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Evolution and Development of Rites of Passage among the Modern Abagusii Community in Kenya

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Abstract:

The concept of rites of passage is generally understood to mean four stages that a human being undergoes on this physical world. The stages are: birth and naming, initiation, marriage and death. This is the understanding that many people have from ancient time and as far as the writing of African history and religion is concerned.

This research paper however is designed at widening the understanding of rites of passage and how this has evolved to the contemporary period. In the contemporary period and among secularists, the rites of passage can refer to more than the four stages mentioned above. According to the research the stages are conception, birth, naming, schooling, initiation, employment, marriage, retirement, death and resurrection/ God's judgment day.

The contemporary African society is that of "today" which is majority a mixture of Christians, Muslims and secularists. The society is more of contemporary than modern because modern could mean a longer period down the line.

The world and human life is dynamic and not static. Life continues to change from what and where it used to be to expected and unexpected experiences. Further, globalization has led to many changes in the world and is likely to create uniformity to humankind all over. All religious movements are ready to adopt new elements, invent new rituals or re- interpret the old (McEwan, 1968)

In this research the author had discussed five main questions of concern. The first question is referred to as the 'what' questions. The question answers questions such as the definition of rites of passage. It identifies ten rites of passage among the modern Abagusii. The second question is the 'when' question. This answers the question about the particular period of time or season that the various rites of passage are carried on. The third question is the 'who' question. It answers the question about the specific individuals involved in the various rites of passage. The fourth question is the 'why' question that gives reasons as to why each of the rites of passage is practiced. The fifth question is the 'how' question. The question responds to the issue on how each of the practices is practiced by the modern Abagusii.

Finally, the research paper has been designed purposely to bring awareness of the effects of the changing world on the emergency and development of rites of passage among modern communities.

Keywords: *Evolution, Development, Rites of passage, Modern Abagusii.*

1. Introduction

The title of the research paper is the evolution and developments of rites of passage among the modern Abagusii community in Kenya. Rites of passage are communal ceremonies that are performed when an individual passes from one stage to another, at birth, adolescence, adulthood and death (mugambi, 1989; 96). Rites of passage are very important stages that a normal human being goes through. It is however, not a must that once born, one has to undergo all the stages. Sometimes it is unfortunate that a person goes through only two; birth and death.

Abagusii just like any other African community believes that an individual belongs to the whole community. They also view the universe as both visible and invisible. The visible portion is the physical world observed through birth, maturity and ends at death. The invisible world is where the dead go to. It is also called the spirit world. The Abagusii have a strong believe that life is cyclical. It begins at conception through birth, initiation, marriage, death and back to rebirth.

The death joins the spirit world and is reborn among their living people. The death is physically replaced by young ones who take up their names and even traits making the cycle complete

The advent of Christianity in Kenya led to mass conversion of Abagusii into Christianity. Whereas the traditionists believe in rebirth the converted Christians believe in the paraousia and resurrection of the dead. This research paper discusses rites of passage among the Abagusii as both traditionists and Christians. The two work harmoniously together when it comes to issues of rites of passage. Unlike many relevant references that identifies birth, initiation, marriage and death as the only rites of passage this research has more others that are practiced by the modern Abagusii. This research identifies conception as the first stage of modern Abagusii rite of passage. After conception is birth, which is closely followed by naming, schooling and then initiation. This is followed by

employment marriage and death. The rite of death marks the end of this physical /visible world. Abagusii traditionist believes in the life-after which leads to back to conception. Christians too believe in the resurrection of the souls (mbiti, 1992: 122) according to this research, resurrection (hereafter) is regarded as the last rite of passage in contemporary Abagusii people.

1.1. Conception

Conception is regarded as a transition from the spirit world to the womb of the mother to be. Family members who died come back through the first sign of conception.

