

## Year Naming among the Bahaya and Contemporary Morality

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### **Abstract**

This article attempts to explain the historical development and significance of the year naming practice among the Bahaya. Despite the vitality of this practice like many other traditional practices in Africa, the year-naming practice is facing several setbacks including contending with the forces of change and modernity, hence in danger of disappearing. As a result, the year naming practice among Bahaya regardless of their intrinsic value and relevance face the danger of being sidelined in various forms. This philosophical analysis of this practice, therefore, can illuminate on the values enshrined in year names since they serve as the catalyst frontiers of contemporary Bahaya and Tanzanian society generally, where morality is a principle of responsibility and an index of humanity. Towards this end, the article contends that year naming is not only symbolic but also a source of and a means for preserving morality.

### **Keywords:**

Bahaya, Year Naming, Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Morality, Ethics

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### **Introduction**

The traditional practice of year naming among the Bahaya is an essential part of the Haya identity. The given name serves as a road map of the events and activities to be carried out by community members. The name of a respective year indicates how the significant socioeconomic and political changes have affected the morals of its Ruhaya speakers and authors. These year names also serve as a potent indicator of ethnic identity. In the African context, Likaka (2009), Nyambi et al. (2016), and Okello (2021) contend that a name is not taken for granted because of the sociocultural importance it embodies. This article attempts a philosophical assessment of year naming in Bahaya.

Specifically, it covers the background information, the colonisation vs decolonisation narrative for year naming, the essence of year naming and the moral tenets the practice embodies. Phenomenology, hermeneutics are used as the methods towards the conclusion of this paper. The general list of the year names since 1959 to 2023 are also given. It ends with a conclusion that year names given is another source where moral-ethical values are grounded and it stands as 'life-in-its-fullness' where individual self-worthy is established.

### **Background information**

The Haya or Bahaya are a Bantu-speaking ethnic group based in the North-western Tanzania (Ishengoma 2005; Kamugisha 2010). The local vernacular of the Bahaya is Ruhaya (Baisi 1957, p. 155). The tradition of keeping year names in written form dates back to 1959, a practice that had been hitherto informal (Kafunzile 2002), with the name presented orally at the harvest ceremony of each year. In this regard, one of the respondents explained in Kiswahili this tradition as follows:

*Jina lilikuwa linatolewa wakati wa sherehe za mavuno mbele ya mfalme; ilikua ishara na alama ya kuonyesha namna ya kutoa neno ambalo lilitakiwa kuwahimiza watu kuongeza juhudi ya kile walichokuwa wanatarajia kwa mwaka unaofuata. Neno lilitolewa na mmoja wa wazee, sherehe hizo ziliitimishwa na neno hilo ambalo lilikua na ujumbe au mpango kazi mpaka kusanyiko lijalo.*

Translated:

The name was provided during the harvest festivals before the king; it was a symbol and a sign to demonstrate a kind of a word or phrase that was intended to encourage people to boost their efforts that would stand as a direction or root cause in their activities for the coming year. The word was delivered by one of the elders and the festival concluded with that word, which had a message or a work plan to last until the next gathering.

The proceedings of the year naming elaborated to the kings what was likely to follow in their kingdoms. The practice also predicted how good

or evil the coming year could turn out to be (Rwelamira 2003). Usually, it came to pass that what the name foresaw transpired as predicted. A respondent justified this belief by referring to the year 1957 that had been named “Bilemorengire”<sup>1</sup> whose meaning manifested in the social movement towards political independence in then Tanganyika. On religious grounds the year predicted the era of the Africanization of the church (Ekpenyong & Okoi 2021). The argument above gives a writer an avenue for looking into the political climate prevailing at that time. In the 1950s, two major things were happening in Africa. The first were political liberation movements that spread like wildfire across Africa and the second was the Africanization of the church. These two historical developments were timely since many African societies had generally been stripped of their cultures, controlled for years under a colonial yoke, hence making the prospect of self-government and self-assertiveness an attractive proposition (Wallerstein 2005). Thus, the naming of the year 1957 as ‘Bilemorengire’ was designed to capture this essence. By 1960, a number of African countries had attained their political independence, hence the naming of that year as “Ija-Webonere.”<sup>2</sup>

Considering that colonial control had become a staple of almost all African countries following the 1884-85 Berlin conference that arbitrarily divided Africa into colonial states for European powers during the so-called ‘Scramble for Africa’ (Brantlinger 1985), the dawn of independence sweeping across the continent came as a pleasant surprise. The name *Ija-Webonere*, therefore, aimed to alleviate the people’s fear at the time, signalling that they would now be an integral part of an independent nation. This euphoric moment allowed the community members of the Bahaya to recognise and embrace their autonomy, empowering them to manage their own affairs without external interference as was the case under colonial administration (first under the Germans and subsequently under the British). Most significantly, the name intended to foster the spirit of diligence, self-assurance and patriotism while striving to eradicate various forms of discrimination.

