending the use of western methods unlike the traditional ones. Such scholars have given

biased conclusions and recommendation to fit the demands of their sponsors, the Europeans as stated by (Obiero, 2023). The more they have continued to enforce the use of these ideas, the more the lake has been destroyed. With the fact that these actualities have not been eroded completely, there are still some traces of the indigenous spiritualities. We now need to base on such traces for rebuilding the broken Walls of the Black spirituality and save the fishing career and other ecological elements. The intending loss of these indigenous spiritualities really needs to be avoided if we are to safeguard our environments, like our forefathers did.

Like other qualitative studies, this research was characterized by access challenges due to mistrust, diverting effects due to the economic and sensitive aspect of the topic, being spiritual in nature. The study however focused on Basamia community and therefore may not capture the full multiplicity of indigenous spiritual manifestations in other regions or ethnic groups. This study expressively contributed to the increasing body of knowledge and literature on native knowledge systems. It offers a comprehensive understanding of how spiritual beliefs, rituals, taboos and totems among the Basamia are straight away connected to fishing practices and ecological sustainability. Whereas much scholarship on fisheries inclines to emphasize on economic or ecological scopes, this study exceptionally illuminates the spiritual aspect as fundamental to indigenous livelihoods. In a supplementary way, it offers contributions to the anthropology of religion and African indigenous scholarships. It provides underrepresented spiritual practices among small African societies like the Basamia which has been frequently skipped by most scholars, and unlocks novel passageways for incorporating cultural and spiritual structures into present-day ecological control.

6.3. Recommendations

The concept of change is a natural and undeniable trendy. It has great, adequate and strong force that cannot be completely scrapped. This unbreakable fact calls for an association fabricated between the indigenous knowledge systems and the modern conservation practices for effective and sustainable management of aquatic resources of the Basamia. This is because the indigenous systems which have been highly scored as the most sustainable are also the basics upon which this great force (change) can be championed. For this reason, the indigenous systems cannot be wholesomely ignored in the pretense of embracing the new methods. The two approaches are paramount and necessary if we are to sustainably preserve, maintain and have the continuity of the aquatic resources. This idea challenges societies which have not respected their traditional indigenous systems because of their reverence for change. It informs them that these changes cannot hang in space; they need a basis upon which they can be invented to operate. This therefore affirms that the new approaches are founded on the indigenous ones, and cannot existence without the former. The same idea blames the angle of thinking which only insists on applying the new approaches for the destruction of the ecology but also rebuts to equal with those who only cling on the indigenous approaches, as those who defectively attempt to fight the great force of change. Ohajunwa, (2021); Oketch, (2022) remarkably understood the approach of integration as an attempt of establishing a balance between the Western and African knowledge systems. His consideration is a substantial one since the two classes of people are now inhabitants of the African landmass, and all need to contribute toward the wellbeing of their society satisfactorily.

This recommendation is based on the fact that the indigenous knowledge just like the non-indigenous understanding has for long received global or international recognition in different aspects of life like education, science, culture, sustainability and health, among others. It is

efficient, effective and sustainable to the natural environment. The World Bank recognizes it in the same manner. To effectively bridge these two approaches, we can copy from the works done by some organizations which have already attempted to bridge. For example the African center for Aquatic and Education, which aims at connecting both local and international research partners to advance regional research and education needs as once guided by Obiero, (2023). This can help to incorporate the local indigenous contexts and the modern frameworks which are derived from these international communities. By incorporating both local and international knowledge and understanding, we will be able to name the best sustainable elements emerging from the two. When combined, they can be the most superlative strategies that will save our environment which is on the rage of dying. Each of them will have something good to offer, or each one of them may cover up the inadequacies of another. In support of this recommendation, Nunno, et'al. (2015) and Norman, (2011) provide that likely approaches have worked very well in Ghana and Mali respectively. For instance, instead of having the indigenous-like bans and fishing seasons, it is identically imaginable to copy the Basamia traditional approach of sustaining the lake and ensuring ecological balance. For example, checking on the rate of extraction of one species at the expense of others or generally over fishing, accompanied with the modern system of preservation. This can be done through adopting the method of specialization over the extraction of particular species. This strategy can be based on to organize for modern bans over the fishing of specific species for months, in intervals. Through issuing out of these contemporary fishing licenses which describe the species which the individual or company extracts without intruding on those taken by other groups, these customary approaches of bans and seasons can be married with the modern understanding of preservation, monitored by the fisheries leaders at all levels.

