

African Institutions of Initiation into Life

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ABSTRACT

Social institutions are prevalent in all human societies. These social institutions reflect both moral-ethics and social values held by human communities over decades of their existence. In the evolutionary process of this existence the society develops cultural morals and norms that bestow societal identity. This maze of social institutions is held together by myriad of rites and rituals that are passed on and practised by generation after generation of the particular society. The comprehension of these social institutions by an outsider depends by and large on the sympathetic and positive reception, assessment and evaluation the outsider makes of the encounter. The end result of the encounter therefore, on the one hand maybe gross misrepresentation, stereotypes or even an outright rejection labelled as primitive. On the other hand the encounter may result in a clear understanding and recognition of the social institution as genuine effort by the society to understand the phenomena of human life and society by a specific people. African traditional social institutions are therefore not a unique phenomenon of the African peoples. Rather these social institutions are and should be viewed as being prevalent in all human societies.

Keywords: Social institutions, Rituals. Rites, Cultural morals, Norms

INTRODUCTION

The naming of this African traditional social institution is deliberately called the institution of initiation into life. This is meant to enable us capture the broad meaning of the institution. Life is a value of the highest priority for the African. As Mages rightly asserts: "Initiation of course, does not refer exclusively to induction into maturity, as is often reductionistically thought. It refers inclusively to all those rites that Arnold van Gennep (1960:65ff) calls "rites of passage, or which can otherwise be referred to as moments of crisis" that span the African religion, initiation also refers to the process of induction into certain groups and societies, blood-friendships oaths of secrecy, or commitments to a certain cause and so on." (cf Harris 1997:95). Similar to other social institutions the initiation to life institution is held together through a tapestry of rites and rituals that are performed at the emersion of each progressive cycle of life. These rites and rituals are normally shrouded in mystery and top secrecy kept and closely guarded by the initiated against their acquirement by the uninitiated. Therefore, the content of these rituals has ever aroused intriguing curiosity and

interest by the uninitiated inquirer. The secrecy of course is meant to heighten the importance and significance of the passage ritual. This protection and guard is further meant to strengthen the efficacy of the ritual. Parrinder concurs with the study on rites of passage and writes: "... it has been realized how important are these "traditional rites" which mark stages in the life of the common people. The transitional rites indicate the passage from one place or stage in life to another" Parrinder: 1989:90).

BETROTHAL

Having made this brief introduction to the African social institution of initiation to life we have to concede that the emergence of humanity is coloured by very interesting intriguing episodes. For the African this begins at betrothal and manifests through various stages or cycles of human development physically, emotionally and spiritually. The dreams, wishes and action plans of a consenting couple begin to manifest at betrothal. At this stage concrete intentions and plans are formed by way of agreements as to home building. The whole process begins to unfold the patterns of companionship in a family

unit of procreation. The seal of the union of the couple is achieved by the early consultations and agreements of the two parental groups. This ensures that the union is firmly grounded in the immediate, the wider as well as the badimo family. This then affirms the full participation of these significant others in life, life as represented in the newly planted seed, the marriage union. The rituals that pertain to the marriage situation will be dealt with later when we consider the social institution of marriage. For now, it suffices to indicate it as essential tenet of the ritual ushering the social institution of initiation into life.

Conception of Human Life

The next phase that is also received with much ritual and joy is when the mother to be conceives. The air of expectancy will breeze all around from the spouse, parents, family and society at large. Parrinder catches this in his work: "The ritual of birth begins with the pregnancy of the mother. African peoples recognize the act of sexual intercourse as necessary for conception, though its working may be misunderstood... Children are greeted with joy throughout in Africa. Desire for children is a main cause of polygamy and of changing ones' married partner after trial has proved sterility" (Parrinder 1968:91). Virginia van der Vliet also shows how this expectancy is experienced not only by the family but rather by the mother to be as well: "No Bantu marriage is considered complete until the woman has borne her husband at least one child. A young wife will anxiously await her first pregnancy, for a child ratifies the bride wealth contract between the family and that of her husband and completes her status as an adult woman" (van der Vliet:1974:212). This state of anxiety among the Sotho and Tswana is rife. It is easily noticeable in the communities among the newlyweds. There are several pre-pregnancy and rebirth rituals that are enacted. It is common to see a newlywed carrying on her back a doll called ngwana morula-ngwana seho. This is a make believe baby doll meant as an incentive to facilitate conception. It is also common to see the newlywed woman carrying on her back a neighbour's child as a matter of daily chore. This ritual is meant to be prayer for conception. Sekese (1983) in his book entitled, *Mekhoa ea Basotho* (could be translated Customs of Sotho People) tells an ancient story of an invalid man born with miraculous powers whereby his prayers for barren women were fruitfully answered with gifts of babies. Sekese (1983) claims that his informant