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<sup>1</sup>*Bilemolengile* literally translates as *to attempt*

<sup>2</sup>*Ija-Webonere* literally translates as *be an eyewitness*

### **Colonisation vs decolonisation narrative for year naming**

In Africa, many of the traditional cultural practices have generally been dismembered and destroyed by the legacy of slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism (Smart 2019). The traditional indigenous knowledge was characterised by belonging to the community and religion in addition to embracing good behaviour practices (Magoti 2012). Europeans brought to Africa liberation from diseases, ignorance, and superstitions but they also brought the unfortunate feeling of being inferior before European technology. In this line of thinking, Magoti continues to argue that “Africa is being mired in problems, being alienated from its cultural beliefs and practices as a result the attempt to search for meaning is eschewed” (Magoti 2018). Moreover, Andindile (2016) noted “Africa has been a victim of misrepresentation since the advent of colonialism” (p. 127). The African is presented as an inferior subject and her humanity or personhood is measured only through her relationship with the West. In terms of the problem of double consciousness, the African has to be alienated, namely, reject himself/herself, and his/her identity, and acquire the humanization narratives of the West to be accepted. Laurent Magesa (2014) Laurent Magesa (2014) contends that, in the name of “development,” Africa’s formative institutions—such as churches, schools, political organisations, and ancestors’ traditions—copy unquestioningly foreign models of thought and existence, despite the delusion of modernity and globalisation.

Furthermore, when encountering the outside world, African cultures were often unjustly perceived as ‘primitive,’ with Africans depicted as uncivilized, intellectually inferior, irrational, and irreligious, unfairly characterized as lacking morality (Kivinge 2021). Moreover, the Africa that is portrayed in Western scholarship generally is one of savagery with individuals who did nothing, developed nothing, or created nothing historical (Hegel 1944). With regard to ethics, early western scholars held the view that Africans had no sense of morality. Writings of the earlier missionaries and anthropologists such as in “Alliers’ *The Mind of the Savage*” (1938), and Brelsford’s *Primitive Philosophy* (1935) found no sense in what they saw as the “mind of the savage” (Ukpokolo 2017). The implication is that before the 1850s all Africa was characterised by the

proverbial darkness—no roads, no schools, no governments, no civilisation.

Hegel and Kant contentiously believed that Africans lived in the state of innocence, unconscious of themselves and *tabula rasa*, as far as reason is concerned (Hountondji 2002). Hegel contends that Africa was a land of childhood where no serious thought took place, a region where philosophy and history had no place consequently unethical (Kuyekendall 1993). As a result, the Africans were—under this Eurocentric lens—were reduced to a people incapable of any philosophical mode of inquiry and even lack of civilization without tangible evidence. For instance, from a religious perspective, the missionaries were not in favour of using indigenous names, hence new converts during their catechetical classes were made to forfeit their traditional names their traditional names and ways of life. They became baptized with new Western names. Along these lines, during Baptism, converts were given “Christian names” (even though many of them were simply European names), hence resulting in undermining traditional names because people who became Christians identified themselves with new names (Niwigila 1972, p. 121). Having European or Biblical names symbolised the transformation of an African from a seemingly ‘barbaric’ into a new ‘civilised’ person reborn under Christianity. This Christian identity and a nominal identification with foreign names became synonymous as a result. Also, the converts had to embrace the European culture which was closely associated with missionary Christianity and abandon their ‘wayward’ African ways that they needed to be ashamed of.

As a matter of fact, anything African was reduced to traditional and anything Western was modern. Such irreconcilable differences tend to identify the traditional with backwardness and modernity with progress—contestable as that might be, hence disregarding and undermining African values, and eroding moral strength of the indigenous peoples. Yet, the ever-questionable thinking that there was no history in Africa and that an African had no capacity to go into the world of ideas were not guided by any credible principles.