Among some of the traditional approaches that should be considered in the marriage is encouraging the adoption of Artisanal fishing and indigenous extraction methods since they were more sustainable in maintaining both the Basamia indigenous spirituality and the fish stock. According to Jeremy, (2021) and Leveque, (2003), the fishing communities of West Africa which practice artisanal fishing have sustained their fishing exercise than those that have adopted the western commercial and industrial exploitative type. African fishing communities like the Basamia which certainly desire to sustain fishing, only need to support artisanal/local fishing. Governments and other policy makers, have to make sure that industrial type of fishing is circumscribed. This does not only rescue the devastating fishing industry but also empowers the locals economically through employment provision. On ground that the fish and the fish habitants (water bodies like seas, oceans, lakes, rivers) belong to the locals first and far most, the government should not always put the industrial-like foreigners in the first thought. According to Christian Leveque, the international organizations like UNESCO and FAO have recommended that the only solution to the falling fishing activities of Africa is to “get back to the roots” and adopt the traditional practices. Yet one of such traditions is artisanal fishing. Sussy, et’al. (2012) described a likely approach when he suggested that in a way of complementing the African spirituality and modern approaches of conservation, policy makers should welcome and uphold the African feeling of life or” Essence” in every object and then use their modern strategies of sensitizing. The masses to have respect for life as it has been done before, life not for humans alone but the life of animals, stones, trees, forests, lakes and rivers, since all of them have life. This can help in sustaining our environment. However, Nweke, I.O. (2020) notified that as we are attempting to create such a harmony, we need to start with establishing the commonalities between the two, and not capitalizing on the differences which have for long created tension between the two ideologies.

For instance, he stressed that the two approaches share common values and intentions. Above all, the two approaches are from God, given as a gift for the people to interact fairly with their mother environment. Such commonalities lay a fertile ground upon which an association can be manufactured.

In addition, addressing the contemporary environment management and fishing sustainability in particular will not need only independent scientists, decision makers, environmental management/fisheries leadership put by government, UPDFs or local community working in isolation. Instead, it will call for an inclusive approach where all these stake holders equally contribute towards the making of policies and decisions pertaining the preservation of their fishing livelihood. In fact, all of them will need to work collaboratively and move beyond the use of only culturally informed practices within this western scientist frame works but instead use a power-neutral approach. Under this approach, power shall be distributed to all stake holders who will then have the chance to contribute towards the wellbeing of the lake and the entire fishing job. This approach shall allow in a mixed method operation which will render diversified strategies that can help in maintaining the ecology but also attending to the needs of all stake holders. Rendering other stake holders less concerned or less responsible for their environment has left the ecology in the hands of a few parties, who may claim to be more effective in preserving the environment, yet most have failed to address the matter. In regard to the submission above, Sussy, et'al. (2012), stressed that all people right from the grass root level should strive to care for God's creation and in the long run protect the environment, he described this approach as decentralization of power in the maintenance of natural resources.

Nunno, (2015) supported this idea when he provided that people are aware that the indigenous practices are more sustainable, what they only need is to be empowered. Therefore, knowledge co-

production and power co-formulation and development offers a promising avenue to bridge indigenous and western knowledge in a meaningful and benefiting way– when all stake holders equally contribute towards the creation of knowledge. Affirming what Obiero, et’al (2023) said, this will as well broaden the acceptability and applicability or implementation of innovations arising from the joint efforts of all stake holders in natural resource management of aquatic ecosystem. However, when some of these contributors are left out in these processes, they may not acknowledge and implement the “unknown” knowledge made by the “unknown people”, from “unknown places “with “unknown intentions”. Therefore, Change must occur within the indigenous knowledge systems so that it can be supported and promoted by key community members holding indigenous authority. For instance, the concerned government agencies like National Environmental Management Authority (NEMA), Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries can encourage the formulation of by-laws which are based on the cultural, social and spiritual norms of the people, to work with the central law governing the entire country. This can be formulated upon consultation of individuals vetted with indigenous knowledge like the elders. This will ensure a holistic approach as supported by Issifu, & Diawo, (2015).

