

BELIEFS IN ANCESTRAL SPIRITS: INTERPRETING CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDES OF THE BAGANDA TO THE ANCESTORS

by

Francis Xavier Mulambuzi

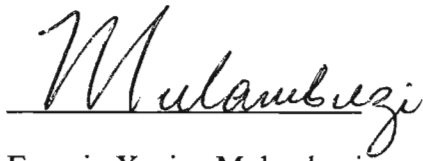
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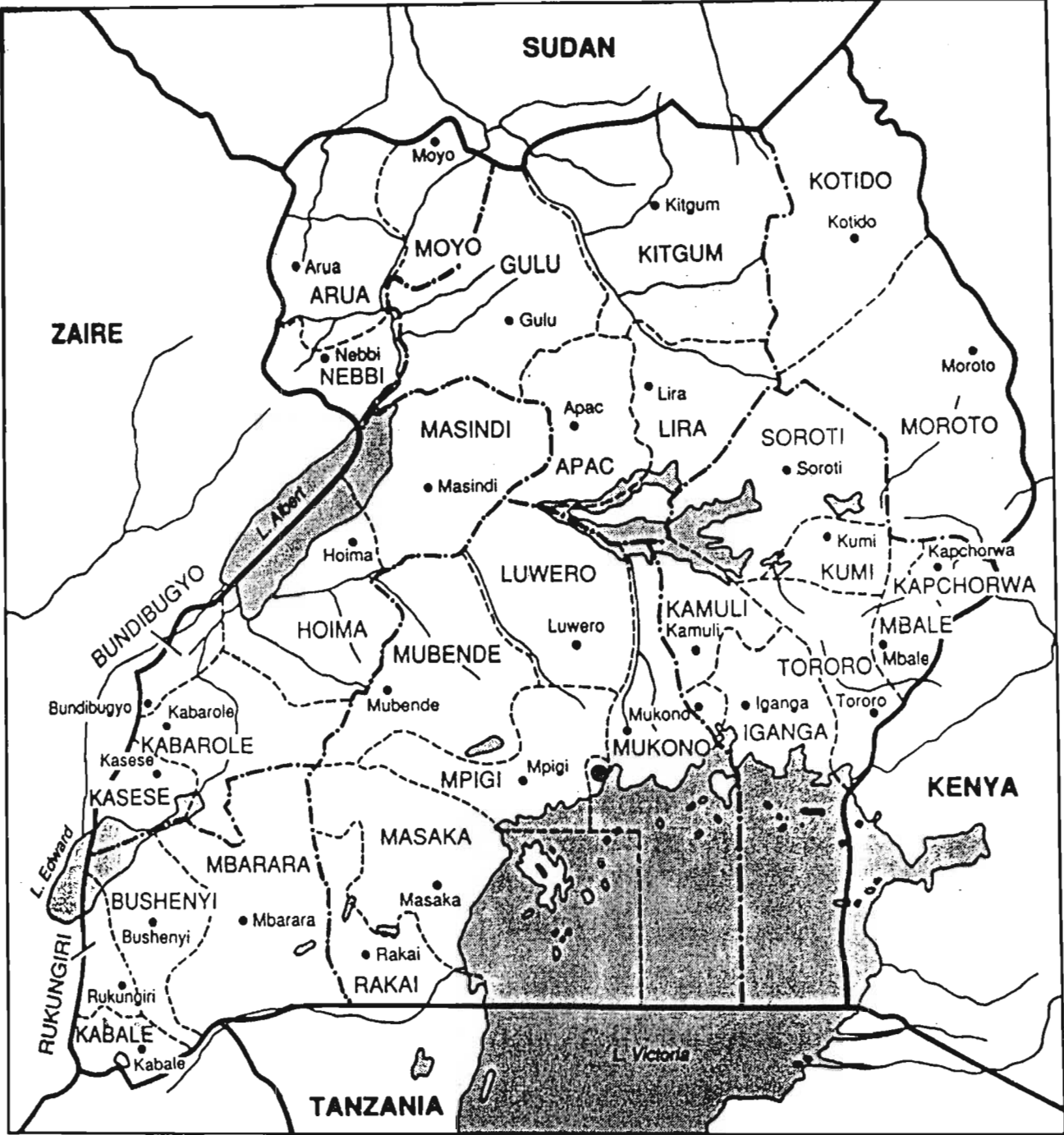
DECLARATION

This thesis represents my own original work. It has not been presented or submitted in any form to any other University for purpose of a high degree. Where reference has been made to the work of others, it is duly acknowledged in the text.



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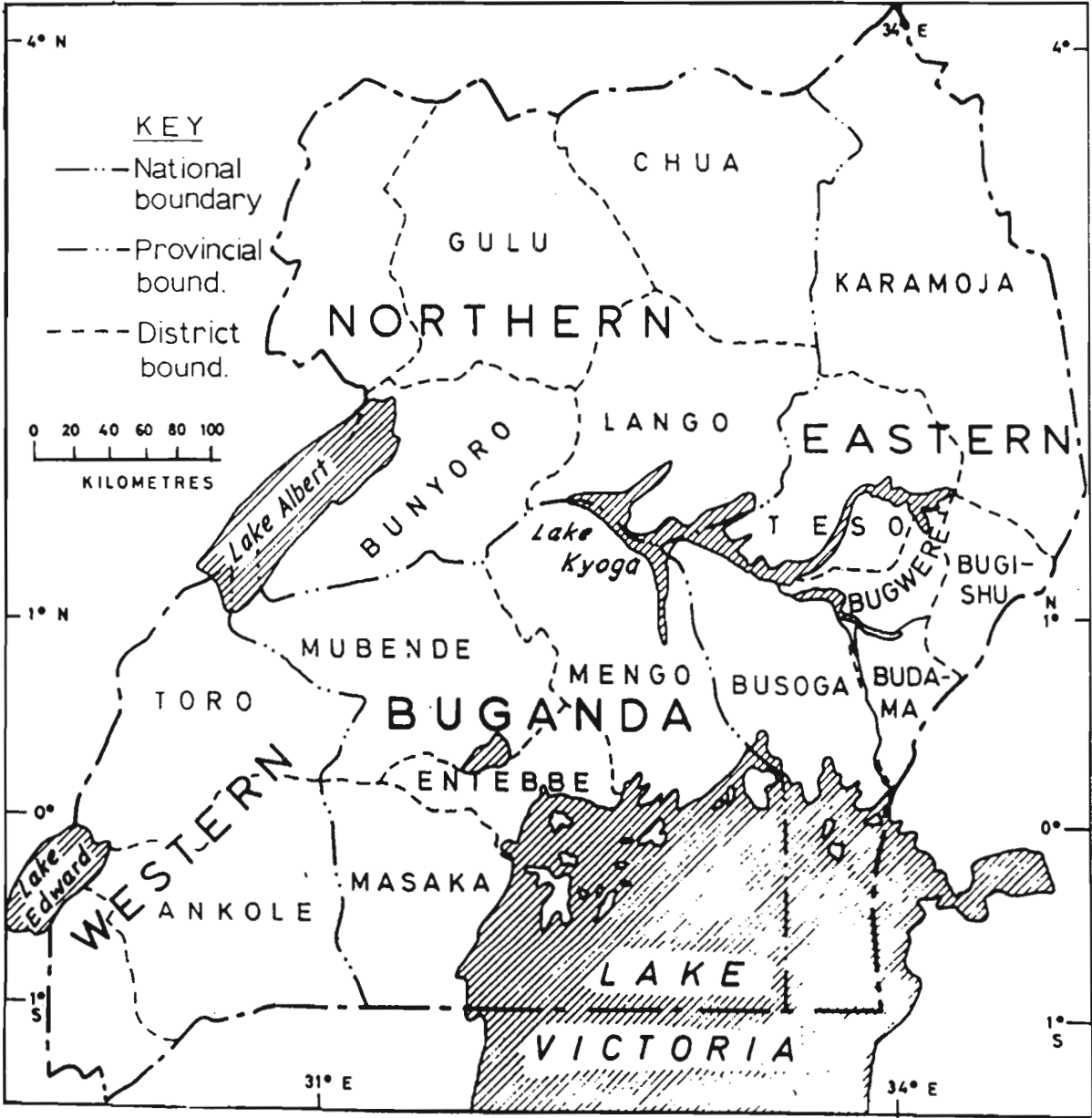
MAP 1: UGANDA: Boundary with its neighbours and District Boundaries



0 20 40 60 80 100
 Scale (Km.)

- International Boundary
- - - District Boundary
- Kampala, Capital City
- District Headquarters

MAP 2: UGANDA PROTECTORATE: Administrative Divisions 1939



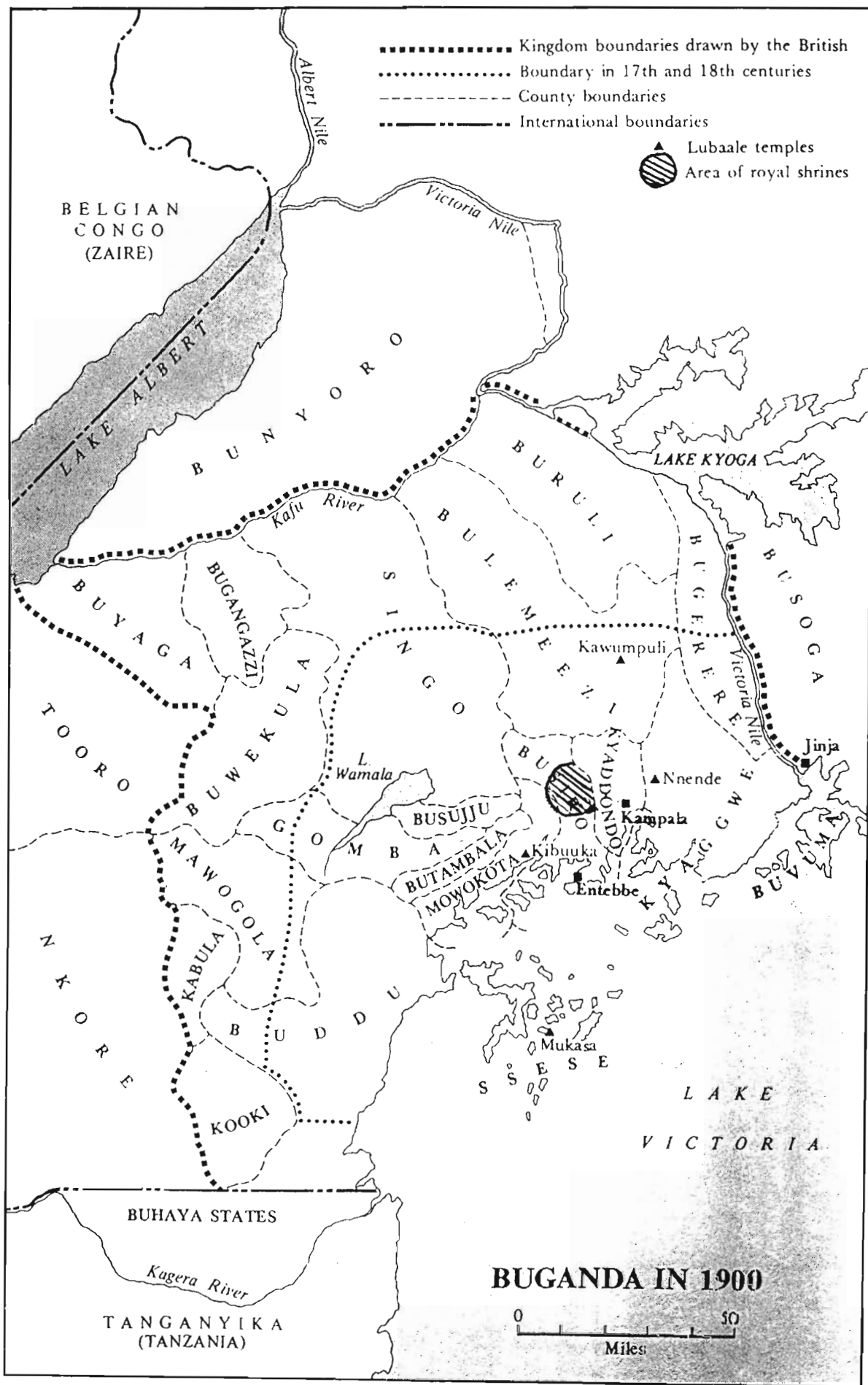
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ABSTRACT

Ancestors represent a more enduring reality in the African world-view than deities, other non-human spirits, or amulets and charms. This thesis argues that many Baganda have beliefs in ancestors. Much of the knowledge on ancestors in Buganda is still confined to oral tradition. It can be useful to have some material on the ancestors in a written form. The time will come when those who know about the subject will die and much of the information will disappear with them for ever.

Early European writers on Baganda people touched the topic of ancestors only briefly in their texts, without reaching great depth. The subject is given little space in their works. Hence, they missed some major and dynamic aspects of the Baganda religion and beliefs. Another point is that there are many changes that have taken place and influenced Baganda's beliefs since these writers produced their works. By highlighting those changes, this thesis tries to give a clear picture of what has transpired between the period when those early writers wrote and today (1996), as far as such beliefs are concerned. The early part of the thesis defines the word *ancestor* and other key concepts. It gives a general analysis of ancestors in Africa. Then it moves on to consider ancestors and the ancestral cult in Buganda. The thesis describes the earliest accounts of the cult of ancestors in the pre-colonial period after which it looks at ancestral observances. The effects of christianity, Islam, and political independence on Baganda ancestral beliefs are discussed. The final stage of the study covers my findings from fieldwork. This includes statements from some of the informants I interviewed during fieldwork and my own conclusions regarding change and the contemporary situation.

In this study, I have reflected on the perspectives of recent academic findings in order to facilitate comprehensive descriptions, analysis, discussion and careful interpretation of the beliefs under investigation. The ability of the Baganda people to retain their traditional beliefs along with basic Christian, Muslim and modern beliefs has been described and discussed.

INTRODUCTION

This study discusses Baganda beliefs concerning the existence of the ancestors and the implications that follow from such beliefs. It discusses their beliefs in the supernatural powers ancestors are thought to have. These powers are believed to influence the lives of the immediate relatives. Writers like J.G. Frazer (1910), J. Roscoe (1911), L.P. Mair (1934), D.A. Low (1971), and several others have written a lot about the Baganda people's traditional, cultural, social, religious and political orientations. There is general agreement that many Baganda believe in the continued existence of life after death and the belief that ancestors possess the power to affect the living by ensuring fortunes and prosperity, fertility to humans and land, looking after the welfare of families and protecting their relatives against diseases and attacks from bad spirits. If the person is newly dead or if the dead person was very powerful as in the case of a king or a chief, it is believed that his spirit could have special power to influence the living people.

Although much has been written on various aspects of Baganda life, little intensive study has been carried out about beliefs in ancestors. This study attempts to fill the gaps in our knowledge of ancestor beliefs in Buganda by examining religious adaptations to social, economic and political change. It discusses the pre-colonial ancestral cult and modern beliefs about the ancestors, the perceived roles and functions of the ancestors and the significance of the ancestors and the ancestral cult.

The ancestors are the spirits of former living members of the community, that is: the family, clan and entire ethnic group. Their influence is thought to be felt on all those levels I have mentioned. There is a general belief that the spirits are thought to have certain personal wants as the living do, for example, they are believed to get hungry or thirsty, to suffer from the cold and to get angry when they are neglected. Ancestors are believed to remain in close contact with their living relatives. As regards their dwelling place, they are thought to live in the vicinity of their graves in which their bodies were buried. Hence, a clan or family's burial grounds (*Butaka*) is always treated with special respect and importance.

The Baganda

The Baganda are divided into a number of social or kinship divisions called *bika* (singular *kika*), which mean *clans*. The Baganda clans are exogamous units, which prohibit members from marrying blood relatives of the same clan. They are patriarchal, with strong emphasis on male authority stratified into both kinship and political hierarchies. In Buganda patrilineal emphasis is marked.

The clans of Buganda play an important role in the social structure of the nation. Each is a family-group which traces its origins to a common ancestor and has common totems, mostly animals, held sacred by all its members.... Each clan has its family estates, to which it acquired a prescriptive right when three or four generations of a family had been buried there: after this, not even the Kabaka disrupts its inalienable right to the land (Faupel 1965:3).

Baganda people are a group belonging to the Bantu speaking African community. From an anthropological point of view, the term Bantu embraces many ethnic groups of people who are related due to the similarity of their languages

Characteristic of their language is the universal term *muntu* (plural *Bantu*), which means person or human being (Huntingford 1963:59).

The term *Baganda* is derived from the root word: *Ganda*, which can also stand on its own as a word to refer to the people. When a prefix *ba* (singular *mu*) is added on the root to get the word *Baganda* (singular *Muganda*), it means people or a person. If the prefix *Bu* is added to the root word, the word Buganda is formed which means the nation. Likewise, when *Lu* is added to the root word, we get a new word *luganda* which means the language spoken by the Baganda. In some instances, different authors have used either *Ganda* or *Baganda* to refer to the people of Buganda. Either word is acceptable. In general, Baganda (singular *Muganda*) are the people, Buganda is the kingdom or nation, *luganda* is the language spoken, and *kiganda* is the adjective for things that are done by or belong to the Baganda. The Baganda people or the *Ganda* are the largest ethnic community in Uganda, occupying the central and southern part of the country.

Buganda started as a number of territorial distinct clans, divided into sub-clans. The Baganda originated from the Bantu clans that were already in this area hundreds of years ago, and by the 14th and the 15th centuries, Buganda had expanded by fighting and capturing the neighbouring areas (Karugire 1988:21ff). By the time the first Europeans arrived in Buganda (Speke and Burton visited Mutesa I's palace in 1862), Buganda had become a strong and big kingdom to reckon with in this great lakes region.

In the mid-nineteenth century Buganda was one of forty or fifty kingdoms of greater or lesser size which stretched from the southern shores of lake Kyoga in the north, westwards to the eastern shore of lake Albert, and then southwards across the equator, and down through the gap between lake Victoria and lakes Edward and George to the northernmost tip of lake Tanganyika (Low 1971:xiii).

According to another account given by J.F Faupel:

In the nineteenth century, Buganda, which later became one of the four provinces making up of Uganda Protectorate, was a fully independent African kingdom with a hereditary ruler known as the Kabaka (1965:1).

This study considers three stages: (i) the pre-colonial period that covers Baganda's beliefs before the advent of the missionaries and the colonial administrators; (ii) the colonial era from the early twentieth century up to independence time in 1962; (iii) The post-independence period considers how beliefs in ancestors have changed from the independence period up to the present moment. However, the usage of certain words and phrases in trying to describe particular periods should not be taken rigidly because there are beliefs which existed in pre-colonial period which are still being carried on even now. For example, I can use the word *traditionally* to describe an old custom or belief which is still working or being practised in the community at the present moment. The relevance of the word or phrase can be chiefly determined by the context where it appears.

Methodology

This thesis involves methods commonly employed in the sub-disciplines of Religious Studies, especially the history of religions (and, to a much lesser degree, procedures that belong to the social sciences). I have tried to work within a broadly phenomenological atmosphere. In the fieldwork especially, I tried to act as a careful but sensitive "participant observer". I do not think that it is possible to achieve complete "neutrality" or "objectivity", but I have tried to make a sincere effort during the writing of this thesis to suspend my own beliefs and presuppositions about my subject as far as possible.

I consulted and analysed the existing texts and literatures carefully in order to make a sincere examination about my subject.

During the fieldwork, I had the chance to participate in some of the death and funeral ceremonies and observed what was taking place. I was a careful observer during some of the proceedings and this helped me to get first hand information about what was happening on such occasions. I had to take notes from time to time of the events as I saw them happening and I found this method of note taking a very useful research tool. Moreover, I did a fair amount of reading from authors whose works on the Baganda traditional religion and cultures have been studied in the thesis.

The information I obtained from the people I interviewed helped me to corroborate some of the descriptions I had read earlier on my subject. The advantage of this method is that it combines the use of factual material such as historical facts which have been accepted as reliable (whether orally transmitted or written down), with the interpretation of entirely new material gathered during the field work (for example, the meaning and significance of certain rituals).

The fieldwork was conducted in various places in Buganda. The category of interviewees ranged from old men and women, local ordinary Baganda people to professionals like teachers, office workers, a few religious leaders and a number of

students. Being a member of the community under study (a Muganda), I had a linguistic advantage because I did not require an interpreter to assist me while carrying out my research. Some of the people I interviewed knew me personally and they were easy to extract information from. Though by the time I went to the field I had acquired a lot of information on the topic of the ancestors and the ancestral rituals, the research helped me to gather more valid and detailed information which I would have missed if I did not carry out this research.

CHAPTER ONE

Ancestors in Africa

1.1 Introduction

In various African ethnic groups, people and their ancestors are related to one another as if the dead were still alive. Many Africans believe that death does not destroy life. Life, it is believed, continues after death and some categories of departed persons become ancestors. The family line usually includes the ancestors who are believed to be generally benevolent to the family, although they can get angry if they are neglected. Offerings of beer and food can be given for their appeasement. Through such communication the relationship between the ancestors and their living relatives is maintained. It is believed that ancestors visit their descendants either directly or through other beings such as snakes. The ancestors are supposed to care for their living relatives and to avert evils from them.

Ancestors continue to take an active interest in the fortunes of their living descendants over whose behaviour they exercise a powerful control. They reward with good health and prosperity those who treat them with respect and obedience, but punish with sickness, economic loss, or some other misfortune, those who neglect or offend them (Setiloane 1976:66). Ancestral spirits are a source of supernatural powers and are believed to be anywhere, but they are thought to reside mostly in places like trees and grave yards.

1.2 Some African views of Ancestors

Common to most African communities is the belief that one becomes an ancestor only after death. Communication between ancestors and people is through rituals. Many

Africans believe in the power of the ancestors, and some can describe incidents which show this power at work. For example, there are people who have dreams in which ancestors appear to them and give them certain messages or instructions. There are ^{treatment} ~~part~~ those who claim to fall ill and when an animal is sacrificed to the ancestors, they believe they can recover from their sickness. Others believe that ancestors can mysteriously give them fortunes in their lives. Before I narrow the discussion to Baganda here are some widely held perceptions and common beliefs about ancestors which one finds over a wide range across Africa. While commenting on the general African views of ancestors, I would like to give some examples from various parts of the continent to illustrate some common features of ancestral beliefs shared by a number of communities.

Ancestors are intimate members of a family: they are part of the family and are considered and consulted on all important occasions. The ancestors can influence the fortunes only of their own descendants. A man is sure that sickness cannot befall him if he propitiates his ancestors, for they have power to ward off all misfortunes and evils. They are propitiated through offerings of food, beer and prayers.

The family ancestors are the spirits of one's grandfathers, grand mothers, fathers and mothers, uncles and aunts, brothers and sisters. One can find this significantly among the Bantu-speaking people of Eastern, Central and Southern Africa. People's lives are profoundly influenced by their ancestors, and this belief is widely spread. Sacrifices have to be made to them at regular intervals, or when a diviner deems it fit. A man's misfortunes are a reaction of his grandfather's spirit. These beliefs attributed to some African societies are most shared among the Ibo and Kulu of Nigeria.

The dead are present everywhere. People never drink or eat without pouring libation or throwing small portions of food on the ground for the ancestors. They believe there is a world of spirits where all their ancestors live a life very similar to that on earth. This idea is reflected in the rituals of Ashanti funerals. Some offer the first morsel of food to the ancestors and pour libations to them daily. Success and life revolve round the ancestral spirits. This is a popular belief among the Ashanti of

Ghana, but it is also found in other communities in Africa (Gelfand 1966:119).

When a person falls sick, his/her family or relatives should sacrifice and pray to an ancestor, although an appeal and sacrifice might be made to the Supreme being as well. The Dinka who live in Southern Sudan and some communities in West and Southern Africa take this belief seriously. A person who breaks a taboo has to be cleansed or purified by means of the medicine man who works through contact with the ancestral spirits (Gelfand 1966:122).

There is a general belief that ancestors can be benevolent and malevolent at the same time. Here let me use one valid example to throw more light on this point. Amongst the Southern Nguni there exists an attitude of ambiguity towards the ancestors. On the one hand they are revered and remembered with affection, joy, thankfulness and familiarity because they are intimately part of the family or clan; while on the other hand they seem to be feared and warded off.

The fact of the matter is that the ancestors are capricious, jealous and easily offended, and their wrath is an important explanation for misfortune (Hammond-Tooke 1974:331).

This ambivalence towards the ancestors serves specifically to regulate harmony in the social order. The power of the ancestors to punish the living encourages attempts to keep them satisfied by adhering to the customs and traditions of which the ancestors are the guardians; by ensuring that harmony prevails, right relationships are maintained, that respect and service to the authorities is observed, and that anger, jealousy and hatred are not harboured.