The discovery of a woman to be pregnant is good news in tradition African Society. The news was received with a lot of joy among close family members and relatives. In some communities such as the Kikuyu of Kenya, the parents of the mother to - be were the first to know before the husband and then the rest of family. In other communities, the husband was informed of this good news before the rest of the family and relatives (Mbiti ,1992: 87) Pregnancy ensured fertility of the woman and therefore continuity of the family and community at large. It also secured the marriage institution attracting respect from both family members and relatives.

The mother to be could be treated in a special way and given a lot of respect. Among the special treatment included eating special meals such as meat, honey, fruits, milk and special vegetable. She could not be allowed to perform heavy tasks such as splitting firewood, carrying heavy luggage and walking long distances. She was given protective charms to swallow and others to wear on her body. Some communities such as the Maasai avoided direct or close contact with the husband. (Gichara, et al 2004: 164). It was common practice among the Abagusii for the expectant women to return to her parents when she was about to give birth. This was common during the first delivery in which total love and safety could be provided.

At the expiry of the pregnancy period, the woman could give birth, adding a new member into the family and community. Unfortunate incident such as death of the newly born baby could generally lead to sorrow and grief. Among the Abagusii the body would be disposed off in a special way and in the house. But if the expectant mother died before giving birth, the two would be separated in the grave. Traditional surgeon could get into the grave, operate the body, removing the unborn and place it aside. This is a clear indication that life began at conception and that is why the yet to be-born were regarded as part of the family members.

1.2. Successful Birth

Successful birth meant the presence of expert midwives during birth. Arrival of a new member (infant) was received with a lot of joy. Among the Kikuyu, safe deliver of a boy made the mother and assistants to emit five joyful screams. If the baby was a girl four joyful screams were made. The father could cut five sugar canes for a baby son while for a baby girl he cut four. A goat could be slaughtered for the occasion. After four days, the mother went to the river for purification. (Mburu, 2006).

Among the Abagusii a successful birth was announced by the midwives ululating three times for a baby boy and two times for a baby girl. The after birth (Placenta) was carefully disposed off as the rest of the extended family embarked on eating, drinking, singing and dancing. The Abagusii people marked this occasion with a lot of joy for the following reasons:

(i) The process of giving birth was risk and if not handled well could lead to death of both the mother and the baby. That explain why the exercise was only to be handled by expert elderly women midwives. It is with this reason that first birth took place at the home of the women's parents who were trusted of total monitoring and safety of the expectant daughter

(ii) Birth ensured continuity of both the family and the community "tree" at large. Departed family members were replaced by the new born babies. They were named after the departed ones and expected to behave the same.

(iii) Successful birth cemented marriage relationships. It strengthened the link between the parents of the child and the families of the man and that of the woman.

(iv) Successful birth meant success in courtship and mediation process. Parents, relatives and friend(s) who were involved in the identification and engagement process that led to the marriages receive more respect for the work well done. This act improves their general curriculum vitae (C.V) in the community.

Protective charms were given both to the mother and the newly born baby. Prayers of thanksgiving were said to God and the ancestors for the wonderful gift.

Although some people continue to practice the traditional rituals in birth, it is however noted that many pregnant Abagusii women give birth in hospital. Many of these women are Christians and their prayers are directed to God, unlike the traditional prayers that were directed to the ancestors.

1.3. Naming

According to this research, naming stands out to be a separate rite of passage from birth. This took place after successful birth ranging from one week to one month. Some communities gave names immediately after birth while others took longer period.

Among the Abagusii a temporal named "mosamba mwaye" was given to the infant. Later but not longer than one month, family members assembled for both naming and purification purposes. Naming was done by elderly people (women) in consultation with the parents of the child. Abagusii gave names to young ones for the following reason:

- a) Identification of members. Specific names identify member as belonging to Abagusii community e.g. Ntabo, Omete, Nyakerario and Nyaboke.
- b) Some names indicated the place where birth took place e.g. Onchere (on the roadside, Bitutu (among bushes) and Nyabiagi (at the granary /stores)
- c) Weather conditions or season. Names such as Ombura [rainy season) indicate that the child was born during a rainy season.