Nevertheless, the truism is that all cultures are valuable in their own right. Such culture also directs how people should be, believe, and behave. How they should be entails a variety of activities economical political social and relations. It is from this note it is vital to correlate the essence of year naming vs colonisation and decolonisation narratives. Since African cultures are inter-mixed with no proper trace of the origin and bland of what they are today. It is from this perspective that the researcher was concerned about the discourse on the meaning and validity of the Bahaya year naming. After all, the values of the practice of year naming in totality are set as an index for naming standards.

### **Values of the year naming practices as an index for naming standards**

Based on these standards, Kivinge (2021) notes in his doctoral thesis, that for African ethics to demonstrate their relevance, they should be based on the continent's own traditions or indigenous values rather than Western standards. On the same note, Gyekye (1997, p. 131) asserts that “if one was to examine the ancestral system of values objectively one would find some values that would be considered relevant for the modern circumstances in Africa”. Consequently, morality in the practices in African societies has to be traced back to the cultural practices, which for the Bahaya system of year naming constitutes an integral part that survives to-date, signifying as it does traditional values passed down from one generation to generation for continuity.

Thus, the year naming traditional practice among the Bahaya from the non-written structure of the names and progressively to the written forms signifies the lived and experiential reality that illustrates the unique and fundamental basis of the life lived and understanding of the Bahaya worldview. As such, understanding the concept of year naming among the Haya is central in exploring the beliefs and attitudes, as well as the distinction of good and bad. This article reports the findings of a study that sought to illuminate on the centrality of the year-naming practice as an index for morality among this ethnic group of people who are native to northwestern Tanzania in Kagera region particularly on the western side of Lake Victoria.

### **Theoretical framework**

The presentation in this paper is informed by the philosophical hermeneutics model adapted from the ideas expounded by Hans-Georg Gadamer. This model has been adapted in this paper because it focuses on the relationship between Being (ontology), art, history, language, as well as understanding to depict on how these relationships are relevant to the description of the year naming pattern among the Bahaya. Understanding, therefore, becomes the way of being of humans, in Gadamer (2008). This model, based on Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics is helpful in this analysis because it justifies the investigation of the application of philosophical hermeneutics in African philosophy, in this case regarding year-naming.

Gadamer's theory of universality of hermeneutics, known as philosophical hermeneutics, informed the data analysis of this study. Gadamer's theory sheds light on how the interface between year naming practice among the Bahaya and moral tenets is explored in all areas of life. The theory underscores the importance of hermeneutics for universal human understanding. The theory rests on three main disclosures of truth namely, arts, history, and language (Kinsella, 2006).

Gadamer also discovered the "intrinsic question of thought" in relation to art. One way to think about the process of discovering the truth via interpretation is like playing a game when the object of the game is bigger than the participant. Gadamer's thesis is predicated on the hermeneutic idea that truth is revealed through our everyday experiences. According to this viewpoint, time is more than just a measure of length for Africans, and the Bahaya in particular; it is a container of truth. Truths that have a significant impact on people's everyday existence are ingrained in the complexities of language and the naming of years.

Another way of disclosing the truth is through historical research. Gadamer claims that we cannot go out of history and have a completely objective understanding. History and traditions prepare us for knowledge and understanding. For example, the authors of the names in every year began by briefly reflecting on the past years, incorporating the present

while envisioning the future. In this regard, time is expressed as a continuum. Time is the lived-history expressible in the name of the year given. In essence, the authors of every year create a nexus between the outgoing year and in-coming year as it is in the welcoming note of the year 2002 *Rundana- to Settle* as follows”

*“mwaka shamura ogendege, obakeise. Oshamwire twabona, abashamuruirwe bona nimbaihukya....”*

Translated as,

They year *Shamura*, we bid you farewell. You enlightened us, and we all witnessed it.

From this perspective, and according to Gadamerian thought, comprehending the social, political, religious, and economic contexts of authors allows for a more thorough understanding of their work, as Dallmayr (1993) explicates. As such, it is crucial for any understanding, to integrate the past horizon to correctly develop the present forecast. This part of the theory emerges from the concept of cultural perspective of which Bahaya have carried on to generations through the year naming. It is, therefore, vital Gadamer’s’ theory on this particular part to support the view and the year naming practice.

