

DECLARATION

**RITUALIZATION AMONG THE ABANYOLE:
A STUDY OF CLEANSING RITUALS**

BY

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ABSTRACT

RITUALIZATION AMONG THE ABANYOLE: A STUDY OF CLEANSING RITUALS.

This study seeks to find out the nature of the function of the Abanyole cleansing rituals. It investigates the Abanyole cultural and religious knowledge transmitted through rituals and the effects they have on the social and spiritual life of the Abanyole.

There are several rituals that characterized the Abanyole traditional religious aspects of life. For example departure and arrival ritual purification mourning, incorporation, planting-harvesting, establishing new homesteads, marriage relationship, healing reconciliation, appreciation and settling dispute rituals. These rituals bind Abanyole to have a common belief that the ancestral spirits and the supernatural being controls every aspect of human and nature's life.

A ritual is never a matter of routine, habit or the dead weight of tradition but a suitable means of securing cultural knowledge. It is an affirmation of communal unity in contrast to competitiveness of social life and organization. It is eminently suitable for organizing a theoretical conversation that wishes to uncover a cultural meaning through its practices. This study attempts to analyze the effects of ritualization as practice on the socio-religious life of the contemporary Abanyole community.

The study examines the elaborate proceedings of Abanyole rituals that comprises personal and public activities and identifies their significance in the socio-religious life of the community. Under normal circumstances the Abanyole personal rituals affected the individual life and status whereas public rituals consist of external activities taking place outside the person's life thus affecting the environment in which he lives. The study relied on the secondary and primary sources of data. There were 250 informants from the Abanyole community consisting of scholars and religious leaders who have authority in African Traditional Religion. Data was collected using observation and questionnaire. It was evaluated by critically examining each questionnaire and recording case themes from all informants. The tape recorded data was transcribed and translated into English then analyzed according to case themes of the study.

The study is a contribution to knowledge that benefits institutionalized religious leaders, lecturers of religion and literature, and Social scientists. The thesis has five major divisions of study. Chapter One is the Introduction of the Study. Chapter Two is the Literature Review. Chapter Three discusses the Methodology adopted for the study. Chapter four discusses specific rituals and their significance and how they affect the socio-religion life of Abanyole. It also discusses the fading away and discarded rituals as well as identifying various effects of rituals on the socio-religious life of the contemporary Abanyole. Chapter Five embodies constructive conclusions and formulates the recommendations for future research and summarizes the research findings.

1.0 CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

This study investigates the cleansing rituals practiced among the Abanyole community. The Abanyole are an ethnic Bantu speaking people who inhabit Luanda and Emuhaya divisions, Vihiga district Western province of Kenya. They are part of larger Seventeed ethnic grouping called Luhya who occupy some parts of the Rift Valley and Western Province of Kenya. The province, which lies commonly in the lake region, has seven administrative districts namely; Kakamega, Butere-Mumias, Vihiga, Lugare/Malava, Busia, Teso and Bungoma. The Abanyole community uses 'olunyole' as a common medium of communication. It is densely populated, rich in traditional, cultural, social and religious activities. It has a diversified class distinction of the extreme impoverished and extreme rich. It comprises of Forty five major clans. The encounters with Abanyole traditional elders reveal how much the community values clan relationship as in elder Okumbe's words, "the clan is neither one man nor is one man the clan." Their solidarity is traced through cultural values, which are cemented by ritual ceremonies. One famous proverb expresses the fact that only in terms of other people does the individual become conscious of his own being, his own duties, privileges and responsibilities towards himself and others. Thus in the wisdom of one respondent, "Life can only be sweet and complete when the gods are presently manifested in our Shrines". They are agriculturalists, keep livestock and poultry. They depend on trade as their livelihood. Luanda Township is their main market and attracts a cross section of traders from Uganda, Tanzania and Kenya. The Abanyole share the border on the southwest with "Ababo", the east with the "Abalokoli" and the "Abashisa" on the north. Their landscape

comprises of rocky and hilly areas, which are mostly barren, valleys mostly watered by all round season flowing rivers. For example, river Olukose and evergreen vegetation. This area has both long and short rain seasons and a dry season annually. The Abanyole landscape is dotted with sacred alters made and placed in shrines from where cleansing rituals are practiced. The Abanyole are deeply ritualistic from the fact that they participate in rituals from conception through birth to long after death. Abanyole preserve thickets, caves and trees as sacred areas where cleansing rituals takes place. They believe in 'omungu' as their supreme being. According to Omasaba, 'omungu' means one who is endowed with extreme power and Holiness beyond man's mind. He is considered to be too abstract to be conceived by anybody. He equally distributes His blessings and curses to all depending on the behaviour and character of people. It is criminal for anybody to swear by His name. Shrines and sacred places are points of focusing the Abanyole sense of the holy and the otherness of the spiritual realities. Shrines are places where the spiritual comes to the community by means of rituals. Specific elders appointed by the clan priestly group of elders erect shrines. They are believed to be resting places for ancestral spirits. There are two types of shrines, the private family and the public community shrines. The family shrine is located in the middle of the homestead. It is grass thatched using special soft grass cut from river valleys or swampy areas. A good time is spend searching for twigs because they must be very mature to withstand hard climate. Special plants around the Shrine are for protection and to make it respectable. Some of the plants are medicinal while others produce sweet scented flowers. Family religious rituals are carried out in shrines

connected with family homesteads. There are various marks found around and within the shrines such as porcupine quills, blood strips, grains, ashes and dry grass.

Other areas that Abanyole have preserved as sacred shrines include natural thickets, caves, rocks, swamps and trees. Priests and elders are responsible for safeguarding these shrines.

Rituals are universal, cultural dynamics and modes of socialization observed and practiced in various ethnic groups and cultures. All the ancient cultures established their fundamental religious beliefs and practices through elaborate rituals. Their rituals were decorated with fixed symbols that portrayed the nature of the deities. There were private and public rituals that connected the participant to their occupations, religion and seasonal changes. Turner (1975:58-81) states that, rituals serve as a vehicle for unfolding social dramas where social dramas are embodied in the rituals and have a set of functions that make clear the deepest rules of the culture. In Turner's view, ritual is a mode of social action that involves participants under the direction of elderly leaders or priests.

Nyaundi (2003), Lewis (1960) and Mbiti (1975) have traced the effects of rituals on African religious and social life emphasizing virtually on rites of passage, mainly funerals and burial rituals, marriage, circumcision and the concepts of the supreme being. It is believed that each African ethnic group had its own version of effecting religious ritual.

This study focuses in depth on the cleansing rituals identifying their effects or socio-religious life of the community. Shisanya (1993) who did the latest research on impact of Christianity on the Abanyole beliefs and rituals surrounding death concluded that more

research should be carried out on cleansing rituals practiced among the Abanyole. Shisanya's research neither focuses on the central role rituals play in human behaviour, nor develops the theory of ritualisation that explains the process by which rituals operate and the structure of social life where ritualisation is evident. Therefore the role of ritual in Abanyole socio-religious life is the search gap that this research addresses.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

This study examines a selection of cleansing rituals practiced by the Abanyole. It gives insights on these rituals showing how they enhance African Traditional Religion.

The research establishes the impact and relevance of cleansing rituals in the Abanyole community and as well demonstrates their contribution to the contemporary Abanyole life. More precisely the research statement addresses the role of ritual in socio-religious life of Abanyole. The study seeks to find out the cleansing rituals that are valuable to the Abanyole community today, when they are recognized as strategic forms of the Abanyole Cultural Practice.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

This study aimed at;

- Outlining the cleansing ceremonies practiced among the Abanyole today.
- Examining the importance of cleansing rituals on the socio-religious life of Abanyole.

1.4 Assumptions of the Study

The following two assumptions are posited:

- (a) That the cleansing ceremonies are major consciousness and key activities of the Abanyole traditional religious practices through which the entire community is solidly bound.
- (b) That there are some rituals that are still in force and valid among the Abanyole social religious life while because of the influx of foreign religious movements, some have been discarded.

1.5 **Justification of the Study**

The study of rituals is associated with the presence of many preserved sacred shrines, caves, thicket, trees, valleys and symbols found scattered all over the Abanyole landscape. There are many stories told by elderly people about cleansing rituals that take place in these sacred spaces.

This study avails the most recent data about the Abanyole cleansing rituals to lecturers in religion, religious leaders, socio-scientists and the ordinary public. The practical aspect of the study assists the beneficiaries to understand the conditions under which the Abanyole cleansing rituals become effective and functional.

2.0 CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review

This literature review examines researchers that have done work on ritual ceremonies worldwide. It also looks at the research done on the Abanyole rituals. His purpose is to show that Traditional African religion is experienced through reliable specific sources such as shrines, music, dance, language, symbols and rituals.

Witson (1956) and Lewis (1980) demonstrate the usefulness of cleansing rituals in African communities as a means of reconciling the clans and families. Such rituals made people have a clear distinction between good and evil. African communities preserve many sacred places in the environments from where ritual ceremonies are made. The foregoing demonstration is true for the Abanyole to an extent that its landscape has many sacred altars and shrines from where rituals are practiced. The implication from this review therefore is that there is need to find out the effects of reconciling rituals on the Abanyole.

Ochieng-Odhiambo (1995) and Parrinder (1954) observe that religion is absolutely a spiritual one, however material it may appear at first sight. In traditional African communities, all things share the same nature and the same interaction one upon another. Mbiti (1969) states that, "I am because we are and because we are and therefore I am". These sentiments form part of this study because the researcher traces from the history of Abanyole how rituals enhance togetherness and oneness among theory. The research explores the significance of nature in drawing the attention of the Abanyole to offer cleansing rituals to praise and worship God, who they called *Omungu*.

The research looks into and considers all forms of prayers made by the Abanyole and outlines out how prayer cultivate the community dependence on God. It goes far to examine the roles of ritual leaders in prayer rituals.

Durkheim (1915) notes that religion is eternally destined to survive all symbols and transform itself rather than disappear. The Abanyole used innumerable symbols of religious nature and value such as ornaments, trees, rocks, pots, herbs, and fields in their ritual ceremonies. This study examines reasons why symbols were used for rituals and to what extend they affect the religious beliefs of the Abanyole. It also establishes how symbols have survived contemporary socio-religious changes among the Abanyole.

Nyaundi (2003), states that African traditional religion is known to be one of the religions where the supernatural reality is approached with a tall respect through natural objects and images. This thesis addresses the religious beliefs and practices among the Abanyole in respect to ritual ceremonies.

Shisanya (1993) asserts that both Christianity and Abanyole to some extent share similar rituals surrounding marriage and death. There are many other ceremonies between Abanyole and Christianity, which have the same, or different rituals surrounding them as examined by our work. Such as purification, incorporation, building and moving to new homesteads, covenants and many other solemn relationships.

Radcliffe Brown 1952, Gluckman 1965 and Tambid (1979) made a common observation that a ritual is the most distinct rhythmic series of symbolic acts that surround ceremonial occasions such as births, marriage, baptism illness, worship and death. It can therefore be shown to have a specific social function when, and to the extent that it has

for its effect to regulate, maintain and transmit from one generation to another sentiments on which the moral laws of the world societies depend.

Rituals are therefore universal; they involve all the people in the world. They are social acts in which societies re-enact their relations to the sacred objects and through them to the beyond thus reinforcing their own solidarity. Generally, rituals suggest joyous occasions as well as potential ones; edification as well as rebuke, even some healing rituals suggest appeasement and others emphasize on cleanliness.

According to Radcliff-Brown (1952) a ritual is a rule of behavior. Rules have religious implication and those who overlook them feel a sense of guilt and seek ritual restoration. Therefore religion can be discerned in terms of rituals, ceremonies and religious priests. Rituals are the means through which the profane world is brought into contact with the sacred. They serve as institutional sanctifying agents without doing damage to the social fabrics. The study finds out the extent to which rituals are agents of bridging the spiritual and the profane world together among the Abanyole.

In Africa, rituals are powerful means of sustaining social order, they dramatize tradition beliefs, values and invest them with emotional content. The people's relationship to nature, society and the supernatural is enhanced in rituals, which surround ceremonies such as death, marriages, initiation and exchange of vows among others.

However traditional religions in Africa are not universal but tribal. Tribes preserve part of the environment believed to be manifest of God's presence, such as forests, thickets and river valleys. These sacred places become reliable and valuable from where ritual ceremonies can be held.

Talcoth (1949) argued that by the common ritual expression of their attitudes, men not only manifest them but they in turn reinforce the attitudes. Rituals bring the attitudes into a heightened state of self-consciousness which greatly strengthens them and through them strengthens in turn the moral community. He further implies that in a ritual, the relationship of a leader and followers are acted out and the rituals incorporates the individual into the group which give him emotional support.

Nkoyoyo (1999), and Parrinder (1954), both conclude that, religious ritual is a celebration of life that puts those involved in touch with their deepest heart and spiritual world through a procedure involving a series of acts, bodily gestures and symbols. These sentiments are vital because the research deeply explains how then Abanyole rituals enhanced religious solidarity among them.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

The development of this study is conceived from the Structural Ritualization Theory. According to Knottnerus (1997), the theory focuses on the role rituals play in social life and the process by which ritualization occurs thus leading to the formation, reproduction and transformation of social structure.

The Encyclopedia of Religion defines ritual as, "*a prescribed form of activity, determined by consideration of traditions and symbolism*". (1995:655).