- d) Some names indicate the condition of the mother or family members around the time of birth. The name Ngoge and mbera indicated unhappy condition either as a result of many previous deaths or long stay without a child.
- e) Names such as Ntabo (one) indicated the presence of one, one child born in the family. The name Barongo was given to those born twins.
- f) Naming was done of great members of the region (heroes and heroines) e.g. Sakagwa, Moraa, etc: Naming of this type could go beyond the community to include the neighbors e.g. Kenyatta (Kikuyu's), Moi (Kalenjin), Mboya (Luo) etc.
- g) Abagusii named children after their close departed ones. Family names rotated within the same family circle and one could easily identify a child's family by mention of name.

The occasion was marked by shaving of both the baby and the mother's hair, eating, drinking, singing and dancing. Just like birth, some few people continue to observe naming as it used to be. Many however have abandoned the practice and they give names immediately after birth in hospital. Some parents have a list of names kept save awaiting berth. Traditional names are gradually losing popularity as new Christian and western names gain popularity. Christian parents give and also confirm names during baptism ceremonies. They take their children to church where several rituals are performed such as prayers of thanksgiving dedication and blessings.

1.4. Schooling

The start of young boys and girls to go to school is compulsory these days. According to this research, the practice is compulsory especially when young people attain the age of 3 years. The formal education in Kenya was introduced by early missionaries mainly for evangelism. From 1846 when the first missionary school was established at Rabai, missionaries controlled education in Kenya up to about 1911. A department of education was created in 1911 and the first government school for Africans began. Up to 1967, government schools for Africans were Alliance, Mangu, Kagumo, Kakamega, Nyeri, Kisii and Maseno (Eshiwani, 1993).

The governments of Kenya in collaboration with the church continue to provide this basic need to the citizens. At independence the first president of Kenya identified three main challenges in the young country Kenya. These are poverty, disease and ignorance. The solution to all the above lay in education. Educated citizens would be great merchants and use the natural resources wisely to alleviate poverty. Some would become doctors to heal disease and maintain good health.

At age three all children are taken to school to begin the long journey of acquiring new knowledge. It is joy both to a parent and child, when joining school for the first time. The joy is expressed in the purchase of new uniform, books, pencil and sometimes a school bus picking the young learners to and from school. According to Kenya's education curriculum the first three years of schooling are classified as pre-school i.e. Baby class, Nursery and Pre- school. In many schools, there is a great ceremony when the young graduates from pre-school move to standard one. You could see them shining in graduation gown bought or hired by the parents. Primary school runs for eight years making the pupils ready to sit for a national examination called Kenya Certificate of Primary Education (KCPE). The conduct, marking and release of the results are national issues. There is prayer, eating, singing and dancing whenever the result is good. Sorrow and grief engulfs individuals whenever the result is not good.

The successful candidates proceed to secondary school, lasting for four years. At the expiry of the fourth year, candidates sit for the secondary national exam called Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE). Successful students move on to the final stage of University education. Just as the KCPE and the KCSE, examination result is marked by prayers, eating, drinking, singing and dancing. The celebrations are even more elaborate when the individuals are graduating from University.

Regardless of the process and period of time taken, education is compulsory not only for Abagusii, but all tribes in Kenya. The researcher regards it as one of the modern rites of passage because it is religious and compulsory in Gusiiland, same as birth and naming. It marks transition from illiteracy to literacy stage (informal to formal status).

1.5. Initiation

The onset of puberty among many African societies is marked by circumcision for boys and clitoridectomy for girls. There are however other forms of initiation such as removal of some teeth, piecing of ears, and tattooing on the face or body, leading to permanent scars. (Gichara, et al 2004. 167)

Among the Akamba, initiation take place around the age of 18 years. The candidates dress in a special way performing tough and difficult drills as directed. To prevent excessive pain during circumcision the initiates are sent to swim in the coldest stream early in the morning. Dancing accompanied all the process and the special songs told all that took place (Mburu, 2003). When the operation was over, the initiates were taken to a special hut. Feasting continued as the initiates were left with a sponsor and some assistants. Initiates of the same year became, brothers in life. The education which in these days is taught in schools could be given during seclusion period. After healing was over a goat and shaving ceremony was performed (Mburu, 2003).

