IDEO-THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON NYABINGI RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT IN KIGEZI

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DECLARATION

I, **NIWAMANYA BRIAN**, solemnly declare that this scholarly work, entitled 'Ideo-Theological Perspectives on Nyabingi Religious Movement in Kigezi,' unless where properly cited and acknowledged is my original work and has never been submitted for publication or presented in any academic institution for any purpose.

Signature

Date

SUPERVISORS' APPROVAL

This serves to certify that this academic work entitled "Ideo-Theological Perspectives on Nyabingi Religious Movement in Kigezi" has been conducted under our supervision and has gone through all the necessary reviews.

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Signature

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Date

DEDICATION

I dedicate this academic work to Mr. Namara Obed, my former boss, whose inspiring leadership, firm mental support, and insightful guidance profoundly influenced my professional growth and development. I will always be glad for the privilege of working with you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I am profoundly grateful to God for the strength and guidance that enabled me to compile this academic report. The journey of reviewing a multitude of articles, visiting various libraries, writing extensively, tracking numerous corrections, and constantly re-reading drafts from my supervisors has been a challenging endeavor and I believe could only be accomplished through God's abundant grace.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study undertakes a critical deconstruction of the ideological and theological paradigms undergirding the Nyabingi religious movement in Kigezi, with a specific focus on perspectives of the Bakiga. Other than relying only on the Interpretivism tradition of research, this study utilizes a triangulated methodology that synthesizes in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and secondary data analysis, thereby elucidating the complex interplay of beliefs, values, and practices that shape the Nyabingi movement.

The study adopts contextualized approach to critically interrogate the ideological and theological constructs that inform the Nyabingi movement. In addition, this research contributes meaningfully to the existing body of knowledge on African religious movements, while illuminating the complex dynamics of religious innovation and cultural expression in contemporary Africa. The study provides insights into the ways in which Nyabingi movement reflects and shapes the ideological and theological perspectives of the Bakiga. The study concludes that Nyabingi remains an influential deity even among the contemporary Bakiga and continues to be revered through ‘Okuterekyerera’ and the priestess *Abagirwa* continue to experience the possession of Nyabingi.

GLOSSARY

a) Abafumu: These are the medicine men and women among the Bakiga. They are responsible for prescribing herbal medicine for various illnesses among the Bakiga. They are known for knowing all the herbs and what they (herbs) treated.

b) Abagirwa: The abagirwa are the dedicated priests of Nyabingi, endowed with a unique spiritual anointing that allowed them to communicate directly with the Nyabingi spirit. Traditionally, these priests are women chosen by Nyabingi herself, distinguished by their special calling and rigorous training under the guidance of senior abagirwa. Their role is not merely ceremonial; they are the vital link between the divine and the community, delivering responses to worshippers seeking guidance and solace. They devoted themselves entirely to their sacred vocation, often living in service to Nyabingi, attending the shrines where rituals were performed, and assisting in the offering of sacrifices that honored the spirit. The position of a mugirwa was viewed as a lifelong commitment marked by devotion and reverence.

c) Abakafiire: The term abakafiire refers to individuals who adhere to no specific religion, often labeled by contemporary Christians as pagans. This designation originated with missionaries who aimed to classify the Bakiga who resisted the embrace of Christianity. Over time, the term gained prominence, particularly during the East African revival movement in the 1920s, when cultural and religious identities were being passionately redefined. The abakafiire are seen as essential cultural bearers of traditional beliefs, standing apart from mainstream religious practices.

d) Ebibumbe: These are the sacred portraits of Nyabingi movement. Unfortunately, majority of these were smashed by the balokole of the East African revival movement who destroyed everything that seemed ungodly to them.

e) Ekeleziya: Catholic Church.

f) Ekanisa: The Anglican church of Uganda.

g) Endaaro: The endaaro are sacred shrines, typically simple yet significant structures, often small huts tucked away in the backyards of traditional homesteads among the Bakiga. These intimate spaces served as the focal point for worship, where the essence of Nyabingi was honored through prayer and ritual. Each endaaro was not only a place of devotion but also operated as the office of the abagirwa, where they carried out their spiritual responsibilities, facilitating important ceremonies and community gatherings. The endaaro embodied the intersection of the physical and spiritual realms, reverberating with the prayers and sacrifices offered by the worshippers, who sought connection, protection, and blessings from the divine.

h) Engoma: This is a Rukiga word for a drum. Nyabingi has a special drum known as 'kamuhagamo' which was played during occasions, festivals, and during the performance of rituals among the Bakiga.

i) Ideo-theological: This term pertains to the intricate religious beliefs associated with the Nyabingi phenomenon among the Bakiga. It captures a wide range of ideas, emotions, and reflections that define the Nyabingi religious movement. This movement holds deep significance for the community, representing not only their spiritual convictions but also their cultural identity and collective heritage. Through the lens of these beliefs, the Bakiga find meaning, connection, and a sense of belonging within their social and spiritual landscape.

j) Kubandwa: This is also said as 'Okubandwa' which literally means, 'something falling on you.' It was a situation where Nyabingi falls on her servants in order to have them possessed. When a mugirwa is in the state of Kubandwa, she acts on behalf of Nyabingi.

k) Ruhanga: Ruhanga is the Supreme Being in Bakiga belief. He is known by various names depending on his actions, including Nyamuhanga, Kazooba, and Mukama. According to Bakiga tradition, Ruhanga created the heavens and the earth and resides in a place that is beyond reach. He is considered superior to all other deities within the spiritual realm.

l) Nyabingi: Nyabingi is a legendary female spirit highly revered by the Bakiga. She is seen as next in prominence to Ruhanga, the Supreme Being. Nyabingi played a crucial role in the formation of the Nyabingi religious movement in Kigezi, which was integral to the resistance against British colonial rule during the 1930s.

m) Okunywana: The process of visiting friends to cement their relationship. It is still a common practice among the Bakiga in the contemporary Kigezi.

n) Okuterekyerera: The process of sacrificing to Nyabingi to appease her.

o) Okutweija: The act of taking presents and gifts to Nyabingi such as herds, harvests and many others.

p) Orukiga: This refers to the language spoken by the Bakiga of South Western Uganda in Kigezi region.

ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

ATR: African Traditional Religion

C.O.U: Church of Uganda

ERM: East African Revival Movement

FGD: Focus Group Discussion

KCA: Kikuyu Central Association

NRM: Nyabingi Religious movement

UBOS: Uganda Bureau of Statistics

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CHAPTER ONE: GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.0 Introduction

This section is designed to provide an introduction to this study, highlighting the key issues and contextual factors that shaped its development. It focuses on the rich cultural identity of the Bakiga, detailing their unique characteristics, social structures, and belief systems. By gaining a deeper understanding of Bakiga society, we can constructively explore their theological perspectives and religious frameworks, particularly in relation to the figure of Nyabingi. The research prioritizes examining the origins, practices, beliefs, and rituals associated with Nyabingi worship, establishing a clear framework that will guide this inquiry toward its intended objectives.

1.1 Thesis outline

1.1.1 General Introduction

Chapter one offers a general introduction to the study. It also presents the background to this study, states the problem to this study, purpose of the study and the objectives of conducting this study. It lays out the Questions to be answered as derived from the study objectives.

1.1.2 Literature review

This chapter presents the existing related literature. The literature is organized thematically in line with the objectives of the study. The purpose of reviewing the related literature under this chapter was to justify the need to conduct this study. This was done by pointing out the gap in what is available in documentary and provide a general view on the area under study. This section also includes a review of the theoretical lenses through which the study was approached.

1.1.3 Methodology

This chapter provides information regarding the methodology and the techniques that were used to arrive at in the findings of this study. Areas discussed under this chapter include the research tradition, research approach, research design, area of the study, sampling techniques, data collection tools and instruments, and methods used to collect data from the field.

1.1.4 Results and findings

This part presents findings of the study that are in line with the objectives and research questions. It presents has contains issues pertaining what Nyabingi religious movement is, its origin, rituals, beliefs and practices of the movement. It also summarizes the cultural background of Nyabingi and analyses the impact of Nyabingi religious movement on peoples' lives in Kigezi. This section is broken into chapter four, five and six.

1.1.5 Summary and Conclusion

This section is in chapter seven of this thesis and presents the final remarks about the study. It provides the reader with a general overview of the work and sums up the entire discussion. This section summarizes the study and gives a general conclusion of this thesis.

1.1.6 Recommendations and areas for further study

This chapter particularly presents suggestions to academicians and other policy makers about Nyabingi Religious movement and presents areas for further research on African spirituality and African religious movements.

1.2 Background to the Study

In the scenic landscapes of Kigezi, located in southwestern Uganda, the figure of Nyabingi holds a significant place in the cultural consciousness of the Bakiga. While the elders of the community recount her legacy with deep affection and respect, the younger generation often views Nyabingi through a critical lens, perceiving her as a myth or an unverifiable belief. This situation presents an opportunity to bridge generational gaps and foster dialogue about the meaning and implications of Nyabingi in contemporary society.

The narratives about Nyabingi are diverse and multifaceted, each adding a layer to the existing knowledge about Bakiga identity. Some portray her as a spiritual force or a divine figure, while others depict her as a strong-willed woman who once sought power in Rwanda. Additionally, certain revivalist interpretations label her as a demonic presence or an agent of the devil, arguing that she stood in opposition to the developmental progress of the people's lives during the era of European colonization. Such interpretations maintain that Nyabingi led the Bakiga away from enlightenment, encouraging rituals that divert attention from modern advancements.

This multiplicity of narratives raises important questions about the authenticity and impact of these stories on the community. I generally believe that by examining these narratives critically, we can uncover valuable insights that contribute to a deeper understanding of Nyabingi and her cultural significance.

In the existing literature, Nyabingi is frequently described as a revered queen and her spirit viewed as a goddess by her followers. Scholars have approached Nyabingi as not only a figure of reverence but also as a symbol of resistance against colonial forces. However, the diversity of perspectives in the literature indicates a lack of consensus regarding her origins, the circumstances that led to her rise, and her meaning within the broader cultural context.

Despite these differences, one point of agreement is that Nyabingi gained substantial prominence among the Bakiga of Kigezi in the early 19th century. This shared understanding serves as a foundation for our inquiry and represents an opportunity for further exploration. Through this study, my aim is to construct a more nuanced understanding of the Nyabingi phenomenon and its implications for the Bakiga. By addressing these questions thoughtfully, this study can contribute to a constructive dialogue about the cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs of the Bakiga, fostering a deeper appreciation of their history and identity. This study is basically situated in Kigezi region in South Western Uganda.

1.2.1 Kigezi region

Kigezi is situated in the southwestern region of Uganda, bordering both Rwanda and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (formerly known as Zaire). The name "Kigezi" is derived from "Egyezi" or "Akagyezi," which translates to "a small lake." It is perched on a hilltop known locally as "eibare" within the current Kabale. The area is known for its terraced fields, which contribute to its unique visual appeal. Due to its stunning landscape, Kigezi is often referred to as the "Switzerland of Africa" (Kabananukye, 2016). The region covers the districts of Kabale, Kanungu, Kisoro, Rubanda, Rukiga, and Rukungiri.

As noted by Rutanga (1991:1), Kigezi was established as a colonial entity in 1911 through the Anglo-German-Belgian agreement that divided the Kivu-Mulera-Ndorwa region among the three imperial powers. Rutanga also indicates that Kigezi spans approximately 2,045 square miles and has a population of 2,947,837 Bakiga as per the Uganda Bureau Of Statistics (UBOS) report of 8th October, 2024 (UBOS, 2024).

Population projections suggest that the region continues to experience growth in all fields of life due to several factors. First and foremost, Kigezi is renowned for its beautiful scenery, including

hills, water bodies, and lush forests, which attract both residents and tourists. Moreover, Kigezi's fertile soils support year-round agricultural production, making it a significant source of irish and sweet potatoes in Uganda (Rutanga 1991). Additionally, it draws many visitors for academic, recreational, and study purposes, further contributing to its year-round population density.

1.2.2 The Bakiga

The Bakiga, often referred to as the ‘Kiga’, form a resilient and dynamic ethnic group within the broader Bantu-speaking community in Southwestern Uganda. Their notable presence is particularly concentrated in the Kigezi region, which is celebrated for its breathtaking mountainous landscapes that have profoundly influenced their cultural identity and lifestyle. The term "Bakiga," meaning "people of the mountains," aptly reflects their deep connection to this rugged terrain (Doyles, 2015). The Bakiga communicate primarily in a uniform language known as ‘Rukiga.’

The origins of the Bakiga are a subject of scholarly interest and ongoing debate, characterized by a blend of historical accounts and oral traditions. Some narratives indicate that segments of the Bakiga community migrated from the fertile plains of Karagwe in present-day Tanzania, while others suggest their ancestry can be traced to Bunyoro, claiming they arrived during the tumultuous period of the Luo invasion (Ndyabahika, 1997:124).

Further enriching their ancestral narrative, a compelling tradition, as noted by Ndyabahika (1997:126), posits that the Bakiga may have roots in Buganza, Rwanda. This belief is prominently conveyed through their cultural practices, particularly in traditional folk songs that reflect their migratory history. One significant song includes the lyrics, "Abakiga twena tukaruga Rwanda, omu Byumba na Ruhenjere," which translates to "All of us, the Bakiga, migrated from Rwanda in Byumba and Ruhenjere." Such narratives vividly illustrate the Bakiga's journey from

their ancestral lands in search of fertile agricultural land while escaping the political unrest and conflicts that affected their early communities.

The Bakiga are distinguished by their remarkable resilience and strong work ethic, particularly evident in their agricultural practices. Their diet is diverse, predominantly consisting of staple foods such as sweet potatoes, Irish potatoes, millet, and sorghum. These crops are cultivated with great diligence, providing essential sustenance and economic stability for numerous families. Indeed, agriculture serves as the foundation of Bakiga life, underpinning their livelihoods and enabling them to flourish in the lush, verdant landscapes they inhabit.

The Bakiga, residing primarily in South-Western Uganda, are a dynamic and vibrant community celebrated for their spirited traditional dances. One of their most cherished cultural expressions is the exhilarating dance known as "ekyizino." This lively performance involves both men and women, who come together to create an energetic display of joy and camaraderie. With rhythmic jumps and synchronized movements, the dancers embody a celebration of togetherness that transcends mere entertainment. Instead, "ekyizino" serves as a significant pillar of their social gatherings and festive occasions, fostering deep community ties and a strong sense of cultural identity.

In terms of spirituality, the Bakiga hold a profound reverence for a supreme being known as 'Ruhanga' or 'Kazooba Nyamuhanga.' Revered as the grand creator of the universe, including the vast heavens and the earth beneath their feet, Ruhanga represents an intricate and multifaceted concept. The name 'Ruhanga' is derived from two Rukiga words: 'Ru,' meaning "one," and 'hanga,' meaning "to create." Therefore, Ruhanga is interpreted as "the one who creates" or "the creator." In the belief system of the Bakiga, Ruhanga personifies the origin of all life and possesses absolute authority over all living and non-living entities. He is seen as the giver of life,

endowed with the profound power to determine the fate of individuals, encompassing both life and death. The relationship that the Bakiga cultivate with Ruhanga highlights the essential need for harmony with him and the surrounding natural world, signifying their deep-rooted connection to the earth. In their spiritual practices, Ruhanga is regarded as the ultimate being, revered above all others in both earthly and spiritual realms, often called 'Mukama,' a term that signifies his dominion over all creation.

Alongside the veneration of Ruhanga, most Bakiga pay homage to Nyabingi, a powerful goddess spirit believed to serve as a bridge between the human realm and the divine. Nyabingi is often manifested through a priestess named Muhumuza, who plays a critical role in the spiritual life of the Bakiga. The name 'Nyabingi' translates to "one who possesses many things," reflecting her esteemed status among the community. She is frequently depicted as a historical figure of remarkable strength and benevolence, thought to perform acts of goodness and miracles for her dedicated followers in Kigezi (Vokes, 2015:14). Majority of the Bakiga continue to worship Nyabingi with urgency, as she is perceived to respond more swiftly to their prayers compared to Ruhanga, who is preoccupied with the vast concerns of the universe.

Within each Bakiga household that worships Nyabingi, a sacred shrine known as 'endaaro' is typically maintained in honor of Nyabingi. This intimate space serves as a gathering spot for family members to engage in worship, seek guidance, and petition her for blessings or assistance. Nyabingi is considered a vital agent of Ruhanga, and neglecting her worship is believed to attract severe repercussions from Ruhanga himself. When Nyabingi is satisfied with the offerings and prayers made to her, it is thought that Ruhanga will also find contentment. The fact that not all Bakiga worship Nyabingi makes the abagirwa the esteemed female servants of Nyabingi, possess the authority to perform rituals and prayer on behalf of the broader community. The family chief, known as 'Omukuru weeka,' typically a male figure, fulfills the primary responsibility of serving

Nyabingi, overseeing the family shrine. In the absence of the family head, the firstborn son is often entrusted with this significant duty, underscoring the importance of lineage and inheritance in Bakiga culture.

Moreover, the spirits of deceased family members, referred to as ‘emizimu,’ are believed to maintain a profound influence over the lives of the living. If these ancestral spirits feel neglected or disgruntled, they are thought to cause misfortune, resulting in ailments, barrenness, or poor agricultural yields for their living relatives. Consequently, the Bakiga often seek the intervention of Nyabingi to find relief from these rebellious ‘emizimu.’ In other circumstances, they may turn to ‘emandwa,’ protective spirits assigned to safeguard them and their households from malevolent forces.

The social structure of Bakiga society is organized into a diverse range of clans, each possessing its own distinct lineage and identity. Each clan is led by a figure known as the "Omukuru w’omuryango." Research conducted by Ngologoza (1998) has identified several clans within the Kigezi region, each linked to unique totems that carry significant cultural importance. In Bakiga traditions, it is customary for individuals to refrain from marrying within their own clan, ensuring that familial lines remain clear and distinct. Among these clans, the Basigi clan holds a prominent position, celebrated for its historical depth and cultural richness.

Due to population pressures and the pursuit of better opportunities, many Bakiga have migrated to different regions across Uganda, leading to their presence in districts such as Kabarole, Hoima, Rukungiri, Kasese, Masindi, Kibale, Rwampara, Rakai, and Masaka.

The cultural significance and spiritual practices surrounding the worship of Nyabingi are fundamental to the Bakiga’s identity, setting their heritage apart. Without the Bakiga's active

engagement and commitment to preserving their traditions, the reverence for Nyabingi may not have flourished as it has today.

1.3 Research Motivation

I was driven to undertake this specific study by a number of influences covering religious, sociological, and academic realms. Each of these spheres provided unique insights and motivations, fueling a deep curiosity and commitment to exploring the subject matter in greater depth. The interplay of beliefs, societal dynamics, and scholarly discourse created a rich inspiration that guided the researcher's journey.

1.3.1 Religious Motivation

I was deeply fascinated by the rich tapestry of oral narratives originating from Nyabingi Religious Movement (NRM), particularly regarding the extraordinary reverence afforded to its spirit, which is celebrated above all other spiritual entities among the Bakiga. This intrigue has led to several pivotal questions: How did the Nyabingi spirit come into existence? What were the historical and cultural pathways that brought it to the Bakiga? Might there be a connection to the Bakiga ancestors, who have long shaped the region's beliefs? How is Nyabingi intertwined with the concept of Ruhanga, the Creator? Furthermore, is Nyabingi best understood as a cult, or does it represent a significant expression of African traditional religion (ATR) within the Bakiga community? Given these complex religious inquiries, I was motivated to undertake a comprehensive study of this phenomenon to lay the groundwork for more extensive future investigations.

1.3.2 Sociological Motivation

The compelling stories surrounding the Nyabingi movement suggest that it has profoundly influenced the daily lives and cultural practices of the Bakiga. This influence encompasses

various aspects, such as how the Bakiga worship, their perceptions of the divine, the ways they organize social gatherings, the rituals surrounding ceremonies, and numerous elements of their cultural identity. Although the initiation rituals and subsequent participation might appear daunting to outsiders, the Bakiga exhibit a remarkable ability to embrace and conform to the social norms associated with the Nyabingi movement. My main aim was to delve into how the social ramifications of the NRM continue to shape the everyday experiences and cultural expressions of the Bakiga community.

1.3.3 Academic Motivation

The phenomenon of Nyabingi has been the subject of numerous academic investigations, with notable studies exploring various dimensions of its impact. Works such as "Nyabingi's Engagement in Current Political Discourse in Uganda: A Contemporary Political Science Study" (Nakato, 2020), "Kigezi and Its People" (Ngologoza, 1998), and "Nyabingi Movement: People's Anti-Colonial Struggles in Kigezi" (Rutanga, 1991) have shed light on particular facets, including the movement's engagement in political arenas, its significant role in the anti-colonial struggle in Kigezi, and the crucial contributions of women to its evolution and growth. Yet, despite this growing body of literature, substantial questions remain unresolved regarding the origins of Nyabingi. The beliefs, rituals, and practices associated with its worship have not received the detailed examination they warrant. As a result, pressing questions linger: Where exactly did Nyabingi originate, and what specific beliefs and practices were integral to its worship? What rituals were conducted in association with these beliefs? These scholarly gaps have ignited a profound curiosity within me to explore this study further.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

The Nyabingi movement is a crucial aspect of the Bakiga's cultural identity and social structure in the Kigezi region, having significant influences on their religious beliefs, political connections, and economic activities since 1912. Central to this movement is the worship of the Nyabingi spirit, with shrines called "endaaro" serving as key places for communal worship. However, existing research primarily focuses on the reasons behind the Bakiga's devotion to Nyabingi rather than exploring the rituals, practices, and their significance within the community. This oversight has created a gap in understanding the movement's religious, cultural, and social values. Consequently, the lack of well-documented rituals and beliefs poses a risk to preserving this unique cultural heritage for future generations. Therefore, there is a critical need for an extensive study to thoroughly investigate Nyabingi's rituals, beliefs, and practices to provide a valuable resource for scholars and to ensure the preservation of the Bakiga community's rich cultural legacy.

1.5 General Objective of the study

This study aims at exploring the ideological and theological underpinnings of Nyabingi religious movement in Kigezi.

1.5.1 Specific Objectives

The specific objectives of this study are:

a) To explore the socio- cultural antecedents of Nyabingi religious movement.
b) To examine the dimensions of Nyabingi religious movement.
c) To investigate the ideological and theological influence of Nyabingi religious movement on the religiosity in Kigezi.

1.6 Research Questions

This study will be guided by the following critical Questions:

a) What are the socio- cultural antecedents of Nyabingi religious movement?
b) What are the dimensions of Nyabingi religious movement among Bakiga?
c) What is the ideological and theological influence of Nyabingi on the religiosity in Kigezi?

1.7 Scope of the study

The scope of this study covered three aspects, i.e. Geographical, Content and Time scope.

1.7.1 Geographical Scope

The study was particularly limited to the Bakiga of Kigezi region and the data was collected from Nyarushanje Sub County in the parishes of Bunono, Burora, Ihunga, Bwanga, and Kisiizi. The choice for Nyarushanje as a hotspot for data collection in this study was on ground of the oral stories about the area having people who worshipped Nyabingi. I was very familiar with the area and since I am a Mukiga from Nyarushanje who has lived in the area since my childhood, I approached the field knowing that the residents were Bakiga, who knew something about the worship of Nyabingi. (Namususwa, Isiko 2024). In addition to this fact, I have for over five years been interested in Nyabingi religious experience and though informally, I have previously participated in the religious activities of Nyabingi religious movement as an observer with an aim of trying to understand the religious experiences of its adherents.

1.7.2 Content scope

The study focused on exploring peoples' ideological and theological perspectives on Nyabingi Religious Movement in Kigezi and anything that was not in line with the study's set objectives

was ignored. It also focused on the beliefs, rituals and practices of Nyabingi movement to clearly understand its impact on the Bakiga religiosity in Kigezi.

1.7.3 Time scope

The data was collected for over a period of ten weeks but the study was not tied to any specific time dimension. However, most of the data obtained from the written records was from the early 1920's when Nyabingi religious movement became popular in Kigezi. The data obtained from the field had no specific time frame.

1.8 Significance of the Study

This study adds to the body of existing knowledge of African religious movements by providing a clear documentation of Nyabingi's beliefs, rituals and practices through using a cultural lens. It also provides insights into the spiritual practices, beliefs and values of Nyabingi hence widening the understanding of African spirituality. This further facilitates the academic comparison with other traditional religious movements through critical thinking and analysis on the complexities of African traditional and cultural heritages. This can therefore inform policy makers and other development initiators to properly engage with the adherents of the movement by being more sensitive on culturally sensitive matters.

1.9 Limitations of the Study

The study had a number of limitations that affected the identification of the study area, data collection and analysis of the data obtained. These were later dealt with to ensure the efficiency of this study. These included the following.

a) The content scope itself was so narrow, something that limited the researcher from obtaining other relevant information about Nyabingi Religious movement. The study was

centered on researching about the ideological and theological perspectives of the Bakiga on Nyabingi Religious Movement and this led to the neglect of other crucial aspects like the political dimension of Nyabingi.

b) There was also interpretational bias that affected the study so much. Most of the informants were not willing to provide the necessary information because they had converted to Christianity or had denounced all the practices of Nyabingi during the 'revival movement' era. This led to distortion of the true meaning of the Nyabingi, its practices, beliefs and rituals. This was solved by comparing data from the various methods employed during this study. In this case, the data obtained from interviews and FGDs was compared with that from the documentary data in order to arrive at a conclusion of the findings.

c) Most of the participants also faced emotional related to the nature of the study especially after sharing the hurting experiences of Nyabingi. These would at times hade tears, something that would stop further research activities at that time. The researcher worked with the religious leaders of the neighboring churches to offer counselling sessions to the emotionally distressed participants.

d) Moreover, accessing the some reference books and other texts was quite challenging during this study. Some works were unpublished and others like 'Kigezi and its people' by Paul Ngologoza; were not available on internet. Even those that were available online had download restrictions. This forced the researcher to rely on the few materials that existed in Kyambogo and Ndejje university libraries.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter has laid a solid foundation for understanding the Bakiga, their religious practices, and their cultural significance in Kigezi, which are pivotal to the objectives of this study. This discussion will enable me to transit into the next chapter of Literature review, where I will analyze the existing researches and theories which are relevant to this particular study. This analysis will not only highlight gaps in the current knowledge but also situate this study within the broader academic discourse, providing a more clear understanding of the Bakiga culture and its implications.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

This section offers a theoretical and comprehensive review of relevant literature from available sources. It analyzes existing studies on the meaning and origin of NRM and provides insights into its rituals, beliefs, and practices. Furthermore, it examines the religious landscape and traditional life of the Bakiga, including their ancestral connections. Lastly, this chapter addresses the limitations faced in the study of Bakiga religious heritage.

2.1 Theoretical review

This study is based on the theory of symbolic interactionism, a sociological framework that investigates how individuals create and interpret meanings through their interactions with others. By focusing on the subjective experiences and views of individuals, this theory enhances our understanding of the intricate social dynamics at work during this study.

2.1.1 The theory of Symbolic interactionism

This study utilizes the symbolic interactionism theory pioneered by George Herbert Mead in the early 20th century to explore the role of symbols and shared meanings in shaping human behavior and society (Carter & Fuller, 2016). This theory was also employed by influential sociologists, such as Charles H. Cooley and W.I. Thomas, who were associated with the University of Chicago during that era. Originating in the United States, symbolic interactionism rose to prominence within the field of sociology.

The theory asserts that individuals create meaning through their interactions with others and their surrounding environment. It highlights the significance of symbols, language, and communication in shaping experiences and understanding of society. Central to its claims is the

idea that human life exists within a symbolic realm. According to Denzin (2017), individuals derive meaning from symbols and utilize these meanings to guide their interactions with others.

Denzin (2017) further elaborates that Herbert Blumer popularized this theory, outlining three fundamental premises: people act toward things based on the meanings those things hold for them; the meanings of things emerge from social interactions; and these meanings are shaped and modified through the interactive processes among individuals.