The encyclopedia of Americana 1954, defines rituals as a, "*religious ceremony done from sacred chamber marked by cabalistic signs that distinguish it from other dwellings*" (1954:539-541). Both definitions express the fact that symbols and sacred places highly strengthen the practice and orderliness of the ritual actions.

This framework emphasises on ritual as a strategy for social actions. The ritual specifies the performers relationship to what is being performed. A ritual always reinforces the individual's attachment to the entire community and strengthens social interactions. The elderly community members empower elderly priests and agents to control all ritual actions in the community. Therefore a ritual is staged and uses multiple communication skills to afford the initiate an intense experience. It involves the choice of site, objects to be used and rising of the altars. The ritual looks for something that can be interpreted, thus making apparent the true meaning of cultural phenomena. Any ritual is accompanied by processions, Songs, Oaths, dances, prayers and sometimes smoking sacrifices. A ritual is a means by which collective beliefs and ideas are simultaneously generated, experienced and affirmed as real by the community. These arguments show clearly that socio-religious beliefs and practices do not just exist in one ethnic group but are structurally spread out in all world ethnic groups.

John Mbiti (1969) supports the concept of ritualization when he indicates that rituals make communities develop common traditional religion, morals and share same sacred symbols. The implication of his findings brings out the fact that religious rituals are not only the point at which the conceptual aspects of religious life converge for the initiate but the point at which interaction between them and their supernatural being can be reached.

Hobsbawn (1983) conceptualized that ritualization is a process of sustaining tradition in contemporary societies. This study examines the effects of ritualization as a practice on social-religious life of the contemporary Abanyole. Ritualization is the form of a practice that brings people to work together as a social structure. It is successful

among the Abanyole because a common language, "Olunyole", common religious beliefs, interests and kinship relationships bind them. The study further points out that Abanyole traditional religious rituals are regarded as networking links that go far to enhance stability to their socio-religious life at the family and community level.

The majority of African ethnic groups have well-defined "age set" or "age group" and "elder" system that have their own codes of acceptable behavior effected through observation of cleansing rituals. The ethnic group activities are guided, monitored and controlled by the elderly community members while the restrictive rituals control the intimate lifestyle in sexual behavior. But our observations are that rituals serve various purposes such as reconciling and uniting community members and connecting them to their deities.

This study establishes the fact that ritual practices, specifically cleansing rituals are a strong force among the Abanyole and have unique capacity to transform, and mould character that determines the destiny of individuals. It is evident from the study that Abanyole embraced African traditional religion in which ritual actions are characterized by the presence of symbols, the process by which the rival talks and the spoken words by either the priest or the initiates.

This work also looks into Abanyole rituals by distinguishing different points of views actualized between religious, traditional private and collective community rituals, dramatic performance, ritual performance and solidarity rituals.

3.0 CHAPTER THREE: Methodology:

3.1 Introduction

The researcher's responsibility in this study was to collect data using thematic structured questions that provide him with sufficient information about the practice and impact of cleansing rituals on socio-religious concepts of Abanyole.

3.2 Population and Sample

Abanyole have eight administrative locations each governed by a chief, his assistant and a group of village elders. The community has twenty-six ritual spaces and each is under the management of fifteen elders appointed by the council of elders, thus making a total of three hundred and ninety ritual leaders. Besides, there are twenty-five established religious institutions.

The researcher purposively selected three hundred and ninety ritual leaders and of a simple size of two thousand five hundred members in established religious institutions for the study. These informants have a thorough knowledge of the subject to be studied. Their names, ages and biographical data are recorded for the study.

Moreover, "Omasaba", an informant and the former clan ritual elder and advisor to the researcher introduced other two elderly ritual agents who have been administering rituals before and after the division of the Abanyole into eight locations. The three gave all names of ritual priests, priestesses and ritual agents who proved very useful for the study. In total two hundred and fifty informants were purposefully sampled for the study. Each informant is limited to a particular age, his or her socio-economic status and religious responsibilities in the community. One hundred ritual priests, two priestesses

inclusive are purposively sampled for the study because they are the chief custodians of all community ritual spaces, perform rituals, consult the supernatural being and ancestral spirits on behalf of the community, speak blessings and curses and their spoken word cannot be disputed by any community member.

Eighty-two ritual agents aged (65-79 years) (two female ritual agents inclusive) are purposively sampled for the study. They assist ritual priests and priestesses, are responsible for organizing ritual participants, make sure that all ritual requirements are in order and ritual spaces well organized.

Eight youths were purposively sampled. The criteria for selecting them is that they are the only ones appointed by the elders to be very close to ritual agents and assist in organizing ritual actions.

One hundred institutionalized religious leaders were sampled purposively for the study. They embrace Abanyole traditional ritual practices and have mutual relationship with ritual administrators. The only surviving two retired chiefs were selected for the study. Finally ten scholars were sampled for the research. Age bracket was the underlying factor for sampling research informants. It narrowed down the number selected from the whole community to remain a realistic cluster for the study. The research informants were grouped into categories at intervals of ten.

3.3 Data Collection Methods

The methods used for the study were participatory observation and interviews. The methods sought to gaining insights of the Abanyole cleansing rituals. The research relied mainly on fieldwork because of limited literature on Abanyole rituals.

Participatory observation offered first hand information and helped explain verbal and facial expressions made by participating members at various levels of rituals observed. The researcher had an assistant for the purposes of comparing notes so as to make accurate conclusions. The researcher's knowledge of the local dialect "Olunyole" enabled him interact easily with informants. A tape recorder was used to record the relevant information from priests and priestesses.

A list of the informants, dates of interviewees, observation schedule and places are summed up in (*Appendix II*) of this study.

About eight months were spent in the library searching for relevant materials on rituals. In the preceding work the researcher elucidated the Abanyole religious world view in particular and trends in the study of ritual activities among them. It was achieved by reading relevant archival and unpublished materials and magazines. However, there is limited existing literature on Abanyole rituals thus the researcher had to depend on fieldwork as the main authentic source for the study.

A questionnaire was used for interviewing ritual agents, Priests and retired Chiefs. A semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect information from the clan ritual elders, retired civil servants, youths and institutionalized religious leaders.

An observation guide was used to gather data on cleansing rituals such as

- The Emukusa Shrine where burial rituals are done.
- Omukawino Shrine where crime-cleansing rituals are done.
- Esikomoli Shrine where cleansing rituals are done.
- Emaloba Esitsimi Shrines where traditional homestead are common.
- Esibakala and Esirambatsi Shrines where harvest rituals are done

- Esianana hill, believed to have been the first sacred hill where Abanyole performed their first rituals.
- Omuhaya sacred tree where cleansing rituals for warriors takes place.

3.4 **Data Analysis**

The questionnaires are critically examined and qualitatively evaluated by case themes after collecting data. The tape-recorded data was transcribed, translated into English then analyzed. The data was logically and systematically analyzed. The corresponding answers from informants are put together and carefully analyzed according to the themes of the ritual in practice. The notes recorded during ritual observation were compared and aspects of the ritual actions, use of objects and symbols were analyzed.

The assembled oral information was analyzed to explore its contribution to the Abanyole religious practices and their religious history.

3.5 **Scopes and Limitation**

The research is carried out from Emuhaya and Luanda divisions in Vihiga district where the Abanyole live. Although the area is large and thickly populated, the age bracket set for respondent's limits the number of subjects to be interviewed for the study. The accessible villages to public transport are those found near Kisumu-Siaya, Busia-Yala, and Luanda-Khumusalaba-Chavakali roads. The rest of the rural parts of Emuhaya – Luanda community are not accessible to good transportation means. This constrains

4.0 CHAPTER FOUR: Results and Discussion

4.1 Abanyole Rituals And Socio-Religious Structure

4.2 Introduction

The researcher explored the establishment of various complex ritual shrines, sacred spaces and forms of rituals that were practiced in every shrine. He carefully analyzed roles of ritual agents, worship models, signification of altars, and the position of the human body when participating in ritual actions at the altar or in a shrine. Further the research has provided an overview of the Abanyole major clans that traditionally were deeply involved in ritual activities. Nonetheless, the family and community totems, the commonest paraphernalia found in shrines have been featured in this chapter.

Besides the researcher has attempted to examine how Abanyole associated natural colours, symbols, fetishes with ritual practices and reasons that make ritual actions to effectively control the Abanyole socio-religious structure. The criteria for the ritual body to uniquely encounter transcendent experience when participating in any ritual action have been established in this chapter.

4.3 Ritual Forms

The word ritual first emerged as a formal term of analysis in the 19th century as observed by Edward (1966), to identify what is believed to be a universal category of human experience. The term expressed therefore, the starting point of a major move in the way European culture compared itself to other traditions, cultures and religions of the world. Since then various definitions of ritual have been developed and linked to a wide variety of scholarly endeavours. A religious ritual is a celebration of life that puts those

involved in touch with their deepest heart and the spiritual world or mystical powers through a procedure involving a sense of acts, bodily gestures and symbols.

Abraham (1962), Onyewuenyi (1982) and Opuka (1989) point out that rituals are used to develop the African traditional religious thought and the social structure.

Africa as a whole has many vigorous societies with characteristics that distinguish them from the classical simple societies. It relatively consists of widely spread ethnographic units, great in size, in terms of territorial and numbers as well as sharing common dialects-languages. Informants in this study observed that traditional Abanyole being part of the African ethnographic unit consider themselves as essential members of the larger Luhya tribe, which give them identity. They have knit large extended families. The informants were in agreement that the original Abanyole clans are Abamuli, Abasiratsi, Abamutete, Abahando and Abamuhaya whose genealogy is traced through Muhindila and Muhandu families, the offerings of Anyole who migrated from Uganda in search of security, water and green pasture. They finally converged at Esianana hill where they made the first thanksgiving.

The largest original sub-clans are Abamutete, Abasakami, Abasikhale, Abasiekwe, Abatongoi, Abasiratsi, Abahando and Abamang'ali. Most of them live in homesteads, build altars and preserve sacred spaces for worship. All clans put into practice Abanyole traditional religion whose social structure calls for collective responsibility.

It was a social evil for anybody to sneak out of the homestead, *Litala*, and indulge himself in any whim. Such a person would be kept under constant surveillance for three seasons so as to give him time to reform.

Abanyole had no names for weekdays; they worked throughout and rested only when there was a funeral. *Erotso* and *Esubwe* were their long and short seasons. Each season was ushered in through cleansing rituals, presided over by the ritual Priest, *Omwesalisi* or *Ombiti*. One season was marked and separated from each other at the planting, '*eliraka* and harvesting, '*elichesa*' time.

There emerged repeated phrases from the youth informants. They kept on referring to, *abakhulundu bakhale bafwa*, the most knowledgeable elders are not with us anymore; *abakuka bafwa*, "our grand parents are no more, they are not with us, they have died, we don't know much". "We can't do things the way they were done". The youth informants used these phrases to describe the most meaningful aspects of their traditional religious life. The expressions reflected a general feeling that Abanyole youths had strong attachments to their original cultural values and that the modern generation feels inadequate to act as in the past. Our youth respondents focused on the importance of not aping foreign religions and traditions in lieu of their own Abanyole traditional religious practices and beliefs. It is further ascertained that most youths still respect the Abanyole religious practices and beliefs. Most of the youth we interviewed found deep meaning in the particular relevant ritual actions that enhanced the unity of the community.

Emy (1981) and Herdt (1982) observed that, what happens in the child's environment greatly affected his intellectual heritage.

The knowledge and awareness about the aspects of cleansing rituals highly revamp youth morals. In traditional Abanyole, the practice of *cleansing rituals*, fosters a sense of sacredness, moulds their worship aspects, belief and respect for their elders.

The Abanyole traditional religion activates the viable practice of rituals that deals with the spiritual or religious aspect of the people. They believe in the God of their ancestors known as *Omungu* whose attributes are summed up in two fold attributes *Nabalala*, being present everywhere, all the time. *khakaba*, the provider for all that life entails.

Abanyole believe in the strength of prayer as demonstrated in the potent words uttered by *the ritual* priest, at every cleansing ritual action. Abanyole traditional cleansing rituals channels norms that support life wholly by counseling sessions and social activities. Cleansing rituals form a backbone of Abanyole socio-religious structure. Rituals emphasized on individual sobriety and group sociability. To understand the abanyole religious view, one has to be its practitioner by cultivating worship of ancestral God, recognizing his attributes and accepting the role of the priest in ritual making.

Abanyole are interwoven together by a common language, Olunyole which give them a sense of corporate identity, makes them share common feelings. It allows them accommodate personal differences and encourages peaceful life.

Cleansing ritual actions firmly hold all clans intact and maintain a balance between the natural and the spiritual world. Rituals promote authentic ways of life and enrich the heritage of Abanyole. They instilled a wide variety of knowledge in history, tradition, *imela-ifwo* and go far to instruct on how to maintain mutual family relations. The participation greatly enhanced the good of common life.

Abanyole have rich and skilled cultural heritage that outwardly can be seen done with painting using flowers, clay and ash on various objects and human bodies. Their art form is limited to pottery, weaving and painting.

Paintings and decorations done on human bodies are symbolic in nature; strips of beautiful bright colours painted on legs, arms, chest and the face symbolize people's appreciation for life and goodwill. Decorated bodies colours the harvest, wedding and planting rituals. Dancers decorate their musical instruments, hides, shrines, clay pots. They sing, dance, and give offerings, sacrifices to thank the supernatural God, ancestors and the living dead for good life. In cases of sorrow, death, calamity, mourners have to decorate their hands, faces with ash and white wash. Other objects painted include the three legged traditional stools and the elders cane, painted dark grey and dark red which as a symbol of authority, qualification to perform ritual activities, and gives an elder power to preside over disputes.