Unlike the Akamba and some other tribes the Abagusii practiced both circumcision and clitoridectomy. Initially the ceremonies took place during August and December of every year. These were months after harvest and granaries were full. Later (from late 70s) the practice was restricted to the month of December. Circumcision and clitoridectomy was practiced to boys and girls of between 8 years to 14 years old. The boys and girls due for initiation were informed in good time and the message spread wide. The candidates were given encouragement leading to a joyous anxiety among the involved parties. Enough food was gathered for the occasion and traditional brew (Busaa) made ready.

In the process of preparing candidates they were taken through a physical ordeal and were expected to successfully finish it. This was a proof that one was ready to leave childhood behind and enter adulthood with maturity (Mugambi, 1989). Among the Abagusii, boys were expected to collect enough firewood from special trees that would run them a whole period of seclusion (about 30 days).

Actual cutting was expected to take place very early in the morning at a special place. This was a shrine with a special/sacred tree, for boys and special stone for girls. Candidates were warned of severe punishment (including death) in case they cried or simply shed tears during the cutting process. Common beliefs went around among the initiates that there was a giant cruel monster that could swallow them in case of crying. Shouts from elders holding weapons during the act prevented one from crying.

Special songs accompanied the initiates back home from wherever the cutting was done. The songs were very educative and the wording could attract the attention of every one including the initiates who were in great pain. According to mzee William Tinega Mwanacha of Bonyansiaga village (Nyangoso) there were two songs; one for boys and another one for girls. The boy's song was sung by the men specifically in the company of the initiates back from the initiation shrine. The girl's song was sung equally sung by women accompanying the initiates from the shrine to the seclusion hut. It was a taboo for anyone to sing the songs anyhow and anywhere. Although the songs were different the message conveyed was the same.

While the girls' song warned them from carelessly interacting with children and people of the opposite sex, the boy's song warned them from carelessly interacting with children and girls belonging to their wider clan. The two songs that sounded obscene clearly indicated that the initiates were no longer children, but adults. They poured praises to the initiates for the heroic act and for the parents' wise decision. The songs brought out the different roles of boys, girls, men and women according to the Abagusii traditions. They identified clearly the relationship between Abagusii and their neighbors and how the initiates were expected to interact with them. General behavior (virtues) expected of the young adults were spelled out in the initiation songs. Apart from the above teaching, the songs were a form of entertainment both to the initiates undergoing pain and the group escorting them back home. The songs were also sung loud to attract the attention of all informing them that the ceremony had started. It was indeed entertaining drama as individuals tried to expose their talents in singing and dancing. Women decorated themselves beautifully and sometimes camouflaged as a moving bush, from a distance. Lads and lasses were not allowed to accompany the group. Sometimes the men's group and that of women could meet on the way home. They formed one group, women in front and men behind. Each group ensured total shielding of their initiates from the other group and passersby. The mother joyously ululated and danced when approaching the men escorting her son. She held high a panga (Machete) that signified the future role of men as warriors. When approaching the girl's group, she did the same a ululation and dancing, but this time holding a cooking stick. This signified the future role of girls as house wives. In case the two groups were together as described above the woman could carry both a machete and cooking stick. One could not afford to miss this drama that occurred between the initiation shrine and seclusion house.

It is important to note that sometimes the ceremony would turn tragic. Shedding of blood after the cut was expected to last for about 10 minutes for clotting to take place. In case of prolonged bleeding, application of medicinal herbs and rituals were done by known specialists. The simplest medicine was done by squeezing drops of certain plants juice on the cut. For the girls it was millet flour that was used to prevent bleeding. In case the bleeding persisted, rituals such as a woman walking over the initiate were performed. This was a woman who had sex with her husband the night following the day. If there was none to volunteer herself, a bitch would be made to pass over the initiates.

