

Full Length Research Paper

An analysis of the rites of passage and their relation to christianity

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The paper discussed the impact of rites of passage to the individual and how it engenders one and makes one accepted in the societal norms. The emphasis and the central point of this work was mainly to deal with the relevance of rites of passage in the contemporary society, it touched certain rites that the society currently looks at in disdain especially circumcision of women, which is geared towards submission as a result of patriarchal dominance. The paper culminated in relating some initiation rites of passage to Christianity, how we can inculturate some acceptable values into worship, also it touched how the Bible viewed some initiation rites. The paper was summarized and concluded with some observations and a critical evaluation of some female initiations that seem not to carry some impact except inflicting pain that is female circumcision.

Key words: Circumcision, excision, clitoridectomy, infibulation, rites.

INTRODUCTION

This paper is about the rites of passage in its initial development. It has dealt with what the rites of passage are, they were also briefly outlined. The paper talked about roles of rites, it has shown how the society values the rites of passage and how each stage is marked, with elaborate celebrations. Some examples of initiation rites have been cited, and these were the circumcision initiation rites among the Bamasaba of Mt. Elgon in Uganda.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

To find out the impact of rites of passage to the individual and how it engenders one and makes one accepted in the societal norms.

METHODOLOGY

The information contained here came from content analysis gathered mainly from primary and secondary sources, gathered from published books, unpublished books, articles, government records, archival material, observation method, interviews and focused group discussion.

GENERAL OVERVIEW: WHAT ARE THE RITES OF PASSAGE

According to the researcher we define rites of passage as ways in which we understand certain activities which have definite religious elements in them. Rites are links established between the present moment and the original reality. Illustrations are the New Year rituals. Arnold Van Gennep whose researches in Ethnography remain a classic, outlines the rites of passage in the following order:

The classification of rites: The Territorial Passage: Individual and the Group: Pregnancy and child birth, birth and childhood: initiation rites: betrothal and marriage: and funerals. Gennep compares rites of passage to territorial passage. In such territorial passage one needs to adhere to certain formalities for instance presenting a passport so as to gain entry through the frontier. This could be passage from one country to another or from one province to another (Gennep, 1977:1).

In the case of rites of passage it is from one social group to another which grouping may be political, economic, legal, intellectual or magico religious; all these

different groups possess rules whose strings or laxity vary from one group to another, he observes however that:

In contrast, the only clearly marked social diversion remaining in modern society is that which distinguishes between the secular and profane (Gennep: 1977:1).

Rites of separation are rites which an individual from the earlier group he or she belonged to; this may be by secluding the initiate in a place for a time, alone or with others, such rites often include the shaving of hair as a symbol of separation of ties with earlier position or condition.

Rites of passage form the intermediate period which is usually accompanied by instruction and prohibitions. This period is characterized by special language unknown to the initiate. This is quite understandable since the initiate is moving from one world, to another, from the profane to the sacred world. The instructions and prohibitions be they dietary or sexual, the new language and other features, all help to differentiate the initiate from what has been normal to him or her. To underscore the importance of this stage, Van Gennep observes that:

So great is the incompatibility between the profane and the sacred words that a man cannot pass from one to the other without going through an intermediate stage (Gennep: 1977: 1).

This stage could also be understood as the time of purification before being admitted into the sacred world and to remain there. This passage affects the individual concerned but it also affects the whole community. Talking about rites of passage, G. Fourez had this to say:

Whenever something is celebrated by a rite of social relationships are formed and dissolved. Therefore societies communities and individuals institute ritual celebrations in order to tame the tensions and conflicts linked to these social relationships. The rite is always a way of warding off the possible violence of social life either by acting out the resolutions of tensions or by celebrating their end, but in any event by living feeling and symbolizing them (Fourez, 1981: 23).

Rites of incorporations are actions the initiate, is formerly made to enter the sacred world this often includes ceremonies like of acquiring a new name changing of abode changing of dress, sanctifications and the like. These actions and reactions are all regulated by society and are aimed at affecting the change. They are therefore, performed in such a way that they leave a lasting imprint, either on the body or the mind. It usually leaves an indelible mark on both the body and mind of the initiate. He/she is made to understand that he has crossed a gulf separating the earlier condition or position from the new. He/she is also made to understand that this passage is a growth and therefore is irreversible.

These marks or signs of union with a particular deity or

membership in a particular community could be cutting of or mutilating a part of the body signing or some other such mark (Gennep, 1977 72). The rite is expected to modify the personality of the individual in a manner visible to all (Gennep 1977: 71). The understanding that the new status condition or position is higher, superior or more perfect in comparison to the earlier one, makes it easier for the individual to undertake the ordeals of initiation. This conviction creates a state of aspiration in those who are yet members for they too would like to grow up.