Special baskets, hides, calabash, horns, mats weaved from *amakhola*, (banana dry fibres) and *amotoko*, (papyrus strings) are decorated in white with orange strips for special personages such as brides, grooms and ritual leaders.

Tattoos are neither practical nor allowed among the Abanyole. They believe that such marks exposed one to physical danger as well as vampire attacks.

Elder Akolo recalled that priests, priestesses and assistant elders do bodily art and symbolism at dawn, implying that they have a religious significance. It had to. He further disclosed that spirits had pleasure in the activities presented to them by the decorated or painted bodies when pioneering the acceptable ritual offerings and sacrifice at specified shrines in the community.

However, tend to describe all colours as gradations between black and white. Most of their colour words are descriptive of origin rather than the shade. Their practical concern is more with the nature of the material that the object was made of, and the virtue of its particular colour. The commonest colours are *indafu*- white, *yobulimo*- green, *imwamu*- black, *itsayi*- red, *esikokhekokhe* or *ekhule*-greish. In as much as fetishes have had numinous mysteries so are colours. The Abanyole colour description reveals why spotted objects, birds or animals wear not accepted in ritual use. Ritual leaders highly recommend spotless animals, birds or object for ritual offerings and sacrifices because they wore natural colours which pleases the ancestral spirits, the living dead spirits and the supernatural God when such animals or objects are presented as sacrifices and offering. Colours and other ritual elements emphasized on the influence that an action has upon a receptive organism.

Eliade (1965), and Turner (1967) observed that images and symbols in traditional communities highly influenced their religious beliefs and practices.

Abanyole have several coloured objective symbols, shrines, altars and fetishes that represent divine presence and hence respected as holy features. Every colour has a combination of unifying life elements attached to it. It adds physical sensation, encourages the feeling of touch on barks, leaves, feathers, animal skins, fur, and their slimy softness or hardness that is paramount to enhance cleansing rituals.

A reddish early morning sky symbolizes a bad approaching season. White symbolizes death or sorrow; whenever a spouse died either the husband or the wife, (widow, widower – *Omulekhwa*, *Omukhutsakhali*) walks down in the company of men incase of a widower and of women in case of a widow to *mwilongo* where one has to be

smeared with white wash as funeral dirges are said. A ritual was performed declaring one to be in a mourning state and funeral songs, "dirges" said.

The Abanyole altar has three stones, symbolizing completion in spiritual powers, whereas one stone symbolizes the presence of the supernatural Omungu, the other two are symbols of the ancestors and the living dead. This symbol is mysterious, as it is not clearly known how it started.

There are several ritual symbols of animals and birds, for example black cats and owls are symbols of misfortunes. The Abanyole ritual leaders had paraphernalia required in performing the said rituals. For example rainmakers had rain-making pots full of water placed in their shrines; they also had powerful herbs, sheep dung and urine kept safely in their shrine. Otenyo, seka, oka and Esipisu professional rain makers warned us that rain should never under any circumstances be referred to as rainfall but 'water'. Water was highly valued as a religious symbol, an element commonly required to be used in all rituals. It was used in both the physical and spiritual functions. There were no concoctions for cleansing impurities without water.

Geertz (1966) observed that the construction, apprehension and utilization of symbolic forms are social events like any one; are as public as marriage and as observable as agriculture.

Abanyole healers kept in their shrines or homesteads varieties of herbs, calabashes, gourds as ritual containers while seers and medicines kept beads, herbs, divination gourds; priests and ritual elders had a ritual cane which is assumed to have some excessive powers. The cane is not to be pointed at anyone anyhow lest one would face death or be struck with physical ailments. There are many other Abanyole cleansing

ritual symbols whose meaning did not involve use of common knowledge but searching for the real interpretation from the right persons, well versed in Abanyole religious beliefs and practices. Informants of such nature are few and far between.

Abanyole valued nature in a religious way. The supernatural being in charge of the whole nature. He is mystical, nobody knew every aspect of his moral nature but his power was real. He operated through humans such as ritual agents, healers, rainmakers, seers and diviners. These are special phenomena through which mystical powers of the supernatural being are manifested.

There are natural places that symbolically are meeting points between the visible and invisible worlds. They are preserved for religious activities, rituals, prayers and sacrifices. They serve the community as centers of faith, worship and belief, or etc example, the sacred trees, cave.

Elders are responsible for the safety of religious spaces. The power and influence of Abanyole religious priests is most noticeable at every traditional ritual function where the youths and other community members are reminded of the taboos of ritual rules.

The elder who also played the role of a priest oversaw every homestead ritual. He wakes up earlier before anyone else. He faces the East to bless his clansmen, request the ancestors and the supernatural powers to provide life from the rising to the setting of the sun.

The ritual agents greatly understand the power of the spoken lip-word or potent word. The retention, the force and the challenge from any ritual depended on the spoken-

lip word from the priest. Every constructive altar deals with a series of problems either directly or indirectly connected to the family and the community.

All informants observed that, ritual actions develop, progress and discipline the Abanyole social life, because where there could have been chaos, ritual is used to constitute order at an individual's or group level. Omutuku the elder believes that ritual is an action done, it is not to be thought about nor conceptualized but mandatory to be done physically on the ground. It is not to be questioned.

The ritual agent is therefore abused or mistreated for failing to stop any forthcoming calamities. In such a situation, a ritual fails to function because the clan deploys force. But man-made tragedies such as, casting spells, magic and witchcraft are not tolerated. Clan elders set a pace to piece together dramatic events surrounding contentious issues, which kept wrong doers at bay. For example, tempering with landmarks, barrenness and death of children.

It is observed that the affected ritual participants engage in a ritual action in order to transmit collective messages to them. It happens when sacrifices and offerings are eaten and shared. But at times the ritual leaders give back blessed offerings to the owners for their own consumption. Part of the sacrifice is left at the shrine to be eaten by wild animals, insects especially the safari ants.

Sacrifices among the Abanyole are made to appease the ancestral spirits with an objective of preventing them from causing misfortunes among the clans. Sacrifices humour the supernatural being and the ancestors so that they can effectively restore order and give the community long life with many children. Taylor (1966) stressed that the primary of religious ideas born of emotional experiences are achieved through rituals.

All ritual actions are incomplete without prayers or speech, symbol and a formula or process. A ritual speech is in the ritual's integral part alongside sacrifices that are shared, proving that the participants had accepted the ritual action *in-toto*.

The Abanyole ancestors are great heroic sages who portray the highest level of traditional and rational reasoning. Their proverbial speeches, wise sayings, revealed their deep elaborate and fascinating knowledge which when interpreted suited life well. For example,

- *Omulayi siabulanga imbala* (translated as There is no good man without a problem). The saying literally meant that one cannot be good all round and encounter no problem.
- *Ifula eyolucheka yakhwikamie*.

Literal translation – “fierce rain storm will force you to take cover or shelter on the corridor of your enemy”.

The saying meant that, don't swear or take an oath that you will never have anything to do with those you disagree with especially relatives because some life experience will force you to seek for their assistance. Sacrifices, offerings, sacred features such as altars, the constructed or natural shrines absolutely intertwine the living to their supernatural being, the ancestors and the living dead for continuity and consistency of life.

It is notable that many of the Abanyole village names are associated with the most fascinating, legendary and valuable sacred features. For example; Emusenjeli and Emuhaya villages derived their names from the famous sacred trees from where religious

rituals were conducted especially healing and war rituals. Eliangoma village is derived from a massive tall rock with a curved cap like small stone on top of it, which the warriors used as a sounding bell to warn the villagers of the coming enemies. The sound reverberated throughout the village and its environs. Esikomoli community center which is named after the *Esikomoli* shrine that was destroyed by the first missionaries to evangelize Abanyole. Ebwali village is the artifact of Mbwali a historical site where burial rituals were done.

Cleansing ritual actions enhance people's beliefs in their supernatural being. They harmonize links between man and God even among themselves. They ensured life continuity and abundance especially having plenty of farm harvests, many children as well as good wise men. The Abandonee religious structure comprises of activity network in a descending order:

- The Supreme Being who is accorded the top most priority ruled over the whole nature
- The ancestral spirits that mediate between man and God; are very delicate and call for extreme respect and care. For example, if they are not named after they would cause havoc even death. Ritual agents are called upon to find out the demands of spirits and inform the community about it. Every now and then cleansing rituals are performed to drive away bad spirits that endangered the community; like sicknesses and deaths.
- Man, in whom religious values are invested is the basic and fundamental network of social relations. Rituals are composed of various processes that were deemed to constitute the Abanyole traditional religion.

4.4 **Abanyole Shrines and Transcendent Experience**

The Abanyole traditional way of life is their very ritual way of life. Life is a mystery and its revelations lied in the hands of the ritual priest who performs cleansing rituals related to spiritual beliefs from specific shrines.

All shrines are natural except for the individual ones that are marked by miniature structures. The practical ritual mastery or knowledge is made clear to the participants from communal shrines. Every ritual step performed from the shrines emphasized on the beliefs and practices of the homo religious (the religious man).

The Abanyole shrines are like arenas where pairs of forces interact, the transcendent and man's powers. During our research, we visited sacred spaces and shrines namely Emukusa, Esibakala, Esirambats, Ebulonga – Etwenya, Ebusiekwe Musichimbilo, Omukawino thicket and Omuhay sacred tree.

Abasiekwe clan has the vast number of ritual shrines especially those located at Ebusiekwe hills. These sacred spaces have various articles and items left after cleansing ritual actions, such as potsherds, graves, water pots, herbs and domestic tools. All shrines are religious sanctuaries and their presence proved the fact that Abanyole are extremely religious. They marked the physical point of contact between the spiritual (transcendent experience) and the physical worlds.

The Emukusa shrine is the most remarkable and outstanding sacred space where extra ordinary cleansing ritual actions were observed. The shrine is the most feared; respected and restricted to an extent that mentioning its name alone sent chilling waves in the minds of people. Only ritual agents and community elders are allowed

entrance into Emukusa shrine. All villagers are to keep their distance from the Shrine. Today, it is reserved as a religious site by the local government under management of Luanda town council. The practice of Abanyole traditional religious ritual in Emukusa shrine makes a distinct between human and something that transcends them not substantively in the sense that the religious shrine was necessarily believed to occupy another world but functionally in the sense that within this one world of experience the ritual agent, believed that he encounters powers that were impressively greater than (transcendent to) his own.

He was exposed to several dimensions of Transcendent Experience. During this experience, elaborate conceptions and dispositions are fused for the participants that penetrate to the real meaning and dynamics of burial and worship rituals. It is believed that the Emukusa shrine is over one hundred years old. The shrine is preserved for burial rituals of:

- The dead member of the council of elders.
- The honourable and nobility; For example the warriors and soloists in war songs, cattle race leaders and others who had special roles in the community.
- Community specialists, such as rainmakers and stoppers, herbalists, ritual priests and ritual agents.

The elders make a ceremonial entry into the shrine carrying one who had died. They prepare a grave and make a chair like shape inside the grave. The dead is forced to sit on it upright. No soil is returned to the grave but big pots, are used to cover the entire corpse. Two small holes are made in the pot to let the eyes remain visible.

The last elder to be buried in this position was Ngota in 1961. A common factor that comes out clearly is that the Abanyole do not believe that someone can die and leave them but always become a secret spirit dwelling among them and cares for their liveliness. The dead see and that was reason enough for the elders not to close their eyes inside the huge pots. Ritual agents wash their legs and hands in a waterway that runs through the shrine they symbolized the beginning of a new life and removal of pollution. They leave behind the hoes used for digging graves. The ritual agent, speaks potent words as they wash in water, stopping the spirits of the dead from haunting them.

- The ritual leader speaks words, after which he reveals all the secrets and desires of the dead that were to be passed over to the family members after burial ritual. They spend three days in this shrine uttering words such as "The spirits should continue to live with us. Newly elected elders are exposed to and taught secrets of the community during this burial ritual activity. They take oaths of allegiance and acquisition of ritual knowledge.

The ritual agent teaches them how to discipline errant members. This is one reason that makes a ritual pattern to be part of the education of Abanyole.

One informant said that the Esianganyinya shrine, the original home of Nganyi the rain maker who migrated to Ebusiekwe hills is directly linked to other ritual shrines by supernatural powers such that whatever happens in any one of the shrines, the elders in those shrines immediately know about it and quickly arranged for action. There is need for more research to be done on these shrines to find out what powers link them together.

It is believed that after the cleansing ritual has been performed no fire of any kind would burn down the shrine. Strange graves and several potsherds are still visible in the shrine and big snakes have occupied the hollow pots left after the decomposing of copses. The shrine is a restricted space and ordinary villagers are prohibited from working into the shrine, grazing their animals in it, firewood is not to be collected from the shrine or any tree cut from it. Anybody who violates the restrictions ends up dying instantly or hailstorms would destroy everything in the community.

The significant of ritualization was clearly structured from the cleansing ritual actions that took place in Emukusa shrine located in Luanda. A close description and evaluation of these cleansing rituals tend to develop two simultaneous patterns of spiritual powers or forces opposing each other. There are powers operating inside the shrine that preserve Abanyore religious beliefs and are closed to or concealed from those who are authorized not to enter the shrine. At times they mistake the ritual agent of religious biasness and for denying them entry into the shrine. One informant said that somehow, such a situation reduced the spiritual powers of a social person instead of augmenting them.