Furthermore, we ought to base our policies and decisions on the local scientists, researchers and practitioners who in most cases are attuned to indigenous customs and values than the foreign ones. The local researchers and scientists usually know about the importance of honoring local protocols and leadership for community entrance, hospitality, etiquette and therefore building a long term relationship with communities and key members. In most cases, their research involves formulating their engagement with community members based on collectivity, thus warranting evidence based-decision making. The local researchers may also embed cultural preferences into their sampling design. For example, they may choose to conduct interviews informally with

community members including key knowledge holders like the practitioners themselves, elders, lineage heads and many others. However, basing decisions and policies on the studies made from other countries, especially out of Africa, at most times give inverted contexts which contrast with the African societies and environment. Their findings hold no element of the African spiritual context that has for long driven their understanding of the universe. By so doing, we may need to somehow move away from the pretext of globalization and accept with appreciation the fact that in some way, we are existing in somewhat different societies and environments which may call for different approaches in handling, dealing and maintaining nature. Appreciating this fact shall call for the use of the locally conducted research and recommendations to address our own unique environmental challenges, in our own understanding and perception.

Designating from the fact that indigenous oral traditions within which experienced and knowledgeable elders trained, groomed and imparted intergenerational knowledge to the young ones has been replaced with formal education, there is need for expanding on the pedagogical tool box to include teaching processes that integrates indigenous spirituality with the modern sustainable practices at micro and macro levels. This strategy can also help to address the trouble of the declining use of the spiritual traditions in the struggle for ensuring environmental conservation. At micro levels like primary and secondary, cultural and spiritual awareness should be created to the learners through including some of these spiritual traditions in their syllabus. Learning about this can help them to acknowledge and appreciate the existence and impact of these traditions on their interaction with the environment. This can guide them to respect and practice the rituals, observe the beliefs in form of taboos and totems. They can also remain connected to their spiritual roots and then be able to incorporate elements of this indigenous sanctity into their modern experiences. In fact, it is mostly education that can help in establishing a link or a bridge

between the old and the new systems as earlier on suggested. Once this link is established, the mindset of the young Africans who have been deceived that their spirituality is evil will definitely change and match what Sussy, et'al. (2012) suggested in an effort to harmonize the African spiritualities and the modern strategies; he suggested that for any imperative move towards integrating the western and African ideologies of spirituality, mindset change of the young Africans is a key aspect.

There is need for first of all correcting the misconception of the term traditional, which is deceptively taken to be a description of the past and out dated phenomenon. ATR from where African indigenous spirituality is established is a living religion and still influencing the lives of many people both within Africa and outside. I believe that this suggestion can only be achieved through formal education. At the macro levels, like at colleges, universities and other tertiary institutions, students should be guided to carry out research and document on some of the spiritual fascinating issues, record them in a written form for future generations and provide recommendations which can be used to ensure success in the struggle for the conservation of the environment. In the same understanding of the above, Chakale, & Muramo, (2018) provided that it is only through education that the concept of African indigenous spirituality can be preserved and applied in various fields of human experience. He added that it is the only way through which the foreign misinterpretation of the African spirituality as witchcraft can be corrected among the young generation. Having witnessed the negative impacts of the absence of this African system, he urged Africans to incorporate these ideas in their education so that we avoid losing it completely.

Feasible and enforceable fishing regulations should be established like it was done in the tradition. The workable restrictions and regulations are those that are designed from within their culture and

understanding, for example from their daily life experiences traced inside their beliefs and practices. To ensure actual sustainability in fishing and to secure the livelihoods of the people who survive on fishing, the restrictions and regulations should encompass issues relating to the size of fish to be caught, ensure specific seasons of fishing by announcing bans, and disapproving certain harmful methods. For instance, indigenous fishers treated the catching of big fish as prestige and this was celebrated. However, catching small sizes would be seen as misfortune, they would release the small fish back in the waters. According to Opondo, (2016), the Luo fishing people of Western Kenya had regulation called “Chike-Lupo” that regulated the fishing methods. The restrictions ensured that fishers only catch what was enough for them for food and selling to a few known customers. If this can be incorporated by the modern fishers, it can help in encouraging more breeding and production of the fish species. The restrictions should also protect the mangrove, wetlands for fresh water provision.