was an old man of the Monaheng clan whose name was Rankakaloe, who was a contemporary and of the age group of king Moshoeshoe I of the Basotho nation. This man is said to have died at a ripe age in 1892. This Ntli then had not married. One of his legs had no foot rather it was folded as a fist of the hand. He thus could not walk by himself. However, he was a singer with a most beautiful or charming voice. The childless newlyweds and barren women would carry him on their backs as a baby and visit the mountain caves where they would sing and dance day and night for some days as prayer offering for conception. It is said they would experience a miraculous shower of water and sand thrown upon them. Having experienced this, they would then go back home rejoicing. At the village cattle would be slaughtered prior to their arrival and great feasting would take place. After the ritual, sure conception would take place and children born. In the song prayer, there are enshrined essentials of African traditional beliefs.

These are:

- The invitation of Ntli the miracle worker
- Secondly declaration of faith by the potential mothers to be, "Nka ikhohla ka Ntli, ka kuka (emara) / If I could rap myself against Ntli, I would conceive".
- Thirdly an Ode to Badimo the ancestry Bo-Nkhono ba llela matlala – Ba a bona jwangba shoele – Ba bona ka paka tsa mabitla – Ancestors are unsatisfied they cry out for their portion of choice meat pot.
- Fourthly the nagging problem and reality of sleeping and talking with this make believe doll l-ngwana morula, ngwana seho- throughout the night. The baby doll is dumb has no mouth does not respond to the lullaby. She invites someone in the bedroom to continue to sing as she is now tired. A feeling of utter exasperation at the ordeal. Would God and Badimo come to her rescue – conception (Sekese 1983:43-45).

When conception has taken place several precautionary measures are set in place as care of the expected mother and baby. These precautionary measures relate to safety and health issues both for the mother and the baby. The mother is barred from eating some kinds of foods that may be harmful to her and the baby. She is also not permitted to undertake heavy or exacting chores as well as to travel too long journeys. Parrinder emphasizes this practice: "So

when a woman announces to her husband or mother that she is pregnant there is rejoicing, and precautions are taken to ensure normal gestation and delivery. These precautions include both medical and spiritual attention... At the same time taboos are placed upon the expectant mother so as to protect her from harmful influences.” (Parrinder1968: 91). Magesa stressed the importance of this care and says it also includes protecting her from harm as well as feeding her with choicest of food stuffs:“...so also is a woman carrying the fullness of life usually secluded to remove her from harm’s way. She must be fed with the choicest foods to make sure the life she now carries matures.” (Magesa1997:88). The expectant mother is described in terms that affirms and emphasizes the expectations of the family. She is said to be moimana-the conceived one-she is in weight-o bokete, implying she is heavy with baby, she is not alone. She is further described as o kgutletse morao, she is gone back to the cradle, at the bed of reeds from whence all humanity has emerged. This is reference to the Bed of Reeds myths from which the first people emerged as well attested by Setiloane (1976:4-5). During this period an African traditional medicine expert, Ngaka (traditional doctor) may be engaged to help the process by giving relevant herbal medicines to facilitate the process. This may be done even if the expectant mother attends a pre-natal clinic of modern day health care institution (Mbiti: 1975:84; Van der Vliet; 1974:213). The reception of life depicted in these rituals at this very early stage of the emergence of human life affirms this African value. The joy, the stringent precautions taken all reveal deep thankfulness to the creator for this gift regarded as essential for procreation.