4.5 **Worship Models**

Religion among the Abanyole simply means to worship. It requires sacrifices of domesticated animals and offerings of farm produce. Worship was a means by which the Abanyole maintained a balance between the natural and the spiritual world. Religion was a force that held all physical and spiritual elements together.

Abanyole have no myths of creation but ascribe various attributes to God; strongly believed that *Omungu*, the omnipotent God controls the entire nature is everywhere and sees everything or every event that human do. This explains reasons for their being keen to worship and perform rituals.

Omungu is the name given to their supreme being, who is not to be offended, otherwise this would result into a curse or disaster would befall the entire community. In the event of any human offence, then rituals are to be made to appease Him.

The Abanyole are committed to ritual actions because they believe that through them, God intervenes in their lives to avert evil and propagate good. The foremost quality ascribed to *Omungu* is that of him being the giver of life. His role as the sustainer of life becomes evident from the way *Omungu* is addressed in prayers made before and after every ritual. For example, at dawn, the priest has to chew finger millet and spit it while facing the rising sun uttering potent words, "You are God the Omnipotent and Omnipresent, you have given us Light, Life and all our wealth. Protect my people so that evil meets none of them." The priest also faces where the Sun set and without spitting towards the direction says, "No evil from the west should arise against my people." The Omnipotent God, *Omungu* is also conceived as *Khakaba*, meaning the provider of all good things that are essential to people. The Abanyole have observed that, Abanyole highly value the moral nature of God and equate Him to a responsible Father who always provides essential needs to His family, maintains order and harmony in the family. The Abanyole ritual worship is reinforced as a central category of social life whose pivoting force is within the omnipotent God. Apparently the Abanyole concept of the supernatural being is dualistic from the fact that rituals necessitated the good of the community, drove

evil out as directed by the priest from the altar, a holy place. These actions proved that the concepts of good and evil existed in the Abanyole religious practices and beliefs.

According to elders Tichia and Echoka, prayers exclusively accompany rituals made at every occasion. The Abanyole word prayer is synonymous with worship and the Abanyole prayers are addressed to God basing on His three qualities, as the creator, provider and protector. The nature of the event dictates how prayer, is made either at family, individual or community level. The elder is the first person to wake up at dawn and usher in prayers facing the Sun, then the rest of the members join him. Prayers are commonly made at sunrise and sunset either publicly or communally. But there are several events that prompted the process of prayers to accompany specific rituals such as:

- Crises rituals including tribal wars, drought and famine, and insect invasions or pandemics.
- Seasonal rituals that involved planting and harvesting activities.
- Rites of passage rituals that revitalize the naming system; initiation rituals for example, the ritual of bleeding women's faces to leave blade marks for beauty was very much idealistic among the Abanyole as well as circumcision and marriage rituals.
- Purification rituals, which ridded curses, contaminations. For example, patricide and matricide acts, incest and bad dreams.
- Anointing rituals that embroider the virgin bride, esironde, on her wedding day.

Ndale, one of the oldest surviving administrators explained why the Ebwali shrine has been preserved to date. It is believed that some of the dead buried in Mbwali would trouble family members through dreams or kept on appearing to the living. A cleansing ritual had to be made after exhuming the corpse and cremating it to ashes. Ritual Leaders prepare herbal medicine that is sprinkled around the entire compound of the family, everything in the house is sprinkled by the medical herb including all those that the dead appeared to in dreams. A sheep is slaughtered and its blood spread at the altar, *Obwali*. The Priest speaks harsh potent words to the dead spirits then throws the ashes back to the grave to be absolutely buried and never to trouble the living again.

- Swearing rituals which deals with cases of unfaithfulness, removal of landmarks and stealing livestock are important because they reinforce laws. For example, a council of elders invites all prime suspects in the livestock theft to appear before it. Any suspect who denies committing such an offence is made to walk through a ring or a coil made from the *olwolia* twigs or leaves and placed between *Olusolia* and *Omurembe* trees – meaning *markhania lurea* and *nandi flame* trees where an altar is set. A ritual leader takes a milk gourd, holds it high and speaks harsh utterances condemning anybody who drinks or denies drinking the ritual milk. He is condemned by ancestral spirits and cursed by the lips of the council of elders. Any suspect who walks through the coil knowing very well that he is a livestock thief immediately dies after crossing the coil. The coil is the symbol of death and always determines the end life of any victim in such a ritual.

- The Abanyole therapeutic systems. The purpose of such ritual is to deal with diseases that attack farm crops, livestock and people. It involves offering sacrifices, eating specific diet and giving prescribed gifts. Ritual leaders assemble all community members at a specific common shrine to deal with any disease affecting the entire community. The Abanyole therapeutic rituals were highly affected by the ritual leader's potent words. Whenever a priest prepares medicine and dispenses any person, that priest according to Abanyole traditional religion always invoked the power the supernatural being. He makes the people sip the prepared medicine that symbolizes life.

Keen observers especially Mbiya council elders noted that magicians and sorcerers skewed resources from their clients but life is never restored instead they dwarfed it. They are not accepted by the Abanyole at all. Potent words were spoken according to the nature of ritual medicine to be administered; for example protective medicine, success medicine, like in the case of 'wresting'. Rituals reveal the fact that ritual leaders value human life more than materialism and the Abanyole bear true marks of human nature. For example they rehabilitate and integrate war prisoners, women and children captured at war time are highly protected, never annihilated nor raped.

One informant, Omoro, elaborated that, there was two effectual entities of a ritual namely, the sacrifice and the offering. The sacrifice referred to cases where animal life was destroyed in order to present the sacrificial animal either in whole or in part to the supernatural being, the spirits of the dead or ancestors. It symbolized removing stains of curses. Since most of the rituals are meant for communal functions, the community offers a goat as a sacrificial animal. The animal is kept at the elders homestead

overnight. He then brings it to the altar the following day. At times chicken are also used. The sacrificial animal is to be strangled then slaughtered by elders assisting the ritual leader.

However, Tichie the informant pointed out that the sacrificial sheep is the only one used for cleansing and reconciliation especially where murder occurs. The process is done very early in the morning at a special altar, women bring water, some dry finger millet and its flour; the ritual leader and the clan elders bring firewood for the ritual. The victims sit in the middle of the set shrine and the altar, while the ritual leader muttered potent words when facing the East, where the sun rises. Such a ritual is the most immense and acute that if not carefully done ancestral spirits can destroy or curse the whole clan because of the careless crime committed by individual or other members of the clan. The ritual appeased the gods and calmed their anger. As a crisis ritual, it restored a balance and orderliness between Abanyole and their ancestors.

The ritual leader prepares before hand a herbal and reddies a sacrificial sheep. Family and clan members gather for the cleansing ritual, fire is lit using two friction sticks in the altar. A sheep is strangled, slaughtered and cut into pieces. Some pieces are roasted on the altar and the ritual leader carefully observed to see a thin smoke moseying straight to disappear into the early morning blue sky or clouds as proof that the ancestors accepted their cleansing ritual. The sheep is the symbol of peace established between the clan members and their ancestral spirits.

Whoever committed murder, incest and all the affected family members kneels before the medicine container to drink of its content, lick some ash, and the medicine sprinkled on them by the ritual leader. After which, they would walk back to their huts

where the ritual leader had to anoint everything in the hut and around the compound, including the livestock. The whole process symbolized life restoration.

They enter into reconciliation time by sharing meals prepared from the finger millet flour and the roasted mutton that remained. Cow dung fire that, never goes off is left burning on the altar and sometimes later the ritual leader comes to discard the ashes thus making the clan start a new life. Songs were not to be sung when such a ritual was in progress nor even after. However a child born out of incest died after the ritual function; Osula remarked that the death of a child born out of incest characterized or symbolized the removing of the lineal curse from the affected families.

The Abanyole harvest rituals did not involve many animal sacrifices but mainly from produce. It is a blood free ritual, meant for thanks-giving, appreciation and worshipping the Omnipotent God and the ancestral spirits for good harvest, in blessing season, good rains, long life, health, children and all sorts of blessings the community was enjoying. For example, a clan elder assembles everybody in the open field for a communal harvest ritual. They are led into prayers and thanksgiving offering. Each family has to make sure that it has sufficient storages or silos. All tools used in cultivation and harvesting crops brought before the ritual elder, beginning with the clan leaders then the rest followed. The ritual takes place after everyone had finished harvesting and drying the grains ready to store them.

When everything is in order, the ritual leader cleanses the village, the tools and blesses his people that the work of their hands would be fruitful. A shrine is erected and thatched with special grass. An altar is set and a three-end-forked fetish, pegged at the center of the altar. The priest takes a blameless spring chicken, black in colour, utters

potent words at it for sometime, and then places it in between the forked end of the fetish. The sacrificial spring chicken is held firmly at the fetish by the supernatural powers until the ritual is over. The ritual leader then leads the clan members into a thanksgiving prayer. They applaud by clapping hands breaks into singing, greetings and dancing as the ritual leader chews finger millet spitting it into the air and broadcasting part of other harvest on the ground. The spring chicken is then removed from the fetish; strangled and slaughtered, meals prepared and brought by women are shared among all the clan members while praising their Omungu for each blessing. The lowering of the spring chicken was symbolic of bringing down all blessings from the Omungu, the ancestral spirits and the spirits of the dead into the forms of the people.

Makumba the Abasikhale clan elder, describes the ritual as an exemplary religious behaviour embraced by the Abanyole. He further said that a ritual sacrifice was a means of transforming an individual and the community as a whole. A cleansing ritual altar bears in a self marks of life and death sweeping around the altar symbolizes worship.

It was clear, that even the poorly educated Abanyole with no grasp of theological concepts still tended to have precise accurate knowledge of ritual practices and their effects on human life. Ritual agents engage participants in ritual actions so as to transmit collective messages to them. It is a voluntary participation, compelled not by circumstances but by the fact that it is the requirement of the individual's form of worship. Clan members make prayers while facing the East where the sun rises. They feared the sun because it is the source of life, it brought newness of life every morning and extended it yonder.

Ritual procedures vary and are adapted for various functions depending on the prompting circumstances; for example a wedding ritual is only and strictly applicable to a virgin. A shrine is set at the front of the virgin's homestead and a goat skin regalia spread in the shrine. She sits on the regalia while maids surrounded her. Only elderly women who married as virgins and have good reports are privileged to be agents of the wedding rituals.

Ritual agents dress the virgin bride in a *regalia* made from different colours of glittering beads around her neck, wrist and the head. The ritual elements for the occasion include soaked finger millet flour safely carried in a woven plate and sesame mixed with ground nuts carefully put in a special calabash and well prepared cow fat that would be smeared on her skin. The ritual leader anoints the virgin bride with a mixture of sesame and pure finger millet flour and fine crushed groundnuts. The anointing elements reflect or symbolizes fertility and a life of holiness ascribed to the virgin of integrity, respect and honour.

The priest and elderly women blesses the virgin bride and offer prayers commending her before *Omungu* and the ancestors. Soloists lead villages into songs of praise that have deep meaning portraying purity and defining the nature of the bride who has been accepted by the clan and village elders. Suddenly all villagers join the ritual actions with songs and dances. The meaning behind the ritual was to request *Omungu* to bless the virgin bride, increase her bosom by making her, bring forth pure children, bring forth sons and daughters, handsome and beautiful, to fill the valleys and the fertile land.

It is believed that *Abanyole* find it easier to adapt ritual practices from one generation to another because of a common language, *Olunyole* which enables them to

gather and keep the accumulated knowledge drawn from the environment and nature. Oluoch, Abahando ritual elder reiterated that rituals enrich the Abanyole social interactions and train people to occupy rightful and respectful positions in the community thus enhancing one to one relations.

Rituals comprise of many processes that eventually constitute the Abanyole culture. Osango, an informant, made a strong distinction that ritual and belief are interwoven and yet separate since it is conceivable that clan members can accept beliefs but not ritual activities associated with them. For example the *nanyitsa* ritual that faced out the crop frost disease is done by sounding drums late in the evening, thus sending the disease to the land of the dead. It is not necessary for one to participate in the ritual but can choose not to.

All rituals are sources of security where the environment proves hostile for example along the boundaries where wars take place. Cleansing rituals bring Abanyole together, express the cohesion that its different participants in rituals helped sustain the life of the individual and the family. For example, every warrior first and foremost has to be cleansed after the war before joining his family members. The ritual is meant to exorcise evil spirits of the dead who might follow the warrior after war and remove a series of bloodstain curses that could follow the warrior especially from those he killed during the war. The presence of the priest, is absolutely essential in enhancing effective cleansing ritual action. Priests and Priestesses are the Abanyole cleansing ritual megastars. The required qualifications for a priestess ritual leader are;

- One who married as a virgin bride.
- The woman who is in her menopause age.

- One who has a good report and character in the village.

Priestesses are mainly responsible for initiating wedding rituals and child baptism. Ritual leaders are anointed agents of the people as well as heavenly guardians. Andulu, an informant made it clear that every ritual agent is a shepherd, and men are impotents. Elderly women, beyond menopause age are responsible for recommending the man to become the priest. The proposed candidates are carefully chosen and presented to the elderly frigid women for vetting. Beautiful mature girls are made to sit with their open chests and breasts in a semi-circle before the proposed ritual priests. Women carefully observed them, whoever fails to gain erection qualifies to be the priest. Women quickly do away with proposed priests who erected. It was assumed that such active men would spoil the young girls should they become priests. A priest is accessible to everybody regardless of age. Ritual leaders earn reputation for being honest, faithful and abrasive.

