

To the Bottom of the Heap: Decoding Symbols of Initiation Rituals in the Lunda Traditional Society

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Abstract: The Lunda initiation ritual is examined against the theoretical background of Victor Turner's adaptation (1967, 1968, 1969, 1974) of Arnold van Gennep's model (1960), according to which every rite of passage is consisting of three stages: separation; liminality, a state of being "betwixt and between"; and aggregation, the phase of re-admission and return to society with a new, transformed status. The main features of Lunda rites of passages and the sequences characterizing them are outlined. The paper then decodes and discusses the meanings of and values of male and female puberty rites symbols. It is suggested that considering their significance and values, the performance and the ritual celebration conducted during the initiation period are of great importance in the Lunda day to day lives.

Keywords: Initiation rituals, Lunda people, and Symbolism.

I. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

This paper examines the Lunda rites of passage and their symbols in a traditional context. First, it has dealt with what the rites of passage are generally. Then, the procedural analysis of these rituals, as well as the different symbolic aspects related to them. It should be mentioned from the onset that this paper is concerned exclusively with boys' circumcision ritual (*Mukanda*) and girls' puberty ritual (*Nkang'a*). It would have been better had it covered all the rituals of Lunda society, but that would have been impossible in one paper. Additionally, the analysis offered here is based on the Lunda interpretation of symbols occurring in these rituals, as well as their functions. For tailoring this paper to fruition, aside from my introspection and the few interview conducted, I equally consulted works by Anthropology scholars who lived among the Lunda and wrote extensively about them. Some of them include Victor Turner (1920-1983), an American field anthropologist who was deeply concerned with rituals in both the African communities and the contemporary developed world; Edith Turner (1987) who worked with her husband Victor Turner; Arnold van Gennep (1960), whose work on rites of passage was inspirational; James A. Pritchett (2001), Jan Vansina (1968), M. K. Fisher (1984), and M. McCulloch (1951).

II. BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE LUNDA

Lunda is one of the major language groupings in Zambia (Kashoki, 1978). It is spoken by the people called Lunda, also known as Lunda-Ndembu. The Lunda are found in North-western Zambia, particularly in Zambezi, Mumbeji,

Manyinga, Kabompo, and Mwinilunga Districts. The language is not only spoken in Zambia, but also in Eastern Angola, and in the Southern part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, albeit with some linguistic variations such as tonality, palatalization, and morphological features (Mutunda, 2011, p. 15). According to historical records, the Lunda are descendants of seventeenth century emigrants from the Mwaanta Iyamvwa dynasty in the South-western part of the Democratic Republic of Congo (McCulloch, 1951; Turner, 1963; Brelsford, 1965; Vansina, 1966; Pritchett, 2001). The Lunda are historically related to the Chokwe, Luvale and Luchazi. Linguistically, the Lunda, which is part of the West Central Bantu Language Zone, is agglutinative with ten noun classes (Fisher, 1984, p. 115). Economically, as documented by Victor Turner (1967), the Lunda practice a form of substance cultivation in which cassava (*makamba*) growing is associated with hunting. In addition to cassava, finger millet (*masang'u* or *kachayi*) is grown by small circle ash-planting methods mainly for beer making, and maize is cultivated in streamside gardens for food and beer. It should be noted that cassava is the Lunda's staple food while millet is grown mostly for brewing. Other crops include rice, pumpkins, sweet potatoes, castor oil plants and a variety of garden crops. Beside subsistence agriculture and hunting, the Lunda also keep some cattle, chicken and goats. Turner (1967) further observed that the Lunda practice matrilineal descent combined with virilocal marriage. They live in small, mobile villages mainly because of hunting and shifting cultivation. It should equally be noted that, not only villages but also individuals and families have high rate of mobility. Men, of their own volition, and women, through marriages, divorce, widowhood, and remarriage, constantly move from one village to another, although men usually go where they have kin.

