

KUSAMIRA: SINGING RITUALS OF WELLNESS IN SOUTHERN UGANDA

by

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Introduction

Studies of spirit mediumship and ritual healing have drawn on ethnographic research across the humanities and social sciences (e.g. Tantala 1989; Roseman 1991; Janzen 1992; Friedson 1996; Schoenbrun 1998; Feierman 1999; Thram 1999, 2002; Kodesh 2010). Renee Tantala refers to these as studies of “classical religion” in East Africa, while Steven Feierman, Neil Kodesh, and David Schoenbrun write on “public healing,” and John Janzen and Steven Friedson prefer the proto-Bantu cognate “*ngoma*.” These terms offer alternatives to negatively-tinged formations like “cults of affliction” or “drums of affliction,” even though they recognize a common intellectual ancestor in the work of the late Victor Turner (1967, 1968). Drawing on this rich literature, this article examines a type of ritual in southern Uganda called *kusamira*.

Anthropologists and historians of African spirit mediumship neglected important forms of evidence and methods for analyzing them prior to the ethnomusicology of the 1990s. They consistently asserted the importance of music and performative symbolism, but they remained either ill-equipped or unwilling to further investigate specific performances and songs. My research among the Baganda and Basoga peoples of Uganda asks what it means for ritual practitioners to perform for and with spirits.¹ Performances at the center of this ethnographic record reveal and often produce social continuities between human and spiritual realms, and these continuities rest on two main assumptions. First, social relationships incorporate living and spiritual members of society. Second, good social relationships promote what members call “*obulamu bulungi*,” literally a good life, characterized by general wellness (Kiwalabye 2009; Nalubega 2009). These performances embody tensions inherent in the juxtaposition of contemporary life on one hand and time-honored advice of elders and patron spirits on the other. Spirit mediumship performs the dialectic in which these tensions emerge; it is where many Baganda and Basoga grapple with what constitutes moral action and what will promote

¹ I am extremely grateful to the Smith Educational Trust for supporting trips to Uganda in 2006, 2008-2009, and 2009-2010. The Florida State University Graduate School underwrote field research in 2008-2009. A Fulbright-Hays Doctoral Dissertation Research Abroad Fellowship provided additional funding for six months of field research in 2010. I am responsible for all images and translations except where otherwise noted.

wellness for their communities. In this regard, *kusamira* constitutes performance in the sense that Steven Feld has characterized it: “a cultural enactment whose very dynamics reproduce social relations” (Feld 1989: 135). Feld was responding to Anthony Seeger’s emphasis on “social life as performance,” a concept that he originally articulated in his influential book, *Why Suyá Sing* (1987). These notions of performance remain persistently relevant in musical ethnography. *Kusamira* practitioners perform rituals of spirit mediumship to reproduce social relations of wellness and to teach successive generations the requirements and implications of good living.

For Baganda and Basoga, like many of their regional neighbors, several types of ritual involve performance as a defining behavior of an event. These case studies in song constitute one of the types of *kusamira* ritual that I researched in Uganda. All of these performances relate to both specific challenges and to broader notions of good living. The lyrics articulate the notion of compulsory mediumship and the consequences of mistreating this compulsion. As in Steven Friedson’s (1996) and Diane Thram’s (1999) studies, both song and sacrifice come to symbolize the mutual dependence of human and spirit realms. Through mediumship and spiritual patronage, these categories also become mutually inclusive. The singers explicitly articulate social continuities among professional mediums, their kin groups, and ancestral and patron spirits. In brief, spirits need tribute from human mediums and their broader groups of ritual devotees as much as these human groups need spiritual patronage in order to cultivate and continually reproduce wellness.

Any reading of possession ritual as performance requires some careful introduction. John Beattie (1977: 2) interpreted ritual as “the performance of expressive acts” in which performers embody “outside powers” to promote catharsis. The key expressive act in this context is that of possession. *Basamize* use this term in English, but they also refer to its routine use as mediumship. Mediums’ ritual performances have multiple purposes: they expose and redress breaches of moral boundaries, they identify and rectify individual and social afflictions, they identify spiritual patrons to aid in these processes, and they promote general wellness in a target body politic, usually a clan (*kika*), a group sharing the same totem. As Roy Rappaport observed, “if there is no performance, there is no ritual; performance itself is an aspect of that which is performed. The medium is part of the message; more precisely, it is a metamessage about whatever is encoded in the ritual” (1992: 250).² Likewise the verb *kusamira* implies both musical performance and spirit mediumship. I define possession and mediumship according to culture bearers’ patterns of language use in Luganda, Lusoga, and English. These people view a spirit’s initial possession of a human host as a clear compulsion to become a medium. From his shrine in Buyijja village, a Muganda spirit medium and university-trained physician named Dr. Yahaya Sekagya explains, “Spirits need us. If they need to deliver a message or tell us to make a place for them, they will not wait for us to call them.” Mediumship involves

² cf. Rappaport 1968: 174, 185-190 and Lambek 2001: 250, 262. I thank Diane Thram and an anonymous reviewer for encouraging a closer look at Rappaport’s important work on the anthropology of ritual.

promoting spirit possession on a regular, often professional or semi-professional basis. So while spirits evidently decide when to take control of a host's body and consciousness, the host has some agency to control the process. Dr. Sekagya continues, "If we need [spirits], we can organize a process using the techniques we know" (Sekagya 2008). One of the main techniques people learn when they become mediums is to induce and sustain spirit possession by performing songs and dances for and with spirits.

The things of culture: divination and diagnosis

"When you go to begin *kusamira*, now you go to a diviner," explains Ssematimba Frank Sibyangu. Ssematimba is a diviner, drummer, singer, ritual musician, and *musamize* (spirit medium) who lives in Nakifuma town, about an hour's drive east of Uganda's capital city, Kampala. His was a typical introduction to *ebintu by'obuwangwa*, the things of culture, in this and many other ways. However, the various rituals involved in that initiation were no simple matter. One does not easily earn the title 'Jajja,' meaning 'venerable ancestor' or 'grandparent.' He continues,

He throws the divining objects and he says to you that, 'guardians [spirits] are biting you, but guardians of the clan.' Because now guardians of the clan, we have guardians of the blood pact, we have those of the in-laws. You have the guardians of ours here in Buganda, but now he is in praises because of your clan biting you, sometimes of blood brotherhood...when you go to *kusamira*, we have a fire that we call *okwaza*. Now then, when you go and you research here at our place we take four or two days. We are in the *lubugo* and you purchase banana beer, and you go to the place where you went to become a *musamize*, and you say to that [*musamize*], 'my father,' and pray on money of one million or two million, and you say to him, 'my father I am sitting [here]: we have come for guardians to call us to research.' Now and they sit and they beat drums and they call guardians (2010e).³

Starting from this brief description of entry into Kiganda ritual life, this article asks how musical processes of wellness maintenance beyond this kind of initial divinatory diagnosis reveal local cultural categories of illness and wellness, and how people perform this etiological process in their attempts to live well. These indicators of good living constitute cornerstones of a Kiganda concept called *obulamu obulungi*, literally 'the good life,' a phrase commonly used in reference to habits of healthy living. Practitioners called *basamize* (singular: *musamize*) pursue *obulamu obulungi* as a constant process, cultivating their social relations with each other and with patron spirits. By listening to how this process informs ritual practices, we can more thoroughly understand Kiganda conceptions of illness and wellness.

³ *Bw'ogenda okusooka okusamira, kati bw'ogenda w'omusajja alagula, n'akuba omweso n'akugamba nti, 'lubaale akuluma, naye lubaale wa kika.' Anti nno lubaale w'ekika, tulina lubaale w'omukago, tulina wa e bukojja, olin balubaale e waffe waawano Buganda. Naye nga ali mu emitendera yinze okubanga wa kika yakuluma, oluusi wamukago. Bw'ogenda mukusamira, tulina ekyoto kituyita 'okwaza.' Kaakati, bw'ogenda n'oyaza ewaffe twalize ennaku nnya oba bbiri. Mu—ogwolutubugo, n'ogula omwenge, n'ogenda e wa we yagenda okusamiza n'omugambe, 'taata nze,' nakusabira ssente oba million, oba million bbiri, n'omugambe, 'taata nze okuns—kutuula. Twazze lubaale okutukuyita kwaza. Kat ne batuula ne bakuba enoma ne bayita lubaale.*

This article uses the adjectival term Kiganda to refer to various elements of ritual and performance aesthetics in this region.⁴ Like the Basoga, Baganda use the verb *kusamira* to refer to the act of releasing one's usual sense of self to patron spirits. Because this is a type of somnambulistic mediumship, meaning that mediums neither experience nor remember what happens during this period in which they release consciousness to spiritual control, people interact with the mediums as the spirits (cf. Thram 1999: 7, 15, 2002: 131; Rouget 1985: 19-20).⁵ Both Baganda and Basoga also adapt the verb for synecdochic use: as a noun, it refers to the rituals associated with the activity implied by the verb, and as an adjective, it describes songs as *ennyimba ezokusamira*, meaning 'songs for mediumship'.