Tuti, the Abatongoi clan youth leader has grown believing that the Abanyole ritual practices are inseparable from ritual spaces, shrines and ritual leaders. The reason being that the link between man and the spiritual realm is only realized by performing rituals from an altar set at a shrine. Family rituals are carried out from homestead shrines situated in the nearby thickets, behind or at the front of huts. Shrines are simple, either natural or artificial in appearance. Abanyole natural sacred places associated to religious rituals included: Esirambatsi landmarks found in Ebunangwe, Ebusiekwe hills found in Ebusiekwe and Esianana hill today known as Ebulonga hills found in Ebulonga.

There are also trees associated to ritual sacredness particularly *omurembe* (*erythrina lutea*) whose seeds are medicinal, also used for making medicines. Its trunk is used for making mortars and drums. The tree connected to death, sorrow and curses.

No wonder the ancients referred to it as, *omusala okwesilamo* translated as, 'a curse infested tree, and at times could take a heavy toll of human life. Sacred *omurembe* grew to age, naturally had to dry, fall down and rot. Informants ascertained that, the tree is the most feared. Abanyole believe that the tree registered people's talks or words. A chilling demonstration of devastating ritual consequences of all unbridled diseases, hatred, law-breaking, taboos, witchcraft, sorcery, magic and social abuse were solved once for all at this tree. It is a taboo to cut the tree down because evil will befall the community such as a heavy rainfall accompanied by thunder, lightning and storm would destroy human, animal and plant life. Women are forbidden to use the tree as firewood because its smoke alone can blind family members. Burning down this sacred tree is like burning the dwelling place of spirits.

Nevertheless, Abanyole percussionists use this sacred tree under which no cleansing ritual has taken place for making their best musical instruments. Cleansing rituals are performed because of what people believe and in turn they cement and communicate Abanyole religious beliefs. Eventually rituals developed as channels of communicating religious ideas, repeating and disseminating them to all future generations.

Abanyole also believe that the physical appearances of some totems in homesteads necessitated immediate preparation of a cleansing ritual. Such totems were believed to be mediums through which evil operated. For example, an owl's, presence symbolized death and bad omen. An owl is associated with witchcraft and sorcery. It is a taboo for an owl to land anywhere at the homestead premises. Seka, the ritual elder painfully said that, whenever one heard a family elder say, *a death curse is hovering over*

me. Then a cleansing restoration ritual had to be organized quickly to evade the impending death, a monster hovering in the family. A ritual sacrifice, involving the slaughtering of a brown sheep by the ritual agents prescribed a cure for death; herbs and charms are used to protect or shield the family from the curse of death or reversed sufferings that the family had to face. A council of elders summons suspected magicians behind this evil totem, the owl for cross examination and if found guilty while the cleansing ritual was in process then all their paraphernalia would be confiscated and burnt and the magician cursed or condemned to death. The ritual consisted of a set of moral judgments, thus assisted in reinforcing, restoring and maintaining the moral order of the community. It made people conform to the accepted standards of behaviour in order not to be equated with evil personages.

The ritual agent commended urgent restoration ritual for the reason that it reversed suffering and avoided the affected family to seek revenge from either a magician or a sorcerer. Abanyole ritual elders never entertained revenge. They believed that revenge broke the order and harmony of the community, created fear, suspicion and slavery. Revenge also annoyed the supernatural god, the ancestors and the living dead.

Abanyole have continued to participate in various elaborate cleansing ritual activities with all respect through many totems. For example, in war and wrestling rituals, the ritual agents prepare medicinal herbs and sprinkle the mixture across the wrestling field and the boundary demarcating the two warring communities. The ritual roots out the spirits of defeat and when the totem is buried in the same area, it buries defeat and practically constructs victory for the Abanyole wrestlers and warriors. The

Abanyole especially Abamutete clan prepare war rituals under Omuhaya sacred tree. The feature is the physical source for religious expressions of Abamutete.

The Omuhaya sacred tree is estimated to be over one hundred years old. Only warriors congregate around the tree to participate in war rituals. Women are not under any circumstances allowed to come closer to this tree when the ritual is in progress. Their ritual leader prepares the ritual by first recognizing the significance of *Omungu* whom he addressed as *the divine protector*. This is away of appreciating Him in anticipation to victory given because of Him being “all powerful, The protector in whom lies all human security”.

The ritual leader offers a goat as a burnt sacrifice. The sacrificial animal is strangled then slaughtered and placed on the altar. The ritual agent anoints each warrior with herbal medicine mixed with blood starting with the war commanders. It is an example of a crises ritual whose objective is to prevent enemies from extirpating them.

The clan is assured of losing war only when the thin smoke from the altar does not ascend straight into the sky. A special appeal has to be made to the supernatural powers to model the whole ritual action again. Emergency consultations are made by clan elders under the priest to find out what could have caused the deities refuse the sacrificial offering and the prayers of the warriors and clan members. In actual sense, the cleansing ritual is just a means by which the assembled clan members attach their feelings and emotions to the spiritual deities. Only the priest's potent words moves the deities to react in a more meaningful manner and respond to the clan's needs. The ritual itself has no power to effect intercession of deities, pacify the dead, bring rain nor make seeds germinate but the attachment of the priest between them and the deities through his

spoken word has powers to dislodge the supernatural being and the ancestral deities to respond to the demands of the clan.

The Abanyole cleansing rituals strengthen links between humanity and the Supreme Being. They cultivated their dependence on Him and increased their harmony and trust in Him. Rituals reminded Abanyole of all the attributes of the Supreme Being known as 'Omungu', For example He is the distributor of all good things in the world, His presence is everywhere and sees everything.

The in-depth discussion of cleansing rituals in the following chapter clearly describes and designates the role of attributes of *Omungu*. Cleansing rituals enhance religious values that affected the social and cultural implications of Abanyole life as disclosed widely in the forth-coming chapter.

4.6 The Human Body in Abanyole Ritual Activities

The personhood in traditional Abanyole ritual is structured by social, economic and religious activities. The social human body is the basic organ through which ritual practices activated the Supernatural Being the ancestral and spirits of the living dead to become active in the social lives of the community. He is the most resourceful person, who possesses vast knowledge and experience in Abanyole rituals. He is the virtuous person whose presence has a greater impact on the ritual domains. He comes on the scene to advice wherever Abanyole are faced with socio-religious disruptions. He is not necessarily a religious personage according to this study but can be ritualized and authorized by virtue of his respect to preside over ritual actions.

The social human body is ritualized at a sacred ritual space. The space is demarcated, preserved and controlled by the clan council of elders. An example is the Emukusa ritual shrine, which today is preserved by Luanda Town Council as a resource cultural shrine.

The body is an important entity of the traditional Abanyole community. It is either male or female who marry, conceive and bring forth offsprings. One informant noted that the ritual body is fragile prone to sickness, committing wrongs that has to be cleansed by rituals performed around it, transcended and the soul purified at every given ritual activity.

The presence of the body makes the occasion very seductive in a sense that it is the center of the ritual action. Thus the body mediates all action: it is the medium for the internalization and reproduction of social values and for the simultaneous constitution of both the self and the world of social relations.

Obuma, an informant and a scholar argued that social practices, structured the body, thereby constructing “social beings” through basic religious practices and values. The socialized body is regarded as the source of power that illuminates the cultivated rules and impacts of ritual actions in the individual’s entire life logically showing that the divinities are active and real among the Abanyole.

Informants are in agreement that the Abanyole cleansing ritual practices solves extreme problems such as curses, illness and drought affecting both the community and the ritual body. Rituals also model the social body to enable it focus on the ritual dynamics. The social ritualized body subordinates to the complex dimensions of cleansing rituals taking specific positions such as sitting on the colourful decorated hide

cross-legged. The ritualized priest is required to sit on a three-legged traditional stool, or on heels so as to concentrate on the principles that underline the nature of the cleansing ritual and not necessarily in the act of the sitting positions. Abanyole attached special importance to ritual actions and not body positions. They believe that once there is a ritual body, then there was a complete flow of communication from the supernatural being, through the ancestors down to the spirits of the living dead to reach the rest of the community. It goes far to preserve nature as the dwelling place of the divinities. The ritualized body qualifies to be the ritual agent that officiates Abanyole religious rituals. He is designated to make offerings, sacrifices and prayers on behalf of the Abanyole community. Community members visit some of these ritual agents in their homesteads for example rainmakers, clan elders, herbalists, priests and circumcisers. All offices are inherited from family elders except the priesthood office, which is elective. There exists a unified life experience expressed in, the Abanyole cleansing rituals that conceptualized their religious beliefs and practices. The ritual agent makes sure that understood by the traditional Abanyole as a way through which the community experiences and expresses its symbolic understanding of life and in turn conveyed it to the succeeding generations. The ritual becomes effective among the Abanyole because traditional authority characterizes the community. The ritual agent uses the traditional powers invested in him to bless the entire community, for example he anoints elders, prays, worships, appease the ancestors, request for good harvest, resolve conflicts and restore harmony. He never advocates for individualism but is an instrumental agent who shapes, structures and strengthens the community neither by suppressing nor imposing any activity to it but by

being a great teacher using organized wise sayings as committal instruments for social integration and consensus. For example,

- “*Andeka weikulu Sali owetsinyumba tsibili tawe*”, meaning, Unity is paramount.
- “*Chenda kalaha yola mumbo*”; meaning that take your time to do your work and you will succeed.
- “*Kata omuchesi yebalungwa*” meaning, even the wise listen to the instructions of other people.
- “*Olukhwi lworenyele nilwo olukhulisia omwosi*”, literal translation, the firewood you collect is the very one whose smoke affects you, translated as. what is yours however nasty it may be.
- “*Esituya khumukuru sienyanga owamenyamwo.*” Literal translation, whatever threatens the house pillar needs the attention of the house owner. Meaning – it is the owner of the house to solve hardships facing the family; a man cannot run away from his family’s problems. He should be the one to solve them amicably.

The ritual agent is far and away the very uttermost ritualized body empowered to reinforce, position and constitute ritual actions at a particular time. He is involved in specific structured social interactions between *omungu* and himself as he performs the cleansing ritual. Each and every ritual has its own distinct dimension and a peculiar form of social behaviour attached to its ritual features. The research findings revealed that sacredness and profanity facilitated different ritual objectives depending on the interests

of the ritual agent. Some ritual altars are set not for the good of the community while most of them are holistic in nature and benefits the community, the born and unborn children, women, men, the sick, the destitute, the health, animals and the whole land of the living.

The realities and traditional strategies ascribed to ritual altars can be explored in a practical process known as ritualization. It is a means of making ritual agents through social interactions or is a means of modifying forms of character of a thing, an object or a person into a ritual or ritual agents. Apparently the solidarity ritual agents are the apotheoses of the community. They are more acceptable, constructive and focused on community well being in contrast to the magic – witchcraft ritual agents.

The research reveals that magical-witchcraft ritual agents are informal agents and are only a few in numbers. They form the ritual of resistance, are opposed and confronted by the majority of Abanyole elders. They are associated with profanity. Their functions decorate the community with the character of revenge, jealousy, envy and hatred. They contribute to the communities' ills such as unexpected deaths, droughts, poor harvests, bareness or impotence among the family members and contentions, low animal production and harmfulness.

One informant commented that ritual of resistance is anti development, causes chaos, destruction and promotes all sorts of ill-motives within the Abanyole. The magical witchcraft ritual agents are very technical in their operations, can make technical appearances mostly at witching time-in darkness. Unfortunately reaching any witch-magician was hard because they are few, scattered and isolated; moreover nobody wishes to witness one visiting the shrines of witches and magicians.

As noted during the interviewing, the traditional Abanyole considered witchcraft-magic ritual agent a social misfit. Its presence invokes fear among the people because in most cases its agent is associated with bad events. The community believed that such agents used some mysterious powers to cause harm to successful community members. They are compared to snakes that bite to kill but don't eat. The Abonyole attributed every malevolent occurrence to witchcraft – magic agent, hence forced for their eradication from the social community to pave way for socio-religious achievement. If such an agent succeeded in his mission, the community suffered a lot and the only way to reverse suffering is to reconcile with the agent. The suffering community seeks for revenge. Such actions greatly affected the family and broke the order and harmony of the community. The Abanyole traditional council of elders is invested with community powers to confiscate and burn all the paraphernalia of magic-witchcraft ritual agents.

Crawford (1967:104) noted that belief in such ritual agents was an attempt to rationalize and understand the malevolent forces of nature and the misfortunes of life. It consisted of a set of moral judgments, hence, helped to reinforce ideas of what was good and bad or evil and who was good and bad. That kind of judgment helped restore and maintain the moral order of the community. The people would be able to conform to the acceptable standards of behaviour in order not to be equated to a magic-witchcraft ritual agent.

As noted during the interviews Abanyole council of elders, subjects the suspected magic-witchcraft ritual agent, to interrogation and only when sufficient evidence is gathered proving him guilty then is he charged with a banishment sentence and not mob justice. One respondent confirmed that, the words spoken by the traditional

council of elders against the witch ritual agent are extremely effective and powerful such that as the victim walked to his banishment destiny he died on the way.

The elders judgment contrasts with many other traditional world societies, for example, the biblical Old Testament Hebrews eliminated their omulosi by stoning him to death without proper evidence, but as long as one was mentioned to be a witch ritual agent.

A cross section of the informants said that such ritual agents were never supported and their extinction brought about a just community, orderly and coherent in which people would live upholding the moral order of the community.