A small plant (Ekerundu) was uprooted for the initiated boy to carry home from the circumcision shrine. The initiates placed it on the ceiling to dry up. By the time it totally dried up, the boys would have also healed. In the seclusion house a special plant (Esaguta) was planted and the boys were expected to water it. It signified continuation of life. Fire was lit by means of friction. It was a taboo for the fire to extinguish before the end of seclusion period. The initiates, and care takers [usually a young man] ensured survival of the fire to avoid curses. Initiate were hidden /shielded from public viewing until the end of seclusion. At the homestead, boys were taken into a special hut for healing as the girls also took separated hut.

During seclusion the initiates were taught many things about the adults' life they had just started.

The end of seclusion period was marked by a big ceremony with many rituals being practiced. A goat or cow could be slaughtered, 'Busaa' brewed and the young adults blessed, welcomed into practical adult life. It is indeed great joy that marked a successful process from childhood to adult hood. The Abagusii practiced initiation majorly for the following reasons.

i. The ceremony was a rite of passage that made an individual to move from childhood to adulthood. The act shed off childhood and made one an adult legible to marry. An individual would be allowed to own property and socialize freely with other adults/elders. It also raised the social status of the parents to mature adults/elders.

ii. During seclusion the initiates were taught of the history of their people and life skills. Among the topics covered includes how to protect the family, virtues and how to acquire wealth.

iii. Initiation ceremony united the people. It was an occasion for people to share meals pray together and sing and dance. The initiates were united to the ancestors by the bloodshed during the cut.

iv. The ceremony was used to identify Abagusii as an independent community. Neighboring communities such as the Luo did not practice circumcision and clitoridectomy

The Abagusii continues practicing both circumcision and clitoridectomy up to these days. They however don't celebrate exactly in the same way it was done earlier. Instead of the forest/shrines they do it on hospitals where modern medicine is applied. Seclusion of the initiates is no longer necessary. It is no longer a communal affair but individual one. The elaborate celebrations are not observed. The age bracket (8 years-14 years) is equally not observed. Some people have abandoned both circumcision and clitoridectomy as valuable rite of passage.

1.6. Employment

The researcher identifies employment as a modern rite of passage that transits an individual from a state of dependence to independent state. Education among the Abagusii has become necessary and mandatory. When young people graduate from primary, secondary and university, they begin seeking for work. Of late a good number of those who are not successful in being employed by the government or private sector start their own projects. [Self employment]

Similar to the other rites of passage, thorough preparations have to be made when seeking employment. For example, spending a lot of money, undertaking several courses to make job seekers relevant in the job that will come their way.

When successful close, relatives meet, offer prayers, eat, drink, sing and dance. The individual is congratulated and given advice on the expectations of the family as an independent man or woman. It is common practice for home coming ceremonies to be organized for politicians who emerge winners in elections. Equally, people come together to celebrate once an individual has been successful in his or her own projects (self employment). In the modern days and according to this research all normal people must undergo conceptions, naming, schooling, initiation and employment (self employment included). There is joy when a dependant moves to a state of independence. It is not always that an individual must attain university certificate for him or her to be employed. Some finish primary and get employed while others get employed after secondary education. What is common is that employment is celebrated religiously when acquired just like the other rites of passage.

1.7. Marriage

The rite of marriage is one of the few in which an individual takes his/her own choice. One does not choose to be conceived, born or initiated. But in employment and marriage there is room to choose when what and who to take.

Among the Abagusii, marriage was conducted after initiation. A man or woman would not socially be recognized as a grown up without being married, no matter how old he or she might be chronologically. The process of marriage was characterized by rites and transactions through which the marrying individuals were welcomed into the social adulthood (Mugambi, 1989).