Even in the antecedents to *kusamira* such as divination, sound often holds a prominent place in diagnostic activities. Baganda diviners frequently use prayer and song to call the spirits, and some use a gourd idiophone to accompany their supplications. The term for this kind of diviner is *omulaguzi*, meaning 'one who reveals,' from the verb *okulagula*, to show or reveal something. Through a close relationship to the spiritual world, a *mulaguzi* can see things that others cannot, even things yet to occur, and make recommendations to clients. Often what they recommend requires considerably greater monetary and musical resources.

These basic etiological principles generate a number of different motivations for performing *kusamira* ritual. This article focuses on a laudatory Kiganda performance of *okwaza lubaale*. By contrast, some performances of *okwaza* involve a diagnosis, a sacrifice, and resolutions for further ritual actions to restore positive social relations between *basamize* practitioners and their patron spirits. *Okwaza* performances often form the diagnostic portion of a more protracted path toward good living. In this case, however, the initial diagnosis happened years in advance, so the *basamize* carry out these ritual actions as a means of maintaining healthy social relations with their patron spirits. This case study enables an investigation of *okwaza* as both musical performance and spiritual encounter in a time of relative wellness.

The things of culture: unbinding the blessings

Among the various ways Baganda and Basoga *basamize* use to open pathways for blessings, song is among the most prominent. Some of the examples below will outline a distinctive Kiganda repertory, but these two groups do share at least some songs in common. Best known among these are the songs invoking the twins (*abalongo*). These songs acknowledge a cosmology of spiritual twinship, which holds that every human has a spiritual twin to whom they were connected in the womb. This helps explain why Baganda preserve the umbilical cords when human twins are born in order to construct power objects from them. Human twins transgress the normal order of things.

⁴ These and other foreign language terms in this article appear in Luganda, the language of the Baganda people and their kingdom, Buganda.

⁵ For more on somnambulistic possession and mediumship in Interlacustrine East Africa, see also Bjerke 1981.

Evidence from Kisoga *nswenzi* rituals indicates that Basoga share this view (Kyambu 2009; Okwabya Olumbe 2009). Their umbilical cords therefore constitute for *basamize* a physical manifestation of their potentially dangerous spiritual power. This power must be contained, so mediums assist parents of twins in tying up the umbilical cords into a power object, a process called binding the twins (*okusiba abalongo*).



Figure 2. *Abalongo*, twin umbilical cords preserved in a power object, shown with ritual offerings of medicinal herbs and small denominations of money. Photo by author.

Figure 2 shows a newly made power object in which *basamize* have placed offerings to the twin spirits. This object, together with the offerings, encompasses the entire project of ritual exchange. Cleansing herbs symbolize the richness of nature, knowledge of which the spirits bestow upon their human devotees. Cowrie shells, once a form of currency, symbolize the sacrifice of goods and resources that humans offer to their patron spirits. Adepts cleanse themselves with ritual herbs, they make offerings to patron spirits, and these spirits reward their sacrifices richly with the blessings of a good life.

Although many of the twin songs come from this ritual, Baganda perform some of them quite often to begin a wide variety of other rituals. These performances recall not only twinship and its associated rituals, but also the ‘four bodies of the king’: the person of the Ganda king (*Kabaka*) himself, his spiritual twin, the royal corpse he leaves behind in this world when he moves on to the next, and the royal medium in whom he eventually manifests as a spirit (Ray 1991: 123-129). Beginning so many various kinds of ritual with songs from this repertoire unifies ritual order throughout Buganda. The internal structure of the most common song in this repertoire exemplifies patterns frequently found throughout the rest of the Kiganda *kusamira* repertoire, as the examples below demonstrate.

A note on transcription methodology

This and all song texts in this article place translations and other orienting markings at the left for ease of reading, leaving the texts in their original languages on the right *sans* additional markings. This leaves the textual presentation as clear and faithful to the original performances as possible. I thank Ssematimba Frank Sibyangu for his assistance and tutelage on this and many other transcription and interpretation projects. Recognizing that the heterophonic texture of ritual vocal style caused interesting challenges, Ssematimba often assisted my transcription of multiple competing voices before explaining and singing simpler versions (2010a, 2010c, 2010d, and 2010e).

The broader repertory demonstrated that while most *basamize* singers knew these versions, they and the choral singers often tailored verbal improvisations to whatever ritual they were singing at the time. The first few songs that I discuss here use these simple renditions to illustrate form, but most of the songs from the *okwaza* ritual below involve lengthier, more complex efforts to represent musical heterophony.

The musical transcriptions, while heavily influenced by these text transcriptions, depart from the performances in specific and purposeful ways. *Basamize* singers like Ssematimba vary the number of phrases in each broader textual variation, and they employ other improvisatory techniques within standard forms. Moreover, they do not compose this music using five-line staves or any other kind of written notation. Readers should therefore see these musical transcriptions as only partially descriptive representations. I follow both Charles Seeger and Kofi Agawu in asserting that no two-dimensional system of notation can capture the depth and richness of music, African or otherwise (Seeger 1958: 194; Agawu 2003: 64). This article forms part of a much larger project in African Studies to combine notational systems with linguistic and poetic analysis. I have therefore used both printed text and conventional staff notation to present excerpts rather than full scores.

The musical scoring represents both the basic instrumentation of most Kiganda *kusamira* rituals and the spatial and social arrangement of players and singers. The soloist and chorus, who appear at the bottom of the scores, provide the musical foundation around which instrumentalists build their parts. They are most often the first musicians to begin songs and the last to taper off in a near-constant chatter of praise singing, spirit naming, and joking. Many of these singers hold gourd rattles called *nsaasi*. Drummers take cues from the singers to continue an established pulse and maintain it throughout a song. One player beats the main rhythm on the calfskin head of the goblet-shaped *mbuutu* while another punctuates the texture on the monitor lizard skin head of a long drum called *ngalabi*.⁶ Some groups use additional drums and instruments at other rituals, but this small ensemble represents the most common arrangement.

Twin songs: poetic and musical structure

“*Abalongo Twabazaala*” begins with a concrete reference to human twinship that doubles as a spiritual reference in the first of three melodic themes (Sibyangu 2010b).

English

soloist: the twins we produced
two with Father of Twins
Mayanja my child

Luganda (transcription excerpt 1.)

Abalongo twabazaala
babiri ne Ssalongo
jangu ozina abalongo

The term *Ssalongo* refers to any father of twins, but this is also a praise name for *Mukasa owennyanya*, the patron spirit of Lake Nalubaale. This indigenous name for Lake Victoria means ‘abode of the spirits.’ According to Aki Wantanabe and her field consultants, the name Mayanja in the first two melodic themes constitutes another

⁶ For more detailed organologies, see Hoelsing (2011).

euphemistic reference to this spiritual abode (2002: 28-29). This stands to reason, as the Mayanja river proceeds from the lake to divide Ssingu County from Bulemeezi County in Buganda; it is thus a ‘child’ of Lake Nalubaale. This text serves as a cue for the chorus to repeat the same text. It is the singers who play the gourd rattles (*nsaasi*), so the choral entrance (m. 6) cues those holding these instruments to play, and the drummers follow close behind. The *ngalabi* player follows suit soon after, and this call and response continues until the soloist changes the text, singing a second melodic theme and cueing a semi-chorus/choral alternation with new solo variations.

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

Soloist

Chorus

A-ba - lo-ngo twa-ba-zaa-la ba-bi - ri ne Ssa-lo-ngo Ma - ya-nja mwa-na wa-nge ja-

5

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

ngu _ozi-na _aba-lo - ngo

A-ba - lo-ngo twa-ba-zaa-la ba-bi - ri ne Ssa-lo-ngo Ma - ya-nja mwa-na wa-nge ja-

Figure 3. Transcription excerpt 1 (continued on next page)

9

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

A-ba - lo - ngo twa - ba-zaa - la ba-bi - ri ne Ssa - lo - ngo Ma-
ngu ozi-na aba-lo - ngo

12

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

ya - nja mwa - na-wa - nge ja - ngu _ ozi-na _ aba-lo - ngo
A-ba - lo - ngo twa - ba-zaa - la ba-bi-

From the 'child' of the lake, he moves in this new theme to another symbol of spiritual power: the *nkerebwe*, a squirrel and the totem of one of Buganda's clans. On the level of reproductive power, the squirrel echoes a common pattern of innuendo wherein small, furry animals become gender-neutral euphemisms for reproductive organs. However, the song communicates a much more serious message about *basamize* beliefs: just as squirrels dig, open hiding places, and stash food for future use, so *basamize* and their patron spirits know how to open secret places and contain powerful knowledge. Just as the natural world provides for squirrels, so patron spirits move through rivers and animals.