On the other hand the ritual agent of Abanyole solidarity rituals is chosen openly, anointed and crowned as the community ritual agent in the presence of the entire clan members. Solidarity rituals are more domestic and integral to the welfare of the whole community. The ritual agent in such cases has the ability to predict the future events and is a great teacher of moral ethics. Solidarity rituals network through Abanyole religious life and aim at restoring life, good harvest, many animals, protected people from diseases and enhancing harmony and unit among the people. He always imparted the youths with essential strategies related to their lifestyles.

Nevertheless, ritualization is identified with the Abanyole cleansing rituals as a way of acting which made distinctions or differentiations between the two ritual actions, that was the solidarity and magic- witchcraft ritual actions.

This study shows that each case differentiates itself from the other by variety of features involved in ritual making. For example, the shrine where the solidarity ritual

takes place is accessible to all participants and is guarded by the elders. The altar is a restricted space because it is a sacred place, while the shrine is like a sanctuary. Symbols and features involved in magic-witchcraft rituals were different from those applied in solidarity rituals. Everybody has to prepare for and participate in cleansing solidarity rituals. A restricted code of communications takes place between the ritual agent and the supernatural power as he paces around the ritual space. It includes the community interacting and sharing the elaborate ritual festivals. The most interesting observation made is that the ritual slaughtered animal, bird or food staff is shared between all community members and the ritual agent, the priest at the end of the ritual action. The afore said actions were rarely done in magic-witchcraft ritual activities. The ritual is the only pivoting point that conditioned ritualization to be an effective social strategy.

A ritual in traditional Abanyole is a sacred entity, an essential strategy for instilling sacredness. Nevertheless, most ritual series which are practiced by contemporary Abanyole are still sources of religious interactions in all ritual actions. Hence ritualization is uniquely dramatized.

4.7 The Ritual Agent

A ritual agent is a significant title given to the specialist skilled in controlling, overseeing and developing explicit Abanyole religious cleansing ritual activities. His being elected into this occupation is fundamentally based on various qualifications. For example, he must possess leadership abilities, must be an elder. He must be sober, honest and faithful. He should know all community rules governing ritual spaces. Ritual Priestesses should be women beyond menopause age and respected members of the community. Such agents must be gentle, health and respectful.

The clan elders and the predecessor prepare an anointing ritual. Consultations are made and the ritual priest is declared as the ritual priest by acclamation.

Live participatory observation of this anointing ritual is quite breathtaking, for example the priest is adorned with a special heifer hide and a piece of stripped skin tied around his waist. He then swears before all clan elders that; he will always safeguard all the ancestral sacred spaces, will always anoint rightful leaders, advise and rebuke those who break Abanyole traditions. He promises to be the first and the last to see the sun rising and setting down.

It is observed that the priest has, a striking deep consciousness of the supernatural being, the ancestors and the spirits of the living dead. He is a dynamic specialist who focused all his resourceful prayers towards the Supreme Being structured and centred worship around the most powerful. He declared all His attributes, addressing each to a specific role or benefit for the community. Any other Abanyole religious personage cannot dispute the behaviour and rationale of the priest. He is the priest designate. He involved all his physical body, spiritual and social life to serving the people. He is under oath never to delegate duties but guided those interested in this kind of work. The outgoing aging priest is solemnly responsible for anointing his successor; the anointing process makes him or predestined him to spend the rest of his life in priesthood. The predecessor has to give hairy a four legged stool and shows him how to set an altar.

His family elders are instructed to set aside a thicket where varieties of medicinal trees are planted. It is preserved as a shrine or sacred space. Only the priest walks into it to gather his herbal medicines meant for cleansing rituals. A he-goat is

slaughtered to seal the anointing ritual. It is a totalistic activity that linked the community to the spiritual world through the priest. He is given all ritual tools and everyone has to carefully follow his piece of advice without faulting. The sacred thicket becomes a sanctuary for worship because the priest positions himself at it to offer prayers at dawn as he faces the rising sun.

There are scattered number of such sacred spaces for example, omukawino Emukusa and Esirambatsi sacred thickets preserved for circumcision and for capital crime cleansing rituals. Ritual agents offer free services to the community, though sometimes the community can pay them in kind whenever they wish to show their appreciation.

Ultimately, cleansing rituals that the priest, presides over formed the integral backbone of his prestigious roles in the community. The organization, authenticity and accuracy of his work fall short of being challenged by anyone from the community. What he says is legitimate, acceptable and final. One interesting factor is that the ritual agent, never conforms to the clans modes of life in relation to his religious vocation but to the complex teaching of the supernatural being and the ancestral spirits.

Anointing of the priest is the installing credential that strengthens him to maintain a balance between the past and the present Abanyole religious life by being directly accessible to the altar, the supernatural being, the spirits of the living dead and the ancestors. Any cleansing ritual is a legitimate mode of worship in which the participants have a face-to-face encounter with the real authority and the works of the supernatural power.

The popularity and development of rituals in traditional Abanyole strategically placed the ritual agent at a better position to fulfill separate functions at different levels; for example as seers, circumcisers, diviners, rain makers, clan elders, priests, blacksmiths and prophets. Ritual agents orchestrated ritual actions within their own religious bounds; constructed altars and shrines to restore orderliness and life among the traditional Abanyole. They do not depict cleansing ritual as a source of masking force subjecting the community to ritual ordeals nor to camouflage the individual's, clan's and family social disorder but rather openly show that the moral weaknesses of man can only be put right by the unique powers of the Deity who was reached through worship organized at the altar. The idea refuted the fact that the traditional Abanyole deified the sun. All ritual actions, arrangements and setting of altars, the potent vocabularies of ritual agents and obedience of community to comply with ritual rules is proof enough which show that Abanyole highly entrusted their lives in the supernatural being. He was invoked to come and be involved in the Abanyole social governance and religious affairs; whenever the ritual agent addressed Him several times at the altar. Whatever action the Supreme Being took was always for restoration of harmony, good relationships with His people and all creation; that was reason enough for the ritual priest to be upright in his morals. He maintained the sacredness of morality by staying very close to the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the rest of the community.

4.8 Modes Of Solidarity Rituals

4.8.1 Introduction

Solidarity rituals provide common bonds and reinforce community integration. They surrounded special occasions, which are observed by the traditional Abanyole. The Chapter analyses some of the most prominent rituals which were practised and observed by the traditional Abanyole; for example, rain-making and stopping, wedding, speeches, planting and harvesting, greetings; crises circumstances such as war, famine, murder, incest, anointing, bleeding dripping ritual and inauguration rituals. Such are powerful, invariant events that when put in practice revealed qualities of religious sacredness. The research has shown that ritual actions tended to place Men on the superior side than women. All ritual actions demand that ritual agents be wise, physically fit and those who participated in rituals actions were promised long life while old age was associated to wisdom. The study shows how rituals provided a structural mode of expression and response that supported either individual or group solidarity. Certainly the researcher has analyzed factors surrounding the ritual practices among the Abanyole.

4.8.2 Cleansing Healing Rituals

There were innumerable occasions when healing cleansing rituals were performed and administered by:

- Herbalists, professional ritual who are possessed with the gift of knowing different varieties or classes of medicinal herbs – medicinal trees.
- Medicine men, who are great intercessors, constantly in communion with the clan spirits.

- Priestesses skilled in treating infants and expectant mothers.

These rituals are non-magical since they are performed in the open with all clan members participating. In such cases prayers accompany each ritual action. One ritual elder commented that purification and cleansing healing rituals are the same. The rituals are still paramount to date. Any visit to Abanyole markets, especially Luanda, significantly explains everything explicitly. The markets are flooded with every kind of herbal medicine, the Abanyole buy the herbal medicines prescribed to them by middle-aged men and women. Most of the interior homesteads have planted medicinal trees and vines. Some of the vines are symbolic in nature. A vine, (*imbasa*) grows as climbers and twirls along the trees. One ritual agent, Ndululu, said that *imbasa* was the emblem of prosperity; more particularly it symbolized female work on earth. The upward ascend in growth is a symbol of manhood while the development of its roots into earth was a symbol of womanhood. Its seeds provided oil used in various healing cleansing rituals, coronation and anointing rituals. Fifteen Botany students of Moi and Egerton Universities for a demonstration process had visited the homestead of Otenyo, the prominent Abamutete healing ritual agent. Three of them were Europeans. They were carrying out a research on the preservation and use of African traditional herbal or medicinal trees.

Cleansing healing ritual enhance Social cohesion among the homogeneous traditional Abanyole clans. It heals and purges unpleasant relationships and restores the unity of the community. The healing ritual is like a live vein with blood full of life.

Unity was the final goal of healing rituals for example;

- In economic dimensions, healing rituals protect the clan's resources such as land, animals, crops – farm products and children among others. The ritual agent used his courtesy to assist the rain stoppers to make sure that they stopped any harmful storms to fall and destroy the economic resources of the clan.
- Divine spiritual and physical aspects. The healing cleansing ritual fronts Abanyole to be closely attached to the supernatural being and the ancestral spirits. Abanyole believed that the physically healthy people had the potential to develop the community, care for and protect the families' natural resources and that the ancestral spirits extended their life span by accepting the offerings placed on the altars when healing rituals were being performed. The ritual agents healed by the potent words of their tongue. Amuli a traditional ritual agent believes that the ritual agent's spoken words were as pleasant as health to the bones of the participant. He further observed that the ritual was like a body of ideal fundamental values commonly shared among the entire community. It required the consent of the participants. Abanyole have depended on traditional herbal medicine for health care since time immemorial. All herbalists are accessible to the clan members. Herbal agents were certified by a group of elderly practising herbalists. They are taught various methods of screening infections and doses given are thoroughly measured depending on the age, degree or nature of the participant. Healing ritual is extended to domesticated animals. The efficiency, quality and safety to fully use the potentiality of traditional medicine as a source of health and

social solidarity depended entirely on the discos of not only one ritual leader but as well on a group of elderly herbalists significantly in cases where strange or mysterious diseases or circumstance occurred. For example healing cleansing rituals are performed to heal the land or for economic restoration in drought season, in case of suicide, murder or after tribal war which left a lot of streams of blood flowing at the boundaries of the community; strange death caused by thunderbolt and incest cases. It is easier to identify or recognize the designated healing shrines in the community. The ritual agents are friendly and welcoming. All healing shrines have common and resembling healing paraphernalia such as pots, porcupine feathers, horns, calabashes, water, fire, herbs, altars, wooden mortars, pestle, hide, three-forked fetish, curved ritual stick, some ash, three legged stool and traditional salt and wooden blades.

Priestesses brought ritual water at the altar. It was an essential element used in healing cleansing rituals. It is a means of contact with the spiritual world. It was sprinkled on the participants at the beginning and at the end of every healing cleansing ritual as a symbol of removing pollution and all diseases. It is important that prayer, "*Obwekayakayi*" be made to accompany healing rituals. There are two categories of healing cleansing rituals;

- The normal cleansing rituals; elaborate sacrifices of praise and petition offering in thanksgiving for a bumper harvest, sufficient rainfall during hard times, good health and for prevailing peace featured in this ritual category. Purification process for offenses against the supernatural being and the ancestral spirits was also observed in this ritual category. The ritual was

bloodless because the blood of the slaughtered goat was not sprinkled on the altar, instead the meat was shared among the participants along side the prepared food stuffs. It also included prayers or worship, songs, dances and anointing of family elder. These are meaningful actions that outwardly facilitate the Abanyole traditional religion. The ritual category fosters mutual dependence, sharing life values and cultural knowledge. These rituals are performed according to schedule and are regularly repeated.

- Other areas that require purification rituals include the return of warriors, incest, accidents and murder cases. The features that made purification rituals practical are, smoking sacrifices, oratorical exhortations, public altar and farm cereals (harvest). Most of the purification rituals were periodic in occurrence and followed lunar and solar cycles. Child bathing is the commonest purification ritual observed by Abanyole at all levels. Children undergo a cleansing ritual in cold-water bath or a special concoctions water bath poured in a potshard. It is believed that the ritual made the child develop resistance to strong disease attacks like small pox. Children are warded off by protective measures enlisting the aid of priests – the ritual leaders, charms and emulates to speak to the spirits wishing to kill them. Elder Andeka described emulates as symbolic images effective through their own inherent qualities. He further pointed out that fetishes - are the commonest ritual symbols found in all Abanyole clans. They become effective by some powerful indwelling spirit well known to the clan. Water in a pot is used to bath a child while on the mother's laps and the mother's legs were as well washed by the ritual leader

(the herbalist). The brother in law of the ritual mother climbs on the roof of the house adjacent to the main entry of the hut and passed urine to drop on his sister in-law's back. Strange enough nobody is willing to unfold the reason for such an action but we concluded that it could have been a symbolic action, that the ritual mother is ready to conceive another baby because the child or cleansing ritual, is done at a time when the child was approaching the seventh season of the year, that was the seventh year after being born. When the same urine dropped on the child and he stretched without much surprise, it symbolized that he would be a clan hero. In such sanctity, family elders have to prepare and preserve a shrine for him from where he is to undertake his in depth training of leadership under ritual elders. The ritual also increases the mother's sense of dignity, developed her beliefs, aspirations and pledged her loyalty to the clan and family elders. The ritual mother quickly facilitated the release of the ritual boy child and hands him over for apprenticeship with hero clan elders under supervision of the priest. The Abanyole believe that the ritual water, purification (where urine was also known as water) ritualizes the participant or modifies the behaviour of the participant. The burden of social control among the Abanyole is borne by the norms of polite behaviour. The tradition, the authority, the prestige and the constraints of the behaviour are restricted or modified at the time when the ritual boy child accessed necessary skills orally transmitted to him from the recognized clean elders.