In the context of the study on Nyabingi religious movement, this theory is particularly pertinent, as it offers a framework for understanding the symbolic and interpretive dimensions of the movement within the Bakiga community in Kigezi. Hałas (2013) notes that, per this theory, individuals engage in an ongoing process of interpreting and reinterpreting symbols based on their social interactions. The meanings of these symbols are not intrinsic but are constructed through social processes, communication, and shared experiences. This theory is highly relevant to this study and closely aligns with three main objectives. The first objective focuses on understanding the meaning and origin of Nyabingi, which entails exploring how symbols associated with the movement are interpreted and negotiated within the Bakiga community. This exploration may include analyzing enduring symbols such as the drum known as 'kamuhagamo,' the Nyabingi caves in Nyakishenyi, the calabashes used in rituals, and the spears employed in the anti-colonial wars against European colonialists.

Additionally, the beliefs, rituals, and practices of Nyabingi among the Bakiga can be examined through the lens of symbolic interactionism. This perspective enables us to investigate how individuals and the community collectively interpret and attach significance to the rituals, ceremonies, and experiences related to Nyabingi worship.

Moreover, the influence of Nyabingi on religiosity in Kigezi can be analyzed through symbolic interactionism by scrutinizing how the symbolic elements of Nyabingi shape individuals' beliefs, values, and religious practices. This approach allows for a comprehensive examination of the symbolic meanings associated with Nyabingi and their impact on religious expressions within the community. It also provides valuable insights into the religious concepts surrounding Nyabingi, best understood through the experiences of the Bakiga.

According to Carter and Fuller (2015), the framework of symbolic interactionism suggests that the meanings individuals attach to events, symbols, and interactions are not static; rather, they are fluid and can change over time. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining the dynamic social interactions inherent in the Nyabingi movement, a significant spiritual and cultural phenomenon among the Bakiga community.

However, one of the notable limitations of this theoretical approach is its relatively narrow emphasis on social structures and broader societal influences. This focus may lead to an oversight of existing social inequalities and how these disparities shape the interactions and lived experiences of individuals within the community.

In light of this study, the application of symbolic interactionism may constrain my inquiries into the role of feminine leadership within the NRM, particularly in understanding why men were largely favored in the recruitment of abagirwa, or spiritual leaders. Such constraints can hinder the ability to draw more generalized conclusions, as the findings may be overly specific to individual cases. Moreover, the subjective nature of the theory relies heavily on personal interpretations, further complicating the analysis.

Despite these challenges, symbolic interactionism remains a fitting choice for this study, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the subjective experiences and symbolic meanings

associated with the Nyabingi movement, enriching our understanding of its significance within the Bakiga community.

2.2 The evolution, dynamics, and diversity of traditional religious experiences within African societies.

Mbiti observes that African traditional religions are as diverse as the people of Africa themselves. This diversity presents a significant challenge in defining these religions, a point that Europeans have used to conclude that Africans are inherently polytheistic and lack a unified religious framework (Mbiti, 1970). Similarly, Ozioko (2021) acknowledges that establishing a commonly accepted definition of religion is a highly complex and challenging endeavor. While Ozioko proposes a general working definition of religion as a collection of experiences, beliefs, ritual acts, and moral behaviors, both individual and collective, that relate to and are directed toward one or more divinities, this definition appears to be influenced by a Western perspective and may not adequately apply to the African traditional concept of religion.

In African traditions, the pursuit of ‘personal salvation’ is not the ultimate goal; rather, it emphasizes maintaining a harmonious relationship with one’s ancestors. The task of exhaustively defining African religion is complicated by the continent's rich heterogeneity, which includes a vast array of cultures, tribes, races, and languages. This diversity suggests that there is no single religion in Africa, as many cultures can be interpreted as distinct religious practices in their own right.

In many parts of Africa, indigenous religions are practiced alongside Islam and Christianity. Ozioko (2022) emphasizes that this practice is a heritage from the past, which is not viewed as outdated but rather as a connection between the past, the present, and eternity. These religions

are not relics of the past; they are actively practiced by living men and women across the continent.

Religion and culture are so intertwined in Africa that ATR is often referred to as a cultural religion, and African culture is seen as a religious culture. Scholars such as Ozioko, Mbiti and Parrinder agree that religion transcends the physical world, extending into the spiritual realm and encompassing both the visible and the invisible (Ozioko 2021, Mbiti 1990, and Parrinder 1954). In the African pantheon, the visible and the invisible, as well as the profane and the sacred, are closely interconnected, resembling two sides of the same coin—they are inseparable and in constant interaction.

In the hierarchy of beliefs among various African societies, God is recognized as the greatest being—the creator of heaven and earth and the giver of life. He is worshipped above all else and is described with attributes such as immanent, transcendent, omnipresent, omniscient, and all-powerful. God is supreme and perfectly good; He is just, rewarding the good and punishing the wrong, all understood by Africans in a culturally relevant way (etal Mbiti, 1990).

God is known by different names among Africans due to the continent's diverse cultures. This diversity should not lead to the conclusion that Africans are polytheistic. For example, the Baganda people of Central Uganda refer to God as Katonda (Kuloba, Kisekka, 2022), while the Bakiga and Banyankole of Western Uganda know Him as Ruhanga. The Yoruba refer to God as Olorun, and the Igbo people from Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Imo states of Nigeria address God as Chineke and Enugu have their own names for God as well.

The kikuyu of Kenya refer to the same God as Ngai meaning the creator. This African God has other deities which are in charge of mountains, lakes, seasons, sun, moon and so on and Africans

believe that God remains powerful ahead of everyone and directing the divinities and deities. Ozioko (2021) observes that, ‘there are also some dead heroes and prominent ancestors who are later sort of divinized and thus share the rank of the divinities.’ Next to deities are the spirits which are believed to either be good or bad. Ozioko (2021) again notes that most spirits are those of the living dead who have not qualified to be ancestors. Though dead, they continue to stay with the clan, community and family members influencing their decisions, lives and choices. When pleased, they are good spirits and can return blessings such as healing, good harvests and protection but once annoyed, they turn into bad spirits and torment family members through sicknesses, suffering and death. These spirits are prized by sacrifices and libations. Leaders, kings and queens in Africa are also given due respect because they are also next to the spiritual world. In some cases, kings and queens as mentioned by Ozioko (2021) are leaders in traditional African systems impacting secular and religious wisdom and guidance to their subjects. In kingdoms like Buganda, the kabaka is a custodian and a guardian of religious centers such as shrines, temples, lakes and sacred forests. In some cases, kings are also said to possess mystical, life sustaining poker, with their well-being intimately entwined with the well-being of their people, lands, and institutions. Leaders and clan heads in ATR symbolize the presence and authority of the ancestors in Africa linking them with humanity. In Imo State, located in Nigeria, God is commonly referred to by the name "Chineke," which signifies His role as the Creator. Similarly, the Kikuyu people of Kenya acknowledge the same deity and call Him "Ngai." This understanding of God as the Creator is foundational across many African cultures, which emphasize His supreme power and authority over the universe.

In these belief systems, Chineke or Ngai is not alone; He oversees a hierarchy of deities tasked with specific domains of the natural world. These deities are responsible for various elements such as mountains, lakes, seasons, and celestial bodies like the sun and moon. Each of these

deities plays a critical role in maintaining the balance of nature and supporting human life. As noted by Ozioko (2021), there are also revered ancestors and historical figures who, after their deaths, have been elevated to divine status. These individuals are often seen as part of the pantheon of deities due to their significant contributions to their communities during their lifetimes.

In this spiritual hierarchy, spirits occupy a place just below the deities. These spirits can be categorized as either benevolent or malevolent (Tinkamanyire, Kuloba 2024). Ozioko (2021) observes that many of these spirits are believed to be the souls of the living dead—those who have passed on but have not yet attained the status of ancestors due to various reasons. Despite their deceased state, these spirits remain closely connected to their families, clans, and communities, often influencing their decisions and guiding their lives.

When these spirits are honored and pleased through rituals, sacrifices, and libations, they are seen as benevolent forces that offer blessings such as health, prosperity, good harvests, and protection from harm. Conversely, if displeased or neglected, these spirits can turn malevolent, bringing misfortune, illness, suffering, and even death to their living relatives.

Furthermore, leaders, kings, and queens in African societies hold significant power and are often regarded as intermediaries between the spiritual and earthly realms. As highlighted by Ozioko (2021), these leaders play crucial roles in traditional African governance, providing both secular leadership and spiritual guidance to their communities. In notable kingdoms like Buganda, the kabaka (king) serves not only as a political leader but also as a guardian of important religious sites, such as shrines, temples, lakes, and sacred forests.

In many traditions, these kings are believed to possess mystical powers that are vital for the well-being of their people and the health of the land. Their fates are often intertwined with those of their communities; the king's prosperity is viewed as essential to the prosperity of the entire kingdom. Thus, leaders and clan heads embody the authority of the ancestors, serving as a link between the spiritual world and human existence, guiding their people based on the wisdom of the ancestors and the spiritual laws that govern their lives. This connection reinforces a deep sense of community, continuity, and reverence for both the living and the dead in all African indigenous religions.

2.3 Rituals, practices and beliefs of African traditional religion

It is essential to recognize that rituals and practices are integral to religious experiences, particularly in African indigenous religions. Various studies have explored this topic. For example, Solekah (2020) found that rituals can express collective and personal emotions within a specific community, contributing to a shared sense of healing and empowerment. For instance, in many African cultures, communal rituals like the Ubuntu ceremonies foster a sense of community through shared experiences, which help individuals heal after personal or community trauma. However, this study did not clarify which specific rituals influence particular behaviors among practitioners. However, it still remains unclear about particular rituals of Nyabingi since the existing study generalizes African religions hence need to conduct the current study.

In a sociological study, Tsai and Bagozzi (2014) discovered that rituals significantly impact on daily life and social interactions within a community. The findings of their study indicated that these rituals and practices extend beyond religious contexts, greatly affecting participants' overall well-being and interpersonal relationships. For example, rituals like initiation ceremonies can shape social roles and expectations, influencing the way individuals behave in social settings.

The impact is substantial, influencing aspects of everyday life such as eating, dressing, speaking, and walking. However, a limitation of this study is that it focused on virtual communities, which may not fully address how rituals influence the lives of people in African contexts. Additionally, there are no defined rituals specific to African societies and religious movements, such as Nyabingi, a gap that this study seeks to address.

More so, religious rituals have undergone numerous changes regarding what is practiced and how, largely due to contemporary influences like globalization and evolving societal norms. Some rituals in African religious settings have been neglected, often viewed through the lens of Western education as 'traditional' and 'outdated.' In his study on the theoretical evolution of cultural rituals and their responses to external influences, Schunk and Greene (2017) found that rituals can serve as a form of resistance against these external pressures. However, they also noted that rituals are often overshadowed by these influences, leading many to disappear altogether. The current study seeks to find out whether rituals and practices of Nyabingi have gone through changes with a purpose of clearly documenting them.

2.4 Religious movements in East Africa

The richness of African traditions has led to the emergence of various religious movements across the continent (Kustenbauder, 2008). These movements often arise out of dissatisfaction within one group toward another, forming coalitions to defend themselves. Many of these religious movements have developed due to the failure of Christianity and Islam to address their questions, which has, in turn, resulted in religious conflicts. It is often argued that these movements represent early examples of resistance to colonial rule, though many existed long before European contact (etal Kustenbauder, 2008). This is because most religious movements

are characterized by revolutionary shifts in worldview and emerge from severe cultural crises, often triggered by major physical disasters or clashes with powerful cultures.

Throughout these struggles, there has been a growing desire among some individuals to return to traditional values and follow the cultural practices of their ancestors. However, it is noted that many African religious movements have been a reaction to the colonial invasion, which distorted numerous aspects of African cultural identities, prompting a response from the affected communities. Independent religious movements in sub-Saharan Africa are flourishing today, a phenomenon deeply rooted in the extensive missionary efforts of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. During this time, Christianity spread rapidly across the region, leading to the establishment of numerous churches (Fernandez, 1978). However, many of these churches were closely linked to Western denominations and often marginalized African cultures to which they originally belonged.

In a worldview where religion is deeply intertwined with daily existence, it becomes evident that for many Africans, life cannot be fully understood without acknowledging the spiritual realm. In this case, religion embodies a formidable power, an essential force that safeguards against the threats of death and offers the promise of a life filled with abundance. Thus, a faith that fails to provide a tangible sense of power and connection in their lives is often seen as lacking substance, leaving individuals yearning for a deeper, more satisfying spiritual experience (etal Fernandez, 1978). The proceeding sub sections present various African traditional movements and associates them with Nyabingi religious movement.

2.4.1 The Dinka and Nuer Movement

Kustenbauder (2008) identifies this movement as the earliest prophet-led initiative in South Sudan, characterized by the significant influence of its leader, the celebrated Nuer prophet

Ngundeng Bong. Emerging in the 1870s, Bong demonstrated remarkable leadership skills during a period marked by social and environmental disorder. He constructed an imposing earthen pyramidal mound, a structure that became emblematic of divine power and presence, drawing followers who believed in its spiritual significance. Prophet Bong was distinguished not only by his visionary abilities, which included an impressive knack for predicting future events, but also by his role as a purifier for his community. The Nuer and Dinka peoples revered him as a personification of the divine, seeing his actions as a conduit for healing and spiritual renewal. As a central figure in ritual practices, he played a pivotal role in reconciliation efforts and peace building within and between these groups.

His leadership was particularly focused on addressing the pressing needs for land and pasture in the rapidly changing riverine environment of the southern Nile region. This region was fraught with challenges, including extreme weather events such as droughts, along with threats of famine and disease outbreaks. Bong's concern for his people's survival and well-being drove him to negotiate for their rights to land and resources vital for their pastoral livelihoods. What also remains clear from this movement is that the Dinka resisted all the alien influences that appeared in their land due to the predatory incursions of ivory and slavery that they had earlier succumbed to. (Nikkel, 1992)

This current literature however does not present the leadership of women in the movement thereby overshadowing the role of females in religion.

2.4.2 The Maji-Maji movement in Tanzania

The Maji-Maji rebellion stands as a remarkable episode in history, characterized by its emergence as a significant religious movement in response to the harsh realities of German colonial rule in Tanganyika, which spanned from 1905 to 1907. This rebellion was not merely a

spontaneous uprising; it was deeply rooted in the grievances of the African populations against the oppressive policies imposed by the German authorities. Kustenbauder (2008) highlights that these policies included not only forced labor but also the obligatory cultivation of cotton, which stripped the local communities of their autonomy and imposed severe economic burdens.

In the face of such repression, a charismatic and influential prophet named Kinjikitile emerged as the central figure of the movement. He galvanized the disparate ethnic groups within the region, fostering a sense of unity and purpose that transcended traditional tribal affiliations. Kinjikitile was said to be possessed by a spirit named Hongo, which conferred upon him the ability to deliver prophetic messages directly from a high deity known as Bokero. His prophecies were often shared at a particular pool of water believed to have mystical powers. This water was not simply a natural resource; it was thought to possess the ability to render those who drank from it impervious to German bullets, thus providing a potent sense of hope and empowerment to the fighters preparing to resist colonial oppression.

The Maji-Maji participants were inspired by Kinjikitile's visions, viewing the rebellion as a sacred struggle not only for political liberation but also for the preservation of their cultural identity and social values. The call for unity under Kinjikitile's leadership ignited a widespread movement among various groups, each seeking to reclaim control over their land and lives. In a desperate bid to maintain their colonial dominance, the German forces unleashed their military might on the rebellion. With advanced weaponry and tactical superiority, they launched relentless offensives against the Maji-Maji fighters. The brutal repression resulted in catastrophic losses, with estimates suggesting that more than 75,000 lives were lost by 1907, as noted by Kustenbauder (2008).

Despite the eventual defeat of the rebellion, the movement left a lasting legacy not only in its place of operation but also across the African continent. It became a powerful symbol of resistance and solidarity among African communities, illustrating their collective desire to safeguard their cultural heritage and fight for fundamental human rights. The spirit of the Maji-Maji rebellion continues to resonate, reminding future generations of the resilience and courage displayed in the struggle against colonial oppression.

The Maji-Maji rebellion incident presents a very clear comparison with other African traditional religions like Nyabingi religious movement. But much as Maji-Maji was fought on ground of colonial oppression like Nyabingi religious movement, the available literature about this movement doesn't accurately speak to the case of Nyabingi. There is still need to articulate the meaning of Nyabingi, its origin, document the beliefs and practices and present the ideological and theological underpinnings of Nyabingi religious movement.

2.4.3 Nyabingi religious Movement

The existing literature about NRM is notably lacking in depth and consistency, as it fails to provide a universally accepted origin story or clear definition of what Nyabingi means. The questions surrounding its birthplace and the timeline of its emergence—particularly before it reached Kigezi—remain matters of considerable debate. Scholars have struggled to pinpoint when Nyabingi first came into existence, contributing to the paradoxical nature of its origin in Kigezi. In addition, the various interpretations of Nyabingi have been put forth by scholars, with some characterizing it as a cult (Nielsen, 2019:19) while others see it primarily as a political movement. Unfortunately, the religious dimensions of Nyabingi have often been neglected, likely due to prevailing biases against ATR, which tend to be undervalued in academic discourse.

Vokes in his study also attempts to study about Nyabingi Religious movement but the writings in his work prove that he was more concerned about the Movement for the restoration of the Ten Commandments, a cult that was commanded by Joseph Kibweteere (Vokes, 2015). Much as Nyabingi is mentioned in his work, there is no great attention to the origin and birth of Nyabingi movement, its particular beliefs and practices and there is nothing said of its significance among the Bakiga of Kigezi. His study only covers a movement that operated in parts of Kanungu district.

2.4.4 Watu wa Mungu Movement

In the 1920s, a significant social and religious movement known as "Watu wa Mungu" emerged among the Gikuyu people of Kenya. This movement was a direct response to the increasing influence of Western culture and colonialism, which many Gikuyu viewed as a threat to their traditional way of life. According to Kustenbauder (2008), the leaders of this movement, referred to as Gikuyu seers, actively rejected European clothing and material possessions. Instead, they emphasized a return to traditional practices, worshipping in a manner that honored their cultural heritage by facing Mount Kenya. This mountain was sacred and considered the dwelling place of the Gikuyu High God, symbolizing a deep connection to their ancestral beliefs.

The Mau-Mau uprising, which took place in the 1950s, is frequently highlighted as one of the most notable examples of anti-colonialist resistance in Africa. The popular view of the meaning of the movement was reinforced in its early stages by a series of political and religious awakenings through oath taking as well as patriotic songs which the colonial authorities characterized by seditious (Wa-Githumo, 1991). Mau-Mau rebellion represented a profound fight against British colonial rule and the struggle for land rights. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that during this time, there was also a significant internal conflict among the

Gikuyu people themselves. The tensions between the landed Gikuyu, who held significant land and resources, and the landless, who sought better opportunities and access to land, were equally pressing issues. This internal struggle added complexity to the broader context of colonial resistance, as Kustenbauder (2008:5) notes, highlighting the multifaceted nature of the Gikuyu people's fight for justice and self-determination.

2.4.5 The Mumbo of the Gusi

The Mumbo movement emerged as a significant religious and cultural force among the Gusi people of Western Kenya during the early 20th century. At the center of this movement was the belief in Mumbo, a deity who was thought to inhabit both the celestial realm and Lake Victoria. This god revealed himself in a vision to a prophet named Onyango, who commenced his preaching in 1913 among the Luo community to the immediate northwest of the Gusi lands.

Mumbo was envisioned as a colossal snake that symbolically linked the heavens and the waters of Lake Victoria. This image held profound significance for the followers, as the snake represented a transformative power that promised a future filled with ease, prosperity, and spiritual well-being for those who heeded its call. The followers participated in various rituals, including sacrifices, to honor Mumbo, reflecting their deep reverence and commitment to the deity.

Kustenbauder further elaborates on the strict cultural practices that Mumbo followers adopted as part of their identity. These rules were a direct challenge to foreign European influences, manifesting in distinct lifestyle choices. For instance, adherents typically wore traditional garments made from animal skins instead of adopting European-style clothing. They also rejected practices such as washing or cutting their hair. Traditional dances were an essential part of their rituals, fostering a sense of community and cultural pride.

Interestingly, the movement permitted, and perhaps even encouraged, the use of bhang, adding another layer of complexity to the cultural practices of its followers. This acceptance of certain substances can be understood as part of their rejection of colonial norms and a means to invoke spiritual experiences.

The Mumbo movement was marked by the presence of several prophets among the Gusi people, with two prominent figures standing out: Zakawa, a former prophet known for his charismatic leadership, and Borairiri, a powerful woman who played a crucial role within the movement. Their teachings and leadership galvanized the community, helping to sustain the movement during periods of unrest.

Throughout the late 1930s and into the 1940s, the Mumbo movement made sporadic yet notable appearances, often characterized by discontent and rebellion against colonial authorities. Notable uprisings occurred in 1933, 1938, and again in 1947, during periods of escalating tension between the colonial administration and local populations. Ultimately, the movement began to decline after 1947, as external pressures and changing social dynamics took hold.

The ideological positioning of the Mumbo movement was particularly oppositional to both European colonial governance and mission Christianity. Its followers exhibited a strong animosity toward local administrative chiefs and officials who were seen as agents of the colonial system, further entrenching the movement in the socio-political landscape of the time. The Mumbo movement thus serves as a profound expression of resistance and cultural identity among the Gusi people during a critical era of change.

2.4.6 Dini ya Msambwa

The ‘Dini ya Msambwa’ is a spiritual movement recognized as the religion of the Ancestors among the Luhya people of Western Kenya. This movement developed in response to the significant oppression faced by African communities during the colonial era, particularly characterized by land alienation, forced labor, and excessive taxation. Wabyanga mentions that Dini ya Msambwa was founded by Elijah Masinde in the 1940s as a protest movement against British colonial rule and missionary Christianity in Kenya (Wabyanga, 2014, Spear 1980). Unlike many other religious movements of the time, Dini ya Msambwa draws connections to Christianity while also emphasizing the importance of local ancestral worship. It makes references to Biblical figures and narratives, creating a unique blend of traditional African spirituality and Christian beliefs by crafting beliefs that intricately linked Bagisu ancestry to the Biblical patriarch Abraham, thereby affirming the community's identity and heritage within a broader Biblical context (etal Wabyanga 2014).

This movement is unique because in addition to being a hybrid movement, it situates the African story into the context of the Bible. The term "basambwa" refers to the ancestors to whom offerings and sacrifices are directed, and "Msambwa" signifies the creator deity known as Wele. Wele is intimately associated with Mount Elgon, an area regarded as a sacred site, as well as a nearby lake, which the adherents of the movement refer to as Zion. Wele is the Biblical messiah to the black people against oppression of mistreatment of the Bagisu by the colonialists.

The study on Dini ya Msambwa remains relevant to this particular study on Nyabingi religious movement, one which had the same aim of liberating Africans from colonial oppression. There is also a clear evidence that Africans understood the meaning of God and had elements of spirituality among themselves. There is still need to study about Nyabingi religious movement

with a purpose of comparing it with other traditional religious movements like Dini Ya Msambwa to answer the questions of this study objectively.

2.4.7 The Holy Spirit Movement

The Holy Spirit Movement emerged among the Acholi of Northern Uganda as a powerful response to the social injustices and violence they experienced during a tumultuous period in the country's history. This movement is defined as a prophet-led millenarian movement, a term described by Kustenbauder (2008), which began in the year 1985. During this time, many believed that the Christian God had sent forth a spirit known as Lakwena, which translates to "messenger." Lakwena communicated through an Acholi woman named Alice Auma, who was regarded as a traditional spiritual medium. Alice established a shrine at a site called Opit, where she conducted ritualistic cleansing ceremonies. These rituals were aimed at rehabilitating Acholi soldiers who had become ostracized by their communities due to their involvement in horrendous acts of violence during Uganda's brutal civil war. Many of these soldiers were deeply troubled and sought redemption through Alice's rituals, which provided a path for healing and reintegration.

Under Lakwena's divine guidance, Alice led her followers in a series of military engagements which were marked by a fervent spirit and strong conviction, resulting in several notable successes. However, in late 1987, the movement faced a significant turning point. As they marched towards Kampala, Uganda's capital, they were confronted by the national army. The clash occurred just 50 kilometers from the city, where Alice and her forces suffered a decisive defeat that would alter the course of the movement.

2.5 Women in African traditional religion

According to the research conducted by Kentaro, Ahikire, and Ebila (2023), women in Africa have held a pivotal role in a wide array of religious practices, acting as leaders, mediums, diviners, and guides in the service of deities. These women not only participated actively in spiritual matters but often led communities in their religious practices, harnessing their deep connections to the spiritual realm.

Before the advent of Christianity and colonialism, Masenoi and Owojaiye (2015) observe that African women were widely acknowledged for their extraordinary abilities, such as healing, prophecy, and exorcism. These gifts were often exercised willingly and were integral to the fabric of African spirituality. However, with the arrival of missionary churches, these same gifts were frequently branded as 'strange gifts,' a label that served to alienate women who practiced these traditions. Such categorization marginalized these talented individuals, stripping them of the respect they rightfully deserved within their communities (Masenoi and Owojaiye, 2015).

Despite all the attempts above to acknowledge the performance of women in African traditional religions, little attention is paid to the area under study. There is no significant contribution mentioned about Muhumuza and other abagirwa in Nyabingi religious movement, something this study sought to achieve.

2.6 Conclusion

The existing literature on cultural movements and religiosity offers valuable insights into the dynamics of religious movements, particularly in the African context. Some studies concentrate on the Nyabingi movement, underscoring its role as a form of resistance against colonial oppression and social injustices. Conversely, other studies explore the broader spectrum of

religious movements associated with Nyabingi, revealing that their primary goals encompass not only spiritual pursuits but also efforts aimed at social, economic, and political liberation. These movements strive to empower communities and challenge the status quo, seeking transformative change within society. However despite the abundance of information available, a significant gap remains in the literature regarding the area under study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.0 Introduction

This chapter outlines the procedures and methods employed in this study. It details the methods and tools utilized to collect data, which were essential in deriving at the research findings. This chapter serves as a crucial foundation for the subsequent chapters of this thesis by thoroughly explaining the research context, methodology, and the rationale behind the chosen approach. In addition, this chapter covers key sub-themes, including study design, study area, population size, sample size, procedures, data collection tools, sources of data, data processing and analysis, as well as the limitations encountered during the study. This comprehensive overview ensures clarity and direction for the entire thesis.

3.1 Research tradition

The study employed 'Interpretivism', a social science paradigm which asserts that reality is subjective and interprets the understanding of a phenomena from the perspective of individuals. This reality is very subjective and can be interpreted by individuals based on their personal experiences. This is through social constructions like language, consciousness, shared meanings and instruments (Myers, 2008). This tradition is relevant to this research since my study aims at obtaining information through interaction. Interpretivism also availed me with reality on Bakiga's ideas about NRM while sharing their own experiences on the movement.

3.2 Research approach

The study embraced a qualitative approach for the collection, presentation, and analysis of data, providing a rich, and clear understanding of the subject matter. The primary aim of employing qualitative methodology was to delve into the thoughts and feelings of respondents regarding the Nyabingi religious movement. This approach facilitated genuine interaction and in-depth

discussions around the movement, allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of its significance.

As Hancock highlights, qualitative research serves as a powerful tool for unraveling the complexities of social phenomena. It not only aids in developing explanations but also fosters a deeper understanding of our world and the underlying reasons for various events and beliefs (Hancock, 1998:2).

Through the use of interviews, a central method of qualitative data collection, I was able to uncover profound insights into how the Bakiga community perceives NRM. Witnessing respondents as they navigated their thoughts, I noted their varied emotional reactions to specific questions—some individuals expressed deep feelings, revealing the movement's significance in their lives. Every verbal response, emotional outburst, and other relevant insights were accurately recorded, ensuring that peoples' experiences and opinions contributed meaningfully to the study's objectives.

3.3 Research Design

The study was ethnographic in nature, as it investigated the perspectives surrounding the Nyabingi religious movement among the Bakiga. As a Mukiga, this study followed my personal desire about Nyabingi religious movement which I always heard about from the oral traditional stories since my childhood. By the time I undertook this study for academic reasons, I only needed ten weeks to collect data from Nyarushanje area because identifying key informants and conducting this study would be less straining. I used direct observation to collect data regarding the emotions, moods, and body language of respondents when I asked those questions. These questions often evoked strong emotional responses, leading many respondents to shed tears as they recalled past events and experiences, particularly regarding the forceful appointment of

abagirwa (spiritual leaders), their denial of rights, the significance of sacrifices, and the punishments for failing to offer genuine devotion to Nyabingi.