As another means for communicating truth, human language is key to understanding the world around us. According to Gadamer “language is means by which being is revealed and made accessible through our finite and historically conditioned language” (Thiselton 2009). Language is connected to the mind, and the mind exposes or defines the actions of the person. Since an ethnic group consists of individuals whose actions are determined by a mentality that can be communicated via language, the application of these two ideas—history and language—requires you to employ historical accounts of the relevant practices. The explanation of African colonisation history in the backdrop denotes the use of this particular theoretical component. Thus, it is of philosophical interest that the Bahaya year-naming practice with these tenets in hindsight.



This predisposition is supported by the terminology used, which among other things refers to the Bahaya as an ethnic group and the language they use to express their lived experience. These ideas from humanism are essential to comprehending the experience of truth including the year-naming practice. The year-naming practice among the Bahaya is acknowledged by the writers as “a way of life” and “a way of truth” based on this study. Using this theory as a lens, we can express the truth-experience as it is enshrined in a particular year name, which serves as an index of morality for the Bahaya people as well as all of Africa because the practice is a “self-representation” of the values it aims to capture.

### **Methods**

This study largely gathered information from oral and written sources. More than 30 interviews and informal talks were carried out in Kagera region between 2021 and 2023. It was on the basis of this account reality to this study was construed as a result of subjective opinions (Mgalula 2023). The data were collected using phenomenological and hermeneutical approaches. Under phenomenology, the study held interviews with the elders and some members who participated in naming years as the first-hand informants. Under this method, snowballing sampling was utilised to gather information from among the elders (*Abagurusi*) who were considered to have experienced knowledge about year-naming practice. The use of interviews in a phenomenological approach enables the respondents to be able to express their experiences and attitude in relation to the practice of naming years (Van Manen 2014). Through this method, respondents had enough freedom and flexibility to respond to the variables of the study.

The study also focused on the essence of the meaning that respondents attached to social phenomena, behaviour, events, and experiences, which is a demand that a phenomenological approach does inculcate (Eric & Audax 2023). Similarly, the study also utilised the hermeneutical approach in reviewing the documents and the year description as well as some other written discourses in relation to year naming practice (Cunliffe 2011; Salamon 2018). Hermeneutics is the study of how to interpret cultural expressions and social phenomena including texts, works of art, rituals,

and actions; this method generally considers understanding as the basic structure of human experience (Finlay 2009). By reviewing the texts, the researcher subsequently generate themes, patterning to the moral themes as they are presented in year names.

## **Findings**

### **Cultural Significance of YNP**

To gain an understanding of the practice of year-naming among the Bahaya, the study also explored the history and the significance of the year-naming practice. In this regard, the study intended to obtain a deeper understanding of the practice's origin and how it has evolved over time. To obtain this information, the researcher reviewed extant literature and historical records based on the Bahaya community in addition to interviews.

Understanding the history and cultural practice of year-naming practice among the Bahaya enabled the researcher to identify the cultural values, beliefs, and customs that influence the practice. This understanding provided valuable insights into the Bahaya worldview and how they perceive their place in the world. Additionally, the researcher was in a position to identify some potential challenges or conflicts that arise from the year-naming practice such as issues related to gender (roles assigned to men and women as catalysts for development), social hierarchy as well as intergenerational relationships. The economic, political, and social factors, the nature of the seasons, and the events that befall a society mark the nature of the year name. This aligns with Magesa's (2019) views in his work *"Is a wholesome Africa possible? Tapping into the Legacy of the Ancestors"* that the quality of life [cannot] be imposed from without, for the quality of life must be understood within the world of symbols and customs proper to each group (Magesa 2019).

### **The development of Year-naming Practice**

The year-naming practice is a lived practice among the community of the Bahaya. It is their custom they use every time in the morning, afternoon, evening, and late night each is given its own form of description. They

give names to different issues at different times. Giving a name goes with the incidence of what had happened. For instance, personal names such as “Mukahitler” started featuring during the second world war because of the notorious Hitler. Other members of the community named their children “Muppapi” because of the wars between people from Rome (the priests) and the chiefdoms. So, it was “*Vita vya Mupapi*”. Hence, they called their children “Mupapi”. One participant said:

A missionary called Esse was the one who started a newspaper called Rumuli Press [a newspaper of the Catholic Church] around 1954. In this one of the practices, he saw was that of year-naming, seasons naming, and peoples’ names. That is why in Bukoba every child has his or her own name reflecting to the time, and circumstances one was born in.