With regard to village structure, Turner (1967) observes that although the majority of Lunda people are relatively transient and unstable, the organisational principles on which they are formed are persistent and enduring. Ideally, there are two major principles that influence residence pattern: matrilineal descent and virilocal marriage. In Turner's view, matriliney governs prior right to residence and virilocal residence, succession to office and inheritance to property. A man is primarily entitled to reside with his matrilineal kin. He may live in his father's village if his mother lives there, or, if she does not, as privilege granted him by his father, by virtue of that father's rights as a member of the village matrilineage, a man has the right to be considered as a candidate for

Headmanship for his matrilineal village and is entitled to share in the property of the deceased matrilineal kinsman. On the other hand, a man has the right to take his wife and reside in his own village.

For socialisation of children, James Pritchett (2001) observes that boys remain under the authority and guidance of their mothers until they have undergone the circumcision initiation rites. Whereas girls remain with their mothers until they marry. Other siblings play an active role in supervising and educating younger siblings. In addition, the grandparent-grand-child relationship (*wubwambu*) or joking relationship (*wusensi*) is extremely close. They are permitted a certain degree of informality and intimacy denied in other relationships. In theory at least, a grandparent cannot deny any request made by a grandchild. As tradition requires, every adult in a village has the responsibility of educating and socializing every child in the village. Today, however, public schools and churches play an increasingly important role in shaping the ideas and ideals of the youth.

In addition to socialisation, the Lunda perform ceremonies to mark most important transitions in life. Two of the most elaborate are *mukanda*, the boys' circumcision rite and *nkang'a*, the girls' puberty rite. It is worth noting that puberty rite which marks the girl's attainment of sexual maturity is considered a necessary prelude to marriage. The objective of these ceremonies is to turn boys into men and girls into women. The basic framework of *mukanda* is composed of separation (circumcision), transition (seclusion while the boys heal and receive cultural training from adult men), and reincorporation of the initiates *atundanji* (sing. *kandanji*) into the village community, where they are received joyously as newly born and real men.

I should add that, the role of initiation ceremonies as vessels of sex education is well documented in anthropological literature. For example, Spring (1976) reports that among the Luvale of North Western province, during the girl's puberty ceremony (called *Wali*), the young woman is personally introduced for the first time in her life to a number of issues relating to sexual conduct which include women therapeutic techniques for sexual enhancement, reproduction and ailments. In Eastern province, among the Chewa and Ngoni (Read, 1956; Skjonsberg, 1989), it is also during the initiation ceremony that girls are given instruction not only on how to enjoy sexual encounters and sexual intercourse but also on how to raise a family.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While his theory of ritual process has been much debated (e.g. Bell 1989, pp. 31- 41; 1992, pp. 20-21), Victor Turner's adaptation (1967, 1968, 1969, 1974) of Arnold van Gennep's model (1960) is still useful and will be the framework of my analysis. This model envisages every rite of passage as consisting of three stages: separation, which isolates the ritual subject off from normal society and activity (by manipulating time, space, food, sleep and so on); liminality, a state of being

"betwixt and between", outside of the everyday world, neither one thing nor another, passive and subject to the remoulding of the community, suspended outside the normal rules of status, time and space etc.; and aggregation, the phase of re-admission and return to society with a new, transformed status (Eliade, 1958, p. 9)

IV. INITIATION RITUALS

4.1. Definition and Significance of Ritual A ritual, according to Turner (1973), is a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests. Turner further observes that rituals may be seasonal, hallowing a culturally defined moment of change in a climatic cycle or the inauguration of an activity such as planting and harvesting; or birth, puberty, marriage, death, even to demarcate the passage from one phase to another in the individual's life-cycle, or can also be performed to placate or exorcise preternatural beings or forces believed to have afflicted villagers with illness, bad luck, gynaecological troubles, severe physical injuries, and the like. Verhoeven (2002, p. 9) sees ritual as a system of symbolic communication, producing and reproducing relations between humans, and between humans and supernatural entities.