English

s: I am calling call Mayanja
Mayanja my child
ch: nkerebwe, (small animal)
s: start we go
ch: nkerebwe venerable digs holes and opens

Luganda (transcription excerpt 2.)

mpita yita Mayanja
Mayanja mwana wange
nkerebwe,
gira tugende
nkerebwe enkulu essima nga eggulira

s: Let's go, let's go	<i>tugende, tugende</i>
where they gave birth to us	<i>gye batuzaala</i>
ch: nkerebwe	<i>nkerebwe,</i>
s: start we go	<i>gira tugende</i>
ch: nkerebwe venerable digs holes and shuts	<i>nkerebwe enkulu essima nga eggalira</i>

15

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

ri ne Ssa - lo - ngo Ma - ya - nja mwa - na wa - nge ja - ngu ozi-na aba-lo - ngo

18

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

ta yi-ta Ma-ya-nja Ma - ya - nja mwa - na wa - nge gi-ra tu-ge - nde

N-ke-re - bwe N-ke-re-

Figure 4. Transcription excerpt 2 (continued on next page)

21

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

tu-ge - nde tu-ge - nde gye ba - tu-zaa - la

bwe enkulu essima ng'e - ggu-li - ra N-ke-re-

24

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

gi-ra tu-ge - nde gu-li-ra gu-li-ra gu-li-

bwe N-ke-re - bwe enkulu essima ng'e - ggu-li - ra

Many *basamize* believe that spirits occupy these forms in dreams and visions to convey esoteric knowledge to humans. For this reason, *Mayanja* could also be a praise name for Ssalongo Muwanga. His sons Kiwanuka and Musoke, associated with lightning and rainbows, respectively, are two of the most common patron spirits to possess *basamize* mediums. Like animals and *misambwa*, a class of spirits who move through other natural forces, these *lubaale* or guardian spirits possess mediums in order to communicate directly with humans.

As in the first section, the soloist and chorus continue in this manner until the soloist cues a new chorus with a third melodic theme. Meanwhile, the instrumental accompaniment provides a musical analogue to the diversity of natural symbols for spiritual power. Drummers beat calf hide and lizard skin wrapped over trees. They treat these instruments with respect as gifts from the forests and pastures where their patron spirits dwell.

In the third theme, the soloist finally and definitively ties a concept of good living to both human and spiritual forces, whose collaborations reproduce social relations of

wellness. He invokes Nabuzaana, wife to Muwanga. Their son Mukasa (of the lake) is the archetypal father of twins to whom the first verse referred. Mukasa's sons, Kiwanuka and Musoke, are associated with lightning and rainbows, respectively. Nabuzaana thus constitutes another important archetype: the wise grandmother, knowledgeable in the ways of plant medicine, child bearing, child rearing, and spiritual discipline.

33

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

Na-bu-zaa - na _Omu-no - zzi w'e-dda-ga-la

bwe enkulu essima ng'e - ggu-li - ra

36

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

Na-bu-zaa -

Ggwe wa-bi-ko-la bu-li ku - jja ng' - o - sa-ga sa-ga-nya ggwe wa-bi-ko-la

Figure 5. Transcription excerpt 3 (continued on following pages)

39

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

39

Nsaasi

39

S.

na Mu-ka Mu-wa - nga

Ch.

Ggwe wa - bi - ko - la bu - li ku - jja ng' - o - sa - ga sa - ga - nya

42

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

42

Nsaasi

42

S.

Nna - lo - ngo _Omu-lee - zi w'a - baa - na

Ch.

ggwe wa - bi - ko - la ggwe wa - bi - ko - la bu - li ku -

English

s: Nabuzaana, gatherer of medicines
 ch: you did things every time you came,
 destroying everything, you have done things
 s: Nabuzaana, wife of Muwanga
 ch: you did things every time you came,
 destroying everything, you have done things
 s: Nabuzaana, carrier of children
 ch: you attacked fiercely every time you came,
 destroying everything, you attacked fiercely
 s: Mother of twins, gatherer of medicines
 ch: you did things every time you came,
 destroying everything, you have done things

Luganda (transcription excerpt 3.)

*Nabuzaana, omunozzi w'eddagala
 ggwe wabikola buli kujja,
 ng'onsagasaganya, ggwe wabikola
 Nabuzaana, Muka Muwanga
 ggwe wabikola buli kujja,
 ng'onsagasaganya, ggwe wabikola
 Nabuzaana omulezi w'abaana
 ggwe wazindabya buli kujja,
 ng'onsagasaganya, ggwe wazindabya
 Nnalongo, omunozzi w'eddagala
 ggwe wabikola buli kujja,
 ng'onsagasaganya, ggwe wabikola*

45

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

Nna - lo - ngo Omu-no - zzi-w'e - dda-ga-la

jja ng' - o - sa-ga sa-ga-nya ggwe wa-bi - ko - la

48

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

ggwe wa-bi - ko - la bu-li ku - jja ng' - o - sa-ga sa-ga-nya ggwe wa-bi - ko - la

51

Ngalabi

Mbuutu

Nsaasi

S.

Ch.

The reference to destruction connotes various methods of preparing plant medicines: cutting and gathering, boiling, chopping, or grinding them for use in teas, salves, and tobacco mixtures. The term *wazindabya*, 'you have attacked fiercely,' serves as a dual reference to attacking illness and to the act of possession, which songs frequently characterize in terms of battle, chaos, and war. Extolling Nabuzaana's knowledge of these processes and of plant medicine clearly assigns her great ritual power; she is the first spirit that this song invokes directly by name rather than by indirect praise epithet. The chorus's high range and polyrhythmic delivery convey a sense of urgency about Nabuzaana that carries the song to its conclusion. The drummers then play an idiomatic rhythmic formula, signaling the end of the song.

Poetic analysis reveals important common patterns in ritual song practice, all of which occur in this song: a chorus echoes the soloist's first theme, a second set of themes alternates with semi-choruses and full choruses, then the pattern switches so that short solo interjections alternate with longer choruses. In all of these patterns, musicians refer to the solo lines as *bisoko*, what we might consider to be verses. *Basamize* assert that a good lead singer knows many *bisoko*, for although people might know many choruses and be able to learn others quickly, they often require a capable soloist to call these choruses to mind using the appropriate introductory lines. In these ways, twin songs encompass many of the general poetic characteristics of ritual song practice in Buganda. Virtually every other song text presented below fits into one of the poetic structural patterns presented here. However, a strictly ethnopoetic approach risks neglecting other important factors that codify *kusamira* and *nswezi* song repertoires.

Musical components of *kusamira* performances illuminate a reading of ritual not as mere text but as interactive social endeavor. Just as this song demonstrates common poetic patterns, so the rhythmic structure of this song forms the basis for most ritual singing in Buganda. Those with gourd rattles (*nsaasi*) play a pattern common throughout Buganda and Busoga (starting in m. 6). Following an idiomatic introductory rhythm (mm. 9-10), the *mbuutu* drummer plays a pattern called *nnankasa*, one of the three most common variations of the ubiquitous Kiganda *baakisimba* rhythm. Meanwhile, the lead singer's verses (*bisoko*) echo throughout the instrumental texture in rhythmic variations by the same name: the long drum called *ngalabi* plays its own variations, and the *mbuutu* imitates these. The *ngalabi* patterns above represent some of the simplest idiomatic variations in favor of textual emphasis. In the absence of singers, or in between songs, these can become complex ways of encoding information. In the present example, the long drum variations imitate the singers' rhythmic idioms.