As part of an ethnographic study, I also observed and analyzed artifacts, such as drums and sticks used during Nyabingi worship, that still exist in some homes in Nyarushanje. I interviewed elderly residents of Nyarushanje Sub County and conducted focus group discussions with individuals from areas where the Nyabingi deity is most worshipped among the Bakiga. Throughout this process, I posed several questions to gain a deeper understanding of how people perceive Nyabingi, the practices and beliefs associated with its worship, the rituals surrounding the Nyabingi movement, and the modern views that continue to exist about it.

These inquiries enabled me to acquire significant knowledge about the origin of Nyabingi, its meaning, rituals, beliefs, and practices, as well as how these elements have impacted the lives of the Bakiga in Kigezi.

3.4 Area of Study

This study was done in Nyarushanje Sub County, Rubabo County in Rukungiri district. This is located in Kigezi region, South Western Uganda. The area of study has different parishes that include Nyabushenyi, Bwanga, Ruyonza, Kisiizi, Ibanda, Bunono, Ihunga, Burora and Ndago. I chose to conduct this study in Nyarushanje because of the availability of many respondents on the study. NRM was most popular in Nyarushanje and Nyakishenyi the two neighboring sub counties in Rukungiri. I was able to trace the respondents very easily and was able to interact with them freely using the local language. Most importantly, Nyabingi movement operated around Nyarushanje where the colonialists first established their functional offices at Nyarushanje Sub County as their headquarters. The Catholic missionaries also established Nyarushanje Catholic parish to help in the evangelization of the region. They also established

vocational and secondary schools around the region and constructed Kisiizi hospital that improved the health of the Bakiga in the region. This made Nyarushanje an area suitable for the study.

The map below shows the location of respondents in Nyarushanje Sub County

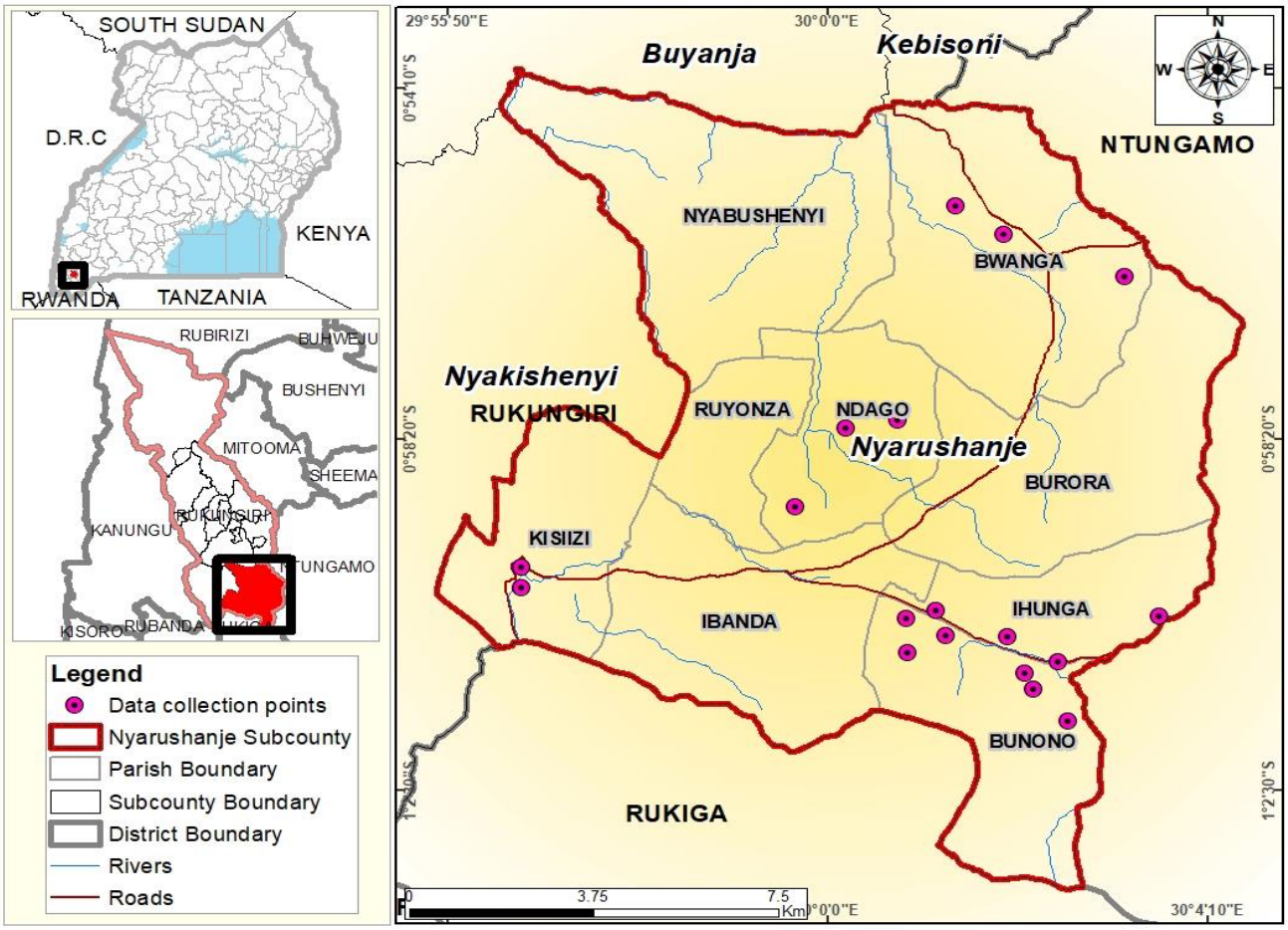


Fig 1 Respondents in Nyarushanje

3.5 Study Population

The study focused on a population of elderly men and women who possessed valuable knowledge regarding Nyabingi and its associated practices within the Bakiga community. The selection of respondents was conducted with careful consideration of age, prioritizing individuals aged 60 and above. This decision was based on the assumption that older adults are more likely

to have a rich understanding and firsthand knowledge of the movement, which is crucial for obtaining reliable and appropriate data for the study. It's important to note that even among those who had not actively participated in NRM, many had absorbed information from narratives shared by previous generations. These stories, often recounted by family members or community elders, provided significant insights into the traditions and beliefs associated with Nyabingi.

Within this demographic, particular attention was given to selecting women, as Nyabingi is recognized primarily as a feminine movement, deeply influenced by female leadership and participation in the Kigezi region. Women often held key roles in the rituals and practices of Nyabingi, making their perspectives and experiences especially valuable. By employing this targeted approach, I was able to connect with the most suitable informants who were able to provide the necessary qualitative data essential for this study. Their contributions were instrumental in deepening the understanding of Nyabingi and the cultural context surrounding its worship among the Bakiga.

3.6 Sampling methods and techniques

I employed a snowball sampling method to identify and recruit respondents in Nyarushanje Sub County, a technique particularly useful in Qualitative studies. This was because of my initial unfamiliarity with individuals involved in the worship of Nyabingi. At the outset, I faced the challenge of not knowing who had participated in these rituals, and snowball sampling presented the most effective means of acquiring pertinent information through personal connections.

To begin my inquiry, I utilized purposive sampling to locate one old retired reverend around Nyamabare cell in Bunono. This is because as a retired religious leader in the Anglican Church, I suspected him to have interacted with followers of NRM in one way or the other. I was so convinced that he was the right person I could consult first during my study. After explaining to

him the purpose of my study, he was willing to show me an elderly matriarch who was about 102 at the time of the study.

This elderly woman proved to be an invaluable informant. During our interview, she shared her profound knowledge of the beliefs and rituals integral to Nyabingi worship. Her insights were especially significant given her direct experience as a participant in these rites, coupled with her harrowing story of narrowly escaping becoming a mugirwa—a drastic fate in this cultural context. Our conversation provided rich qualitative data, which greatly enhanced my understanding of the subject matter.

After our interaction, she took the initiative to refer me to two more respondents living in the Bwanga area, identifying them solely by their homesteads. This referral was instrumental in expanding my network, as I quickly realized that leveraging the connections provided by one respondent could lead me to others with similar insights. At the conclusion of each interview, I made it a point to ask my respondents if they knew anyone else who might contribute to my study, a strategy that yielded a substantial number of additional contacts.

The snowball sampling method proved advantageous in several ways. According to Hendricks, Blanken, and Adriaan (1992), this approach offers practical benefits for reaching a target population effectively. In my case, it significantly minimized the time and transportation costs that would have otherwise been necessary to search for respondents across the entire Nyarushanje Sub County. By utilizing this method, I could leave each compound with a clear understanding of whom I would visit next, streamlining the study process and enhancing my engagement with the local community.

3.7 Data collection methods and Instruments/Tools

The study employed a variety of data collection methods, instruments and tools. The methods used included face to face interviews, documentary review, Focus Group Discussion and Observation. The various tools employed during this study included semi-structured interview guides, observation checklist, a focus group discussion guide, and written documents like articles. Each of these played a crucial role in data collection, while giving room for a comprehensive understanding of the area under study. The interviews conducted provided personal insights, observation captured real-time contexts, and the focus group discussions fostered an exchange of diverse perspectives, all of which contributed to the deep understanding of the area under study. Additionally, the existing documents and literature on the same subject not only offered a valuable background information and context but also answered some of the research questions of this particular study.

3.7.1 Interview Guide

Before embarking on my data collection in the field, I accurately crafted an interview guide to serve as a foundational framework for my study. This guide was critical, as it steered the interview process and outlined the specific questions I intended to pose to the participants throughout the study. Each discussion was anchored by this interview guide, facilitating the organized collection of data thought my study. I opted for a semi-structured interview format, integrating open-ended questions (Davies, 1999; Bernard, 2006) to promote in-depth conversations with my informants.

Flexibility was a key aspect of both the interview guide and my in role as the interviewer; I encouraged probing questions and allowed respondents to expand on their answers, particularly concerning the movement. To ensure confidentiality and protection of the identities of my

participants, I recorded the information in my diary using pseudonyms. This approach not only preserved anonymity but also made the presentation of findings more respectful. In the eventual presentation of results, I utilized codes derived from the initials of the respondents' names to maintain their privacy.

At the outset of each interview, I took care to introduce myself to the respondents warmly, fostering a sense of trust. In turn, the respondents confidently shared their own introduction, establishing a connection before we delved into the substance of our discussion. I requested permission to record our conversation, reassuring participants that their voices would be captured with their consent. The majority of interviews took place in a face-to-face format, which proved invaluable; as it provided respondents with the opportunity to articulate their beliefs and practices related to NRM in their own words. This interpersonal setting allowed me to ask follow-up questions and explore their insights more deeply.

I directed the interview questions toward a carefully selected group of individuals in their own homes, using a language that resonated with them. This strategy significantly mitigated potential barriers arising from language and communication challenges. Every piece of data was recorded in Rukiga, a language my respondents were comfortable with, allowing them to respond with confidence. In this familiar linguistic environment, participants expressed their views using regional proverbs, idioms, and expressions, enriching our conversations with cultural depth. Notably, many concepts about beliefs and lived experiences related to Nyabingi, spirits, and rituals could only be authentically expressed in Rukiga, underscoring the importance of language in this study. Utilizing the local language helped unveil specific terminologies such as "okubandwa," "okuraguza," and "abagirwa," which capture unique insights into the movement.

In instances where I employed a voice recorder on my phone during our interactions, I complemented the audio recordings with written notes afterward. This comprehensive approach ensured that I captured the nuances of the discussion and provided a thorough account of the respondents' perspectives.

3.7.2 Observation checklist

Throughout the interviews, I integrated an observation checklist as a vital complementary method for data collection in this study. I attuned myself to the subtleties of the respondents' behaviors, meticulously observing their emotions, facial expressions, vocal tones, and body language. This heightened awareness allowed me to capture the nuances of their responses.

Many participants exhibited signs of distress when confronted with questions regarding the rituals associated with the worship of Nyabingi and the sacrifices that accompanied these practices. Their voices would quaver, and the atmosphere would shift palpably; some individuals were moved to tears during our face-to-face interactions and in the group discussions. This poignant display of emotion often stemmed from painful memories of relatives who endured suffering or even death due to the brutalities associated with the Nyabingi religious movement.

As I navigated these emotionally charged moments, I found myself feeling the weight of their pain, yet I resisted the urge to express my own emotions, focusing instead on maintaining composure. My resolve to remain attentive and engaged throughout the study was paramount in capturing all the essential information.

This observational method proved invaluable, enabling me to unearth insights and details that informants might have otherwise withheld, particularly concerning items linked to Nyabingi religious movement. By closely monitoring the respondents' reactions, I was able to gauge the gravity of certain issues with greater clarity. To facilitate this process, I employed an observation

checklist, which allowed me to systematically document my observations and insights alongside the information gathered from interviews.

3.7.3 Focus Discussion Group Guide

A Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted at Nyarushanje Catholic Parish, a location chosen due to the wealth of information available from local residents regarding the movement. The discussion group was comprised of six active members of the revival movement, each of whom possessed significant knowledge about Nyabingi through personal testimonies and traditional songs associated with the faith. This sample size aligns with the recommendations set forth by Polit and Beck (2017), which indicate that a group of 6 to 12 participants is sufficient to elicit meaningful insights during an FGD.

To effectively guide the discussion, a structured focus group discussion guide was created, featuring open-ended questions that encouraged participants to elaborate on their experiences and knowledge. Recognizing the linguistic needs of the participants, the guide was translated into Rukiga, ensuring that all respondents could comprehend the questions fully. As the moderator, I played a crucial role in facilitating the discussion, offering direction and support as necessary to promote an open and informative exchange of ideas among the participants. Throughout the session, all responses were meticulously documented in my diary, and an audio recording was made to complement the written notes, allowing for a richer and more accurate capture of the information shared.

3.7.4 Documentaries

In addition to primary data, the study engaged secondary data sources to enhance the understanding of NRM. A comprehensive review and analysis of available documents was undertaken, focusing on those containing valid information about Nyabingi and other African

religious movements. The secondary sources utilized included a variety of published works, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, newspaper articles, and printed books specifically addressing the Nyabingi movement. Furthermore, I consulted dissertations and academic theses that were related to African traditional religious movements, evaluating their findings for relevance and depth.

The selection criteria for these secondary sources was based on their relevance to the topic, their academic credibility, and the date of their publication to ensure the inclusion of the most current and reliable information. Many of the sources were obtained from libraries at Kyambogo and Ndejje Universities, institutions that possess extensive collections on religious studies. However, I faced significant challenges while visiting these libraries. Specifically, I encountered difficulties in finding copies of certain books that were either unavailable or in high demand among other researchers. This created a scarcity of the desired resources that compelled me to turn to the internet as an alternative means of gathering information during this study. The use of internet enabled me to explore various online platforms, including YouTube where I viewed relevant videos, lectures, and discussions about the Nyabingi movement. Additionally, I accessed numerous online articles and resources from Google Scholar, which were repeatedly consulted to gain deeper insights into topics that the surviving respondents had been unable to articulate in our discussions.

This multifaceted approach proved to be highly advantageous, as it not only reduced research costs but also filled the gaps in information left by the fieldwork, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the movement and its significance within the broader context of ATR.

3.8 Data management, Presentation and Analysis

This section offers an in-depth overview of data management, presentation and analysis. It highlights on the processes involved in organizing the acquired data, the methods of presenting it in a clear and impactful manner and the techniques used for analyzing it to derive meaningful insights to this study.

3.8.1 Data Management

The data gathered from the field was meticulously organized in alignment with the three defined research objectives. To transcribe the audio recordings, I listened to each recording numerous times through high-quality headphones, ensuring that I captured every nuance and detail before meticulously documenting the information obtained.

In addition to the audio transcriptions, I conducted a thorough manual review of the written interview responses. This involved a careful analysis of the content to extract meaningful insights related to the research objectives. For responses given in Rukiga, I utilized a dictionary to accurately translate the information into English, being particularly mindful to preserve the context and intent of each response. Furthermore, I ensured that all personal identifiers, including the names of the respondents, were kept confidential to protect their privacy.

When I encountered similar ideas expressed by multiple respondents, I made it a point to quote the individual whose response offered the most comprehensive explanation. This approach offered me an opportunity to highlight not only on common themes, but also the more elaborate perspectives provided by participants.

To validate the accuracy of the transcriptions, I continually played the audio recordings in conjunction with the transcribed text. This process enabled me to ensure the reliability and fidelity of the information presented. After completing the analysis, I securely stored all

materials in a password-protected file to safeguard the data. Once the analysis was finalized and the materials were no longer needed, I took the necessary steps to delete them to maintain confidentiality.

3.8.2 Data Presentation and Analysis

After completing the fieldwork phase of my study, I undertook a detailed analysis of the interview responses to identify commonalities among the participants' views regarding the subject matter under investigation. My goal was to discern not only how many respondents shared similar perspectives but also to gauge the depth and frequency of their views.

To facilitate this analysis, I carefully reviewed each interview transcript, crafting concise phrases that summarized the essence of what was conveyed during the discussions. This process was designed to yield summary statements for each topic addressed in the interviews, laying the groundwork for open coding.

The framework guiding this study was shaped by specific research objectives, which in turn structured the chapters of this dissertation. The findings presented in this thesis are organized into three overarching themes, each derived from these objectives. The first two objectives are integrated under the theme "Nyabingi: Rituals, Beliefs, and Theology," highlighting the intricate connections between spiritual practices and belief systems. In contrast, the third objective, which stands at the heart of my study is elaborated upon, in chapter six under the title "The Implications of the movement on Bakiga Religiosity," reflecting its significance within the broader context.

Throughout the dissertation, I place a heavy emphasis on the respondents' own words, presented as direct quotations to preserve their authentic voices. These quotations are then interpreted within the text to extract deeper meanings and insights. Finally there is a comprehensive

synthesis of the findings of the study and reflects on their implications for understanding the topic at hand.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The study was so mindful of peoples' rights and since the researcher was aware of the nature of area under study, I considered a number of ethical issues in order to avoid hurting the participants. I went ahead to ensure that all participants were in agreement with the study objectives and voluntarily participated in the study. I started by explaining to the participants the reason of conducting the study and guaranteed them of confidentiality after participating in the study. In addition, there is nothing that was recorded without the participants' knowledge. No name of any participant was recorded unless a consensus was arrived at, otherwise anonymity and confidentiality were the two ethical values that this study sought to preserve. Any participant who was uncomfortable with participating in the study was free to quit.

3.10 Conclusion

In conclusion, the study's qualitative methodology proved essential in exploring the subjective nature of the Nyabingi phenomena. By utilizing in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, the study effectively uncovered personal experiences and perceptions, leading to a deeper understanding of the topic. This approach highlights the value of qualitative research in capturing the richness of human experience and the complexities inherent in such phenomena. This chapter connects to the next chapter which addresses the religious landscape of the Bakiga in Kigezi.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE SOCIO-CULTURAL ANTECENDENTS OF NYABINGI RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

4.0 Introduction

This chapter thoroughly explores the rich religious history of the Bakiga people, detailing the various elements of their traditional religion as practiced in Kigezi. It provides insights into how these traditions have shaped the Bakiga identity in their community. By investigating the historical context and the influence of these religious practices, we gain a deeper understanding of the Bakiga's spiritual worldview and its significance in their daily lives.

4.1 The traditional life of Bakiga

This part discusses the traditional life of the Bakiga of Kigezi and highlights on the religious affairs of the Bakiga before the colonial invasion of the region.

4.1.1 Religious life

The Bakiga, nestled in the beautiful highlands of southwestern Uganda, had a profound and rich religious tradition centered on a supreme deity known as ‘Ruhanga’ or ‘Kazooba Nyamuhanga.’ This revered figure was viewed as the omnipotent creator of both heaven and earth, encompassing all that exists within them. The name "Ruhanga" is layered with meaning, deriving from the Rukiga words ‘Ru’ and ‘Hanga.’ In this context, ‘Ru’ signifies "one," while ‘hanga’ translates to "to create." Consequently, for the Bakiga, ‘Ruhanga’ encapsulates the essence of "the one who creates"—the ultimate source of life and existence (Ndyabahika, 1997). This means that the Bakiga believed that Ruhanga not only fashioned the heavens and the earth but also breathed life into every living being including plants and animals. As the giver of life, he wielded absolute power over birth and death, making it imperative for the Bakiga to foster a

harmonious relationship with him and the universe he created. They honored and revered him as the highest being, transcending earthly and celestial realms, commonly referring to him as ‘Mukama,’ a title that conveys his ownership of all creation.

Alongside their worship of Ruhanga, the Bakiga also expressed reverence for a goddess spirit named Nyabingi, who played a crucial role in their spiritual lives. Nyabingi was uniquely manifested through a priestess known as Muhumuza, who was believed to embody her essence. The name ‘Nyabingi’ holds significance in Rukiga, translating to "the one who possesses many things." She was envisioned as a powerful female spirit, a force of nature who continued to evoke wonder and awe among her followers within the lush landscapes of Kigezi (personal interview, Jan, 2024). Nyabingi was often viewed as a formidable figure, second only to Ruhanga, and her worship was more frequent. This was largely due to a belief that she was swifter in responding to prayers, unlike Ruhanga, who was occupied with the vastness of the universe. For this reason, nearly every family maintained a sacred shrine dedicated to Nyabingi, known as an ‘endaaro,’ where offerings were made, and her guidance sought.

Nyabingi was seen as an emissary of Ruhanga, and her displeasure could invoke severe consequences, including divine punishment from Ruhanga himself. The belief was that if Nyabingi was content, Ruhanga would similarly be pleased. However, the privilege of worship and consultation with Nyabingi was not universally accessible. Only the abagirwa, a select group of female servants devoted to Nyabingi, possessed the authority to approach her in reverence. In addition, the family head, typically a male figure known as ‘Omukuru weeka,’ bore the responsibility of serving Nyabingi at the family’s endaaro. In the absence of the family head, this duty would fall to the first-born son, oftentimes regarded as the future leader of the family (FGD, Feb 2024).

Beyond their devotion to the living spirits, the Bakiga acknowledged the presence of ‘emizimu,’ the spirits of deceased family members, who were believed to exert considerable influence over the lives of their descendants. If these spirits were neglected or not properly appeased, they could bring misfortune, manifesting as illnesses, barrenness, and poor harvests that plagued the living. Thus, to seek relief and restoration when faced with vexing spirits, the Bakiga turned to Nyabingi for deliverance. Simultaneously, they believed in ‘emandwa,’ benevolent spirits that shielded them and their families from dark, unkind forces.

When colonialism and Christianity first reached the Bakiga, they were guided by a loose administrative structure that allowed for communal decision-making and respect for traditional leadership. Despite the introduction of foreign beliefs, the Bakiga held their indigenous religious practices and beliefs in high esteem. The encounter between Christianity and Bakiga traditional beliefs was marked by significant tension. Missionaries, upon observing these interactions, mistakenly concluded that the Bakiga had no religion at all. This misjudgment arose primarily from their limited understanding of Bakiga spirituality, which included reverence for ancestors and the practice of maintaining household shrines where family spirits were worshipped. This led to a misinterpretation of their beliefs as polytheism and paganism, rather than recognizing the depth and richness of their spirituality.

Furthermore, the Bakiga's religious practices were not documented in any written form, and they did not follow a single founder or prophetic figure, which added to the missionaries’ misunderstanding (Mbiti 1970). The missionaries overlooked the fact that spiritual values were deeply woven into the very fabric of everyday life for the Bakiga. Each element of their existence was infused with spiritual significance, creating a worldview where everything was interconnected with their beliefs and practices.

Central to their spirituality was the recognition of a Supreme deity, referred to as ‘Ruhanga,’ who represented the embodiment of creativity and existence. The Bakiga believed that Ruhanga was the creator of all things, including the earth, heavens, animals, and human beings. Ruhanga was perceived as the greatest power, residing in heaven, acknowledged for His mightiness, greatness, and holiness. This Supreme Being commanded unwavering allegiance from the Bakiga, who regarded Him with profound respect and fear. They believed that Ruhanga held dominion over life and death, which made their reverence for Him deeply rooted in their consciousness.

In addition to the veneration of Ruhanga, the Bakiga also honored the spirits of their ancestors. The enactment of rituals, such as ‘okubandwa,’ involved giving homage to specific emandwa spirits that were thought to possess unique attributes, including those associated with fertility. The Bakiga held a strong belief in these spirits, considering them pivotal in matters relating to agriculture and childbirth.

Up until the arrival of Christian missionaries in 1877, the Bakiga maintained a vibrant and complex culture akin to many other tribes in Africa. Their culture, steeped in rich traditions and beliefs, encompassed the entire populace, marking it as a communal foundation. This cultural cohesion made it extremely challenging to distinguish Bakiga culture from religion, as both were intricately interwoven in the lives of the Bakiga.

Nareeba (2021) paints a vivid picture of the Bakiga, who embody a great number of cultural beliefs and practices that are deeply ingrained in their identity. Their worldview is characterized by a holistic approach to life, where every action, tradition, and belief reflects their profound spiritual connection to Ruhanga, the creator spirit, and the ancestral spirits that guide them. This

interconnectedness signifies the resilience of their indigenous beliefs, which have remained steadfast despite various external influences.

Within Bakiga society, polygamy is a recognized practice, allowing a man to take multiple wives. In such households, one can often find a man surrounded by his wives and children, creating a vibrant family dynamic. Anthropologists often note that men who engage in polygamy tend to hold distinctive economic, social, or ritual status within the community. Additionally, a larger family unit provides essential support in daily responsibilities and offers a solution in cases where the first wife is unable to bear children. To the Bakiga, having multiple wives is not merely a matter of personal preference but a symbol of wealth and elevated social standing.

Regardless of whether families are structured as nuclear or extended, or whether they embrace polygamous or monogamous arrangements, a core principle of Bakiga life is the emphasis on forming close-knit relationships rooted in deep mutual respect. The practice of bride wealth holds significant importance in their culture, serving as a formal acknowledgment of the marital union and strengthening familial ties. In cases of divorce, it is customary for the dowry to be returned, a practice that reflects both the value placed on the marriage contract and the economic considerations involved. This expectation can sometimes delay the onset of marriage, as many young people struggle to gather the necessary funds for bride price or secure land to establish a family home.

According to Bakiga legends, the concept of virginity before marriage is held in high regard, particularly for girls. Engaging in premarital sexual relations is strictly forbidden, and transgressions are met with harsh consequences. A girl who is discovered to be pregnant prior to marriage may face a cruel fate, often being cast into the depths of Kisiizi Falls as a dire warning to others. This practice highlights the severity of societal norms regarding female behavior;

however, it is notable that the patriarchal structure of Bakiga society often leaves the men who father these children unpunished. This legal and social imbalance perpetuates injustice and hardship for women, many of whom suffer from sexual violence or coercion, further complicating their already vulnerable positions. Another significant religious practice among the Bakiga people was the formation of alliances based on blood relationships, referred to as 'Okunywana' in the Rukiga language. This intricate process involved the ritual of cutting the skin to draw blood and subsequently drinking it, symbolizing the creation of a deep and lasting bond between individuals (FGD, Jan 2024). This act of ‘Okunywana’ was not merely a physical ritual; it was steeped in cultural significance, acting as an emblem of brotherhood and solidarity that aimed to establish and strengthen familial ties as well as friendships within the community.

The intent behind this practice was to cultivate peaceful and harmonious relationships, particularly among children, fostering a sense of belonging and mutual support (Adunkle, 2007). Those who participated in this ritual would enter into an agreement that included solemn vows. These vows mandated that the participants would never disclose each other’s secrets or report any wrongdoing committed by a brother, thereby creating a strong sense of loyalty and trust.

In cases where one party violated the vows related to this sacred relationship, the matter would be brought before a traditional court. Such courts were integral to the community, providing a means of addressing grievances, and they had the authority to impose consequences on the brother who had offended another. This mechanism not only upheld the values associated with ‘Okunywana’ but also reinforced the importance of accountability within the bonds formed through this practice.

Through these rituals and agreements, the practice of ‘Okunywana’ played a crucial role in nurturing a generation of children who understood and appreciated the significance of friendship

and family relationships. It instilled in them the values of loyalty and mutual support essential for maintaining social harmony.

In recent years, however, this traditional practice has begun to diminish among the Bakiga community. The decline can largely be attributed to concerns regarding the health risks associated with blood sharing, particularly following the emergence of diseases such as HIV/AIDS. While this practice has waned, it does not imply that familial relationships have weakened; rather, they have evolved. Today, these relationships are often strengthened through marriage, kinship, frequent visits, and the exchange of gifts known as 'okuzinduka,' which further cement bonds and foster a strong sense of community and belonging.