Commenting on the significance of initiation and puberty rites, John S. Mbiti (1970), a reputed African religious scholar posits that most African peoples have rites and ceremonies to mark the change from passive to active membership in the community. To mark this, the Lunda people observe the *Mukanda* initiation rite of passage for boys and *Nkang'a* puberty rite for girls. Mbiti (1970) further observes that the initiation of the young is one of key moments in the rhythm of individual, which is also the rhythm of the community the individual is part of.

Initiation rites have many symbolic meanings. In addition to physical impact, the youth are ritually introduced to the art of communal. As Mbiti (1970) further observes, this happens when they withdraw from other people to live alone in the forest in specifically built huts away from the village community. While in seclusion, they go through a period of withdrawal from society, absence from home, during which time they receive secret instruction before they are allowed to re-join their relatives at home. This is symbolic in that the youth experience the process of dying, living in the spirits world and being re-born (resurrected). The re-birth, symbolized by the act of re-joining their families, emphasizes that the young people are now new, they have acquired new personalities, and they have lost their childhood.

Another symbolic significance of the rites is to introduce the initiates to adult life. They are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. They enter into the state of responsibility, they inherit new rights, and new obligations are expected of them by society. This incorporation into adult life also introduces the initiates to the

life of living-dead as well as those yet to be born. The initiation rites equally introduce young people to matters of sexual life, marriage and procreation, as well as family responsibilities. Another symbolic significance of the rites is to introduce the initiates to adult life. They are now allowed to share in the full privileges and duties of the community. They enter into the state of responsibility, they inherit new rights, and new obligations are expected of them by society.

Finally, initiation rites have a great educational purpose. The occasion often marks the beginning of acquiring knowledge which is otherwise not accessible to those who have not been initiated. It is a period of awakening to many things such as endurance to hardships, learning to live with one another, learning to obey, and learning the secret and mysteries of man-woman relationship, among others things.

4.2. The Boys' Circumcision Ritual: Mukanda

Throughout Zambia, various forms of initiation ceremonies for boys and girls are practiced among the different ethnic groups and the Lunda are not an exception. The Lunda perform ceremonies to mark most important transitions in life including birth, marriage, coming of age and death. Turner (1969) notes that the Lunda, together with the Ruund of Katanga (DRC), the Luvale, the Chokwe, and the Luchazi, attach great importance to rituals. The most important rituals are the male and female puberty rites, known as *mukanda* and *nkanga* respectively. As Pritchett (2001, p. 143) observes: “*Mukanda*, circumcision ritual of boys coming of age, historically at the age of 10 and 15, is perhaps the most powerful, the most awe-inspiring experience of every Lunda man's life.” In the past, the novices had to remain in seclusion for as long as a year. Today, *mukanda* rites take place during the cold weather (between June and August) as this is considered the most hygienic period for the wound to heal. Nowadays, the whole world especially scientists have found male circumcision to be more hygienic.

The novice of today are about 8-10 years old and rarely over 14-15 years of age and seclusion lasts not more than a month. This lowered age and shortened period of seclusion is largely due to such modern influences as the need for school attendance and pressure of modern economy which requires young man to earn money (Turner, 1967). The main objective of the *mukanda* ritual is to turn boys into men. In other words, the *mukanda* marks the symbolic transition into adulthood. This include teaching boys how to tend to their homes and households when they become men and signalling both the beginning of manhood for the initiate and the end of mother's obligation to her son. Indeed, as Jordan (1998), cited by Taylor (2006, p. 115) asserts, “the bonds between mother and son, weakened after his circumcision wound has healed, is finally broken when the initiate leaves *mukanda*, and restrictions begin that prohibit mother and son from sitting and talking together in public.” In other words, the new initiate lives the mother to join the realm of men.