4.8.3 The Greeting Ritual

Greetings “*Emilemebe*” as a religious ritual process is one of the highly emphasized values Abanyole share among them. Their forms of greetings inculcate most of the basic values such as the spirit of solidarity, hospitality, communalism, obedience and respect for human life into their tradition and culture. It is an action that reveals the innermost emotional feelings of an individual as expressed by Mbandu a clan elder. The ritual reflects the openness, the welcoming spirit and approves of Abanyole vast knowledge and wisdom about day-to-day life. Greeting-rituals enhance and maintain the good inter personal relationship as well as cohesion among the Abanyole clans. One informant, Omukaya, observed that the greeting ritual is the most effective series of actions that sealed the Abanyole reconciliatory rituals. It is one of the basic practices observed on daily basis by all community members. Anyone who does not greet others is precisely a non-fundamentalist and an enemy. Greeting among Abanyole is a deep heart flowing action and has consequences that range from praises, blessing, curses to punishment.

It is an action of social solidarity, a focus on the framework of life; it illuminates complex acts of bodily gestures, symbols, a social procedure associated with peace. It is a functional expression projected out by word of mouth that recognized the attributes of God as the giver of life. *Makokha* an informant was quick to explicitly identify the Abanyole greeting as a form of a ritual with no individual boundaries. It is mandatory to everybody just as it was universal in all other traditional African communities. As a ritual, it arbitrates and neutralizes the spirit of enmity or hatred.

Greetings are common and their meaning seem to be obvious such that many scholars have not taken chances to research on it; yet greeting as a religious ritual is one of the greatest values that Abanyole shared with the rest of the neighbouring communities. Their dimensions include oral communication, embracing, hand shaking, hugging, waving and laying ones hands on the other people's shoulders. But it is not in order for women to handshake men in traditional Abanyole community.

The ritual leader, Kutai was quick to emphasize that greeting rituals both implies and demonstrated a relatively unified and corporate community and leads one another participants to recognize and not to assume the other as a thing, an object or an animal. Hence every time one passes he has to signal his acknowledgment through formal greetings. It is the only way Abanyole recognizes their solidarity, unity and the value of the other.

The Abanyole traditional greeting rituals consists of elaborate mechanism that conceptualize the visible behavioural patterns affecting individual or group relations, for example sad greetings which causes anxiety and joyous greetings that sends out happy moments among the participants. Such rituals integrate individual and others' thoughts, action and daily approaches to life. Greeting is a moral obligation which people feel in their hearts and is rooted therein. They feel obliged to greet each other thus recognizing that God has given them life because the Abanyole valued relationships.

Elder Asitariko confirmed that greeting is the only way by which those relationships are cemented. It is believed that good-hearted people with moral integrity greeted others with respect, reverence and in good spirits. Regardless of the situation greetings reveal to the public the state in which the greeter and the greeted are for

example the depressed, moodiness or springjoys and joviality states of individuals reality revealed the way Abanyole responded to or greeted others.

In most cases, one informant said that the Abanyole pattern of greeting rituals is in force throughout the four stages;

- Early morning greetings, *busieye*, *omukamba nomulayi* which implied that life was good with people.
- Before middle of the day, *emilembe* which implied that it was true that life was well with people.
- Evening greetings, *bwilanga* – the day has been fine.
- Late evening and night greetings, *emwamanga*

Those who meet at a particular spot on the way engage themselves in a brief exchange of words, fact-findings about the life history of the family and clan members. It is the e-mail of the day and its traditional descriptive word order went as follows; *khakabole*, *bolakhukandi*, , *akaliyo* – these are synonymous greeting words used when one opened his heart to another to find out more about his good or bad life and those he left behind. It is an expression of deep concern founding on each other's character, respect, care, it is a matter of enhancing collective responsibility that 'I am because we are'. Affirmative response to those words went like, *ahale*; *omulembe kuliho* meaning that there was peace and tranquility.

Greeting is a functional ritual whereby discrimination of any kind is not practiced regarding gender, age and status. Parents took the first initiative to greet their children especially their sons when bringing back animals in the evening after grazing them. Whoever greeted elders would bow down as a sign of respect. Greeting is not routinely

taken for granted. It is day-to-day demand of a social community. The ritual cultivates integration of thought action, promises; soul settles the participant's desires and life expectations about the others.

However the council of elders has placed restrictions to some physical expressions and symbolic forms of greetings. Hugging is confined to married people-husbands and wives only and to some extent, sisters to sisters and brothers to brothers or between intimate relatives, known well to the family. It is believed that hugging between boys and girls would trigger promiscuity. The eye and body contacts involved in hugging rituals could be stigmatized as wanting or unritual. However embracing was more or less like handshake and is open to everybody.

The Abanyole handshaking is elaborate and vigorous triggering the perception that the ritual is distinct and the associations it engenders are special. It is acted within a specific framework, echoing and alluding to sound Abanyole social life. The body postures of participants speaks volumes of ultimate life experiences decreed to them by the super natural being. They dance; break into Omulembe chorus, shed tears of joy and their souls are filled with honour and courage.

The Abanyole face-to-face greetings ritual is formal, verbal and involves handshake gestures. It pays tribute to people's homage in relation to respect for others and invokes peace, victory success in sorrows and pain; it ushers in joy, love humility and acceptance. The ritual brings about effective calmness in the community. People freely walk throughout the community at any time of the day without fear of encountering misfortune because of the spirit behind the greetings.

One ritual elder told us that, The Abanyole greeting rituals practically unlocks all the inward windows of participants in a way that, each can perceive the entities of the others hidden experiences. Their discourses have a religious undertone. Its essence goes beyond human wisdom because whoever participated in the ritual commanded respect and embraced the semblance of the boundless, goodness, kindness, mercies and the protection of the great source of life-Omungu. Every greeting ritual action leads participants toward a religious experience.

Greeting rituals are processes of healing wounds to foster peaceful life in the community and not necessarily for retrieving historical eventualities from either participant. One ritual leader remarked that, greetings make Abanyole transparent through and through as much as their God of peace (The super natural being Omungu- is in life. He embraces Abanyole greetings as a relatively straightforward mechanism for social solidarity; that social solidarity is seen to derive not from the formalization and communication of coherent beliefs held in common by participants but from the activities of the greeting ritual itself.

But one respondent argued that while the ritual is an important social function with regard to moulding peace at an individual level, the public identification with a group also reinforced the individual's attachment to the group. In other words the socio-religious oneness and closeness of the Abanyole community compelled a single individual to automatically participate in communal greeting ritual. It is not a mask of force in which participants hide to solve a set of tensions nor was it a tool applied to brain wash the participants into peace ritual observations, nor mere actions camouflaging the inner individual perceptions about human life but rather an intimate established order

connected with legitimation to reconcile and abolish animosity between community members. The ritual is an initial step taken in the process of reconciliation. The ritual agent makes the participants reflect on their lives and their personal relations with others. The participant knows well that he stands to be scrutinized by others either to be blessed or cursed, to receive life or death. When commenting on the relationship between the participant and the other. Hence one participates in the reconciliation ritual when he is at peace with the other. The reconciliation process ends by both participants' handshaking and embracing each other saying, *Omulembe Kubeho, Kubeho -itsiayo*.

100 *Omulembe kuhindile-Kuhindile-hakari wefwe*. (let peace be and dwell among us forever). The process goes further to include utterance of respectable epithets, endearments especially prayers-worship, and sharing the sacrificial meal, mostly the slaughtered goat.

101 The reconciliation ritual compels the community participants to acknowledge the truth of life and moves them closer to the personal experience or encounter with the supernatural being who is infinite and the grandeur of peace. The community participant's conscience eventually accuses him that if he is not for peace, then he stands to be a criminal. Thus the reconciliation ritual allows the participants to understand each other as being a form of light in their lives.

102 Greeting rituals encompasses all aspects of Abanyole religious values that amicably shape the Abanyole religious aspects. Nevertheless, the Abanyole traditional greeting ritual profoundly inspires the spirits of the people to abolish individualism and obtain a degree of communal lifestyle that enable people to build common relations and promote the spirit of peace.

The traditional Abanyole greeting ritual is acceptable as a form of reconciliation ritual because a consecrated offering was made in order to establish a sacred bond between the conflicting individuals. Blood offering, the slaughtered goat is prepared to seal the ritual action.

4.8.4 **Cleansing Rituals for Criminals**

There is a traditional council of elders, which deals with misfortunes of life and malevolent forces of nature, or diabolical forces that interfere with the dynamics of social and religious values accepted in the community.

Crimes are closely linked to evil spirits who intended to cause tension between family and clan members; For example, incest and suicide cases structure intensive generation shame and curse while murder fosters frustration, hatred, bitterness among family and clan members. Criminal acts openly stand out as problematic as they do not conform to the basic moral principle echoed throughout the Abanyole traditional religious life.

One informant attributed all criminal misfortunes to the influence of the deadly spirits especially those of magic-sorcery and witchcraft. A cleansing ritual is the only best treatment after the elders-priests diagnose of such evil happenings in any village. These ritual actions calls for ample use of the priest's potent utterances that involved vows, sharing the sacrificial ritual meat that acts as a sentence for life and death on the participants. The ritual actions are logically organized such that their effects make participants contrast the differences between obeying the ultimate moral behaviour of the elders, the supernatural beings-Omungu, the ancestral spirits and the muted ill practices,

ethos of repressed destructive desires that opposed the religious practices of the community.

4.8.5 **Cleansing Rituals for Incestuous practices**

In purification of patricide matricide and incest acts, the community participant endures a series of ordeals such as banishments, his death and that of the infant after the cleansing ritual. The ritual actions were done far away from the altar because it is a defilement ritual.

This is a striking phenomenon where Abanyole highly respected the divine purposiveness of the altar. The action suggested that Abanyole traditional religious alter conceptualized ritualization focusing on redemptive strategies, life restoration and respect of the supernatural being, and his attributes. It further reveals the fact that the empowerment or disempowerment of the ritual action is mainly dictated by the ritual agents- the priests and the elders and not necessarily the presence of the altar in such circumstances.

One informant said that incest is a serious offence which can affect the moral fibre of all family members if not treated in advance. The priest is informed about the case early morning by elderly grandmothers after making strenuous efforts to be given the truth of the situation from the offended girl.

The ritual agents-the priests immediately summon all clan elders and prepare the cleansing ritual elements within the homestead of the pregnant girl.

As far as the Abamutete clan is concerned, the priest concurred with the herbalist and together prepare the ritual herbs and concoctions.

The incestuous man is made to sit in the middle of the council of elders. The concoction is sprinkled all over the family huts, the compound and the members. The expectant girl sits in the grandparents hut and by then she is in labour pains.

The priest paces up and down the compound uttering sacred potent words, mentioning all names of the dead elders of the clan to come and destroy the enemy who had brought shame and filth in the clan.

Those are no formal speeches, songs nor ritual drama at such a time. The clan elders enter into a covenant by slaughtering a brown sheep to show that it is an absolute cleansing ritual. The cleansing blood is sprinkled all over the compound especially at the entrance to the homestead of the girl. Concoctions are put on the back and the chest of the incestuous man. The ritual is extremely horrifying and scaring especially when the elders stand and begin chanting as they hit their ritual canes on the ground.

The ritual blood absolutely removes all stains of curses that would create lasting controversies in the clan. The man and the girl eat the ritual roasted meat, each taking vows, restraining them never to repeat the incident. Their grandparents chew a cactus plant leaves and spit on their heads, chest and the back saying,

“Abetsukhusu, mulamukhe mulombe oluyia-murakala tawe.”

Translated as, *“Our grandchildren, be healed rise up, procreate and do not lag behind.”*

These words are only effective to safeguard life if the girl reveals the incident immediately it happened to the grandmother, otherwise the ritual strategies of a death penalty has to take place.

The research discovered that the ritual is a heinous action but there are no other alternative methods of abolishing such an immoral act in the community. The ritual intends to openly denounce such anti social practices thus bringing them to a stop. Any incestuous man who survives the ritual proved to the elders that he was not driven by his selfish will to commit incest but some forces of evil spirits make him to commit the offence.

A child born out of incest is taken to the cowshed and suffocated in the heap of fresh wet cow dung, by the ritual priest buried very far outside the homestead and the man banished thus sending away the spirit of incest. Both the incest and intentional murder cleansing rituals required the recalling of the dead ancestors to confirm the kind of punishment to be given to the victims. In most cases the man heavily suffers. As he is banishing from the community, he is told, to take away the curse with him. These words heavily place the incestuous man in a state of hopelessness. They are like marks of discontentment wishing him bad luck on the way to the unknown destiny. The man eventually died on the way.

One ritual elder stated that the spirit of the man joined that of *esilutsi* – the incest baby that is suffocated to death in the wet cow dung. He further commented that they manage to raise morally upright girls and boys who never misbehave because they knew the fate of the incest cleansing ritual.

Imbwaka, the ritual priestess pointed out that the youths they raised have earned them pride, not like those of today referring to them as '*abe chai ya samba*' meaning that they are hot and are sexually aroused without cause. Abasiekwe and Abamuli clans scheme their incest cleansing ritual differently. Although the procedure in these clans is

the same as that of the Abamutete, the distinctive feature is that the incestuous man immediately died after eating the ritual meat. His death solves the case once and for all. It effectively instills sexual morals or positive and proper sexual behaviour among the family and clan members.