As a strategy for advancing evangelism, the missionaries intrigued by the practice of naming the years and began advocating for it in the newspaper, incorporating the suggestions into written articles. The initiatives that are in place to-date. When we assign a year name, we are attempting to forecast our goals and aspirations for that particular year. Inspiration for the upcoming year is indicated by it. to state a sort of objective or goal for the upcoming year. In this sense, the year-naming is significant because it upholds the natural world, human interactions, and the sense of community it represents. Cultural identity is believed to be conserved and transmitted from one generation to the next under this moniker. Over the years, names have been assigned with the intention of bringing wealth and good fortune to the town. These names serve as a potent representation of the community’s ties to the natural world and the afterlife. Over the years, names have been assigned with the intention of bringing wealth and good fortune to the town. These names serve as a potent representation of the community’s ties to the natural world and the afterlife.

### **Year-naming Process in Buhaya**

The name for the particular year results from the competition of ideas among community members. Every member of the community is equally empowered to propose a name, provided they engage in a reflective

process encompassing the past, present and future events. By evaluating the experiences of the past year, individuals can draw inspiration to inform the naming of the upcoming year. Consequently, numerous individuals submit suggestions based on their source of inspiration. Then, a panellist composed of the laity, religious priests, and the chiefs' representatives, Rumuli press editors, and some elders (considered as community Wiseman) deliberate after going through all the suggestions to come up with a new name. Some people try to submit the name along with the description every year but the process is so competitive that they do not succeed in emerging the winners.

During the process of selecting the name, they begin by examining the preceding year, including what was anticipated and what transpired, as well as whether those expectations had been fulfilled. This involves a thorough evaluation of the events and outcomes from the previous year. Subsequently, the essence of the preceding year is encapsulated in the name chosen for the new year, serving as a reflection of what has transpired. By comprehending the past, then we outline our trajectory for the future. The expression of the name also stands for where the society would proceed from there. This is evident in this phrase marking the progression from the year 2004 to 2005:

Nitusiima Omukama Mungu kubasa kushabuka SHABUKA<sup>3</sup>.  
Ruhanga akinga rwingi orwu akingura orundi. Yakinga  
SHAABUKA. Yatukingurira SIIMA<sup>4</sup>

Translated as:

"We thank the Almighty for we have been able to crossover  
"SHABUKA". The Lord who closes one door opens the other, He  
has closed SHABUKA, and has opened SIIMA (to give thanks)".

Besides the name which should serve as a catchword, the explanation which is given is also important "*Omwitoitoro*". That is why beyond the name there is an explanation. In this case, where we came from, where the

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<sup>3</sup>SHABUKA the name for the year 2004 literally means to cross-over

<sup>4</sup>SIIMA the name for the year 2005 literally means to give thanks

society was going, and most especially where it would like to head serve as guidelines for the panellist in the selection of the New Year's name. It is like society looking at where it was presently and where it came from so as to ensure the new name captured the essence of where the society would like to go.

On the other hand, the researcher was also keen on determining the composition of the panellists and whether there were some religious dimensions. One respondent noted that "anybody can give the name; but since the Catholic have got the Rumuli Press and are on board, the naming of the years has got a Catholic connotation when it comes to year name giving and writing the reflection". Otherwise, there is no direct obligation. Conversely, it is not forbidden; in fact, naming a child is not a component of religious instruction. The designation of years is not a matter of faith. Even if religion is about establishing moral standards, a name cannot exist in which God is not acknowledged. Although a given name is frequently mentioned in sermons at various levels and can be incorporated into community decision-making, it is neither a policy nor any kind of religious practice because a given name functions as a "catchword." Thus, naming a year is a result of speculating about what the upcoming year would hold.