The government through its responsible departments should help people to come up with other sources of income so that their economies are diversified like it was in the past, rather than over pressurizing the lake. Instead of over relying on the same activity, year in, year out, fishing for the indigenous Basamia was simply a part time job. Otherwise, this behavior of over depending on singular natural resources depletes the ecology. In fact, most of the indigenous African fishing communities never treated fishing as a full-time activity. The *Likouba* and other fishing Africans, only fished during specific seasons, especially after heavy rains and when the water levels had reduced. (Fishman, 2024; Nunno, et al. 2015; Dounias, et al. 2016; Opondo, 2016). In fact, besides fishing, there was truly no full time job in Africa; seasons were respected as they dictated the economic activity to be carried out by the people in a specific period of time. For example, among the Luo of western Kenya, the period between February and June were farming seasons, after all

fishers would turn to farming. Among the Basamia, the period between April and July, fishers would go for harvesting the “new foods” and to conduct rituals that would enable them to be successful when they return to the fishing job. Again, due to the strong wind in the month of December and January, fishing was a risky job and all fishers had to withdraw from the lake for other activities especially, pottery, weaving and other hand craft work. During this time, the fish would reproduce and later be caught in big numbers. It’s only during this era where an individual stays on the lake throughout the year, busy depleting.

The governments should also add more efforts in sensitizing the masses about the sustaining methods of fishing through community workshops that lead to getting of certificates and licenses. During the sessions, the facilitators can encourage local fishers to consider the fishing activity as a communal practice so that the selfish and individualistic tendencies which are of course destructive in nature can be brought to an end. In support of the above, Nunno, et al. (2015) and Opondo, (2016) had the same proposals in their respective literatures. What helped the fishing activities of the tradition to remain sustainable was their communal approach. The communal approach gave all community members a task of ensuring the health of the ecosystem. To end with, there is need to identify the alien fish species which deplete others and be withdrawn from the waters. For this case, the Nile perch will be the first for the East African case. This selection will help in massive reproduction and increase on the fish stock. This submission is in full agreement with Awal, et al. (2024) opinions.

6.4 Areas for Further Research

I also recommend that more research should be made on the same topic of indigenous spirituality and fishing among other small inland and island African communities especially in the Eastern

region of Africa. This will help to provide a comprehensive understanding of how the indigenous Africans connected their fishing job with their spiritual traditions, and continue to explore how the indigenous spiritual perspectives of the indigenous Africans indeed perfectly sustained the lake and its inhabitants. Such explorations will definitely help in bridging the gaps that this study has created and also cover up the missing information that could bring about clarity on the same. In the same manner, I recommend that studies on the indigenous spirituality and how it is imbued with other economic activities like Agriculture, blacksmith/iron working, hunting, domestication of animals, mining, among others be conducted. This will provide additional knowledge of how the same concept was applicable in other economic activities, and how they sustained such doings. More research on how other social and political Activities of the African people were instilled with spirituality will also continue shedding more light on the general spiritual life of the African people, for appreciation by the young generation. Precisely, more studies that explore how the African people interacted with their universe in the social, political and economic spheres should be made, since this study like others have asserted that these African Spiritualities were very sustainable in nature. This will help to promote this phenomenon in the modern world and eventually contribute towards protection of our environment.

In totality, this study has brightened about the bottomless and multifaceted ways in which fishing among the Basamia is spiritually stranded, administered by beliefs, rituals and taboos that not only directed peoples' conduct but also sustained environmental stability. Yet these customs now face noteworthy interruption because of social, economic, and ecological fluctuations. The slow but steady destruction of indigenous spirituality epitomizes not just a damage of cultural identity, but also the dwindling of time-tested structures of ecological stewardship. As the Basamia traverse contemporary challenges, the crucial need is to protect and reinstitute spiritual awareness into local

lives and fisheries administration. Conserving this imperceptible heritage is not simply about the past. It is about safeguarding the significant and sustainable forthcoming generations embedded in principles that have for long time directed human contact with nature.