As mentioned earlier, the chief aim of *mukanda* ceremony is to turn boys into adult beings. Three processes are involved in this usually three month-long ritual. As Pritchett (2001) and Edith Turner (1987) observe, once the boys are at the *mukanda*, the actual circumcision takes place the next morning at an area designed as *ifwilu danyadi*, meaning a place of death for uncircumcised boys. The newly circumcised boys (*atundanji*) rest for the next couple of days, after which they are taken to the nearest stream to wash off the bloodstains. Thereafter herbal medicines are frequently applied to their wounds. It is worth noting that, the uncircumcised are considered impure (*anabulikutooka*). They are prohibited from participating in certain activities such getting in contact with those who are circumcised or even eating food cooked on the same fire used to prepare food for the circumcised men, simply because of their lack of purity. In fact, they are not considered members of the male community.

Following circumcision, the initiates (*atundanji*, sing. *Kandanji*) are then instructed and tested in productive skills, cultural history, and social etiquette. They are also subjected to harsh discipline. Commenting on the educational aspect of *mukanda*, Pritchett (2001, p. 144) asserts that *mukanda* is an educational camp, a sort of finishing school where lessons in history, customs, and etiquette, as well as the practical skills of hunting, fishing, and animal trapping are part of daily life of the initiates (*atundanji*). In other words, *mukanda* is a time for boys to settle to new life. They are taught to be brave, strong, respect elders and how to behave and conduct oneself in the society or among other people as well as how to live with or keep extended families. At the *mukanda* or initiation lodge, lessons are punctuated by frequent beatings for responding to slow to an instruction or command from a ritual officiant or even for a defiant or disrespectful demeanour (Pritchett, 2001, p. 145).

The initiate boy (*kandanji*), who has now become a man should know the bad and good in terms of sexual matters and how to manage a home when he gets married. He also learn how to live with neighbours even how to solve family problems. It should be mentioned that during the whole *mukanda* process, each initiate is assigned young adult male guardian (*chilombweji*), chosen for him by his parents. One of the duties of the guardian is to “collect their son's daily food rations from the *kaweji*, a sacred trestle built on the pathway to the lodge, where parents place food each day. The *chilombweji* or *chilombola* also serves as the initiate's personal tutor throughout the *mukanda*” (Pritchett, 2001, p. 145).

It is worth to mention that *mukanda* is also a time for emphasizing and animating the basic concept of respect and hierarchy. It is a time for demonstrating to the younger generation, in a very dramatic manner, the physical, intellectual, and even metaphysical power of the elders (*akulumpi*). It should equally be mentioned that *mukanda* represents an important time when every young participant acquires the basic minimum corpus of knowledge expected of

any Lunda adult. As one of my male informants said: “As Lunda, we are proud of *mukanda*, because even our master Lord Jesus Christ passed through it.” Upon completion of the *mukanda*, each initiated boy receives the full complement of rights and duties bestowed on all adult Lunda males.

As a rite of passage, the *mukanda* is educational. It is educational because, as Shorter (1987, p. 5) appraises, it is 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, the 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 centred life, centred education today. This type of education is gradual and experimental not simply conceptual. It forms the initiate from his attitude and transforms him from his earlier interior status to a higher one; from childhood to maturity, there is a radical change in thinking, talking, feeling and doing, based on world view.

Before moving to the next section, it should be noted that the boys' circumcision rite (*mukanda*) is also marked by the presence of masked beings known as *makishi* (sing. *ikishi*). These are believed to be shades of ancient ancestors. According to Victor Turner's (1969, p. 16) description, one of the masks known as *muweng'i* wears a bark kilt (*nkambi*), like the novices during seclusion after circumcision, and a costume consisting of many strings made from bark cloth; he also carries a hunting bell (*mpwambu*). This masked being also referred to as “grandfather” (*nkaka*), and greatly feared by women, appears after the boys' circumcision wounds are healed. It is believed that if a woman touches the *muweng'i*, she will have miscarriages.