### **Values enshrined in year-naming**

A name, in any society, expresses identity and, at times, denotes some content. Naming of years carries both senses: it identifies a year and expresses the lived-truth (experience) of a particular time. The practice to give names to years started among the Bahaya started long before independence. The names aimed to shed light on or project an image to the members of the community about what they were expecting in the new season. So, these names indicated the attitude or the way to go in the Bahaya society. For example, in 1959 ('Bilemolengire'-to try) the nation was on the agenda of the pursuit of independence. This name was intended to inspire the freedom fighters in their efforts. In the first ten years, Tanganyika (then before it became Tanzania after forging a union with Zanzibar in 1964) gained independence from Britain in 1961. The names given also reflected the image of the nation at that time when

efforts to develop the young nation and stand firm were necessary. In this regard, the values of courage, composure, and perseverance were encouraged and fundamental to the freedom fighters.

This analysis demonstrates that the practice of naming years is old as the Bahaya themselves. Some durations in the far past were also given names depending on the intensity of the event, for example, the name "*eifa lya ikambura mabati*" (literally translated as the disaster which removes the roofs of the house) came when the Bahaya experienced famine on the land. It was in these thoughts that also led the year 1970 to be named "*tweyambe*" meaning let us be active in response to the hardships of that particular time. The usage of names to express the concept of continuity was also common among the people. For example, a family with twins could name children successive of one another, for example, Kiiza or Rwiza or Nywamwiza followed Kato and Ishengoma. Then names such as Kyaruzi or Kaililiza, among others, would follow Kiiza or Rwiza or Nywamwiza. This sense of naming demonstrates a sense of continuity among the Bahaya that was not necessarily sourced from or imposed by the Christian missionaries.

### **Year-naming practices as a moral guide**

Usually, each year is named after a specific event or characteristic that reflects the collective experiences and aspirations of the community. These names often encapsulate lessons learned, virtues to uphold, or challenges overcome, embodying a moral compass that guides the Bahaya through their daily lives. This practice fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among the Bahaya, as they reflect on their past and contemplate the future together. The chosen name serves as a reminder of the values and principles that bind them as a people in addition to encouraging their adherence to ethical conduct and solidarity in the face of adversity.

In fact, the year-naming practices is deeply engrained and intertwined with the cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs, hence serving as a means for preserving their identity and transmitting traditional wisdom to future generations. Each year's name is carefully chosen to reflect the prevailing ethos of the community, drawing upon historical events, cultural milestones, and collective experiences of significance to the Bahaya

people. The selection of a name is a deliberative process that involves contemplation of the community's achievements, challenges, and aspirations. By naming each year after virtues such as resilience, solidarity, or compassion, the Bahaya underscore the importance of these qualities in their collective journey towards a better future. This practice does not only reinforce moral values within the community but also serves as a source of inspiration and guidance for individual behaviour and decision-making. Emphasising on the significance of togetherness and helping one another in the year 2004, the pone participant said:

*Okujunangana omubyemba nikwo kulatumanyisa okwo tulishabuka amoi. Twolekye obulumuna bwaitu n'obumoi bwaitu,.....katulanagirana abarwaile, abafarwa, abana entabwa, abanaku, nitwenda kushabuka nowai.*

Literal translated as:

In helping each other through challenges is established the pillar that will aid us in crossing together. Let us demonstrate our brotherhood and solidarity... if we leave behind the sick, the orphaned, and the disabled and so forth, whom do we intend to cross with?

The practice—as a moral guide—also aims to foster a sense of human relations among community members. Also, year-naming practices among the Bahaya does not only serve as a cultural tradition but also cultivates a deep sense of humanism within the community. This tradition further reflects a profound understanding of human experiences, virtues, and aspirations, emphasising the importance of empathy, compassion, and solidarity among individuals. By naming each year after events or characteristics that resonate with human values, the Bahaya highlight the significance of fostering a humane society where individuals strive to support and uplift one another.

Furthermore, the naming of years among the Bahaya reinforces the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of solidarity in the face of adversity. Through their chosen names, which often reflect

resilience, unity, and perseverance, the Bahaya stress the resilience of the human spirit and the transformative power of cooperation and mutual support. This humanistic approach to the year given names underscores the Bahaya's belief in the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, fostering a culture of inclusivity, tolerance, and social justice within their community. It is a profound expression of humanism that shapes their collective identity and guides their actions towards creating a more compassionate and equitable society. Such a co-relation of the expression is what makes Kierkegaard (1987) in the analysis of the individual relation to the other contend that the self requires the other to become an authentic subject.