Melodic contours can also inform a more thorough holistic analysis of *kusamira* songs. The tonal structure of the themes appears to lie mostly within a minor pentatonic scale. For much of the song, both soloist and chorus remain within the four-note range of f, g, b-flat and c. In the third theme (m. 34), the soloist adds a fifth note, d, as he addresses the spirit directly for the first time in the song. The chorus responds on the word *Ggwe* meaning 'you,' adding a sixth note, e-flat, and again addressing the spirit with a personal pronoun. Moreover, the chorus begin on this note to sing a 4:3 polyrhythm to the words

Ggwe wabikola, ‘You did things’ or *Ggwe wazindabya*, ‘You attacked fiercely’ (even numbered measures between mm. 36-50). Like many ritual songs, this high tessitura and insistent rhythmic delivery of second-person perspective contribute to the sense of urgency with which performers call patron spirits into their presence.

Reproducing symbols of power

This example typifies an entire repertory of twin songs that Kiganda and Kisoga rituals use in slightly different ways. For *basamize* in Buganda, these songs begin nearly every ritual. They provide the means to call a category of patron spirits called ‘created spirits,’ i.e. those made by Katonda, the Creator, enlisting them to open the blessings. They contrast, therefore, with songs used to call other kinds of patron spirits such as ancestral spirits (*mizimu*), spirits in nature (*misambwa*), or working spirits (*mayembe*). However, the referents in this song—to twinship, child bearing, and reproductive capacity, to sacred knowledge of spirits and plant medicine, to animals and other natural forces—assign great power to patron spirits of all kinds beginning with created spirits.

Kiganda *kusamira* and Kisoga *nswezi* rituals reveal the ways in which these and other spirits contain and control the release of this knowledge and power to spirit mediums and other ritual adepts. *Baswezi* use songs from this twin repertory either in early stages of rituals (as in Buganda) or when they suspect that Kiganda spirits have afflicted someone. The twin spirit Kiwanuka in particular features prominently in one of the songs, “*Sserubwatuka*” [CD track 1] that both groups sing.



Figure 6. *Omukongozzi wa Kiwanuka* (Kiwanuka’s medium), Mpanga John⁷. Photo by author.

⁷ Mpanga John sings “*Sserubwatuka*” [CD track 1] about Kiwanuka.

English

soloist: *Sserubwatuka*,
 down [on earth] you were in the lake
Sserubwatuka you thunder,
 in the heavens there is fire!
 chorus: [repeats same text]

Luganda

Sserubwatuka,
wansi wali ennyanja
Sserubwatuka wanuka,
wa ggulu eryo muliro!

The reference to Kiwanuka here appears in the praise name *Sserubwatuka*, which translates roughly to ‘the big man who throws lightning.’ The stem *-bwatuka* is an onomatopoeia for the sound of thunder. Kiwanuka’s association with fire is strong: after mounting his mediums, he frequently picks up coals from the fire to munch on them, offering them to others as food or using them to ‘bathe’ by scrubbing themselves with burning branches.

Extraordinary feats indicate the spiritual power to harm or to heal, to lavish blessings, (*emikisa*) or cause bad things to happen (*okuleeta ebibi*). Whatever their uses of twin songs, and whatever other spirits they invoke, Baganda and Basoga *basamize* recognize and respect this spiritual power. For them, living the good life means staying in close touch with created spirits, ancestors and other patron spirits, making appropriate sacrifices, and generally ensuring that those who have the power to harm or to heal can help people live well.

Okwaza lubaale: toward an audible ethnography of ritual

Mediums and other ritual adepts cultivate their proximity to these powers by creating social and physical spaces wherein they and their patron spirits express their mutual needs. Both Baganda *basamize* and Basoga *baswezi* explore these needs through *okwaza*, which means ‘to search.’ *Okwaza* does not appear in vernacular dictionaries with any semblance of the meaning it carries in ritual. For *basamize*, it means to search for or do spiritual research about a connection to patron spirits that requires maintenance or has been lost entirely. The purpose of *okwaza* is to establish or renew these links, whatever their current status, between patron spirits and a target body politic: it frequently involves members of a segmentary lineage within a single clan.

An ethnographic musicology of this ritual likewise requires an interpretive search for the essential meanings and functions of *kusamira* song performances. Two important points render songs an important focus for such an analysis. First, the context of potential illness versus performative focus on wellness remains as present here as in other regional *ngoma* traditions (e.g. Bjerke 1981; Friedson 1996; Janzen 1992; Thram 1999, 2002; Turner 1967, 1968; van Dijk et al. 2000). Second, *basamize* singers and spirit mediums bind appropriate manners, relevant symbols, and meaningful sacrifices together into powerful ritual music. They assert this power with a shared belief in their patron spirits’ authority to affect wellness negatively or positively. In so doing, they actively reproduce ideal models of social and spiritual relations that they believe will ward off affliction, maintain wellness, and promote better living. This process expresses a central paradox of *kusamira* ritual: by binding these things together in performances

of ritual, *basamize* believe that they can unbind the valuable indigenous knowledge and abundant blessings that their creator deity, their ancestors and their other patron spirits so richly bequeath them.

Narrowing this inquiry to one particular group of singers at a specific ritual facilitates opportunities to examine specific song performances that, while indicative of their immediate context, also become representative of the broader *kusamira* paradigm. So although the narrative past tense refers to selected song performances from a ritual that I attended in 2010, the singers' shifts in temporal perspective, their ornamentation of particular words and phrases, their uses of respectful gestures and linguistic idioms, and especially the lead singer's musical and poetic devices all point to a codified set of ritual performance practices and repertoires. Well beyond my examination of these plural pasts and musical methods, Ssematimba combines leadership in ritual and song, his drumming, and his careful revelation of ritual knowledge to edify his *baswezi* companions, and they laud him for his efforts. Ssematimba's work demonstrates how *basamize* approach protracted projects of individual and communal growth within historically conscious terms, building their ritual knowledge from that of the ancestors and patron spirits whom they venerate.

Namusaale Day 1: gathering (*Okunyanana*)

On May 28, 2010, members of the sheep clan gathered far north of Kampala in a Nakaseke District village called Namusaale. This location signified for the *basamize* of a particular lineage within this clan their descent from a common male ancestor, and they held this gathering at his homestead. Theirs would be a ritual of spiritual maintenance; it expressed the notion that affliction need not be present in order to motivate the continual pursuit of wellness. In a time of relative wellness—compared with similar rituals—this *okwaza* sought ways to open the blessings (*okusumulula emikisa*) that enhance the good life (*obulamu obulungi*) by reproducing positive social relations with patron spirits.

The participants began this function by bathing outside in medicinal herbs called *ebombo* (*vitaceae momordica foetida*) and *olweza* (*amaranthaceae aerva lanata*).⁸ Mediums commonly use these herbs for pre-ritual purification. *Ebombo* is a climbing vine found in bushy areas, and indigenous healers also use it to treat worms, upset stomach, snakebites and other wounds. *Olweza* is a creeping vine found in grassy areas. Indigenous healers use it to treat fevers and infections of the ear, nose, and throat. As at other *kusamira* rituals, those at Namusaale bathed with these plants to purify themselves and promote openness to blessings.

Everyone then gathered into a small shrine called a *ssabo*. Twenty-five or thirty people lined the walls of the circular structure. Near one wall, a large drum (*embuutu*) sat beside several pairs of gourd rattles (*ensaasi*). An obligatory ritual fire burned nearby,

⁸ I thank ethnobotanist Dr. John R.S. Tabuti for his assistance in correlating indigenous plant names with the Latinate taxonomy.

providing a place to warm drums and place burnt offerings for spirits. I met Jjajja Ssabiti, the main host and facilitator of this event. He built this shrine and the houses around it. Namusaale was his home village, and he later identified his grandfather as the common male ancestor to the gathered members of his lineage. Some of the others present included his sisters and brothers, while others were members of their extended kin group (*kika*).

Following the standard performance of the twin songs to open the ritual, Jjajja Ssabiti prayed: “There now with all of your *lubaale*, I introduce you, you have understood the function of searching the skin of Kibuuka.”⁹ Ssabiti refers to animal skins, which important figures wear in addition to bark cloth, announcing to Kibuuka the group’s intention to renew the spirit’s place in their community. This had additional meanings: beyond the actual animal skin that Kibuuka would request upon arriving in the body of his medium, wearing a spirit’s skin connotes the act of mediumship. A spirit medium does not cease being who he is while serving as a medium; rather, he releases his normal sense of self in service to the spirit and to those gathered. The group continued with a song welcoming spiritual guests to possess such mediums.

English

soloist: peace, peace, I greet the gathering

chorus: we are well

s: my dear ones

ch: visitors I am greeting you, we are well!

s: my companions, I greet the good ones

ch: we are well

s: my dear ones

ch: visitors I am greeting you, we are well!

s: Namuwanga, I greet the gathering

ch: we are well

s: my dear ones

ch: visitors I am greeting you, we are well!