Generally, the attitude of the ancestors to the living is parental, protective, corrective and aimed at the welfare of the whole group. But their authority and power is significantly greater than that of the living, for they are able to observe both their actions and their secret thoughts. The ancestors serve thus as a collective conscience for the group. We may therefore state that the ancestors serve to legitimize social and moral authority and power for the sake of social order. They become idealised role

models.

The Baganda share similar features of ancestral beliefs with some of the African ethnic groups I have quoted as examples. I now present some of their general concepts of ancestors. Baganda people consider ancestors as dead relatives who continue to show an interest in their surviving descendants. The living relatives communicate to the ancestors mainly through rituals. Ancestral observance and activities are expected to establish harmony and peace between the living and the dead. Communication with the ancestors is done through traditional religious specialists like diviners and spirit mediums. The ancestors reward their descendants in return with protection, wealth, children and animals when there is healthy communication. Hence, the activities and presence of ancestors in and around a particular family are facilitated through various rituals.

All the features of ancestors I have reviewed apply to African traditional societies generally except to a few which do not accept most of the features and functions which are attributed to the ancestors. Mention here should be made at least to one society which does not subscribe to similar beliefs.

The Lugbara of Northern Uganda are some of the exceptional cases in Africa who do not fuss about ancestors. Middleton (an anthropologist who studied the Lugbara recently) found out that the dead among the Lugbara are regarded as simply senior kin, beneficent in intention, even if resenting and avenging neglect (Welbourn 1962:177). The Lugbara do not worry much about performing rituals in order to appease their ancestors. Very occasionally, they can offer them gifts of meat and beer. It seems the Lugbara do not consider the ancestral tombs as sacred objects either. They erect their ancestral shrines using stones and these are set under the food granaries and against the walls of the huts. Others are built in the bush-land and in the cattle compounds, but no restrictions are imposed or any observance of discipline while walking near the ancestral shrines. Children, chickens and goats can wander unconcernedly among them.

It is also likely to find ancestral cults less developed where there is a strong cult of gods. This is so because there is some kind of divided loyalty between the gods and the ancestors. In west Africa especially, different ethnic groups are said to have a good number of gods. The Yoruba of Nigeria are said to have 204 or 401 gods (Parrinder 1961:116). In this case, people may regard the ancestors as less important than gods and rituals may be focused on the gods instead. These gods can easily overshadow the importance of the ancestors and steal away the attention from them. A nice example of Yoruba gods is Shango (the god of lightning and thunder). This god is regarded as the principal national deity and of great importance in Yoruba religion and national ceremonies. Some people have altars for him outside their houses. On this alter they present offerings to ensure success in their work. Here we see the ancestors' position taken over by this god (Parrinder 1961:33).

Another example of a god is Amadi-Oha of the Ibo in Nigeria. The Ibo storm god Amadi-Oha is one of the most important gods in this society. Most villages have shrines dedicated to him. This god is thought to be seen in the lightning and heard in thunder. Amadi-Oha punishes sorcerers, witches, and those who break his laws. But being the rain giver, he also gives fertility. Prayers are made to him both for the increase of crops and for children in homes. Offerings are usually placed at his shrine, and fowls sacrificed (Parrinder 1961:33). In this case, the Ibo feel more indebted to their gods than to the ancestors whom they may regard to be less important. However, this does not rule out totally the role attributed to the ancestors in those societies.

To summarise what I have said about ancestor beliefs in Africa, I would say that ancestral spirits are believed to play significant roles except in a few exceptional cases where their positions are overshadowed by national gods like in some West African societies. Ancestors are believed to be so important in the spiritual world that their existence and powers should not be underestimated (Parrinder 1974:57).

1.3 Are Ancestors Venerated or Worshipped?

Scholars who write about African beliefs and ancestral spirits (like Parrinder) have discussed the issue of whether ancestors are worshipped or not. Some academics say that what most Africans do in honour of their ancestors is nothing other than an act of worshipping them. Parrinder (1954:63-64) and Mbiti (1975:69) reject this idea and instead use less strong words like: revere, venerate or pay homage. It can be grossly misleading to take the practices as ancestor worship before properly examining what exactly takes place during ancestral observance. Berglund also argues that there is nothing like worshipping the ancestors.

There is only an association, a togetherness which takes honour and respect of seniors for granted but allows for intimacy and atmosphere of mutual trust as expressed and experienced in the sharing of food (1972:28).

As will be indicated later in the presentation of my account of the Baganda beliefs (based on interviews which I conducted), ancestors are not worshipped, for they are not God. Propitiation does not necessarily imply worship, which normally involves elements of adoration, devotion and supplication of a superior power. Propitiation is understood here as an act of appeasement.

From the rituals I will describe in the chapters to come, some of which I observed personally, I would say that the ritual sacrifice and offerings to the ancestors performed by the Baganda are for their honour and remembrance. It is God who can be worshipped because He has power over both men and ancestors. The only difference between men and the ancestors is that while men are physical human beings, the ancestors are spirits and immaterial. Offerings of food and beer can be regarded as a cultural expression to specific ancestors in order to appease them, a form of communion between people and their ancestors.

There are communal gatherings which involve acts of venerating the ancestors such as the death and funerary rites. In Buganda, ceremonies and rituals that are performed during childbirth, initiation of twins, traditional marriage, death and the funerary rites

consist of dances, singing, offerings, invocations and sometimes chanting (which may mistakenly be interpreted as prayers).

In societies where ancestors are honoured, they hold the sanctions of moral behaviour. They are the guardians of the land and have the capacity to correct and bring back transgressors to the correct path. Ancestors are embedded in the descent of social organisations. When things do not happen the way they normally do, it is the ancestors who are approached or employed as explanatory devices (discussion with Professor Kiernan on the ancestors: Friday 23rd April 1996, at University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg). Therefore, ancestors have to be approached regularly with gifts of food, animals or beer. Communication with the ancestors is expressed in a number of rituals such as sacrifices, offerings, invocations and sometimes prayers.

When one considers the invocations the head of family or clan utters to the ancestors, the offerings or the sacrifices he gives to them, should one interpret the practices as acts of worship? During a communal festival, the spirit medium may kneel inside the ancestral hut while chanting invocations to the ancestors. How about the celebration that follows? Should the observer call this a kind of worship? We should look at these cases closely.

One may argue that in some societies in Africa people prostrate to chiefs or kneel before elders and their seniors. They also bring gifts to them (Parrinder 1961:125). However, to give the king gifts or offerings may in one way be like "bribing" rather than worshipping him so that in return he acts favourably towards the givers of the gifts. So, when similar acts are done to the ancestors they can be interpreted as signs of great respect or rather "*bribery*" than acts of worship. [bribery here should be understood as an act of exchange].

To use Parrinder's argument in support of the idea that ancestors are not worshipped:

Because people are closer to their ancestors than to the Supreme being and rarely come into contact with Him, they may address their prayers to Him through the ancestors who can serve as mediators (1954:63).

However, the problem here is to prove whether in pre-colonial Africa the question of mediation was really an issue at all. Though many ethnic groups in Africa had a concept of a Supreme Being, they never developed the relationship with this being. The Supreme being to them, was conceived to be responsible for the workings of nature but they rarely came into contact with him. There is a controversial scholarly debate about the extent to which African Traditional religions include belief in "God" (God understood here as a Supreme Being), as distinct from the minor gods and spirits. I am not going to spend a lot of time on this controversy but let me try to discuss briefly some views that have been raised by some scholars.

Scholars like Jim Kiernan (1995:25&26) argue that the Bantu speaking people had no concept of God before the arrival of the European missionaries. In his argument he refers to the Zulu and Swazi people. He argues that the claims that the Bantu people recognised the existence of a supreme Being (a Creator God) before the coming of the European missionaries are mere myths which have been preserved for generations. Nevertheless, he takes seriously the beliefs in ancestors which are widely spread among the Bantu speaking people.

On the other hand Mbiti in his book: *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970) argues that from time immemorial Africans have had a concept of God. The Supreme Being in Africa was an ultimate spiritual Being beyond time, space or human control whether there was no direct communication between Him and the people. People like the Baganda often addressed this Supreme being as *Liiso Ddene* (the big Eye), *Ssebintu* (Master of all things), *Katonda* (Creator, and Master of life), and gave Him several other names which showed His transcendent nature. Though these attributes are similar with those of the monotheists' God, this does not mean that these attributes were brought in by the missionaries. As I am going to discuss in the next chapter, the beliefs of the Baganda include: belief in God, the divinities, ancestors, and other spiritual beings such as the nature spirits (*misambwa*).

As I have mentioned, this question of the Supreme Being is a controversial issue in traditional Africa. As a scholar, I would prefer the theory that in the olden days there was no need of mediation. What people believed was that their ancestors were always close and helpful to them. The important issue is that, from time immemorial the African people have always been solely concerned with life and how to protect and ensure its continuity. Hence, if they believed that their ancestors were capable enough to help them, then they turned to them for help. What they strongly believed was that the ancestors had powers, stronger than theirs. The primary objective was how they related to the ancestors and what they thought the ancestors were capable of giving them (Parrinder 1954:64).

Mbiti also thinks that the ancestors are not worshipped. He says:

Although African people use these intermediaries in performing some of their acts of worship, they do not worship the intermediaries themselves as such. They simply use them as conveyor belts, as helpers or assistants (1975:69).

Ancestral activities involve sacrifices, offerings, prayers, constructing ancestral huts and observing discipline at ancestral burial grounds. Here, one may be tempted to classify everything as acts of worship. Hammond Tooke shares this opinion. He suggests that ancestral rituals represent a sustained and concentrated interaction with the presence of spiritual beings. Though some rituals are for showing respect or honour to the ancestors, others such as the rituals of thanksgiving are meant to invoke the ancestors to be present at a ceremony or a communal meal. The activities that follow have all the characteristic of an act of worship (1974:331ff). However, the term worship is considered in this case very inappropriate. Worship suits well with Christian religions and it refers to acts performed to God, such as prayers. Even if some people argue that in African traditional religion people never debated whether ancestors were gods or could be prayed to or not, as a student I think it is worth to discuss the topic as a continuing debate within Religious Studies. The term ancestor veneration is a more accurate term than ancestor worship. A family may have its chain of ancestors and those may not have any meaning to the people living next to that home. Clan ancestors are beneficial to a particular clan only but not others and

the national or tribal ancestors cannot operate outside their national boundaries. Scholars should do further profound research on many other aspects of ancestral rituals so as to ascertain whether those acts can be termed worship or veneration.

1.4 Conclusion

Having discussed most of the ancestral features common to African ethnic groups generally, I should now turn to the Baganda beliefs. The Baganda do agree with most of the beliefs and features which are attributed to other African societies about the ancestors. The idea in this chapter has been to highlight the main beliefs which I am going to discuss throughout the study. In the next chapter I am going to consider the Baganda ancestor beliefs beginning with the "pre-colonial" cult of ancestors.

CHAPTER TWO

The Ancestral Spirits: Hierarchy and Supernatural Powers

2.1 Introduction

I have talked about the African view of ancestors where people belonging to different ethnic groups believe that they and their ancestors are related to one another. The family line includes the ancestors who are taken to be its guardians. In Buganda, religious beliefs of people are systematically set out, beginning with the Supreme being, followed in descending order by the lesser spirits. Lesser spirits include minor gods, ancestral and nature spirits. Finally there are religious specialists such as diviners and spirit mediums (who act as intermediaries between the domain of spirits and the people). Mbiti in his works: *Introduction to African Religion* (1975), *Concepts of God in Africa* (1970), *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969), *The Prayers of African Religion* (1975), etc., prefers to call ancestors the *living dead* or *departed elders*.

In this chapter, I am going to explain that most Baganda believe in the existence of the ancestors. The Baganda also believe in the existence and profound activities of other spiritual beings. There is a hierarchy in the spiritual world which may appear as follows: the Supreme being, deities or national gods, ancestral spirits (including the spirits of some of mythological figures) and other spirits commonly known as nature or ordinary spirits (Mbiti 1989:74).

2.2 Categories of Spirits in Baganda Beliefs

In pre-colonial Buganda there was a concept of a Supreme Being who was conceived to be in the form of a spirit. Several names were attributed to Him. Names like

Katonda (Creator), Lugaba (Giver), Ddunda (Pastor), Ssebintu (Master of all things), Liisoddene (the Great or big Eye), and others were used to address Him. This indicates that, in their traditional religious thought the Baganda recognized at an early period the existence of a Supreme Being who was beyond their comprehension. Alois M. Lugira mentions that people in Uganda traditionally believed in a Supreme being and they referred to this Being as "*Katonda*". Besides, there were numerous spiritual beings both of nature and those of the departed who were believed to play vital roles in people's lives (1979:16). Though the concept of a Supreme Being existed in the Baganda's old thinking, it was not highly developed in their traditional religion. He was considered to be a distant figure with whom daily contact was not possible. Hence, his position was taken over by minor gods and the ancestors whom people thought were very near to them and available all the time to assist them. Since my study is not about the Supreme being or the minor gods, I should not talk much about them. My study looks at Baganda's beliefs in ancestors only.

There are various categories of spirits which I would like to hint on before I discuss the beliefs in ancestors in detail. The Baganda consider spirits in different categories. The Supreme comes first. The second group includes the gods or deities (*balubaale*). *Balubaale* (*lubaale* in singular) were spirits of people who were once leaders, heroes, warriors, clan founders and other outstanding men and women who were highly respected and honoured by the clan, community or the entire Buganda nation. According to Welbourn:

It seems these were a mixture of historical and mythological figures, together with personifications of major natural phenomena and objects and of human activities (1962:171).

When these personalities died, they were elevated and people called them national deities. They played distinctive roles in their societies and were believed to possess supernatural powers while they were alive, to help people in various ways such as saving them from wars, or bringing them rains during droughts and giving the land and women fertility. The best example of such national heroes who were once human beings were Kibuuka and his brother Mukasa. According to oral tradition, it happened

at one time in history that Buganda was at war with Bunyoro, a neighbouring nation. A *lubaale* (singular) by the name of Wannema had two sons; one called Mukasa and another Kibuuka. Knowing the fame of Kibuuka in warfare, king Nnakibinge asked Wannema to send his son Kibuuka to assist him in the war. Since Kibuuka's fighting skills were inexplicable by normal standards, he was taken to be super-human, believed to have come from *Olubaale* or sky. He was elevated and became the patron of wars. His young brother Mukasa, on the other hand was believed to have been exceptionally intelligent. The Baganda believed that he would forecast the rainfall, diagnose infertile women and help them to get children. He was then constituted the deity of fecundity and the lakes/seas. It is important to note here that *balubaale* are a combination of mythological figures and deified heroes who, loosely could be called gods or deities. The *balubaale* were taken to be more important than the ancestors in the pre-colonial period. This was believed to be the case because the Baganda in their early battles against neighbouring ethnic groups like the Banyoro, could seek help from their localised ancestors. But where such desired help was inadequate for Buganda's future protection, the rulers began to "build up" a new cult known as the "Lubaale". This spirit worship of the "Balubaale" seems to have survived for more than two hundred years (Thomas 1950:205-206). With the introduction of Christianity in Uganda in the mid 1880s, the influence of the *balubaale* was greatly diminished. In my study, the mythological figures and national heroes I am interested in are those who are ancestral in nature.

In the third category are *mizimu* or *ancestral spirits*, or the *living dead*. These are connected to human families and are believed to dwell around homesteads of their descendants.

Baganda venerated the spirits of their ancestors. These beliefs seem to have been brought to Buganda from the North by Kintu, the Father of the Baganda, and his followers, probably about the fifteenth century (FaupeL 1965:3).

The Baganda have myths that talk about Kintu, the founding hero of the Buganda nation and therefore greatest ancestor. The biggest problem here is to try to disentangle the type of mythological figures and national heroes who are ancestral in

nature from the others who are not. There is of course an overlap between what most people have classified as *mizimu* or ancestral spirits and the mythological figures and national heroes. There are claims in oral traditions that deified heroes and mythological figures may be regarded as *distant ancestors* who have distanced themselves away from the nearer and more recently departed elders. Since most people are mainly concerned with those ancestors whom they believe to interfere in their own lives and with whom they can interact, the *distant ancestors* are not as important to them.

There is also a problem in the usage of the term *lubaale*. In Buganda, someone who is believed to be possessed by an ancestral spirit can be described as, "*aliko lubaale*" (one under the influence of the ancestral spirit). People can then mention whose *lubaale* (spirit) has possessed its host. Here we find that the term is not completely restricted to the deities or gods but can also apply to the ancestral spirits in some situations. Therefore, when I use the term *lubaale* it means that I am referring to an ancestral spirit.

The fourth group comprises the *misambwa* or nature spirits (these are sometimes called "*ghosts*" but I shall not emphasise the terminology). *Misambwa* have no immediate family ties. They are associated with natural objects like rocks, streams, trees and animals. They require objects through which to manifest and reveal themselves. They are usually confined to lineage or kinship groups and localities in their activities. In some villages people talk of a certain well, tree, river or hill belonging to a *musambwa*. They are feared and thought to be ubiquitous. Some spirits are clan "*property*", or the "*property*" of a given region (Mbiti 1989:86). An extraordinarily big tree or rock in one of the *butaka* clan estates is usually taken to be their property. I will explain later what *butaka* burial grounds mean. Such items are feared and people keep a distance away from them.

Another type of spirit is known as *Mayembe*. *Mayembe* literally means horns of animals. These are objects, chiefly horns of wild animals, used by diviners (or *abalaguzi*) and medicine-men in their activities, which are believed to work when a

kind of nature spirits are called by the owners of the *mayembe*. Spirits alone are not *mayembe*, and neither the horns alone can be effective without the spirits. It has to be a combination of both in order to produce the *mayembe*. Usually, *mayembe* are given personal names, which are called or sung when the diviners call the spirits. *Mayembe* are employed in divinations, diagnosing and healing rites, tracing lost property, preventing attack by magic or by other *mayembe* from an enemy. Others are hired to haunt, kill or bewitch enemies and offenders such as those who love other people's wives or bad debtors (Mbiti 1989:87). However it is not clear what kind of spirits combine to make *mayembe*, but what people believe is that the combination does not involve the *ancestral spirits*. If we pursue the hierarchical consideration here, we can find that the Baganda's spiritual world is wide. The next stage is going to describe and discuss the beliefs in *ancestral spirits* and the *ancestral hierarchy*.

Having described the various categories of spirits, I should say something further about the Baganda's spirit beliefs. Traditional Baganda have a mode of thought and behaviour based on the belief that spirits of the dead and other spirits interact and sometimes communicate with the living people. The interaction and communication take place through dreams, illness and unusual events which reveal the presence of a spirit. I will discuss this point in the next chapter. When the spirits disturb the living, a diviner or spirit medium can be consulted to solve the problem and if appropriate, directly contact the spirits concerned. These traditional religious specialists are very important as far as people's transactions with the ancestors are concerned. A diviner is someone who is believed to be able to foretell the future by reading the signs of nature or studying certain objects such as stones, bones or any other objects. People believe that diviners operate when they are under the influence of ancestral spirits. Close to them are the spirit mediums. A spirit medium is believed to have special powers to link the world of the dead with the world of the living. Sometimes, spirit mediums get possessed by the spirits of dead persons with whom contact is desired. However, since the main focus of this study is on beliefs in ancestors, I shall not dwell much on the traditional religious personalities. This chapter aims at concentrating on ancestral spirits and hierarchy.

2.3 The Ancestral Spirits

As understood by contemporary Baganda, ancestral spirits or ancestors are the departed ones who are believed to be still living but in a spirit form and are believed to be living in the spirit world. The spirit world can be found on this physical earth and under the graves where the bodies of ancestors dwell. In their graves, according to Lan (1985:31), the deceased continue to care for their descendants.

Death is like a weir in a river. For a while the flow of life is held up. The current eddies round and round and streams back on itself as the processes of dying and burial get under way (Lan 1985:31)

Ancestors are remembered by their descendants such as relatives, clansmen and the whole tribe. They include mythological founders like Kintu who is believed to have founded the tribe, some tribal heroes who were once ordinary human beings but because of their heroic acts while they were still alive, were elevated to a higher status than that of ordinary persons, some clan and family dead relatives.

In Buganda, society is fairly stratified and there are royal, national, clan and family ancestors. The Baganda believe in an ancestral hierarchy because each category is considered to have a different office and a different function to play in the community. On the whole ancestors are associated with human activities and experiences.

Africans who have not adopted the Christian or Mohammedan faith believe in, and pray to their spirit elders or relatives. From all parts of Bantu and Negro speaking Africa the evidence supports the fact that a traditional African prays to his ancestors when he is faced with a problem which concerns him or his family (Gelfand 1966: 115).

Nonetheless, it is not only those people who have not embraced Christianity or Islam or any other missionary religion that believe in the ancestors. In Buganda even some believers of those faiths can sometimes seek the assistance of their departed elders. As I will explain in later chapters, some Christians or Muslims remain faithful and committed to their ancestral cults because of what they experience in their day to day

lives. They believe that, although God is there, He is not as close to them as their ancestors. When they are confronted with problems which their religions cannot address immediately, they turn to the ancestors as a solution.

Ancestral spirits may appear in legends, myths, folk-stories (*engerö*).

Others are spoken about in normal conversations among some people, and some possess people or appear to them in visions and dreams or even in the open (Mbiti 1991:75).

The Baganda believe that there are many spirits which possess people and make their demands known. If a person refuses to be a host of an ancestral spirit, the spirit (*lubaale*) may bring him misfortunes such as sickness, sterility or loss of agricultural crop etc., until s/he yields. The ancestors may also possess a person making him their mouthpiece or medium (Mbiti 1975:266)

There is a belief that the ancestors can get angry and can express their anger by inflicting diseases or death upon people. The spirits of the ancestors are believed to dwell in the vicinity of the graves in which their physical bodies lay buried and the lower jaw-bone (*oluwanga*) of the dead person is regarded as the special portion of the body to which the spirit was attached. Once this is taken away, the spirit would follow it where ever it would be kept, and would be quite satisfied to remain with the jaw-bone (Roscoe 1965:283). That is why the Buganda kings had special shrines dedicated for their jaw bones. The Baganda also believe that the ancestors demand from relatives a decent handling of their bodies during burial. I will discuss this in detail when I come to the death ceremonies and burial rites in Buganda.

If one is neglected during her/his illness while s/he is alive or if her/his relatives fail to carry out the mortuary rites properly by neglecting and leaving her/his graves to be overgrown with weeds, her/his spirit can attack and haunt them (Mair 1934:224).

People believe that the ancestors have an increased power which can influence the welfare of the living, namely, the relatives. It is thought that the spirits of the

ancestors can be both benevolent and malevolent. The majority of the spirits of the departed elders have always been regarded as beneficent and are believed to assist members of their families or clans by protecting them from witches and sorcerers, giving them prosperity and ensuring that their welfare is well looked after. People occasionally invoke the spirits of their departed relatives for help. There is a belief that the ancestors may visit their living relatives in different forms. As Kyewalyanga (a Muganda scholar) points out:

It was assumed that the spirits of the dead occasionally visited the living and appeared to them in a variety of ways. They normally appeared to the living, it was thought, in the form of dreams or as human beings or in the form of monstrosity or as animals (1976:107).

People often describe incidents where ancestors appear to them in the form of a dream. This appears to be acceptable and reasonable, because we sometimes dream about people who are miles away from us and whom we have spent years without seeing and during the course of the dream, we can "*see the real person*". Sometimes people dream about dead relatives or friends whose picture is still flesh in their mind. fresh Therefore, when people claim to be visited by their ancestors in this form, their claims may be taken as reasonable. But how about the claim that through such an encounter, the ancestor can give instructions to their relatives to do what they want? In traditional Buganda, it was widely believed that ancestors would appear to their people and deliver warnings or instructions to them and from such messages, people would execute certain duties on their behalf.

2.4 Hierarchy and Power of Ancestors

The Baganda believe in the existence of a spiritual realm in this world, an invisible realm inhabited by invisible beings. Among these invisible beings are the ancestral spirits. The ancestral hierarchy runs as follows: the royal, clan and family ancestral spirits. It will be useful to explore this hierarchy in more details, and to do this I now turn to the categories of the Baganda ancestors.

2.4.1 Kintu The Primordial Ancestor

According to Baganda mythology, Kintu is believed to be the father of every Muganda. All the kings of Buganda are said to have descended from him through a male line. Around him grew up all the rituals and ceremonies of royalty. He was regarded as a semi-divine being but not as a "god". Some authors through informants have written about Kintu, the great ancestor of the Baganda, thus:

Kintu is both the primal ancestor of the Baganda and the founder of the kingship.... As a primordial ancestor, Kintu is the subject of a story (*lugero*) that tells how he became the progenitor of the Baganda and the guarantor of their life on earth. As the founder of the monarchy, Kintu is the subject of historical narratives (*byafaayo*) that tell how he entered Buganda, established the kingship, and organized the clans (Ray 1991:54).