Fig 1: *A monument at Kisiizi Falls depicts the tragic fate of Bakiga girls who were thrown over the falls after becoming pregnant.*

4.1.2 The Bakiga understanding of Ruhanga

The Bakiga people, an ethnic group primarily residing in the southwestern region of Uganda, possess a deeply rooted belief in a Supreme Being known as Ruhanga, who is also referred to as Nyamuhanga. This multifaceted divine entity is revered for its embodiment of immense power, profound knowledge, and ultimate supremacy over existence. In the Bakiga worldview, Ruhanga Nyamuhanga transcends conventional human gender classifications; He is perceived as neither strictly male nor female. However, due to the patriarchal norms of Bakiga society, the use of the masculine pronoun "He" is prevalent. The name "Ruhanga-Nyamuhanga" conveys a rich meaning, translating to "the one who created and continues to create," emphasizing the ongoing nature of creation and divine influence in the world.

Ndyabahika, a scholar who has explored the intricacies of Bakiga spirituality, effectively captures the essence of Ruhanga-Nyamuhanga through various Kikiga proverbs that serve as vehicles of wisdom and cultural expression. One particularly kikiga ancient proverb states, "Owahangire omutwe niwe ogwata," which translates to "the one who created the head is the one who will crack it." This saying highlights the inherent relationship between the act of creation and the authority to bring about change or destruction, acknowledging that the Creator holds power over all aspects of existence. Another proverb, "eki Nyamuhanga akozire tikimurema ishoborora," translates to "what was done by the Creator may be reordered by Him," suggesting a belief in the dynamic and evolving nature of the universe, where creation is not static but subject to the will of the Supreme Being (Ndyabahika, 1997:40).

In the context of Bakiga primal religious beliefs, Nyamuhanga stands out as a unique figure, distinguishing himself from many other religious systems. He does not have designated "abagirwa" (priests) who act as intermediaries, nor does He require formal places of worship

such as "omuzigiti" (mosques), "ekanisa" (Anglican churches), or "ekeleziya" (ecclesiae). This lack of institutional structure underscores the notion that individuals can approach the divine directly, fostering a personal and intimate connection with Ruhanga Nyamuhanga.

Importantly, the attributes of Nyamuhanga characterize Him as a being who surpasses all human wisdom and understanding. He is regarded as omnipotent, omnipresent, and omniscient, which means that He has the power to do all things, is present everywhere simultaneously, and possesses complete knowledge of the universe. The Bakiga people frequently express their faith with the statement, "Mukama nakureeba," meaning "God sees you." This comforting belief reinforces the understanding that divine vigilance and awareness encompass every individual, providing a sense of security and intimacy between the people and their Creator. Ndyabahika (1997:41) outlines the understanding of Nyamuhanga by highlighting three critical attributes that illustrate His role in the world:

a) Rugaba- This attribute signifies Nyamuhanga as the benevolent distributor or giver of goods, closely associated with wealth and prosperity. It reflects the belief that all blessings—material, spiritual, or otherwise—emanate from Him, and He is responsible for the abundance in the lives of His followers.
b) Biheko - This aspect characterizes Nyamuhanga as the eternal sustainer, emphasizing His role in providing ongoing support and nourishment for life. It represents the constant care and nurturing that He offers to all living beings, ensuring their survival and well-being.
c) Kazooba - This attribute refers to Nyamuhanga as the radiant light, akin to the sun. It symbolizes vitality, warmth, and the sustaining force of life. Just as the sun spreads light across the earth, Nyamuhanga is seen as a source of life, illuminating the path for His creation and enabling growth and renewal.

Nyamuhanga is believed to reside not only high in the celestial realms but also to manifest a temporary presence on earth. Here, He might pause during His divine journeys, particularly when delivering blessings, guidance, or lessons in the form of challenges (Ndyabahika, 1997). The Bakiga people typically connect with Nyamuhanga through heartfelt prayers and sincere sacrifices, demonstrating their devotion and desire to engage with the divine.

Ndyabahika emphasizes that the Bakiga do not attribute blame to Nyamuhanga for adversities or consider misfortunes to be curses (Ndyabahika, 1997). Instead, they embrace the challenges of life with the same gratitude as they do to the blessings they receive, embodying a philosophy that views both experiences as essential components of existence. They believe that life contains a balance of joy and hardship—if one is given blessings, one can also expect to face trials as part of the divine plan.

This rich understanding of existence is deeply embedded in the Bakiga's indigenous stories, legends, proverbs, and oral traditions, which serve as cultural repositories that reflect their worldview. These narratives weave together the threads of spirituality, morality, and community life, illustrating how the divine permeates every aspect of their daily existence and shaping their interactions with the world around them. In this intricate picture, the belief in Nyamuhanga is not merely a religious concept; it is a foundational element that strengthens their identity and cultural heritage. The Bakiga people, an ethnic group primarily residing in the southwestern region of Uganda, possess a deeply rooted belief in a Supreme Being known as Ruhanga, who is also referred to as Nyamuhanga. This multifaceted divine entity is revered for its embodiment of immense power, profound knowledge, and ultimate supremacy over existence. In the Bakiga worldview, Ruhanga Nyamuhanga transcends conventional human gender classifications; He is perceived as neither strictly male nor female. However, due to the patriarchal norms of Bakiga

society, the use of the masculine pronoun "He" is prevalent. The name "Ruhanga-Nyamuhanga" conveys a rich meaning, translating to "the one who created and continues to create," emphasizing the ongoing nature of creation and divine influence in the world.

4.1.3 Nyakairima, the Mukiga Prophet

According to the available information surrounding the religious heritage of the Bakiga, Kigezi was once home to a remarkable prophet named Nyakairima. He is depicted as descending from a long lineage, tracing his ancestry back through generations: he was the son of Muzoora, who was the son of Katuuru, continuing the line through Bwengye, Kumanya, Byororwa, Rubaka, and Kaagaambirwa, reaching all the way to Kazigaaba II, Rutanagi, Nkirirehe, Butamanya, Kashema, Murungu, Ihaara, Rumba, Katura, Kahutwiru, Kafuma, Kazigaba I, Rwahaiguru, Kyaizooba, and finally, Muhanga, who is celebrated as the father of the people. As noted by Ngologoza, Nyakairima was born around the year 1838 on Katojo Island, a location close to Nyambwa's homestead in the lush, vibrant region of Nyamabare, within Ikumba, Rubanda (Ngologoza, 1998:36).

Nyakairima was a prophet whose insights reached far beyond the ordinary, foreseeing a myriad of significant events, including the moment of his own death. His presence in Kigezi's history offers a glimpse into the belief that Ruhanga, the Creator, had appointed agents to act in His name, conveying messages and warnings to the people. Like Yahweh in the Christian Old Testament, who communicated divine truths through prophets such as Moses, Isaiah, and Jeremiah, Ruhanga provided Nyakairima with knowledge of future happenings.

One of the most famous prophecies attributed to Nyakairima describes a vision: "Throughout the whole of Kikungere and Kijunguta, there would be nests as white as teeth made by mason wasps and egrets." The people of Kigezi interpreted this vivid imagery as a prophecy foretelling the

arrival of modernity, symbolized by the white iron roofs adorning brick houses that glistened with paint and were adorned with beautiful tiles—a transformation commonplace across various regions of Kigezi.

Tragically, Nyakairima met his untimely demise in 1893 due to a devastating epidemic of yaws, which ravaged the Bakiga population, claiming countless lives across the region and beyond. Ngologoza observes that the exact location of his death remains shrouded in mystery. Some believe he passed away in Rwere, situated on the pretty foothills of Mubutare in Bubaare Sub County, while he was traveling to deliver prophecies to the Basigi, who were embroiled in conflict with the Batimbo (Ngologoza, 1998). Other oral traditions recount tales of his death occurring near the serene shores of Lake Bunyonyi, at Bufundi, while he was making his way home; still, others suggest he found his end in a secluded cave in Kobutungi, located fifteen miles down the road to Bufumbira in Ikumba Sub County. At the time of his passing, Nyakairima was not just a prophet; he was a beloved figure, widely revered and cherished by the people of Kigezi and the surrounding communities.

4.1.4 Ancestry among the Bakiga

Discussing the religious background of the Bakiga requires a deep respect for the veneration of ancestors. For the Bakiga, ancestors are the deceased members of the family and anyone who has died and moved on to the next life is regarded as an ancestor. These ancestors are treated with profound respect because they are believed to remain part of the families from which they came.

Among the Bakiga of Kigezi, it is believed that a person does not truly perish upon death; instead, something known as the ‘omuzimu’ of that person continues to exist. When referring to those who passed away in the past four to five generations, scholar John Mbiti prefers the term "the living dead" rather than "ancestral spirits." The spirits of ancestors, whether they were

Christians or not, are known as emizimu among the Bakiga. After death, individuals transform into emizimu, residing in the spirit world while remaining connected to the places they lived in during their lifetime.

The presence of ancestors is deemed essential for the wellbeing of living family members, as the ancestors are believed to be actively involved in the lives of the living. The ancestors may become angry if sacrifices are not offered to them; however, they are often prayed to and consulted for guidance on matters such as protection, marriage arrangements, business advice, healing, and childbirth. The messages conveyed by the ancestors are highly regarded by the Bakiga (Karibahenda, personal interview, 2024)

To maintain harmony with their ancestors, the Bakiga regularly offered sacrifices, including milk, sorghum beer, and animal blood, to appease them and seek their blessings. No farmer would consume the harvest from their garden before making an offering to the ancestors, as it was believed that the ancestors were responsible for providing a bountiful harvest.

The Bakiga do not view death as an end; instead, they believe that the living dead continue to exist. Ancestors are respected and called upon more for guidance in daily matters than for blessings, while only the Supreme Being, Nyamuhanga, is consulted for major issues when the spirits below him are unable to assist (Mbiti, 1970). Ndyabahika similarly notes that many professing Christians and Muslims in Kigezi still offer prayers to the spirits of the dead, or the living dead. Their weekly worship often includes regular visits to ancestral shrines, Allah on Fridays for Muslim families, and prayers to Nyamuhanga or Jesus on Saturdays or Sundays for Seventh-Day Adventists, Protestants, and Roman Catholics (Ndyabahika, 1997).

Thus, when indigenous believers pray to the Supreme Being (Nyamuhanga), they do so through the living dead. This practice illustrates that ancestor worship intersects with Christianity, as many Christians acknowledge the significance of saints within their Catholic or Anglican traditions. According to Ndyabahika, traditional healers, known as ‘abafumu bebishaka’, often prescribed specific offerings to the ancestral spirits as a crucial part of their healing practices (Ndyabahika, 1997). These offerings served to honor and appease the spirits, ensuring their protection and guidance for the living. In certain cases, some of these healers went a step further by providing their patients with amulets. These amulets were believed not only to offer defense against various diseases but also to safeguard individuals against a range of hazards. Such hazards included the potential displeasure of the spirits, particularly when a person was traveling far from home or during extended journeys.

The concept of the living dead holds great significance within the Bakiga community, as these ancestral spirits are regarded as the protectors and custodians of the community's indigenous culture and historical traditions. It is essential for the members of the community, especially faithful Christians, to actively honor and remember their departed ancestors. This remembrance strengthens their connection to their heritage and reinforces the cultural identity that has been passed down through generations.

4.2 Nyabingi Religious movement

4.2.1 The meaning of Nyabingi

The term "Nyabingi" is a multifaceted concept that holds various meanings for different readers, scholars, and writers. In his analysis, Ndyabahika identifies that several scholars and readers have proposed three distinct definitions for Nyabingi, showcasing its complexity and richness. Among the Bakiga, Nyabingi is known by several names, each reflecting a unique aspect of this

revered figure, including Biheko, Rubambaasi, Nyamwanga-Kwarama, Omukama, and Rutatiina mireego (Ndyabahika, 1997:128, 129).

a) Biheko: In the Bakiga culture, the name Biheko translates to "the one who carries." Nyabingi is seen as a supreme and compassionate figure who embodies strength and nurturing, offering support to the weak and healing the ailments of the afflicted. This divine protector actively fights for the oppressed, standing as a beacon of hope for those in distress. Individuals facing hardships would seek the aid of Nyabingi's servants, known as abagirwa, who would carry them on Nyabingi's back to safety and comfort. This imagery evokes the teachings of the prophet Isaiah, who illustrates a God that carries His people through the challenges of life—sustaining, nourishing, and protecting them while providing for their every need (Isaiah 46:3). In acknowledgment of Nyabingi's benevolent nature and divine assistance, sacrifices and offerings were presented, expressing gratitude and reverence for this powerful figure (Tinkamanyire, Kuloba 2024).

b) Rubambaasi: In this context, Nyabingi is depicted as an immensely powerful deity whose reach encompasses numerous aspects of existence, affirmatively responding to the prayers of her followers. As Rubambaasi, she embodies the capacity to perform all tasks and possesses unparalleled strength and might. The influence of Nyabingi is profound, impacting every facet of life and the natural world through her formidable power. This portrayal highlights her role not only as a protector but also as an active participant in the lives of her devotees, guiding them through their challenges and aspirations. (Bakunda, interview, January 2024)

Nyamwanga-Kwarama: This term refers to an individual who remains outside the bounds of socially imposed seclusion. This aspect of Nyabingi conveys her nature as one who treats all beings and entities with equal consideration, devoid of any form of discrimination. Unlike the

societal norms that often dictate hierarchies and exclusions, Nyabingi exemplifies impartiality in her actions, emphasizing her fairness and inclusiveness. This characteristic reinforces her role as a unifying force among her followers, demonstrating that all are worthy of her attention and blessings. (Bakunda et al.)

Omukama: Meaning "the one who rules" or "the controller," this designation highlights Nyabingi's position as the supreme ruler of all realms. In her conversations, Tiragana noted that Nyabingi is seen as the omnipotent leader, presiding over both the living and the deceased. Her dominion extends beyond mere governance; she is believed to possess control over every aspect of existence, including the accumulation of riches, whether they are visible or hidden. This aspect of Nyabingi's character reinforces her significance as a source of prosperity and ethical leadership, ensuring the well-being of her followers. (Tiragana, March 2024)

Rutatiina Mireego: This phrase translates to "one who never feared bows and arrows," symbolizing courage and resilience in the face of adversity. This depiction exemplifies how Nyabingi inspired her followers to rise against the British imperialists and their Baganda collaborators. Her call to action was to initiate a struggle for autonomy and independence, aiming to establish a sovereign nation for the people of Kigezi. Nyabingi's encouragement to confront these oppressors represents her commitment to resistance and liberation, reflecting her protective nature towards her people and their right to self-determination.

Legend has it that Nyabingi was once a formidable woman who wielded great power during her earthly existence, so much so that her extraordinary abilities allowed her to ascend to a divine status. Her story resonates within the cultural fabric of the Bakiga, illustrating the intersection of womanhood, strength, and spirituality.

Building on this understanding, Arineitwe (1995) offers a profound perspective, emphasizing that Nyabingi, as a spirit, exists beyond the limits of human perception. She cannot be seen with the naked eye but is instead experienced through the rituals of worship and sacrifices performed by a select group of individuals known as abagirwa, or the priests of Nyabingi. These specially appointed priests serve as mediators, channeling the spiritual essence of Nyabingi and facilitating a connection between the material world and the divine. Through their offerings and reverence, they bring the spirit to life, ensuring that her power and influence continue to be felt in the community.

A certain respondent who preferred anonymity described Nyabingi to mean ‘many things’. The word ‘ebingi’ in Rukiga means ‘many’ in English. The word ‘Nyabingi’ therefore means someone who has collected many things (interview 2024). One may clearly say, ‘nyine ebintu bingi’ meaning ‘I have many things.’ It is upon this that Nyabingi priestesses were fond of asking for items and things in terms of sacrifices to please Nyabingi and satisfy her. Nyabingi was also understood as one who gave many things. On the other hand, the name ‘Nyabingi’ carries an additional implication of fertility, the one who possesses many riches or many things. A common nickname for the Nyabingi spirit was ‘nyoko’kuru’, meaning a paternal grandmother (second person), meaning a person who had produced many children in a clan, (Vokes, 2013:49). Therefore, the followers of Nyabingi and its worshippers believed that their goddess was a provider of many things including children. These things also included items like materials, wealth and long life. People who believed in Nyabingi were assured of long life and economic prosperity because Nyabingi would give everything in plenty. Nyabingi was considered generous to the people she loved. The only way for Nyabingi to love people was to pay much reverence to her. Nyabingi is a divine entity that originated from God and is considered a creature of Ruhanga. Unlike mortals, Nyabingi is believed to have never died, living eternally. According to

Tibijugwa (interview, 2024), Nyabingi was both respected and feared, regarded as one of the gods.

Berger (1981) further describes Nyabingi as a supreme being with a unique identity. In the same manner, Ndyabahika (1997) confirms that the Bakiga people believed Nyabingi possessed the power to kill or spare life, bestow blessings, provide wealth, and instill fertility in barren women. This belief set Nyabingi apart within Bakiga society, as many hoped she could answer their prayers regarding fertility issues.

This connection suggests that Nyabingi is closely associated with the "high god" Kazooba Nyamuhanga. In fact, both figures may be seen as two aspects of the same whole. The name Kazooba derives from the word for the sun (eizooba), which the Bakiga regard as the provider of agricultural wealth. Therefore, Nyabingi is thought to ‘derive’ from Kazooba, as she is considered a source of all good things.

Although Nyabingi is subordinate to Ruhanga, she was highly respected by the Bakiga, and the hierarchy between the two was well-established. Kazooba remains higher than Nyabingi, but they are believed to work in harmony. This pattern is common in many religious contexts, where a Supreme Being exists alongside other deities that operate under their authority. For example, in Christianity, the God of the Bible has angels like Gabriel, who delivered the good news to the Virgin Mary (as noted in Luke 1:26-38). Similarly, in other cultures, such as that of the Baganda, they believe in Katonda as the Supreme Being, while also recognizing other gods like Lubaale, the god of Lake Victoria, and Ddungu, the god of hunting. This framework indicates that Nyabingi is relevant to various religious traditions around the world.

4.2.2 The Origin of Nyabingi

The discussion surrounding the origins of Nyabingi is complex, as there is no definitive information about its exact beginnings. Nonetheless, its roots can be traced back to the late eighteenth century in Northern Rwanda, specifically between 1700 and 1800. Ndyabahika (1997:129) notes that the lack of written documentation complicates efforts to draw substantial conclusions regarding Nyabingi's origins. The movement is closely connected to the precolonial history of the Bakiga community, particularly in the Kigezi region of southwestern Uganda (Cantrell, 2022).

Nyabingi's origins are linked to a secret society that existed prior to European colonization in Kigezi. Oral traditions depict its emergence as a tale of power, betrayal, and reincarnation. According to these traditions, Nyabingi ruled in Tanzania before marrying Ruhinda, a chief of Mpororo in southwestern Uganda (Vokes, 2013:21). Kanyesigye concurs that this marriage led to conflict, culminating in Ruhinda’s overthrow of Nyabingi and his subsequent control of the kingdom (interview, Jan 2024). This act of betrayal set off a cycle in which Nyabingi's spirit caused turmoil, including the annexation of the Ndorwa region by the Mwami of Rwanda.

Subsequently, Nyabingi's spirit sought to manifest in an individual in Rwanda but ultimately faced persecution and death at the hands of the Rwandan monarchy. This cycle of reincarnation persisted, with various individuals claiming to embody Nyabingi's spirit. Notably, Rutajira Kijuna, also known as Rutajira Muhanda, emerged as a prominent personification of Nyabingi in Rwanda during the late nineteenth century. Her renown, marked by her healing abilities and a devoted following that regarded her as royalty, ultimately resulted in her downfall at the hands of the ruling Mwami of Rwanda (Benda, 2013:31)

According to Voles (2013), the Nyabingi movement first captured the attention of the German colonial administration in Rwanda around 1907. This significant moment arose when Muhumuza, the determined mother of an unsuccessful claimant to the Rwandan throne, utilized the mystical powers associated with the Nyabingi spirit to rally support for her son's ambitions. By presenting herself as a Nyabingi 'priestess,' she not only legitimized her son's claim but also garnered considerable enthusiasm and backing from the local population, who were drawn to her assertive and charismatic leadership.

In contrast to Voles, Phillips (1928) takes a different approach by tracing the roots of Nyabingi to Buzinza, situated in the Southern region of Lake Nalubaale (Lake Victoria). This divergence illustrates the complexities surrounding the movement's origins. Some scholars argue that Nyabingi originated in what is now Rwanda, while others assert it has connections to the Democratic Republic of Congo, former Zaire, or Mpororo. Turyahikayo (1983) further notes the ties between Nyabingi and the modern Democratic Republic of Congo, adding yet another layer of interpretation to its history.

Despite these varied claims, the prevailing evidence leans toward the idea that Nyabingi indeed has its roots in Rwanda. Linden (1977) reveals that the Nyabingi movement first piqued the interest of colonial officials in Rwanda, and many who support this theory point to Queen Kitami as the movement's founding figure. Her leadership and influence are often highlighted as pivotal in the establishment of Nyabingi's spiritual and political presence.

Throughout the discourse on Nyabingi, there emerges a pronounced inconsistency and a lack of consensus regarding its origins. Ndyabahika (1997:129) further attributes this confusion to the absence of substantial written documentation. He argues that the scarcity of literary resources complicates efforts to make definitive conclusions about the Nyabingi movement's beginnings,

leaving much of its history to interpretation and speculation. Ndyabahika (1997:130) explains that following the death of Kitami, a significant transformation occurred in the perception of the Queen's spirit, which began to be revered as a deity. Her followers and supporters fervently contended that she was an immortal being, thus elevating her status within their community. This development contributed to the rise of the Nyabingi movement, which gained considerable momentum in the Kigezi region, especially within the areas of Mpororo, Kigezi, and Ndorwa. A key figure in this movement was a leader named Muhumuza, who played a pivotal role in popularizing these beliefs and practices.

By the year 1912, the influence of what became known as "Nyabingism" had permeated throughout southwestern Uganda, affecting communities such as the Bakiga and Banyankole. Muhumuza effectively mobilized support from her Nyabingi followers, positioning herself in an explicitly anti-European stance. She claimed the title of "Queen of Ndorwa," a declaration that underscored her aspiration to be recognized as a liberator from colonial oppression and European dominance.

The Nyabingi religious movement had far-reaching impacts on the Bakiga people across various dimensions including social, political, economic, cultural, and religious spheres. It deeply influenced family structures and interpersonal relationships, as the tenets of “Nyabingism” became integral to negotiating agreements, prompting social changes, and fulfilling promises within the community.

Moreover, the Bakiga held Nyabingi in high esteem, believing that she possessed the power to heal a wide range of psychological and physiological disorders. These health issues were often blamed on Nyabingi and emandwa, a term that refers to spirits or supernatural forces. In light of

this belief, abagirwa, or spiritual healers, were trained in various medicinal practices, enabling them to administer remedies to those who sought assistance from Nyabingi.

Despite the robust influence of Nyabingi during its peak, the movement began to lose its grip in the 1930s. This decline can be attributed to several factors: the advancement and encroachment of Western civilization, the recruitment of indigenous people into administrative roles instead of relying on agents from Buganda, the growing influence of Christianity, the spread of formal education, and the eventual arrest and detention of Muhumuza.

As a result of these developments, the once-unified network of Nyabingi ritual specialists started to disintegrate, resulting in a fragmentation of the movement into numerous independent sects (Freedman, 1984). Muhumuza had served as the driving force and central figure of the Nyabingi movement; her absence created a significant leadership void. This lack of direction ultimately contributed to the decline and collapse of the movement as it had been known (Vokes, 2015: 35).

4.3 Bakiga's interaction with Christianity

The arrival of Christianity among the Bakiga was met with considerable resistance, manifesting not only in religious opposition but also affecting the social, political, and economic dimensions of their lives. Ndyabahika (1997:80, 81) highlights that the early encounters between the missionaries and the Bakiga were marked by hostility, as the locals fiercely defended their traditions. Despite their initial resistance being unyielding, it was ultimately undermined by the military shortcomings of the Bakiga and the prevailing belief that Western culture held superiority over African traditions. Yet, throughout this period of tension, the Bakiga showed remarkable stubbornness, creating significant challenges for the missionaries in Kigezi.

Undeterred, the missionaries persisted in establishing their presence in Kigezi, with the White Father missionaries being the first group to so in the region during their journey to Rwanda in 1903.

Ngologoza (1998) recounts that the first to set foot in Kigezi was a Muganda Catholic named Yowana Kitagana. Upon his arrival, he planted a mission station at Nyarushanje, where he began his important work of spreading Christianity, gradually extending his reach to other corners of Kigezi. Yowana approached his mission with immense care, embodying the values of compassion and humility. He devoted himself to assisting the impoverished, and his warm, approachable demeanor helped him win the hearts of many, leading to a steady influx of converts.

Known for his strong patience and lack of favoritism, Yowana served the community with an open heart. His dedication was especially evident in his combat against Nyabingi worshippers and the influential Bagirwa priestesses. A notable incident occurred in Nyarushanje when Yowana engaged in a fierce confrontation with Mukeiganira, a chief Nyabingi mugirwa known for her manipulative practices over the local people. After keenly observing her deceptive tactics, Yowana decisively stepped in. He applied three swift strokes of discipline before arranging for her transfer to Mbarara prison, showcasing his determination to protect his newfound followers.

The Bakiga, recognizing his striking appearance with a long beard, affectionately nicknamed him 'Mareju,' which further cemented his legacy among the community he sought to serve. Ngologoza observations highlight how Yowana was instrumental in convincing many Bakiga to embrace Christianity. He was supported by a team of teachers who aided him in spreading the gospel. This group included notable figures such as Rafael Kabukure, a Munyankore, as well as

Yowana Rutimbirayo and Atanansi Nalugumbula, a Muganda teacher who assisted Yowana Kitagana in instructing the Bakiga in carpentry and organizing baptism classes for new converts.

The initial group of Catholic missionaries effectively communicated their message in various regions of Kigezi, particularly in Rukiga and Mparo. By the time the white Fathers arrived in Rushorooza in 1923, Christianity had already established a solid foundation in Kigezi. The Bakiga had been illuminated by the teachings of the gospel, recognizing the true God and understanding that Satan was untrustworthy. In gratitude, they welcomed the missionaries by providing new sites for church construction (Ngologoza, 1998:94).

The white Fathers contributed significantly to the Bakiga's acceptance of this new faith, often through financial assistance and the distribution of free items such as Bibles, crosses, and rosaries. This approach undoubtedly influenced their acceptance of what was perceived as a foreign religion, leading to some missionaries being affectionately nicknamed 'Mr. Money.' Prominent among them were Rev. J. Laane, Rev. J. Nicolet, Rev. E. Klep, Rev. F. X. Lacoursiere, Rev. P. Brianguier, Rev. Van Ertrijk, Rev. U. Torelli, Rev. P. Spaandonk, Rev. J. M. Letohie, Rev. H. Witbroek, and Rev. Paul Mischler.

In addition to their passionate evangelistic efforts, the missionaries made notable contributions to community development in the regions they served. They undertook projects such as constructing small roads to improve transportation access for local residents. Furthermore, they played a vital role in educating Bakiga by teaching both Kiswahili and English, thereby enhancing local educational systems. Their commitment to community welfare was also evident in their efforts to build places of worship; they financed the construction of several churches with their own resources. As a result of these initiatives, many churches flourished in areas such as

Rushorooza, Nyakibaare, Kitanga, and Nyarushanje, which today stand as strong bastions of Catholicism within the Kigezi region (Ngologoza, 1998).

Ngologoza (1998) highlights that this fertile ground for spiritual cultivation also attracted Protestant missionaries. The first of these was Zakaria Balaba, a Muganda who arrived in 1912. He constructed the first missionary church in Kikungyere, marking the beginning of Protestant missionary work in the area. However, this initial church was soon abandoned and ultimately relocated to Kabira Hill in Rugarama, where a new church was established in 1913. Despite his early death, Zakaria's mission was continued by another dedicated preacher, Zedekia Rwamafwa, a Munyankore deacon, who carried on the gospel's message and built upon the foundation laid by Zakaria. This early work of African evangelists paved the way for European missionaries to come and further solidify the Protestant movement in Kigezi (Ngologoza, 1998).