Luganda

eradde, eradde, namusizza olukiiko

tuli balamu

abange

abagenyi mbalamusa, tuli balamu!

bannange, namusizza abalungi

tuli balamu

abange

abagenyi mbalamusa, tuli balamu!

Namuwanga, namusizza olukiiko

tuli balamu

abange

abagenyi mbalamusa, tuli balamu!

Okulamusa means to see and greet someone. *Namuwanga* is a reference to the spirit *Muwanga* and his female counterpart, *Namuwanga*. Like the twin spirits *Kiwanuka* and *Musoke*, *Muwanga* is one of the most commonly named *lubaale* spirits in *kusamira* ritual. Referring to spirits who possess human hosts as ‘visitors’ is common in ritual song and language. When such visitors began to come, people followed customs of greeting as they would for any visitor: they shook hands, they exchanged copious greetings, they offered coffee berries (*mmwanyi*) and a pipe with home-cured tobacco (*taaba*), banana beer (*mwenge*), distillates (*nguuli*), or specific garments like bark cloth (*lubugo*) and animal skins (*amaliba*). As Diane Thram observes of *Dandanda* ritual, these gestures of hospitality went beyond mere demonstrations of proper greeting customs; they contributed to the constant pursuit of cosmic balance between the mundane world and

⁹ “*Awo nno mu lubaale wo yenna, nkwanjulire, weetegese embaga y’okwaza eddiba lya Kibuuka.*”

that of the spirits (1999: 20, 172, 215). Participants in this and other *kusamira* rituals frequently commented that these items made the spirits feel more welcome, increasing the likelihood that they would possess mediums.

By the time this song ended, the first visitor arrived: a *muzimu*, an unknown ancestor of one of the people present, possessed a man named Jjajja Ssempala. He made no demands, but Ssempala began the arrival of Kibuuka's entourage. As Jjajja Ssabiti explained to me, the guest of honor would not arrive to a party first. The group proceeded to sing many songs. Ssematimba led most of these, for the group had hired him to play the *mbuutu* and sing.

Soon Ssematimba deftly negotiated the space between potential affliction and help from the spirits by reference to a sacrifice.

English

soloist: those children of mine I left them
daddy I have brought [goats] with black and white spots
chorus: walalala [vocables]
s: you death are taking me
ch: he who went, he went with
the fierce ones Nabulagala

Luganda

abaana bange abo nze n'abalekawo
taata nzileese n'obumya
walalala
ggwe olumbe luntwala
ye yagenda, gye genda
bakambwe Nabulagala

He conveyed the seriousness of this ritual: he left the children at home and brought a goat for sacrifice to escape affliction. Even in this time of general wellness, those gathered recognized the omnipresent potential for affliction and death. They therefore called their patron spirits 'fierce ones,' comparing them to formidable animals like lions or leopards. In the song, the fierce ones went to a place called Nabulagala, one of the former capitals of Buganda under Kabaka Ssuuna II, who reigned from 1832-1857 (Kafumbe 2006: 48). One of Ssematimba's later songs would link Nabulagala with Kibuuka and the sheep clan.

The notion of spirits as "fierce" persons, especially persons who had exceptional abilities during their lives, expresses social memory through ritual song. Some of the spirits venerated in *kusamira* ritual were once kings and their warriors like the wandering conqueror kings who founded the kingdom of Buganda. Ssematimba's very next performance in this ritual referred to the wars that these kings fought prior to founding Buganda and during their early days as rulers of the domain.

English

soloist: there were wars, wars
to conquer Buganda
chorus: there were wars
s: our dear ones
ch: to conquer Buganda, there were wars

Luganda

zaali ntalo, ntalo
okuwangula Buganda
zaali ntalo
otuwange
okuwangula Buganda, zaali ntalo

These war references carried additional meaning: they provided another euphemism for spirit mediumship. *Basamize* musicians characterize the chaotic movements at the onset of spirit possession as a battle or fighting. The spirits often stood and

walked as warriors or kings holding spears. This was particularly fitting for a ritual dedicated to Kibuuka Omumbaale, who was associated with the spectacular ability to fly on the field of battle. As in other *kusamira* rituals, this song associated spiritual heroism with spiritual willingness to share extraordinary power with humans. In so doing, Ssematimba articulated the fundamental process of the *kusamira* paradigm: the active production of positive social relations among humans and spirits becomes the reproduction of wellness and good living.

Both Ssematimba and the group situated this ritual performance within a specific cultural history at the heart of the Kiganda royal project. Neil Kodesh has demonstrated the patron spirit Kibuuka's close connections to the initial formation of the sheep clan and to the expansion of Buganda kingdom during the eighteenth century (2010: 138-149). Just as the previous song pointed to Nabulagala as an important location before and during Ssuuna II's reign, the wars in this song recalled a subsequent period in which both Kibuuka and the sheep clan emerged in the Kiganda royal narrative. For participants so clearly invested in Kiganda culture, these two songs encoded social memories of this important period in their kingdom's development.

As he continued to lead the ensemble, Ssematimba progressively narrowed the thematic circles around Kibuuka by naming the spirit's guard or soldier spirit (*muserikale*), Lubowa. From this point on, these two spirits became central concerns for the participants in this ritual. This song, translated below, called the spirit Lubowa, telling him that the dancers were ready and the good-looking women had assembled. Ssematimba's wife, Rita Nakakande, danced and sang in the chorus. The chorus repeats the identical refrain after each line of the soloist. These repetitions of the refrain are not shown after the first three solo lines in the translation below.

English

soloist: (that) dance, dance, dance as you see
 chorus: kneeling, kneeling where you sleep, kneeling
 s: Lubowa you are a goat that I eat
 ch: kneeling, kneeling where you sleep, kneeling
 s: the women you are clever madam
 ch: kneeling, kneeling where you sleep, kneeling
 s: there are good looking women
 ch: kneeling, kneeling where you sleep, kneeling
 s: Lubowa you strengthen men
 s: kneeling Lubowa you have beaten me with rain
 s: Lubowa you brought me problems
 s: the beard is like grass
 s: the eyes resemble the drinking gourd
 s: Lubowa you saw me in the day
 s: poverty disturbed me
 s: the prison saw me
 s: because of mayembe
 s: Lubowa you brought me problems

Luganda

(nti) kuuta, kuuta, kuuta w'olaba
 kutanya, kutanya w'osula, kutanya
 Lubowa oli mbuzi nnume
 kutanya, kutanya w'osula, kutanya
 abakazi mwannema nnyabo
 kutanya, kutanya w'osula, kutanya
 waliyo obukazi obwelagalaga
 kutanya, kutanya w'osula, kutanya
 Lubowa owanga basajja
 kutaanya Lubowa wankubye enkuba
 Lubowa wambonyabonya
 ekirevu kiringa essubi
 eriiso lilinge endeku
 Lubowa wandaga ennaku
 obwavu bwaluma nze
 ekkomera lyalaba nze
 nsonga ya mayembe
 Lubowa wambonyabonya

s: lice ate me	<i>nsekere z'aluma nze</i>
s: because of mayembe	<i>nsonga ya mayembe</i>
s: dance, dance, dance as you see	<i>kuuta, kuuta, kuuta w'olaba</i>
s: you arrive as he has no pants	<i>otuukayo nga talina empale</i>
s: my dear he saw the day	<i>owange yalaba ennaku</i>
s: to arrive when he has not seen	<i>kutuukayo nga talina ndaba</i>
s: the man of the large circumcision	<i>omusajja ow'ennene ensale</i>
s: look there he woos the ladies	<i>labayo akwaana bakyala</i>
s: the big ones are like the water pot	<i>bbunene kiringa ensuwa</i>
s: Lubowa you have said	<i>Lubowa weyogerere</i>
s: Lubowa asked me for a cow	<i>Lubowa yansaba ente</i>
ch: kneeling, kneeling where you sleep, kneeling	<i>kutanya, kutanya w'osula, kutanya</i>

According to Ssematimba, *kuuta* means to kneel or sit with legs to one side (2010d). It can also mean to fester or throw into confusion. Either way, it refers to a medium, and in particular to the behavior of a medium upon releasing his usual sense of self to a spirit. Just as people imitate the position of sleep by lying down to sleep, mediums assume postures appropriate for possession by sitting or kneeling when they prepare for the spirits to come (cf. Friedson 2009: 35). *Kuuta* refers to dances that possessed mediums perform while sitting or jumping in this position. The term invites spirits to possess their mediums and mediums to dance in this manner.