### **Normative foundation of year naming**

Year-naming among the Bahaya serves as a normative foundation and a judge for individual deeds, shaping their moral landscape and guiding personal conduct within the community. Each year's name encapsulates not only the collective experiences and aspirations but also serves as a moral compass, providing a framework for evaluating individual actions. For example, the year 2008 "*Rashana*", which literally means to dexterous; in this community members were encouraged to be agile, adept, and capable of handling tasks with ease and precision. On the other hand, the names of years such as 1968 *Tabaro* (life-or-death adventure), 1988 '*Kakutantalikwa*' (be focused), 2003 *Webaze* (self-evaluation) and 2022 '*Otagwisa mukono*' (do not slacken the hand) significantly represent the normative values that encourage every member of the community to enumerate. It in the long run then, this practice inspires a sense of accountability and responsibility among Bahaya individuals, as they strive to align their behaviour with the virtues and principles embodied in the chosen name for the year. This normative foundation aspects foster a culture of ethical awareness and moral deliberation, encouraging individuals to act in ways that uphold the collective well-being and honour the principles embedded in the year's name.

Moreover, the naming of years among the Bahaya serves as a mechanism for social cohesion and consensus-building, as community members come together to deliberate on the most fitting appellation. This collaborative



process reinforces the communal bonds and shared sense of purpose within the Bahaya society, fostering a collective commitment to moral excellence and virtuous living as evidenced by names for the following years: 1999 *Fukama* (self-reflection), 2006 *Gil'emirembe* (Be at peace), and 2011 *Tongana* (Reconciliation). By internalising the prescribed principles encapsulated in each year's name, every member of the Bahaya community will reaffirm their commitment to upholding the values and ideals that characterise their community, thereby strengthening the normative basis upon which individual actions are to be evaluated.

Furthermore, the practice of year naming among the Bahaya underscores the interconnectedness of individual actions and communal well-being. Each individual's deeds are viewed not in isolation but as integral components of the collective social fabric. By aligning their behaviour with the virtues and principles embodied in the year's name, Bahaya individuals contribute to the overall moral health and harmony of the community. The year 2023 *Ige'nshamba* (Diversify the skills) best summarises this notion.

**Table 1: List of the Year Names from 1959 to 2023**

Year	Haya Given Name	Loose Kiswahili Translation	English Version (Extended translation)
1959	BILEMOLENGILE	Useite kujaribu	Attempt
1960	IJA WEBONELE	Njoo ushuhudie mwenyewe/ uweshuhuda	Be an eye-witness
1961	BILYE OYEKOMILE	Chukua tahadhari/ kula huku umejitayarisha	Eat but be ready for departure
1962	GUMISA OMWOYO	Moyo mkuu	Stand firm/ Be strong

1963	OTULA OBUNGYA	Umekamatika/ umejulikana	Being in a dilemma
1964	KARAMANSHANYIO	Kujaribu jaribu	Trial-and-error
1965	NDARWEBOINE	Yalishanikuta	Futile adventure
1966	BABINDANGIIRE	Wamenihabarisha juu ya hayo	I am informed
1967	TEEKANA	Tulia	Be settled or be calm
1968	TABARO	Safari Buriani	Life-or-death adventure
1969	NYIKIRA	Kazana	Work hard
1970	TWEYAMBE	Kujikwamua/ Tujitegemee	Let us be active
1971	SISIMUKA	Amka/Toka usingizini	Wakeup
1972	SHAYA	Fanya haraka	Do it quickly
1973	GENDERERA	Endelea	Continue
1974	WEKEBUKE	Jichunguze	Self-evaluation
1975	KAKIWEYO	Subiri imalizike	Waiting till it finishes
1976	IJA BALEBE	Mshangao au njoo uone/utazame	What a misfortune!
1977	HENJUZA	Kupekua/ kuangalia kwa	Investigate