Rev. Dr. Leonard Sharp and his colleague Dr. Stanley Smith arrived in 1921 at Kabira in Rugarama. Their arrival marked a renewed vigor in the missionary endeavor, as they were deeply committed to preaching the gospel. In addition to spiritual teachings, they expanded their outreach by providing critical services to the physically afflicted, caring for orphans, and forming collaborative efforts with other religious groups, including their Catholic counterparts. Demonstrating their dedication to community health, they established a church missionary society hospital at Kabira, which served as a vital resource for those in need of medical care.

Dr. Sharp and Dr. Smith took on the challenge of addressing widespread diseases that plagued the Kigezi area. Among these was a particularly deadly ailment that caused painful sores, which developed into pus-filled wounds, inflicting immense suffering on the afflicted. This condition, known as yaws, was notorious for leaving individuals deformed and helpless even after treatment (Ngologoza, 1998). The new missionaries offered not only medical attention but also hope to

those who had been suffering for so long. They later established another hospital in Rwama specifically to combat leprosy, providing crucial interventions that were previously unavailable to the local population. Through the use of strong injections, they were able to effectively treat these diseases, bringing quick relief to many sick people.

In addition to their medical work, Dr. Sharp also constructed another hospital in Kisiizi to cater to the health needs of the surrounding communities, including Kisiizi, Rukiga, and Nyarushanje. The Protestant missionaries recognized that health care was only one facet of their ministry; thus, they actively taught the Bakiga valuable skills that would promote self-sufficiency. They provided instruction in scientific farming methods, carpentry, joinery, craft making, modern pottery, and various other practical skills. This emphasis on education and practical skills was highly favored by Bakiga, as it not only improved their quality of life but also paved the way for greater community development.

These transformative changes in the religious landscape of the Bakiga played a crucial role in shaping their spiritual beliefs, particularly regarding the influence of Protestant missionaries compared to that of Catholic missionaries. Although Catholicism was introduced to the region earlier, it was the active and multifaceted engagement of Protestant missionaries that significantly strengthened the Bakiga's belief in the Protestant understanding of God. These missionaries not only focused on spiritual teachings but also became involved in the practical aspects of everyday life, such as education, healthcare, and community development. This comprehensive approach allowed them to foster deep and lasting connections with the local communities, thereby influencing the Bakiga's religious convictions.

In addition to Christianity, Islam began to find its foothold in Kigezi. The introduction of Islamic teachings to the Bakiga community can be traced back to Sharif, the first Muslim teacher, who

established a mosque at Kirigime, located near Kabale. Although Sharif worked diligently to share the principles of Islam, historian Ngologoza notes that acceptance of these teachings among the Bakiga remained limited. Most of the Islamic missionaries who ventured into Kigezi were Baganda, including notable figures like Abdullah Namunye and Suleiman Ntangamalaala, who dedicated themselves to planting the seeds of Islam in the region. They sought to educate the local population in Islamic beliefs and practices, despite facing initial resistance.

At first, the growing presence of Islam attracted minimal attention among the Bakiga. However, over time, its influence began to expand, particularly with the establishment of Islamic schools aimed at teaching the culture and values grounded in Sharia law. These educational institutions were set up in areas such as Ndorwa and Kambuga, marking a crucial step in the dissemination of Islamic teachings. Despite this progress, one key factor contributing to the slow growth of Islam was the perception among Bakiga that the religion was complex, difficult, and overly demanding, which created an impression that it was fundamentally different from their established beliefs.

A Mukiga respondent pointed out the notable differences between Islam and Christianity, suggesting that the teachings of the two religions often contradicted one another. This conflict led to confusion among the Bakiga, who were trying to navigate their spiritual choices. In contrast to the many Catholic and Protestant preachers who shared a common message centered on God and Jesus Christ, utilized the Bible in their teachings, opposed practices such as polygamy, and held worship services on Sundays, Islamic teachers presented a different narrative. They emphasized the oneness of Allah, with Muhammad recognized as His messenger, and articulated a set of beliefs and practices that were often at odds with those of Christianity.

For instance, Islamic teachings allowed for polygamy, which was a point of contention for many Bakiga. Additionally, the use of the Quran as the central religious text, the obligatory veiling of women, the prohibition against consuming pork, and the requirement of prayers on Fridays, along with circumcision for male converts, created further distinctions between the two faiths. These differences contributed to a complex religious landscape in Kigezi, where the Bakiga were faced with various beliefs, practices, and cultural expectations. The Bakiga, when introduced to the new religions of Islam and Christianity, often viewed them as strict belief systems, which led them to give these religions less attention initially. However, it is important to recognize that these foreign religions brought about certain improvements in the welfare of the Bakiga community in a variety of ways. Ndyabahika points out that evangelists from different faiths imparted essential knowledge about hygiene practices, which marked a significant shift in the community's health standards. Additionally, these evangelists worked to eliminate traditional religious artifacts, such as engisha (fetishes), which were central to the Bakiga's original belief systems, (Ndyabahika 1997:76).

Despite the potential benefits that these foreign religions brought, the overall religious welfare of the Bakiga faced dramatic changes. The exposure to Christian and Islamic teachings led to a dilution and complexity of their past beliefs. Many Bakiga ultimately discarded their traditional religious practices in favor of the foreign deities represented by Christianity and Islam. This shift manifested in the destruction of their ancestral shrines and the burning of sacred objects that held cultural significance. Instead, the community embraced new religious symbols, regularly attending church services every Sunday while carrying bibles, rosaries, and crosses.

The reasons for the acceptance of these foreign religions among the Bakiga can ignite lively debates among scholars and community members alike. Nevertheless, it seems that the practical

solutions these religions offered in response to the social and economic challenges faced by the Bakiga played a crucial role in their assimilation. By comparing the Bakiga from the pre-colonial era with those inhabiting modern Kigezi, it becomes evident that the influences of colonialism had a profound impact on their religious practices and beliefs. In contemporary times, the religious life of the Bakiga has been significantly transformed, leading to the near-total abandonment of traditional belief systems. The result has been what can be described as a Euro-Kiga religious life, which represents a complex fusion of European religious influences and Bakiga traditions.

Today, the majority of Bakiga identify as Catholics, Anglicans, Adventists, or Pentecostal Christians, reflecting a considerable shift in their spiritual identities. The presence of Muslims within the community is notably smaller, as is evident from the limited number of mosques located in the Kigezi region. In the current generation, only a small subset of the Bakiga have retained elements of their traditional religious and social customs. These enduring practices can still be observed in various aspects of their cultural life, such as the rituals surrounding the treatment of the dead, marriage ceremonies, as well as in their music and dance traditions, revealing the rich embroidery of Bakiga culture that persists despite the dominant influences of foreign religions.

4.4 The East African Revival Movement

The East African Revival Movement (ERM) was a transformative Christian movement that emerged in response to the growing discontent within the Anglican missionary church in East Africa. According to Gathogo (2016), the roots of this revival can be traced back to the early 1920s at the church in Gahini, a significant and vibrant center of evangelism in Rwanda. From

this pivotal location, the movement spread like wildfire to neighboring regions, encompassing areas in Kigezi, Tanzania, Kenya, Congo, and Sudan.

The participants of this revival called themselves 'balokole,' meaning 'the saved ones,' and viewed themselves as enlightened individuals, dedicated to a profound spiritual experience. Masenoi and Owojaiye (2015) describe the ERM as the most notable movement of renewal within the Protestant churches in the region, highlighting its unique impact on spiritual life.

The revival began as a spiritual fellowship between English doctors and African orderlies in Rwanda, creating a dynamic exchange of ideas and beliefs that inspired this widespread awakening. Dr. Joe Church played a crucial role in this movement, arriving in Rwanda in 1927 with the innovative practice of public confession popularized by the Oxford Group. His arrival marked the beginning of a significant spiritual transformation that not only revitalized faith within the Anglican community but also had lasting influences across the entire East African region.

In response to the discomfort that many faced in missionary churches, individuals began to seek out more radical and personal messages within their faith communities. This quest for deeper spiritual engagement led to the organization of annual conventions in various locations, where participants focused on the vital themes of repentance and spiritual renewal. During these gatherings, attendees engaged in meaningful discussions about overcoming sin, abstaining from the consumption of alcohol, and delving into the teachings of the Bible.

As noted by Mwaura (2010), African Independent Churches (AICs) uphold a stringent puritanical ethic, which includes clear guidelines against smoking, drinking, sexual immorality, and gambling. Within these communities, the notion of healing transcends the individual; it is perceived as a collective experience. Confession of sins and acts of repentance are communal

practices, with the prophet serving as a key figure in discerning the transgressions of the congregation.

The revivalists' vehement denunciations of worldly behaviors were startling and deeply impactful. They shared powerful testimonies that highlighted personal struggles with sin and the transformative power of total surrender to Christ. While the revival activities of the balokole led to the disruption of various traditional African customs—such as bride price payments, ritual sacrifices, polygamy, and numerous food taboos—they sought to revitalize the spiritual condition of the missionary church, which many felt had become stagnant and disconnected from the divine.

The revivalist confessional practices in East Africa played a crucial role in empowering women, allowing them to reclaim their positions alongside men in the communities where these movements thrived. This remarkable movement serves as a testament to Africans' ability to communicate their spiritual messages in their native languages and engage with the Bible in a manner that met their unique needs.

Moreover, ERM initiated significant shifts in church governance by promoting the involvement of Africans in leadership roles within religious activities that had predominantly featured European leaders. Among the prominent figures that emerged from the African balokole movement were Kosiya Shalita and William Nagenda, a respected balokole from Buganda. Both individuals played pivotal roles as influential leaders during this significant period of transformation.

4.5 Bakiga religious heritage, its strengths and weaknesses

Bakiga are filled with a rich and multifaceted religious heritage, intricately woven with their understanding of Nyamuhanga—an essential deity central to their spiritual practices. This heritage comprises various methods of worship, elaborate rituals, deeply held beliefs, and time-honored practices that have been lovingly passed down through countless generations. In the African worldview, heritage creates a profound bond between ancestors and the living, fostering a sense of continuity and belonging. Traditionally, this heritage was conveyed orally, with certain individuals trained as custodians of knowledge, capable of memorizing and eloquently reciting vital information (Mbiti 1991:4). Though Mbiti acknowledges that oral transmission may not always guarantee accuracy, he argues that this method was far superior to having no representation at all, particularly in eras before literacy became widespread. African heritage comes in many forms—cultural, historical, and religious—each playing a crucial role in shaping identities.

Exploring the traditional heritage of the Bakiga serves as a time capsule, offering vivid insights into their past and shedding light on their existence in Kigezi over thousands of years. This inquiry reveals essential truths about their origins, the homelands they once inhabited, the reasons for their migration to Kigezi, and the esteemed traditional leaders who guided them. It also uncovers the nature of their relationships with neighboring communities, the intricacies of their religious life, and their traditional survival methods, all of which resonate with contemporary practices and values. This enduring connection can be attributed to the fluidity of African cultures, which are characterized by constant evolution and adaptation (Mbiti 1991:2). Consequently, these experiences remain pragmatic and relevant, evolving to meet the diverse needs of the community without a centralized authority to dictate practices.

However, like many other African religions, the movement displays both strengths and weaknesses. From a broader perspective, Mbiti notes that African traditional religions often lack defined founders or reformers who seek to innovate or disseminate these beliefs globally. As a result, for centuries, the rich nature of African religious, cultural, and political heritage has persisted, sustained by the unwavering commitment of volunteers dedicated to preserving their ancestral traditions (Mbiti 1991:17).

In today's rapidly changing world, the dual forces of modernity and globalization pose significant threats to these cherished African traditional beliefs. Many people, particularly the youth, find themselves drawn to Western lifestyles, sometimes at the expense of their indigenous cultures. This trend raises alarm about the potential erosion of unique traditions, jeopardizing the very essence of the vibrant customs that have shaped the Bakiga and their identity through the ages.

4.6 Conclusion

Despite the characterization by missionaries and other non-Bakiga scholars who labeled the Bakiga's indigenous lifestyles as irreligious, these practices are, in fact, profoundly spiritual and intricately connected to their deities. For a Mukiga person, every aspect of life is a reflection of their devotion to God, guiding their actions and decisions in a manner that is distinctly religious. This spiritual dimension manifests itself in various ways, influencing how the Bakiga engage in worship, the specific deities they honor, and the rituals they perform. Their worship practices may include traditional songs, dances, and offerings that reflect their deep reverence and connection to the divine. Additionally, their religious beliefs extend to the choices they make regarding food; certain dishes may be prepared and consumed during religious ceremonies or

significant life events, reinforcing their cultural identity and spiritual ties. This chapter links us further to a more significant part of the dimensions of NRM

CHAPTER FIVE: DIMENSIONS OF NYABINGI RELIGIOUS MOVEMENT

5.0 Introduction

The chapter seeks to excavate the intricate dimensions of the Nyabingi religious movement, employing Ninian Smart's dimensions of religions. Smart's paradigm encompasses ritual, mythological, doctrinal, ethical, experiential, social and material aspects of Nyabingi religious movement. By examining these interconnected dimensions, I aim at gaining a deeper understanding of Nyabingi's rich form, its historical development, and its ongoing significance among the Bakiga.

5.1 Dimensions of Nyabingi religious movement

This section will elaborate on the dimensions of religion according to Ninian Smart in relation to Nyabingi religious movement.

5.1.1 Rituals and practices of Nyabingi religious Movement

Rituals, beliefs, and practices are intertwined concepts that often overlap in their application, lacking clear distinctions in many contexts. Rituals, by nature, require specific practices to manifest, and for both of these elements to be impactful, they must be rooted in a belief system. The scholar J. Mbiti argues that beliefs form an essential component of every religion, as they articulate people's attitudes and perspectives on life, shaping their understanding of existence and purpose. Typically, these beliefs delve into fundamental aspects such as the nature of God, the role of ancestors and spirits, the influence of magic, human life, and concepts surrounding life after death. In parallel, practices serve as tangible manifestations of these beliefs, embodying what individuals hold to be true in their religious or cultural contexts.

According to the ideas shared during a FGD, common religious practices encompass a wide number of activities, including forms of prayer, making various sacrifices and offerings to deities, performing ceremonial rites, adhering to specific customs, and engaging in expressive actions such as singing and dancing. These practices not only reinforce individual beliefs but also create a sense of community among practitioners (FGD, interview Feb 2024). These ideas match with the understanding of a renowned anthropologist, Victor Witter Turner (1973) who defines rituals as a series of activities that may include gestures, actions, or revered objects endowed with symbolic meaning. In more accessible terms, a ritual can encompass everyday behaviors, such as the morning greeting of "hello, good morning" or engaging in regular meal times, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Rituals are often characterized by their repetitive and systematic nature, occurring within defined contexts, which can be religious, cultural, or social. As emphasized by Nkundoruganda in an interview conducted in March 2024, rituals shape the human experience, indicating that no individual can navigate life without them. These rituals dictate established norms, prescribing how various actions should be carried out in accordance with cultural expectations.

This therefore implies that cultural rituals, which are often traditional in essence, have a strong connection to history and lineage, and are passed down through generations. The primary custodians of these practices are the elders of society, who are revered for their knowledge and understanding of the rituals' meanings and significance. These cultural rituals, while not formally documented or codified, retain a remarkable consistency in their performance from one generation to the next. They serve to celebrate significant life events, aiming to maintain social harmony and cohesion within the community.

Cultural rituals commonly occur during ceremonies such as weddings and funerals, while also marking rites of passage, including initiation rites or child naming ceremonies. Various African societies, including the Bakiga, Basoga, Baganda, and Bagisu, actively perform these rituals as a means of preserving their cultural heritage and traditions. These practices strengthen community ties, underline important life events and beliefs, facilitate the passage of cultural knowledge and skills from one generation to the next, and cultivate a sense of belonging among individuals within a specific cultural framework. The cultural significance of performing these rituals lies in their ability to both uphold social harmony and safeguard fundamental societal norms and values.

For religious rituals, specific actions or behaviors are performed in alignment with a particular belief system. Most of these rituals carry symbolic weight and are designed to connect practitioners with the spiritual realm. Although the nature and form of religious rituals can vary widely across different faiths, they typically include practices such as prayer, sacraments (for example, baptism), offerings and sacrifices, pilgrimages to sacred sites, festivals, and celebrations. They may also involve religious dances, songs, or the reading of sacred texts like the Bible or the Quran. Through participation in religious rituals, individuals not only affirm their identities with their faiths but also participate in a shared communal experience that reinforces religious values and beliefs. Over time, the continuous performance of these rituals ensures that the core principles and teachings of the religion remain protected from external influences or dilution.

This research investigates the specific context of Nyabingi worship, highlighting three essential types of rituals and each of these rituals fulfills a distinct role in the spiritual and communal lives of practitioners, thereby enhancing their cultural identity and expressions of faith.

5.1.2 Initiation rituals

Among the Bakiga, rituals serve as significant markers for an individual's transition into new groups, communities, or stages of life. These important life transitions include moving from childhood to adulthood, and they are often accompanied by a variety of cultural and religious ceremonies. Cultural initiations, such as circumcision, play a pivotal role in this process, marking the passage into adulthood. Similarly, religious rituals—like the naming of a child or induction into secret societies—are also integral to these transitions, signifying acceptance and recognition within the community (Kabwegyere 2018:23).

To become a servant of Nyabingi, an important deity among the Bakiga, individuals are required to undergo a formal initiation process involving various rituals. These rites of initiation are designed to ensure that one is adequately prepared for the responsibilities and spiritual obligations that come with serving Nyabingi. Without these rituals, it was believed that one could not truly embody the role of a servant or approach the spiritual power associated with Nyabingi.

Additionally, there are rituals of consecration that serve to differentiate individuals and objects as sacred, endowed with a spiritual purpose. These rituals also mark significant shifts in social status. For example, a young woman may transition into the role of a mugirwa, or a medium of Nyabingi, through specific rites that enhance her spiritual identity and community role.

5.1.3 Rituals of Passage

Rituals of passage are integral to the Bakiga culture and represent the transitions from one life stage to another. These transitions are often profound and are accompanied by a series of ceremonial activities and celebrations that hold substantial religious significance. Key life

events, such as birth, marriage, parenthood, and death, are treated as critical moments in an individual's life history, warranting special attention and recognition.

Within this context, no individual is allowed to navigate these pivotal life experiences without engaging in the appropriate rituals. These rituals provide a sense of a fresh start, enabling individuals to embrace new roles and responsibilities. Moreover, they offer opportunities for elders within the community to impart wisdom, share knowledge, and guide those undergoing transitions. This process not only strengthens communal ties but also fosters social cohesion among members of the Bakiga community.

5.1.4 Rituals of Fertility

Rituals of fertility are another vital aspect of Bakiga culture, focusing on enhancing the reproductive capacity of both humans and other living beings. As noted by Ananti and Emmanuel (1986), these rites are designed to stimulate reproduction and may involve various forms of sacrifice. The primary aim of such rituals is to foster fertility, increase the ability to produce offspring, and promote abundance and prosperity within the community.

Given Nyabingi's role as the goddess of fertility and reproduction, these rituals are quite prevalent. Women who face challenges with infertility often seek the blessings of Nyabingi, hoping to conceive and bear children. The influence of Nyabingi extends beyond human fertility; it is also linked to agriculture and livestock, affecting all entities associated with the cycle of reproduction and growth.

5.2 The Mythological dimension

The Nyabingi religious movement is distinguished by a rich and intricate mythological tradition that offers substantial insights into its cultural worldview and underlying beliefs (Kabwegyere,

1974:201). These myths, passed down through generations, serve as foundational narratives that significantly influence the movement's rituals, ceremonies, and the daily lives of its adherents, shaping community identity and spiritual practices.

5.2.1 The Myth of Nyabingi

As highlighted by Mbiti, the term "Nyabingi" denotes a legendary goddess believed to embody the spirits associated with mediumship and divine communication (Mbiti, 1990:187). Within the mythological framework of the Nyabingi movement, Nyabingi is depicted as a powerful and protective spirit who engages with her followers through a select group of mediums or spiritual leaders. These mediums are believed to facilitate direct communication between Nyabingi and the community, often delivering messages of guidance, prophecy, and reassurance during times of turmoil. This direct line of communication not only highlights the role of intermediaries in the spiritual experience but also emphasizes Nyabingi’s protective influence over her adherents, cultivating a sense of safety and belonging. The steadfast belief in Nyabingi's power and presence forms a critical aspect of the community's spiritual identity, encouraging members to embrace her teachings and to actively participate in communal worship and ceremonies (Kodesh, 2010:156).

5.2.2 The Origin Myth

A prominent narrative within the movement’s mythological corpus details the origins of the Nyabingi movement itself (Ray, 1991:135). According to this account, the founder, Muhumuza, experienced a profound spiritual possession by the spirit of Nyabingi, an event that became a cornerstone of the movement's history. It is said that during this possession, Nyabingi communicated her mandate to Muhumuza, instructing her to establish a new religious movement dedicated to the spiritual and social upliftment of the Kigezi people. The movement was

conceived as a response to the socio-political challenges faced by the community, particularly in terms of colonial oppression and gender-based disparities. Thus, one of its core missions was not only to offer spiritual salvation but also to advocate for the rights and empowerment of women who were experiencing systemic oppression within the patriarchal structures upheld by their Bakiga husbands. This dual focus on achieving spiritual transformation and social justice underscores the movement's relevance and adaptability, illustrating how religious belief can be interwoven with the quest for societal change (Kabwegyere, 1974:203). Through these myths, the Nyabingi movement articulates a vision of liberation that resonates deeply with its followers, emphasizing the interdependence of faith and social advocacy.

5.3 The doctrinal dimension

Under this dimension, I have presented a detailed discussion about movement’s beliefs and practices.

5.3.1 Beliefs of Nyabingi religious movement

All the rituals of Nyabingi are anchored in a set of beliefs and practices. Each ritual is rooted in the conviction that certain outcomes will be realized as a result of the practices. The deeply personal nature of these rituals means that they can vary considerably across different cultures and individual experiences. In the subsequent discussion, the interplay between rituals, beliefs, and practices will be explored in detail. Thus, Nyabingi can be viewed as a religious movement rich in rituals that reflect the community's spiritual life.

The ritual of contacting Nyabingi features prominently in the spiritual practices of the Bakiga. This ritual typically involves personal consultation with the mugirwa, a medium who enters a trance state, allowing Nyabingi's spirit to communicate through them. Once the mugirwa is possessed by the spirit, they become an intermediary, answering specific questions posed by

visitors who are seeking Nyabingi's assistance. People may inquire about healing for sick children or seek guidance on personal matters, making these consultations a vital aspect of the community's spiritual life.

Abagirwa, who serve as high priests of Nyabingi, play a crucial role in these consultations. They act as religious mediums, connecting the community with the divine powers of Nyabingi. Additionally, abafumu, the traditional healers within the Bakiga culture, are consulted during times of illness or misfortune. When community members find themselves faced with ailments or adversities beyond their understanding or ability to address, they turn to these spiritual leaders for help. The abagirwa intercede on behalf of the afflicted, facilitating the healing process. If there is a need to uncover the cause of an illness—be it spiritual, environmental, or otherwise—community members may consult with abaraguzi, who are known for their ability to diagnose and reveal the reasons and origins of such afflictions. In this way, the Bakiga's complex system of rituals, roles, and beliefs link to address the needs and challenges of the community.

The worship and veneration of Nyabingi is a deeply immersive and culturally rich experience that encompasses a wide range of rituals, songs, and communal participation. Central to this practice is the act of singing, where worshippers melodic chanting of songs and hymns specifically crafted to call upon the presence of Nyabingi, a revered spirit. According to Karibahenda (interview), Nyabingi, much like the Christian God, expected to be entertained through these musical offerings, which served to delight her spirit and prompt her to respond to the heartfelt requests of her followers.

These sacred songs are not simply spontaneous expressions; they follow a carefully structured liturgical order that lends a sense of rhythm and unity to the worship. The abagirwa, embodying the role of both performers and mediators, align their voices in a cohesive chorus, creating a

powerful auditory experience during their interactions with Nyabingi. Bakunda highlights the inclusion of various incantations and exclamatory phrases that arise organically throughout the worship process, often lacking a fixed form (Bakunda, interview, 2024). This spontaneity allows for an expressive engagement, and certain phrases tied to local genealogies and significant historical events are woven into the fabric of the songs, evoking a profound spiritual presence among the abagirwa.

This spiritual connection enables the abagirwa to effectively embody the ritual drama associated with being possessed by Nyabingi's spirit. In this state, they harness her energy and convey messages of healing and guidance to the community. Following the possession, Mayumba (interview, February 2024) shares the critical role that the abagirwa play in reassuring clients. They emphasize that it is indeed Nyabingi who is communicating and guide their followers to trust in the authenticity of her voice. By presenting themselves as conduits for Nyabingi's wisdom, the abagirwa instill confidence in those seeking help, facilitating a psychological and spiritual healing process that empowers individuals to confront and overcome their problems (Barangirana, interview, 2024).

In the broader context of spiritual practices, rainmakers or ‘abajubi’ hold a revered position due to their perceived ability to control the weather, bringing vital rain to the often parched Bakiga land. These individuals are believed to possess the unique power to capture clouds and release them, ensuring that rain falls when needed most. In times of drought, community members would gather to offer sacrifices, paying fees or providing gifts referred to as ‘emikimbo’ to beseech Nyabingi for the much-needed rain. Conversely, during periods of excessive rainfall, similar offerings were made to seek Nyabingi's favor in halting the downpour to prevent flooding. When performed with the utmost respect and dedication, these sacrificial practices are

believed to invigorate Nyabingi, enabling her to perform remarkable acts of power. Such acts may include curing long-standing illnesses that modern medicine cannot address, exerting control over the natural forces responsible for calamities like droughts and landslides, bestowing fertility upon couples longing for children, assisting individuals in their search for compatible partners, and nullifying bad omens or harmful curses that may afflict individuals or entire families. The sacrifices offered to Nyabingi during these consultations are categorized into two distinct types; (Ndyabahika, 1997:134).

The first category of sacrifice is known as 'Okuterekyerera,' a traditional process specifically intended to please Nyabingi. During this ritual, a variety of thoughtful gifts and offerings are presented, which may include children, livestock such as cattle, and various foodstuffs deemed valuable within the community. In instances where these more significant offerings are not available, Nyabingi graciously accepts alternative offerings, which may include young girls, meat, beer, and lesser livestock. These sacrificial acts extend beyond mere piety; they embody a collective effort to avert misfortune and maintain harmony within the community. This communal spirit underscores why offerings are frequently made not only by individuals but also collectively by entire communities.

Moreover, the practice of Okuterekyerera serves a crucial purpose in beseeching Nyabingi to quell disruptive family spirits—those restless ancestors whose anger may disturb the peace of the living. By engaging in this ritual, families seek to restore balance and harmony, fostering reconciliation between the living and their deceased ancestors. Through these sacred acts, the intricacies of familial relationships are mended, and a sense of unity and peace is reestablished within both the family structure and the broader community landscape. The second practice in the rituals dedicated to Nyabingi was known as 'okutweija.' This process was integral to the

community's spiritual life and involved making pledges to Nyabingi, the revered deity. The okutweija rituals were typically invoked when an individual intended to offer sacrifices but was unable to procure the necessary items at that moment. In such instances, the person would be granted a certain period to gather the required offerings, which would then be presented to Nyabingi at a later date.

These rituals were carried out with a profound sense of seriousness and strict adherence to tradition. Each participant was expected to honor their pledge without fail or delay. The belief was that Nyabingi, characterized by her ever-watchful nature, would not forget any promise made to her. She was thought to keenly await the moment when her followers would fulfill their commitments, reflecting her desire for respect and adherence to the sacred agreements.

According to Ndyabahika, failing to uphold the promises made to Nyabingi could lead to severe consequences, not only for the individual who defaulted but also for their family members or immediate relatives. The repercussions of neglecting these sacred pledges were understood to be serious. Punishments could manifest in various forms, including experiencing distressing nightmares, suffering from illnesses, facing mental instability, or enduring poor agricultural yields. Such punishments served to reinforce the community's commitment to honoring their pledges, as the fear of divine retribution loomed large in their daily lives.

Although many people felt discontent regarding the strictness of these practices and the ongoing demands placed upon them, they often chose to remain silent about their grievances. The act of voicing dissatisfaction could itself invoke the wrath of Nyabingi, further solidifying the loyalty of her followers. This intricate web of beliefs kept the community tightly bound to Nyabingi and her representatives.