Multiple references to Lubowa revealed his potential for helping with various afflictions named in this song: lice, mental illness as evidenced by the rather comical image of arriving without pants, poverty, imprisonment, and trouble with romantic relationships. This was no litany of bad things affecting those present; rather, Ssematimba sang examples of potential problems brought on “because of *mayembe*” like Lubowa. A *jjembe* (singular of *mayembe*) is a type of spirit associated with a specific kind of work. In Lubowa’s case, that work entails guarding Kibuuka. When people neglect either the work or the spirit who does the work, these spirits can inflict illness or cause some other harm to their mediums and others. For example, the term *wambonyabonya* ‘you brought me problems,’ means that when a *jjembe* (working spirit) either has no house or has been neglected in his house, he causes problems with his medium to garner ritual attention. Ssematimba indicated that this condition most often causes mental illness: the medium “acts crazy,”¹⁰ goes walking in public without clothing, or says nonsensical things (2010c).

The mediums at this event, by contrast, called Lubowa and other patron spirits in order to ward off problems. Their shared etiological principles regarding spiritual afflictions, together with their knowledge of the Kiganda spirit pantheon, empowered them to take preventative action. All of their efforts for the remainder of the night addressed Lubowa, who prepared the way for Kibuuka. When Lubowa arrived, they greeted him as they greeted their first guest. They met his tacit needs for hospitality, namely by sharing coffee berries, banana beer, and tobacco with him. In the final line of the song, Ssematimba indicated Lubowa’s request for a cow as a sacrifice: the *basamize*

¹⁰ *akola ebilalu* (lit. “does crazy things”)

had come prepared to show him a goat as a compromise. The cow they reserved for his master, Kibuuka, whose arrival and willingness to open the blessings depended in part on the proper treatment of his soldier, Lubowa.

It was not until the next day that we encountered Kibuuka Omumbaale, the *lubaale* whom Lubowa guards. Ssematimba addressed him in song: “You Nabulagala Kibuuka Omumbaale,” he sang, incorporating the earlier reference to the place called Nabulagala into a praise epithet.¹¹ Ssematimba then directly invoked him: “You hurry up sick one of all!” or the one who can cause illness for all.¹² This lyric offered another telling look at a spiritual approach to etiology. A medium who experiences illness caused by a spirit must become the medium for that spirit in order to restore his or her community’s relationship with it. In this way the person’s relationship with the spirit embodies the whole group’s relationship with the spirit. Ritual embodiment of the spirit becomes the pathway to sustained wellness for all. So the “sick one of all” connotes both medium and patron spirit; the distinctive capacity for flexible personhood in *kusamira* ritual renders the two indistinguishable. In this case, owing to the adepts’ prior knowledge of these etiological principles, maintaining a spiritual link with this spirit through mediumship and regular ritual observance ensured the continuing health of both the medium and the community. For *basamize* at Namusaale, the “sick one of all” became “the one who reproduces wellness for all.”

Whether or not the ritual proceeded from here depended in large part upon available resources. The *basamize* had called their patron spirits, and the spirits had come. The focus then shifted to a crucial exchange: the *basamize* offered sacrifices and requested blessings from these spirits. The group came prepared with a cow and a goat, a rather large sacrifice that could readily appease nearly any spirit. Moreover, Jjajja Ssabiti’s opening invocation actually named Kibuuka, a further indication of this group’s familiarity with patron spirits and their demands.

Compared with other *okwaza* gatherings wherein participants engage in an exhaustive etiological search for spiritual connection, the invocations and subsequent exchanges at Namusaale remained relatively brief. When the spirits Lubowa and Kibuuka arrived again with several other spirits through their mediums (including Ssematimba and Ssabiti), the other adepts greeted them at length. Again they shared coffee berries, banana beer and tobacco. The patron spirits made few requests, which the *basamize* readily met. In other words, the *basamize* carried out a standard set of preventative operations in order to preserve convivial and prosperous social relations between the participants and known patron spirits. The *kwaza* at Namusaale was in these ways less like a search in the strict sense of the term *okwaza* and more like feeling through a dark but well-known space for a light switch. Seasoned *basamize* need their patron spirits just as novices do, but the proceedings at Namusaale demonstrated that the former group had a better idea of what spirits would require to open the blessings.

¹¹ Considering the significance of this location to later kings of Buganda, it appears that Nabulagala was an important site where Kibuuka triumphed in battle.

¹² “Ggwe yanguwangako mulwadde wa wonna!”

Namusaale Day 2: transition and sacrifice

Following a long night of singing for the spirits, the mediums and other adepts exited the *ssabo*. The women sat outside in the shade peeling *matooke* while the men prepared their tools to slaughter and butcher the sacrificial animals. At noon a member of the sheep clan named *Bbosa* cut the cow's throat, then the goats. Meanwhile, the *jjembe* spirit Lubowa possessed his medium to supervise the collection of blood from the goat that the group had sacrificed for him. This blood would be used to strengthen his house. Also called *jjembe*, this house is a power object made from the horn of an ungulate and kept in a place of honor in the shrine.¹³ With these sacrifices, *Bbosa* and his fellow *basamize* called forth a new set of ritual actions that consumed the next two days with feasting and singing: they planned to feed the spirits and strengthen their places in the community. Although Lubowa requested that the *basamize* strengthen his house, they already knew that a *jjembe* would also consume some of the sacrificial blood to strengthen his spiritual essence. They knew that in exchange the spirit would give them meat to strengthen them both physically and spiritually. The music during the previous night facilitated not only mediumship but also clear communication between experienced *basamize* and their patron spirits. Likewise these same *basamize* proceeded with the assurance that their sacrifices would garner blessings.

Once back inside the *ssabo*, singing began anew. Twin songs came first as they would in any *kusamira* ritual, but this was not an entirely new function. The performers intensified their focus on Kibuuka and Lubowa with songs for feasting and gratitude. The first of these specifically called Kibuuka Omumbaale to take hold of his medium and speak.

English

soloist: you will grab him Kibuuka
my master and you speak
chorus: *walalala*¹⁴
s: you my master
ch: he is not grabbing him changing over
as if he is feigning possession
s: you will grab him Kibuuka
my master you I am calling
ch: *walalala*
s: speak for yourself
ch: he is not grabbing him changing over
as if he is feigning possession
s: hurry a bit my master
you speak
ch: he is not grabbing him changing over
as if he is feigning possession

Luganda

onaamukwata Kibuuka
mukama wange oyogera nga
walalala
mukama wange ggwe
alinga tamukwate kyefuula
ng'ali mu kikookooma
onaamukwate Kibuuka
mukama wange ggwe (n)koowoola
walalala
oyogera nga ggwe
alinga tamukwate kyefuula
ng'ali mu kikookooma
yanguwako mukama wange
oyogera nga
alinga tamukwate kyefuula
ng'ali mu kikookooma

¹³ This is the subject of an entirely separate ritual called *okuwanga amayembe*.

¹⁴ *Basamize* singers often add this set of vocables to emphasize the previous phrase or simply fill space in their improvisations. It imitates ululation (*okukuba enduulu*) and can also appear as "wolololo."

Jjajja Ssabiti, Ssematimba, and Nakakande agreed on the dual meaning of the term *kikookooma* and its association with feigning possession. The word warned people against the trickery of fraudulent spirit mediumship, an offense against which *basamize* have many safeguards. It also implored the spirit to stay long enough within its medium to speak and to make its desires known. This latter meaning helped explain the phrase “he is not grabbing him changing over,”¹⁵ i.e. he is not possessing the medium fully. This line called on the spirit to do what the *basamize* had called it to do: “grab” its medium and speak.

Once Kibuuka arrived via his medium,¹⁶ the men who had been roasting meat brought it into the shrine and the group fed Kibuuka, who then distributed meat to all participants. This included organ meat, and most importantly, the meat of the liver (*ekibumba*). On another occasion, a *jjembe* spirit named Kasajja explained that eating this meat could function just as the liver does inside the animal: it could promote spiritual detoxification. It could help people “to put things straight,” or “to put things together” (*okubumbirabumbira*), help them overcome misfortunes and pestilence (*bibi*), and promote blessings (*mikisa*) (Kasajja 2010). This helps explain why roasting and evenly distributing the liver of a sacrificial animal often consumes such a great deal of time following the sacrifice of an animal. In times of scarcity, the threats of protein deficiency and anemia might have motivated efforts to share resources through social feasting. Considering their various professions and overall high level of economic stability, the group at Namusaale surely had different motives. However, these carefully enacted moments in Kiganda social life preserve enduring cultural memories of hungry and dangerous times. Having accomplished this important task, the whole group spends the rest of the day celebrating current abundance by feasting, drinking, and sleeping.

