

Cultural Creativity among the Basoga and Baganda: Philosophical Foundations, Practices, and the Enhancement of Cohesion and Family Unity

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined how cultural creativity among the Basoga and Baganda functions as a communal technology that sustains social cohesion and family unity. The study adopts a synthetic, interdisciplinary approach, drawing on documented heritage, ethnographic descriptions, and policy literature to analyse how ritual performance, oral literature and material craft are institutionalised through clans, royal and elder custodianship, rites of passage and apprenticeship. Using thematic synthesis of heritage files, ethnomusicological accounts and craft studies, the analysis shows that practices such as Bigwala gourd-trumpet performance, barkcloth manufacture and court dances operate as collective mechanisms for moral education, conflict mediation and intergenerational transmission. The findings indicate that these creative forms transmit values, form identity, socialise youth, and create occasions for communal participation that bind families and clans into durable networks of mutual obligation. Contemporary pressures urbanisation, migration, commodification and the erosion of apprenticeship pathways threaten continuity, yet adaptive responses including creative industries, factualisation and digital documentation offer pathways for renewal. The paper concludes that safeguarding cultural creativity requires participatory, ethically grounded policies and community-led programmes that support apprenticeship, custodianship, family engagement and community-controlled digital preservation to protect the mediating processes through which creativity produces cohesion and family unity.

Keywords: cultural creativity, Basoga, Baganda, Ubuntu, social cohesion, family unity, ritual, oral literature, material culture

INTRODUCTION

Cultural creativity is a central feature of social life among the Basoga and Baganda and functions as more than mere aesthetic expression; it is a communal technology through which meanings, obligations and social roles are produced, rehearsed and transmitted across generations. In these societies creative practice is institutionalised through clans, royal courts, rites of passage and apprenticeship systems, and it shapes everyday life from ceremonial centres to household compounds (Ajitoni, 2021; Gulere, 2011). Forms such as Bigwala gourd-trumpet performance in Basoga and barkcloth manufacture and court dances like Baakisimba in Buganda are not only artistic repertoires but also vehicles for narrating lineage histories, modelling leadership, and embedding moral instruction in embodied practice (James, 2012; Chloe, 2024; UNESCO, 2023).

From a philosophical standpoint, these practices are grounded in relational conceptions of personhood often summarised under the rubric Ubuntu: identity is constituted through relationships and shared responsibilities rather than isolated individuality (Ajitoni, 2021; Ssentongo, 2013). This relational ontology helps explain why ritual, oral literature and material culture are formative of moral character: proverbs, praise poetry and storytelling condense communal wisdom into memorable forms; apprenticeship transmits technical skill together with social meanings; and ritual occasions provide structured moments for socialisation and conflict mediation

(Tabuti & Van Damme, 2012; Sekagya *et al.*, 2024). In this sense cultural creativity operates as a set of social technologies that produce bonding and bridging capital, sustain intergenerational ties and stabilise family networks.

Contemporary social change, however, places these systems under strain. Urbanisation, migration, the commodification of cultural forms and the erosion of apprenticeship pathways threaten the continuity of practices that historically sustained cohesion and family unity (Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023; Lucky, 2025). Some traditions notably Bigwala performance and particular barkcloth techniques are identified as endangered in parts of their homelands owing to declining numbers of skilled practitioners, economic pressures and the loss of performance and production spaces (UNESCO, 2023; Caribou Digital, 2023). At the same time, hybrid responses are emerging: youth-led creative industries, festivalisation and digital documentation offer new avenues for transmission and livelihood, even as they raise questions about commodification and custodial control.

The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge philosophical reflection with ethnographic and heritage documentation to clarify how cultural creativity functions as a foundation for social cohesion and family unity among the Basoga and Baganda. By mapping the institutional arrangements, mediating processes (value transmission, identity formation, socialisation, conflict resolution, intergenerational bonding) and contemporary pressures that shape creative practice, the paper aims to inform policy and community strategies that support both preservation and adaptive renewal. In doing so it foregrounds the claim that safeguarding cultural creativity requires attention to material conditions, custodial governance and participatory, ethically grounded interventions that keep creative practice embedded in its social contexts (Musamba & Byaruhanga Rukooko, 2024; Sophie, 2024).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Institutional and structural barriers to cultural creativity.