This legend about Kintu is widely popular in Buganda and many people believe in it though there is no tangible evidence to authenticate it. Some of the Baganda Ray interviewed argued that Kintu was a foreigner whose origins lay outside Buganda. However, others insisted that Kintu was not only an indigenous Muganda, but also a member of some clans. What Ray confirms is that, at least most Baganda recognise the idea that they descended from Kintu.

Here, Kintu is portrayed through myth as the royal founder, who ensured the collective survival of the Baganda through generations. Kintu is the focus of the dynastic traditions about the origins of the kingship. Though some oral tradition sources represent him as a foreign clan leader who entered Buganda and established the kingship by killing the indigenous ruler, his leadership is not disputed at all (Ray 1991:53). He is the founder of the Baganda clans and the one who gave those clans their totems. Ray, who researched recently on the Baganda kingship, Kintu the founding hero of the nation and the myths surrounding his origins and disappearance, records:

Kintu expressed the dual foundations of the state; the patrilineal clan system and the institution of kingship (1991:53).

This point affirms Kintu's role as a royal founder. A number of kings who came after him were considered to be his direct descendants. Whether these narratives are mythical and legendary, they are considered as true in the Baganda's oral history, as they relate to what is believed to have happened.

2.4.2 The Royal Ancestors

In traditional (pre-missionary/colonial) Buganda, early rulers had a sense of hierarchical organization noticeable in the structure of their administrative officials. The royal household and its surroundings were usually looked after by chiefs of varying degrees of importance. Even after a king's death, this hierarchical organization would be followed during the funerary rites. I will discuss this point when I come to the themes of death, burial and funerary ceremonies of a king. However:

The administrative system did not acquire its permanent feature until Buganda's period of greatest territorial expansion which was during the 17th and the 18th centuries (Karugire 1980:21ff).

Kingship and beliefs in the *royal ancestors* played and to an extent still play a significant part in the Baganda's political and religious life. Through an association with large social and political units, the royal ancestors were taken to be more important than the family ones which remain close to individual families with no attachments to larger social organizations.

Royal ancestors were strongly believed to be the custodians of the tribal laws and customs in Buganda. Parrinder on the kingship in Buganda observed that the kingship was looked upon as so important that all the country was the king's possession and conversely the welfare of the king was believed to be vital to the people. Though he could delegate administrative powers to his officials, he was the final arbiter of law and leadership (1962:59). To be without a king was regarded as disastrous. The king in Buganda was taken to be the father of all the people under his kingship. He was

supposed to exercise both political and religious duties.

If one analyses properly the kind of ceremonies and rituals that surrounded the previous kings of Buganda in a traditional way, and the functions which they presided over, s/he can undeniably agree that the king really was conceived as both a political and religious leader.

In traditional Buganda, when a reigning king died, people believed that he would assume similar social and political roles as those of a living king. The dead king was considered to be both an ancestor and at the same time a king, *Ssekabaka*, as if he was still a living ruler. However, this reference would blur the distinction between the living and the dead. The dead kings were considered both as spirits (*mizimu*) and kings (*Bassekabaka*) because people believed that they continued to be involved in the political life of the kingship both as ancestors and as kings (Ray 1991:151). The *Bassekabaka* were believed by some Baganda to give people what they wanted and requested.

Every royal burial ground in Buganda was treated as sacred. For example, if one gets a chance of visiting the royal Kasubi tombs (*Masiro*) near Kampala city, s/he can observe this atmosphere. The royal tombs accommodate a number of past dead kings of Buganda. Upon entering the *Masiro* at Kasubi, one first sees the *sacred domain* within. No one is allowed to enter the *Masiro* with shoes because the tombs are taken as sacred. In the dimly lit interior, a barrier of spears, shields, and royal drums stand at the centre in front of a large barkcloth curtain. The most remarkable thing is that the long barkcloth curtain which stretches from side to side conceals what is called the *forest*. It is beyond the curtain that the spirits of the dead kings are thought to dwell. Strictly, no one is allowed to go beyond this barrier.

It is called the *forest* because according to the old Baganda's myths, king Kintu is believed to have mysteriously disappeared into a forest near his palace after establishing the kingdom of Buganda. This later became the symbolism of part of the royal ideology that the kings of Buganda never died in the same way ordinary people

died, but they simply disappeared into the forest's sanctuaries of the royal tombs. Like Kintu, all the deceased kings of Buganda are believed not to have died but rather, they went into the forest represented by a wide barkcloth curtain inside the royal tombs (Ray 1991:42).

The Royal ancestors in Buganda are remembered for more generations than the ordinary family ancestors. That is why it is possible to find people with a vivid memory of a succession of Buganda kings right up to Kintu, the founder of the kingship (the dynastic genealogy and chronology of Buganda are given in Appendix 2). The idea that royal ancestors are remembered for a long time can be supported by what Kiernan mentions:

Royal ancestors, the progenitors of chiefs and monarchs, are remembered longer, over ten or more generations, but neither the span nor intensity of their influence is much affected by genealogical regression, because a single line of succession is being preserved rather than a whole web of genealogical connections (1995:21).

Ray seems to agree with the narrative that Kintu might have disappeared into a forest. But he argues that it was out of shame after Kintu had inadvertently killed his *Katikkiro* or prime minister that he decided to disappear. His son Chwa Nabakka I also disappeared some years later while searching for his father. However, according to Ray, many later kings are said to have been murdered by rebellious princes or killed by some supernatural powers rather than disappearing into the *forest* (Ray 1991:42). Then this fact seems to challenge the view that the kings of Buganda never died the kind of death ordinary people die. At Kasubi royal tombs four bodies of Baganda kings: Mutesa I, Mwanga II, Chwa II, and Mutesa II are buried. At least every surviving Muganda knows that those previous kings of Buganda died from natural causes and were physically buried. They did not just disappear as Kintu is believed to have done. On the other hand, we should not forget that the *forest* inside the royal tomb is symbolically used. Taking this interpretation as correct, we should therefore try to understand the *disappearance* as a metaphor.

2.4.3 Family Ancestors

Family ancestors are always near their descendants even though they are invisible. They are thought to watch over their descendants' households and are taken to be benevolent. Before the introduction of Christianity in Uganda in 1877 (Faupel 1965:13), each home in Buganda nearly had an *ancestral hut* for the family ancestors where offerings of food and beer would be placed. Some homes still have them but since the majority of the Baganda have been converted to Christianity, Islam and other missionary religions, their numbers have decreased in a wide area. In some homes, there are ancestral baskets or bags made from barkclothes (*ensawo za baJjajja*) where money offerings and dried coffee (*ebigali*) are put for the family ancestors in order to seek their protection and help. In some areas, family ancestral spirits have to be ceremonially moved when the family is shifting to a new place. This ensures that the spirits of the ancestors move with the members of their human relatives. These are directly connected to individual families and are thought to dwell around the homesteads.

Many elderly people believe that a favourite place of the spirits is among the trees and plantains in the gardens where they make sport, especially at noon when the sun is hot. On this account children are warned against going out to play in the gardens during the heat of the day. Even adults fear getting closer at this time, unless they are obliged to do so. But with the increasing search for survival and earning a livelihood, this fear is dwindling as people work all the time of the day. The belief is still surviving mainly in remote villages where there are fewer economic activities and where some people's work is chiefly restricted to subsistence needs. When Roscoe carried out his research in various villages in Buganda, he recorded in his findings thus:

When the wind blew softly and murmured in the leaves of the trees, the ghosts were said to be talking to one another and when a whirlwind occurred and carried up the dust and the leaves, the ghosts were said to be at play (1965:179).

Elderly people in Buganda hold that the spirits of the family ancestors dwell where their bodies are buried and there is a traditional custom which has survived for ages which collaborates this belief. It is customary and common practice for members of an extended family or to a wider extent, members of a clan, to meet once in a year or two years in order to pay homage to their dead ancestors. During the family gathering, the weeds that have grown over the graves are cleared and the family graves are put back to order when the disappearing marks on the graves are replaced. The most important thing is that the rite is usually done by the immediate descendants of the dead ancestor or ancestors. Even if one household is rich enough to afford the services of hired labour to do the job, it is not acceptable to use outsiders. The implication is that the family ancestors feel happy in their spirit world when they are shown care and affection by their real relatives. The physical presence of the living relatives and their participation in the event is very significant in this ritual.

It is believed that when the ancestors are shown such concern, they in return respond by giving protection to their relatives by helping them in their daily needs. The hostility of the spirit of a close relative could be due to the extent of maltreatment which s/he might have suffered while still alive. The worst of all spirits is considered to be the man's sisters' spirits. According to Roscoe:

The ghosts of a man's sisters were thought to be troublesome, their malice venting itself more especially on his children (1965:286).

This could sometimes happen when family members neglected their sick relative. As Mair reports:

Neglect of a person during her/his last illness was almost certain to be resented by his/her spirit (1934:205).

Nevertheless, a diviner (*Omulaguzi*), or a medicine man could calm down the situation by showing the people in a family the victim of the ancestral anger and how to appease the spirit. Contrary to this, the spirits of the parents such as the paternal grandparents, maternal grandmothers and sometimes paternal grandfathers, are not always violent to their relatives. They are believed to return to their families to

correct one of the members who strays from the path of morality and virtue. All categories of ancestors can get annoyed, especially if the relatives fail to appoint or install an heir or heiress especially the heiress to a man's dead sister.

If the man neglected to appoint some girl to be heiress at the time of his sister's death, her ghost would cause his children to fall ill, and would sometimes even kill them, unless he speedily removed the occasion for the illness (Roscoe 1965:287).

The reason given to anger the paternal aunt's spirit is that the brother fails to appoint one of his daughters as heir to the dead sister. It is believed that whenever the children are troubled by the spirit of their dead paternal aunt (*Ssengawabwe*), it has to be appeased and if that is not possible, it can be calmed by a medicine-man who would "*capture*" it (capture is used here as a metaphor) and secure it in a gourd or a pot, and take it away to a piece of waste land or drown it in a river (Roscoe 1911:102). The spirit of the paternal aunt is very much feared. People refer to it as a peculiarly authoritarian and oppressive figure, usually very troublesome.

Due to the general belief that the ancestors can suffer the effects of the cold or feel thirst, each ancestral hut has its fireplace, a supply of firewood and layers of barkclothes to keep out the cold. Beer is usually poured out on the ground for the ancestors at the entrance of the hut and a pot or gourd of beer often placed inside for their use. Certain animals such as cows, goats, sheep and to some extent, fowls are dedicated to the family ancestors for their appeasement. The animal or bird is known as the *beast of ancestors* (*mponge*). It is still possible to find some families in the rural areas still keeping such animals even today. In such a family, a healthy goat, or sheep or even a cow can be dedicated to the ancestors and this animal is usually kept alive until it dies of old age. No animal dedicated to the ancestors might be killed or sold for meat. As a traditional religious custom such animals should be left to roam about in the vicinity of the ancestral shrine.

It is believed that the animals used for appeasing the ancestors usually look healthier than the ordinary domesticated animals because of the extra care given to them. The colours of the skin of the animal must be those reflecting purity and sacredness

otherwise the animal will not be accepted by the ancestors. Here colour symbolism plays a very important religious function. Usually, a completely white or black animal is preferred for example, a black he-goat, a white sheep, a cow with white and black patches or a cock with spots on its feathers. Here, white signifies purity and cleanness. This practice of dedicating animals or birds, known as *okuwongera lubaale* is much condemned by the Christian preachers and since many Baganda have been converted either to Christianity or Islam, the practice is disappearing slowly.

2.5 The idea of Partial Re-incarnation and the Naming ceremonies

As I have discussed, it is thought that the health of the family depends on the support of the ancestors. Furthermore, the fertility of the family seems to be of interest to the ancestors, for people consider them to be the elders and as departed elders of a family; the ancestors would also seek a rebirth into the same family. Childlessness sometimes is ascribed to the anger of an ancestor and barren women occasionally appeal to the ancestors for children by humbly invoking them. Some Baganda hold a view that the dead sometimes are re-born. However, what they mean is a kind of *partial re-incarnation*, since it is only certain characteristics or physical distinctions of a dead relative which may be noticed in a newly born child. *Partial re-incarnation*, a term coined by Mbiti, implies here that when children arrive with some characteristics of their forefathers, it may be taken to mean that the dead have been re-born and were now manifesting themselves in the newly born.

When a child is born with certain characteristics like those of the departed relative, people may say that s/he have come back, returned or have been re-born.

Spirits of the dead return to their families in a welcome manner "through the birth of a baby which is regarded as a partial form of reincarnation". The spirit is told; "there are babies about to be born, choose for thyself one of them", and it is enjoined to make its return to human society that way (Mbiti 1975:102).

Hence the idea of giving newly born children names of the dead relatives to affirm this claim. What we see here can be described as an idea of partial reincarnation because it is not the entire person who is reborn but only some of her/his previous physical distinctions and characteristics that are noticed in the child.

It is always important in a family to name a newly born child after the great ancestors. When an ancestral name is given to a child, the relatives keep the ancestor's memory alive. The naming of children after their dead relatives is a sign of remembrance to them, especially if their features or characteristics have been inherited by the children. In the family or clan naming ceremony:

The continuing concern of the ancestors for their lineage is shown by the selection of one of the paternal ancestors to be the special guardian of the child (Welbourn 1962:176).

Traditionally, the family naming ceremonies used to be a very important social and religious function. Each clan has a group of names by which one of its members was named and such names were usually derived from the names of the dead forefathers. The giving of children the clan forefathers' names continues even today though the traditional naming ceremonies are rarely held in a traditional way.

According to custom, although the newly born child became a member of her/his father's clan at birth, s/he was not formally recognised as such until the naming ceremony (*okwaalula abaana*) had been performed and her/his clan name given to her/him. This would take place after the child had been weaned. This ceremony would be performed when there were children of both sexes and more than one father present. Since no person who had not gone through it could attend the funeral rites of a member of a clan, the death of a near relative was often an occasion for the hurried naming of some children in the extended family.

The ceremony could be performed in the homestead of the oldest brother who had a child to be named. Parents and the children could assemble and the mothers were supposed to come along with the umbilical cords of their children which had been

preserved since the birth of the children. The rite would begin with a communal meal served by the women of the father's clan. Then, the mothers would sit down in a row outside the houses, each with her child seated naked on her thighs, and each husband standing opposite his wife. A container with a mixture of water and local beer would be brought and placed on a new barkcloth. The grandmother then would throw the umbilical cords into the mixture. The legitimacy of each child to the family could be proved if its cord floated, or if it pointed towards the father.

After this test, cries of joy would break out amid which the senior clan head present would proclaim the child to be a true member of the clan, enumerating several of the family direct ancestors and the original heads of the clan. There was a belief that if the child going through this test process was illegitimate, s/he would die immediately. Many people believed that on such occasions the living would interact with the dead family members in a free and friendly atmosphere. Sometimes, that would be the time for those favoured by the ancestors to get possessed by their spirits.

The naming ceremony started to be disregarded with the coming of the European missionaries and families whose members got converted to Christianity gradually abandoned the ritual. Christian teaching condemned the function right from the start because of the beliefs in the supernatural causes of death which it involved. Children started to receive Christian names at baptism and the names of the clan could be conferred on a child immediately after birth by one of the senior member of the family, especially the paternal aunt (*Ssenga*), without any future arrangements to hold and make the child go through the elaborate traditional naming ceremony.

2.6 Ancestral possession and exorcism

One of the ways the ancestral spirits are believed to make their demands known to their people is through possession. Both men and women get possessed and each time such an experience occurs, it means that the ancestors have an important message to impart to their living relatives. The form which this possession takes is usually a

wasting sickness, or a mild form of insanity; in which case, a traditional healer should be consulted to exorcise the spirit (Roscoe 1965:288). This belief was stronger in the past than it is today.

Much as the ancestors are remembered and honoured with joy and thankfulness, they are sometimes feared and kept at a distance. The reason given here is that, some are considered to be good and others troublesome, and even those which are believed to be benevolent can sometimes get annoyed and strike on their relatives without warning.

Family ancestors may punish their relatives for neglecting them while they were still alive. There are some serious cases when the ancestral spirit becomes hostile to its people. Sometimes it is thought that such a spirit may be of a dead relative who was troublesome when he was still alive. It may also be a spirit of a relative who was murdered by one of the family relatives and the angered spirit, ever restless, can decide to make its appearance by attacking one of the offspring of the guilty family. In this case, the ancestral spirits would continue causing this person trouble until the animals or fowls had been replaced (Frazer 1910:287). I will discuss the ancestral rituals later in the course of this study.

It can be argued that the power of the ancestors to punish the living encourages law and order in a given community because people tend to keep their ancestors satisfied by adhering to the laws and customs of the land. By doing this, harmony and peace prevails and good relationships maintained between people living in the same community, and between people and their ancestors. Adding to this point:

By their attacks and interventions, people come to obey their ancestors and so the social order is maintained. (Parrinder 1962:59).

The Baganda show enormous intimacy to the ancestors. Right from the time when someone falls sick, dies and is buried, there is always much care and attention for the sick person, an elaborate funeral ceremony for the deceased and later the observance of discipline during the mourning period especially of an adult dead person and the

installation of the heir to succeed the deceased. The graves are a constant reminder of how close the ancestors are to their living relatives. The *Mutaka* (Head of clan) knows as a matter of course, his paternal ancestors back to the founder of the clan itself.

2.7 Does everyone become an Ancestor in Buganda when s/he dies?

It is worth noting that traditionally, not everybody in Buganda was considered to become an ancestor when s/he died. "*Ancestorship*" was not automatic to everybody and it could vary in the value placed upon it. It seems that the dead could only be honoured by the living if they had ended their lives in conformity with the rules of society. It was the living relatives who conferred it and ultimately depended on their continued willingness to honour it. Using Jim Kiernan's explanation to support what I am saying:

In the first instance, it is granted only to those who during their lifetime represented some span of authority and responsibility towards subordinates, for example heads of families, lineages or clan heads and royalty (1995:20).

In other words, the relevance of the *ancestors* was a function of their social position while still alive.

National heroes, because of their heroic acts, became ancestors when they died. Burial and funeral rituals of elderly men were organised by their living relatives in order to make them gradually give up living responsibilities and play their part as ancestors. In most African communities, it was believed that the old people (those with grey hair), knew very well the secrets regarding the laws and customs of the land. Like ancestors, they too were guardians of the land and when they died, because of their social status, they were supposed to receive special powers which were necessary in supporting their living relatives. Spirits of adults were believed to have the necessary amount of power to be able to interfere regularly and significantly in the lives of other people and their families (Bjerke 1981:77).

Unmarried men and women, boys, girls, children and the childless would be eliminated from becoming ancestors. Their spirits were regarded as powerless and could not influence people. In pre-colonial Buganda, women were regarded to be of no public importance. Therefore, their spirits were taken to be powerless. Only spirits who had "power" could maintain an interaction with the living and this would be determined by the social status they held while they were still alive.

Thus children of both sexes below the age of marriage have insufficient power to interfere for good or bad in the lives of the living (Bjerke 1981:76).

This group of people could not be given elaborate funerals and were never the focus of the *ancestral cult*. In Buganda, it was taboo for a man to die without a male child because it meant that after his death there would be nobody to take over his previous responsibility in the community. However, steps could be taken, even retroactively, to find a solution to this problem. For example, a son of one of the deceased's brothers could be installed as heir in order to avert this awful crisis. As time went on, even unmarried men and women who had children and property would be considered ancestors as long as the ancestral rituals were organised for them after their death, such as installing heirs for them who would take over their living responsibilities.

People who lived indecently (like thieves, people who committed suicide, idlers etc.) could not become ancestors. Committing suicide in Buganda has always been regarded as taboo and a person who died such a shameful death could not be given an adequate funeral and during his burial certain rituals had to be performed in order to put the family or clan back to normal life. Burial had to be followed by a ritual cleansing ceremony to clear the pollution caused by the incident. Witches, sorcerers and cannibals, though not much pronounced in Buganda, could not become ancestors too. Anti-social characters like witches were not desirable in the community because they were believed to be the source of most evils. They had nothing good to contribute to society apart from bringing misery to the people. Therefore, their death could be a sort of relief but not something worth remembering. The witches were believed to bring harm and destruction in the nation.

Dying childless meant that one had no descendants to look after or to act as medium for her/him. The person's spirit would wander through the villages, angry and malicious. There were rituals performed at such peoples' funerals in order to "*tame*" the spirit so that it would not harm the relatives. In the same environment, the cannibals because they were associated with robbing the graves in order to find and eat the flesh, were considered to be outcasts in society.

In the past, an individual who could die from a dreadful disease like leprosy was definitively struck from the list of ancestors. Abnormal people such as: the deformed, mentally ill, dwarfs etc., were taken to be outcasts in society and hence, when they died, they would not become ancestors. Strangers, even if they overstayed in an area and got integrated into the society, on their death could not qualify to be called "ancestors". For example, there are a number of Banyarwanda and Barundi people who came to Buganda a long time ago to be employed as manual labourers on the Baganda's coffee plantations. After some years, some of these people decided to stay and they were adopted and integrated into the society. But because of their lack of communal identification, none of them would acquire the title of "*ancestor*" when s/he died. This belief is summarized by Zahan:

The stranger lacks participation and communion with the life of the group in its spatial and temporal continuity (1979:49).

People who were not given adequate burials, such as those murdered and whose bodies were abandoned in the bushes or those not buried in their home territory (in which case the appropriate burial rituals would not have been performed), were also not considered as ancestors. One dying far from home without the knowledge of his relatives who would establish him/her ritually as an ancestor, remained virtually forgotten. Their spirits were translated into wild spirits which are indiscriminately harmful. According to Shorter:

There are large numbers of deceased who never become ancestors, children, barren women or sterile men, cripples and social drop-outs, people who die far away from their homeland, outcasts and those who in any way incur social censure or disapproval (1975:126).

For one to qualify as an ancestor, s/he would have fulfilled what most people considered to be the ideals of her/his society. Social success conferred immortality. A man who got many children, many wives, friends and who was rich during his life time to extend hospitality and gifts to a wider community, was equally influential even when underground. Political leaders, however brutal they were thought to be, because of their social influence were greatly revered. In this case, fear rather than love would have been the dominant sentiment in their veneration. Proper funeral rituals for adults were very important because they assured that the dead would arrive in the correct and desired manner at the abode of the *ancestors*.

2.8 The Ancestral Cult

In this chapter (and entire research) the term "*cult*" refers to a system of beliefs and religious rituals which are practised by a group of people. My meaning of cult here is distinct from the often hostile meanings attached to it by Christians (they use the term to refer to certain practices and beliefs which are dubious and are in tension with established religious traditions). I wish to use the term "*Ancestral cult*" to mean the system of Baganda beliefs and rituals that concern their particular aspects of life. Here, the belief system in ancestors, the rituals and religious personalities that surround those beliefs are what constitute to what I mean by the *ancestral cult*. The adherents of respective cults usually meet in the open spaces such as, the graveyard, or outside and inside the ancestral huts (*Amasabo*). In the old days, some ancestral cults would take place within the residential area such as around a grove where a thick vegetation grew, a large tree, or a rock.

The family ancestral cults are usually centred around the graveyard and the ancestral huts within the vicinity of individual homesteads. The cult of the ancestors is mainly carried out within the proximity of the lineage or family burial grounds known as *butaka*. In most cases, the activities conducted are normally private and sometimes secret. Only the death, funerary and burial ceremonies attract the presence of outsiders, but even during such ceremonies, there are distinctive rituals preserved for

the family members only. The location of various *ancestral huts* in some homesteads give a clear expression to the idea that the family spirits are believed to be residing near the homesteads together with their human occupants. A number of cult groups today have been reduced to the family, hence, the old common cult places are becoming more rare to find and have probably been substituted. But cult places within the confines of the individual homesteads can still be located in some villages.

Today, the ancestral cult is on the decrease. There are a few families which still have their ancestral huts. The public cult for the royal ancestors which used to attract many adherents and which used to be centred around the dead king's tombs or *Masiro*, the jawbone shrines and other ancestral places connected to Baganda royalty where a number of royal rituals would take place, have to a great extent been phased out by the religious adaptations to social, economical and political changes. Though the tombs of some dead kings still survive and have been properly put in order, not so many people in Buganda still cherish the spirits of the dead kings with the same affection as they used to do some fifty years ago. In the following chapters I will try to discuss why this decline has occurred, and whether there are any substitute practices that have replaced the old ones that have been phased out.