Nyabingi was perceived as an insatiable deity; no matter how generous the offerings, she was always believed to demand more. Followers of Nyabingi, along with the broader Bakiga community, understood that one of the essential duties of the abagirwa, her priests or spiritual intermediaries, was to consistently solicit and secure offerings on her behalf. The very name 'Nyabingi' hinted at her perpetual need for abundance and lavish offerings.

Every gift brought to her was expected to be presented in full measure, reflecting the community's respect and dedication. For instance, offerings had to be comprehensive: a full basket of food, a complete jerry can of beer, or an entire portion of 'omuramba,' the local brew, were all necessary to effectively appease her and encourage her to bestow miracles upon her followers. In this context, offering anything less than what was explicitly required was deemed a serious affront, leading to punishment for the individual making the sacrifice and reinforcing the importance of adhering to the rituals and obligations set forth by Nyabingi. The practice of making sacrifices to Nyabingi eventually led to significant social and economic challenges, particularly as the abagirwa accumulated substantial wealth derived from local peasant communities. These offerings included a diverse display of goods such as honey, locally brewed beer, sprouted grains, fermented gruel, tobacco, butter, animal skins, and livestock (including cows, goats, and white sheep). This accumulation was rationalized by the belief that Nyabingi demanded these items as tributes. The very poorest members of society were often tasked with providing additional offerings, such as green vegetables and firewood, further burdening them. Notably, goats, peas, and potatoes were deemed unsuitable for sacrifice and were consistently rejected by the abagirwa, creating an implicit hierarchy in what was considered acceptable to Nyabingi.

According to Ndyabahika (1997), these expensive sacrifices resulted in growing dissatisfaction and fear among the local population, transforming the perception and status of women within the community. In my discussion with Bakamwanga (interview, 2024) highlights a pivotal shift: the fortunate Bakiga women, known as abagirwa, were granted the unprecedented opportunity to publicly express their thoughts for the first time. This newfound voice allowed them to command respect and influence men without facing the usual social restrictions. Ndyabahika further posits that the authority these women gained from their connection to Nyabingi significantly shifted power dynamics, transferring leadership roles from men to women. As this transition unfolded, the abagirwa adopted a more militant stance, with men often relegated to observation rather than participation. Women began to take an active role in fostering the welfare of the Bakiga and exerted authority over men, empowered by the legitimacy granted by Nyabingi. Their influence was particularly pronounced during the Nyabingi resistance against colonial forces, as it was widely believed that Nyabingi held the power to secure victories in conflicts, a conviction that resonated deeply within the community.

Furthermore, Nyabingi's approach was characterized by a notable absence of discrimination; it did not favor long-term adherents and operated on principles of neutrality. For instance, individual A could invoke Nyabingi to launch an attack on individual B, while simultaneously, individual B could appeal to Nyabingi for protection against individual A. This duality illustrates Nyabingi's commitment to serving those who demonstrated genuine devotion through appropriate sacrifices. The central aim of Nyabingi was to assist anyone who authentically sought divine intervention, regardless of their affiliations. It’s upon this that Bananuka (1972) mentioned that the British colonial government found the NRM intolerable, particularly in light of its involvement in militant resistance and disruptive activities. Consequently, the British authorities decided to confront the Nyabingi fighters directly, swiftly and brutally suppressing

the movement in an effort to restore order and eliminate any perceived threats to their colonial rule. The clash between Nyabingi's followers and colonial powers underscores the complex interplay of religion, power, and resistance within this historical context.

According to Rutanga (1991:25, 104), the selection process for young females into the ranks of the Nyabingi religion was steeped in an atmosphere of secrecy and mystery, often evoking a sense of fear in the community. This clandestine ritual unfolded under the cover of night, shrouded in darkness to keep its procedures hidden from prying eyes. The pivotal moment of selection involved placing a metallic rod or spear between the thighs of the chosen girl, serving as an unmistakable symbol of her distinction. From that dawn onward, the whispers would spread like wildfire among the peasants, announcing who had been chosen by Nyabingi for her sacred service. This divine selection marked the young woman, instilling in the community both reverence and trepidation towards her. These chosen girls became figures of awe; defying or questioning Nyabingi’s decision would invite grave consequences, as the community was bound by a code of respect towards these selections.

Nevertheless, it is crucial to delve deeper into the reasons behind the nocturnal nature of these selections. The abagirwa, the enigmatic individuals entrusted with carrying out these secretive missions, sought to mesmerize and mislead the peasants, preserving the mythic allure and sanctity of the Nyabingi institution. Any breach of this tradition could potentially undermine not only the selection procedure but also the overall power of the Nyabingi movement, prompting resistance from the community, particularly the men, against the authority of the abagirwa. Thus, it became vital for the people to believe that these acts were orchestrated by supernatural forces connected to Nyabingi.

The element of secrecy was not just a mere preference of the abagirwa; it was a fundamental demand from Nyabingi herself. Absolute discretion was paramount; no one was permitted to speak of their observations or experiences during consultations with Nyabingi. Everything revealed in those sacred moments was to remain confidential, with any discussion—good or bad—regarding Nyabingi confined solely to the abagirwa, who would provide explanations or guidance. Rutanga further emphasized that Nyabingi embodied a religion of secrecy, suggesting that much of its essential workings were conducted away from the public eye. The rationale behind this pervasive secrecy lay in the fact that Nyabingi had numerous adversaries, both within and outside the region of its influence. Disclosing information about Nyabingi risked exposing the movement to potential destruction (Rutanga 1991:25).

In order to reinforce this code of silence, the abagirwa instilled a strong sense of fear among the followers, declaring that any act of betrayal would not go unpunished. Nyabanimba (interview, Jan 2024) elaborated that revealing any secrets about Nyabingi would lead to being labeled as a traitor or coward, thus positioning oneself as an enemy of the movement. Such labels carried serious weight, especially during the time of Nyabingi resistance, where the consequences might include tragic fates—loss of life, deafness, or a cursed muteness imposed by Nyabingi. The very existence of a coward could become a living nightmare; those identified as such might find their lives ruined, stigmatized, or even forced into exile from lands that Nyabingi's influence touched. Those who dared to discuss Nyabingi openly were not only risking their social standing but faced the danger of becoming pariahs in a community where silence was both a shield and a survival tactic (Nyinankumbuye, Jan 2024). NRM was therefore characterized by a practice of fixed membership, with a select group of followers who underwent initiation to safeguard, uphold, and promote the movement's principles and activities. According to Vokes (2015:40), these dedicated followers were referred to as "ordained apostles." He elaborates that the initiation

process into the Nyabingi movement was both careful and highly selective, requiring members to pledge unwavering respect and allegiance. This meant that no individual could enter the service of Nyabingi without undergoing a specific selection process or receiving a special anointing.

The journey to becoming a mugirwa, which is the term for an initiated member of Nyabingi, involved rigorous training that emphasized the values and rituals of the movement. Once a person successfully completed this process, they were considered a lifelong member, bound to the beliefs and practices of Nyabingi. It is important to note that lay followers had limited roles within the movement; they could participate in Nyabingi practices only through the intermediary of a mugirwa. Beyond their observance, lay followers were expected to remain silent, refraining from direct involvement in rituals or ceremonies.

Karibahenda, in a personal interview highlighted a significant aspect of the Nyabingi structure: lay followers lacked the ability to communicate directly with the Nyabingi spirit. Instead, they relied on a priest—a mugirwa—to act as an intermediary in all spiritual matters. If an individual wished to perform a ritual, this had to be done through a designated mugirwa, and the lay follower had to trust that Nyabingi would respond to their requests without questioning the priest's authority.

An important historical aspect of the Nyabingi movement is its incorporation of an earlier fertility practice known as 'biheko'. This tradition focused on restoring fertility, particularly for women. Nyabingi emerged as a female-centered fertility movement, often referred to as "emandwa za'bakazi," which specifically aimed to assist married women in their desire to conceive. In this cultural context, women who married but were unable to have children were frequently viewed as cursed and considered infertile. As a result, many women consulted Nyabingi before marriage, seeking blessings to enhance their fertility and ensure they could bear

children soon after the ceremony (Karibahenda, interview 2024). Consequently, Nyabingi became recognized as a divine entity deeply invested in the fertility and reproductive health of women.

However, by the time the Nyabingi movement began to decline, its primary focus on fertility appeared to fade, leaving observers puzzled about the reasons for this shift. Barangirana speculated that a growing lack of fear and reverence for Nyabingi contributed to this decline; as people began to regard the abagirwa as ordinary individuals rather than spiritual leaders, the movement lost its previous sanctity. Moreover, the initiative to recruit men closer to the abagirwa diminished their authority and influence within the traditional framework of the movement.

As time went on, Nyabingi started to delegate power and authority to male followers, especially during periods of resistance against external pressures. This transition marked a significant disruption to the established order of the Nyabingi practices and beliefs. Rutanga pointed out that this indiscriminate admission of various individuals into Nyabingi ultimately led to a variety of internal challenges, contributing to the movement's decline. At a time when new servants could not receive proper training or initiation in the traditional manner, the practice became increasingly diluted. The inadequacy of training left many abagirwa ill-equipped to defend, protect, or uphold the sacred secrets of the movement.

As a result, some members began to use Nyabingi for their personal benefit, pursuing personal wealth rather than the movement's goals, which led to widespread disorganization, turmoil, and unrest within the ranks of the Nyabingi followers (Rutanga 1991:141). This deterioration culminated in a fracturing of the movement, illustrating the challenges faced by a religious tradition struggling to maintain its core values in the face of changing societal dynamics. Before

embarking on any military campaign, Bakiga would first seek the counsel of the abagirwa, the spiritual leaders known for their insights and prophecies. Central to their war preparations was the figure of Nyabingi, a revered deity thought to grant success in battle. The Bakiga deeply believed that having Nyabingi lead them would significantly enhance their chances of victory. The abagirwa played a crucial role in reinforcing this belief, famously convincing the warriors that bullets would transform into water, a prophecy reminiscent of the teachings during the Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905 in Tanganyika.

According to Ndyabahika (1997), the mere acknowledgment that Nyabingi had sanctioned a war would galvanize people to join the fight. They had strong faith that Nyabingi was guiding them, which instilled a sense of purpose and determination among the combatants. Additionally, the followers of Nyabingi were motivated by the belief that failing in battle would result in divine punishment from the goddess, compelling them to fight with both fear and fervor.

However, between 1910 and 1914, significant challenges began to surface within the framework of Nyabingi's religious influence. Many peasants had become overly dependent on the Nyabingi movement, placing all of their hopes and faith in its promises. This situation was exacerbated by the abagirwa, who began to assert themselves as living embodiments of Nyabingi. While this shift encouraged some individuals to resist colonial oppression, it ultimately led to disastrous consequences, including widespread massacres at the hands of colonial forces.

Countless men and women lost their lives during the Nyabingi resistance, fueled by their conviction that Nyabingi would shield them from the dangers of battle, including bullets. As the conflict continued, it became increasingly evident that Nyabingi's power to protect her followers was failing. The loss of lives led many to question their faith in a deity who could not deliver them from violence.

As families mourned their lost relatives, they began to withdraw from the movement, creating a vacuum in leadership that hindered the continuity necessary for the movement's survival. This lack of stability not only weakened the resolve of remaining supporters but also led to the emergence of fragmented leadership, further damaging the collective strength of the Nyabingi movement.

This historical narrative underscores how African societies, particularly during the tumultuous period of the Maji-Maji rebellion of 1905-1907, shared common aspects of religiosity. These elements played a significant role in shaping their responses to colonialism and the crises they faced. The interplay between faith, leadership, and resistance illustrates how deeply intertwined spirituality and socio-political struggles were during this period. During this significant rebellion, Kinjikitile Ngwale emerged as a prominent figure, claiming to be possessed by the spirit of a sacred snake known as Hongo. This belief fueled his leadership and rallied many followers to his cause. In preparation for the conflict, Kinjikitile instructed his associate Bokero to create a mixture of millet and water, which they smeared on the bodies of the warriors. He preached that this ritual would protect them, asserting that bullets would transform into water, thereby ensuring their safety in combat. Armed only with rudimentary weapons such as spears, arrows, and makeshift sticks, Ngwale’s followers marched confidently to battle against the German colonial forces.

Tragically, a large majority of these warriors were killed in the ensuing conflict, highlighting the disastrous outcome of blind faith in Kinjikitile Ngwale's teachings. Their deaths led to widespread disillusionment and skepticism about his claims and the efficacy of his spiritual guidance.

In a parallel struggle, Nyabingi emerged as another symbol of resistance, leading a fierce opposition against British colonial rule in the Kigezi region. While both movements were marked by significant loss of life, Nyabingi's motivations were deeply rooted in concerns for the social, political, and economic welfare of Bakiga. She sought to liberate her community from the oppressive grasp of colonial forces and to challenge the imposition of foreign religions that undermined local beliefs and practices.

Both Maji-Maji and Nyabingi's movements are now regarded as powerful symbols of resistance against oppression within African history. They are celebrated not only for their roles in the fight against colonialism but also as integral parts of the rich cultural heritage of Africa, embodying the struggle for dignity, autonomy, and justice. During this rebellion, Kinjikitile Ngwale claimed to be possessed by a spirit of a snake called Hongo. Before going to the war, Kinjikitile also called Bokero mixed millet with water and smeared the mixture onto the peoples 'bodies arguing that bullets would turn into water and people would be saved. With this teaching, Ngwale's men matched confidently to the battle against the Germans with their poor spears, arrows and weak sticks. Majority of them died disapproving of the teaching of Kinjikitile Ngwale. Therefore, it was not a surprise that Nyabingi also led a resistance against the British in Kigezi.

Although many people died as a result of faith without question, Nyabingi portrayed that it was concerned about the social, political and economic ways of the Bakiga. The purpose of Nyabingi's engagement in the war was to liberate the Bakiga and protect Kigezi from being oppressed by the British and curb down religious imperialism. Both Maji-Maji and Nyabingi are today symbols of resistance against oppression and are used to celebrate African cultural heritage.

5.4 The Moral dimension

The moral dimension, often referred to as the ethical dimension of religion, comprises of rich principles and values that guide the behavior of members of Nyabingi religious movement. Central to this movement is a profound commitment to resisting oppression, particularly in the face of colonialism and external domination. This resistance is fueled by an unwavering sense of justice and a zealous desire for self-determination among its adherents. At the heart of the Nyabingi movement lays the vital concept of community coordination and solidarity. This emphasis on unity is not merely a social construct; it is woven into the very fabric of their shared experiences. Members come together in vibrant rituals, ceremonies, and practices that strengthen their bonds and foster a collective identity.

Furthermore, NRM serves as an example of spiritual and moral guidance for its followers, highlighting the importance of living a virtuous life that aligns with traditional values. This guidance flows through a variety of channels, including the sacred rituals and ceremonies that mark their communal life, as well as the daily teachings imparted by the abagirwa—spiritual leaders whose wisdom and insight resonate deeply within the community. This dimension also encompasses various principles and values that guided the behavior of members of Nyabingi religious movement.

Moreover, there was strict emphasis on resistance against oppression. The movement was characterized by its resistance against colonialism and external oppression. This resistance was fueled by a strong sense of justice and a desire for self-determination. This was achieved through community coordination and solidarity. Nyabingi there therefore emphasized the importance of community and solidarity among its members. This was reflected in the shared rituals, ceremonies, and practices that brought people together.

Additionally, the movement provided spiritual and moral guidance to its adherents, emphasizing the importance of living a virtuous life and upholding traditional values (Ray, 1991:135). This guidance was often provided through the movement's rituals and ceremonies and through the daily teachings provided by the abagirwa.

5.5 The social dimension

The social dimension of the Nyabingi religious movement seems to be a complex and multifaceted phenomenon. The social dimension of the Nyabingi religious movement presents itself as a rich and intricate phenomenon, weaving together a variety of diverse social structures, institutions, and interpersonal relationships (Kabwegyere, 1974:201). These social elements are fundamental in institutionalizing the Nyabingi movement, influencing not only its organization but also the rhythm of its operation within the community.

At the heart of the movement is a profound respect for the Kikiga system of clans and lineages characteristic of the Kigezi region. This system provided a solid foundation for the performance of various practices and rituals, which were deeply intertwined with the community's cultural traditions (Mbiti, 1990:187). The movement's adherence to these clan structures lent it legitimacy and facilitated the establishment of communal ties.

A significant aspect of the Nyabingi movement was the formation of councils of elders, comprising esteemed community leaders tasked with providing guidance and oversight. These elders were not merely figures of authority; they played a crucial role in ensuring the continuity and integrity of the movement, imparting wisdom based on their life experiences to navigate the challenges faced by the community (Ray, 1991:135). While the council was predominantly male, this did not diminish the supremacy of Muhumuza, who stood as the highest leader and spiritual authority within the movement, embodying the principles and aspirations of Nyabingi.

Integral to the movement's spiritual framework were the "abafumu," a revered class of individuals recognized for their spiritual prowess. These figures provided invaluable spiritual guidance, healing, and protection, especially to those who sustained injuries during the resistance against colonial rule (Kodesh, 2010:162). Their role extended to offering herbal treatments for various ailments, drawing from a deep knowledge of medicinal plants. Among these was "Omuramba," a herb utilized in rituals and ceremonies aimed at purification, healing, and protection. Omuramba was not merely a medicinal herb; it held a sacred significance in the community, symbolizing the cleansing of the body and spirit.

Another notable herb, "ekikomero," was believed to possess substantial spiritual power. Its use varied, often in conjunction with ritual objects such as drums, to facilitate communication with Nyabingi. The connection between the physical and spiritual realms was pivotal, with ekikomero sometimes being burned as incense or crafted into protective charms, believed to ward off malevolent spirits (Kodesh, 2010:162).

The profound interplay of these social and spiritual dimensions within the Nyabingi movement illustrates not only its resilience but also the deep-rooted cultural values that sustain it, reflecting a rich heritage intertwined with the struggles and aspirations of its community that encompasses various social structures, institutions, and relationships (Kabwegyere, 1974:201). These social aspects play a crucial role in institutionalizing Nyabingi religious movement. They set a pace at which the movement was organized and operated.

The movement respected the Kikiga system of clans and lineages in Kigezi. This provided a basis upon which practices and rituals were performed (Mbiti, 1990:187). Moreover, the movement recognized and formed a council of elders, composed of respected community leaders who provided guidance and oversight to the movement, ensuring its continuity and integrity

(Ray, 1991:135). Although majority of these were men, this council didn't overshadow the supremacy of Muhumuza as the highest leader in the movement.

In addition, "abafumu," were part of the movement and were another highly respected class of people in NRM. According to Kodesh, these provided spiritual guidance, healing, and protection to members of the movement especially after sustaining injuries during their fight against colonialists, (Kodesh, 2010:162). They would also give herbal treatment to the members that suffered from other illnesses as guided by Nyabingi. Herbs such as "Omuramba" and "ekikomero" were used. Omuramba was also used in rituals and ceremonies of purification, healing and protection. Ekikomero on the other hand was believed to have spiritual power too and was used in conjunction with objects like drums to communicate to Nyabingi. According to Kodesh, they would also be sometimes burnt as incense or applied as a protective charm to ward off evil spirit (Kodesh 2010:162)

5.6 The material dimension

This dimension includes various physical objects, artifacts, and symbols associated with the Nyabingi religious movement (Kabwegyere, 1974:201). These material aspects played a significant role in shaping the movement's practices, rituals, and worldview. A key element of the movement was the "engoma," known as "kamuhagamo," which was sacred and central to Nyabingi rituals and ceremonies among the Bakiga. This drum facilitated communication with spirits and ancestors (Mbiti, 1990: 187). Without the kamuhagamo, it was challenging to connect with Nyabingi. Kanyesigye notes that this drum required special players, called abagirwa, who could perform in a way that invoked Nyabingi to convey important messages. The kamuhagamo was highly respected and protected due to its divine significance.

Additionally, the movement featured special statues known as "ebibumbe." These statues represented the gods and goddesses of the Nyabingi pantheon, which is deeply rooted in Bakiga mythology (Ray, 1991:135). The ebibumbe were crafted from clay and illustrated the essence of Nyabingi and her mysterious powers. These statues were also respected and venerated by the members of Nyabingi religious movement (Kabwegyere, 1974:201). These material aspects played a significant role in shaping the movement's practices, rituals, and worldview.

The movement had “engoma” known as “kamuhagamo” which was sacred and very central in Nyabingi rituals and ceremonies among the Bakiga, facilitating communication with the spirits and ancestors (Mbiti, 1990: 187). Without this drum, communication to Nyabingi was difficult. Kanyesigye notes that this drum had special abagirwa to play it very well in a manner that invoked Nyabingi to pass on the necessary messages. “Kamuhagamo” was very respected and protected because it was divine.

Additionally, the movement had special statues called “ebibumbe”. Statues represented the gods and goddesses of the Nyabingi pantheon, which was deeply rooted in Bakiga mythology (Ray, 1991:135). Ebibumbe were special images made of clay that demonstrated the nature of Nyabingi and her mysterious powers. These statues were also respected and venerated by the members of the movement.

5.7 The experiential dimension

The experiential dimension of Nyabingi religious movement encompasses the personal experiences and emotional connections that adherents have with the divine, ancestors, and spirits (Kabwegyere, 1974: 201). This dimension is a vital aspect every religious movement because it provides adherents with a personal and emotional connection to the divine, ancestors, and spirits.

Nyabingi involved the aspect of spirit possession before, during and after worship. Mediums, known as "abagirwa," experience possession by the spirits of ancestors and gods, which is a central aspect of Nyabingi rituals and ceremonies (Mbiti, 1990:193). This process of possession was known as Okubandwa. During this, someone possessed would lose all the physical senses and Nyabingi would take control.

Kanyesigye further notes that Visions and Dreams were part of the adherents of the movement. Several Nyabingi adherents often reported having visions and dreams that provided guidance, wisdom, and insight into the spiritual realm (Kodesh, 2010: 168). This became more prominent during the movement's war against foreign domination. These visions and dreams provided tactics of fighting, revealed the hide out areas of the enemy and at times, abagirwa received military training through dreams. The experiential dimension of the Nyabingi religious movement is a significant aspect, encompassing the personal experiences and emotional connections that adherents establish with the divine, ancestors, and various spirits. As articulated by Kabwegyere (1974: 201), this dimension plays an essential role in any religious movement, as it facilitates a profound personal engagement with spirituality that fosters a sense of belonging and purpose among followers.

A fundamental characteristic of Nyabingi practice is the phenomenon of spirit possession, which occurs before, during, and after worship ceremonies. This sacred tradition involves mediums, known as "abagirwa," who serve as conduits for the spirits of ancestors and deities. The process of possession, referred to as Okubandwa, results in the medium entering a transformative state where they temporarily relinquish their physical senses and allow the divine manifestations to take control. This experience is central to Nyabingi rituals, generating a profound spiritual energy that resonates within the community.

Furthermore, as Kanyesigye notes, visions and dreams play a critical role in the lives of Nyabingi adherents. Many individuals report receiving insightful revelations through vivid dreams, which provide guidance and wisdom regarding their spiritual paths (Kodesh, 2010: 168). This aspect became particularly pronounced during the movement's struggles against foreign domination, as the visions served practical purposes, offering tactical guidance for resistance efforts and revealing information about adversarial positions. Such experiences not only contribute to the spiritual depth of the adherents but also strengthen their collective identity and communal resilience. The experiential dimension of the Nyabingi religious movement is rich and deeply rooted in the personal encounters and emotional ties that its adherents cultivate with the divine, their ancestors, and various spirits. As noted by Kabwegyere (1974: 201), this aspect is crucial to any religious community; it offers followers a pathway to forge intimate connections that transcend the ordinary, allowing them to feel a profound sense of belonging and purpose within their spirituality.

Fundamental to Nyabingi practices is the compelling element of spirit possession, a phenomenon observed before, during, and after worship ceremonies. Within this sacred tradition, mediums, referred to as "abagirwa," become vessels for the spirits of ancestors and gods. This experience, central to Nyabingi rituals, is known as Okubandwa. During these moments of possession, the medium undergoes a transformative state, relinquishing all physical sensations as they surrender their will to the relentless power of Nyabingi. This connection creates a powerful experience that engulfs both the medium and the congregation, fostering a collective spiritual energy that is felt throughout the community.

Kanyesigye further elaborates on the mystical aspects of this movement by highlighting the significance of visions and dreams. Many adherents report being visited by vivid visions and enlightening dreams that provide crucial guidance, wisdom, and insight into the spiritual realm

(Kodesh, 2010: 168). During times of strife, especially amidst the movement's struggle against foreign domination, these visions became particularly significant. They served not only as spiritual revelations but also as practical tactics for warfare—guiding adherents on strategies for combat, revealing hidden locations of the adversary, and sometimes even imparting military training through these nocturnal encounters. The deep emotional resonance of these experiences further solidifies the bond between the adherents and their faith, enriching their spiritual journey and communal identity.

5.8 Conclusion

The findings presented in this chapter indicate that the foundation of trust and faith in Nyabingi is deeply intertwined with a diverse range of rituals, beliefs, and practices that are integral to its worship. Central to these practices are the Abagirwa, the priestesses dedicated to Nyabingi, who assume a pivotal role in overseeing and conducting various rituals and sacrifices. Their leadership is vital in nurturing the spiritual life and continuity of the movement, ensuring that the traditions are preserved and revitalized over generations. These intricate rituals, deeply held beliefs, and meaningful practices connect NRM to other religious traditions, highlighting the universal importance of rituals, celebrations, and communal experiences in fostering a sense of belonging and spiritual engagement among practitioners of every religious movement.

CHAPTER SIX: IDEOLOGICAL AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NRM ON BAKIGA RELIGIOSITY

6.0 Introduction

This chapter delves into the implications of the Nyabingi religious movement on the religious practices and beliefs of the Bakiga. It examines the various ideas and perspectives surrounding the Nyabingi phenomenon, highlighting its significance within the cultural context. The findings shared here are based on direct responses from participants, providing a rich, firsthand account of their experiences and insights related to this intriguing movement.

6.1 Nyabingi as a deity

This study established that Nyabingi was a highly esteemed deity who wielded the greatest supernatural powers among the Bakiga. According to Ndyabahika, by the 19th century, Nyabingi had emerged as a significant supernatural figure, revered and worshipped for her divine abilities that transcended the ordinary. Nyabanimba, in an interview conducted in 2024, elaborated that Nyabingi was recognized as a formidable goddess among the Bakiga during the early 1990s. She was not only feared but also deeply respected by all, as her presence was believed to have the capacity to bring about both blessings and misfortune. Nyabanimba further described Nyabingi as a powerful entity whose influence could disrupt the status quo and command immense respect within the community. Her importance in the spiritual and cultural lives of the Bakiga was profound, as she represented a force that could shape their realities and beliefs.

Nyabanimba mentioned that;

"Nyabingi akaba namanya buri kintu kyoona. Akaba ayine amani gokumanya nebintu ebyabire bigambirwa omumwirima. Okaba otagamba kintu kyoona kirikukwata ahari Nyabingi ngu tiyakimanya. Nabantu ababire bamugambaho omibwehserekye akaba abamanya kandi

abafubiira. Okumuyaga kikaba kiretera omuntu okuboona obuzibu ebiiiro byoona byamagara gye.”

This was translated in English as;

"Nyabingi was endowed with profound knowledge and remarkable power, enabling her to identify her adversaries even from considerable distances. Her exceptional abilities allowed her to perceive even the most clandestine mutterings directed against her. Consequently, any act of disobedience towards Nyabingi or her followers, known as abagirwa, resulted in an unforgettable and often severe consequence that would remain etched in the memory of the individual for the entirety of their life." (Nyabanimba, March 2024).

The approach to seeking guidance from the Nyabingi goddess required deep self-reflection and meticulous preparation. Prior to consulting the abagirwa for Nyabingi's assistance, individuals were encouraged to engage in thorough self-examination. This meant taking the time to genuinely repent for any wrongdoings, acknowledging their sins, and seeking forgiveness.

As a result, a culture of moral integrity flourished among Bakiga, who held a profound reverence for the goddess, believing she possessed the ability to see all and be present even in the most hidden corners of their lives. The fear of invoking Nyabingi's anger deeply influenced their behavior; they were determined to avoid any actions that might irritate her or draw her ire. Following the teachings of the abagirwa, they aspired to live pure, righteous lives that honored her presence.