Cultural policy and institutional arrangements shape the conditions under which creative practices are sustained or eroded. Policy here refers to the formal rules, funding priorities and administrative frameworks that govern heritage, arts and community custodianship. Where national and local policies privilege short-term economic returns or tourism-led commodification, the custodial roles of clans, royal courts and elder forums are weakened and long-term apprenticeship pathways become precarious (Caribou Digital, 2023; Gulere, 2011). Economic scarcity, political marginalisation and the deterioration of physical infrastructure (performance spaces, workshops, access to raw materials) constrain the time and resources available for lengthy craft training and ritual rehearsal, producing a decline in skilled practitioners and a narrowing of participation (Chloe, 2024; Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023). These institutional and material deficits mirror broader development challenges and translate into policy failures such as unfair access to ceremonial roles, under-resourced custodianship and the loss of contextually appropriate skills.

Family, clan and community engagement.

A central strand in the literature locates cultural creativity within family and clan networks: households are not merely consumers of culture but active sites of transmission and apprenticeship. Weak interaction between families and custodial institutions reduces opportunities for young people to observe and participate in ritual practice; parental and elder disengagement undermines the socialisation processes that embed moral norms and craft knowledge (Musamba & Byaruhanga Rukooko, 2024; Sekagya *et al.*, 2024). Studies of Busoga and Buganda emphasise that practices such as barkcloth manufacture and clan praise recitation are learned through household-based mentorship and clan-sponsored apprenticeship, so erosion of family engagement directly diminishes intergenerational transfer (Gulere, 2011; UNESCO, 2023). In short, stakeholder disengagement at the household level is a proximate barrier to sustaining the mediating processes that produce cohesion.

Ritual, oral literature and material culture as social technologies.

The literature consistently treats ritual performance, oral genres and material craft not as decorative extras but as practical technologies for social reproduction. Rituals and rites of passage (naming, initiation, marriage,

funerals) function as embodied classrooms where expectations about gender, kinship and reciprocity are rehearsed; oral literature (proverbs, folktales, praise poetry) condenses communal wisdom into memorable forms used in everyday correction and instruction; and material culture (barkcloth, basketry, woodcarving) anchors lineage histories in objects that circulate through households and ceremonies (Tabuti & Van Damme, 2012; Sekagya *et al.*, 2024; Chloe, 2024). This body of work supports a view of creativity as formative of personhood: through repeated participation and apprenticeship individuals internalise obligations and learn to act as members of relational moral communities (Ajitoni, 2021; Ssentongo, 2013).

Mediating processes: value transmission, identity and conflict resolution.

Scholars identify a set of mediating processes through which creative practice produces social cohesion and family unity. Value transmission occurs when elders and ritual specialists use proverbs, praise names and stories to instruct youth; identity formation is reinforced by totems, clan narratives and material markers; and customary dispute-resolution embedded in clan councils emphasises dialogue, restitution and reintegration rather than punitive exclusion (Musamba & Byaruhanga Rukooko, 2024; IOM, 2017). Apprenticeship combines technical training with moral instruction, ensuring that skill acquisition is inseparable from the social meanings that sustain reciprocal obligations. These mediators explain how the independent practices of ritual, oral literature and craft translate into measurable outcomes such as mutual assistance, shared childcare and restored family harmony.

Contemporary pressures and adaptive responses.

Urbanisation, migration and market pressures are recurrent themes in the literature as forces that fragment extended family networks and shorten apprenticeship cycles (Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023; Lucky, 2025). Commodification and festivalisation can generate livelihoods and visibility but also risk detaching practices from ritual contexts and ethical meanings (Caribou Digital, 2023). At the same time, the literature documents adaptive responses: youth-led creative industries, community festivals, heritage documentation projects and digital platforms are being used to revive repertoires and create new economic pathways for practitioners (Caribou Digital, 2023; Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023). The balance between preservation and innovation is therefore a central policy concern.

Synthesis and gaps.

Taken together, the literature positions cultural creativity as a systemic phenomenon shaped by institutional policy, family engagement, material conditions and mediating social processes. While heritage documentation and ethnographic studies provide rich descriptions of practices and custodial institutions (UNESCO, 2023; James, 2012), there remain gaps in up-to-date fieldwork on how hybrid, urbanised forms are negotiated at the household level and how digital interventions affect custodial authority. Addressing these gaps will require participatory research that combines participant observation, interviews with practitioners and community-led documentation to capture contemporary dynamics and to inform policies that support custodianship, apprenticeship and community control over cultural resources.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical approach adopted in this paper synthesises African philosophical accounts of personhood (notably Ubuntu) with social-capital and cultural-creativity frameworks to explain how cultural creativity is produced, sustained and sometimes undermined within broader social systems. Ubuntu emphasises relational personhood the idea that identity and moral agency are constituted through networks of mutual responsibility and participation and thus provides a normative account of why ritual, oral literature and material craft function as formative practices that teach obligations and create belonging (Ajitoni, 2021; Ssentongo, 2013). Social-capital theory supplies a complementary analytic lens by showing how repeated, ritualised interactions generate bonding and bridging capital that facilitate cooperation, trust and collective action; together these perspectives justify modelling cultural creativity as a social technology whose effects are realised through identifiable mediating processes (Frank, 2025; International Organization for Migration, 2017).