4.3. The Girls' Puberty Ritual: *Nkang'a*

Taylor (2006) observes that virtually every Zambian ethnic group maintain coming-of-age rites for girls. Among the Lunda people, the girls' initiation ritual is known as *nkang'a*. The determining factor to hold *nkang'a* is the first reported menstrual period, mostly in the range of 12 to 14 years of age – known as *wadi* or *kutembuka* – by the girl to her grandmother or a close elderly female relative. Commenting on the importance of girls' initiation rite, Victor Turner (1987) says: “[*Nkang'a*] prepares a girl for her future as a sexually mature woman. It takes her through a stage at which all her feelings are strange; it lifts her, so to speak, across the gap between childhood and womanhood” (1987, p. 58).

Girls' initiation differs in many respects from that of the boys. As documented by James Pritchett (2001) and Edith Turner (1987), while boys are initiated in groups in the bush, girls are initiated individually in the village, rather than in groups in the forest. Whereas boys are subjected to hard labour and harsh discipline, girls are relieved of all physical labour, pampered, groomed and sung to up to three months. Unlike boys who are circumcised, girls do not undergo any physical operation or clitoridectomy like some other ethnic groups in West and East Africa. Like the boys, however, girls are

instructed in productive skills, cultural history, and social etiquette. Much of the instructional focus and symbolic expressions is on augmenting reproductive capacity and on child-rearing competency. For most of *nkang'a*, a girl (*kankang'a*) remains isolated from males in a small seclusion grass hut (*nkunka*) built outside the village, where she is regularly visited by elder women from the surrounding area. A young female attendant (*chilombola* or *chilombweji*, also known as *nkong'u*) is assigned to each girl, to be her constant companion and to attend to her every need. The initiate girl has to remain silent throughout *nkang'a*, speaking only in whispers to her attendant should the need arise.

I should add that before the puberty ceremony begins, a small grass hut known as *nkunka* is built outside the village to which the initiate is carried at sunset. The hut serves as her seclusion place for close to three months. A young girl below the age of puberty is appointed as helper upon the girl undergoing initiation; she is called *kasonsweli* on account of her function as lighter and stoker of the girl's fire. The *kasonsweli* remains with the girl throughout the entire period to attend to her personal needs. It is worth mentioning here that two main laths of the wooden frame of the *nkunka* are made of *mudyi* (milk tree) and *mukula* (blood tree) respectively. I should say that both species are dominant in symbols. *Mukula* represents the husband whom the girl will marry immediately after the puberty rites, and *mudyi* stands for the bride, the novice herself.

As documented by James Pritchett (2001, p. 149), the *nkang'a* ceremony begins quietly at night with the initiate, her mother, and *kasonsweli*, offering prayers to the ancestors. The next morning the initiate is carried to *ifwilu dakankang'a*, a place of dying for the initiate, a spot where she remains motionless under a blanket all day while women dance around her in circle, singing songs extolling female virtues and ridiculing male vices. Many of the songs have provocative lyrics, discussing female sexual appetite while taunting and teasing the men, who organise their own circle of dancers nearby.

The initiate (*kankang'a*) is also subjected to a number of food taboos while in seclusion. For instance, she is forbidden to take slippery foods as they are believed to increase the possibility of spontaneous abortion; red foods are said to cause difficult menstruation periods; and the meat from spotted animals are said to cause leprosy; other foods include dry up milk. Other restrictions include the handling of sharp instruments, contact with fire, cooking of own food, eating off normal plates and dishes, washing and cutting of nails, contact with the opposite sex. While in seclusion, the initiate is also given herbal medicine to make her strong, to ensure her fertility, and to enhance her milk production in the future when she has children.