This understanding of Nyabingi paralleled the Christian belief in an omnipotent God, whose strength and authority were viewed as boundless, casting a significant influence on the ethical

and moral conduct of the community. The intertwining of spirituality and morality shaped the very fabric of their lives, encouraging them to lead lives defined by virtue and respect.

Among the Bakiga, Nyabingi stood out as a powerful force, overshadowing the usual emandwa, which are lesser spirits believed to influence the lives of Bakiga. In an enlightening interview with Turyagirugamu, Nyabingi was portrayed as the sacred owner and nurturing mother of the Bakiga world. This revered figure was said to transcend the limitations of space, able to manifest herself in countless places at once. Her vast influence reached far beyond the hills of Kigezi, extending into neighboring regions like Ankole, Bunyoro, Rwanda, Tanzania, Congo, and Burundi (interview, 2024). It is this immense reach that reaped her both deep respect and an underlying sense of dismay among the Bakiga.

Nyabingi was not merely regarded as a spirit; she was treated with the reverence typically reserved for divine beings. In contrast, the emandwa were viewed as lower entities within the Bakiga spiritual hierarchy. While the emandwa continued to be honored and appeased through various rituals, it was Nyabingi who occupied a superior position, embodying a force that transcended the fragmentary spirits of the deceased. The emandwa were closely associated with specific family lineages and individuals, acting as the spirits of the dead who influenced the living.

According to Barangirana (interview, 2024), although emandwa could be called upon during rituals, they were infamous for their disruptive nature. They were known to sow discord, fracture marriages, inflict severe illnesses upon family members, and, in more terrible cases, even cause death. In essence, the emandwa were viewed as malevolent forces, frequently summoned by those with ill intentions within the community, demanding sacrifices as a means of appeasement.

The responsibility of appeasing these spirits often fell upon the family heads—predominantly men—who were tasked with making consistent offerings of beer and meat to the emandwa. This ritualistic practice was seen as a necessary effort to appease the spirits and avert trouble, with sacrifices made in both prosperous and challenging times alike. The clear difference between Nyabingi and the emandwa lay in Nyabingi's role as a protector against the very chaos wrought by the emandwa. This distinction was profound; the Bakiga turned to Nyabingi and her devoted followers, the bagirwa, seeking their powerful protection against the nefarious influences of the malevolent spirits.

Nyabingi emerged as a beacon of hope and solace, a figure who provided comfort to those grappling with adversity. All suffering within the Bakiga community was attributed to the ill-willed emandwa, intensifying Nyabingi's status as a respected savior, healer, liberator, and guardian, especially for the afflicted. Her presence was perceived not only as a source of protection but also as a guiding light in dark times, reinforcing her pivotal role in the spiritual and communal life of the Bakiga.

6.2 Nyabingi as a Spirit

Numerous reports collected from the field reveal that Nyabingi is an elusive spirit, invisible to the human eye yet profoundly influential in the lives of the Bakiga. Although she cannot be seen, her presence resonates in every facet of daily existence, shaping thoughts, actions, and traditions. Nyabingi is said to be akin to a gentle breeze that sweeps through the landscape, shifting in many directions but remaining forever unseen. She lacks a physical body and does not possess any human traits. However, she embodies qualities reminiscent of humanity—capable of eating, appreciating beauty, engaging in conversation, and experiencing emotions.

The esteemed Mukiga writer Ngologoza (1998) affirms that Nyabingi is not a mere individual but rather a significant spiritual entity. To Ngologoza, the name “Nyabingi” transcends a personal identity; it entwines itself with various aspects of existence and culture. Supporting this view, Linden (1997) describes Nyabingi as the spirit of a legendary woman woven into the fabric of Rwandan culture, whose essence became intertwined with that of another woman, Muhumuza. This association led to the rise of a vibrant following based on Muhumuza’s teachings, which eventually blossomed into a religious movement embraced by the Bakiga.

Within the context of African beliefs surrounding spirits and deities, Nyabingi has successfully established herself as an object of reverence and devotion. She is cherished and respected by her followers, seen as a chief messenger of Ruhanga, the Supreme Being. As Lugira (2009) elucidates, in the African religious landscape, the Supreme Being reigns as the most powerful deity in heaven, often too preoccupied with cosmic matters to engage in the daily lives of mortals. In this divine hierarchy, God entrusts the lesser deities with responsibilities, allocating tasks according to each spirit's role in the spiritual realm (Lugira, 2009). In this capacity, Nyabingi guides and directs the experiences Bakiga in Kigezi and beyond, shaping their beliefs, practices, and interactions with the spiritual world.

The concept of Nyabingi as a spirit is deeply rooted in the belief systems of the Bakiga, showing how many individuals perceive God, the supreme creator of heaven and earth, the one in whom all existence unfolds. The essence of God is entirely invisible, a profound mystery that has eluded human sight since the dawn of time. In the Christian Bible, specifically in Exodus 3, there is a vivid account where Moses describes God as a spirit who can ignite a bush with flames yet not consume it, symbolizing His strange nature. While Moses engages in dialogue with this divine presence, he hears His voice reverberating through the air, yet he never witnesses the

figure speaking—illustrating the deep mystery of the divine. In the Gospel of John 4:24, it is stated that God is spirit, and those who worship Him are encouraged to do so in spirit and in truth. This notion suggests that Nyabingi, revered by the Bakiga, embodies the same attribute of invisibility, intensifying her veneration among her followers.

Nyabingi commanded respect across all facets of life in Bakiga society. For the devout, she was not just an abstract figure; she was a guiding spirit whose insight was sought before embarking on any significant endeavor. Her omniscience was believed to encompass every thought and action, fostering a deep-rooted sense of respect for the unseen spiritual realm. Respondents recalled a transformative period when the Bakiga exhibited remarkable moral integrity; they shunned stealing, respecting the possessions of others, and refrained from engaging in extramarital relationships.

Men approached their marriages with reverence, choosing not to divorce or resort to violence against their wives without just cause. The fear of being reported to Nyabingi, who was thought to observe every secret act, instilled discipline in the community. This belief not only elevated standards of conduct among men and women but also nurtured a spirit of harmony and unity within families and the broader community of the Bakiga. The influence of Nyabingi created a strong foundation of mutual respect and order, resulting in a cooperative and peaceful way of life.

6.3 Nyabingi, the most powerful god

Among the Bakiga, Nyabingi was widely regarded as the most powerful and significant deity in their historical and cultural landscape. Many members of the community believed that Nyabingi possessed immense power and was not only formidable but also practical in her dealings with humanity. Her reliability in fulfilling promises—whether to deliver blessings or enact

punishment—made her a trusted figure. This strong bond illustrates why Nyabingi remained intertwined with the everyday lives of the Bakiga, as they frequently turned to her for guidance and support.

One striking example of Nyabingi's influence involves the customs surrounding marriage. Many respondents in this study highlighted that Nyabingi was consulted prior to a man’s marriage. The belief was that she had the authority to bless couples, ensuring their union was approved and that they would be blessed with children and fertility. Beyond this pre-marital consultation, Nyabingi's involvement continued even after weddings. In cases where couples faced challenges such as infertility, miscarriages, or marital conflicts that could potentially lead to divorce, the Bakiga community would promptly seek Nyabingi’s intervention. They believed that she could alter these unfortunate situations and provide enduring solutions to the problems affecting their marriages.

Moreover, the agricultural practices of the Bakiga were deeply influenced by their reverence for Nyabingi. Farmers would often engage in worship and offer sacrifices to her, seeking her blessings for fruitful harvests. The hope for bumper crop yields was paramount, as successful farming was essential for the community's sustenance and prosperity. When the harvests proved successful, families would express their gratitude towards Nyabingi by dedicating a portion of their produce, often in the form of grains, as a token of appreciation. This act of giving back was a significant ritual, emphasizing her role as the ultimate giver and provider of all things essential to life.

Bakiga believed deeply that no warrior would venture into the chaos of battle without first invoking the protection and favor of Nyabingi, their revered goddess of war. Known for her remarkable undefeated nature, she stood as a symbol of strength and resilience not only among

the Bakiga but also in the neighboring cultures. The towering figure of Nyabingi cast a long shadow over the battlefield, her presence considered essential to the success of any conflict. Many of the Bakiga warriors believed that her divine guidance could tip the scales of fortune, ensuring victory for her faithful followers and safeguarding their lives amid the uproar of combat.

Nyabingi's influence permeated every aspect of Bakiga life, intertwining with their spiritual beliefs and social practices. She impacted significant rituals, from marriage ceremonies to agricultural endeavors, becoming a central figure in their daily existence. During the tumultuous arrival of British colonialists, the Bakiga's faith in Nyabingi intensified. They turned to her in a fervent hope that her strength would embolden them to resist colonial rule, sparking a determined effort to engage in armed conflict against their new oppressors.

In times of clan warfare, Bakiga warriors sought Nyabingi's aid not only for their own battles but also as other clans looked to her for assistance against shared enemies. Victorious moments on the battlefield were celebrated with exuberance, as the goddess was honored and praised for her undeniable influence. Following their triumphs, the Bakiga would offer sacrifices and sing hymns of gratitude to Nyabingi, exalting her as the goddess who ensured glorious victories in all conflicts.

The power attributed to Nyabingi necessitated a culture of reverence among the Bakiga. Worshiping her was viewed as a duty, and even those who chose not to engage in formal worship were obligated to show her profound respect. It was considered blasphemous to utter words of doubt or disdain toward her, as doing so could provoke her fierce spirit and unleash calamity upon the individual or the entire community. The consequences for such defiance were severe, meted out by the vengeful spirit of Nyabingi herself.

In this way, Nyabingi emerged as the most venerated and formidable spirit among the Bakiga, her presence remembered with both fear and deep respect. Only a select few, known as the abagirwa, were granted the honor of standing in her divine presence, along with others deemed worthy by Nyabingi herself, further underscoring her supreme status in the spiritual hierarchy of Bakiga society.

6.4 NRM and its membership

The movement initially recruited women and was known to be a feminine movement relying on the fact that its leadership and membership was dominated by the women, Muhumuza being the greatest leader of the movement. Young girls occupied the top positions of abagirwa and assumed the responsibility of working as mediums through which Nyabingi communicated. However, not every young girl was chosen to go for this training as a mugirwa. According to Ndyabahika, the process of selecting abagirwa had a lot of balances and checks that were observed before, during and after the process (Ndyabahika 1997:132). Firstly, they had to be chosen before they were trained by senior abagirwa who would spot them from the rest of the young girls in the community. These young girls had to be blameless without scars on their bodies, with reputable disciples and had to be virgins. After identification and selection, they were supposed to declare publicly of their call and dedication to serve Nyabingi from the very beginning. This took them to the next stage that involved a training period. The senior abagirwa would then train and orient the newly selected abagirwa for a period of 6 months, after which they would go through initiation exercises and after passing, they were given the mandate to serve Nyabingi.

The process of training was very secretive, mysterious and extensive in nature. It took place at night, when everyone was asleep and no one was supposed to witness it, apart from the one

being trained or training, one being initiated or the initiator. No ‘mugirwa’ was supposed to leak any secrets of the movement to the outside people as such would call for punishments from Nyabingi herself. In addition, failure to keep privacy by the abagirwa provoked Nyabingi and in order for Bakiga to believe in Nyabingi’s supernaturalism, abagirwa had one major task of maintaining this privacy and punishments for bleaching this practice depended on the anger of Nyabingi at the time. To maintain the privacy of this secretive movement, no ‘mugirwa’ was allowed to marry except if Nyabingi permitted her, otherwise, ‘abagirwa’ were expected to dedicate their full lives to Nyabingi. The major problem with this tradition was that the selected girls never benefited their families financially since bride price was a form of wealth to families among the Bakiga.

The movement initially recruited women and was recognized as a feminine movement, largely due to its leadership and membership being dominated by women. Muhumuza emerged as the foremost leader of the movement. Young girls held the highest positions among the abagirwa and took on the responsibility of serving as mediums through which Nyabingi communicated. However, not all young girls were chosen for this training as mugirwa. According to Ndyabahika, the selection process for abagirwa involved numerous checks and balances that were observed before, during, and after their training (Ndyabahika 1997:132).

Initially, the girls had to be identified by senior abagirwa, who would select them from the rest of the young girls in the community. The selected girls needed to be without blemishes, possess reputable backgrounds, and remain virgins. After they were identified and chosen, they would publicly declare their calling and commitment to serve Nyabingi. This declaration marked the beginning of a training period.

The training itself was secretive, mysterious, and extensive. It occurred at night, while everyone else slept, and was meant to be witnessed only by the individual being trained or the trainer. No mugirwa was allowed to disclose any secrets of the movement to outsiders, as doing so would provoke punishment from Nyabingi herself. The abagirwa had the significant responsibility of maintaining this secrecy, and failures in this regard could result in varying degrees of punishment, depending on Nyabingi's disposition at the time.

To preserve the privacy of this secretive movement, no mugirwa was permitted to marry unless granted permission by Nyabingi. Otherwise, abagirwa were expected to dedicate their entire lives to her service. One major problem with this tradition was that the selected girls did not provide any financial benefits to their families since bride price was considered a form of wealth among the Bakiga. Moreover, Bakiga women felt pride when wealth was brought into their parents' homes in the form of money and livestock through bride price. Ultimately, this dedication to Nyabingi deprived the girls of two significant aspects of life: financial wellbeing for their families and the opportunity to contribute to their cultural practices regarding marriage. Girls were expected to bring wealth in their parents' homes in the form of money and bride price in form of livestock. Therefore, this whole idea of dedicating life to the service of Nyabingi deprived girls of two major things;

Firstly, Nyabingi imposed strict restrictions on abagirwa, preventing them from marrying or having romantic relationships. In her quest to protect her own interests and maintain her divine authority, she forbade these devoted servants from entering into marriages or engaging in sexual relations with men. However, there were rare occasions when Nyabingi would bestow a husband upon a mugirwa as a reward for her loyalty and service. Yet, even in these instances, the mugirwa had no autonomy in choosing her spouse. Karibahenda notes, "Only Nyabingi would

select special husbands for these young servants from the community, recognizing their dedication. If it was Nyabingi's will, she would designate a husband to be rewarded to a mugirwa." Despite the gift of a husband, the prospect of having children remained elusive, as rewards like marriage were scarce and few in number.

Additionally, the Nyabingi practices isolated abagirwa from social interactions outside their designated roles. They were distanced from their families, bound to serve Nyabingi wholly, often sacrificing personal relationships for the sake of her divine wishes. The consequence of this devotion was a profound loneliness; as these young girls aged, they often found themselves alone, without friends or allies. In truth, their only companions were their fellow abagirwa, forming a peculiar family network defined by their shared experiences and obligations. This intense isolation was further compounded by rigorous training, which instilled in them the importance of silence and discretion, forbidding them from revealing even the smallest secrets about their lives and service. Deprived of connections to both nuclear and extended families, they lived in a cloistered world, dedicated to preserving the sanctity of Nyabingi's secrets and desires.

Upon completing their rigorous training, abagirwa were honored with the presentation of a spear and a shield, both significant symbols of power and authority within the Nyabingi movement. This ceremonial assignment was reserved exclusively for those who successfully qualified during the training program of the movement, emphasizing the high standards and commitment required (Ndyabahika, 1997).

According to Nyabanimba, individuals who did not meet the qualifying criteria were not initiated into the ranks of abagirwa. Instead, they were granted the freedom to leave the training but were also given a chance for redemption. They could undergo a cleansing process, and if they were

later selected by Nyabingi, they would have the opportunity to be initiated as abagirwa after completing another round of training (interview, 2024)

The weapons bestowed upon those who successfully completed their training were not merely artifacts; they represented the serious responsibilities that came with the title of mugirwa. Being a mugirwa was a profound commitment, entailing an obligation to engage in both offensive and defensive actions during conflicts. It signified a calling to participate actively in battles, facing the enemy head-on.

With this understanding in place, anyone who was initiated into the Nyabingi movement was well aware that they were stepping into a role that prepared them for confrontation—either to provoke an attack or to defend against one. This expectation was integral to the philosophy of the movement, which intertwined themes of strength, resilience, and the necessity of standing one's ground in the face of adversity.

It is strikingly clear that a greater number of girls than boys were chosen to become abagirwa, the religious mediums of Nyabingi, ushered into the sacred and enigmatic world of Nyabingi's secrets. This practice not only enriched the spiritual landscape of the Bakiga community but also significantly elevated the status of women within it. By allowing women to assume roles of leadership akin to those of men, the tradition challenged long-standing societal norms.

Tibijugwa proposes that this recruitment trend may have served as a deliberate effort to combat the pervasive gender imbalances that have historically marginalized women in many African societies, including the Bakiga. Women often encountered isolation and mistreatment at the hands of men in various spheres of life—be it in positions of authority, the accumulation of wealth, or the inheritance of property. Many women were subjected to oppressive food taboos,

held captive by the archaic belief that they were inferior and unworthy of the same rights and respect accorded to men (Tibijugwa, interview, Jan. 2024).

This practice of selecting abagirwa mirrors the foundational elements of Christianity and various other modern religions. For example, Jesus' choice of the twelve disciples illustrates a similar process; he carefully selected and nurtured them, empowering them with the authority to heal the sick and drive out demons (Matthew 10:1-4). In the context of contemporary Christianity, the journey to becoming a servant extends beyond mere desire; it necessitates confirmation from seasoned church elders, adherence to a respected code of conduct, and recommendations from higher ecclesiastical authorities prior to engaging in theological training. This thorough and discerning process of selection and evaluation fosters a sense of unity and coherence among church leaders, ensuring that they remain aligned under a common doctrine.

6.5 Nyabingi as a gendered movement

A Focus group discussion (FGD) highlighted the significant connection between Nyabingi and gender systems in the Kigezi region. Participants revealed that Nyabingi is intimately linked to a powerful female deity, revered for her immense strength and influence in challenging and dismantling the gender barriers that have long existed between Bakiga men and women.

In a personal interview, Nyinankumbuye (2024) elaborated on this perspective, describing the Nyabingi movement as a transformative force aimed at liberating women from centuries of traditional oppression and subjugation by men. This movement is seen as a sanctuary for women, providing them with a vital platform to express their grievances, concerns, and aspirations.

The female deity associated with Nyabingi is particularly attuned to the issues facing women. She is perceived as a protector and advocate, encouraging women to voice their struggles and

seek justice in a patriarchal society. Nyinankumbuye emphasized that the movement's mission is not only to empower women but also to foster a sense of community and solidarity among them, ultimately enabling them to reclaim their agency and rights within their cultural context.

"Eshi Nyabingi akatuyamba abakigakazi!' She then continued to mention; 'Manya abashijja bakaba baratuteera nkabeerere. Okaba otagamba mubantu. Omukazi akaba aturaga omukiyungu." This in English translates, 'Oh Nyabingi saved us the Bakiga women. Men used to beat us like babies and none of us would take any leadership position in Rukiga. In many cultures, women often found themselves relegated to the background, particularly in discussions dominated by men. However, for the Bakiga indigenous women, the figure of Nyabingi emerged as a powerful savior, offering a beacon of hope and a pathway to empowerment. Nyabingi wasn't just a deity; she was a profound understanding of the struggles that women endured and the deep-seated oppression they faced in their daily lives. This unique perception of Nyabingi as a female figure challenges the conventional notions of divinity in many African societies, where gods are commonly male representations.

In many African societies such as the Buganda community of central Uganda, for instance, male deities typically reign supreme. Yet among the Bakiga, Nyabingi stood apart as a distinctly feminine god, entrusted with the power to address women's concerns and actively involve them in the affairs of daily life. This revolutionary role of Nyabingi illustrates how many religious movements aim to uplift the downtrodden and liberate those enduring suffering. A clear parallel can be drawn to Christianity, where Jesus Christ's actions and teachings significantly bolstered the status of women, advocating for their dignity and defending their rights in the public sphere—challenging the widespread marginalization that painted women as an inferior group meant solely to submit to men.

Under the NRM, women did not merely participate; they flourished in roles of prominence and authority. They served as abagirwa (spiritual leaders), senior abagirwa, and strategic commanders during times of conflict. Women took on the vital responsibilities of leading sacrificial rituals, conducting intercessions, and delivering prophecies, thereby placing them at the heart of spiritual practice and community leadership.

A particularly significant aspect of this movement was the tradition of establishing a dedicated hut, known as an endaaro, in each household. This sacred space, which housed the Nyabingi spirit, became a focal point for worship and connection. The women of the community meticulously ensured that every endaaro was constructed and maintained, overseeing its physical elements while imbuing it with spiritual significance.

Typically, the head of the family—a male figure—would make the decision regarding the endaaro's location; however, the women, or abagirwa, exercised considerable influence over its design, structure, size, and the materials used. Usually positioned in the backyard, behind the kitchen to symbolize its domestic sanctity, the endaaro represented a blend of familial duty and spiritual devotion. Although constructing the endaaro was predominantly considered a man's role, women ensured its upkeep and proper functioning, creating a communal space for worship and connection with Nyabingi.

Beyond the confines of individual families, the care and attention given to endaaro also extended to the broader community, where Nyabingi's abagirwa took on the responsibility of maintaining these sacred sites, ensuring that the essence of Nyabingi and her blessings were felt throughout every corner of their lives. Initially, men were sidelined during the early stages of the Nyabingi movement, which aimed to resist colonial rule. However, as the movement evolved and the struggle against the British colonialists intensified, men began to take on a more active role in its

activities. Their recruitment as leaders occurred later in the movement when the physical and emotional toll of resistance became too great for women alone to bear. One respondent highlighted that women often became weary from the demands of the resistance, necessitating the involvement of men who were perceived to be more fearless in the face of danger. These men were thought to embody a philosophy that transformed the fear of bullets into determination, helping them stand resolutely against colonial forces.

This strategic inclusion of men in the movement also reflected traditional gender roles within Bakiga society, where men were historically seen as defenders and protectors of their families and communities. The re-engagement of these men, who had been disarmed during colonial rule, played a significant role in restoring social order in the Kigezi region. Their participation not only reinforced their roles as protectors but also helped to galvanize the resistance movement, ultimately altering the dynamics of community engagement.

In the context of religious institutions, gender roles are frequently distributed unevenly. For example, in the Catholic Church, women are often restricted from holding significant leadership positions, which limits their ability to serve in influential capacities. Similarly, in the Anglican Church, while women can serve as reverends and catechists, they are still barred from attaining the highest office of diocesan bishop. This systematic segregation within religious affiliations poses serious risks; it can create a hierarchy that favors one gender over another, leading to potential oppression of those who are marginalized. This imbalance can cause significant psychological and emotional stress for individuals who feel undervalued within their religious communities.

To rectify this situation, it is essential to advocate for gender equality in religious roles, ensuring that both women and men have equal opportunities to serve in clerical positions, provided they

meet the necessary qualifications. Empowering women in religious domains is especially important, as they have consistently shown their capability to manage and excel in their responsibilities when afforded the chance. Many women have proven themselves to be just as competent, if not more so, than their male counterparts, often providing innovative perspectives and leadership that enhance the entire community's spiritual life. By promoting inclusivity and equality, religious institutions can create a more balanced and harmonious environment for all members.

The study of Nyabingi represents a pivotal moment in the evolution of Bakiga women, particularly in their ascent to leadership roles. For the first time, women were empowered to take charge in various crucial aspects of life, guiding and influencing the men around them on matters of belief, cultural practices, and the societal norms associated with the worship of Nyabingi.

This empowerment allowed Bakiga women to emerge from the shadows of segregation that had long plagued their existence in religious, social, and political domains. No longer confined by the restrictive views of the past—where women were often seen as comparable to children, prohibited from consuming certain foods, leading meetings, or speaking publicly in the presence of men—these women began to challenge and dismantle these outdated beliefs.

The rise of Nyabingi not only elevated the status of women but also championed their rights as essential members of society. This shift marked a significant departure from the traditional constraints that had historically oppressed them in Kigezi, paving the way for a more equitable recognition of women's capabilities and contributions. Through this movement, the foundations were laid for a more inclusive community that celebrated and respected the autonomy and strengths of women.

6.6 Nyabingi the redeemer

Nyabingi is well-known for its anti-colonial activities against the British in Kigezi. The movement gained notoriety for its rebellious actions, as it opposed the colonial agents and the Baganda administration in the region. Many people in Kigezi refer to Nyabingi as a fighting spirit, one that was aggressively opposed to anything contradicting its doctrines (FGD interview, 2024).

Between 1908 and 1930, during the invasion of missionaries and Baganda agents, the Nyabingi movement viewed these outsiders as religious enemies of the Bakiga. They regarded these foreigners as intruders who sought to destroy their culture and undermine their religious beliefs and practices. The Baganda agents subjected the Bakiga to forced labor, restricted cash crop cultivation, imposed heavy taxes, and utilized harsh tax collection methods. Furthermore, the Bakiga were often treated as slaves in their own homeland and had to seek permission from the Baganda agents to use their own land.

Their culture was undermined, and they were portrayed as a primitive society lacking a proper understanding of the true God. The Nyabingi movement identified this treatment as oppression imposed by the Baganda, which caused immense suffering and hardship for the Bakiga on their ancestral land of Kigezi. In response, the movement began mobilizing support to resist the further encroachment of colonialism by the Baganda agents in the region. At this juncture, Nyabingi adopted strategies to recruit young and energetic men, aiming to overpower their adversaries. Consequently, the movement shifted its membership from being predominantly female to a more inclusive, multi-sexual representation.

The movement's involvement in resisting British colonial rule and their Baganda agents is viewed through two contrasting lenses by contemporary Bakiga. Firstly, Bakunda articulates a

critical perspective, suggesting that the movement was primarily a vehicle for pursuing selfish interests (Bakunda, interview, 2024). This period marked a significant transformation for Nyabingi, which evolved in various ways—its membership broadened, and its beliefs, practices, and doctrines began to shift. The initial exclusivity that characterized the movement faded, creating an environment where anyone could join. However, this openness came at a cost, as the influx of new members diluted the core teachings and mysteries of the movement, ultimately undermining its strength. Many newcomers were eager to fight, but they were ill-equipped with the essential doctrinal knowledge that had once been imparted by the abagirwa.

As this transformation unfolded, Nyabingi transitioned from a peaceful spiritual movement to a more militant force, aggressively resisting the encroachment of colonialism. Kanyesigye (2024) reflected on this shift, stating, "Nyabingi was very belligerent during its struggle against colonialism. It showed no respect for the people who came to civilize our region and guide us toward heaven." This assertion reveals a deep-seated resentment towards colonial authorities, framing Nyabingi as a fierce guardian of traditional values and autonomy.

Additionally, Kanyesigye argued that the rise of Nyabingi played a significant role in the stagnation of Kigezi's development when compared to other regions that were more welcoming to European influences. This viewpoint sheds light on the absence of robust colonial infrastructure—such as well-maintained roads, educational institutions, and healthcare facilities—that one might expect in a region engaged with colonial powers. Kanyesigye maintained that any infrastructural improvements that did occur were only realized after the Europeans had triumphed over the Nyabingi fighters (interview, 2024).

For many anti-Nyabingi Bakiga, the struggle against the Nyabingi movement was a missed opportunity for advancement. They believed that the colonial powers wasted valuable time and

resources suppressing what they viewed as self-serving fighters when that same energy could have been directed toward civilizing many of the Bakiga, potentially leading to a more progressive future for the region.

The Europeans were compelled to respond with violence and to restrict constructive actions in Kigezi, a region facing colonial encroachment. Surprisingly, the Nyabingi movement did not capitulate to the colonial forces, which appeared dominant and powerful. Instead, leaders of Nyabingi transformed their approach from one of mere threats and intimidation to one of active and armed resistance. They took up weapons such as spears, hoes, pangas, and various other tools repurposed for warfare, signaling a significant escalation in their struggle against colonialism.

According to Rutanga, the Nyabingi movement underwent a transformation in its leadership models and fighting tactics, adopting some strategies from colonial forces. Many individuals who had been released from colonial detention brought back not only stories of oppression but also new military hardware and innovative combat techniques. This infusion of fresh knowledge and resources brought into the movement by strong revolutionists like Kaigirirwa and her husband Ruhemba significantly prolonged the resistance effort, allowing the movement to adapt and evolve continuously (Rutanga, 1991:102).