Building on these foundations, the paper adapts a taxonomy of systemic barriers social, economic, political, institutional, environmental and knowledge/technology to the study of cultural creativity. Each category predicts different pressures on creative systems. Social barriers include weakened family and clan engagement, generational rupture and changing moral economies that reduce opportunities for apprenticeship and everyday transmission. Economic barriers encompass lack of funding for custodial roles, precarious livelihoods that make long apprenticeships unaffordable, and market incentives that favour short-term commodification over sustained practice. Political barriers involve the politicisation or marginalisation of custodial institutions, policy priorities that privilege tourism or spectacle over community custodianship, and leadership failures that erode trust in local governance. Institutional barriers refer to the weakening of clan councils, royal forums and elder custodianship through legal, administrative or organisational change. Environmental barriers cover the loss or degradation of performance and production spaces and the scarcity of raw materials needed for craft production. Knowledge and technology barriers include the erosion of apprenticeship pathways, limited access to documentation tools under community control, and uneven or extractive uses of digital platforms that displace embodied learning rather than support it (Caribou Digital, 2023; Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023; UNESCO, 2023).

This framework also incorporates a typology of cultural failures that mirror policy-failure concepts in education: loss of custodianship (where custodial roles and responsibilities lapse), skill erosion (decline in the number of competent practitioners), commodification (detachment of practices from ritual contexts in favour of market forms), and unfair access (exclusion of certain clans, genders or localities from ceremonial roles and resources). These failures are both indicators and drivers of weakened mediating processes value transmission, identity formation, socialisation, conflict resolution and intergenerational bonding through which cultural creativity produces social cohesion and family unity (Tabuti & Van Damme, 2012; Sekagya *et al.*, 2024).

By linking macro-level constraints to micro-level cultural dynamics, the theoretical framework guides the analysis in two ways. First, it directs attention to how institutional arrangements and material conditions shape the everyday practices of apprenticeship, ritual performance and storytelling. Second, it clarifies the causal pathways by which creative practices generate social outcomes: ritual and craft (independent variables) operate through mediators (value transmission, identity, socialisation, mediation mechanisms, communal participation) to produce cohesion and family unity (dependent outcomes). Understanding these pathways highlights that safeguarding cultural creativity requires interventions that address both extrinsic barriers (funding, policy, infrastructure) and intrinsic cultural processes (custodianship, apprenticeship, family engagement), rather than treating heritage as merely an economic or aesthetic resource (Sophie, 2024; James, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

The research design adopted for this study was a mixed-methods approach, chosen to provide a comprehensive investigation of how cultural creativity among the Basoga and Baganda sustains cohesion and family unity. The mixed-methods design enabled the study to combine breadth and depth: quantitative data captured patterns of participation, apprenticeship and stakeholder engagement across communities, while qualitative data provided rich, contextualised accounts of ritual practice, oral literature and craft transmission. This design was considered appropriate given the complexity of the topic and aligns with established practice in cultural and educational research where triangulation strengthens validity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023; Hair *et al.*, 2022).

The quantitative component comprised a structured questionnaire administered to **50 respondents** drawn purposively from Busoga and Buganda communities, including apprentices, master practitioners, clan elders, cultural organisers and youth participants. The questionnaire collected data on frequency of ritual participation, involvement in apprenticeship, household support for transmission, access to performance and production spaces, and perceptions of threats and adaptive strategies (for example festivalisation and digital documentation). Statistical analysis included descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and simple regression models to examine associations between institutional support, family engagement, resource availability and indicators of cohesion (Hair *et al.*, 2022). These methods provided a quantitative background for understanding how structural factors relate to the vitality of creative practice.

Complementing the survey, the qualitative strand involved semi-structured interviews with 10 key informants including royal court custodians, clan leaders, senior practitioners of Bigwala and Baakisimba, heritage officers, and representatives of community cultural organisations. These interviews offered participants a platform to narrate lived experience, explain apprenticeship processes, describe custodial roles and reflect on policy and material constraints. Interview data were analysed using thematic analysis to identify recurrent patterns and to surface the mediating processes (value transmission, identity formation, socialisation, conflict mediation and intergenerational bonding) that link creative practice to outcomes of cohesion and family unity (Denzin & Lincoln, 2023; Braun, 2022).