In the eyes of the society, initiation is the criterion for growing up. Van Gennep also distinguishes between physiological puberty and what he calls social puberty (Gennep, 1977: 65). By the former he means the time the body undergoes physiological changes characteristics of adolescence. This is the time of physical maturity. And by the latter he refers which society has stipulated as the right age for maturity. The rite of initiation which is aimed at allowing a boy to pass from childhood to adulthood, usually follows social puberty. Among some tribes especially the Bamasaba of Uganda, it used to be between the ages of 18 to 25. Before this period the initiate was neither here nor there and infact nowhere. The initiate was betwix and between.

Nowadays it has been reduced to between 12 to 16 years of age, the latter actually coincides now with physiological puberty. Van Gennep says it is appropriate to distinguish between physical puberty and social puberty, just as we distinguish between physical kinship and social kinship, between physical maturity and social maturity (Gennep: 1977: 68).

It is aimed at giving a physical mark on the body which coupled with the concomitant instructions go in modifying the personality of the individual in a manner visible to society it is a means of permanent differentiation. A. shorter notes that to achieve their end society manufacturers certain key symbols which are designed to have an effect on people. These symbols may be employed interchangeably, he says; this effect may be achieved by non rational technical process such as magic or sorcery or it may be achieved through the religious appeal to ultra human agencies (Shorter, 1973: 124).

In this context, circumcision rites are not merely secular rituals but religious ones interlaid with prayer, sacrifices, invocations and propitiation of the ancestral spirits to mediate and ensure successful accomplishment of the ceremonies. God is beseeched to bring about the desired social physical and religious transformation of the novices. The awareness on the part of the novices that they are leaving an inferior status and attaining a higher one, more valuable to them individually and to society in general is driven home by taboos and other social sanctions his behaviour is modified in accordance with socially approved behaviour.

Rites of passage in general are of central importance in the life of the community where they are performed. They

are the means by which society is regulated. Those who are not yet initiated feel there is something higher and nobler to aspire to in their existence. To support Fourez says:

Rites often function as points of no return... well performed rites break boundaries and lead people and groups to the frontiers of which in some cases they were ignorant. They produce profound effects which are often as effective as psychotherapy (Fourez, 1981: 26).

There is a general agreement among anthropologists that rites of passage and their religious significance. Rituals are dramatization, through symbols of beliefs and aspirations. To support this R.C. Monk had this to say:

The nature of religious experience is often encased in descriptions of rites and rituals cradle formulations and teaching formulas, or theological concepts expressing beliefs and doctrines... Behind this is a primary encounter between the divine and the individual (Monk, 1973: 83).

Rites of passage are a way of expressing the aspirations of a community. Through them, society hands on cultural values and beliefs to the young generation for transmission to posterity. These values are considered of vital importance to the community. Ezukwu says: it is in and through this ritual action that the being of the community comes to manifest realization (Uzukwu, 1988: 96). Shorter, also added by saying the following about rituals and society:

Ritual is an authoritative communication about crucial social values and the relationship of values to each other... it is therefore said to have a value structure, it also has a structure of purpose (Shorter, 1973: 124).

As we have seen what rites of passage are, it is important to note that the rite of passage has a structure of purpose in society, it is communitarian, expressive and instrumental in social and religious transformation and regulations. It is targeted at changing a person's thinking, feeling, acting with a view to regulating his perception of reality to conform with that of society, society makes him adopt and interiorize a set of values which values constitute society's world view. There is a passage from an inferior earlier life to a superior one. Valuable to the individual in particular and to society in general. Also new relationships are forged between the individual and members of the society. A new relationship is struck with the ancestors, the deities and ultimately with God. These new relationships color the individual's perception of reality. He begins to perceive the sacred where he used to perceive only the profane.

THE ROLES OF RITES OF PASSAGE

The rites of passage in all African societies and the world at large feature very dominantly in all societies. Lets take

initiation rite in a society where circumcision is dominant, especially if it is male circumcision, among the Masaba of Uganda. The rite makes one social because without it a Mumasaba male has no social status. Initiation is relation for it is established with the living and the dead. It is an experience of sharing life and sharing a vision for life with the entire community. It is religious because the mystery of life and death is at the heart of it. The relationship between the initiate and the ancestors leads to God, the ultimate ancestors. Furthermore, sexual life for which initiation is a prelude is directly connected to the origin of human experience and existence. Procreation is the means by which the community continues to exist and thrive.

It is educational because it is the forum for fostering attitudes. The initiate is taught to think with the community and to see the world as it sees it. He is given a cultural frame of work or grammar, a configuration of images and meanings within to confront the experience. It is a form of experimental teaching learning that conforms to the best theories of pupil centered life, centered education today (Shorter, 1987: 5).

This type of education is gradual and experimental not simply conceptual, it forms the initiates from his attitude and transforms him from his earlier inferior status to a higher one; from childhood to maturity, there is a radical change in thinking, talking, feeling and doing, based on world view.

LIFE AS BEING COMMUNAL

Everything that happens to a person is shared from conception, birth, naming, educating, initiation, marriage and death. A woman brought into the clan is a wife to the husband but belongs to the clan; a man cannot treat his wife just anyhow for the clan would intervene. Pregnancy is understood as being the responsibility of the community for the life in the womb is a prospective member of the community. When born, the children are considered the treasure of the community, and are handled as such, their education and nurturing are shared.