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APENDICES

APPENDIX ONE: INTERVIEW GUIDE

KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILLOSOPHY

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND FISHING AMONG THE BASAMIA IN EASTERN UGANDA.

Dear respondent,

I am Wafula John a student of Kyambogo University, conducting a research study about the indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia of Eastern Uganda. The findings of this study will help in informing the policy makers in the fishing sector and act as a channel of passage of our rich culture to the young generation for preservation. You have been selected as an eligible person who can contribute towards the success of this study. Therefore, kindly respond to the researchers' questions.

The information given will be confidentially handled and used for only academic purposes. Thank you for participating and making this research a success.

SECTION A: RESPONDENT'S DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

What is your:

A1 Name (optional)

A2 Gender

A3 Age

A4 Marital status

A5 Clan.

A6 Village

A7 Education Background.

A8 Occupation

A9 Work place.

SECTION B: GENERAL KNOWLEDGE ON THE FISHING PRACTICE

B1. Which role do (did) you play in the fishing practice, and why?

B2. Can you play another role, apart from that? Which one and why?

B3. For how long have you performed that task?

B4. Do you have a plan to quit this occupation, why?

B5. What do you think has enabled you to perform this task for that long?

B6. On which fishing grounds have you operated and why?

B7. Which fish species have you been catching from the above fishing grounds?

B8. Which one among the above has been the most caught and why?

B9. When do you go fishing and why, is there any spiritual attachment over that?

B10. How often do you go fishing in a distinctive week?

B11. What do you do to ensure plentiful fishing activities?

B12. How do fishermen prepare for the fishing journeys?

B13. Is there a specific season or time of the week, month or year when fishing is banned?

B14. Which common methods do you use to catch fish, and how do you select them?

B15. Do you follow any traditional methods passed down through generations?

B16. Which tools do you use to extract fish, and how do you get them?

B17. Which preservation methods have been used and why?

B18. When did fishing as an activity begin in your area?

SECTION C: BELIEVES AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE FISHING ACTIVITIES

C1. According to you, how did the water and all that belong there come to be?

C2. As a fisherman, monger, seller, etc., do you believe in the existence of God, gods, special power or spirit, why?

C3. Anyway, are there some spirits or power which inhabits the waters, the fish, fishing gears, sellers, market places or consumers, what is your believe and experience over this ?

C4. If yes, how do they influence fishing practices?

C5. How do fishers in your area express their belief in this and deal with these spirits and powers?

C6. What are some of the taboos/ prohibitions associated with fishing, water bodies,(fishing grounds), fish species, fishing gears, boats, canoes, fishers, market places and consumers, Are there times or places etc. where fishing is not allowed, why?

C7. Are there any totems or restrictions linked with fishing practices which are also rooted in the spiritual beliefs, which ones?

C8. Do they perform some rituals for the fishing gears, fishing grounds, boats, fishers, fishing voyage, start and end of fishing seasons, the fish, spirits, market places, sellers, consumers etc. before, during or after fishing? Which ones and why? (Kindly describe them)

C9. Who performs those rituals and why?

C10. Do you believe that some of these spiritual practices affect the success of someone's fishing, how?

C11. Does your fishing community have any spiritual leader or elder who guides fishing practices through spirituality beliefs and practices? Who are they and what do they specifically do?

C12. When and how do young people get the fishing skills and practices?

C13. Can you share a story or experience where spirituality influenced your fishing practices?

SECTION D: INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE FISHING

D1. Do you believe that the above spiritual beliefs can help in marinating the well-being of your fishing i.e. increasing on the fish population, stock, breeding rate, extraction rate and sustaining the rest of the environment, how?

D2. Do you believe that these beliefs were more sustainable than the modern policies? Why

SECTION E: FISHING CHANGES THAT AFFECTS INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

E1. Are the belief and practices mentioned in previous section still applicable and taken serious, or you notice some changes?