In the evening, this affirmation of beneficial relationships with Kibuuka and Lubowa required a remembrance of life’s finite nature. The male elders went to the nearby plot of graves (*magombe*) to pour libations for their common ancestor and for Jjajja Walumbe, the patron spirit of death. They said almost nothing as they renewed their commitments to live good lives while they could. They drank millet beer (*marwa*) late into the night. With feasting over and the *kwaza* ritual all but complete, this time provided some much-needed respite for tired ritual facilitators.

Namusaale Day 3: tying ritual themes together

In the morning, they returned to their duties with renewed vigor. Ssematimba implored his fellow *basamize*, singing, “morning has broken children of the sheep [clan]!”¹⁷ Having achieved their purpose, they began to say goodbye to the “visitors,” the spirits who had come with blessings to this feast:

¹⁵ *alinga tamukwate kyefuula*

¹⁶ This particular medium preferred to remain anonymous.

¹⁷ *obudde bukedde abaana bëndiga!*

English

soloist: goodbye, we are going to cast off
 chorus: visitors goodbye, visitors

Luganda

*mmweraba tugenda kwegana
 abagenyi mmweraba, abagenyi*

This song continued a familiar host/visitor dualism: the *basamize* greeted patron spirits as visitors throughout the ritual as they arrived through their mediums. They accommodated them with sacrifices and feasting. This greeting began to conclude ritual proceedings. As others cleaned up and prepared to return to Kampala, Ssematimba's close companion, Tony Olekyo, led a song linking birth, illness/wellness, and death.

English

soloist: s/he gave birth to me,
 s/he gave birth to that one
 chorus: skeleton she gives birth to a crazy person,
 he knew her, skeleton
 s: s/he gave birth to me, s/he gave birth to you
 ch: skeleton she gives birth to a crazy person,
 he knew her, skeleton

Luganda

soloist: *yazaala nze,
 yazaala oyo*
 chorus: *kiwalaŋaŋa azaala omulalu,
 yamumanya, kiwalaŋaŋa*
yazaala nze yazaala ggwe
 ch: *kiwalaŋaŋa azaala omulalu,
 yamumanya, kiwalaŋaŋa*

Sacrifices to Kibuuka and Lubowa, together with libations for Walumbe and the recently deceased, established the context for this song to bind together the major themes of the ritual. If earlier songs provided some insight into diagnostic processes of similar rituals, this one expressed a “cosmic balance” (Thram 1999: 172, 215). It did so by reference to a spiritual etiology for disease and death in a time of relative wellness. Whatever physical or psychological manifestations illness might have, the *basamize* at Namusaale—just as their counterparts at other rituals—conceptualized its causes as spiritual in nature. Staying well therefore required the participation of patron spirits just as resolving illness and misfortune relies on their intervention.

Ssematimba sang from that same epistemological stance, returning to themes of the ‘created’ patron spirits called *lubaale*: the waters of Lake Nalubaale (Lake Victoria). “Will you hear the lake when it ripples?”¹⁸ he asked his fellow *basamize*, inquiring whether or not they would recognize the presence of their benevolent patron spirits in the natural world. Reflective songs continued like this, alternately addressing guardians (*lubaale*) like Kibuuka Omumbaale and working spirits (*mayembe*) like Lubowa. One song referred to an ancestor, Kamungolo, whose bag full of ritual accoutrements symbolized the careful containment of indigenous spiritual knowledge (*obuwangwa*) (Hoelsing 2011: 162-165). Another song nicknamed a spirit Kasambalyanda, the one who kicks a burning charcoal, referring to a crafty person or someone who can do anything (*omukujjukuju*).

English

soloist: it came back it came back long ago
 chorus: the one who can do anything it came back
 as they took it, the one who can do anything
 s: the one who can do anything it came back

Luganda

*gwakomawo gwakomawo dda
 kasambalyanda gyakomawo
 gye bagatwala, kasambalyanda
 kasambalyanda gwakomawo*

¹⁸ “Ojjowulira emyanja bwe yira?”

it came back that one
 ch: the one who can do anything it came back
 as they took it, the one who can do anything
 s: the one who can do anything it came back
 it was from Kyaggwe
 ch: the one who can do anything it came back
 as they took it, the one who can do anything
 s: walalala, it came back it came back, eee
 ch: the one who can do anything it came back
 as they spent the night with it
 the one who can do anything
 s: it came back our mayembe
 ch: the one who can do anything it came back
 as they spent the night with it,
 the one who can do anything

gwakomawo ago
kasambalyanda gyakomawo
gye bagatwala, kasambalyanda
kasambalyanda gwakomawo
gava mu Kyaggwe
kasambalyanda gyakomawo
gye bagatwala, kasambalyanda
walalala, gwakomawo gwakomawo, eee
kasambalyanda gwakomawo
gye bagasula
kasambalyanda
gwakomawo mayembe gaffe
kasambalyanda gwakomawo
gye bagasula,
kasambalyanda

Having just “spent the night” with spirits, this praise song extolled their abilities to affect human welfare for the better. Ssematimba’s mention of Kyaggwe referred to his home county; here he playfully doubled the meaning of Kasambalyanda as not only a spirit who can do anything but also a musician who can play or sing anything. His tongue-in-cheek lyric enhanced the light atmosphere at the end of this function.

Closure: ritual songs of gratitude

Toward the end of this ritual the celebratory nature of the songs reflected a shared perception that the time and resources expended at Namusaale had resulted in a successful outcome. Ssematimba and his companion, Tony Olekyo, led two celebratory songs: one concerned the feast they had just enjoyed and the other “Omugabi” [CD track 2] offered gratitude to Kibuuka for his presence and his blessings. Both songs reflected a common belief that if the spirits had come, appeared pleased with the sacrifices, and opened the blessings of a sacrificial feast to all, other blessings would fall into place.

In the first of these two songs, the singers treated meat as a luxury, placing it on the level of riches. They used an excerpt from idiomatic Luganda phrasing in which a guest thanks his hosts, specifically the cook and the person who provided or purchased foodstuffs and drinks. Although families often prescribe them less strictly now, these roles continue to carry gender connotations wherein cooking and provisions constitute feminine and masculine domains, respectively. These singers placed Kibuuka in the latter masculine role.

English

chorus: the generous one
 soloist: my companions he has shared
 ch: the generous one has shared meat
 s: the meat Kibuuka has given us
 ch: the generous one
 s: my companions he has given us
 ch: the generous one has shared meat
 s: listen my companions he has given us
 ch: the generous one
 s: Ancestor who has given
 ch: the generous one has shared meat
 s: o.k., meat and he gives us riches
 ch: the generous one
 s: my companions he has given us
 ch: the generous one has shared meat

Luganda (transcription excerpt 4.)

omugabi
bannange agabudde
omugabi agabye ennyama
ennyama Kibuuka atuwadde
omugabi
bannange atuwadde
omugabi agabye ennyama
wulira bannange atuwadde
omugabi
Jjajja nga agabudde
omugabi agabye ennyama
kale, ennyama natuwa bugagga
omugabi
bannange atuwadde
omugabi agabye ennyama

The musical score is written in 8/8 time. It features four parts: Soloist, Chorus, S. (Soloist), and Ch. (Chorus). The Soloist part has a melodic line with lyrics: 'ban - na-ng - a - ga-bu-de - - - ka-l'e - nnya-ma ne Ki - buu-ka a - tu-wa-de -'. The Chorus part has a rhythmic accompaniment with lyrics: 'bi - - - - o - mu-ga-by'a - ga-bye nnya-ma'. The S. part has a melodic line with lyrics: 'ba - na-ng' a - tu-wa-de - - - - wu - li-ra ba - na-ng' - a - tu-wa-de -'. The Ch. part has a rhythmic accompaniment with lyrics: 'o - mu-ga-bi o - mu-ga-by'a - ga-bye nnya-ma'. There are fermatas over the final notes of the Soloist and S. parts.

Figure 7. Transcription excerpt 4.

Likewise Ssematimba sang declamatory praise with a style of vocal ornamentation that Baganda call *ggon*. These figures appear at the ends of the words *gabude* in m. 1, *atuwade* in m. 3 and again in mm. 5 and 7. His singing provided a musical analogue to the physical gestures of gratitude that his fellow *basamize* directed toward the spirits.