2.9 Conclusion

This chapter has thrown light on the Baganda beliefs in the spiritual world. We have seen that the spirit world comprises: the Supreme being, *balubaale* or the deities, the *living dead or the ancestors* and the nature spirits. It has discussed the Baganda's beliefs in the *ancestors* and what they believe ancestors do to them. This chapter has identified the various categories of ancestors which are believed to exist in order to show that there is a belief in the *ancestral hierarchy*. The next chapter tries to discuss the Baganda's relationship with their ancestors through rituals. It explores in details the various ancestral rituals meant to appease and propitiate the departed elders. It looks at the rituals performed in the pre-colonial era and those which are still being performed today. Ancestral rituals have always been intended to maintain good

relationships and keep people in touch with the ancestors. In response to the rituals, the ancestors reward their living relatives or clansmen with protection from wars, diseases, droughts or floods and they also guide them to the expected standards of society as prescribed in the laws and customs of the land.

CHAPTER THREE

Baganda's Ancestral Rituals and Observances

3.1 Introduction

Adult Baganda regard ritual observances as the supreme safeguards of their everyday existence, basic needs, and the relationship that makes up their social order. Traditionally, the Baganda venerated their ancestors through a number of formal rituals. They would make offerings and sacrifices inside or outside the ancestral huts (*Amasabo*), or in the vicinity of the grave yard. Invocations to the ancestors would be made whenever they required help from them. It was widely believed that the phenomenon of death would transform a person into a state of personal immortality, which would commonly be referred to as an *ancestral spirit*. Hence, there were numerous ceremonies held in honour of the dead relatives such as: death, burial and other funeral rites. Through such rituals, the Baganda believed that they would maintain good relationships and keep in touch with their living dead. Because of the care showed by their living relatives, the ancestors were thought to give them protection and other favours they needed. Clan or family ancestors would usually be invoked for rain, at seed time, during harvesting of the first fruits, in fishing, in hunting and during war.

3.2 Death and Funerary Rituals

In pre-colonial Buganda, though spirits were sometimes thought to cause trouble, they were also supposed to render help to the members of the family or the clan to which they belonged if they were well treated. A chief or wealthy person would occasionally make a feast for the ancestors by killing a goat or a sheep at a shrine (*e Ssabo*) built purposely for them and then partake of the meat with the relatives and friends whom

he had invited. The blood of the sacrifice was at the same time made to flow by the door of the shrine, and beer was poured out during the meal (Roscoe 1965:288). In return for such affection, it was believed that the ancestors would increase his wealth, the number of children and animals.

In Buganda, almost every household had a small grass thatched ancestral hut (*e Ssabo*) dedicated to the family ancestors where beer and food offerings could be placed and sometimes offerings of money could be given. A *Ssabo* was normally a conical grass thatched hut, some four to eight feet high. The size of the huts for the ancestors varied in size according to the status of the spirit the shrine was dedicated to. Ancestral rituals where food offerings and sometimes animal sacrifices were made, served a lot of purposes as far as the relationship between the people and their ancestors was concerned.

Traditionally, as in the case of a troublesome spirit, an offering or sacrifice had to be made in order to "tame" the spirit. A cow, goat or a sheep could be given to the spirit. The living always felt they had an obligation to propitiate their ancestors. The sacrifices and offerings were a means of caring for their departed ones regularly. They represented an aspect of duty that had to be performed, whether the ancestors showed favour or not. At the same time, the rites implied that faithfulness to the ancestors in such offerings or sacrifices would draw their favour and continuous help. The voluntary giving up of a valued substance to the ancestors showed the extent to which the people believed in the activities and powers of their dead relatives.

The rituals associated with the ancestors were performed to ensure good relationship with the ancestors and to avert any disaster that would befall the community or a particular family, were such a ritual not performed. People would have been aware that the sacrifices or offerings (*ebitamiro*) made to the ancestors were not directly used by them. The food or beer would not practically be eaten or drunk by them but the act symbolised the strong commitment people had towards the ancestors. This in return would induce the ancestors to give out the desired results. The rituals performed, involving sacrifices or offerings to the ancestors could serve as

thanksgiving for the protection the ancestors were believed to give their living relatives against wars, diseases, famine, storms, plagues like small-pox and plague, and attacks from witches and sorcerers. During such rituals, it was conceived that people and their dead ancestors met and mixed freely. In other words, people would have communion or got together with their ancestors during ritual periods.

In Buganda today death is considered as part of the natural rhythm of life. It occurs when the physical body of a person loses its life. The body must be disposed of quickly through burial. While the body decomposes, the spirit is believed to move on to another state of existence. Death can happen due to natural or unnatural causes, the latter being attributed to the work of witches, sorcerers or magic. For the Baganda, death signifies the beginning of a new life in the world of the spirits. Death stands between the world of human beings and the world of the spirits, between the visible and the invisible (Mbiti 1989:145).

Death disrupts social order in a community. It brings feelings of agony, sorrow, sadness and pain to the relatives and friends of the deceased person. There are many complicated and elaborate rituals connected with death such as: burials, funeral rites, inheritance. The next world is believed to be here, around this earth, only separated by the fact that the spirit world is invisible to human beings. It is also considered to be underground where the bodies of the ancestors are interred. The Baganda believe that the next world is close to that of humans. It is usually on the ground that offerings, libations, sacrifices and even some divinations are made in order to contact the ancestral spirits. The cult of the ancestors is carried out within close proximity to the actual burial place of the family (Mbiti 1989:156). If the ancestors are denied adequate and elaborate funeral ceremonies, they might take action against their living relatives and this can be in the form of misfortune, such as some kind of illness. Hence, people are careful to follow the proper practices and customs regarding the burial or other means of disposing of dead bodies. Special care of the graves should be taken since the ancestral spirits are thought to dwell in that area.

Since the ancestors are believed to be unpredictable and are thought to have supernatural powers to influence the lives of their descendants, they have to be properly looked after through veneration, remembrance and performance of the appropriate funeral rites. This mainly applies to the ancestors who died recently and are therefore still remembered by their descendants. But it is also believed that those who died long ago have some influence over the living. The living relatives have to maintain good relationships with their departed relatives if they want peace to prevail in their families. On this point Parrinder writes:

Many rites, of widely varying importance, are made for the propitiation, help and repose of the departed spirits (Parrinder 1974:62).

Through ritual processes organised by the elders of the clan such as the ceremony of the "last-funeral-rites" (*Okwaabya olumbe*), when an heir is installed, ancestral status can be conferred. For example the age, status and social qualifications of a person are necessary in order to endow him/her with supernormal powers which are socially supportive. Jim Kiernan in his article, "African Traditional Religions in South Africa" records thus:

This ritual transition takes the form of mortuary rites which, like any other rite of passage, are conducted over a period of time, from three months in one place to two years or more in another, thus permitting the ancestor to gradually relinquish living responsibilities and to assume and settle into the new role of ancestor (1995:21).

The continuity of good relationships with the ancestors is usually kept through the rituals. Mbiti explains that human beings keep the relationship going between them and their ancestors, chiefly through libation, offerings of food, beer and other items, prayers and the observation of proper rites like sexual abstinence during the period of mourning for the dead person, respect of elders, following traditional laws and cultures or the instructions from them (Mbiti 1989:158).

People's requests and invocations are usually addressed to the dead. If one is to consider what people write in the news papers, such as: "It is now two years since you left us" or "You are greatly missed by your wife and children", s/he should

believe that even modern people speak to their departed ones.

The words are the bridge of communication and people's witness that they recognize the departed to be still alive (Mbiti 1991:81).

Failure to do this means that the ancestors are forgotten and the consequences could be bad.

However, due to a number of social, economic and political changes that have taken place, Baganda's ancestral rituals have been greatly modified and others dropped. Nonetheless, there are elaborate funeral and burial rites which are observed by both educated and non-educated people, and all these rituals surrounding death are mainly meant to venerate the dead relatives.

3.2.1 Death and Burial Ceremonies of a King

In pre-colonial era when a king of Buganda died, several of his widows usually looked after his tombs, as well as the medium. The jaw bone (*akaba*) and umbilical cord of each king when he died were preserved in a special temple. It was believed that the spirits of the dead kings dwelled in the lower jawbone. Hence, upon the king's death, the jawbone could be extracted from the body and be kept in a jaw shrine while the body was being buried separately. However, the relics of a particular king could become less and less important with each succeeding generation. The jawbone tombs and the body tombs of the *baSsekabaka* or dead kings back to Kimera still survived with a few hereditary officers, and many were rebuilt since 1955 (Welbourn 1962:179). At the royal tomb (*Masiro*) is where the dead kings' spirits were supposed to dwell. The enclosure and the interior of the tomb were looked after by the king's widows who had children by him or who were specially chosen for that duty. In the back of the tomb were kept the jaw-bone and the placenta of the departed monarch, and to these his spirit was believed to be attached. The jaw-bone in particular was called "*the king*" (Frazer 1910:470).

The importance of the jawbone was also found in Bunyoro, a neighbouring ethnic group, where the legitimacy of the ruling *Omukama* (king) would be proved by his possessing his predecessor's jawbone. However, it seems the Banyoro never shared with the Baganda the belief that any *muzimu* or ancestral spirit was likely to cling to its earthly jawbone.

Before the Mengo crisis which saw *kabaka Mutesa II* deposed and forced into exile in 1966, the Baganda regarded their reigning king as a protector as well as a guardian. The king, while seated on his throne would be revered by his subjects in an exalted manner. This behaviour would be observed even when the king died. The Baganda believed that the spirit of the dead king would foretell events concerning the state and even advise the living king, warning him when war was likely to break out.

The royal spirit of the dead king had more excellent honour and power than any other person's spirit. To justify this belief, a number of ritual killings in connection to the appeasement of the spirits of the dead kings were carried out. A certain ritual where the reigning king visited the actual jawbone tombs of his predecessors would be observed only rarely and on each visit human sacrifice for the services of the dead king was common practice. According to John Roscoe's account:

The living king would make periodical visits to the temple, first one, and then of another, of his predecessors (1965:283).

Sometimes, convicts would be sacrificed but on some occasions, ordinary native people would be rounded up and sacrificed.

When the king had left the temple and was being conducted back, he invariably gave an order to catch everyone who had not passed a certain place he mentioned; the order was given suddenly, and the bodyguards promptly carried it out, capturing and binding all whom they could lay hands on if they had not passed the spot indicated by the king. The captives were taken back to the temple and slain within its precincts, in order that their ghosts might minister to the late king's ghost (Roscoe 1965:284).

Here, the main reason for the indiscriminate human sacrifice was to initially send the dead king helpers to serve his spirit. Later on, after the arrival of the European

missionaries at the end of the 19th century, King Mutesa I (1854-1884) opened a new era by starting to do away with some of the old and brutal royal funerary rituals. For example, he exhumed the bodies of some of his predecessors and had them buried in the jawbone tombs.

He disinterred the bodies of some of his predecessors and had them buried in the jawbone shrines. He himself, and his successors, were buried without dissection; and he left instructions for the uncovering of deceivers who would pretend to be possessed by his *muzimu* (Welbourne 1962:179).

Mutesa I did not believe in the claims that the late king's medium would get messages from the dead king's spirit which he would speak out to the people under his instruction. Mutesa I shifted from the traditional beliefs because the new faiths he had embraced, first of all Islam and later Christianity, preached against some of the ancestor rituals.

The Baganda considered the spirit of the late king to have more honour than that of any common person, for the roles it was thought to continue playing. The announcement of the death of a reigning king would be bad news to many of his subjects. A number of subjects were sacrificed to accompany the dead king in the spirit world.

Just as, in his life time, men were killed to invigorate him, so in death he would require men to accompany him: in addition to some of his widows, his chief cook, chief brewer, head cowherd and the guardian of his water well; ..., a cook and those who had charge of his beer, his bed chamber, his water, his clothing and his milk (Welbourn 1962:179).

In the days when the Buganda kingdom was still very powerful, up to Mutesa I's death in 1884, communication with the departed ruler was held by means of his royal medium (*Omusamize wa Kabaka*).

The person of the deceased Kabaka was also represented by a spirit medium through whom he maintained contact with the living king (Ray 1991:123).

The royal medium acquired this power by drinking beer out of the dead king's skull. After doing that, it was believed that the king's spirit could enter into him whenever

the late king desired to communicate to his successor or with the people. On such occasions, the medium went to the throne and, sought to speak to the spirit in the inner room. He could smoke from one or two pipes and then began to rave, which was an indication that he was possessed by the king's spirit. In this condition, imitating the king's voice, he declared the king's will. After the message had been delivered, the spirit could return to the inner room and the medium could go away. However, as Roscoe reports:

The king's ghosts did not give advice about ordinary cases of illness, and were not consulted by the common people; they held receptions every three to four days, and from time to time sent the king important messages about matters of state or warned him of invasions which were being planned (1911:113).

It has been argued by scholars like Ray that the ancestors' role was not of great significance in the politics of Buganda. The royal mediums might have been primarily ritual figures who kept alive the spiritual reality of the deceased kings by regularly "*holding court*" (*Okukiika eMbuga*) at their shrines (1991:125). On the other hand, the royal mediums would deliver ritual greetings and give political advice of some significance. Before Mutesa I changed the old royal ancestral rituals, these mediums were thought to play vital political roles bridging the dead and living kings by advising the living kings on national matters.

After the abolition of kingdoms in 1966, many previous tombs and temples which were dedicated to the dead kings were looted and some were completely destroyed.

After independence, Uganda witnessed an almost inevitable struggle for power between the Baganda and the rest of the country, between Kabaka Mutesa II as a regional king and Milton Obote as a national Prime minister. This confrontation reached a climax in May 1966 when Obote sent the army under colonel Idi Amin to attack the Kabaka's palace. Mutesa fled to England and died in 1969 (Mazrui 1986:269).

Hence, political independence brought negative changes which saw the abolition of traditional political structures in Uganda. These changes also affected the royal ancestral cult whereby all the royal rituals had to come to a standstill. Colonialism

involved the abolition of many traditional institutions. The colonial administrators introduced new forms of governance and laws which had never existed in Buganda before. Hence, local authorities like kings, chiefs, spirit mediums, medicine men, diviners, etc., lost some powers and some of the respect they used to command. Their position as law enforcement agents and final arbiters of justice in their society was heavily undermined.

3.2.2 Death and Burial Ceremonies of Ordinary Persons

In Buganda, death at a very old age was desirable and when it happened, it could be attributed to natural causes. It was inconceivable for a young person to die. Such a kind of death would not happen without a cause. An explanation had to be found. Here the main cause of such death would be attributed to the work of a witch or sorcerer. In most cases, people did not consider death happening due to natural causes. Illness was usually much more likely to be the result of witchcraft and sorcery. Death was considered as the outcome of sickness which the skill and art of a traditional healer had failed to challenge. Sometimes the cause of sickness could be due to the influence of an ancestral spirit which had not been propitiated (Roscoe 1911:98). When one died, there would be a number of rituals and ceremonies held in his honour. The death of an old grey haired person was always considered as a smooth transition from the physical world to the world of spirits.

Before the introduction of Christianity in the late nineteenth century, when an old person started showing signs of senility and to fall sick, his relatives started giving him a lot of attention and good treatment. It was much desired for one to die without any grudge left behind. Hence Mair had this to say about the Baganda on this topic:

Neglect of a person during his last illness was almost certain to be resented by his spirit (Mair 1934:205).

Immediately the sick person died, women would start wailing. Traditionally, wailing was always done by women and girls. Men remained quiet while the wailing went on.

Occasionally, a man would burst into tears out of excessive emotions and the strong love he had for the deceased. The wailing could go on almost continuously during this time while the men, though some would shed some tears, would not give any violent expression to their grief. In Buganda men were not supposed to weep because they were always expected to show courage and bravery in times of hardship and great strife. Even at death rituals, this spirit had to be maintained.

The wailing of the women would send a message to the neighbours that someone had died. Relatives would be notified at once and the preparations for the burial would start. Relatives and friends would start to gather in the compound of the deceased. It was customary to keep an all night vigil on the day a person died and some other days before the burial took place. The major reason was that death was feared and considered dreadful. Therefore, the relatives and friends were required to be present during those horrific nights to console the bereaved family members. Another reason for keeping the night vigil over the dead was perhaps to look out for the witch or sorcerer who might have caused the death. Before the introduction of missionary religions, witchcraft beliefs were very strong and widely spread in Buganda. Nothing calamitous or bad could happen without a cause. People would also keep a night vigil in order to protect the dead body from being taken away by cannibals.

The corpse could be washed and shaved by the widow(s) and sisters, if it was a married man, and after about two to three days of exposure, the corpse could then be shrouded in layers of barkclothes (*Embugo*) before being lowered into the grave. Digging the grave was always done by the men in the neighbourhood. It was customary for the village community of adult men to assist the bereaved family in digging the grave and the members of the family would be excused from this exercise. It used to be very important to bury a grown up person in a reasonable number of barkclothes because it demonstrated how popular the deceased had been among his people and how many friends he had to mourn him. The corpse would then be lowered into the grave. The people present would start to fill the grave with soil using hoes, spades and their own hands. Then soil could be piled up a bit above the grave and stamped on to make it firm. If the cause of death was believed to have

been caused by a witch, the announcer would point it out and perhaps mention the suspect. Witch hunting, though, was not much pronounced in traditional Buganda; it occasionally happened and with devastating consequences. The people attending the funeral would invade the homestead of the alleged witch, destroy his banana plantation and other property before setting fire to his house and banishing the entire family.

I now discuss why people bothered themselves so much by performing many rituals when they buried the dead.

In traditional Buganda, it was believed that the dead persons' spirits highly valued their mortuary rites, the survivor's grief, the wailing and the gifts of barkclothes, and the maintenance of the graves (Mair 1934:208).

When a person had been finally buried, it was common to hear people say, *agalamiziddwa kubutaka bwa ba Jjajabe* which is the equivalent of, "s/he has been laid to rest next to her/his ancestors". Every family had its burial ground known as *butaka* where family burials for members of the same clan were usually buried. I will explain in detail what the "lineage butaka burial grounds" meant to the Baganda in the course of this chapter.

On the whole, the elaborate funeral rites were mainly intended to assist the safe passage of the deceased's spirit to the land of the dead and to ensure that it did not turn into a malevolent spirit. They also had an important social function of reuniting a family/society following the rift caused by the death of one of its members.

3.2.3 The Period of Mourning

Traditionally, mourning for an old person would last till the installation of the heir. This could take some months or a full year and during this period a lot of activities had to be suspended, like cultivation of the field in the deceased's home.

During the period of mourning, the mourners (the relatives of the deceased) would abstain from doing any kind of work, observe sexual restraint and stop shaving their heads. The brothers and sisters, children in the family and widows could not shave their heads. They could not wash their chests and there were sexual taboos to be observed by both widows and children (Mair 1934:209).

Death was thought to be contagious and it was believed that it could claim more lives from the same family if strict discipline and observance of certain rules during the period of mourning were not followed. In the case where a chief died, the whole village or chiefdom stopped cultivation of the fields for some time. Friends and relatives would continue pouring into the home of the deceased and they would bring some presents of food, beer, salt, groundnuts, beans and others. The in-laws would in addition bring calabashes of beer. Each time new visitors arrived, the wailing would resume. However, the mourning of children, young boys and girls was never as significant as that of the elderly people and it would be concluded quickly. An old person's mourning would be concluded in a ceremonial way.

3.2.4 The Ceremony of Installing the Heir

A formal rejoicing to mark the close of the period of mourning and the resumption of normal life was usually celebrated in the "last-funeral-rites" (*okwaabya olumbe*), literally translated as "to get rid of death" (Mair 1934:210). This ceremony, for quite long, has been the key stone as far as ancestral veneration in Buganda is concerned. I am going to attempt to describe and discuss what used to take place during the celebration and the significance of the function and the rituals that accompanied it.

Here, note has to be taken that, though after any death even that of an infant, there was a period of some days of mourning, the ceremonial termination of mourning was reserved for persons who "had a place of their own",

a status in community involving duties and responsibilities which must be taken over by a successor. In the past, only a married person was in this position (Mair 1934:210).

Every person was expected to name her/his heir in the will before death, except when s/he died a premature and accidental death. In Buganda, people would make their wills verbally by revealing their wishes to their trusted elders, who would not be actual members of the family. A person would reveal his wishes or his heir to one person only and this could be kept secret till his death or during the ceremony of installing the heir. Other people would make their future heirs known to everybody even before their death, such as in case of a very beloved son. Here, the father would proudly declare the beloved son publicly as his heir and when he died, everybody would be aware of his immediate successor.

During the actual moment of installing the heir, the *heir to be* stood on a barkcloth spread on the ground, accompanied by a woman called *lubuga*. Some meaning which may be arrived at for including this woman perhaps was:

A man cannot inherit alone, he cannot stand alone on the ritual barkcloth or man and wife inherit together (Mair 1934:213).

As Mair puts it, the *Lubuga's* position was analogous to that of a girl attendant on a bride. But he was not allowed to marry her or keep her after the ceremony since she was a relative and regarded as his sister (1934:213).

When the people had gathered around, the clan drum-beat known as *omubala* would be beaten by a clan member who recited some clan totemic legends and histories of the family. He could announce the principal totem *Omuziro* by which the clan was always known, the secondary totem *Akabbiro* and the words of the sound of the clan drum-beat. This could be followed by the head of the clan (*Omukulu w'Ekika*) giving a spear to the heir and a knife to the *Lubuga* and a gourd of beer to drink. The action of investing the heir with a new barkcloth and spear symbolised the clan's acknowledgment of his succession and the acceptance of carrying on the responsibilities of the deceased. If it was a woman who was being installed, she

would be given a knife instead of a spear. The head of the clan would announce:

This is the heir of so and so, child of so and so, grandson of so and so, then some more ancestors and finally the origin of the clan known as *e Ssiga* (clan estate) and clan heads *Abataka* (Mair 1934:214).

Inheritance meant carrying out a number of responsibilities, not only in the home of the deceased but even in the entire clan.

The general celebrations in the past would conclude with a meal at which one of the dead person's animals, in this case a goat, would be eaten. At least every household in Buganda had a couple of goats as domestic animals. It is believed that those persons on whom sexual abstinence had been imposed during the mourning, would die after eating the meat if they breached the taboo and ate it. The one who had done so had to refuse the meal, thus publicly confessing being guilty. This meal could be eaten in the afternoon and at dusk the heir and *Lubuga* would go into the inner room of the house and perform the *Kukuza* rite. I explained how this rite used to be performed when I described the rite of the "naming ceremony" in the previous chapter. Where the heir was a woman, the rite would be done with the widower and if the widower was dead, with his heir, not in the house but in one of the huts specially built for this purpose. After the introduction of Christianity, not many people continued to perform all the rites I have mentioned because Christianity condemned and preached against them.

A night or two days after the installation of the heir, the graves are put in order. If burial was recent only new earth was trodden down but if the mourning lasted a long time, the grave or graveyard was weeded. After that, the property of the deceased could be distributed and most people returned to their respective homes. Traditionally, by the end of the mourning ceremonies, the men would go and leave behind their wives who would stay to help in clearing the weeds on the land of the deceased that had grown during the long period of mourning. They would be collected later by their husbands.

As Mair observes:

This completes the rendering of honour to the spirit and the installation of his personal substitute, an act which in itself is an honour to the spirit, for this is thought to be the chief way, apart from calling children by his name, of keeping his memory alive (1934:216).

After the ceremony of putting the graves in order, all restrictions would be lifted and normal life resumed.

These beliefs on the whole had their place in trying to reinforce the accepted moral codes. Though the main belief was the fear of making the ancestors angry by breaking the taboos, like in the case of those who failed to abstain from sexual intercourse during the mourning period, it seems there was emphasis laid on morality in the community. The test in the ritual which took the form of a meal of a goat was actually effective in an indirect way through its result in exposing the guilty person in public disapproval. But it was not clear whether the punishment would really happen. What was believed to kill those who broke the rule of sexual abstinence was the eating of the meat which was their due share of the feast when mourning was concluded, and because of this emphasis on death, whoever breached the rule was likely to refuse to participate in the feast, thus revealing him or herself as guilty of that crime.

There were a number of aims connected to the ancestral rituals. In the first place, the living felt they had an obligation to propitiate their ancestors. If they did not, they could experience misfortunes like illness, crop failures and others as a result of the anger of the spirits. The element of fear in the veneration of the ancestors could be explained as playing an important part in maintaining the existence of the rituals, and much of the ancestor cult was a belated response to events which were interpreted as vengeance or punishment (Shorter 1975:127).

Here is an account of the celebration of the "last funeral rites" of my late uncle Selevest Kizito which I attended personally during my fieldwork. The ceremony took place in July 1996 at the home of the deceased at Buseke in Kalungu county. My

uncle died in October 1995. He was survived with a widow, one son Steven Ssemayanja (who became the heir) and two daughters. The deceased belonged to the same Mamba clan (the lung fish) to which I also belong. Before he died, he had made a will in which he stated that his son Steven Ssemayanja was to be his heir.