A majority of men married through the use of mediators/go-betweens. Very few cases were as a result of eloping and self engagement. In the case of eloping a group of men would way lay a girl from neighboring clan going to market, fetching firewood or water, carry her shoulder high to a man ready to marry. In the second case of self engagement the researcher refers to a case whereby a boy would introduce himself to a girl, sweet talk her and when an agreement is reached they inform relatives to assist in the remaining process. There are also cases where the first wife could look for a helper (co-wife) and then inform the husband to marry. The man becomes a polygamist, an institution that was legalized among the Abagusii. Marriage did not have an end since a man could marry several women, several times including when very old. This is similar to schooling whereby to some, school ends at standard 8 others at form 4 while others at university.

Marriage among the Abagusii was a communal affair. Once a girl was identified either by an individual or by family member's arrangement was made and dowry paid.

The process of giving dowry started by a formal invitation being given to the parents of the bride. The parents of a boy assembled the cows which could be at least 10 and at least two goats. The bride's father accompanied by a few of his sons, close male relatives visited the home of the boy. They usually arrived there by around noon. They received warm welcome and straight away shown the animals set aside for them. In most cases less figure was shown/presented to the visitors so as to providing room for negotiations or bargaining. In case the bride's side was weak in the bargaining, they would take less the number set aside for them. A strong bargaining force on the part of a bride would even lead to additional number of animals from what was meant for them. It therefore was upon the parent of the bride to choose wisely men who could accompany him when going to negotiate dowry.

When an agreement was reached, then the group settled down for celebrations. The whole night would be spent at the boy's home eating, drinking, singing and dancing. The following morning visitors were escorted away with their flock.

These days, the institution of marriage has changed due to modernity and Christianity. Boys and girls meet in schools and other social places where they begin a relationship. Their parents and relatives come to know of their relationship after they are already in marriage. A small percentage that are devout Christians marry through church wedding thus abandoning the traditional practice. Dowry which was commonly given in form of cattle and sheep has been commercialized to the use money. Where animals are given as dowry, only very view (less than ten) and the remaining is in cash. The researcher has realized that instead of the parents of the girl collecting the dowry, the parents of the boy take the animals to the home of the bride. It really complicates the bargaining power because whether you like it or not the animals have been delivered at your home. Many people do not spend the whole night at the other side. Bargaining is done very fast and before sunset the visitors have gone back to their homes.

Abagusii tradition prohibited closely related relatives and clans from intermarrying. For example, Abanyansiaga clan could not intermarry with Abandonya clan. It is a taboo for the two clans to intermarry as they shared close ancestry. This taboo has been abused as defiant boys and girls marry within the same clans. Some have ended up committing suicide when forced to separate.

1.8. Retirement

The issue of retirement from active employment has been formalized by Abagusii to attain the status of rites of passage. These days, people do not just walk out of their jobs after attaining the official 60 years' retirement age! Immediately or soon after receiving special notification, they also notify relatives, friends and workmates of the retirement dates. Letters and messages of invitation are sent out to the above persons. A clear programme of the day's events is drafted. Major events such as prayers, speeches, eating, drinking, singing and dancing are indicated in the programme. The ceremony marks a transition from active public work to passive private work. Such retirement ceremonies are very common in the teaching profession. Retiring teachers who are a majority of public

servants in the region have fully formalized this practice. The researcher views this ceremony as a rite of passage because it is religious with songs and prayers and lots of gifts given to the retiree in the transition to the new stage. One incident that the researcher participated saw a collection of gifts such as hoes, wheel bellows, shovels, gumboots, overall dresses and money. These were given to a retiring teacher who previously used to handle chalks, pens books, and rulers. The researcher was amused when the retiree was urged to be careful not to forget one morning and walk to school to teach. The wife was equally advised on being vigilant whenever she saw him dressing smart in the morning. An interview with one of the teachers of Boochi – Misesi Division (Ogembo) revealed that schools contribute a fixed amount of five hundred shillings (500/-) to a teacher going on retirement. A committee is formed to ensure good organization and conduct of the ceremony. Friends, relatives, workmates, teachers and clan members are invited to give a retiring teacher a good send off.