Birth of Child, Naming and Socialization

The arrival of the baby is greeted with much jubilation. The announcement is made to the significant others within the household. In the Sotho tradition the practice is to inform the father in two ways, should the baby be a boy child he will be informed by an elderly man who will approach unexpectedly and give him a whipping with a walking stick. Should the baby child be a girl an elderly lady will also unexpectedly approach the father carrying a bucket full of water and pour it over the father? In both instances with the announcement it’s a boy and it’s a girl respectively. There will be laughing and rejoicing around about his ordeal. The symbolism should be clear. In the announcement of a boy, the protector, hunter

and warrior is born. The girl symbolism depicts a mother, household caretaker and provider is born. Village womenfolk will bring containers of water for washing and household use. This will also be accompanied with firewood. Hence forth a reed or fresh branch of a tree will be laid down on the door way to indicate that there is no entry, this is maternity room – ga go tsenwe ke mo botsetsing. This is the beginning of the seclusion period for both mother and baby. Only the midwife, elderly women or ones passed childbearing stage and young children will be allowed to enter the maternity room. This is done for health reason as the baby in particular at this stage is regarded as of still low immune system and thus susceptible to infections. The umbilical cord is cut and the placentas are both buried in a secret spot within the household precinct. This becomes a sacred spot for the child where it connects with nature and its origins. In Setswana this is sealed with the idiomatic saying, kalana ya me e wetse fa (maybe interpreted, my placenta – umbilical cord is buried here) Parrinder 1968:92 Van der Vliet1974:214. One of the most ominous legislations and practice of the apartheid regime in South Africa was the Resettlement Act that forced the relocation of African people from their aboriginal settlement. This caused bitter resistance, resulting in defying bulldozers and guns of the law enforcement agents. This resulted in thousands of deaths of deviant residents, some, at the point of defeat, would be found bodies hanged in suicide bids outside their destroyed homes. This was precisely for this reason. The abode homeland of the African is sacred, their attachment to the soil is sealed by the buried after birth elements. It is also their burial site. The head of the family, father having been buried in the kraal behind or before the household. The mother of the family buried in the lelapa – the home enclosure – the sibling children all buried in the maternity room of all time. Even when this household it’s no more, it has in ruins – dithako – no one is allowed to create their new home in this place – it remains sacred, it is an altar, a meeting rendezvous of this lineage with their forebears, badimo. So the seclusion of the mother and new baby has begunbotsetsi. This period differs in length among different households it stretches from three to six months or more, among the Tswana is longest. This is a period or recuperation for the mother and growing of the yet tender human. At the end of this period a day of festivity is set when the mother and the baby will be received back into the community and

the baby – This new life is introduced to the community. The ritual is called Pitiki amongst the Sotho and go ntsha motsetsi in the Setswana, imbeleko in Xhosa. The baby will emerge adorned in amulets some with protective medicines while others will bear totemic insignia. The naming of the baby takes place at this time; its name will be introduced. Of particular interest will be how well fed the two appear especially the mother she is expected to be at the height of her beauty, shape and wellbeing. (Pauw 1960:144 – 151; v d Vliet in Hammond – Tooke 1974: 214ff); Mogapi 1998: 382ff; Murray (eds) 1980: 124). The growing infant continues in the process of initiation into life through other rituals before reaching adulthood. At the first full moon the baby will be shown the moon. This is an exciting ritual for both adults and young children alike as all are invited that evening to witness the young one looks up to the moon. Wrapped up in its soft blanket it will be shown the moon by song, Kururu Kururu, bona thaka ya hao ke yeo, see your mate. (Sekese 1983:16; van der Vliet – Hammond – Tooke 1974:215) This is said repeatedly as the child looks on intently at the moon with laughter of everyone around. This ritual attested is as practiced by many African tribes. The significance is interpreted differently. After the burial of the umbilical cord and placenta in the ground this is also a ritual connecting child to the world of nature. It is also alleged that it helps the child not to wet the sleeping mat or blanket. It will also be a life companion for the child throughout life's difficulties. It will ever be a faithful symbol of continuity of life notwithstanding. As soon as the child crawls it will at the first rains be set in the pouring rain on the door way. The baby cries trying to get to the door until the mother picks it up for rescue. This is also a nature ritual witness to the delight of all present. It is also alleged that this helps the child to avoid being a stammerer. Virginia van der Vliet sums up these infant rituals as a complete drawing of the baby into life of the community: "The African baby, by contrast, is from an early age drawn into the life of the community. At first this means going about with his mother... soon given into the care of child – nurse, typically an older sister, cousin or girl of the household. These young nurses, usually five or ten years old often congregate in or near the village with their young charges, and the baby is thus introduced into a play-group of contemporaries" (van der Vliet:1974:217). Today many Day Care Centres

fulfil this function in addition for those who can afford the costs.