This kind of ornamentation, along with the text and the idiomatic gesticulations, enhanced the effusive demeanor of heartily satisfied guests. For the singers, this constituted a major role reversal from host to guest. Recall that in the earliest songs from this ritual, they sang as hosts inviting spirits as guests. The *kwaza* ends with the communal recognition that the spirits were the hosts all along. The participants celebrate once more in song, this time treating the spirits as hosts and guardians rather than guests.

English

chorus: we are grateful, we are utterly grateful

soloist: we are thankful Kibuuka we are thankful

ch: we are grateful, we are utterly grateful

s: we are thankful mayembe we are thankful

ch: we are grateful, we are utterly grateful

s: we are thankful Kibuuka Omumbaale

ch: we are grateful, we are utterly grateful

s: we are thankful lubaale we are thankful

ch: we are grateful, we are utterly grateful

Luganda

tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege

tweyanze Kibuuka tweyanze

tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege

tweyanze mayembe tweyanze

tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege

tweyanze Kibuuka Omumbaale

tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege

tweyanze lubaale tweyanze

tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege

This standard song of thanksgiving reaffirmed the conclusion of the ritual. Songs like this highlight several themes that remain consistent in ritual repertoires throughout Buganda and Busoga. In bringing animals for sacrifice, in knowing to open the ritual and its blessings with twin songs, and in singing a common repertory, *basamize* reinforce respect for local knowledge (*obuwangwa*). The ability to access, contain, and share this knowledge comes at a cost to ritual adepts. The aforementioned song *Zaali ntaalo* compared ritual with battle. The performance of ritual is in itself quite a struggle: it is physically taxing, particularly for novice mediums, and people must overcome considerable economic challenges and social stigma in order to engage in a regular practice. Christian and Muslim communities might well ostracize those among them who admit to attending *kusamira* ritual. Gifts and sacrifices for spirits are costly and time consuming, and not everyone understands why people are willing to bear this financial burden or expend so much time and energy in shrines. Coupled with the psychological and physical demands placed on mediums by the experience of flexible personhood in spirit possession, the notion of battle stirs in ritual practitioners the stamina and tenacity to endure days and sometimes weeks of these activities. This particular ritual was plagued by a further challenge: tiny biting insects (*nsanafu*) hid in the grass and infested the area all around the shrine (*ssabo*). These pests, the *basamize* explained, often infest the area surrounding the shrine at rituals to keep people inside doing what they should be doing rather than shirking their duties somewhere outside.

Finally, every ritual progression eventually points toward thanksgiving for the spirits. '*Tweyanzizza, tweyanzeege*' served as a representative example of a much broader musical vocabulary for expressing thanks. Whereas *okwaza* can function as a diagnostic ritual, much of this gathering ended as an occasion for praise singing. Members of the sheep clan celebrated overcoming so many obstacles, from economic challenges to biting insects, to enjoy the blessings that the spirits had bestowed upon them. Having overcome these challenges; sacrificed time, effort and resources; and placed their creative capacities of musicianship and mediumship in service to the spirits, they ate their fill when the spirits in turn distributed meat and blessings to all participants. This feasting reflected the convivial focus of cultivating social relations among clanmates and spiritual patrons (*cf.* Overing and Passes 2000).

Conclusion

Performances of *okwaza lubaale* ritual in Buganda provide glimpses into what it means to live the good life (*obulamu obulungi*). Like other *kusamira* rituals, *okwaza* seeks blessings, which humans and spirits express socially through reciprocal exchange, sacrifice and redistribution. The meat of sacrificial animals becomes a central symbol in these processes: communities offer it in exchange for blessings, then cook it to feed spirits, who in turn physically distribute it to the *basamize*—hand to mouths—as a symbol of the blessings. Musicians perform to create appropriate social space for these interactions. Not only do *basamize* use music to call patron spirits, they also play music and dance with the spirits to cultivate appropriately convivial relations and to lavish them with praise names as a pretext for sacrifice and celebration.

Music in *kusamira* goes far beyond causing possession, for spirits can surely possess mediums at will and without being called (Sekagya 2008). Asserting the communicative function of music in ritual, *basamize* note that music renders spiritual encounters more useful (Ndiwalana 2008; Sekagya 2008).¹⁹ As Paul Berliner suggests of Shona *bira*, musicking in ritual provides a means of “bridging the world of the living and the world of the spirits and thereby attracting the attention of the ancestors” (1978: 190). Diane Thram likewise observes of Shona *dandanda* mediums that they obtain relief from the problems of life only through communication with spirits (1999: 203). Just as in *dandanda*, the music of *kusamira* makes this process of communication possible. Daniel Reed and Steven Friedson similarly characterize the role of music in spirit mediumship, suggesting that “music makes translucent the boundary between human and spirit” (Friedson 1996: 100; cf. Reed 2005: 350). *Basamize* then make these spirits feel welcome, offering them coffee berries, banana beer, tobacco, familiar clothing, sacrifices and laudatory songs. Invoking Heidegger’s notion of *technē*, Steven Friedson asserts that such music constitutes an essential technology of ritual communication in the sense of technology-as-art (Friedson 1996: 36; Heidegger 1977). This places performances of spirit mediumship somewhere between art and science. *Basamize* rely fundamentally on creative capacities—namely musicianship and mediumship—to test etiological hypotheses, seek out the underlying spiritual truths of illness and wellness, produce the desired health and wellness outcomes, maintain these positive outcomes and celebrate the blessings of a good life.

Basamize thereby cultivate ritual atmospheres for the production and continual reproduction of wellness through social interaction with their ancestral and patron spirits. Humans realize their desires in the form of prayer and song and begin to satiate them in the sharing of ritual meals given them by the spirits. These activities reflect convivial, respectful behavior: people invite the spirits, greet them properly, offer them gifts, and accept their blessings. Spirits realize their desires through both consumptive and productive activities of ritual: they obtain the sacrifices they require, a kind of spiritual food that only humans can offer. As an essentially creative process,

¹⁹ See also Sekagya’s statements on page 2.

the exchange of sacrifices for blessings produces wellness (*obulamu obulungi*) in the convivial atmosphere of *kusamira* ritual. Misfortunes (*bibi*) counterbalance this neat symbolic symmetry, necessitating constant repetition of productive exchanges.

This reading of *kusamira* departs slightly from the focus on illness in earlier studies of spirit possession and spirit mediumship. Victor Turner's seminal work on cults of affliction (notably 1967, 1968) provided both structural models for analyzing ritual and conceptual frames that have proven invaluable to later ethnographers and historians of religion. Gilbert Rouget became one of the first ethnomusicologists to look seriously at the relationship between music and trance, and Marina Roseman's work in Malaysia triangulated that approach by reference to healing (Rouget 1985, Roseman 1991). John Janzen generalized the connections between these three categories by drawing on specific examples from his extensive studies all across southern Africa (1992). Steven Friedson's notion that patients afflicted by spirits could "dance their diseases," taken together with his application of Heidegger to musical ethnography, further advances a mature musicology of possession ritual by developing descriptive terms appropriate for music as a primary focus of ethnographic analysis (Friedson 1996). These have been important and lasting contributions to the study of music, ritual, possession and mediumship, and yet they fall short of capturing the local focus on wellness and good living constantly present in *kusamira* ritual. Just as John Janzen's critics identified in his work a preoccupation with therapy, so a careful reading of *kusamira* should reveal that there is more to hear in ritual than coping mechanisms for affliction and misfortune (van Dijk, Reis and Spierenburg 2000).²⁰ The present case has demonstrated how one community cultivated positive social relations with their patron spirits for the purpose of preventative maintenance rather than as responses to crisis.

As with other *ngoma* traditions, *kusamira* reveals pestilence to be associated with social alienation of humans from ancestral and patron spirits. *Basamize* musicians and mediums characterize wellness, by contrast, by reference to convivial social interactions between these groups. The release of one's usual sense of self to a spirit in the performance of *kusamira*, like a contribution toward the purchase of a sacrificial animal or banana beer for ceremonial use, becomes a sacrifice for the good of all. These actions express membership in a social group that shares ancestry, draws on common histories and cultural logics, and recognizes the efficacy of spiritual patronage against the threat of worldly afflictions. *Kusamira* music binds locally accessible symbols, visible gestures, and musical idioms into powerful song performances, offering a dramaturgical analogue to physical power objects. Like other power objects, it then facilitates communicative processes, convivial social interactions, and productive exchanges to support wellness. For *basamize*, it is only through these sacrifices, and through spiritual approval of them, that they can unbind blessings and live the good life.

²⁰ See especially the editors' Introduction (1-11) and Henny Blokland's contribution to this critique (15, 12-38 *passim*).

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