I should mention that ritual separation is found in both ceremonies: the boys are secluded in a lodge away from the village, while the girl sleeps at the village but in a special grass hut (*nkunka*), and spends her period of daily time away

at a special tree (*mudyi*). Many features of daily life are barred to both sexes during their seclusion. Special clothes are worn by both: the girl has her blanket, the boys their kits of frayed bark. In addition, trees symbolize fertility for both girls and boys; both males and females assume new roles in society as adults after the rites are completed. As for the organization of the ceremonies, both boys and girls have instructors known in either case as *yilombola* or *yilombweji* (sing. *chilombola/chilombweji*). These attendants are present to help the novices in both rites. Additionally, although both boys and girls undergo rites of passage, the forms and purpose of these rites differ in either case. Boys are circumcised, but girls are not subjected to clitoridectomy like it is for some ethnic groups in West and East Africa. Boys are initiated collectively, girls individually. Boys are initiated before and girls at the onset of puberty. The main purpose of boys' initiation is to inculcate the tribal values, hunting skill, and sexual instruction; conversely, that of the girls is to prepare them for marriage. Boys are secludes and taught in the bush, while a grass hut is built in the village itself for the girls. Other striking differences are that, for boys' rite of passage, the emphasis is on obedience and discipline of the elders, as well as endurance of hardship. As for the girls, the emphasis is on sex, reproduction, and the freedom from manual work.

We have seen that the female rites fall into threefold division of entrance, seclusion and emergence. In the male rites an identical division is found. Circumcision and the period of special danger until the wounds have healed; seclusion after healing during which the strictness of taboos is relaxed; emergence with celebration. In the female rites, there is no point after entry at which the taboos and special observances of the girl are relaxed until her time of emergence. This may be considered with the severer degree of physical separation from normal life imposed upon the boys. For the boys separation is absolute prior to healing; after this they go into a special spot near the village and meet old women past the menopause or children below the age of puberty. Thus the strain of ritual separation is somehow relaxed for boys. The girls although separated during the day, sleeps in the hut (*nkunka*) in the village and help in carrying garden produce or firewood.

In essence, boys' circumcision rite (*mukanda*) and girls' puberty rite (*nkang'a*) seeks to develop the potential of both boys and girls so that they may become fulfilled and socially accomplished adult members of society as husbands and wives, and eventually fathers and mothers. In addition, the boys' circumcision rite, qualifies a man for entrance into the hunting cults while the girls' puberty ritual prepares a woman to take part in the fertility cults.

4.4. Initiation Rituals and their Symbols

Symbols are evidenced in both Lunda boys and girls initiation rites. The Concise Oxford Dictionary defines symbol as a thing regarded by general consent as naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of

analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought. There are a variety of symbolism as there are different cultures. Verhoeven (2002, endnote), defines symbol as anything taking the place of something else in order to designate it. He further states that, symbols operate by association and they transmit messages.

In addition, Verhoeven (2002) has distinguished three kinds of symbolism namely hidden symbolism, conventional symbolism, and dominant symbolism (2002, p. 5-13). He opines that hidden or latent symbolism is not apparent but perceptible. This kind of symbolism refers to the non-obvious symbolic aspect of material culture such as the location and nature of entrances, largely unconsciously informing one about expected behaviour. Conventional symbolism refers to 'normal', often domestic symbols, such as decorated pottery. Dominant symbols are special in that they focus as well as evoke in a more persistent manner than do conventional symbols; they are especially used in rituals.

As mentioned earlier, among the Lunda, symbolism is present in both boys' circumcision rite (*mukanda*) and the girls' puberty ritual (*nkang'a*), and they carry multiple meanings. However, in this section, I shall specifically focus on dominant symbols, particularly those that are evidenced in the above initiation ceremonies.

Perhaps the simplest way of classifying the symbols of *Mukanda* and *Nkang'a*, would be under two main headings: (1) symbolic articles (*chinjikijilu*) and (2) symbolic actions (*kusolola*). The former would include for example powdered white clay (*mpemba*), powdered red clay (*mukundu*, *ng'ula*, or *mukung'u*), while the latter would include for instance blowing *mpemba* on the initiate candidate or the initiate hut, etc. I have selected these example at random to indicate the wide range of articles and actions covered by this loose classification. What I have now to do is to examine specific symbols from each class in relation to the initiation rites (*Mukanda* and *Nkang'a*) above more closely, in order to say something about the relations between a ritual and a symbol, and what they signify.