E2. What changes have taken place in the fishing activities today?

E3. What has caused the changes above?

E4. How do changes in fishing practices impact your spiritual beliefs or practices related to fishing?

E5. How does the younger generation view spirituality in relation to fishing practices compared to the older generation?

E6. Are there some traces of indigenous spirituality in modern fishing or it has completely changed?

E4. What should be done to preserve the cultural perspective of fishing?

Closure: do you have anything else you would to share about spirituality and fishing in your area?

APPENDIX TWO: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE
KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

**INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND FISHING AMONG THE BASAMIA IN EASTERN
UGANDA.**

Dear respondent,

I am Wafula John a student of Kyambogo University, conducting a research study about the indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Eastern Uganda. The findings of this study will help in informing the policy makers in the fishing sector and act as a channel of passage of our rich culture to the young generation for preservation. You have been selected as eligible persons who can contribute towards the success of this study. Therefore feel free to interact with me about this topic.

The information given will be confidentially handled and used for only academic purposes. Thank you for participating and making this research a success.

**SECTION A: BELIEVES AND PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH THE FISHING
ACTIVITIES**

A1. According to you, how did the water and all that belong there come to be?

A2. As a fisherman, monger, seller, etc., do you believe in the existence of God, gods, special power or spirit, why?

A3. Anyway, are there some spirits or power which inhabits the waters, the fish, fishing gears, sellers, market places or consumers, what is your believe and experience over this ?

A4. If yes, how do they influence fishing practices?

A5. How do fishers in your area express their belief in this and deal with these spirits and powers?

A6. What are some of the taboos/ prohibitions associated with fishing, water bodies,(fishing grounds), fish species, fishing gears, boats, canoes, fishers, market places and consumers, Are there times or places etc. where fishing is not allowed, why?

A7. Are there any totems or restrictions linked with fishing practices which are also rooted in the spiritual beliefs, which ones?

A8. Do they perform some rituals for the fishing gears, fishing grounds, boats, fishers, fishing voyage, start and end of fishing seasons, the fish, spirits, market places, sellers, consumers etc. before, during or after fishing? Which ones and why? (Kindly describe them)

A9. Who performs those rituals and why?

A10. Do you believe that some of these spiritual practices affect the success of someone's fishing, how?

A11. Does your fishing community have any spiritual leader or elder who guides fishing practices through spirituality beliefs and practices? Who are they and what do they specifically do?

A12. When and how do young people get the fishing skills and practices?

A13. Can you share a story or experience where spirituality influenced your fishing practices?

SECTION B: INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND SUSTAINABLE FISHING

B1. Do you believe that the above spiritual beliefs can help in maintaining the well-being of your fishing i.e. increasing on the fish population, stock, breeding rate, extraction rate and sustaining the rest of the environment, how?

B2. Do you believe that these beliefs were more sustainable than the modern policies? Why

SECTION C: FISHING CHANGES THAT AFFECTS INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY

C1. Are the belief and practices mentioned in previous section still applicable and taken serious, or you notice some changes?

C2. What changes have taken place in the fishing activities today?

C3. What has caused the changes above?

C4. How do changes in fishing practices impact your spiritual beliefs or practices related to fishing?

C5. How does the younger generation view spirituality in relation to fishing practices compared to the older generation?

C6. Are there some traces of indigenous spirituality in modern fishing or it has completely changed?

C4. What should be done to preserve the cultural perspective of fishing?

Closure: do you have anything else you would to share about spirituality and fishing in your area?

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR TIME AND CONTRIBUTION

APPENDIX THREE: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL
KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

The researcher will observe the following:

- a) The environmental conditions like clean water, weather, presence of community members during fishing activities etc.
- b) The fish species found in the area
- c) The fishing tools or gears and methods used
- d) The preparation for the fishing expeditions
- e) The nature of fishing i.e. whether individual or communal fishing
- f) The interaction of fishermen during the activity, whether they stay silent, or keep communicating.
- g) The sacred or spiritual objects found near fishing sites e.g. shrines, alters, offerings etc.
- h) The rituals performed before, during and after fishing e.g. prayers, ceremonies, festivals, sacrifices, blessings, thanks giving, ritualized catch sharing etc.
- i) Signs of spiritual symbols on the fishing equipment like markings on boats and nets etc.
- j) Participation of elders, leaders, religious men and to other responsible people.
- k) Taboos being observed by the community members e.g. avoiding some fish species, fishing grounds, fishing banns etc.
- l) The interaction between different generations for passage of fishing knowledge.
- m) The influence of other foreign religions in the fishing
- n) The time for fishing

- o) Signs of environmental degradation, pollution, over fishing, for they might influence spirituality

THANKS.