The members of the family needed enough time to make the necessary preparation for the rite of installing the heir. Therefore, the function did not take place until the following year in July. I attended this function and this time because I was conducting a study on a related subject, I watched and observed carefully whatever proceedings that took place. Though I had attended similar functions previously during my childhood, this was going to be a good opportunity for me to observe step by step the proceedings and get the full meaning and purpose of the rite. The ceremony took place on Saturday 20th July 1996.

On Friday (the day before the ceremony of installing the heir), many relatives and friends assembled in the home of the deceased. A number of huts thatched with dry banana leaves were built to house some of the people who came to attend the function, especially for the husbands of the female relatives whose relationship did not allow them to sleep in the main house. This night was of great festivity. Women spent the whole night cooking *matooke* (bananas), which was to be fed to the people invited to attend the ceremony on the following day. The same night, two cows were slaughtered for the same purpose. People present spent the whole night dancing, singing and drinking. At intervals, some Christian hymns were sung and prayers said. This symbolised the beginning of the end of the mourning period for the deceased and the beginning of normal life with the welcoming of a new person to take over the duties and responsibilities of his predecessor.

On the morning of the following day, the ceremonial shaving and washing of the mourners followed and it lasted till mid-day. The shaving and washing of the members of the family of the deceased signified the purification process from the pollution brought into the home by the death of a family member. The widow, the heir to be and some other members of the family (belonging to the Mamba clan) went

through the rituals of shaving and washing. The mother of the deceased performed the ritual of shaving and washing. After that she served them a meal with mushrooms.

At around 10.00 am before the heir was installed, holy mass was celebrated. This was done because my uncle was a staunch Catholic follower. Another reason was that the heir needed God's blessings besides those he could get from the ancestors.

When everything needed for the important ritual of installing the heir was ready, *Ssemayanja* stood on a barkcloth spread on the ground, accompanied by *Nagaddya* (his *lubuga*, the one to serve as his ceremonial attendant). This may appear like a groom and his bride but the interpretation cannot come exactly to this.

When the people had gathered around, the clan drum-beat (*omubala*) was beaten loudly by a clan member who recited some clan totemic legends and histories of the family. He announced the principal totem *of our clan* (*Omuziro*) by which the clan is always known, the secondary totem (*Akabbiro*) and the words of the sound of the clan drum-beat. The words (clan praise song) went like this:

"Omuziro gwaffe, Mamba. Akabbiro, Muguya. Munyanja weddiramu ki? Mamba. Omubala gwaffe guvuga gutya? Sirya Mamba, Amazzi nywa".

The equivalent of this utterance is:

"Our principal totem is the lung fish. Our secondary totem is a young lung-fish. What is your totemic animal in the lake/sea? The lung fish. How does our clan drum-beat sound? I do not eat the lung fish but I drink the water".

Each time these words were uttered, the man sounded the clan drum-beat.

This was followed by the head of the clan (*Omukulu w'Ekika*) *Petero Balimunsi* giving a spear to the heir and a knife to the *Lubuga* and a gourd of beer to drink. The action of investing the heir with a new barkcloth and spear symbolised the clan's acknowledgment of his succession and the acceptance of carrying on the responsibilities of the deceased.

The head of the clan would announced:

"Ono ye musika wa Selevest Kizito, mutabani wa Selevest Kizito, muzukkulu wa Sebastiane Mbuga Bafiirawala, muzukkulu wa Nkulumbi Etwaalamugenzi, muzukkulu wa Ssemayanja Teruddukwa, muzukkulu wa Mugula, muzukkulu wa Gabunga. Omukulu w'ekika kyaffe ye Gabunga asangibwa e Buwaya mu Busiro. Tusibuka mu Ssiga lya Mugula ENtebbe, Omukulu asokerwaako ye Eneriko Kalungi e Kasozo. Owokubiri ye Yozefu Ssemayanja Teruddukwa e Nsujuwe. Owokusatu ye Mukalazi e Ziba, Buwaya. Abakulu abo basibuka mulujja lwa Kazimiri Mukalazi e Ziba...."

The equivalent of this pronouncement is:

"This is the heir of Selvest Kizito, child of Selvest Kizito, grandson of Sebastiane Mbuga Bafiirawala, grandson of Nkulumbi Etwaalamugenzi, grandson of ssemayanja Teruddukwa, grandson of Mugula, grandson of Gabunga. The senior head of our Mamba clan is Gabunga who lives at Buwaya in Busiro. We originate from the clan estate of Mugula at Entebbe. The first clan head is Henry Kalungi at Kasozo. The second one is Joseph Ssemayanja Teruddukwa of Nsujuwe. The third is Mukalazi of Ziba, Buwaya. All these clan heads originate from the family of Kazimiri Mukalazi of Ziba....".

Inheritance meant carrying out a number of responsibilities by the heir, not only in the home of the deceased but even in the entire clan. The injunctions that followed explained this point.

The head of the clan went on to say:

"kitaawo yali musajja wakisa, naawe beera wakisa. Yatuwanga emmere nomwenge, naawe olina okukola bwooty. Abantu bayise bulungi ngakitaawo bweyali abayisa. Beera mujagujagu ngakitaawo bweyali. Tomalanga gayomba nabantu ewatali nsonga ntuufu ekuyombya. Bulijjo weewalenga okuswaaza enyumba yammwe n'ekika kyo".

This statement can be translated as:

"your father was kind to people, you must also be kind. He always served us with food and beer, you should do the same. You should treat people well like how your father used to do. Be brave as your father was. Never quarrel with people for no good reason. Always avoid bringing shame to your family and clan'.

When the injunctions were finished, the head of the clan said:

"Emizimu gya ba Jjajabo gikukuume".

This meant:

"may the spirits of your ancestors protect and look after you".

When this was finished, the heir and *Lubuga* went into the house and sat on the bark cloth and various relatives came in and introduced themselves by explaining their relationship with the heir. Some money in form of donations was thrown on the barkcloth by the relatives for the heir and some drank beer from the heir's gourd. After the installation of the heir, a feast followed. Food and meat were supplied to all the people present. After eating, locally brewed beer was distributed to those who wanted to drink. In this way, the family had finished the process of "getting rid of death" (*Okwaabya olumbe*) of the late Selvest Kizito, which was the whole purpose of the ceremony of the "last-funeral-rites". When people had partaken of the communal meal and drank the beer, the majority went back to their respective homes. A few relatives remained behind to attend to the grave yard two days later.

Two days after the installation of the heir, and the remaining relatives went to the family burial site to put the graves of all the dead in order. I too, attended the rite. Because the function took some time to be held the weeds had grown over the graves and some marks were beginning to disappear. Therefore, the graveyard was properly weeded and some of the disappearing marks replaced. After that, the property of the deceased was distributed and most people returned to their respective homes.

After this function, it would be difficult for the dead man's spirit to come back and haunt the living members of the family. The family had fully carried out the required burial, mourning and later the last-funeral-rites for the dead. The significant fact here is that in any family, life is strengthened by putting emphasis on performing all the necessary duties to the adult dead person. Then the family can be in peace without fear of the punishments from the angered ancestral spirit.

I did not witness the ritual meal that was supposed to be shared by all family members who participated in the mourning of the dead after the installation ceremony. This meal used to be prepared in the past to find out who among the relatives were guilty of breaking the mourning taboos by engaging in sex or any other forbidden activities before the conclusion of the funerary rituals. This might have been due to the fact that the changes that have taken place in Buganda have also brought changes in the way modern rituals are performed.

We have seen that during the communal remembrance of a departed relative, it is assumed that there is participation of both the living and the dead. The clan leaders and the village elders expect the heir to emulate the virtues of his dead ancestor and failure to do this can bring the heir certain misfortunes in his life. The rituals associated with the funeral and last-funeral rites in Buganda continue to play a vital role in ensuring that relationships between the dead and the living were kept alive and harmonious. This account is in agreement with what Mair reported about fifty years ago although there are some changes that have taken place in the way the ceremonies are held.

3.2.5 Suicide and the Rituals that go along with It

Traditionally, suicide was taken as the most dreadful kind of death experience. Suicide was regarded as the worst crime against the land of the ancestors. The Baganda were very superstitious about it. When it happened, there were a number of rituals performed in order to cleanse the land that had been polluted by the act and careful precautions were taken in removing the body and in '*destroying*' the spirit of the victim of the suicide. The spirit had to be destroyed ritually in order to prevent it from causing further trouble to the living relatives. Nevertheless, suicide cases were rare and very rare among women.

When a man hanged himself on a tree, somebody was supposed to cut down his body and run forward without looking backward. Perhaps this was to stop the victim's

spirit from following him and making him also commit suicide. The tree on which the victim hanged himself would be cut down. The deceased's body would then be tied on a pole and taken to a distant place where cross-roads met. There, the body would be burned with the wood from the felled tree being used as firewood. If the suicide happened in a house, the house had to be brought down. All belongings were taken with the body and burned in the middle of a road. The property was considered dangerous and polluted. No one would dare to live in a house where a suicide had taken place. The people participating in the ritual of burning the body had to wash their hands thoroughly at the scene of the burning, using sponges collected from the plantains and later threw them on the pyre. Whenever women passed the place where a suicide ritual had been carried out, they threw grass or sticks upon the heap. This was done in order to prevent the spirit from entering into them and being re-born at a later period. The idea of burning the body was itself a precaution aimed at destroying the spirit (Roscoe 1911:20)

According to Baganda traditions, a person who commits suicide dies a shameful, humiliating, and disrespectful death. There are no elaborate funerary rituals performed in order to appease his spirit. A heir cannot be installed for him as successor and thus, his spirit cannot be counted as an ancestral spirit.

3.3 The Meaning and Importance of the Hereditary Burial grounds (*Butaka*) of the Baganda Clans

In Buganda, all clans have burial grounds called *butaka*, where three or four generations of the clan have been buried. The burial place of a clan was such an important and significant place that displacing or evicting a resident from his *butaka* land could cause a lot of tension and social problems in the community. Right up to the time of the Buganda Agreement of 1900, the head of each clan lived on the land which was supposed to have been settled on by the first ancestor.

Usually, the family or clan burial ground was located in the banana plantation, a few meters away from the main house or on the side of a hill surrounded by small trees. It was always well looked after in order to make the spirits happy. When three successive generations, father, son, and grandson had been buried in such a piece of land, it became a *butaka* or freehold burial ground, where other members of the extended family would bury their dead (Frazer 1910:475).

In each respective family or clan burial ground, some members of the family would reside in it in order to tend the graves and keep others from using it. On these *butaka* lands the descendants of the original founders of each clan had the right to be buried. They could also live there as they wished. Traditionally, the *Mutaka's* (Clan head) position differed from that of other chiefs because the former could not be removed from his hereditary land at the king's pleasure. If such a thing happened, the expelled *Mutaka* would go to the king and make an appeal, naming the ancestors whose graves were on his land, and would invariably be reinstated.

The graves were always referred to in this connection simply as evidence of rightful ownership of land. Even peasants were usually left undisturbed in land which they had occupied for several generations. Roscoe, in discussing the position of *Bataka*, states that the king respected their rights because he dreaded the anger of the spirits (Mair 1934:164)

However, the hereditary clan lands started to be disrupted by the advent of the colonial administrators and the Western missionaries. The colonial masters had interests in acquiring land in order to use it for farming purposes and to establish administrative headquarters. The missionaries wanted land to set up their missions where churches, schools and hospitals would be erected. This need for land culminated in the arbitrary division of land which was realised in the signing of the 1900 Buganda Agreement. As a result:

Some people unlawfully acquired their fellowmen's *butaka* lands by reason of the 1900 agreement, which provided that each one should survey his own estate which he held in possession (Low 1971:62).

The *Bataka* (Clan heads) had the rights as the lineage sons of the original *Bataka*, who preserved the country from long ago on the system of *butaka* land tenure the Baganda ancestors dwelled.

With the unlawful acquisition of people's land, a new kind of land tenure system known as *Private Mailo land* was introduced by the colonial administrators, where land could be re-allocated. Rich people and some of the king's loyal and favourite subjects acquired the *Private Mailo lands* and immediately started to force the indigenous occupants from land which they had owned as "Freehold lands" for years. Such pieces had been passed on to them from generation to generation by inheritance through the male line. People's graves were destroyed and bodies of ancestors exhumed, a thing which was contrary and unacceptable to the Baganda customs. This disruption went on for a long time and there came a period when some families could not even trace their original burial grounds (Welbourn 1962:177).

Anyone whose dead body was exhumed had to appeal to the king. As a result, a representation of the people (the *Abataka*) petitioned the government on the question of the *Butaka* lands.

The *Abataka* petitioned the chief secretary of the government of Uganda on 6th May 1921 about complaints for the re-acquisition of their *Butaka* lands. An association known as *Ekibiina ky'Abaganda Abataka* (The Association of the Baganda Ancestors or *Bataka*) was formed with main aims to re-organise the *Butaka* estates that existed before the colonial advent, to see that each of the displaced persons got back his original *butaka* estates and for the British government to ratify and preserve the same, and to recognize all clan institutions that existed in the country and their relative duties to the king (Low 1971:64). The petition was signed by Daudi Basudde and Yudu Musoke Kasa, the secretaries of the Association of the *Bataka* of Buganda. In an effort to try to settle the main issue in dispute against which the *Abataka* were petitioning the government, king Daudi Chwa wrote to them on the 13th May 1922.

The king had previously noted that the Baganda Regents themselves acknowledged that some of the estates of the *butaka* were allocated and acquired by people who were not entitled to get them and even themselves had left their own estates held according to their title of office and acquired new estates which did not belong to them (Low 1971:63). Though the Buganda *Lukiiko* (Legislative council) was authorised by the principal agreement to allocate estates, it never ordered or authorised the *Lukiiko* to expel people from their estates which they possess. With regard to the *Abataka's* memorandum referring to the exhumation of bodies of the ancestors, the *kabaka* (king) ordered anyone whose ancestor's dead body was exhumed to appeal for action.

Similar issues rose from the *Mailo Estates*, but because the king could not re-allocate the *Mailo* estates anew, many Baganda lost their *butaka* lands. However, for the chief *butaka* estates, there was no compromise. They had to be given back to their rightful owners by the king's orders:

.... because every Muganda, who is known as a proper Muganda, has the feeling of one's butaka at heart and should therefore be sympathetic with his fellow Baganda in this question since this is not the first time for Butaka estates claims to be pleaded before the Bakabaka of Buganda kingdom. It is a fact that from olden times all the Bassekabaka were bound to accede to their requests (Low 1971:65)

The king ordered that for any *Mutaka* who was displaced for no just reason during the *Mailo land* allocations, the *Likiiko* had to allocate him a *Mailo* to enable him redeem or exchange his *Butaka Estate*.

The important point indicated here is the significance and meaning that the Baganda attached to their lineage ancestral burial grounds. Ancestral burial grounds were the actual places where the family or clan ancestral cults would mainly be centred, because that has always been the place the Baganda have considered to be the dwelling place of generations and generations of their ancestors. The ancestral burial grounds have often served a religious significance of uniting the *living dead* and their living descendants.

3.4 Some Scholarly Interpretations of Baganda Ancestral activities

In ritual observance the social and religious significance of Baganda's beliefs in ancestors are highlighted. Many writers on ancestors have discussed the social and religious significance of the beliefs in ancestors in one way or another. Though the Baganda's traditional experiences need to be analysed as holistic, as a scholarly observer, I noticed that there are other aspects and perspectives such as political, psychological, and economic themes which are related to the ancestral cults that need to be discussed. Here I would like to give my personal comment on those.

If one observes carefully (from a scholarly point of view) what goes on during ancestral rituals, s/he will surely be able to discover that the rituals, besides their central function of ancestral veneration, have some political, psychological, and economic implications in addition to the religious and social dimensions. This implies that the beliefs have adapted to social, economic and political change. Let me try to discuss these implications, after a summary of social and religious significance.

In some Baganda traditional family or clan ceremonies such as birth, initiation, naming, marriage and death, the calling on the ancestors to be present has to be done by a clan or family head or any other dignified personality. The moral influence of ancestors is thus limited to the narrow sphere of the family or clan. Generally, the ancestor cult functions to bridge the living and the dead. The function of ancestors is to maintain good social order among the people. They maintain social harmony and promote community well being and restore order when it is disrupted. Veneration of ancestors is strongly regarded as a religious obligation which serves social functions as well, bringing families or clans together to remember their deceased relatives and friends as a group. The act of sacrificing to the ancestors is one way of keeping society alive, and maintaining the social and moral order of that society.

Ancestral rituals are usually done so as to thank the ancestors for the care they are thought to give their living kin, to thank them for the good seasonal harvest, the fertility of land and women. Rituals are also performed in order to appease the

ancestors and ensure the continuous protection they provided their descendants against diseases, drought and wars. The types of rituals range from private ones like those performed by a head of a family when he places some food and beer offerings inside an ancestral hut or slaughters a cock and let the blood to pour at its entrance, to public ones like the death rituals I discussed in chapter two which involve the participation of many members of the extended family.

Some of these ideas and practices are still maintained. Rituals which occasionally bring members of a wide extended family together, such as the naming and wedding ceremonies, and the "last funeral rites" celebrations help in strengthening the bond of unity within the extended family. During such occasions, family members have communion with their ancestors and the gatherings meet social needs as well as other purposes which I am going to discuss. Ancestral spirits, such as all the clan dead (the majority of which are unknown to the performers of the rituals) indicate a group of ancestors who are revered and appeased as a collectivity. These are believed always to be present at all clan rituals performed by their descendants. The social idea of sharing happiness and misery together as a whole group is much emphasised in these rituals. It is strongly believed that ancestors sanction ethical behaviour in a community. Through the set laws governing behaviour and observance of tribal customs and norms, they advise their descendants and sometimes punish the wrong doers who violate those laws. In this chapter I have hinted at the taboos which sanction the mourners during the time when family members are still observing the mourning rituals for a dead adult relative.

Since ancestral rituals have to do with people's communication with the ancestors, they serve important religious functions. There are some families in Buganda that still invoke the spirits of their ancestors from time to time. Because of the good things people think their ancestors give them, they give them an elevated position. There is emphasis on the continuing belief in the activities of the ancestors (such as giving women and land fertility, protecting families against diseases, famine, witches and enemies of various kinds). In most cases, the ancestral activities are thought to be good and of benefit to the families where the *ancestors* lived while still alive. As I

have mentioned before, some people dedicate animals or birds to the ancestors. These creatures serve a religious function of appeasing the ancestors, thus keeping them at a good distance. The choice of colours of the animal's skins or the bird's feathers should reflect purity and sacredness otherwise the animal will not be accepted by the ancestors.

The practice of calling on names of the departed relatives when one is chanting invocations can be interpreted in religious terms. The invocations are like Christian petitionary prayers addressed to God, where the worshipper assumes that her/his prayers can be answered with the things s/he asks from God.

It is the custom in some parts of Africa to mention the names of the departed relatives when one is praying to God (Mbiti 1975:125).

The head of a particular clan, when installing a heir or heiress, has to recite and invoke a list of names of the family ancestors in his proclamations. This is a very strong act of reverence to the ancestors which can well be interpreted as a kind of prayer.

I should also reflect on Baganda ancestral cult from a psychological perspective. The traditional belief in Buganda about the appeasement and veneration of ancestors through sacrifices and offerings is that people performing the rituals should be rewarded with protection from famine, witches, diseases, wars and other pestilence. Failure to do the required rituals could anger the ancestral spirits, which would seek revenge on the family by for example, destroying their crops, sending diseases, or causing bad luck.

In the world we are living in today, people in both urban and rural areas are increasingly experiencing fears and anxiety and are constantly uncertain about their every day problems such as finding jobs, getting married and producing children, passing examinations at school, getting promotions at the work place, etc. Due to these fears and uncertainties some people try in one way or another to "*bribe*" the ancestors by performing the necessary rituals. The quest for survival where people

strive to satisfy their daily needs to get food, good health, and fight their enemies makes some people depend on the ancestors for most of the things they require. Thus there exists what can be termed, "psychological dependence on the ancestors and the ancestral cult syndrome" in some clusters of modern Baganda. Though today the belief that without the help of the ancestors nothing good can be obtained is not widespread, there are people who still feel that they cannot get what they require in life without the intervention of their ancestors. People normally find themselves referring to their ancestors either consciously or unconsciously. It can be argued therefore that some people perform ancestral rituals because of pressures. They feel they cannot achieve what they want unless their departed relatives come to their rescue. On the other hand, people become confident and hopeful of getting what they want after performing certain rituals to the ancestors. They spend and give away their valuable items in anticipation of getting some rewards in the end.

Royal ancestral rituals express important social-political realities. Royal ritual forms and political structures are closely knit and interrelated. Here royal rituals are not only a means of expressing political change, but also of transacting it. Through an association with large social and political units, the reigning king is always taken to be the greatest, most important and exalted person in Buganda. Even after the death of a king, his spirit is taken to be more important and powerful than ordinary ones with no attachments to larger social groups. After the death of a reigning king, the Buganda state must be constructed anew by the succession ceremonies whereby the new king is invested with ritual images of royal power and prosperity (Ray 1991:105).

The king is the political and symbolic centre of the nation. Royal ancestors are regarded as the custodians of the tribal laws and customs. Politically, the king maintains his distinctive position in society by preserving his status and extending his hegemony beyond the graves as a powerful traditional leader. Another point is that when elders in villages perform ancestral rituals, this is one way of ensuring that their hegemony is strengthened. As respected traditional and religious specialists, rituals help them to maintain their status and power. When a ritual official such as a spirit

medium or a head of clan speaks to the people, they have to listen and follow his instructions without questioning. This is so because he is considered to have special authority over them. A decrease in ritual performance however, may result in their status and power to be diminished or vice versa.

People in Buganda are keen to defend the land passed on to them by their predecessors at any cost. The main reason is to protect and safeguard their ancestral estates and burial grounds. They develop a spirit of nationalism in order to defend the very land which has been passed on to them through generations of their ancestors. This factor brings in an idea of solidarity, where people belonging to the same ethnic group or to the same clan get the feeling of belonging together as members of the same family or ethnic group.

Because ancestors are linked to culture, politics, people, rituals and African spirituality, it would be wrong to say that they are useless and have no place in Buganda. Thus, the political interpretations are relevant. Some ancestral rituals are done so as to enable those in power to maintain and strengthen it. This is how the old people hold on to power in their societies and dominate the young people especially in decision making.

It is believed that ancestors depend on living people for the things they require. When people perform rituals, they also expect to get something in the end. Looking at the main objects of ancestral sacrifices and offerings one can find out that the sacrificers spend some resources in order to obtain them. For example, the sacrifice to the ancestors may require the sacrificer to buy a cow, a sheep or a goat. Here the sacrificer needs to find the resources required to buy the animal. The officiant of the ritual too may claim his share, either in physical monetary terms or in the form of a gift which may turn out to be also an expensive item. All this is done with the hope that the ancestors should reciprocate by providing the desired gifts and blessings. I have already described that in some homes, there are ancestral baskets or bags (*ensawo za Bajjajja*) where money offerings and dried coffee (*emmwanyì*) are put for the family ancestors in order to seek their protection and help.

I have discussed how members of an extended family or to a wider extent, members of a clan occasionally meet a year or two years in order to pay homage and respects to their dead ancestors. During the family gathering, the weeds that have grown over the graves are cleared and the family graves are put back to order when the disappearing marks on the graves are replaced. The arrangement of such ceremonies normally requires large sums of money. So whenever the ceremonies take place it means that people's financial positions are going to be affected. Usually, prior to the ceremony, a clan official can go through various families of the extended family to collect the money required for such an occasion. People's transactions with ancestors involve religious personalities such as diviners and spirit mediums. These serve as intermediaries between people and the ancestors in the spirit world. If a person is attacked by an ancestral spirit, a diviner (*Omulaguzi*) and a medicine man can be consulted to calm down the situation. The diviner can show the people in a family the victim of the ancestral anger and how to appease the spirit. Naturally their services are not for free. Even in the olden days before the introduction of the monetary system, these people would get rewarded for their services with some kind of valuable gifts.

Certain animals such as cows, goats, sheep and to some extent, fowls are sacrificed to the ancestors. The diviners, spirit mediums and traditional medicine-men usually take a lion's share if any of the sacrificial animal is to be slaughtered or they acquire whole live animals after the ancestors have had their share. This is an easy way of acquiring wealth. Traditional specialists acquire animals and money from their clients who go to consult them. This whole notion of gifts, that is, giving of animals, fowls, food, beer and money (in today's situation) brings about the relevance of economic interpretations of these rituals. Ritual leaders, those who officiate the rituals, gain status and material things like gifts of animals and money. The whole ritual process involves money, cattle, sheep, goats, beer and other economic factors. Thus, economic factors affect and influence these beliefs.