4.4.1. Symbolisms in Male Initiation Rite

For the Lunda, notions of *chaambu*, separation between males and females, permeates several abstract and philosophical realms, including that of colour symbolism. The symbolism associated with white and red in particular, enables one to have a look at some metaphorical underpinnings of Lunda discourse about gender relations.

As documented by Victor Turner (1967) and James Pritchett (2001), white is associated with goodness, health, strength, the absence of death, and chieftainship or authority. It is generally a positive colour, standing in opposition to black, which represents the domain of things that are hidden, unknown, unknowable and therefore negative, and red can be either positive or negative depending on the context. The physical referents that most powerfully convey the notion of whiteness

are semen, milk and cassava flour. Each white substance is associated with nourishment. Collectively, they represent the maintenance of life, and indeed, the very flow of life. The role of milk and cassava in the nurturing life is obvious. But semen also plays a most important role.

According to the Lunda biological conception, semen is the glue which congeals female blood to form the body of the baby. The glue must be repeatedly applied lest the baby forms incompletely, resulting in a miscarriage. Therefore, a man must continue to have sexual intercourse with his wife even after she is known to be pregnant. This traditional belief seems to be medically unproven. However, according to the online source (*whattoexpect.com*), it has been proved that sex during pregnancy has got several benefits, one of them is that it is good for the baby and the mother. It can help her sleep better, lower her blood pressure, and even make her happier. Thus, it is the man's task to nourish the unborn child with semen, the woman's task is to nourish the newly born with milk, and all adults are tasked to nourish themselves by planting cassava. The white realm also includes both the male and female initiation ceremonies, *mukanda* and *nkang'a* respectively. The dominant symbols in each are white/whiteness and red/redness.

For the *mukanda* ritual, the novices are circumcised beneath the milk tree (*mudyi*). For the boys who are about to undergo the circumcision process, the milk tree symbolizes motherhood and the mother-child relationship, that is about to be broken. During the circumcision process, the novices sit on a log of red *mukula* tree, until their wounds stop bleeding. This tree provides a red gum it secretes, which according to Lunda people, is likens to the blood that comes out the moment the foreskin is removed from the penis. Then they are lifted over a cutting of the *muyumbu* tree which is customary planted as a shrine to the village ancestor spirits, and placed still bleeding on the *mukula* log. Here the *mukula* tree stands mainly for two things. It represents the wish of the elders that the circumcision wounds will heal quickly (belief deriving from the fact that *mukula* gum quickly coagulates like a scab). It also represents masculinity (*wuyala*) and the life of an adult male, who as hunter and warrior has to shed blood. The rite represents, firstly, the removal of the boy from his mother (the passage from the *mudyi* tree); secondly, his ritual death and subsequent association with the ancestors (the passage over the *muyumbu* tree); and thirdly, his incorporation into the male moral community of tribesmen (the collective sitting on the *mukula* tree where the boys are ceremoniously fed like infants by the circumcisers and by their fathers. Each boy is given a boll of cassava mash – *nshima yamakamba* – to be eaten from the circumciser's knife).

Furthermore, as mentioned above, boys' circumcision rite takes place under the tree. But in this context the whiteness is said to represent semen, fatherhood and maleness. Thus, as I indicated earlier, the Lunda believe that, having likened the thick latex coming out of *mudyi* to semen, a man needs to have sexual intercourse with his pregnant wife continuously,

so that his latex-like semen can strengthen the foetus and eventually the unborn child so as to avoid miscarriage.

Another symbol that occurs at boys' circumcision is the use of *mpanza* – usually a form of the arch over the stream. This is “the crotch” or the bifurcation of a human body. As documented by Victor Turner (1969, p. 65), *mpanza* is used at the boys' circumcision for a tunnel of legs that belong to senior officiants and circumcisers, beneath which the junior guardians who tend to the novices during seclusion should pass. Symbolically, this tunnel stands for both the entrance to the situation of circumcision and also a magical mode of strengthening the genitalia of the junior guardians.