Likewise, to the self employed persons a ceremony is held when one retires paving way for the children to assist in the work. However, the retirement ceremony is not elaborate as the one by civil servants. While retirement for public servants is at age 60, the one for self employment is from about age 70, when an individual naturally needs a rest from active work.

1.9. Death

This marks the last stage of man's physical life on earth. Death of a family member was announced by several sorrowful screams. The death of an elderly member received loud screams that lasted long while a bad person receives short screams from few people. This was the case to very young people/children. The death of unmarried person was not regarded to be as a great a loss as that of one who had fulfilled this obligation (Mugambi, 1989:102)

The Abagusii believe that death is caused by more than one cause. They believed that sorcery, witchcraft and evil magic caused death. They could try to find out who must have used sorcery, witchcraft or magic against the dead person.

The Abagusii also believed that some deaths are as a result of evil spirits.

These might be sprits of people who have had a grudge against the persons or whose bodies were not properly buried or who have been neglected by their relatives for some reason or another. Some deaths were said to be as a results curses. People endeavored to avoid being cursed or break oaths. Old age was also a cause of death according to Abagusii. At old age, people believed that God could call one from this world (Mbiti, 1992) physical causes of death such as floods, earthquake, disease. Lightening animal attack, etc were all attributed to some magic or witchcraft.

Many words are used in reference to death among the Abagusii. These includes sleeping (Orarire) getting lost (Osirire), migrated (Onganyire) gone (Ochire) rested (Otimokire) shutting the eyes (Omiamirire) saying bye (Oakire Okwaheri) cooled down (okendire) cut off (obutokire) ascended (otirire)), finished (oerire) switched of (orimire) and so on.

The Abagusii observed severed ritual rites during funeral and actual burial. A goat or sheep and hens were slaughtered during that time as a sacrifice to the sprits. Meticulous care was taken to fulfill the funeral rites, and to avoid causing any offence to the departed.

This was not done for unknown strangers, for thieves murderers, witches and other trouble-makers in the community (Mbiti, 1989: 19)

The Abagusii buried their people in graves of over 6 fits deep. This happened almost immediately death was confirmed by elderly people. Sometimes women were not trusted when they screamed. A man's scream which was of course different from that of a woman followed by prolonged women screams justified/confirmed death to the distant neighbors. One could differentiate screams for death, screams for stolen animals and screams for a man 'disciplining' a woman. Except for deaths that occurred late in the day and night, burial would not take more than one day. Grave diggers would not talk while digging and remained naked while in the grave. The body was laid facing right for a man (male) and left for a woman (female)

The following day after burial the whole clan assembled cattle, directed them to the grave where the commotion and confusion created made even animals 'mourn' for the death.

As already mentioned the size and importance of a funeral varied according to the deceased. For children and unmarried people, the funeral is simple and attended only by close relatives, for leaders and elders, it was a community affair that involved suspension of normal life such as feasting, cultivation and any activities that were associated with joy. Close relatives fast for all the period of morning. They smeared themselves with clay as a sign of death and mourning. A widow could wear the deceased shift, court or sweater inside- out while the widower dressed unequally. No normal cooking took place in the homestead as pots, utensils were broken. Cereals such as maize millet and sorghum, together with the broken utensils were thrown on the grave.

By doing these things people were able to come to terms with the agonies, sorrows and disruption caused by death (Mbiti, 1989: 122)

A part from burial in a grave the modern Abagusii have abandoned the very many rituals that used to be practiced. Death is a normal and a must among human beings. Many people die in hospital and bodies preserved for some days to allow funeral and burial arrangements. People celebrate a well lived life with feasting, prayers speeches, singing and dancing.