Circumcision Ritual

This ritual represents a symbolic end of the childhood cycle and entry into adulthood. Mageza (1997) has succinctly summed up the significances of this ritual: "But the most significant instruction on the life of a clan, the individual's rights and responsibilities in society, and the transition from childhood to adulthood is achieved only at or around puberty during the process of initiation. This is the time when the individual's vital force and the power of life generally are formally confirmed and imprinted indelibly in the individual's rational consciousness" (Mageza:1997: 95) We may add to this by saying that it is at this stage of the institution that the person fully finds its identity. The "who I am" squarely founded for the individual. The labels that one will be given in the course of one's life will be judged against this identity. It is indeed the hallmark of one's personality. Victor Turner expounding on what he names the form and attributes of rites of passage addresses and evaluate the work of Arnold van Gennep (1909) who spoke of rites de passage, defining these rites de passage as "rites which accompany every change of place, state, social position and age... van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or transition are marked by three phases: Separation margin (or limen, signifying "threshold" in Latin), and aggregation. The first phase (of separation) comprises symbolic behaviour signifying the detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure, from a set of cultural conditions (a state) or both. During the intervening "liminal" period the characteristics of the ritual subject (the passenger) are ambiguous; he passes through a cultural realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state. In the third phase it is reincorporation, the passage is consummated. The ritual subject, individual or corporate, is a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations vis-à-vis others of clearly defined and "structural" type; he is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standards binding on incumbents of social position in a system of such positions (Turner 1977:94ff). From this, Turner's exposition then, it is clear that the initiates in the circumcision rite stand at a liminal stage of the cycle into adulthood. In this position they neither bear the characteristics of childhood and

its accompanying social terminology nor the characteristics of adulthood cycle to which they are advancing. Thus in the preceding activities they are not referred to as boys – bashemane, basimane in Sotho-Tswana or girls, bananyana, basetsana in Setswana but rather respectively are referred to as Maqai in Sotho and Mashohoro in Northern Sotho, Legwane or Lepodi in Setswana and mathisa in Southern Sotho and bojale in Setswana for girls.

In discussing the attributes of “liminal personae – threshold people”, in this case our initiates into the institution of initiation into life. Turner further states: “...they are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate state and position in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonia l. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols... liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.” (Turner 1977:95). There are three clear notions held by the African society about those being prepared to enter this new cycle of life into full adulthood. Firstly, they approach the rite as they stand there, empty, they possess nothing, no status, no material worth. This is the reason they would be symbolically: “disguised as monsters they wear only a strip of clothing or even go naked, to demonstrate that as liminal beings they have no status property, insignia...in short, there’s nothing that may distinguish them from their fellow neophytes or initiates,” (Turner 1977:95).

In the second phase the society is bent on instilling in them a humane spirit before their fellow citizens as well as their co-initiates. Turners further explains:” It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned a-new and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life:(Turner 1997:95) The third motion is that of gaining filialness with their fellow initiates. A quality of bond to hold them together in trustfulness from now henceforth in their human existence. Turner emphasizes this: “Among themselves, neophytes tend to develop an intense and egalitarianism. Secular distinctions of rank and status disappear or are homogenized” (Turner1977:95). It is not

only to their co-initiates that the incumbents are exposed to experience this belonging. Rather it is also to the community. They belong and should internalise this being part of their wider community. The African most cherished dictum of I am because you are (Setiloane 1986: 10,14,40) finds apt resonance in Turner’s exposition of communities: “ ...What emerges recognizably in the liminal period, is of society as an unstructured or rudimentarily structured and relatively undifferentiated community, or even communion of equal individuals who submit together to the general authority of the ritual elders... I prefer the Latin term “communitas to community, to distinguish this modality of social relationship from an area of common living” ...It is rather a matter of giving recognition to an essential and generic human bond, without which there could be no society. Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low” (Turner1977:96-97). The African traditional understanding of this institution of initiation into life is expressed in the execution of the rite of circumcision. The whole village or community is involved in the inception of the rite. Adults of the society will register their concern to the ruling authority about the growing delinquent menace caused by the youth eligible for circumcision. They will complain of the disturbing behaviour of the Mashohoro (Hammond-Tooke 1981:78). These youth have reached a stage of unruliness that cannot be contained even by their rightful guardians: “The pressure to perform the rites derives from demography... the bodika school is organized when people begin to complain that mashohoro are becoming too numerous and are making a nuisance of themselves... these are boys between the ages 7 and 14 who spend their days herding cattle and loitering around the villages getting up to all kinds of mischief – stealing chickens, raiding crops and so on. They are under the formal control of their fathers but are not considered to have “sense” (tlhaloganyo); in particular they are not considered to be morally responsible, either to the ancestors or to the political authorities... they are also in practice, much under the influence of women (mothers, aunts, and elder sisters) and in a sense, are not clearly differentiated as males from the general category of children (bana)... main function of the rite would appear to be to make them unambiguously men, and the genital operation does precisely this. There is some evidence that the foreskin is associated with the labia minora