The money economy brought new tastes and styles of life which are economically draining. The manner of conducting mortuary rites too has somehow changed. During

preparations for a funeral, money collections must be made. Money is needed to buy the coffin and the linen in which the dead body is shrouded. Money is also needed to buy food and beer which are usually distributed to the people who attend the funeral. The free contributions of food, beer and barkclothes have almost disappeared especially in the urban communities. The spirit of communalism has greatly been weakened. Traditionally, every adult Muganda was supposed to offer a free gift of barkcloth for the burial of a relative or a friend who was living in the same neighbourhood. Today, most of the funeral expenses must be met by the members of the deceased's family, like the buying of a coffin. In the ceremony of installing the heir (*Okwaabya olumbe*), most of the food to be cooked, the cow or ox to be slaughtered and the drinks must be bought with money. It is becoming more and more rare to hear of people pledging free contributions as it was some twenty years back.

In Buganda, though the main reason of the inheritance (*okusika*) ceremony is not to gain wealth, the function itself has economic benefits. Here, the one who inherits is not only expected to continue carrying on with the duties and responsibility of the deceased, but s/he also expects to acquire the biggest share of the dead person's wealth. If the dead person left cows, land, houses and other things, those can immediately become hers/his. There is also rivalry and competition over inheritance. If the dead person left a number of sons without clearly indicating the one to be his heir, fighting can break out over inheritance. There are cases in Buganda where brothers have gone to the extent of planning to kill each other because of their dead father's property. In polygamous families, mothers have struggled amongst themselves to see that each one fixes one of her sons as heir to the father when he dies. All this is done because of the huge desire to acquire property and money. The inheritance rituals here involve economic benefits because of the huge gains that are normally received by the successor. The inheritance rituals here involve economic benefits because of the gains that are normally received by the successor.

In all these cases, though the main nucleus of the ancestral activities centres on veneration as a whole, an observer can not fail to envisage psychological, political or economic interpretations from the whole range of activities that take place.

3.5 Conclusion

The Baganda have always ensured that their relationships with the ancestors are good. This has been possible through rituals prepared and performed by various families in their honour. The remembrance of the family ancestors previously was chiefly done through libation, animal sacrifice, food and beer offerings or any other items thought to appease the ancestors. Though today most of the practices associated with ancestral rituals have diminished and lost some of their traditional significance, some people continue to perform the limited rituals they can afford to do in order to ensure the safety of their lives and the prosperity in their households. Often, people address prayers and invocations to the dead relatives. On the other hand, death is feared. That is why when a person dies in a homestead, relatives and friends usually gather in the home of the dead person to spend nights of vigil until the deceased has been buried. In traditional Buganda, if a man died without begetting any child, a hole would be made in a wall of his house for the corpse to be removed. The idea was to make his spirit not to come back and harm the living descendants.

Today, you may find some people who are quite ignorant about the issue of the "royal ancestors". It is mainly the elderly people who used to serve the previous kings that are still keen about them. Due to a long period of non-function of traditional institutions in Buganda, children were born and grew up in the absence of kings and all the royalty that surrounded them, like the royal functions at his palace, tombs and other royal shrines. Despite the recent revival of the kingdom in 1993, some traditional rituals and ceremonies which used to be performed in honour of the dead kings are no longer practised. However, as I have highlighted in the chapter, Mutesa I started the transformation of the kingdom by doing away with some rituals like human sacrifices and the separating of the jawbones of the dead kings from the body and keeping them in temples while the bodies were buried somewhere else. The new religions he embraced demanded that people had to be buried whole so that they could rise whole on the judgement day. The later kings (after Mutesa I) went on eliminating some outdated rituals and at the moment Buganda has little left as far as the veneration of the *royal ancestors* is concerned.

CHAPTER FOUR

Effects of Christianity, Islam, and Political Independence on the Baganda's Beliefs in Ancestors

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the thesis I will discuss the effects of Christianity, Islam, and political Independence on Baganda's ancestral observance. Emphasis is put on the two religions because both are widely spread in Uganda. Islam and Christianity were the first non-African religions to be introduced in Uganda in the nineteenth century. First of all, in order to understand what was involved in the attempt to Christianise or Islamise traditional religious beliefs and practices in Buganda or Uganda as a whole, one should examine the Christian missionary and Muslim convictions and assumptions when they started to spread their religions in the mid nineteenth century. Secondly, s/he should also look at the converts who moved from one faith to the other. In doing this, it may perhaps be discovered that the converts to Christianity and Islam inhabited a combination of intermediate systems of beliefs and practices, each combining elements available in the other in a kind of *syncretistic way*. However, one has to understand that neither Christianity nor Islam changed people's traditional beliefs and practices completely. For example, the Baganda's beliefs in the ancestors continued to survive in their cultural, social and religious organizations. Because the new faiths were thought not to fully occupy the whole person as much as the traditional religions would do, many converts to these faiths continued to cling to their old traditional beliefs by incorporating them in the new ones. Both missionary work and colonialism tried to alienate the Baganda from most of their traditional beliefs. This chapter will highlight the religious adaptation to social, economic and political changes with reference to the Baganda's attitudes to the ancestors.

4.2 Christianity in relation to beliefs in Ancestors: the place of Ancestors in the Christian context

Since its arrival in Uganda in the late 1880s, Christianity has fought tirelessly to uproot certain traditional beliefs and practices from its followers and perhaps the community at large. On the one hand, the missionaries achieved some progress by managing to make some people drop some of those beliefs. On the other, they failed to persuade them to abandon the beliefs completely. The most sensitive area the missionaries and the indigenous preachers who got converted to the new religions struggled to fight was the belief in the ancestors and the *Balubaale* or national deities. Even well practising Christians in Buganda or in Uganda in general, continued to pay homage to their ancestors while at the same time they worshipped the God professed by the Christian or Muslim preachers.

In Buganda, during the early days of the European missionary work, the preachers would first persuade a person to reject his/her traditional beliefs, and burn all his/her fetishes and objects used in ritual activities. If one had an ancestral hut for the family ancestors, s/he would also be told to destroy it. It would be after denouncing the old beliefs that one was incorporated in the Christian family. But the condemnation of the ancestral cults by Christians set a stage for conflict between the people and Christianity and made communication of the "good news" in terms of culture very difficult. Belief in ancestors was considered by the missionaries to be incompatible with the Christian teaching. To honour one's ancestors was equal to the worshipping of false gods. *Mizimu* or ancestral spirits were collectively referred to as demons or Satan. Baganda writers like Lugira have highlighted this point a great deal.

The new forms of worship which were introduced created a lot of confusion and even promoted some kind of division in the Baganda society. Christianity condemned almost all traditional beliefs including beliefs in the ancestors and the new Baganda converts also started to discriminate against their fellow kinsmen who refused to abandon the old ways. They started looking at them as heathens or pagans and as Christians, it was not lawful to continue associating with *pagans* (Lugira 1979:21).

In church, African traditional forms of songs, dress, musical instruments and other objects were not allowed as they were taken by the missionaries to be associated with the traditional ancestral rituals. Instead, Western songs and hymns, instruments like pianos and organs and the ritual of burning incense, drinking wine and eating bread during the holy communion were introduced. The new way of worship was acceptable as being Christian and holy while the old traditional practices were taken to represent heathenism. But this was in a way stripping the Africans naked of their cultural heritage and identity, a move to undermine their traditional patterns of behaviour.

Lugira (1979:22) points out:

Hence, music instruments for church worship came from Europe. Hymns were sung according to the European tunes and in European languages including the archaic ones like Latin and Greek.

There was an assumption that everything an African did or thought was wrong and perhaps evil. The Christian missionaries tried as much as possible to disassociate their converts from the old cultures and beliefs. At baptism, names of Baganda heroes: Mukasa, Kibuuka, Musoke, Muwanga and others which intrinsically bore spirituality would not be accepted for christening. Instead, names like Livingstone, Harry, Wilson, Stanley etc., which had nothing to do with Baganda religious virtues were assumed (Lugira 1979:23).

Today, many Baganda continue to believe in their ancestors even when they convert to a new religion like Christianity. This is due to the strong belief that the ancestors are often helpful to their people. Whether one has converted to Christianity, Islam, Bahai, Hinduism etc., s/he will continue to appease the ancestors through various rituals and sacrifices in private rather than in public forms of worship.

It is possible to find many Baganda Christians who are still faithful and committed to their ancestral cults. This is because of what they experience in every day life. For example they believe that it is their ancestors' benevolent care that gives them the kind of protection they need. It is their ancestors who keep them from death, diseases, accidents and show interest in what they do and even make them succeed

in their endeavours. God may be there but He is not as close to them as the ancestors, whom they can turn to whenever there is a crisis.

It is very difficult for an African to turn against his ancestors and this is a problem which the preachers should not ignore (Moila 1989:149).

It can be suggested that the place and importance of ancestors should be considered as a focus for further discussion of some of the religious issues which emerge in the encounter of the Christian faith with traditional religions. As Kwame Bediako suggests (1995:210) the place and significance of ancestors actually offers opportunities for reflecting and understanding some dimensions of spiritual experiences and historic consciousness which are inherent in the Christian religion. Here I wish to exclude Islam because it has not been much restrictive and conservative to religious practices as far as Baganda's traditional beliefs are concerned. Thus, there are no serious condemnations by the Muslim religion on the issue of ancestors as those made by Christianity.

There are perspectives and questions about Christian conversion in Uganda which need to be analysed. If we consider the two great foreign religions, Christianity and Islam, it is important to observe Baganda's religiousness that has attached itself to both religions. The extent to which Christianity and Islam have been influenced by the traditional religions and vice versa has to be studied closely. However, I would like to suggest that traditional religions have to a large extent influenced the current shape of both religions. There are more traces of traditional religious practices in these religions than traces of Christianity or Islam in Baganda old beliefs and practices.

S.N. Ezeanya in his article "The Communion of Saints", talks of the ancestral cult from a Christian point of view as:

Ancestral cult prepares the ground for the doctrine of the communion of Saints. The strong attachment to ancestors makes it easy to promote both devotion to the Saints and prayers for the departed (1969:45).

Here, the notion of adaptation and adoption is clearly demonstrated. By incorporating the ancestors in their circles, the Christians are trying to modify ancestral beliefs in order to suit Christian standards. Traditional ancestors can be linked to the communion of Christian Saints. It may be argued that ancestors get converted to Christianity when they are incorporated in the family of Saints. During modern ancestral rituals, the ancestors can be asked to intercede for their living relatives before God. Thus, when approached this way, ancestors play important mediatorial roles between people and God in the same way Saints are expected to do.

McVeigh (1974:124&169) suggests that Christian affirmation of African ideas on ancestors could make a significant contribution to the doctrine of the communion of Saints. The incorporation into Christianity of ideas derived from African ancestral cults can serve as expressions of family or clan solidarity and continuity. The idea of the communion of Saints will surely satisfy the passionate religious desire of many Africans to be linked with their ancestors. Prayers for the dead and pleading for the salvation of the dead will make Christianity more meaningful to the Africans. A new doctrine of ancestors is the unavoidable by-product of understanding God in African experience. It would be helpful if the church introduces new ways of re-interpreting the tradition of those spirits they designated as *ancestors* (Saints). There is an unresolved problem though, of determining the extent of the importance of Christian perception of ancestors. There is an issue of the so called *faithful ancestors* in African Christianity today. According to Kwame Bediako (1995:230), not all ancestors are implied, but those who were faithful to the Supreme God before the arrival of the gospel, as well as early converts. Here the ancestors are conceived as fully within the new community of faith and they pray together, an idea which fits well in the Christian religion as well as the African world view.

In today's situation, if the church in Uganda is to remain strong and not divided, it could make attempts to reach a reconciliation with traditional religions, and a reconciliation can only happen as a result of general re-education in accordance with the trends of contemporary attitudes and pastoral practice (Shorter 1975:146). For example, the Catholic and some other denominational churches have started to work

towards the concept of cultural pluralism. Translation of liturgical texts has been implemented, creation and acceptance of local hymns in churches, the use of traditional music instruments like drums and some traditional religious ideas such as the collectivity of ancestors have been tolerated and incorporated into their liturgy. In Buganda, the liturgy and most church hymns are conducted in Luganda. Traditional instruments like drums are often played. Local names of some Baganda heroes are also accepted for christening such as the names of the twenty-two Baganda martyrs.

Some new Religious Education courses in East Africa have been created that have attempted to utilize the ideals of traditional religion and culture. However, there are other Christian publications which continue to use negative and offensive references to traditional religions, referring to them as primitive, and this can inspire a mistrust and contempt for them. Shorter (1975:147) suggests that institution of dialogue with the so called spokesmen for the living traditional religions that still exist (such as diviners, spirit-mediums, healers and other traditional religious specialists) will do everyone a good service. Religious leaders and scholars should develop a more tolerant and discerning attitude towards African traditional religion and try to remove offensive terms and statements aimed against African traditional religions.

On the other hand there are traditional practices that have been dropped as a result of the encounter with missionary religions, colonial administration and modernity. For example, the old ancestral rituals involving human sacrifices which were meant to appease the spirits of dead kings were phased out immediately after the arrival of the Christian missionaries in Buganda. This practice was cruel and deserved to be dropped.

4.3 The Impact of Islam on the Ancestral Cult

Islam, like Christianity, also accelerated the process of the breaking up of Baganda traditional religion. Islam was introduced to Buganda by the Arab traders who came

via the East African coast in 1844 (Gray 1947:80-97). Mutesa I (whom I discussed earlier) embraced Islam and used it to acquire more social powers, especially his power over religion (Kasozi 1981:129).

It was Mutesa I who rejected the old custom of separating the skull of a dead king from the body and keeping it in a royal shrine while the body was buried elsewhere. Mutesa claimed that Islam required that people should be buried whole so that they should rise whole on the final day of judgement. By doing this, he violated the royal custom founded by his forefathers. He recommended that the common people should also bury their dead in the Islamic manner instead of the traditional way.

It can be argued that Mutesa's customary reforms might have been influenced to a large extent by the Islamic and Christian concepts about the life after death. Following his "*intoxication*" by the Muslim religion, Mutesa I changed many practices and rites such as the removal of the jaw bone from the body of a dead king and the sacrificing of human beings to the dead king's spirit. These ritual practices were started by his forefathers and were a process of centralizing into the hands of the monarchy powers over social and religious issues which had formerly been entrenched in the community. In 1869, Mutesa I having consulted with some of his senior chiefs who had converted to Islam and an Arab friend Khamis ibn 'abdullar, ordered that the body of his late father Ssuuna be disinterred and be rejoined with its jawbone so that it could be reburied in a tomb. He did this to eight other dead kings. This was thought to be in conformity with the Muslim doctrine of resurrection, in order to ensure that his ancestors would be resurrected intact (Kaggwa 1901. Translation by Kiwanuka 1971:160). To some Baganda traditionalists, this act was interpreted as a transgression of royal customs which would bring serious consequences to the kingdom in the future.

Like Christianity, Islam interpreted the beliefs and honouring of the ancestors as a kind of polytheism, where God was being worshipped alongside other traditional spiritual beings. Venerating ones' ancestors was taken to be equal to worshipping other gods as opposed to the worshipping of the one true God *Allah*. True

monotheism as observed and taught by the Muslim prophets of the past stressed direct communication with "Allah". Therefore, the beliefs and practices in ancestors were regarded as unacceptable among Muslim followers. Those who failed to join the Muslim community were referred to as infidels (*kafirs*). This destabilizing influence of the Muslim and Christian activities upon established traditional beliefs and values has gone on for quite a long time culminating in the erosion and loss of some beliefs and practices which previously formed the fabrics of social and religious identity in Buganda.

4.4 How the Royal cult was affected by political Independence

Colonialism and later political independence, brought a re-evaluation of the role of traditional rulers and cultures for the old political system. There was a re-thinking on the importance of traditional beliefs and the authority of the kings and other traditional rulers and religious specialists was weakened.

In Buganda, the Europeans introduced the land re-allocation policy by virtue of the 1900 Buganda agreement. As a result, a certain class of people favoured by the king acquired land unlawfully from other people. Some of the rich people who got large portions of land, known as *Mailo* land (for the largest were measured in square miles), started forcing the indigenous citizens to leave their ancestral burial grounds. The family or clan ancestral burial grounds were normally acquired through inheritance from generation to generation. As a result of this disruption people's graves were destroyed and bodies of ancestors exhumed (Low 1971:62&63). According to tradition, this was very unacceptable, shameful and disturbing. Some Europeans acquired land to cultivate cash crops for export by means of using native labour.

The Arab traders and colonial administrators introduced the money economy which encouraged large proportions of adult males to move away from their homes in search of manual labour on European farms. It also meant labourers spending long periods

away from their families and local communities. In a way, this marked the beginning of the weakening of clan and lineage structures. There were royal duties which required able bodied men from various villages in Buganda to participate. For example, they would be required to repair or construct shrines where the dead kings' jaw bones and bodies were kept. The introduction of the money economy brought the desire for money and the demand for greater individual freedom. People started to abandon and neglect such royal duties. Traditionally, communal living mattered more than individualism but this adaptation to political change brought in a weakening of the royal cult in particular and the ancestral cult in general.

By the time of Uganda's political independence (1962) traditional rulers like kings and local religious specialists such as royal spirit mediums, medicine men, diviners, and chiefs had lost powers and the respect they used to command. The authority they wielded in their own society was much weakened.

In Buganda today, it seems that people are becoming more individualistic. Modernity seems not to encourage the existence of social groups larger than a nuclear family, that is husband, wife and a limited number of their children. At the moment, with salaried employment, many youngsters are no longer interested in staying in villages. They are attracted to cities and towns where employment and modern social amenities can easily be found. Nowadays, when a person dies, people no longer spend weeks or months to mourn him/her. Immediately after burial, people disperse to go back and attend to their jobs. Only a few relatives and some neighbours will stay with the bereaved family for a few more days after the actual burial ceremony has taken place. The elaborate traditional period of mourning the dead is considered time-wasting as it interferes with people's economic activities. The manner of conducting mortuary rites too has somehow changed. During the preparations for the funeral, money collections are part and parcel of the ceremony. Money is needed to buy the coffin and the linen in which the dead body is shrouded. Money is also needed to buy food and beer which are usually distributed to the people who attend the funeral. In the past, family members, friends and neighbours would make contributions of food, beer and barkclothes for free, which would be enough to conduct an adequate and

respectable funeral ceremony. These days money is taking precedence over the old voluntary funerary contributions from relatives and friends. In other words, the death and funerary rituals are becoming more and more commercialized. However, the custom of carrying dead bodies of people who die when they are far away from their family homesteads, back to the ancestral burial grounds is still much practised. It is a reminder that a Muganda person has to be made to rest next to her/his forefathers when s/he finally dies.

4.5 Can Christianity, Islam, and the Ancestral cult live together in harmony?

Two notions are continually present in the ongoing reflections about belief in ancestors. These are change and adaptation. The emphasis, especially in the Christian religion, is gradually shifting from a conservative and strict to a more accommodating and tolerant approach. This can be a healthy development because the cultures and traditional beliefs of people have to be given due consideration, that is, giving them an appreciation of their traditional experiences including their own religious beliefs.

Despite the negative and hostile attitudes to African traditional religion by Christian missionaries and some Muslim preachers, today those groups seek positively to integrate into their own liturgy and teaching elements of African rituals, beliefs and practices. As Peter Clarke notices:

Many of the traditional life cycle rituals in the religious and cultural life of African Christians such as birth, marriage and funeral rites, and practices such as the veneration of ancestors, once frowned upon by mission Christianity and which consequently were simply allowed to run parallel to the so-called Orthodox version of the faith, have now been incorporated in one form or another into the church's liturgy (1991:189).

What is important to note here is that throughout Africa, Christianity has undergone considerable transformation as a result of its encounter with the traditional religious practices of African people.

Many Christian churches have already embarked on what they call "Inculturation" or "Enculturation", which is a move to bring together different forms of worship, especially those found in African beliefs, and create a harmonious atmosphere between faith and culture. It is the continuous endeavour to make Christianity truly meaningful in the cultures of indigenous believers in order to make it relevant to existing situations.

Inculturation means the honest and serious attempt to make Christ and his message of salvation evermore understood by peoples of every culture, locality and time. It means the reformulation of Christian life and doctrine into the very thought-pattern of each people (Waliggo 1986:12).

Adaptation is another term that is used to signify the same reality. The only defect is that the term does not go far enough to express the reality of an indissoluble marriage between Christianity and each local culture. It only takes into account a selection of certain rites and customs, purify and insert them within the Christian rituals where there are any apparent similarities. For example, in the Catholic church, ancestors can be linked to the communion of Christian Saints.

Here the aim is to make the message of Christ understood in the cultural context of the life of a believer, as both an African and a Christian. In addition, the issue of ancestral veneration has to be seriously reviewed by mainstream churches because this practice seems to be inherent in many Africans religious thought patterns. In a pluralistic world, any religious system that tries to undermine or swallow up traditional belief systems it comes into contact with is out of place. Shorter (1975:142) suggests that what is required is a differentiated system which is in real contact through religious dialogue with other systems of beliefs and values in various localities. If the church wants to be universal it must be prepared to admit cultural pluralism. This is what most Christian denominations in Uganda are trying to do.

There is debate as regards the ancestral cult within Christian churches. The debate is concerned with the centrality of God as opposed to the ancestors' powers and authority. The main issues at stake here are, should ancestral rituals and veneration be included in the Christian liturgies and can the two work together in harmony?

The role and influence of the ancestors are thought to be limited and confined to individual families and clans. The problem comes about when church preachers and some believers misinterpret ancestors as the *absolute* moral agents to the people. God only is the absolute agent (absolute should be understood here as meaning perfect, unlimited and self-existent). I have explained that the role of the ancestors has always been limited to families and clans. One can perhaps argue that the influence and functions of the ancestors have sometimes been too much exaggerated.

Christianity teaches that God but not the ancestors is the "*absolute*" protector of our lives. However, when Christianity was introduced in Uganda, it found the Baganda knowledgeable about the spiritual realm. They already believed in the existence and powers of spiritual beings, the supreme being *Katonda* (creator) being on top and very remote from them. The Baganda recognised the supernatural as the source of goodness and morality. Therefore, if Christian followers can look beyond the ancestors and give God a distinctive position in their spiritual quest, there will not be any confusion. At the same time ancestors should not be denied their rightful position. There should be a balance of both God and the ancestors, with God reigning as supreme.

Since there are Baganda people who believe that the ancestors have supernatural powers and can influence their lives, Christian and Muslim leaders should be careful when preaching to their followers against the ancestors. There should be a proper place of ancestors in the Christian and Muslim faiths. Some people can argue that ancestors, like the Catholic saints, are God's agents. Ancestors are sometimes believed to warn or advise their descendants not to do bad things. They are believed to guide people in the same way the Christian saints or angels do. From what has been discussed, one can easily admit that ancestor veneration is certainly comparable with the Christian cult of saints in so far as it is an expression of the moral ideals of a given society.

In the Roman Catholic religion a few dead people who lived exemplary lives are recognised by the church as saints, and there is the recognition that the saints may be enabled by God to work miracles (Cameron 1977:27).

This function of acting like Saints is what most Baganda believers in the powers and influence of the ancestors in a Christian sense are in agreement with. There are vivid examples where ancestral veneration has been incorporated into Christian and Islamic forms of worship in Buganda. This can mainly be observed during the burial and funeral ceremonies in Buganda, and elsewhere in Africa.

It includes the address of the ancestral spirits of the dead person by the people attending the burial, by a priest if the deceased was a Christian or a Sheikh if s/he was a Muslim prior to the lowering of the corpse into the grave. At the closing prayer, God is asked to receive the departed. During the ceremony of the "last-funeral-rites" when an heir is installed, Christian or Muslim prayers precede the ritual. During the actual time of installing a successor, the ancestors are addressed and invoked when the head of the clan makes his proclamation, calling on a line of family and clan ancestors. This is the official induction of the deceased's spirit into the ancestor realm as a condition for and sanction of all future interaction between the living and the departed elders.

Since societies are dynamic, ancestral rituals too change from one generation to another and are not static in nature. Some of the ancestral rituals which are still being performed are gradually being modified. Practices like pouring libation, slaughtering of animals and fowls, placing of food at the entrance of *amasabo* (ancestral huts) for the ancestors and others may disappear with time, but this does not mean that people will forget all about their ancestors.