4.4.2. Symbolism in Female Puberty Ritual

Much of the activities of girls' puberty (*nkang'a*) ceremony also take place around a *mudyi* tree. The girl's puberty ritual begins in the early hours of the morning when a novice is wrapped in a blanket and laid at the foot of the *mudyi* tree *Diplorrhynchus condylocarpon*, known for its white latex, which exudes milky beads if the bark is scratched; it is for this reason that it is called “the milk tree.” Once there, the women gather around the tree to sing and dance in jubilation.

This milk tree (*mudyi*) is of a great importance to the Lunda. Several meanings have been attributed to it. In the first place it is said that the milk tree is the “senior” (*mukulumpi*) tree of the ritual. Secondly, the milk tree stand for womanhood, motherhood, the mother-child bond, a novice undergoing initiation into mature motherhood. In reference to observable characteristics, the milk tree stands for human breast milk and also for breasts that that supply it. Simply stated, the white latex in this context symbolizes milk, motherhood, and femaleness

As Turner (1967) rightly points out, the Lunda relate this meaning to the fact that *nkang'a* is performed when the girl's breast begin to ripen, not after the first menstruation. Van Gennep (1960, p. 65) better describes this physical transformation from childhood to adolescence of a girl as “physiological puberty”. He further states that during this stage, “the girl is marked by a swelling of the breasts, an enlargement of the pelvis, the appearance of pubic hair, and above all the first menstrual flow” (Van Gennep, 1960, p. 65). In the third place, the women describe the milk tree as “the tree of a mother and her child” (Turner, 1967).

Beyond the breast feeding aspect, the milk tree also symbolizes matriliney, the principle on which the Lunda society depends. According to Victor Turner (1967), matriliney governs succession to office and inheritance of property. It also confers order and structure on Lunda social life. Beyond this, Turner further observes, the milk tree (*mudyi*) stands for tribal custom (*muchidi wetu*) meaning our tribal culture and custom. As the backbone of Lunda social organization, the principle of matriliney symbolizes the total system of interactions between groups and persons that makes up Lunda society. Therefore, the milk tree stands for the unity and

continuity of Lunda society. As the child depends on its mother for nutrient, similarly for the Lunda, tribesmen drink from the breasts of tribal custom.

Earlier, I mentioned that the girl's initiation rites (*nkang'a*) takes place in a small round grass hut (*nkunka*), where the girl remains isolated from males during the seclusion period of about three months. The two main laths of the wooden frame are made of *mudyi* (milk tree) and *mukula* (blood tree) respectively. We have seen that both species are dominant in symbols. *Mukula* represents the husband whom the girl will marry immediately after the puberty rites, while *mudyi* stands for the novice as future bride. It should also be noted that, a tiny bow (*kawuta*) of *mudyi* wood is placed at the apex of the seclusion hut. The bow, wrapped with white beads representing children, symbolizes the novice's desired fertility. The point of junction between the poles is called *mpanza*. According to Turner (1969), this bifurcation stands for biological and social continuity.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper was aimed at exploring symbolisms in initiation rituals of boys and girls in Lunda traditional society. It has been found that female and male rites of passage play an important role in the Lunda traditional society and the people's day to day lives. They are used to inform, encourage, educate and to discipline the youth within the society. The paper has also immaculately revealed that in the Lunda male and female initiation, there exist a variety of symbolisms which when fully understood one can get a lot of meanings and the significance of their performances. It is only that in its performance, rituals are done without giving a clear meaning and their significance in the people who have to undertake these performances. It is this symbolism which makes the meaning and significance of initiation rituals not to be apparent to any layman. It needs a close look and a great mind to understand these symbolic gestures, items and taboos, and to find their significance in society. After getting hold of these symbolic gestures one may easily understand that they play a very big role in the maturity and by following practising them properly, with pride and confidence the society can grow and have responsible adults.

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