and its removal eliminates the potential ambiguity. The bojale custom appears to do the same for the girls by stressing female characteristics” (Hammond-Tooke 1981:78). The preparatory actions that precede this rite are accompanied by most rigours, physical pain inflicting acts. Beatings, subjected to activities that will invite heavy disciplinary response from the tutors. These include being sent on errands at the end of which beatings are the rewards. Sekese (1983) describes an inaugural feast on a semi-braided fore-arm of a freshly slaughtered beast. This is sliced into pieces, carried on his back by a renowned soldier or man of bravery deeds in the community. The young initiate recruits made to eat these on their knees hands behind their back each in turn. As they miss the pieces of meat as it is being tossed before them, the reward is this gruesome beating until one catches the meat and at this point they are given meat which they can now handle with their hands and eat, while their fellow travellers one by one undergo the same treatment (Sekese 1983:21). This treatment continues throughout their period in the circumcision lodge – Bodika – Mophatong. As they receive various instructions, secrets – dikoma, songs and other customs, the ingredient, what makes this knowledge go down and sink is moretlwa (van der Vliet 1974:221) A Setswana idiomatic expression has it as, kgomo ya mosimane ke e nkgwe (penalty cow of a boy – legwana – the initiate, is caning. (Mogapi 1985:185) Magwana a logediwa ka thupa – the initiates are oiled by cane. (Mogapi 1985:186). This ordeal culminates with rathipana (circumcision ngaka expert) at the circumcision stone (alter) of the Bodika. Hammond – Tooke (1974) captures this: “The focal point of the segregation ritual is , of course, the circumcision itself: here the importance of the action does not have to be driven home by blows with a moretlwa wands but is indelibly imprinted on the psyche by pain and the visual impact of spilled blood. That this is an anxious time even for the experienced circumciser himself is shown by the medicines he holds in his mouth to strengthen him psychologically for the ordeal. Prominent also is the use of molebatsa medicines to make the boys to forget their previous status” (Hammond – Tooke 181:79). Thus the liminal cycle is dealt a grievous blow. Simultaneously the gateway and horizons to full adulthood have dawned upon the neophytes. They blossom into new status, they are now a new mophato (age – set or group) to be announced and introduced by the head of the community in the ensuing celebrations

(Hammond – Tooke 232:1974). The next few days the initiates spend in learning songs, composing personal praises, learning and taking instructions of ethical nature. They can be spotted roaming the open veldt duped in white ochre thus marking the crossing of the liminal, threshold. The girls in their bale, bojale, underwent operations that differ in gruesomeness in accordance with different tribes and times. Nevertheless, the symbolism of crossing the threshold of liminality took some form of physical operation or imitation thereof. The recruitment of the neophytes took place at the same time with that of the boys. As indeed the age – set mophato had to be the same throughout children of that age span. The girls were circumcised “ka go ba netla – go ba tswaya – ka fa pele, ka fa seropeng sa leoto la moja, kwa kutung ya sona (Mogapi K 1998:200) by marking on the inside of the left thigh at the top most joint. This is a common symbolic action in most of African societies. (Magesa L 1997:100; van der Vliet in Hammond-Tooke 1974:233). The graduation day for both boys and girls neophytes is an of the lodge inaugurates the celebration events.