There are people who believe in the mere existence of the ancestors. As my field work findings will show in the next chapter, most of the people believe that there are ancestors. Others believe that ancestors have powers to influence their lives but do not perform rituals to them unless they are struck by a major crisis. Usually, it is during difficult times that people may think of all possible options in order to solve their problems. This happens when people have sick relatives whose health conditions fail to get better after trying western type of medicine. It is possible to find people consulting diviners or spirit mediums for help when scientific medication proves to

be of little use. There are those who perform the ancestral rituals because they believe that their ancestors have powers to influence them and to reward them with good fortunes if they fulfil their ritual obligations.

Much of the literature I have read on this subject seem to emphasise this point. Although some people retain beliefs in the powers of the ancestors, they perform no rituals except when things go wrong, say, when misfortunes befall them.

But loss of faith in the influence and power of one's ancestors may lead to a decrease in the ritual performance. At crisis time however, this person can make occasional sacrifices and offerings to them. A situation where people may continue to believe in the influence of their ancestors cannot be disputed, but their belief in the powers and importance of the ancestors keeps on changing due to the influences discussed earlier in the chapter.

4.6 Conclusion

It has often been said that the weakness of African traditional religious systems in the face of European pressure was that each was so limited in its area of application (Ranger and Kimambo 1972:215). On the other hand, some people are still interested in the traditional religions because of their efficacy. They think that they can get good results such as material and spiritual satisfaction from traditional healers, diviners, rain-makers and spirit mediums. Most of the Baganda traditional beliefs, and in particular the beliefs in ancestors, have been weakened or have declined largely due to the effects of Christianity, and Islam. Though Christianity introduced constructive elements into the Baganda or Uganda nation such as building schools for formal education, hospitals to combat diseases and introducing new ways of agriculture, they were responsible for spreading the propaganda which was aimed at discrediting traditional beliefs and practices. They also contributed towards the disintegration of the family and clan structures because they thought that the larger traditional social groups with their organisation and ideas would not work in harmony with their

Christian message. They were opposed to many aspects of native practices and beliefs, whether these were directly forbidden by Christianity or not. They discouraged polygamy, bride price, a number of initiation ceremonies, traditional songs and dancing, wailing at funerals and the beliefs in ancestral spirits. They labelled most of the traditional beliefs primitive and superstitious. Here, the restrictions imposed on the native Baganda resulted in cultural alienation, psychological imperialism, and social inhibition. The restrictions infringed on people's rights of worship and socialising, hence bringing in a feeling of Western domination and cultural superiority.

In the next chapter I am going to present and discuss the findings from fieldwork about contemporary Baganda beliefs in ancestors. In the discussion, I will try to discuss the information collected in an effort to see how it relates to some of the issues and themes raised in the earlier chapters.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion of Fieldwork findings

5.1 Introduction

This study is the result of careful literature review and field work done in some parts of Buganda mainly during the month of July 1995 and in July and August 1996. It also includes earlier knowledge about ancestral beliefs which I have acquired through experience over a number of years before I carried out this field work. Before I embarked on this research, I had prior knowledge on the topic under investigation since I was born and grew up in this cultural setting. I made a lot of contact with a number of Baganda people, interviewed old and young, men and women, rural and urban people and in the end managed to get some good answers from them. The people I interviewed were the people whom I thought mattered as far as my research was concerned. The approach of obtaining information about people's beliefs from the grassroots was indeed very useful. The interviews I conducted helped me to validate much of the information which I had gathered from the literature review.

Much of the information gathered during the actual field work which corroborates some of the material that appears in the existing texts (for example, the nature of ancestral cults and beliefs in ancestors) has been presented in a descriptive way but has also been analysed and criticised where necessary.

When I started the field work, I already had a picture of the oral traditions and history of various theories of Baganda's beliefs. The field work was about the examination of recorded historical facts, for example, death and funerary rituals, royal history about the tombs, jaw-bone shrines etc., by the works of renowned researchers on the Baganda like Roscoe, Mair, Mbiti, Ray and others. These authors collected the information from local reliable informants and from the royal guardians

of the tombs and shrines, clan heads, as well as leading ritual officers connected with accession and death ceremonies in Buganda. The works of Apollo Kaggwa (a learned Muganda and main historian of Buganda) are much relied on since he wrote without any biases and prejudice on the subjects he researched at that time. Though one would say that in today's situation first generation cultural anthropologists like Roscoe, Mair and others are no longer fashionable because they are thought to have left out quite a lot about the communities they studied, lack of available second or third generation scholarship in the area of my concern, makes me rely on their works instead.

The standpoint adopted in this thesis has been to study and analyse the beliefs in the ancestors and the performance of the ancestral rituals in order to ascertain the extent of religious adaptation to social, economic and political change. Here, early accounts of pre-missionary and pre-colonial ancestral cults have been described and analysed properly. In writing this thesis my main objective has not been to discard the accumulated knowledge of past scholarship about the ancestors, but to endeavour to clarify and examine it in the light of modern life styles and conceptualisations. The baseline of my assessment, while drawing freely on the evidence provided by other scholars, is my first-hand experience of the Baganda beliefs. First-hand statements and narratives from informants have been analysed in order to arrive at some unbiased conclusions about the subject under study.

5.2 Interviews with people

The people I interviewed included old Baganda men and women, professionals like teachers, civil servants, clergymen, and a number of youths. The majority (out of about one hundred people that I interviewed) believed in the existence of the ancestors and life after death. A few (about 10%) did not believe in life after death at all. Those who did not believe said that when a person dies, it is the end of everything for him or her. Most of the people who acknowledged their beliefs in the life after death emphasised that ancestors are the spirits of only those people who

were good and influential during their life time. This confirms my earlier description that not everybody becomes an ancestor when s/he dies. Most of the people I interviewed had never been affected by ancestral powers.

Sserwanga Stephen (a 29 year old teacher) testified to having been affected by the spirits of his ancestors once. He said to me that when the incident happened, he lost some of his normal senses and felt something strange occupying his whole body. He passed out and when he regained consciousness, people around told him that he was talking in a voice which was similar to that of one of the old relatives who had died some years ago.

The second person who confessed to have been affected by his ancestors was a 24 year old student, Emmanuel Bbosa. This one's experience started with a slight headache, fever and shivering. Shortly afterwards he became unconscious. He did not understand what was happening but was told later that two of his grandparents' spirits had possessed him and were demanding a cow, a black goat and two white hens. The victim of the ancestral attack said that after his grandparents' spirits had made their demands known to the relatives present (speaking through the victim of possession himself) and the demands guaranteed, the spirits left him and immediately he recovered. He felt weak for some time as the fatigue disappeared from him slowly and in phases.

Yoana Mulindwa, an old man at Kalungu village in Masaka District, narrated to me a story about a son of his late brother Petero Kasamba who was seriously ill after being possessed by his late father's spirit. It started when Dominic Lubega (son and heir to his late father Kasamba) decided to sell his dead father's land to raise money and start a business. In the written *will* which the deceased left, the successor had no right to sell any portion of the land which also had a number of family graves. This young man did not take the warning seriously. Soon after the inheritance rites were concluded, Lubega went ahead and sold off the land (*kibanja*), which according to tradition belonged to his ancestors. This was a contravention of the father's order not to sell the land and it would not go unpunished. He was attacked by a mysterious kind

of disease with symptoms like near insanity. The elders in the family consulted a diviner (*omulaguzi*) who after performing his divination identified the cause of the attack and established that it was the spirit of the dead man that was taking revenge on the son who had sold the land. The diviner prescribed some special herbs and dry leaves were brought and put on a broken piece of a pot (*olujjo*) and live coal placed on them. The afflicted person was covered with a blanket and made to inhale the smoke from the concoction of drugs (*okumunyookeza eddagala*). Immediately, the spirit was exorcised. It left him having been assured that the money was going to be returned to the buyer and the land to be recovered. Then some peace was restored.

This old man (Mulindwa) told me that what he saw and heard during the time when the spirit was being dislodged from the sick person was raving, sweating, and talking in a strange way. Finally, the man who was believed to be possessed by the angered spirit became unconscious. He regained consciousness after about thirty minutes when he became normal again. The informant said that if the medicine-man had not treated the sick person quickly, perhaps the victim would have died.

In the rituals performed at times of sickness divined as having been sent by the ancestors, the importance of the descent groups is much highlighted. There is participation of a number of relatives in the extended family. These rituals involve invoking the ancestors, calling on them to be present and intervene. There is dancing, singing clan songs, and the use of "home protective medicines". Usually, during the incident, there is a mixture of anxiety and fear among the observers which justifies the belief that the ancestors are both feared and loved.

Some of the people I interviewed enumerated a number of rituals which they perform to the ancestors. They build ancestral huts for them, make sacrifices where they offer gifts of food and beer to the ancestors and occasionally "feed them with blood" from the animals they sacrifice to them. They pray through them, clean the graveyards, air out family problems during clan ceremonies and carry out the required death and funerary rites.

Many informants admitted that ancestors can punish their living relatives if they break or violate the customary laws (like in the case of Lubega who was nearly killed by the spirit of his dead father). But this applies only to those people who recognise them. The kind of punishments which ancestors are believed to send include: mental disturbance, famine, poverty, impotence, barrenness, poor and stunted crops, wars, epidemics, or even death. Quite a few did not accept that ancestors have the powers to punish offenders. These insisted that it is only God who has the power to punish people who do wrong.

About 70% of the people accepted that beliefs in ancestors and traditional beliefs in general have been greatly influenced by Christianity, Islam, Western education and values. As a result of these influences, ritual performances have declined in some places.

I asked one civil servant by the name of Kintu Leonard how important ancestors were to him and he answered me that they were important to him because he derives his surname from them. He insisted that his ancestors protect him, and provide rain and food to all people in the nation. Most important, he said that ancestors make him realise the cultural values and ethics of his clan. Ancestors solve his problems and this makes him gain more confidence and trust in them. They show people that though they are dead physically, they are still active members of families and clans. But there are less people who share views like his.

Let me present a few accounts by individual informants of their attitudes to the ancestors, which will show how this subject is dealt with in contemporary Buganda.

Account 1. Joseph Nsereko Muwanga is a 24 year old Muganda school teacher. He believes in the notion of life after death. On the question of life after death he said: "Life after death is a spiritual life (not bodily) and it is in form of a renewal or punishment for what one has been doing or done during his/her stay on earth. Consequently, some people are exalted and live in very good life whereas others are punished and lead a life of misery".

Muwanga told me that there are people who believe that ancestors have special powers to influence the lives of people but he admitted that such beliefs were on the decrease. He said that those beliefs are not as strong and relevant today as they were fifty years ago.

According to Muwanga, "some people believe that there is a hierarchy in the spirit world. People who were leaders are assumed to enter into the spirit world with similar status and responsibilities. The spirits of common people will still remain so in the spirit world".

On the question of spirit mediums being respected in Buganda, he answered in the affirmative. I asked him why and he replied: "They are expected to be the mediators between man and the spirit world. They are expected to bring blessings to clans and individuals".

When asked how ancestors influence people's day to day activities, Muwanga replied that some people consult them before doing anything which is vital. He however denied having been affected by the powers of his ancestors at any time, but performed some ritual to them only occasionally. The rituals he admitted having performed involved naming his children after his forefathers, and those connected with death. He does not think that ancestors get their power from God.

On worshipping the ancestors he said: "ancestors are not worshipped, they are only venerated. It is God (Katonda) who is worshipped. Ancestors are simply mediums or instruments through which God is worshipped. But due to ignorance of some ritual performers, they sometimes do acts which appear like worshipping them".

Muwanga admitted that ancestors are thought to punish their living relatives if they break the customary laws. He said that to those people who recognise them it may be likely to happen. Ancestors can make them fall sick, get poor, have no children or even kill them.

About the way Christianity, Islam, Western education, urbanisation and modernity have influenced his belief and attitudes to the ancestors, he said; "I do not see any need to venerate them though I may praise those who were courageous and well behaved while still alive. Those who did great things for their people in my tribe can be praised. I do not need the mediation of ancestors in order to communicate to God. I do it directly or channel my needs through the Christian Saints like St. Joseph, the blessed virgin Mary, the Uganda martyrs etc.". "With urbanization, Western education and modernity, (i) I regard belief in the power of ancestors as superstitious. (ii) I trust hard work, integrity and patience as tools to success other than running to the ancestors. (iii) I regard ancestors as being too weak to influence real life situations".

Account 2. Ssentamu Julius is a 24 year old third year Engineering undergraduate student at Makerere University, Uganda. He believes strongly in the life after death and the existence of ancestors. This belief makes a lot of sense to him. To him, the belief that ancestors can punish their living relatives or provide wealth to them is doubtful. What he believes is that ancestors are still living in the midst of their people but in an invisible form.

On the issue of spirit mediums, Ssentamu agrees that they are respected in Buganda especially by those people who always consult them. "They are the link between people and the ancestors. They are the ones who take the gifts and offerings to the ancestors. They are believed to be nearer to the ancestors than ordinary people".

When I asked him whether he had ever been affected by the powers of his ancestors he answered in the negative. He also confessed not to have performed any rituals to his ancestors though he believed that the ancestors existed. He also believes that ancestors get their powers from God.

Though he did not himself believe that ancestors can punish wrong doers, he admitted having heard people say that ancestors can cause death, diseases, famine, poverty, infertility and such other disasters.

On how Christianity, Islam, Western education, urbanization and modernity have influenced his belief and attitudes to his ancestors, Ssentamu said that those influences have confirmed to him that ancestors are not dead, but living with God. The present and future are related to one another and people should not fear death. He however said that many young people no longer believe in the activities of the ancestors as a result of those influences. He takes ancestors as important to him because he believes that they are mediators between people and God. They socialise with their living kin and help in uniting them.

Account 3. I interviewed 58 year old Grace Kakande, an educated and mature house wife and got the following responses.

"Do you believe in life after death?" I asked. She replied "Yes". I asked her what she understood by life after death. She answered "Life after death means that when people die, their spirits continue to keep in contact with their living relatives". I asked her, "Is there any hierarchy in the spiritual world and how is it described?" She replied "There is a hierarchy. If you die when you are an important person in community, your people will still recognise your spirit as important. If you are poor, your spirit will be considered in similar terms. This hierarchy follows the positions people hold when they were still alive".

As I mentioned earlier, not everybody who dies qualifies to become an ancestor. She said that people like thieves, robbers, murderers, witches and those who commit suicide cannot become ancestors when they die because they transgress the laws of the land. "Because they do not live to the expected standards, their death is a curse by the spirits. They turn into bad spirits which bring misfortunes to people". Women who hold responsibilities in society like house wives and mothers become ancestors when they die, but ancestors of their own clans not their husbands'. For children, despite their innocence cannot become ancestors because they do not contribute to the development and wellbeing of society. In other words, they depend on the adults for their survival.

Grace Kakande believed that ancestors could influence people's day to day activities. "People think that the living dead normally see and guide them in everything they do. Therefore, many of them are careful not to do wrong things which can anger their ancestors". Though she told me that she believed in ancestors having the power to affect people in a special way, she told me that she had never been affected by them herself.

I asked her how often do she performed rituals to her ancestors and what she usually asks from them. She replied, "Not very often. It is only when we have family gatherings. Whenever there is a function which brings us together, for example a wedding, death and funeral rites, we perform rituals to our ancestors. Normally, we ask for things like protection from diseases, luck, money, children, love from their husbands or wives, employment, etc...".

For Grace, she did not believe that ancestors were worshipped. She called the actions that were involved in ancestral rituals "veneration". She said that the term worship should be applied to God only.

When I asked her how important ancestors were to her, she replied "When I face problems, I resort to my ancestors for help. They help me to give me special guidance to follow the right direction in life. They give me security and a sense of cultural belonging. Generally, ancestors are important to society because many people fear to anger them and in the process, there is harmony and order in society".

Account 4. Gabriel Mgeyekwa, a 37 years old and a Pastor belonging to the Lutheran church told me; "I do not believe in the activities and power of the ancestors but I acknowledge that some people (including those in my church) believe in both God and the ancestors. To him ancestors are not important and he believes that they do not have any serious effect on the living people. He said "I do not refuse people in the church, if they want, to pay respects to or venerate their ancestors. After all, I know that ancestors do not help their people".

He mentioned that some Christians in his congregation believe that ancestors can be offended if they are forgotten by their living kin. They also believe that ancestors act as intermediaries between man and God, and that they have more power and knowledge than human beings. When the ancestral spirits are offended, they can bring misfortune and suffering or when they are happy they can bring blessings to the living.

On spirit mediums, the Pastor accepted that these still exist and are respected by their clients and some other people in society. The people who consult them believe that they help them in solving their problems. The spirit mediums are believed to communicate with the ancestors on their behalf and the ancestors can communicate back to them through the spirit mediums. For their role, they are respected.

Though he denied having performed any ritual to the ancestors (after all he does not believe in them), he admitted that there are people whom he knew who were performing the ancestral rituals. "I have seen people performing rituals once or twice or more times depending on their needs. The aim is to give thanks to their ancestors, to avoid punishments from them and ask for blessings. To the people who believe in them, ancestors can bring bad luck, poverty, diseases, poor harvest, impotence and barrenness etc., if the living relatives break the customary laws".

As a church leader, Pastor Gabriel admitted that Christianity and Western education had changed him completely and made him not believe in ancestors at all. However, he told me that there were some Christians who occasionally invoke the ancestors when confronted with serious problems. They believe that ancestors can help them. Some people think that their ancestors give them security and a sense of belonging. Ancestors are important to the people who believe in them because they are thought to maintain law and order in society by punishing those who transgress the laws and rewarding those who follow and respect the customs and traditional values.

I interviewed a group of ten Catholic students to hear what they had to say about the ancestors. I asked them whether they believed in life after death. All of them believed

in the life after death. I asked them, "Do you believe in ancestors?" All of them said, "Yes". I asked them again, "Do you believe that your ancestors can punish you if you break the customary laws?" The five students said "Yes" while three answered in the negative. Of the whole group, two accepted communicating with their ancestors and performing rituals to them. Even those who said that they believed in their ancestors confessed that the church they belong to did not allow them to get involved in ancestral activities. So from my findings, five had positive attitudes towards the ancestors, three did not and two were doubtful.

5.3 Comments on Fieldwork findings

Nowadays, there not as many people in Buganda who venerate the ancestors as they were before independence. Though belief in the existence of the ancestors is widely spread, there is a general decrease in ancestral activities. Ancestral huts (*Amasabo*) and the cults associated with them have decreased in numbers. This is mainly due to the effects of Christianity, Islam, colonialism, modernity and the changes in social and economic circumstances. One can say that there are a few ancestral cults remaining especially at family burial grounds where most of the burial and funeral rituals in honour of the dead relatives still occur.

The royal cults, their mediums and the many shrines where a number of royal ancestral rituals used to take place have decreased in number and lost much of their old charm. The royal ancestral rituals that used to be associated with the veneration of the dead kings have nearly disappeared. Political changes at the traditional level have happened as a consequence of colonial activities and have in a way brought about the falling apart of the traditional order. For example, the idea of Baganda kings not dying but only disappearing was challenged as untrue. Later, kings started to be buried.

Colonialism involved the abolition of many traditional institutions. The colonial administrators introduced new forms of governance and laws which had never existed

in Buganda before. Hence, local authorities like kings, chiefs, spirit mediums, medicine men, diviners, etc., lost powers and the respect they used to command. Their position as law-enforcement agents and final arbiters of justice in their society was heavily undermined.

My own fieldwork experience confirms the decrease of ancestral huts in people's homesteads. In one of the ancestral huts I visited, I was able to see gourds containing local brewed beer, baskets where coins or paper money and coffee berries are placed for the ancestors. The general situation today may appear as though the existing huts for the ancestors are surviving only in remote villages. But even in urban areas a few people still have them including practising Christians and Muslims. Christianity discourages its adherents from associating themselves with anything to do with ancestral spirits. But the converts know that God sometimes does not respond to their demands in the way their departed elders do. So, when there is a crisis, some believers in the Christian or Muslim faith may secretly resort to their ancestors for quick solutions.

Interestingly, in a number of individual homes, people keep ancestral bags (*ensawo za Bajjaja*) where money offerings and gifts of coffee berries are constantly placed for the family ancestors. This confirms the continued dependence on the protection and help of the ancestors.

In Buganda today, one cannot fail to confirm the extreme importance which most people attach to the social and religious celebration of funerals and funerary rituals. Though lots of changes have taken place, death and burial ceremonies are conducted almost in the same way as they were some hundred years ago except with some modifications. In Buganda, death at very old age is still desirable. A number of funeral and burial rituals have to be conducted in honour of the deceased. The wailing of women still sends a message to the neighbourhood that somebody has passed away. However, Christianity and modernity have influenced people so much that nowadays too much wailing is considered as primitive culture and insincere to the dead. Christianity interprets death as a completion of the earthly pilgrimage to the city of

God. Therefore, people who are mourning the dead should instead use prayers and hymns which are much needed for the safe passage of the deceased's soul to heaven. Relatives and friends who live far away can be contacted through the radio when someone dies. Announcements of the death of someone and the date of the burial can be communicated to the people concerned within a short period.

Communication between the living and the dead still going on especially during the death rituals. During field work, I attended two death ceremonies where mourning and inheritance or "the last funeral rites" ceremonies focused on the graves. I did not find much difference from what Roscoe (1911), or Mair (1934) had written about them.

It is still customary to keep an all night vigil on the day a person dies and some other days preceding the actual burial. The major reason is to console the bereaved family and perhaps to strengthen them since death is feared and is undesirable. The exposure of the body for a number of days before burial is also preached against. The exposure of a decomposing body for so many days can create unhealthy conditions. The shrouding of the body in layers of barkclothes is also on the decline. Nowadays, people prefer using linen and coffins instead. However, there are those people who are poor and cannot afford using linen or coffins. To them, the use of the traditional means, that is, using the barkclothes, is still practised.

Here, I would like to quote a burial ceremony which I attended during my field work. I have grown up seeing how burial ceremonies are conducted in my community but the most recent I attended was on Monday 12th August 1996 when I was conducting my research in Uganda. The function gave me chance to observe with interest some of the proceedings I had never bothered to question before and to see whether the method of burial had changed greatly over the past years.

The sad death of Lawrence Yiga (my former High school teacher in the late 1970's) occurred in the second week of August on the 11th August 1996. I heard the announcement over the radio and immediately I prepared myself to travel to the home

of the deceased at Kasanje village in Kalungu county. His father had died some years back and was buried in the family burial grounds next to his house. Being his successor, Yiga was living in his father's house with his mother up to the time of his death.

I went with a colleague of mine and when we arrived at the compound, some women were wailing but not very loudly. In the evening, the local church choir arrived (the deceased was a good Catholic Christian). Villagers, especially men, had an obligation to keep a night vigil at the deceased's home and to console the members of the bereaved family. Throughout the night there was praying and singing of funeral hymns.

On the following day (12th August) was the burial. By daybreak, most of the relatives from near and far had arrived. Village men started digging the grave at the site of the ancestral burial grounds. For each relative and friend arriving, a certain amount of money was collected. By 10.00 am, enough funds had been collected for the buying of the coffin and the linen for shrouding the body. The funeral organizers sent some people to the nearby town to buy the items for the burial. When the body had been washed, shrouded in white linen and put in the coffin, it was brought outside and put in a makeshift shade which had been built. People continued to pay their last respects to the deceased.

At noon, the parish priest arrived to say the funerary mass. Before his arrival, the lead of the coffin was still open to give relatives and friends have a final glance of their beloved one. Now the coffin had to be properly sealed and after that the mass started. It was a short service, after which the procession continued to the family ancestral graveyard in the banana plantation a few metres away from the house. More hymns were sung until the body was placed in the grave by the coffin bearers (with the head facing upwards).

The priest sprinkled holy water on the coffin, got a spade and collected a small amount of soil which he dropped in the grave, saying:

"Ono Muganda waffe amaze emirimu gye kunsu. Twaava munfuufu era munfuufu mwetugenda okudda. Omugenzi Omukama amuwe ekiwummulo eky'emirembe. Amiina".

The equivalent of this statement in English is:

"This brother of ours has completed his earthly duties. We came from dust, and in dust we have to return. May God give the deceased eternal life. Amen".

Singing continued as each person collected some soil and dropped it in the grave. Whoever finished dropping the soil in the grave had to wash his/her hand with some sponges extracted from the banana stems. The grave did not need to be filled with soil since it was going to be constructed with cement, concrete and bricks. As the ceremony came closer to the end, an announcer came forward to give a brief life history of the deceased. He thanked all who had come to bid farewell to their brother and friend and told them that he would let them know when the rite of installing the heir would take place after preparations had been finalised by the family members. After the announcement, most of the people returned to their respective homes. Only a few family members remained to continue mourning the dead. This burial ceremony was conducted in a Christian way but the fact that the body had to be interred next to the rest of the family dead relatives was evidence that the dead are thought to continue being members of their families.