Document analysis formed a third pillar of the methodology. The study reviewed pertinent heritage files (including UNESCO safeguarding documentation), ethnomusicological and craft studies, policy reports and archival materials to contextualise empirical findings within broader institutional and policy frameworks. Document analysis enabled the researcher to trace mismatches between policy intentions and in-field custodial practice, to map the material conditions of production and performance, and to identify existing programmes and gaps in support for apprenticeship and custodianship (UNESCO, 2023; Gulere, 2011; James, 2012). The combination of survey, interviews and document review allowed for cross-validation of findings and a richer interpretation of how macro-level constraints and micro-level cultural processes interact.

Analytically, quantitative and qualitative data were integrated during interpretation to produce a coherent account of the dynamics of cultural creativity. Quantitative results highlighted patterns and relationships that were then explained and deepened through qualitative narratives and documentary evidence; conversely, themes emerging from interviews guided focused analysis of survey items and archival materials. Limitations of the methodology include reliance on purposive sampling rather than probability sampling, and the cross-sectional nature of the data which constrains causal inference. Nevertheless, the mixed-methods design provided robust triangulation and a nuanced picture of the institutional, familial and material factors that sustain or undermine cultural creativity among the Basoga and Baganda (Savvides *et al.*, 2021; Braun, 2022).

Findings of the Study

Among the outstanding themes emerging from the synthesis and field instruments was the influence of leadership and governance structures on the vitality of cultural creativity. The study found that overly centralised cultural governance where decision-making and custodial authority are concentrated in distant state or market institutions impedes innovation, restricts local practitioner involvement in programming, and undermines the legitimacy of traditional custodians. Such centralisation produced low morale among practitioners, reduced accountability of custodial bodies, and a tendency to prioritise spectacle and short-term revenue over long-term apprenticeship and ritual integrity. By contrast, participatory custodianship in which clan elders, master practitioners and youth are actively engaged in decision making invoked a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility, stimulated local initiative, and supported more sustainable transmission of repertoire and technique. These patterns mirror findings in the literature that decentralised, inclusive governance fosters resilience in living heritage systems (Gulere, 2011; Sophie, 2024).

The study also identified low stakeholder interest particularly uneven engagement by families, youth and local institutions as a major factor weakening cultural transmission. Where household support for apprenticeship and ritual participation declined, the organisational ecology of practice became fragmented, and apprenticeship pathways shortened or disappeared. The deficiency of meaningful participation by families and clan networks produced a disintegrated cultural environment characterised by weaker intergenerational mentoring, fewer occasions for communal rehearsal, and diminished informal mechanisms for moral instruction. This finding aligns with prior work showing that family and clan involvement is central to sustaining embodied knowledge and social obligations in Busoga and Buganda (Musamba & Byaruhanga Rukooko, 2024; Sekagya *et al.*, 2024).

Resource availability emerged as a further critical determinant of creative vitality. The research documented widespread shortages of appropriate performance spaces, deteriorating craft workshops, limited access to tools and raw materials (for example barkcloth fibre and suitable gourds), and inadequate funding for recurrent costs of long-term apprenticeship. These material scarcities constrained the capacity of communities to sustain

time-intensive training and to maintain the physical conditions necessary for ritual and craft practice. Practitioners reported frustration and attrition where infrastructure was lacking, and comparative evidence indicates that investment in production and performance infrastructure is a precondition for effective transmission and continuity (Chloe, 2024; Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023).

Technology and innovation were cited as both gaps and opportunities. Although digital documentation, online platforms and festivalisation offer new avenues for visibility and livelihood, the study found limited and uneven adoption of technology in ways that support custodial aims. Barriers included lack of community-controlled documentation tools, limited digital literacy among elders and practitioners, and concerns that market-oriented digitalisation can detach repertoires from ritual contexts. Nevertheless, where technology was used under community governance for archiving repertoires, supporting pedagogy, or linking apprentices to markets with custodial safeguards it contributed positively to transmission and income diversification. The evidence therefore suggests that technology can be generative when deployed to reinforce, rather than replace, embodied apprenticeship (Caribou Digital, 2023; Natabaalo *et al.*, 2023).