The instruction to rush home at speed with no one looking back on pain of detrimental curse is meant to emphasize the destruction of all boyish and girlish characteristics. At the village people watch as the great smoke of the burning lodge goes up. The initiates are now dressed in new clothes that are traditional, being gifts having been brought by their parents the previous night. The body ointment on each is now no longer white clay ochre but red ochre. For the Sotho girls there is ritual called catching doves – ho tswara maeba the previous night. While men slaughter sheep and goats the women folk go to the veldt to meet bale. They however return with no doves in their hands. This of course being just a ploy to deceive men, who in turn will have dismissed the allegation of catching doves as womanish lies. They would continue with the slaughter of the animals. There is an interesting popular Christian hymn or rather chorus sung frequently with great rejoice by the young women prayer guilds that seem to resonate this maeba ritual of the returning bale. It is more so as the leaders of these young women guild groups are elderly women. So it might well be that this chorus represents resurgence of this circumcision rite so demeaned and suppressed by the church discipline. The chorus goes like:

Rona, Rona, re tje, re tje ka maeba

Thina, Thina sinje , sinje nga majuba
We, we ourselves are like, like doves.

This is indeed characteristic of how many cultural traits that are suppressed near their heads through generation after generation given compatibility of African traditional institution of initiation into life with the modern Euro-Western educational system. In conclusion of this section on the institution of initiation to life, we need to concede that what this institution seeks to achieve through all the rigorous levels and steps meted on initiation could equally be achieved through subjecting or availing our young person to modern systems of education. At the early stages of growth both primary and secondary education is adequate to enrich a young life with the necessary coping skills, namely literacy, managing numeral and language development in all its cultural facets. As the young person pursues higher learning fields of study such as psychology especially human development a mature human being is surely set to emerge, fulfilling the very objectives of African rites of passage. From human developmental psychologist we learn of the various stages of human development. These are "divided according to the forms of development predicted for each age" Hurlock has given the characteristic development of each of these periods which he gives as eleven stages in all (Hurlock 1959:4). Erickson E has given the eight stages of human growth in which he gives observations of behaviour and thus the needs at each development stage of child to adulthood (Erickson. 1977:222-243). Pikunas in his book Human Development- an Emergent Science gives the key developmental stages under five levels. Those are: psychological growth and psychomotricity, dynamics and motivation, development tasks, major hazards and personality and the self-concept. (1969:395-399). Indeed, one could go on to innumerate some of those writers who concerned themselves with concepts such as readiness for education, the age levels from childhood to adulthood. Researchers that were concern with when are humans ready to benefit from any level of education, life skills that are commensurate with their physical, mental and emotional growth age.(Goldman:1970; Groome:1980; Morrison: 1991). The undeniable fact however remains that it is not everyone who is exposed to these disciplines. There are innumerable impediments. Illiteracy due to poverty in many parts of the world let alone African continent. Western education is a privilege of the affluent. These

factors say one thing to us and that is traditional African social institutions remain valuable and essential resource in the building up of persons to mature humanhood. Kalilombe (1994) writing on spirituality in African perspective, has put his finger on this dilemma of the inaccessibility of these modern educational ways to a person when he says: "And yet the means of enabling people to adapt to these new ways and function successfully within the new context were in no way equally available to everyone. Modern education and training, unlike traditional methods, reach individuals and communities in a highly selective manner, and the conditions for obtaining them are not totally in the hands of people themselves, but dependent mainly on the individual's own efforts and personal ambitions, rather than on community cooperation and sharing. It is a worldview that puts a premium on aggressive and self-interested competition " (Kalilombe1994:131). It is for this reason that in the modern multi-national, multi-racial societies there are glaring and disturbing imbalances that manifest due to lack of uniform morality and life styles that could be characterized as non-belonging or parts belonging to phenomena that actually negate the African core values of belonging namely ubuntu being ones' existence in relation to others. Monstrous poverty that grips many societies and the unacceptable levels of illiteracy that goes hand in hand with modern affluence.

CONCLUSION

Rituals commemorate significant events in the life in African communities and provide a means for renewing the meaning of those events among us. Rituals can be exciting and dramatic, engaging all of our senses. Rituals help individually and communally to make sense of life's transition, providing some structure to ease movement from the familiar to the unknown. Becoming an adult is a significant event in our lives. We move from the familiarity of dependence and the protection of childhood to assume the mantle of responsibility in the adult world. This symbolizes the generosity to provide for others. Like all symbolic action, our rituals can have different meanings depending upon the context or our experiences. Religious ritual expresses our deepest understanding of the world.

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