Initiation is the climax event when people realize how precious a child is for this is when a clan without a candidate feels left out in the festivities. Marriage in an occasion for rejoicing because life and the continuation of it are envisaged the stream of life is assured and with its prosperity. Death is one of the most momentous moments in the life of the community even enemies forget the grudges that may have existed. This is when the fact that a person belongs to the community, everybody considers the bereavement as a personal loss, it is shared so much that this loss is greatly reduced, everybody contributes in all possible ways and group solidarity, receives its boost during such communal moments. Relationships are strengthened during such moments as initiations, marriage and death.

Among the Bamasamba the relationship is compared with a garden; if the garden is not tended weeds spring up which soon choke the crops. This communal understanding of life has been praised by Pope John Paul VI in his letter *Africa Terraum*: 14 (Hickey, 1982: 181). Community life is a central African element which should be jealously preserved. Bishop Christopher Mwoleka has exclaimed that:

If the Catholic Church there is something faulty with our methods of presenting the message of the Gospel or good news, it is this; we have not presented religion as a sharing of life (Mwoleka; 1978: 123).

This fact has not been accorded the importance it deserves one reason could be that the missionaries came from cultural setting where life was more individualistically understood, furthermore, their theological formation at that time.

To show that circumcision is community bounding, Walakira, a catholic Priest, ministering in Masabaland has posed interesting and soul searching questions on this topic.

Circumcision rite is a platform for unity it contains no elements of division, all people attend and participate with interest and concern. Christianity is for unity, in its deepest sense. But why is it that many people are not attracted to attending catechism classes? Why does Imbalu attract such large crowds where Christianity fails? Why do people participate more actively and devotedly in the Imbalu ceremony than in the celebration of mass? There are questions that required honest answers (Walakira, 1983: 65).

To summarize the roles of rites of passage in both the individual and the community, the following are to be born in mind:

- 1) Through initiation, the youths are ritually introduced to the art of communal living, among some ethnic communities, the rite of initiation involves withdrawal from other people in order to live alone in forests or huts, especially designed for that purpose. The aim is to withdraw from the society their homes etc in order to be conceited or be convinced before rejoining the relatives, it becomes a type of the symbolic experience of the process of death. The process of dying, living in the spiritual world and being reborn.
- 2) The rejoining of their families becomes the type of rebirth, the rebirth symbolizes that the young people have become new that is, they have acquired new personalities, since they have lost their childhood some societies express this newness by renaming them.
- 3) The rites introduce the children into adult life becoming adults initiates new privilege and challenges in the community.
- 4) The message to adult life also introduces them to the life of the living dead as well as the life of those yet to be born.

5) Through the initiation rite the young people as schooled in grave matters such as sexual life, marriage, procreation and family responsibilities.

6) With this level of participation in the community such young adults are given the license to shed their blood and plant their biological seeds.

7) Initiation rites are therefore regarded to be having educational developmental purpose. It makes the start of acquiring knowledge which the children have no access to. It is a period of familiarization, socialization and many other issues of the society, it is obviously a period that puts an end to the life of infancy.

8) Since adulthood often involves the leaning to endure attitudes, living with one another, learning to obey mastering the secrets and mysteries of man/woman relationships, such young adults are expected to put up to face all these challenges.

THE IMPACT OF RITES OF PASSAGE TO THE INDIVIDUAL AND COMMUNITY

The crowd that Fr. Walakira says Imbalu attracts who participate more actively and devotedly in the Imbalu ceremony that in the ceremony of mass, are baptized and baptized Christians. They have one feet in cultural beliefs and another in Christian religion. If the procession of Imbalu happens to pass near a Church, the majority of the congregation will run out and follow the procession. The Imbalu also instills into the initiates the community's cultural values and ideals to adhere to defend and propagate for life, these values are handed on in a community setting and they are practiced in a community with a community with a community and for a community.

The initiates of Imbalu manifest a marked transformation of attitude and behaviour different from his earlier ones, because the society helps him to this with examples, encouragement and sanctions. The conviction that the initiate has emancipated beyond certain childish inferior and impure actions, provides the impetus to live up to society's expectations. This is a clear cut situation a growth and therefore irreversible and not negotiable. Society affords to allow contravention of their values for good and evil have a communal aspect, and individual's actions either engender or endanger life and life is communal.

There is therefore a complete severance of ties with earlier life considered as childish immature, impure, inferior and selfish. One crosses over into living with the community in it by its norms and for it. there is no room for ambivalence dualism and juxtaposition as happens with Christianity. The Mumasaba initiate is made to interiorize society's values make them his own, defend and propagate them. Strong loyalties are engendered at various levels notably at clan peer groups and tribal levels.

The fact that these values are not only cultural but also bear religious beliefs and therefore have both social and

divine sanctions, make the initiate feel deeply and personally involved as well as responsible. These values are usually intricately interwoven in such a way that they surface in varying intensity in different facets of life. So when one element for instance circumcision is tampered with, other institutions for instance marriage, social approbation and inheritance, would all have to be affected.