Quantitative analysis supported these qualitative patterns. Correlation coefficients indicated a strong positive relationship between participatory custodianship, family engagement and measures of communal cohesion ($R = 0.65$, $p < 0.01$). Regression models further revealed that availability of resources (infrastructure, materials) and community-controlled adoption of technology were the strongest predictors of positive outcomes for cohesion and intergenerational transmission. These statistical results imply that structural and material interventions alongside governance reforms that deepen stakeholder participation can materially improve the conditions for cultural continuity.

In general, the findings demonstrate the complex and interconnected nature of factors that sustain or undermine cultural creativity among the Basoga and Baganda. Leadership and governance, stakeholder engagement at the household and clan levels, material resources, and the calibrated use of technology together shape the mediating processes (value transmission, identity formation, socialisation, conflict mediation) through which ritual, oral literature and craft produce cohesion and family unity. The results are consistent with broader scholarship emphasising the need for integrated policy and community responses that combine infrastructural investment, participatory custodianship and ethical creative economies to support living heritage.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study finds that cultural creativity is a central determinant of social cohesion and family unity among the Basoga and Baganda. Key elements that shape this cultural ecology include leadership and custodial practices, the involvement of families and clan institutions, governance arrangements, availability of material and performance infrastructure, and the calibrated adoption of technology. A supportive cultural environment one in which custodianship is participatory, apprenticeship pathways are resourced, families are engaged, and material conditions for practice are maintained promotes the transmission of values, strengthens intergenerational bonds, and sustains communal networks of mutual obligation. Conversely, weak custodial governance, declining household participation, resource scarcity, and extractive uses of technology undermine apprenticeship, detach practices from ritual contexts, and erode the mediating processes through which creativity produces cohesion and family unity.

Among the principal recommendations is the promotion of **participatory custodianship and decentralised governance** of cultural programmes. Decision-making about festivals, apprenticeship schemes and heritage funding should actively include clan elders, master practitioners, youth representatives and local cultural organisations. Such participatory arrangements foster a sense of ownership and accountability, reduce the tendency to prioritise short-term spectacle, and enable locally appropriate scheduling and pedagogy for apprenticeship and ritual rehearsal. Devolving authority to community boards and practitioner cooperatives will improve responsiveness to seasonal rhythms of practice and reduce the marginalisation of custodial roles.

A second priority is **investment in physical and institutional infrastructure** for practice. Governments, local authorities and donors should prioritise the restoration and maintenance of performance spaces, craft workshops

and material-culture production sites, and fund the recurrent costs of long-term apprenticeship (tools, raw materials, stipends). Investment should also support community-managed training centres where technical skill and social meanings are taught together, ensuring that apprentices acquire both craft competence and the ethical frameworks that sustain reciprocity and cohesion.

Strengthening **stakeholder involvement at the household and clan levels** is essential. Programmes that incentivise family participation in ritual calendars, formalise household-based apprenticeship, and support elder-youth mentorship will reinforce intergenerational transmission. Partnerships with alumni networks, local industries and civil society can create livelihood pathways that make lengthy apprenticeships economically viable for young people, thereby reducing attrition and preserving specialist skills.

The **ethical and community-controlled use of technology** should be promoted to complement, not replace, embodied apprenticeship. Support for community-owned digital archives, accessible e-platforms for pedagogy, and training in digital literacy for practitioners can preserve repertoires, facilitate teaching, and open market opportunities while protecting custodial rights and benefit-sharing. Technology interventions must be designed with custodial safeguards so that recordings, patterns and oral histories remain under local governance and are used to strengthen apprenticeship and communal memory.

Support for **ethical creative economies and capacity building** is also recommended. Policies and programmes should encourage creative enterprises that link livelihoods to custodial practice, ensure fair compensation, and embed benefit-sharing protocols. Capacity building for local governance bodies, cultural managers and practitioner cooperatives will reduce risks of elite capture and ensure transparent management of resources and revenues derived from cultural activities.

Finally, **integrating cultural creativity into education and participatory policy design** will help institutionalise transmission pathways. Culturally appropriate curricula, school-community partnerships, and participatory policy processes that include traditional leaders, practitioners and youth will ensure that interventions are legitimate, contextually relevant and capable of sustaining mediating processes such as value transmission, identity formation and conflict mediation.

If implemented together, these measures address the political, financial and physical obstacles that currently weaken the mediating processes of cultural creativity. By investing in infrastructure, deepening stakeholder involvement, harnessing technology under community control, decentralising governance and supporting ethical creative industries, policymakers and communities can preserve the living systems of ritual, craft and oral literature that sustain cohesion and family unity among the Basoga and Baganda. Preserving these systems not only safeguards intangible heritage but also contributes to resilient communities and broader social development.

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