		makini	
1978	SHULIZA	Kumbuka	Remember
1979	TIKILIWA IGAMBA	Itasimuliwa daima	Everlasting
1980	BURUR'OBONE	Funguka uone	Openup and see
1981	GALAZIW'ENZIHI	Kwa jitihada zako/ mwenye uwezo ndio ataweza	Based on your efforts
1982	GOSHOKO	Rizika	Prosperity
1983	SHOBOKERWA	Elewa	Understand
1984	IKINGURA	Ufunguzi	Opening
1985	KANKWEHANUZEO	Kuomba ushauri	Seek advice
1986	SHUUBI	Tumaini	Hope
1987	WEMOGE	Jitazame/jirudi	self-appraise
1988	KAKUTANTALIKWA	Tazama mbele	Look Ahead
1989	KWATIRAHO	Shikilia	Hang-on
1990	HANULIRWA	Pokea mashauri	Receive advice
1991	HUMURA	Pumzika	Rest
1992	NYIN'EIRIWO	Nina kiu/ Enye kiu	I am thirsty
1993	YOMBEKA	Jenga	Build
1994	HUMBYA	Imefanikiwa / hongera	Success attained

1995	GUMA	Imara/ uwe na nguvu	Be strong
1996	YECHUZE	Ujirudi	Return to your true self
1997	CHWAZIIKA	Jishughulishe/ shughulika	Get Busy
1998	TEKEREZA	Kufikiri	Think
1999	FUKAMA	Piga magoti	On your knees/ Prostrate onself
2000	SHANDUKA	Furahi/ changamka	Be happy/Get Excited
2001	SHAMULA	Kungaa	Shine
2002	RUNDAANA	Tulia	Calm Down
2003	WEBAZE	Kujitafakari/ Ujirudi	Self-reflection
2004	SHABUKA	Kuvuka	Cross Over
2005	SIIMA	Shukuru	Be Grateful
2006	GIL'EMILEMBE	Kuwa na amani	Be at peace
2007	TEGEKA	Pangilia	Plan
2008	RASHANA	Kazana/ pambana	Be dexterous
2009	JWAHUKA	Kuwa shapu	Be active
2010	CHULELA	Nyenyekaa	Be Humble

2011	TONGANA	Upatanisho	Reconciliation
2012	WECHONCHE	Kuwa hai	Being Active
2013	WEBANGE	Kujiandaa/ kurudi nyuma na kujipanga upya	Get prepared/ Retreat and Rebound
2014	YEETOHYE	Kujitoa	Selfless
2015	IJUKA	Kumbuka	Remember/ Recall
2016	YANGUHA	Kuwai/ kujali muda au wakati	Punctuality/ Effective Time Management
2017	YEGASHANIZE	Kusali	Pray
2018	Ganyira	Kusamehe	Forgiveness
2019	Birug'omumpiita	Inatokana na kufanya kazi kwa bidi	Result of Hard-work
2020	Kanyis'emisili	Ongeza vyanzo vya mapato	Diversify Income Sources
2021	Bagara	Kupalilia	Weeding
2022	Otagwisamkono	Usiangushe mkono	Grip Firmly
2023	Ige'nshamba	Jibidisha	Diversify skills

**Source:** Field Data from Rumuli Press Bukoba (September 2022 to November 2023)

As Table 1 illustrates, year-naming is an established practice that feeds into the social milieu of the Wahaya communities.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, examining the year-naming practices among the Bahaya reveals that these names are imbued with profound moral significance. In fact, this naming of subsequent years exist in a continuum and their derivative messages are replete with inspirational messages aimed at making crucial the Bahaya society scale greater heights as individuals and as a collective. Moreover, the symbolism attached to these names are also heavily pregnant with meaning that community members use as a guide in their relationship with one another, particularly since they foster human values. These moral principles embedded in year-naming also serve as guidelines, a strong normative foundation for human actualisation, and yardstick for gauging individual deeds. Furthermore, they direct people's moral decisions and behaviour in society. As the Bahaya have a strong spiritual dimension, with beliefs in the existence of a higher power or spiritual realm, year-naming also has a spiritual dimension. In this regard, spirituality is often associated with the mundane—everyday life, as well as with religious rituals and practices forming an important part of the Bahaya cultural identity. After all, year-naming does not thrive in a void but in a society rich in cultural heritage that sustains such practice even in the face of drastic changes engendered by modernity and colonial and postcolonial interventions. To move forward, especially in the field of ethics, there is a need to heed the constructive principles enshrined in these practices and the traditional setup that informs them. The reason that every society has its own foundation, and among the Bahaya naming a year is “life in its fullness”. From this perspective, the year-naming practice is an avenue for fostering moral, ethical and spiritual wellbeing as drawn and preserved among the Bahaya.

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