It is true there are changes in the manner mortuary rites are conducted today due to the money economy. People should not also forget that societies are not static. We should not expect the way rituals are conducted in modern times to be exactly the same as they were conducted some fifty years ago. Nevertheless, to some people, decent burial ceremonies are more associated with status, publicity and sometimes displaying wealth rather than the fear of punishments from the ancestors. However, people believe that a person deserves a decent and respectful funeral, otherwise her/his spirit can return to her/his relatives and haunt them.

Nowadays, Christian or Muslim prayers usually accompany the dead into the grave (as in case of the burial ceremony I have referred). There is a combination of

ancestral veneration and Christian liturgy or Muslim prayers. The Christian clergy or Muslim sheikh says his prayers before the corpse is lowered into the grave. In addition, prior to the lowering of the coffin, there are addresses, though not public, that are made by the members of the family of the deceased to the ancestral spirit of the dead person. The rich today erect a modern brick and cement structure on the grave, perhaps with a tombstone. Those who cannot afford to do that may gather stones and heap them on the grave or just leave the grave without any additional thing. People no longer spend weeks or months mourning their dead relatives. Most people prefer a shorter period of mourning and to install the heir immediately after burial, in contrast to the elaborate traditional system which was time wasting. People nowadays are conscious about their work or jobs. They see the long period of mourning as interfering with their economic activities and even encouraging laziness. Visits of condolence no longer gather so many people and do not last long after a person has been buried.

The method of performing the "last funeral rites" is still the same in Buganda as it was in the old times, except that nowadays a mixture of ancestral veneration and Christian liturgy or Muslim prayers operate alongside each other. Like during the "last funeral rites" of my late uncle which were held in July 1996, I noted that there was a combination of traditional veneration practices and christian prayers. The mass that was said was meant to appeal to God to rest the deceased's soul in peace and to give the heir wisdom and courage to carry on his dead father's duties. On the other side, the ceremony involved the address of the ancestral spirits. All the proclamations made by the clan head were meant to address the ancestors.

During the installation of the heir, the clan head normally makes invocations, calling on a list of the family forefathers. I have witnessed this practice quite a number of times (I described the rite of installing the heir in detail in chapter three). This is an indication that the ancestors are recognised as present at such a ceremony. Hence, we find that it is the reverence for the dead and a mixture of fear for what the ancestors can do to their living descendants, that inspires the entire range of practices and rituals that are associated with death.

The dead relatives are usually referred to especially during family gatherings. The giving of children names of their forefathers is a constant reminder that ancestors are still remembered with affection. Some children in villages still wear amulets and talisman charms which are considered to guarantee ancestral protection.

In Buganda, all clans still have their ancestral burial grounds called *butaka*, where three or four generations of the clan members have been buried. From my fieldwork experience, people still keep and look after their ancestral burial grounds. I saw plenty of evidence of this in some of the burial grounds I visited. When people die in cities, their bodies must be transported back to their homesteads so that they can be buried close to their ancestors. It is common practice to carry bodies from near and far of relatives to the clan burial grounds, to be buried next to the ancestors. The idea of burying the dead in public cemeteries is resented by many Baganda. People still believe very strongly that it is a noble obligation to unite the dead relatives according to families or clans instead of burying them with aliens where they cannot be remembered as a unity.

The main issue here is the importance and meaning attached to the ancestral burial grounds. Right from the beginning of the twentieth century (when the infamous Buganda Agreement of 1900 was signed) up to this present date, issues arising from people's burial grounds have usually been sensitive and difficult to handle. There is no way one can disassociate people from their family or clan ancestral lineage burial grounds where generations of dead relatives have been buried. Every Muganda has a strong feeling of his/her family burial ground. To deny him/her this birth right is to deny him/her the right to belong to a particular Baganda family or clan, which is tantamount to stripping him/her of his/her national identity. *Butaka* has a religious and social significance of specially uniting the living relatives and their ancestors.

At the royal Tombs (*Masiro*) at Kasubi near Kampala, I found the structure of the tombs in almost the same way as Ray (1991) described them. The attendants who conducted me round explained to me the oral and written history of the tombs and this can easily fit in the descriptions of earlier Baganda writers like Apollo Kagawa

(1901,1905), Lugira (1968, 1979), Kiwanuka Ssemakula (1971) and Western researchers like Roscoe, Mair, Welbourne, Ray and the rest. Inside the tombs, the "Forest" where Kintu is believed to have disappeared is much evident marked by the long and wide barkcloth curtain. The royal regalia, the spears, shields, drums and pictures of the four previous kings buried inside clearly manifest in the interior of the tombs. These still serve as valuable properties of Buganda kingdom and the royal ancestors. The idea of sacredness of the "*Masiro*" is still expressed by visitors not entering the royal tombs with their shoes on.

Most of the people I interviewed confirmed the presence and activities of traditional religious specialists like spirit mediums, diviners, healers, royal mediums and shrine keepers. Some people consult them when they are in need of communicating with their ancestors or when they are confronted with various problems which are thought to be caused by different kinds of spirits. However, their demands and activities have greatly been affected by modern influences. They demand things which were never asked in olden days like expensive gifts of materials of cloths, watches or shoes, and charge exorbitant fees from their clients.

5.4 Conclusion

Though belief in ancestors still exists in Buganda, reference to the ancestors is less significant now than it was during pre-colonial or pre-independence periods, with a marked decrease in the performance of rituals. Ancestors had more meaning to the majority of the people in the past than today. As more and more elderly people keep on dying, and more and more young people leave their ancestral burial grounds to go to the cities in search of work, some of the burial grounds are being left unattended. By going to the cities, the young men are likely to meet many strangers, men with different languages and habits and in the process of mixing with them, they are liable to forget their ancestral obligations. This trend weakens the significance of ancestral beliefs and rituals.

Generally speaking, based on the results of my findings from fieldwork, ancestral activities in Baganda have undergone many radical changes. As traditional family structures continue to break up (that is, extended families being replaced by nuclear family systems), the ancestral spirits which held them together no longer seem as powerful as they were in pre-colonial Buganda. When society changes, even the traditional system of belief loses some of its credibility. But despite the changes, the traditional system does not break down completely. In Buganda, some ancestral rituals have changed style and others have been wiped out completely. For example, the ritual sacrifices of human beings to the spirits of dead kings are no longer executed. Most public rituals have shifted to Churches and Mosques which are taken by many people to build more social order and relations than the ancestors. Should we then take Bourdillon's suggestion that ancestral rituals are no longer considered very important in matters concerned with keeping groups together (1993:76), as a viable conclusion in consideration of the Baganda situation? I think the importance of these rituals depends on the benefits people get and value they see in them.

GENERAL CONCLUSION

In the first place the general attitude of Baganda of today regarding the continued existence of life beyond the grave is that when people die, they continue to live as spirits. At least, the truth that has been established in this study is that most Baganda acknowledge that there is life after death and acceptance of the existence of the ancestors. However, some Christians and followers of other missionary religions would argue vehemently that ancestors do not have powers to influence the lives of living people. Therefore, they are not important. There are those who may believe that ancestors have power but would not admit it publicly for fear of compromising their new religious beliefs. Whether some people do not admit their belief in the power of the ancestors, it does not mean that the dead are not remembered. Some of those people who think that ancestors are not important in every day life, when they are confronted with crises, they can seek the ancestors' help. There are people who have testified how they were attacked by mysterious culture-bound diseases such as persistent headaches or some form of insanity which could not be cured by Western medicines. But when they performed the appropriate ancestral rituals, they got better.

The second issue is about the performance of rituals to the ancestors. My fieldwork confirms that people who do not believe that the ancestors have powers to influence the lives of people, do not usually perform rituals and do not give offerings to the ancestors. However, during periods of crisis they may turn to them for protection. Then they can make offerings to them in hope of finding solutions to their problems. There are those who retain a belief in the powers of the ancestors but make no offerings to them except during times of crises. Others neglect them until some misfortune strikes them. Here, it is clear that in one way or another, a person in Buganda who believes in the power and influence of his/her ancestors will perform some form of rituals to his/her departed elders to ensure peace in his life. Here, the type of performance may vary considerably among people who maintain a belief in the ancestors and their powers. This issue has been emphasised by many writers, such as Martin West.

It is important to understand the relationship between the Baganda's beliefs and the rituals they perform to the ancestors. Authors like West (1975:205) agree that a decrease in belief may result in a decrease in the ancestral rituals performed. But this does not apply in all situations. For example, one person may begin to lose faith in the influence of his/her ancestors but continue to give them offerings. The response is motivated by psychological reactions where the performer derives some form of satisfaction even though s/he does not believe very strongly in the powers of the ancestors.

At times of crisis, people will occasionally perform rituals to the ancestors even if their trust in them has decreased. Traditionally, if a family is shifting to a new place, its ancestors and "their property" should be ritually moved too. But in overcrowded urban areas it becomes extremely difficult to find a place where a person can erect a hut for his/her ancestor(s). The possibility is even made more difficult when people have to stay in flats. Nonetheless, individuals can still keep their "ancestral bags" where they can put loose money for the ancestors. As I explained earlier, most young Baganda when they go to towns for job opportunities, are likely to spend long periods without visiting their rural homes where their ancestral burial grounds are located. This may bring about the neglect of their anticipated contribution in some of the rituals that take place in the villages for the ancestors.

During my field work, I found some Christians whose outlook to the nature of the ancestors' importance had changed. To these people, ancestors are no longer powerful because they are also answerable to God.

As I have pointed out, the distinction between belief in ancestors and the performance of the ancestral rituals may be generally useful, and particularly important in dealing with situations of social change. In this case, I may agree with some writers on ancestors when they say that belief in ancestors may continue on one level in a situation of change, while on another level cults of the ancestors may decline or become modified. Most writers on this topic have dwelled much on the notion of the transaction aspects of cult activity (West 1975:188) and this has resulted in a narrow

view of the subject as dealing with propitiation and conciliation, punishment and benevolence, offering and prayer, with emphasis on the interaction between the ancestors and their living corporate kin for their mutual and material benefit. Aspects like belief and morality should be taken as natural parts of the transaction.

Many authors agree that social change also brings religious change. Religious adjustments are made when social systems change. Ancestors are embedded in the descent of the social organisation and the after life is not much separated from the living world. In those societies where ancestors are honoured, ancestors hold the sanctions of moral behaviour, that is, they are the guardians of the land and have the capacity to correct and bring back those who transgress to the correct path. The moral function of ancestors is socially and religiously emphasised. Why? While still alive, they used to exercise the functions and responsibility of being the moral guardians. When dead, they continue to exercise those functions but in a mysterious way. They impose social control by regulating social behaviour.

There is nothing wrong with people having faith in their traditional beliefs. The question can be asked now: what is the future of the ancestors in Buganda? Why do people keep this belief in a changing society?

In my own view, I hope there is. As long as there are no major social, economic and political changes which can bring with them destructive tendencies to the surviving cultures and beliefs of the Baganda, the future of the ancestral cult can be assured. We have to know that customs and beliefs are maintained in most cases out of respect for the past.

Some people are concerned that their traditional customs and beliefs should be maintained because they serve to give people an identity and some kind of security in a modern society. As one of the persons I interviewed told me, these two points are very crucial in the maintenance of such beliefs. People's beliefs and values are also influenced by their material interests and their struggle for power.

However, beliefs change as society experiences material changes. When material factors change, traditions no longer apply as they used to do. Beliefs which worked very well in the past do not necessarily provide the best rule for life now. The Baganda beliefs, and the beliefs in ancestors in particular should *adapt* to the needs of all its people; young and old, poor and rich, if they are to ensure their continuity. There is need for adaptation in this case in order to make the beliefs more relevant and to serve the needs of all the people in this community.

The works of Mbiti (especially his *Introduction to African Religion* and *African Religions and Philosophy*) confirm that there are grounds for expecting the beliefs in ancestors in Africa and Baganda in particular to continue forming a popular culture for a long time to come. Ancestral beliefs denote an ever present dimension of the Baganda's experience of reality.

Concluding Remarks

This study tries to help people understand beliefs in ancestors in the Baganda contemporary context. Through understanding these beliefs, they will be able to appreciate why people have adopted such beliefs, and be more tolerant of people's traditional religions, cultures and customs. To describe the beliefs in ancestors as outdated and mere superstition misses altogether the significance of traditional religions in the way they help in maintaining societies. Suppressing such beliefs can result in the total loss of essential elements in a traditional social structure. Condemning these beliefs can also mean ignorance and failure to recognize their importance and value in various traditional communities.

My analysis of the notion of ancestors shows clearly that the Baganda are indebted to their departed relatives and heroes. However, we have to accept the fact that when societies change, they bring corresponding changes in beliefs. For example I have discussed in this study how the Baganda's beliefs in ancestors and the ritual practices have changed as a result of society changing.

Christianity and colonialism in Africa introduced new cultures and attitudes to life. The new forms of belief and worship at the moment have overshadowed the old ones. Many young people do not want to associate themselves much with their traditional beliefs due to the emphasis laid by the Christian religious preachers and by some modern school teachers that such beliefs are superstitious, primitive, and evil. A person's success in life today is taken to be a result of his hard work rather than a blessing from the ancestors. Today, the coming of the rains and a bumper harvest are attributed by most people to the good season and may be due to the use of agricultural chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides rather than the wish of the ancestors.

People are more knowledgeable to explain the causes of most diseases and when they do so, they shift their attention from the ancestors as beings that can help them to fight the diseases. People nowadays are becoming less concerned with witchcraft and angry spirits and more ready to accept scientific explanations about the spread of various diseases.

Important to my study is the examination and analysis of contemporary attitudes of the Baganda to their ancestors. This goes hand in hand with an interpretation of their religious adaptation to social, economic and political change.

I hope that my contribution will help in (i) offering descriptive data of Baganda beliefs and practices, (ii) analysing the contemporary trends of beliefs and research on religion in Uganda, (iii) answering some of the complex questions about the beliefs in ancestors in Buganda, and will help in further future research about this issue. The study has opened fresh awareness for further research. The significance of ancestors consists of their continued relevance for their societies. The purpose of this study is also to help contemporary Baganda to look at their traditional beliefs and to think about them and be prepared to see where change might be constructive. Old traditions cannot just be dismissed as outdated, and unable to change, or to dismiss someone who upholds them as someone who is backward and primitive. It is useful to try to understand what the youths of modern time need from life and create an atmosphere

in which they can fulfil their desires without dropping or frowning at traditional values and ideals. The young generation should know that a society without traditional customs and values to display is no society at all.

APPENDIX 1

List of Common Words

Words with a specific meaning are used throughout the study. These words have been defined here. The Luganda words used have their English translation when they appear for the first time in the text.

Ancestor: In many religions, especially Primal religions, ancestors generally refer to the dead progenitors of a family, clan or tribe as long as the living members of those dead individuals pay regular cultic homage to them. An ancestor should have a regular kind of sacred relationship through communication of some sort. In Buganda, ancestors are remembered by their relatives and clansmen. The Baganda know their distant ancestors and heroes through legends.

Barkcloth: Strip bark extracted from a tree known as *Omutuba* which is worked on by Baganda professionals to turn it into a material of cloth through a process called "*okukomaga*". The size can be two metres wide and four metres long. In pre-colonial period, the Baganda wore barkclothes. Barkclothes were used as bed-sheets and dead bodies used to be shrouded in barkclothes.

Belief: A concept, doctrine or philosophy in which one places his/her trust. In a religious, political or philosophical context, to have a belief implies a commitment to that belief and a resolution to act according to the principles of that belief. This study is about beliefs in ancestral spirits.

Cannibal: A person who consumes human flesh or who pulverizes bone-ash of a dead person for sniffing or consumption purposes. In Buganda, there are beliefs that some people practice cannibalism especially in the rural areas. However, there is no evidence to prove that such people are there.

Clan: A natural grouping of people in the sense that members are related by blood or claim the same ancestors. Clans have symbols and emblems, usually animals like lions, monkeys, cows, leopards and other creatures called totems. In Buganda each clan has a family estate called *butaka* or ancestral burial grounds and these are looked after by a clan head (*Omutaka*). The king in Buganda is at the same time the *Ssabataka* or the leader of all the clan heads. The clan is united by its sharing a common totem. It is not a family in the sense that it does not consist of blood relations only nor does its members necessarily live in the same location. The clan shares the same rules of respect, and follows the same rituals.

Cult: A set of religious practices and beliefs which are typically practised by a group of people. It is a religious body which does not have prior ties with another established religious body in a particular society. Sociologically, it refers to small religious groups which are in tension with established religious traditions and society in general.

Custom: Established and habitual practice, especially of a religious or social kind, that are typical of a particular group of people.

Deity: Any divine being, especially any god or goddess in polytheistic religion or God of a monotheistic religion.

Divinities: A set of spiritual powers which are believed to rule over some area of the world or some special activity in human life. Sometimes they are called the "lesser gods"

Diviner: Someone who is believed to be able to foretell the future by reading the signs of nature or studying certain objects such as stones and bones. A diviner is believed to be endowed with special gifts of insight. The supernatural agents like spirits call the diviner to exercise those insights. In the Baganda context, a diviner can be seen as a medium between the ancestors and the people. S/He is seen as a filter through which communication between the ancestors and the people takes place.

Libation: A form of traditional religious act or ritual where water, beer, or blood is poured on the ground for the ancestors or gods. It may be an invitation to the ancestors or gods to come and participate in a traditional ceremony. Also, it can be a welcome invocation during the invitation of the ancestors or a customary preliminary before a traditional function. In old Buganda, during naming, wedding and funerary ceremonies libation would be poured for the ancestors. Nowadays the practice has much disappeared.

Living-dead: This is a term coined by John Mbiti to refer to the persistence of a person's individual soul after his/her death. Ancestors are the *living-dead* in this sense because they are thought to be dead but at the same time they are believed to affect and influence the lives and events of the living people. The dead are neither alive in a physical way nor dead in a spiritual one.

Medium: A person who is believed to have power to link the world of the dead and supernatural with the world of the living. Sometimes, mediums are believed to get possessed by the spirits of dead persons with whom contact is desired.

Myths: These are stories intended to convey important meanings relating to the origins of the world, the origins of the tribe, the meaning of death etc. Myths are usually described in terms of symbolic language, often related to rituals, used to give explanations or provide didactic support to the practices and beliefs of a religious group. In Buganda there are myths about the origins of the nation, Kintu (the founding father of Buganda nation), and how death came in the nation.

Mythology: It refers to the usage of stories and interpretations of stories as employed in oral literature to convey meanings that some forms of speech cannot convey.

Priest: In African traditional religion the term can be used to refer to traditional religious personalities. It does not involve a special consecrated individual set aside by training and with a special call to be in the service of god. In this case, a priest can be a diviner, a spirit medium, a seer, a rain maker etc...

Primal religions: The non-universal religions of the world's non-literate people.

Progenitor: A technical term used to refer to a person from the distant past, from which someone is descended. For example, Kintu is considered as a progenitor of the Baganda people and kingship.

Reincarnation: The condition of being reborn in another body. In African primal religions, it is believed that the transcendent soul of a recently deceased ancestor might be re-incarnated in an infant born to a member of the family. This "partial reincarnation" means that distinctive characteristics and features of the newly born child can be observed.

Ritual: A practice which is performed as a means of addressing and communicating with the supernatural forces. It is a sacred custom or any form of repetitive behaviour which is fixed by tradition. Usually, the ritual element in religion cannot easily be separated from Faith and Belief. Religious rituals that presuppose the existence of a supernatural or divine order, revealed by natural occurrences such as life and death. In Buganda various rituals are performed by some people in order to venerate and appease the ancestors.

Sacred: That which is set apart; the holy. It refers to that which belongs to God, the deity, or the supernatural. The sacred person, object or place must always be treated with the greatest care and respect. Often purification rites must be performed before anything sacred can be approached.

Spirit: Supernatural being or phenomenon. A spirit is a disembodied entity which displays the characteristic of individual persons that are sometimes regarded as the souls of the ancestors. In some religions, some types of spirits are regarded as potentially dangerous.

Spiritualism: A form of religious practice that attempts to communicate with the spirits of those who have died, usually by employing intermediaries known as

mediums, to contact and speak with the dead. In the Baganda's traditional beliefs, spiritualism is pronounced.

Syncretism: The combining of beliefs from systems of religious thought and practice. In Buganda for example, missionary religions like Christianity have adapted some elements from the indigenous traditional beliefs and practices. The use of vernacular, traditional hymns and music instruments together with the linkage of some group of ancestors to the communion of Catholic Saints indicate some form of "*Syncretism*".

Taboo: A prohibition excluding something from use because of its sacred or unclean nature. It involves things, places or persons that must be avoided for fear of bad luck, misfortune, punishment or death.

Totem: A representative, especially an animal or a plant thought by certain clan societies to have a close relationship with the tribal group and is used as a symbol of that tribe or clan. A totem is a symbol or emblem of a clan, and it is either an animal, a bird or sometimes a plant or vegetable which represents or symbolizes the clan. Usually, animals and birds like lions, buffaloes, leopards, sea-gulls, crested-cranes, and others are called totems. Such totemic animals or birds are not supposed to be killed or eaten by any member of the clans they represent.

Tradition: Cultural practices which are inherited from the great forefathers and have been practised for ages from generation to generation.

Veneration: This is to hold a being or object in great respect or awe; to prostrate oneself before a being or object by kneeling or kissing, and the performance of other acts of respect or reverence. A good number of the Baganda are considered to venerate their ancestors in one way or another.

Worship: The religious acts or ceremonies done to God or gods. To pay reverence and homage to God, a god, a sacred person or any object which is regarded as sacred

or worthy of respect. Worship may be given by means of prayer, sacrifice, invocations, chants etc. In this study, there is debate whether the Baganda "worship" their ancestors or simply venerate or revere them.

APPENDIX 2

The Dynastic Chronology of Buganda, calculated at 30 years per generation and based on the revised genealogy of Kaggwa after Kiwanuka Ssemakula. Rulers of the same generation are grouped together (Kiwanuka Ssemakula 1971:195).

Ruler	Generation	Year
1. Kintu		
2. Chwa Nabakka	Beginning of 14th Century.	
3. Kimera	1	C.1314 -
4. Tembo	3	1374 - 1404
5. Kiggala	4	1404 - 1434
6. Kiyimba	5	1434 - 1464
7. Kayima	6	1464 - 1494
8. Nakibinge	7	1494 - 1524
9. Mulondo		
10. Jemba	8	1524 - 1554
11. Suuna 1	9	1554 - 1584
12. Sekamaanya		
13. Kimbugwe	10	1584 - 1614
14. Kateregga	11	1614 - 1644
15. Mutebi		
16. Juuko	12	1644 - 1674
17. Kayemba		

18. Tebandeke		
19. Ndawula	13	1674 - 1704
20. Kagulu		
21. Kikulwe	14	1704 - 1734
22. Mawanda		
23. Mwanga 1		
24. Namugala	15	1734 - 1764
25. Kyabaggu		
26. Junju		
27. Semakookiro	16	1764 - 1794
28. Kamaanya	17	1794 - 1824
29. Suuna II	18	1824 - 1854
30. Mutesa 1 (30) d.1884.	19	1854 - 1884

Kigongo, R. Mugerwa, author of a small pamphlet for tourists to the royal Tombs entitled "KASUBI TOMBS" (1991) adds on this dynastic chronology of Buganda three generations of Baganda kings (1991:6). These are:

31. Mwanga II	20	1884 - 1897
32. Chwa II	21	1897 - 1939
33. Mutesa II	22	1939 - 1966.

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Do you believe in life after death? Yes/No....
2. What is your understanding of life after death?
3. What beliefs about ancestors were strong in the past but are no longer strong or relevant today?
4. Can a thief, a robber, a murderer or one who commits suicide be brought back home as an ancestor? Yes/No?.... Explain why.
5. What happens to the spirits of; Women, Unmarried people, Children?
6. Is there any hierarchy in the spiritual World? How is it described?
7. Are spirit mediums respected by your community? Why?
8. How do ancestors influence people's day to day activities?
9. Have you ever been affected by the powers of your ancestors?
Yes/No?....
10. If you have ever been affected by such powers, explain what happened.
11. How often do you perform rituals to your ancestors and what do you usually ask from them?
12. Do the ancestors get their powers from God? Yes/No....
13. List the different kinds of rituals which you perform to your ancestors.

14. On the attached paper, record words, phrases or a song which is used in one of the ancestral rituals.

15. Are ancestors worshipped? Yes/No.... Give some explanations on this issue.

16. Do you think ancestors can punish their living relatives if they break the customary laws? Yes/No.... What kind of punishments are those?

17. (a) How has Christianity or Islam influenced your belief and attitudes to your ancestors?

(b) How about Western education, urbanization and modernity?

18. In what way are ancestors important to you?

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