1.10. Resurrection

According to this research, the last rite of passage is resurrection. The Abagusii used to believe in the hereafter or the next world. It is with this reason that the death received descent burial to enable them have a peaceful transition. Life did not end with death, but continued to the next world. Although invisible, the next world was believed to be very close to that of the living. The departed remain in the neighbourhood of the living homestead. (Mbiti, 1989)

Fortunately, enough, many Abagusii people are Christians who believe in the second coming of Jesus Christ. While the traditionalists believed in the incarnations of the dead into conception and birth of young ones, the Christians believe in resurrection of the body. Traditionists celebrate when a woman conceives as it marks a transition from the death to the living. Christians on the other hand are eagerly waiting for the day when resurrection takes place and the dead will transit to either glory or permanently death. Just as in the

Bible, the Abagusii believe that only good people are remembered and they come back in the form of young ones. The ones considered to be evil and social misfits would be forgotten, thus receive permanent death.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The design of the study adopted by the researcher was descriptive survey research design. Descriptive survey design employs the study of smaller population and sample by selecting and assessing the outcome of the sample chosen from large population using questionnaire and personnel interview (Abonyi, Okereke, Omebe, and Anugwo, 2006) The large population of the two Abagusii counties (Kisii and Nyamiriki) could not be easy to reach each person and collect information. Only a few professionals mature and relevant people were sampled from the two counties represent the large population

2.2. Scope

The study was carried out in the two counties of Kisii and Nyamira. The two counties are bordered from the south by the Maasai, East by the Kipsigis, North to West by the Luo. The population of the Abagusii of Nyamira is 598,262 while that of Kisii is 1152282 (2009 census)

2.3. Sampling

The researcher used simple random sampling method to collect information from relevant people. This method was convenient because the target population is large with relatively wide area. Among the twenty women and men who were interviewed ten were from Kisii and ten from Nyamira County. Among the aged members of over seventy years twenty were orally interviewed. Each County produced 10 members. One hundred people were interviewed from among the working class. Each County had fifty respondents. Among the working class were the youth and church leaders repressing the main Christian denominations in the region i.e. Catholic, Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) and Pentecostal Assemblies of God (PAG)

2.4. Instruments for Data Collection

The researcher used structured questionnaire, oral interview and library materials in collecting data. The questionnaire was designed with two parts, A and B. Part A had oral questions concerning personal details of the respondents. Part B had questions concerning the research study.

Oral interview was used to get information from elderly people. These are women and men of above 70 years old. Most of them participated fully in the traditional birth, naming, initiation, marriage and death practices.

Data collection was also done by the use of library materials found in institutions of learning. These included schools and national libraries in Kisii and Nyamira towns.

Information collected from books, questionnaires and interviews was analyzed using both qualitative and quantitative methods. The result of the analysis was that apart from the four rites of passage practiced by the traditional Abagusii, six more are practiced by the contemporary people. These are conception schooling, employment, retirement and resurrection.

3. Conclusion

The title of this research paper is evolution and development of rites of passage among modern Abagusii community. Many reference materials have identified Birth/naming, initiation, marriage and death as the only rites of passage. This research has identified and discussed more other rights with a practical case study of the Abagusii community. A careful analysis of the tribes' practices in the modern days reveal six more other practices with equal qualities as the four. Together they have been discussed as conception, birth, naming, schooling, initiation, employment, marriages, retirement, death and resurrection. An explanation has been given as to why all the above qualify to be rites of passage. In the general explanation, is the fact that all are communal, religious ceremonies that are performed to enable one move from one stage to another. Apart from the three characteristics identified by the KLB Secondary CRE Student's book (Gichara et al 2004) this research has identified four characteristics. These are; separation, transition, in cooperation and once. Rites of passage separates people, transfers people to another stage where they join others and each of the rites occurs to an individual once. For example, a man marries his first wife and the two have their rite of marriage once. In the second marriage the man does not have marriage as a rite of passage, but does the second wife and so on. Life is not static but dynamic with so many changes being experienced. It is with this reason that the modern Abagusii have entered into many practices that qualify as rites of passage.

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