An interviewee emphasized that despite the conflict, Nyabingi deeply cherished peace and pursued the vision of a liberated Bakiga society. Nyabingi actively opposed conflicts and other circumstances that could disrupt peace in the region, engaging only when provoked by external forces. Ndyabahika (1997) highlights that the Nyabingi movement evoked a spirit of united action among its members, inspiring collective struggles against oppression and exploitation in any form. In this context, Nyabingi emerged as not merely a religious figure but as a protector

and redeemer of the distressed Bakiga. She was regarded as their steadfast leader and guardian throughout times of conflict, particularly before, during, and following the onset of European colonial rule.

Rutanga further notes that the Nyabingi movement was not restricted to its spiritual roles; it expanded its focus to address the immediate social and economic needs of the peasant population. This evolution necessitated the leaders of the resistance to utilize the framework of Nyabingi's religion, even if they did not fully subscribe to its tenets. The integration of spiritual elements provided a robust framework for the fighters, offering them a sense of purpose and community in their struggle. It became essential for the resistance to cling to this faith in Nyabingi, allowing it to serve as a compelling narrative that rallied the people. (Rutanga 1991:138)

The abagirwa, or practitioners of Nyabingi, played a pivotal role in nurturing the fighters' faith and instilling a sense of fear in their commitment to the movement. They motivated the resistance fighters to stand firm, encouraging those who wavered or exhibited weakness to strengthen their resolve and engage more fiercely in the conflict. This dynamic not only emphasizes the considerable influence of Nyabingi as a religious movement but also highlights the significant impact of faith in inciting the Bakiga toward a common cause.

As the Bakiga became increasingly unified under the banner of 'Nyabingism,' they developed an untiring determination to overcome the British colonial forces, resolute in their mission to achieve sovereignty at any cost. Nyabingi thus emerged as a dominant religious force in Kigezi, thanks to its profound impact on the populace during and after the colonial era. On numerous occasions, the Bakiga demonstrated their capacity to challenge and disrupt colonial

administration, compelling the Europeans to adjust their strategies and operations in response to the fervent resistance they encountered.

The Nyabingi fighters experienced a surge of confidence as they steadfastly pursued their mission to resist the colonial invaders encroaching upon their land. Though they faced challenges and periods of weakening strength, the Bakiga community remained resolute in their fight, motivated by a firm belief that the Nyabingi movement would ultimately lead them to freedom and self-determination. As the struggle progressed, some individuals who had previously aligned themselves with colonial powers were gradually persuaded to join the fight for independence. These new recruits, having recognized the potential of the Nyabingi movement to achieve liberation, brought with them valuable insights and strategies that exposed the vulnerabilities of the colonial forces. This infusion of leadership and innovative tactics played a crucial role in disrupting the established colonial order and pressured the European authorities to consider and implement various administrative reforms.

In addition to military engagement, Nyabingi's pursuit of resistance served to highlight the nationalistic sentiments among the people of Kigezi. The movement's actions directly influenced colonial decision-making, leading colonial officials to involve Bakiga chiefs in local governance. This participation undermined the previously held cultural arrogance of the Baganda agents and British administrators, who had underestimated the capabilities and rights of the Bakiga in their own homeland. By openly resisting foreign domination, the Nyabingi movement aimed to protect and preserve the traditional culture and practices of the Bakiga from being diluted or eradicated by colonial influences.

One respondent noted that, like many religious movements, Nyabingi championed the rights and freedoms of its followers, prioritizing the protection of its members. This commitment stemmed

from a deep-seated concern about the potential loss of indigenous doctrines and cultural identities to foreign religious systems that often regarded African traditions as inferior. Nyabingi demonstrated a keen awareness of the threats posed by foreign religions, which sought to impose their ideologies on the Bakiga community.

The historical context further illustrates the significant role of religious movements in the struggle for social justice and cultural preservation. For instance, upon their arrival in Uganda between 1877 and 1900, Protestant and Catholic factions found themselves in fierce competition for followers, leading to conflicts that divided communities. Many individuals were compelled to align themselves with the stronger faction, facing grave consequences if they chose to resist. This backdrop underscores that Nyabingi's determination to confront anti-doctrinal issues and uphold its beliefs was consistent with the broader patterns of resistance observed in religious movements globally. In this way, the Nyabingi movement stood as a vital force in the struggle for the rights, identity, and cultural integrity of the Bakiga amidst the pressures of colonial rule.

The Nyabingi movement, once a vibrant force of resistance against colonial oppression, eventually fell into disarray under the relentless pressure exerted by the British colonialists. Stripped of its organizational strength and financial resources, the movement faced an insurmountable challenge. The situation became even dire with the arrest of key leaders, including the influential Muhumuza, which marked a turning point that led to the movement's complete disintegration.

As the hope for liberation dwindled, the once-spirited peasants who had supported Nyabingi began to lose faith. The voluntary assistance that had bolstered the remaining fighters in the region evaporated, leaving them isolated and demoralized. The Bakiga, overwhelmed by despair and seeing the futility of their struggle, chose to abandon their fight against colonialism. It

became painfully clear to them that the Nyabingi movement, which had once ignited their hopes for freedom, was no longer a viable force capable of overcoming the might of European colonial powers (Karibahenda, interview, 2024).

In the past, Nyabingi had taken a strong stance against traitors, meting out punishments to those who betrayed the cause. However, the movement's weakened state rendered it incapable of enforcing justice, as the colonial authorities maintained a tight grip on power. The brutal suppression of the Nyabingi fighters starkly illustrated the colonialists' military superiority and their unwavering resolve to dominate the Kigezi region. Faced with this harsh reality, the Bakiga were left with no choice but to submit to colonial rule, coming to terms with their perceived inferiority in the face of well-armed oppressors and their agents.

The conflict between the colonial forces and the followers of NRM had profound and damaging effects on traditional African religious beliefs, particularly among the Bakiga. Once, Nyabingi was revered as a powerful redeemer and protector, embodying the spiritual essence of the community. However, the pressure and violence exerted by the colonial authorities led to a significant erosion of trust in this deity.

As colonial rule tightened, many Bakiga began to perceive Nyabingi and other African gods as weaker compared to the powerful European gods associated with the missionaries. This shift in belief was exacerbated by the brutal tactics employed by colonial forces, which included intimidation and violence against those who continued to uphold their traditional practices. As a result, a majority of the Bakiga turned to the new religions introduced by the missionaries, seeing them as more viable sources of hope and salvation in the face of colonial oppression.

Moreover, the defeat of the Nyabingi leader Muhumuza added to the disenchantment felt by the community, particularly among women who had looked to him as a symbol of strength and resistance. With many abagirwa—the warriors and custodians of the Nyabingi faith—losing their lives during this struggle, the spirit and morale of the community were severely diminished, leaving many women feeling defeated and hopeless.

Despite the overwhelming pressures to abandon their beliefs, a small number of Bakiga continued to hold Nyabingi close to their hearts. These devoted individuals practiced their worship in secrecy, fearing retribution from the British colonialists who deemed the worship of Nyabingi as mere fetishism. The colonialists not only dismissed these beliefs as primitive but also vowed to punish any remaining practitioners. Thus, while the public expression of Nyabingi faith diminished, its echoes persisted quietly within the hearts of a few who remained committed to their spiritual heritage, practicing in the shadows of colonial oversight.

6.7 Nyabingi movement as a cult

Traditionally, the head of the family, typically a male, held the authority to decide the location of the endaaro, a sacred space for worship. Yet, behind the scenes, the women—known as abagirwa—exerted a profound influence over its design and construction. Their input shaped every detail, from the endaaro's structure and size to the choice of materials, signaling the importance of their role. Usually, the endaaro was strategically placed in the backyard, just behind the kitchen, a position that symbolized its sanctity within the domestic sphere. This sacred space was not merely a physical structure; it embodied a harmonious blend of familial responsibility and spiritual devotion. While men primarily engaged in its construction, it was the women who diligently maintained and operated the endaaro, creating a communal sanctuary

where family bonds could deepen and worshippers could forge a connection with the divine presence of Nyabingi.

The care given to each endaaro reached beyond the individual household. In the wider community, the abagirwa of Nyabingi took on the sacred duty of maintaining these important sites, ensuring that the spirit of Nyabingi and her blessings resonated in every aspect of daily life.

At the onset of the Nyabingi movement, which emerged as a resistance against colonial oppression, men found themselves sidelined, their roles diminished during the early struggles. However, as the movement grew stronger and the fight against British colonial forces escalated, men began to reclaim their positions within the resistance. Their recruitment as leaders happened later when the weight of the struggle proved too burdensome for women alone. One respondent pointed out that women became increasingly weary from the relentless demands of the resistance, prompting the need for male involvement. These men were perceived to embody a brave philosophy, capable of transforming the terror of gunfire into unwavering resolve, allowing them to stand steadfast against the oppressive colonial regime.

This intentional re-engagement of men illustrated the traditional gender roles deeply rooted in Bakiga society, where men were traditionally viewed as the protectors and defenders of their families and communities. Their return to active participation significantly contributed to restoring social order in the Kigezi region. By stepping back into their roles as defenders, they not only reinforced their positions within the community but also invigorated the resistance movement. This shift transformed the dynamics of community engagement, making the struggle for liberation a collective effort that unified men and women in their quest for freedom and justice. Traditionally, the head of the family—a male figure—held the authority to decide on the location of the endaaro, a sacred space integral to family and community life. Despite this male-

led decision-making, women, referred to as abagirwa, wielded significant influence over the endaaro' s design, structure, size, and the materials selected for its construction. Nestled in the backyard, typically situated behind the kitchen, the endaaro symbolized domestic sanctity, serving as a harmonious blend of familial duty and spiritual devotion.

While the act of building the endaaro was predominantly seen as a man's responsibility, it was the women who ensured its ongoing maintenance and functionality. They nurtured this communal space, fostering a deep connection with Nyabingi, the revered deity who represented both protection and benevolence. This duality of roles showcased the collaborative effort between genders, as women infused the space with care and affection, making it a true sanctuary for worship, reflection, and unity.

Beyond the intimate confines of individual households, the commitment to the endaaro radiated into the wider community. Nyabingi's abagirwa took on the vital duty of preserving these sacred sites, their diligence ensuring the essence of Nyabingi and her blessings permeated every aspect of daily life. In this collective stewardship, the endaaro transformed into a cornerstone of spiritual and communal identity, linking families with the divine.

In the broader historical context, the Nyabingi movement initially sidelined men, particularly in its formative stages aimed at resisting colonial rule. However, as the struggle against British colonial forces intensified and the weight of resistance became increasingly burdensome for women, men gradually began to step back into active roles within the movement. Their recruitment into leadership positions came as a crucial response to the mounting physical and emotional toll faced by women, who often found themselves weary from relentless demands.

One participant in this historical narrative noted that women, despite their strength, frequently felt the strain of the resistance. The involvement of men was seen as essential; they were perceived to embody a courageous spirit that transformed the instinctive fear of violence into resolute determination. This philosophy, enabling them to confront the threats with unwavering resolve, helped restore a sense of balance and purpose to the movement.

The inclusion of men in the resistance also mirrored traditional gender roles within Bakiga society. Historically viewed as defenders and protectors, their re-engagement became pivotal not only in bolstering the resistance but also in restoring social order in the Kigezi region. The men, who had been disarmed during colonial rule, emerged as essential figures in galvanizing efforts against oppression. Their active participation reinforced their roles as guardians and played a crucial part in altering the dynamics of community engagement, weaving together a narrative of resilience, collaboration, and unwavering strength against colonial forces.

In the typical structure of a household, the responsibility for determining the location of the endaaro—a sacred space for worship and family connection—often rested on the shoulders of the male head of the family. Yet, the influence of women, known as abagirwa, was deeply woven into the very fabric of its construction**.** Drawing on their profound understanding of familial dynamics and spiritual needs, their contributions were pivotal in defining the endaaro' s overall design, structural elements, dimensions, and the selection of materials used. Usually situated in the backyard, the endaaro was intentionally placed behind the kitchen — a location that emphasized its role as a peaceful retreat. This thoughtful positioning allowed for a harmonious flow between the home and this sacred space, where the warmth of domestic life mingled seamlessly with a deep sense of spirituality. Overall, the endaaro served as a cherished sanctuary, a place where family bonds were nurtured and spiritual practices could flourish.

Constructing the endaaro was traditionally regarded as a man's domain, a task reflecting authority and responsibility. However, the true lifeblood of this sacred space lay in the hands of women, who diligently ensured its upkeep, cleanliness, and proper functioning. Their tireless efforts transformed the endaaro into a vibrant communal hub, fostering a deep connection with Nyabingi, their revered deity. This space became a sacred point for family gatherings, prayer, and shared spiritual experiences, which further solidified the bonds of kinship and community in their daily lives.

Beyond the private realms of individual households, the care and devotion given to these sacred sites extended to the wider community. Nyabingi's abagirwa, with their deep-rooted commitment, took it upon themselves to maintain and sanctify these spaces. Their diligent stewardship ensured that the blessings of Nyabingi permeated every corner of their lives, creating a spiritual atmosphere of unity and strength throughout the region.

Initially, during the early stages of the Nyabingi movement—which sought to resist the oppressive grip of colonial rule—men found themselves largely sidelined. However, as the struggle against British colonialists intensified and the weight of resistance became increasingly burdensome, a shift began to occur. Men started to step into more active roles, answering the call for leadership at a crucial juncture when women's endurance was being tested. One insightful respondent noted that women often found themselves weary under the relentless demands of resistance, underscoring the need for men's involvement, who were often perceived as more fearless in the face of adversity.

These men embodied a transformative philosophy—one that converted the palpable fear instilled by colonial violence into an unwavering determination to stand resolutely against oppressive forces. Their inclusion was not merely tactical; it reflected the ingrained traditional gender roles

within Bakiga society, where men had long been viewed as defenders and protectors of their families and the larger community.

The re-engagement of these men, who had been disarmed and marginalized during colonial rule, played a pivotal role in restoring social order within the Kigezi region. Their active participation reaffirmed their identities as protectors and guardians, while simultaneously invigorating the resistance movement. This dramatic shift not only altered the dynamics of community engagement but also fostered a renewed sense of solidarity and collective purpose among the people, illustrating the intricate interplay of gender roles in their fight for autonomy and dignity.

The decision-making process regarding the location of the endaaro—a sacred space within the domestic sphere—was traditionally dominated by the head of the family, typically a male figure. However, the women, known as abagirwa, exerted significant influence over various aspects of its design, structure, size, and the materials employed in its construction. Generally situated in the backyard behind the kitchen, the endaaro symbolized domestic sanctity and represented a convergence of familial duty and spiritual devotion. While the construction of the endaaro was predominantly viewed as a masculine responsibility, women played an essential role in its maintenance and functionality, fostering a communal space for worship and connection with Nyabingi.

Beyond the confines of individual households, the commitment to maintaining the endaaro extended to the broader community. The abagirwa of Nyabingi assumed the responsibility for upholding these sacred sites, ensuring that the essence of Nyabingi and her blessings permeated all aspects of communal life. Initially, during the early stages of the Nyabingi movement—an initiative aimed at resisting colonial domination—men were largely marginalized. However, as the movement progressed and the struggle against British colonialists intensified, the

involvement of men became increasingly prominent. Their incorporation as leaders occurred later in the movement, particularly as the physical and emotional burdens of resistance became unsustainable for women alone.

It is noteworthy that many respondents observed that women's exhaustion from the demands of the resistance prompted a call for male involvement, as men were perceived to embody a greater sense of fearlessness in the face of mortal danger. This inclusion of men reflected traditional gender roles within Bakiga society, wherein men were historically positioned as defenders and protectors of their families and communities. The re-engagement of these men, who had been disarmed during colonial rule, was instrumental in restoring social order within the Kigezi region. Their active participation not only reasserted their roles as protectors but also contributed to the galvanization of the resistance movement, ultimately transforming the dynamics of community engagement.

6.8 Nyabingi, the unsatisfied deity

Among all the respondents interviewed, Nyabingi emerged as a notable deity, recognized for her seemingly insatiable demand for sacrifices. The Nyabingi movement was sustained by the generosity of her followers, who were expected to offer their gifts in abundant measure. Despite the considerable support she received, Nyabingi was never fully satisfied; she consistently solicited more, irrespective of the nature of the offerings provided.

The name Nyabingi itself is imbued with multifaceted meanings, reflecting the complex identity of this deity. This complexity was also apparent in the rewards she conferred upon her devoted adherents, serving as symbols of gratitude for their loyalty. One respondent characterized Nyabingi as a goddess of abundance—one who demanded much but likewise bestowed numerous blessings in return.

However, a prevailing belief among Bakiga holds that an individual approaching Nyabingi with a half-filled basket or an offering deemed inadequate in size or quantity would face outright rejection. Such an offering was interpreted as a test of Nyabingi, suggesting doubt regarding her generosity. Consequently, she was esteemed as a divine source of wealth and prosperity, regarded as the origin of all good things. Offering anything less than a full measure was perceived as disrespectful and an affront to her generous nature.

This belief system has significant ramifications for the community. Primarily, it positions Nyabingi and her abagirwa (spiritual leaders or intermediaries) as figures who are eternally unfulfilled and self-serving. By persistently demanding substantial sacrifices, Nyabingi appears to extract resources from her followers, obligating them to work diligently to appease this demanding goddess. Paradoxically, this dynamic has cultivated a robust work ethic among the Bakiga, compelling them to combat laziness and aspire toward progress.

Presently, the Bakiga are recognized for their industrious nature, and their region remains a vital source of food that nourishes the entire nation. According to one respondent, Kigezi produces staple crops such as vibrant Irish potatoes, golden sweet potatoes, hearty sorghum, nutritious beans, and delicate peas. Furthermore, a small segment of the Bakiga community participates in pastoralism, thereby enriching their agricultural practices. This unwavering work ethic has played an instrumental role in alleviating poverty in the region, substantially improving the living standards of the Bakiga, all attributable to the enduring legacy of Nyabingism (interview, May 2024).

6.9 Conclusion

In conclusion, the significance of Nyabingi and the traditional beliefs of the Bakiga profoundly influence their political, economic, social, and religious spheres. As highlighted in this chapter, the relevance of Nyabingi's doctrines and teachings underscores the difficulty the Bakiga face in completely detaching from their traditional values. The contemporary lifestyle of the Bakiga serves as a testament to the enduring influence of Nyabingism, demonstrating that these traditions are not merely relics of the past but active components of their identity today. In the following recommendations, it is essential to acknowledge the role these beliefs play in the community. Strategies to integrate traditional values with modern development efforts could foster greater social cohesion and economic progress, ensuring that the Bakiga retain their cultural heritage while embracing contemporary advancements.

CHAPTER SEVEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.0 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the study, presenting a detailed summary, key conclusions, and actionable recommendations derived from the main findings of this study. As the final chapter of this thesis, it synthesizes all the critical discussions and analyses the data presented throughout this study. By highlighting the significant insights gained from this study, it aims to provide clarity on the implications of the findings and to offer guidance for future research and practical applications in the field.

7.1 Summary of the study

The study mainly aimed at establishing the ideo-theological perspectives on the Nyabingi religious movement in Kigezi. Using the theory of symbolic interactionism, this study made an investigation into the meaning and origin of Nyabingi with a clear articulation of its beliefs, rituals and practices. During the discussion on beliefs, practices and rituals, there was a concurrent presentation because of the close relationship that the three possess. All this relied on qualitative methods to collect and analyze data. These methods included interviews, observation, and focus group discussion which were employed in the field to collect data that was later analyzed and transcribed into the required information to answer the research questions. The information obtained from the field was supplemented with the already existing literature of other researchers and scholars in the same field.

This study found out that Nyabingi was a traditional religious movement that influenced the lives of Bakiga before, during and after the colonial invasion of Kigezi. It also became a major weapon used by the Bakiga to defend themselves during the time of colonial oppression which

generally increased nationalism in the region. Although the missionaries finally defeated Nyabingi fighters and their ideology, they (missionaries) realized that they could hardly dismantle African religious beliefs among the Bakiga. The Bakiga proved that they were not only notoriously religious but also determined to resist anything that sabotaged their indigenous cultural beliefs and practices. Even in rare circumstances where the Bakiga were forced to follow Christianity, they simply did so to win the favour of the colonialists in the region but they never dropped their religion. Bakiga became Afro-Christian in nature and practice, going to church on Sunday and visiting the Shrines on other days. Despite their subscription to the missionary God, they continued to venerate their ancestors and revering their traditional gods such as Nyabingi. This generation is now what is known as the Bachwezi Bashomi, a religious movement that caters for the traditional and Christian cultures among the Bakiga (Tinkamanyire, 2024). Today, religion remains the only discipline that directs the Bakiga and touches every part of theirs and therefore tampering with their religious traditions is clear invitation for war against the Bakiga and the supernatural.

7.2 Contribution of this study

The exploration of religious matters presents unique challenges, primarily because these subjects involve deeply personal spiritual beliefs and practices. However, the relationship between European perspectives and ATR has often been fraught with misunderstanding. Europeans have historically associated ATR with negative connotations, labeling them as primitive and inferior. To the contrary, these religions play a vital and transformative role in the lives of many Africans, continuing to provide meaning and guidance in their daily existence. The case of the Bakiga illustrates this point quite effectively. Despite the likelihood for modernity and technological advancement to overshadow cultural traditions, the traditional beliefs, rituals, and practices of the Bakiga have endured and thrived and continue to impact their political, social and economic

spheres of life. This resilience speaks to the deep significance which these traditions hold in their community identity and personal spirituality.

Upon thorough investigation and analysis, the researcher contends that Nyabingi movement, often mislabeled a cult, and deserves to be recognized as a valid and established religion. It occupies a critical place within the traditional religious landscape of not only the Bakiga but also all Africans. The justification for this claim is that Nyabingi is characterized by a clearly defined belief system and a set of doctrines that guide its followers. The understanding which the Bakiga have of God aligns with core tenets found in many recognized religions, indicating a structured approach to African spirituality that transcends simplistic categorizations. Additionally, the existence of Nyabingi priests and abagirwa mediums, who operate according to established rituals and hierarchies, underscores the notion that Nyabingi is more than an informal movement. It rather exposes the movement as a fully structured religious practice that fulfills many of the functions associated with more widely recognized religions such as Christianity, Islam, Buddhism and Hinduism. Therefore, the continual branding of Nyabingi as a cult is not just a surface-level misunderstanding; it represents a deeper manipulation of the Bakiga's traditional religious practices, reflecting a broader historical ignorance of Nyabingism.

Significantly, the Nyabingi movement has had a profound influence on the development of modern Christianity in Kigezi, particularly within the Roman Catholic Church. Its impact is noteworthy, as it poses significant challenges to the European missionaries who once condemned Bakiga traditional practices. These missionaries who had frequently described the indigenous beliefs as barbaric and savage, often reducing them to terms like fetishism or animism, ended up confessing otherwise. The eventual result was the interaction between these missionary teachings and the local beliefs which eventually gave birth to a blended system of beliefs. It is this

inevitable incorporation of elements of African spirituality into Christian teachings that has resulted into a unique understanding within today's Catholic and Anglican churches in the region, showcasing the enduring legacy of ATR. This dynamic effect reveals the importance of recognizing African traditional religions, not only as crucial elements of African identity and culture but also as significant contributors to global religious discourse. I believe that the primary conflict between Nyabingi and Christianity arises from the perception that Christianity is a European-origin faith, while Nyabingi emerged from an African context. Such differences should not justify the 'Western criticism' of NRM's beliefs and practices, as both systems of faith can coexist and enrich each other.

Ultimately, regardless of how one might label it—as a movement, cult, or spiritual doctrine—Nyabingi serves as an essential means for the Bakiga to affirm their identity, trace their cultural distinctiveness, and connect with their ancestral roots. It is nearly impossible to study the religious, social, and political history of the Bakiga without encountering the concept of Nyabingi, as it permeates all aspects of their lives. It is crucial to emphasize that while the Nyabingi movement may no longer be an active force in the Kigezi region, the spiritual influence of Nyabingi continues to govern the everyday lives of Bakiga. This enduring presence speaks volumes about the vitality of their spiritual heritage and the profound impact that traditional beliefs still have in contemporary society.

7.3 Suggestions for further research

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the NRM, it is essential to conduct further studies focused on several key areas. First, researchers should examine how the Nyabingi has shaped the political landscape and governance structures among the Bakiga in Kigezi. Exploring this area shall shed light on the movement's influence in national affairs and local governance. Secondly,

a thorough investigation into the economic effects of Nyabingi in the Kigezi region is crucial. A study of this nature could reveal how the movement has contributed to local economies, possibly through community initiatives, agricultural practices, or cultural festivals that engage the local population.

Another significant area of interest lies in the role of women within ATR, specifically in the context of the Nyabingi movement. Understanding women's participation and leadership can illuminate their vital contributions to the preservation and evolution of these spiritual practices.

Furthermore, exploring the connection between Nyabingi and the Rastafarian movement in Jamaica offers a fascinating avenue for study. This research has uncovered that Nyabingi has strong ties to Rastafarian culture, particularly in their shared musical traditions and drumming techniques. The term 'Nyabingi' itself refers to a distinctive drum used in Rastafarian music, which emphasizes the cultural exchange between these two rich traditions.

By delving into these areas, researchers can affirm the legitimacy of ATR and help preserve the diverse cultural heritage of various societies through comprehensive written literature. These efforts will not only enhance our understanding of the Nyabingi movement but also underscore its significance within the broader context of African spirituality and cultural identity.

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LIST OF APPENDICES:

APPENDIX 1: INFORMANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Dear Respondent;

My name is **NIWAMANYA BRIAN** a student of Kyambogo University conducting a study entitled *"*The Ideo-theological Perspectives on Nyabingi Religious movement in Kigezi*."* The information that you will provide in response to the following interview questions shall be treated with most desirable confidentiality.

The meaning and Origin of Nyabingi

1. What does Nyabingi mean to you?
2. Where did Nyabingi come from?
3. Do you know when the worship of Nyabingi started in Kigezi? If yes, when?
4. What force Nyabingi into Kigezi?

Beliefs, Rituals and practices of Nyabingi religious movement

5. In your own view, what do you think were the main rituals of Nyabingi religion?
6. What were the beliefs and practices of Nyabingi religion?
7. What is the meaning of the mentioned rituals conducted during Nyabingi worship?
8. What do you think were the values upheld by the rituals conducted during Nyabingi worship?

9. What was the purpose of the rituals mentioned above and why did the Bakiga perform them?

10. Who led the ceremonies of ritual performance among the Bakiga?

The impact of Nyabingi Religious movement to Bakiga's religiosity in Kigezi

11. What do you know about Nyabingi religion?

12. How did Nyabingi affect the lives of the Bakiga during the time it was very active?

13. Do you think Christianity and Islam affected Nyabingi religion in Kigezi? If yes, how?

14. Why is Nyabingi so linked to women rather than men?

15. How did Nyabingi fight against the British?

16. Was Nyabingi a religion?

17. How does Nyabingi and its teachings influence the day to day religious lives?

Appendix 2: FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE

Dear Respondents;

My name is **NIWAMANYA BRIAN** a student of Kyambogo University conducting a study entitled *"*The Ideo-theological Perspectives on Nyabingi Religious movement in Kigezi*."* The information that you will provide in response to the following questions shall be treated with the most desirable confidentiality. Do you have any questions?

Are you willing to proceed with the discussion? Yes ☐ No ☐

Please observe the following rules.

1. Be respectful when others speak
2. Keep all discussions confidential
3. Do not share details of the discussion later, whether with people who are present or not

Origins and meaning of Nyabingi

1. Where did Nyabingi religion come from?

2. Who brought Nyabingi in Kigezi?

3. In which other parts did Nyabingi operate?

4. What does Nyabingi mean?

Rituals, beliefs and practices of Nyabingi religious movement

5. In your view, what do you think are the main rituals conducted by the Bakiga during Nyabingi worship?

6. What is the meaning of the mentioned rituals?

7. What do you think are the values that accompany the mentioned rituals?

8. At what point were those rituals performed by the Bakiga?

The impact of Nyabingi on the religiosity of the Bakiga

9. What do you know about Nyabingi religion?

10. How did Nyabingi affect the lives of the Bakiga during the time it was very active?

11. Do you think Christianity and Islam affected Nyabingi religion in Kigezi? If yes, how?

12. Why is Nyabingi so linked to women rather than men?

13. Why did Nyabingi fight against the British?

14. Was Nyabingi a religion?

15. How does Nyabingi and its teachings influence the day to day religious lives?