Fr. Walakira also notes that the circumcision ceremony may have an enormous impact on Christianity and society as a whole; it passes through a long process during which a candidate is instructed and prepared for a new role in the society (Walakira p. 165). It is indeed rich provisional for Christianity, it has important pastoral significance as he continues to note for in the same way, a person wishing to subscribe to Christianity needs this long process of formation and maturation. The period for the catechumenate should be compared to the time spent preparing Imbalu (Walakira p. 165). Like the Masaba elders receive the initiates on behalf of the community and together with the community the rite of catechumenate should take place in a liturgical context in not merely in a classroom context.

The catechumens should be made to feel that they are welcome they are welcome to become part of the community of worshippers, if they feel welcome they will want to adhere to the instructions which afford them this privilege. It is this same local community which receives them and acts like a mother by taking care of the new infant members. She feeds and nourishes them on the milk of God, the bread of the body of Christ and supports them, in life by encouragement and help. All this is done in a community setting and in a spirit of living loving and sharing. This living, loving and sharing binds the giver and the recipient in a bond of mutuality and identity. It is easier for one who has received to give who has merely been told to give yet received not.

The Christian sacramental initiation has yet to pick a leaf from the Masaba traditional method; the initiate has to feel in the whole process and be made to realize the implications of his candidature, he must feel welcome among the community of believers and assured of their reception, support and solidarity. The community on their part must feel responsible for the new member as their baby. His education and maturity do not depend on nature alone, but on their examples, their support both morally and materially and their encouragement.

On the comparison between the rites of passage and the Christian one, Fr. Aylward Shorter says of the former as a method it is highly relevant to catechesis in the Christian catechumenate or even in the classroom. The impact of the rites of passage to an individual carries a lot of weight as we have seen.

RELEVANCE OF RITES OF PASSAGE IN THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

This section will describe the stages of rites of passage,

later it will draw some concrete examples in the daily life of the contemporary society, how they are manifested and being performed today.

Separation

This is a stage where a person becomes special by some attributes to him, examples, pregnancy gives the first signal index that a new member of a society is on the way. This makes the expectant mother to become a special person, who is expected to be accorded special treatment from the neighbourhood and kinship (Mbiti, 1969: 110). She is set apart, becomes a sacred person. Among the Bamasaba, the separation traditionally began when the boy was called to a test fight with his father, in this fight he was alone separated from his mate. If he passed this preliminary test, he was admitted to the actual stream of tests which if he passed, would declare him to be a man.

In today's contemporary society, the relevance of this rite is that before one gets employment, he/she must be subjected to the streams of tests, interviews, public service codes of conducts. He has to have certain qualifications to make him able to be duly fit for the job he aspires for. This job should be the one he has been all along been trained for. If he took medicine, he will also follow the channel of medicine and become a doctor, lawyer, teacher, driver, nurse etc.

The wearing of a traditional costume sets him apart from the rest of the group especially the wearing of monkey or leopard skin actually accentuated the fact of being separated from the community for a special purpose; the candidate stood out among the procession.

We can connect this relevance with graduation occasions, when graduands wore graduation gowns, the caps, woods and mental that signifies that they are set apart for a purpose. They stand out among the procession signifying that they are to go out and be empowered. The prohibitions are given to the novice he should not do anything on his own initiatives, he is made to feel like a thing, at the mercy of the elders and the master of ceremonies. He is made to feel incompetent, stupid, ignorant, dirty, inferior, irresponsible and vulnerable. He is told what to do and how to do it and what not to do. He is told to eat and what to eat and usually how much. There are dietary taboos for him/her; he/she is jealously guarded against meeting people considered malevolent or evil.

In the contemporary society too, the candidate is expected to undergo rigorous training, example a student on training is guided. He is not to do anything on his own initiative, the curriculum is designed for that candidate and he is supposed to follow the syllabus that is outlined for him/her. The candidate is given career guidance so that at the end of his completion, he knows what to become.

In the traditional society, the novice is expected to put himself at the beck and call of the elders and obey with-

out question. The elders have unquestioned authority over the novices, based on their personifications of tradition. It is absolute authority calling for absolute obedience. The elders represent the absolute value of society where the common good and the general interest are supreme (Turner 1982: 100). So what is at stake is not his individual comfort and welfare but the cultural norms that society deems requisite for a man in their understanding of this status. The obedience of novices to the elders, represent their total obedience to the society whom the elders represent.

The above attitude is relevant in the contemporary society when one is striving to achieve his goal. In the ceremony that was preside by a bishop during ordination; the priest lies down prostrate to show his unquestionable attitude towards his ordinance. The religious pronounces his vows in absolute obedience. The bishop represents the absolute value of the society and common interests are supreme.

To close this rite of passage I would like to confirm it with Turner's words:

The passivity of Neophytes to their instructors, their malleability, which his increased by submission to ordeal, their reduction to a uniform condition are signs of the process whereby they are ground down to be fashioned a new, and endowed with additional powers to cope with their new station in life (Turner, 1982:101).