APPENDIX FOUR: LOCAL AUTHORITY CONSENT FORM
KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

LOCAL AUTHORITY CONSENT FORM

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND FISHING AMONG THE BASAMIA OF EASTERN
UGANDA.

Dear..... [Name & title],

I am Wafula John a student of Kyambogo University, conducting a research study in your area on indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia of Eastern Uganda. The findings of this study will help in informing the policy makers in the fishing sector and act as a channel of passage of our rich culture to the young generation.

This is therefore to seek your permission to conduct research within your jurisdiction. I will interact with community members including men and women involved in fishing, to collect data through interviews and observations. The research will respect the customs, norms and regulations of the community and participation will be voluntary. Although the findings may be published, the information given will be confidentially handled and used for only academic purposes.

By signing on this form you permit me to conduct research in your community. For any clarification, feel free to contact me on 0789654960/ 0705492576 or wafulajohn919@gmail.com

Authority's consent:

I.....[Name & tittle]

hereby grant permission to Wafula John to conduct the aforementioned study in our community.

Signature

Date and stamp

APPENDIX FIVE: RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM
KYAMBOGO UNIVERSITY

FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

RESPONDENT CONSENT FORM

INDIGENOUS SPIRITUALITY AND FISHING AMONG THE BASAMIA IN EASTERN UGANDA.

Dear..... [Name & title],

I am Wafula John a student of Kyambogo University, conducting a research study in your area on indigenous spirituality and fishing among the Basamia in Eastern Uganda. The findings of this study will help in informing the policy makers in the fishing sector and act as a channel of passage of our rich culture to the young generation.

This is therefore to seek your acceptance to participate in this study. Your insights and experiences are valuable for understanding the topic under study. The participation is voluntary and without any risks or direct benefits, but your contribution will provide valuable insights into this topic. Although the findings may be published, the information given will be confidentially handled and used for only academic purposes.

By signing on this form you confirm that you understand the study and agree to participant. For any clarification, feel free to contact me on 0789654960/0705492576 or wafulajohn919@gmail.com

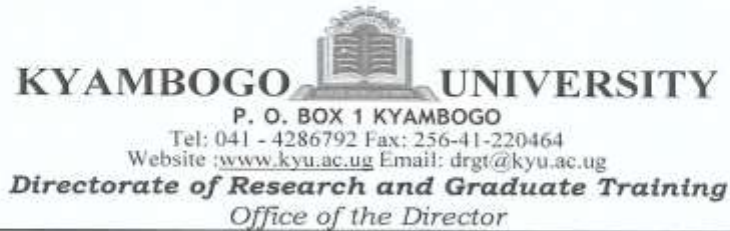
Respondent's consent:

I..... [Name & title]

voluntarily agree to participate in the study conducted by Wafula John.

SignatureDate

APPENDIX SIX: UNIVERSITY INTRODUCTORY LETTER



APPENDIX 8: INTRODUCTORY LETTER

Date: 06/3/2025

The Chief Administrative Officer
Namayingo District

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: WAFULA JOHN

This is to introduce to you the above named student Reg: No **23/U/GMARS/1398/PE** Pursuing Master of Arts in Religious Studies, Department of Religious Studies, Kyambogo University.

He intends to carry out research on **"Indigenous Spirituality and Fishing among the Samia of Uganda"** in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the award of Master of Arts in Religious Studies of Kyambogo University.

The purpose of this letter therefore is to request you to grant him permission to carry out his study in your institution.

Any assistance rendered to him will be highly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

Prof. Bosco Bua
AG. DIRECTOR