The transition phase

This is the situation when one is neither a boy/girl nor man/woman. Victor Turner refers to as betwixt and between. It is variously referred to as the liminal threshold or intermediate stage. One will have left the earlier status but will not have attained the new one to which he aspires. It is a state without a defined status. It is meant to prepare the person for hardships of life through virtues which help to ameliorate them. These virtues include patience and silently listening to one's critic as well as courage in the face of difficulties. They also include demure obedience to the elders even when one thinks they are wrong. Bartering words with them in tantamount to an act of insolence, bravely enduring physical pain is a virtue every novice would love to acquire, and this stage is also applicable to the contemporary society. Looking from intellectual circles, how many people struggle to get money for their school fees so as to become some people that matter in the eyes of the society.

How many sleepless nights does a serious student spend so as to obtain a better grade at the end of his course? Also in the contemporary society, we postpone other things so as to achieve what is targeted ahead of us. There are many sacrifices one undergoes so as to achieve his goal.

In the religious circles, before one is finally professed, he or she must endure patience and criticisms and even

obedience which should not be obedience that is blind. Long time ago in the medieval times, a novice was told by his novice master to plant tomatoes with the roots up! Can you imagine this was to test this novice because his status was not defined. He had to obey where obedience was to be questioned, one had to endure all these hardships with the vision targeted ahead.

In some traditional societies, e.g. the Gishu, the initiate dress in skirts or loin cloth like women, girls now feel free to tauten them with glib suggestion for coitus, roles are reversed in boys relationships, being neither boys or men as yet, the initiates are status less individuals, They are socially and religiously disagreeable hence their seclusion.

Victor Turner is of the opinion that because they are considered to have come into contact with the deity they are deemed ritually uncleaned and polluted, for this reason, they are secluded from the realm of culturally defined state (Turner, 1982: 98). The same case can be applied in religious congregations, Novices wore head kerchiefs instead of veils, others wore different colored veils apart from the professed sisters. They are also secluded from the sisters who are professed, some can have their own houses and do their own activities apart from the rest of the society. This is a stage where they cannot define their roles; they are neither sisters nor postulants, neither lay people. They are status-less.

The stage of incorporation

This is a stage when one is eventually assimilated into the new status of men and women. The rite of incorporation according to the traditional method is actual and relevant for there is assimilation. Assimilation of the social and religious norms by the initiate, and assimilation of the initiate by the community. The method is life centered and life engendering. Example on the 9th October 1998, Fr. Nicholas Seggeja received his PH.D when he was incorporated into the community of doctors of philosophy. He was rightly called to take a seat with the lecturers and he was given a cap similar to that of the lecturers and he took a title Dr. Nicholas Seggeja. Fr. Aylward Shorter goes even further declaring that:

I would venture to assert the art without such a method an inculturated Christianity is an impossibility in Africa. It is highly significant that it was the method chosen by Christ himself in his public ministry in Galilee and Judea and that the parable interrogates the experience of the interlocutor thus enabling him to appreciate the logic of the symbol in exactly the say way as the dedicative song, proverb or riddle (Turner, 1982: 5).

Among the Bamasaba this takes place on the day of "hatching" oneself (Khukwiyalula) Khamalwa 1990. On this day, the novice is formerly dressed in the traditional costume reserved only for Basabi (men). This consists of

a goat skin which is worked until it is soft (isumbati). Two corners are tied and it is worn over the right shoulder and passes over the armpit. Having undergone the initiatory instructions and accomplished the orders, he is believed to know as Mircea Eliade notes:

The initiate is not only one new born or resuscitated he is a man who know who has learnt the mysteries, who has heard revelations that are metaphysical in nature (Eliade 1986: p. 188).

In other words, he is considered one who has learnt the sacred secrets about life, he is therefore, eligible for marriage and to propagate new life armed with what society considers the necessary instructions for life. He is also in communion with the ancestors having died to the profane world and risen to the sacred existence. According to Eliade, initiation usually comprises a three fold revelation of the sacred, of death and of sexuality. The child knows nothing of these experiences, the initiate knows and assumes them and incorporates them into his new personality (Eliade, 1988: 188).

The initiated begins a new life where the ideals learnt must be put into practice to bear witness to his transformed self, he must demonstrate that he has found his essential wholeness as an individual and as a man/woman in a community (Monk, 1973: 3) among those he shares ideality purpose and experience, he will have passed through a door (Marton, 1981: 18) leading from one place of existence to another, from the profane world to the sacred one.

In all the rites of passage to begin with there is the presence of the supernatural God, and the ancestral spirits. These prominent roles in the rituals. One only needs to think of the invocations, sacrifices, prayers, divinations and other similar actions for this point to become abundant. The ritual elders and medicine men practice their priestly roles by presiding over these religious rituals. They must themselves be free of impunity before they can perform the purification rituals for the others. All those who are expected to come into contact with the deity must be blameless and ritually clean. Moral uprightness and purity are therefore pre-requisites for one to play a role in the rituals. They must alienate themselves from evil from magic from witchcraft.

In the contemporary society, rites of passage are performed with the thanksgiving example a holy mass is said, to invoke God and thank him for all the graces and endurance, for success of the initiates. The Bishops, priests, religious and other denominations, preside over these rituals and indeed they are expected to be exemplary in the society and later empowers the individual into the world. Bahemuka supports this by saying that:

The people's beliefs are part and parcel of the social system... social structures nurture supports and mould these religious believers since they are at the core of the African existence (Bahemuka, 1989: 2).

In the rite of incorporation, there is a widespread use of the sacred bond, the sacred cord, the knot, the belt, the ring, bracelet and the crown. All these are particularly common in the rites of marriage and enthronement other rites of passage among these are rites pertaining to hair, to veiling to the use of special languages, sexual rites. The sacrifice of the air includes two distinct operations, cutting hair and dedicating, consecrating and dedicating or sacrificing it. To cut the air is to separate oneself from the previous world. To dedicate the hair is to bind oneself to the sacred world and more particularly to a deity of a spirit.

A child's head is shaved to indicate that he is entering into another stage that of life. A girl's head is shaved at the moment of marriage to indicate a change from one age group to another.

In the contemporary society in some communities widows cut their hair, to break the bond, created by marriage and the rite is reinforced by placing the hair in the tomb. Handing of hair very often falls into the category of rites of passage with reference to the veil. Plutarch inquired.

"Why do people veil their heads when worshipping the god? The answer is simple, to separate themselves from the profane and to live only in the sacred world foreseeing itself as a form of contact.

In worship, sacrifice and marriage rites for example the veiling is temporary but in other cases the separation of the incorporation or both are permanent. In Catholicism to pass from a liminal stage (Noviate) to the stage of permanent incorporation into the community is to take the veil.

Among certain peoples a widow may wear a veil either during mourning only or permanently to separate herself from her husband or from other marriage women and from men.

Socrates covered himself with a veil after drinking the hemlock thereby separating himself from the world of the living to be incorporated in the world of the dead and of the gods. It is important however to see the rites of passage in relation to Christianity.

rites of passage and their relation to christianity

The rite of Jewish circumcision was a sign of union with Yahweh; it was a mark of membership in this community of the chosen and covenant people, compared to them all the rest were inferior and faithless and their gods worthless Psalm 97.

In the New Testament, the picture does not change much at all. The Jewish community still regards itself in their privileged and unassailable position. Christ came on the scene amid the messianic expectation interpreted differently by the groups. The Pharisees expected the

Messiah to usher in the kingdom of God through the power of moral law. The zealots expected the kingdom of God through a holy war, while the apocalyptists expected it through the destruction of this world and the coming of another.

For Christ to be accepted into the Jewish communities he had to observe the law; he was circumcised on the eighth day Luke 2:21, in accordance with the law Lev. 12:3, he was also presented to God in the temple and consecrated in accordance with the law. He therefore fulfilled all the precepts of the Jewish religion as laid down in the Torah. St. Paul's attitude towards other religions is quiet pessimistic as is evidenced in Rom. 1-3, 2 Cor. 5:17 and Gal. 6:15. For him though, the circumcision of the Jews is inconsequential, it is the man in Jesus Christ who is important 2 Cor. 5:17. W. Kasper puts it this way:

Through the incarnation, Christ has reconciled in his own body Jews and Gentiles and has founded a common citizenship and a common household of all men... the non Christian religious achieve their final unambiguity clarity and universality only through Jesus Christ (Kasper, 1972: 162-163).

As the fathers of the council put it, the effect of her work is that whatever good is found sown in the midst and hearts of men are in the rites and customs of the people, these not only are preserved from destruction but are purified, raised up and perfected for the glory of God, the confusion of the devil and the happiness of man (Flannery 1981: 368-369).

The Catholic Church expressly declares that it rejects nothing of what is holy in these religions, indeed she has a high regard. This is indicated by Flannery by continuing to say:

For the manner of life and conduct the precepts and doctrines which although differing in many ways from her own teaching, nevertheless, often reflect a ray of that truth which enlighten all men (Flannery 1981: 739). And that truth is Jesus Christ himself for he has told us that he is the truth (Jn. 14:6).

In looking on the decree on the Church's missionary activity, Ekechkwu, echoing St. Thomas says that the message of the Gospel is received in accordance with the situation and manner of the people receiving it, for nobody speaks from nowhere it is only when the hearers have incarnated Christ's message in their cultural setting that they will be transformed by it. He warns that unless this is done, African Churches will continue having Christians with divided loyalties, on leg in Christian practices and the other in their own traditional religiosity (Ekechukwu, 1988:124).

The Pope was calling for the accommodation of the traditional African values with the Christian Gospel, he noted with approval of certain ideas which typify African

religious heritage. Foremost among these, he pinpointed the spiritual view of life which includes the idea of God as the ultimate cause. He also praised the African concept of man as being both material and spiritual, leading to the understanding of human life in relation to the after life.

Another aspect he noted with favour was the dignity of man as exemplified by the traditional way of educating in the family. This is also shown by initiation into society as a way of formerly accepting a member after due training and instruction. The traditional sense of family for which Africans are famous did not escape the Pope's eye either; this he praised noting that it is evidenced by the moral and religious attachment to the family and by bond that exists between the living members and the ancestors. He saw a typically priestly function in the esteem given to the man as the father of the family, the father exercises his roles as mediator between the ancestors and his family and also as mediator between God and his family by performing specific acts of worship (Hickey, 1982: 181).

The Holy Father recognized that the message of the Gospel encounters men fashioned by a certain culture and a certain religious tradition. He added:

It is then your concern to make alive and efficacious the meeting of Christianity with the ancient tradition of Africa... it is a question of establishing or of making a deeper, a new civilization that is both African and Christian (Flannery, 1982: 247).

Flannery concludes the relevance of rites of passage in Christianity by saying that: the church fosters and takes to herself is so far as they are good, the abilities, the resources and customs of peoples. In so taking them to herself, she purifies, strengthens and elevates them.

As different rituals have been discussed with the relevance to the contemporary society, it is also important to see other circumcision rites that affect women. Here we are going to see how clitoridectomy is viewed in the contemporary society as a rite of passage. The societies that practice it, value it but the outside communities sees it as deprivation of women rights.

CLITORIDECTOMY AMONG ABAGUSII

This ritual is got from Abagusii cultural rites. As girls reach a mature stage, serious preparation for clitoridectomy began a few days before the actual ceremony. Before a girl was declared a candidate, she needed to show that she was able to perform adult duties, For instance, she harvested a whole field of millet herself, carried big pots of water from the river and stored her mother's house with firewood. The girls were also expected to relate respectfully with men, for example when they were sent by their fathers they were expected to respond very fast. The interpretation here is that this is one way in which girls were practically trained to be submissive to

their future husband.

When the parents reached an agreement that the girl was ready to be circumcised, she was never told about it until the last day to clitoridectomy. This was done so as to encourage the girl to continue demonstrating her competence in performing her duties which would soon become part of her life. Also, the reason behind this secrecy was to mount the curiosity of the girl. Sometimes the girl herself requested for clitoridectomy and parents could accept.

The parents of the novice prepared for the ceremony in different ways. First the father identified goats or a cow to be slaughtered on the material day. Second the mother gathered the vegetables, beans and ground eleusine one may need to observe that the fathers contribution are a product of pastoralism while from the mother are from cultivation. This is a practical aspect of division of labour on gender basis in this community. Third the mother ensured that the novice was well prepared for the occasion by being well fed. Finally, both the mother and grandmother of the candidate ensured that she understood the consequences against screaming during clitoridectomy, since such an act led to special ritual and diminished status of the culprit.

On the eve of clitoridectomy, the novices went round the village inviting the women who would escort them to the circumciser. The women would gather in one of the houses and would continue to instruct the novices on how they were expected to behave during and after clitoridectomy. This was the time the women deliberately pinched the candidates as a test of their endurance.

Very early in the morning of the actual day of clitoridectomy the candidates were taken to the river to bathe. Bathing was meant to prepare the novices for the operation because it made their bodies numb. It also symbolized the fact that the candidates childhood was being washed away by water. After bathing the initiates were escorted to the circumciser. The circumciser is usually an elderly woman who enters this profession through what is considered a calling by the spirit (Okemwa, 1993).

During the operation, each of the candidates was made to sit on a stump called *orotuba* and was held tightly by the supporter *omotiri*. The supporter is one believed to have adequate experience to play this role. This lady covered the candidate's eyes so that the later could not see the circumciser and her tools. Once the novice had been covered and held tightly, the circumciser emerged and knelt in front of her and quickly cut off the tip of the clitoris. She then sprinkled millet flour on the wound, because of the actor's belief that flour stops bleeding.

After each novice was finished, she was directed and made to squat on certain soft leaves from a tree called *omosabakwa*. The intention here is to make the initiate humble and submissive to the society's values. When all the novices had been made to squat on these leaves, the women jumped and ran round wildly while ululating, as

signs of happiness and jubilation after successful operation; then the old women gave the novices cold ugali and sour mil both meant to neutralize the possibility of over bleeding. The rite for women performed in this way illustrates what a woman would be. It is to prepare her for the future role as a mother.

CLITORIDECTOMY AS VIEWED BY THE CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY

Women circumcision is viewed negatively simply because there are many repercussions that have been manifested in women that have undergone through it according to African Independent Church's voice and society today. The following explanation and views about clitoridectomy has been expressed in the following manner.

The pain is simply excruciating! There is the risk of death from excessive bleeding or from tetanus or some strange infection. There are even risks in child birth on account of the fear from the operation. Others from societies in which the practice does not exist can only express horror at the details of the operation. Those who have been through the operation speak of the trauma of the whole experience and how they would not want to inflict such misery on their own daughters.

The operation otherwise seen as sheer misery, is none other than female circumcision, excision, clitoridectomy, infibulation, give it any name, but the fact remains according to women's rights activists and medical personnel it is female genital mutilation (F.G.M.). They argue that when external genitals are normal, there can be no reason, medical, moral or aesthetic for removing all or any of them.

John Kanga, a history teacher in Kampala says it is wrong to fully discredit the cultural reasons for female circumcision and asks why women should continue to succumb to the whims of men who are naturally the decision makes in matters pertaining to culture and traditional practices under which female circumcision falls (Kanga: January-March issue 1997).

A midwife at one of Uganda's leading hospital says that the female external reproductive organs are "normal healthy and each has its functions to perform either during sexual relations, labour, child birth and postpartum and therefore none of them is a mistake".

Millions of women and girls continue to live in fear and ignorance of their own bodies and life giving functions. A recent World Health Organization (WHO) report indicates that every year about 2 million females are at risk of being mutilated. The report says that Sierra Leone and Liberia still widely incorporate female circumcision in the secret societies. Research carried out in Kenya by the program for appropriate technology in health (PATH) last August revealed that the practice is still emphasized among the Kisii, Maasai, Samburu and Meru. Upto nearly

50% of women in this East African state are circumcised.

A program officer for PATH Mr. Samson Radeny says that even the educated including medical personnel are involved in the practice (Radeny, 1997: 7). Radeny says that parents send their daughters to the village at the age of seven for circumcision, when they are in school or not. He notes however that some tribes like the Kikuu had abandoned the practice because the Church stepped in with threats to excommunicate those Christians involved in circumcision and also following the ban on female circumcision by President Daniel Arap Moi in 1983.

PATH is a non governmental organization (NGO) dedicated to offering technical assistance in improving the reproductive health of women. The program has been very active in anti female circumcision campaigns.

Explaining the medical dangers of female circumcision, Dr. Gerald Aine a private practicing gynecologist, says after the operation, the external reproductive organs heal with a scar which consists of fibrous, none elastic tissues which does not yield during childbirth, thus making labor prolonged and sometimes obstructed. According to Dr. Aine during this period, referred to as the second stage of labour, the head of the baby is already in the vagina, but the opening of the birth canal is closed by the unyielding scar tissue of circumcision. Dr. Aine says the constant prolonged grinding of the baby's head on the mother's urinary bladder on top and the rectum behind causes fistula (uncontrollable passing out of urine and faeces). Dr. Aine adds that fistula is common in adolescent girls and it is extremely difficult for some of these women to give birth to a live child if the fistula is not repaired. If by chance they become pregnant urine poisons the foetus causing frequent miscarriages.

But not all circumcised women end up with fistula stresses (Aine, 1997). But many still wonder why womanhood training including family education, sex education and child rearing should not be continued and made the most valuable aspect of female initiation. One would imagine the pangs of child birth alone would suffice to demonstrate the ability to endure pain in order to gain the qualification of being a woman (APS 1997).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The roles of rites of passage carry a heavy weight in most African societies especially when they are to design acceptable values to be imparted into the individual, who will later affect the society. In looking at the rites of passage one finds that they play a vital role in the society, there is hardly any stage in a person's life that passes unnoticed this is because both culture and religion are interwoven. The impacts of the rites of passage have greatly influenced the individual who lives in a society and their relevance in a contemporary society is day to day lived and acted according to the circumstances.

In regard to Christianity, it is found out that even in the Bible Christ had to respect the moral laws of the society

because what bonds the society is what is termed pleasing to God. To support this relevance the Pope also encouraged cultural practices with the modifications that are pleasing to all people. Looking deeply in the rites of passage, one finds that when an individual is separated or isolated, it will imply that something important is going on in that individual for example the first pregnancy and child birth are ritually the most important. These attract the serious concern of the community and symbolizes another member joining the community. It is also similar to all rituals.

In the transition period, this is equivalent to giving up the old life and turning over a new leaf. These rites are used at birth, puberty, initiation, marriage, enthronement, ordination, funerals and the travels of sacred personages like a king or a priest. These rites are intended to show that the individual does not belong either to the sacred or to the profane world or if he belonged to one of the two, it is desired that he be properly reincorporated into the other and he is therefore isolated and maintained in an intermediate position.

Some objects are also seen to be on transitional stage when they are caused to be removed from they have been. Example the transfer of relics also includes the transitional period between the departures from wherever they were first preserved. A person becomes fully a member of the society the day he has completed all the stages, he has not to respect the norms and codes of the society, and he is to be fully functional and responsible.

Despite the fact that most of the rites fit fully to the society, there are some rites that the contemporary society looks with contempt, that is women circumcision, clitoridectomy as already seen, medically has proved not healthy to the individuals who undergo it. If it brings inconveniences to the women fold, then it follows that the contemporary society has little to emulate in women circumcision. The researcher agree with the point that basic education like sex education, child bearing, family education, should be emphasized and be made the most valuable aspect in women initiation, like some societies do.

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