Other cleansing rituals done far away from the altar affects affect any person who is unholy or a woman who had given birth before marriage or even the impotents. Our informant noted that the altar is the habitation of the Abanyole supreme being. He was highly respected and the ritual priests feared offending him by not bringing at his altar filthy cases for such would annoy him and make Him punish the entire clan. The lesser ancestral spirits are left to deal with such cases done far away from the altar. Omolo, the informant understood the relationship between the Supreme Being and the Abanyole religious context as one of honour and cultivated peace. He further observed that the idea of cleansing or purification traces its roots back to the family or clan altars where true worship takes place. There is no pretence and hypocrisy by the participants, otherwise once you shared the ritual meal then you definitely paid the heavy price of pretence.

Ndululu, a ritual agent clarified an interesting observation; that the ritual blood sprinkled in the homestead makes the whole environment sacred such that if there is any other disease, '*Olumbe*', it is to be consumed by the sprinkled blood. Blood was life and incest tampered with the normal human body of a relative who bore continuity of life. Hence only ritual blood could cleanse the affected relative's blood as believed by Abanyole. He further noted that the woman's blood which united with man's blood to make life continue was not supposed to be interfered with till marriage.

The fire that is used to roast the ritual meat is lit from the altar, which itself is fire, well known for consuming and destroying ill cultural practices and habits.

Besides, the Abanyole elderly women warned girls to be vigilant whenever they noticed menstrual flow. They were not to allow any man to touch them regardless of the relation, neither were they allowed to light cooking fire.

Therefore the affected girl of the cleansing ritual is denied the right of breastfeeding the child because of her carelessness of being spotted by the blood related man.

Eventually the ritual purifies and saves the family and the clan from all infirmities and disasters, which would have affected their moral fibre.

4.8.6 Rituals Associated with Rain

There are three special shrines where rainstopping-making rituals are practiced.

- The Esianda shrine of Abamutete clan
- The Ebusiekwe hills of Abasiekwe clan
- The Abalonga shrines of the Abalonga-abokhukwanda clan

The prominent and most effective ritual agents included Ndululu and Esipisu of Esianda, Seka and Oka of Ebusiekwe.

Fortunately all these ritual agents are still surviving to date. It was a privilege to have visited the Abasiekwe and Abasianda rain making-stopping ritual agents and their shrines. The Abasiekwe shrine is quite fascinating and has all sorts of paraphernalia such as huge pots, herbs, horns, water, straws, fireplace, *ebitundu* (reeds) and other items which could not be identified.

There are three levels of rain making-stopping ritual agents;

- those that caused or are concerned with storms, thunder and lightning
- those that effected hail stones
- those that worked on calm rains

The ritual agents are not to take baths during the rainy season especially when the beans, peas and nuts are flowering. They are to stay in their shrines-*ebichimbilo* throughout and not even dare walk in water (rain). Rain is always referred to as the prime water that is poured to the people from their supernatural being-*omungu*.

The ritual leaders are believed to be very delicate and if mishandled one could be courting disaster. But they are reluctant to reveal details of some emergency activities involved in rain stopping – making ritual. They believed that such revelations would be doorways opening to strangers to enter and reach their realms and know their powers. They go through a series of movements, gestures, sounds that effectively structured and nuanced the environment. Only three agents are required to go through the movements when sourcing for water-*amatsi* or rain-*ifula*. The terms *ifula*-rain and *amatsi*-water are synonymous but practically had different meanings.

Priests Ndululu and *Oka* commented that the traditional Abanyole preferred using the term water-*amatsi* to rain-*ifula* when referring to the rain (as known in English). They believe that water-*amatsi* is life, which is poured down from the arms of *Omungu* their supreme God. It was an extension of his life to man, children, wives and his animals as well as the environment. The water is permanently given to man and it comes to settle down and continued sourcing rivers, springs and swamps.

Informant further commented that water (rain) symbolizes the real life from the arms of God for the traditional Abanyole. The rain making-stopping ritual is so distinct as it is the concern of all the traditional Abanyole clans. Its congruity goes along or is directly concerned with human activities such as planting, weeding, watering animals and plants. The ritual is very expressive and instrumental because it promises hope and prosperity; it thus achieves the ends and means of human, animal and plant life that for life to be, water has to be available.

Water is a riches and wealth while *ifula*-rain is poverty as put by one respondent Rain seasonally occurred in the life of the traditional Abanyole. It was a wind-cloud carried phenomenon and could end up falling anywhere. Whatever falls easily evaporates back and leaves the environment without moisture.

It is along this line of traditional ritual practices and thinking that this work establishes that ritual is a social drama, a solidarity performance that embraces the participation of the whole community.

The influence and function of the traditional Abanyole rain making-stopping included all aspects of human activities (communalism). The ritual embeddes in Abanyole traditional religious belief the providence of the supernatural being. However the whole mystery of the ritual could not be explained to us, but there it is and practically worked.

These words when interpreted in English mean;

“Into the Universe, who knows everything?

nor tell whence water flows to

where and where is its destiny?

nor whence like water, does wind come from?

On water it blows, it wastes its energy

nobody absolutely can tell the source

nor the foundation of the wind-neither of the water.”

One wise sage, Ndale and teacher of traditional Abanyole youths had this to say;

Musibala Niwina owamanya kosi.,

ne hamatsi kakononga, kamenyanga,

ahakatsitsanga nikawela, niwina omannyile?

ne obusindu butiabanga khumatsi

butsitsanga butswa,

Abulaho omundu uyo omanyile esisina sia

Burulanga ta, nende esinoro esiamatsi ta.

These words are in line with the confession of the rain making-stopping ritual agents who confided in us that they had no powers to make rain (water) but could minimize fierce rains – storms and hailstones. The ritual agent is a traditional meteorologist who carefully studied the changing signs in the atmosphere by observing the direction of the wind and the size-phase of the moon. He stays awake into the night to observe any changes in the sky, for example lightning flash either from East to west or any other direction. He walks around in all streams, rivers and valleys identifying the amount of moisture on the green vegetation, he would feel the temperatures of the water in the rivers and thereafter propose the likelihood of the water being released from the arms of the supernatural being. He also watches the behaviour of totems which played a major role in foretelling the croaking of rain season; For example the appearances of

frogs is a clear indication that the arms of God were ready to pour out the water to His People.

The ritual agent walks back to his shrine and prepares the cleansing ritual. It is the only ritual done from within the shrine premises and not anywhere else. The agents cleansed themselves on the behalf of the clans and thereafter informed the people to prepare their Farms in readiness for planting because water is just about to be poured out. The clan ritual Priests and priestesses organized the community to assemble at the altar where the fetish, had been driven into the earth. They organized an anointing ritual. The seed and the farm equipments are all ritualized. All participants worshipped-*bekayakaya* and gave thanks to their supernatural being for the water he was about to pour out. The participants feasted on, black sliced food prepared from finger millet. It is eaten along with dry-roasted meat. The ritual purifies all farm equipment, the seed and those to lead the work on farms. The ancestral spirits are called upon to protect crops from disease attacks, frost or pests.

The rain making-stopping ritual agents believe that water comes from vapour collected from big rivers, and blown by wind to make black clouds on Mount Elgon. It is at this point that they could control the rate of the rain.

There are three categories of rains; (Hailstones-*eyamachina*; rainstorms-*eyolucheka* or *eyamarunda* and calm rain-*imboma*).

The fierce rains are associated to careless handling and cutting down of sacred trees in some clans, for example;

- hailstones, *ifula yamachina*, is associated with Abanyole – Abokhukwanda.

- Rainstorms, *eyolucheka* or *amarunda* is associated with Abanyole. Abanganyi, Abasiekwe.

Immediately a stormy weather is detected, the ritual agent prepares for the cleansing ritual assisted by his two companions. The purpose is to intercede on behalf of the community before the traditional Abanyole Supreme Being, to divert the storms and give his people good water for life and not for death, water for enjoyment, not for sorrow and mourning. The ritual agents light fire from the shrine, places a big pot full of water on the fire. Some concoctions are added to the water, vigorous hissing vapour gushes out and some spectacular fire sparks can be seen and heard gunning to the atmosphere.

Fierce rains are abominable among the Abanyole community because its effects are insurmountable. For example, it leads to loss of life and property. The elders are very strict to preserve the sacred trees and shrines especially where the rains are controlled from.. Priestess Owendi recalled clearly how the Abamutete clan suffered extreme loses when some careless youth violated the sacred rules governing sacred spaces, went ahead to fell the famous *omukhutsulu* sacred tree.

They suffered that season because fierce rainstorms accompanied by hailstones and lightning violently storm-tossed vegetation, huts, some animals and people died and the fertile soil is carried to the unknown land. It resulted into hunger and disease outbreak. The cleansing ritual had to be prepared first by organizing the altar fire. The community assembled to participate in the cleansing ritual activities. They repeat the priests potent words which were mainly prayers pleading for mercy from their ancestral spirits and the supernatural being to appease their anger and restore life. But whoever cuts down any sacred tree is condemned by the council of elders and eventually dies.

The ritual priests potent words are very powerful, they carry life and death. It goes to prove that he is the spokesman of the supernatural being, the ancestral spirits and spirits of the dead.

The ritual agents involve in scintillating scenes such as wetting their bodies by liquid squeezed from the sappy banana stems. . The ritual counteracts the effects of hailstones. It really proves the ritual leader's will to act urgently in order to reduce human suffering. Some ritualized reed tubes tussled with dry leaves of the wild banana like plant is carefully removed from the shrine and pushed into the ground across all village farms. Nobody is allowed to walk through farms, lest he disturbs the reed tubes filled with concoctions. The ritual agent then waits for the first hailstone to drop on the ground. He takes it, and tightly holds it in his hands until it melted. He offered prayers and severally repeats these words; God who provides, give your people calm water.

Great wind immediately begins blowing across the community from all directions and the hailstones were suppressed. After worshiping a goat is strangled, slaughtered, skinned, roasted and shared by community members. Some of the meat is placed on burning coals on the altar and the Priest carefully obserbed how fire consumed the meat and the direction of the smoke.

The truth of the matter is that every established rainmaking-stopping ritual action needs the total support and participation of the entire community for it to succeed in suppressing any human suffering.

4.8.7 Anointing Rituals

Anointing of the Virgin-Bride, is an appreciation ritual conducted by the Priestesses and the Priest in the family homestead. The paternal parents spearhead the actions. It is done in two stages. In the first stage, the clan elder, Priest has precedence over the anointing. The eldest grandfather of the groom donates *imbusi ye eshitialo and yetsinuni*, the appreciative goats.

The clan elder tied the ritual goat next to the silo at the front entry of the bride's homestead. It was slaughtered and a small belt, trimmed from the tail's skin. It is coiled and carefully hooked on a special fertility stick. The belt is slightly dipped into a decorated calabash containing a mixture of pure millet floor, *sesame*, and fresh dung from the goat's intestines. The Priest waves the belt around the head of the virgin Bride. He first addresses the supernatural being, then turns to bless the bride. He casts out spirits of dead relatives suspected to have built unwanted altars in her womb. He condemns spirits of generational barrenness and impotence mentioning their names and seals them in their graves, never to arise and interfere with the future marriage of the virgin-bride. The anointing is to cleanse the bride from genetic diseases, barrenness that could have been imparted in her by her maternal and paternal relatives. A small portion of the meat is roasted on the altar and shared among the elders to show that they are in agreement with the Priest's work.

The second stage is the most interesting as it climaxed the occasion. Special women who had reached menopause grace the stage. The mother in-law to be designs and decorates skin dress, which is placed and spread at the family shrine. Only the menopausal woman, who married when virgin, is allowed to carry out the final anointing

of the virgin-bride. The items for the occasion included, a calabash, woven container, fat from milk, soaked millet flour, *sesame*, slaughtered goat given to the bride as she is being escorted to her new home. She shares the meat with three special persons, her husband, and mother and father in-laws only.

It is the mutual symbol of her being accepted and welcomed in the new homestead. It is established that the sharing of the goat has been replaced by the sharing of the wedding cake among the contemporary Abanyole.

The bride sits in the middle of the special hide while the bridesmaids stand beside her but off the hide. The cherished bride of the season is anointed, adorned with sesame symbolizing purity. Small particles of finger millet flour are bathed on her chest. All the bridals stand in the middle of the hide after the ritual. The cleansing ritual is elaborate and diversified and is meant to incorporate the bride into family life, to drive away fear and instill confidence in her. After which the bridal set for the ritual procession, joined with two women from the groom's family ready to be escorted to her new house late in the evening. The bride is awarded precious gifts such as cereals, chicken, goats, feathers. The soloist moved the participants into wedding melodies such as;

*“Omusatsa ee ee omusatsa lelo Nzolile
Esindu esilayi nisi? Esindu esilayi ne ingoshe”*

In this song the bride is applauding the groom's decision by asking him, what good thing he is expecting whose reply is affirmative that the good thing is both good and precious. Several participating women, dressed in colourful hide regalia suddenly begin a merciless teasing of the groom as part of the wedding ritual. The villagers value it as a healthy activity for testing the man's emotional stability.

Any woman who had defiled herself or engaged in pre-marital sex is given severe warning never to go through the wedding ritual actions. Otherwise, Owendi and Imbwaka, the anointing ritual Priestesses confirm that the body of such a woman would swell, turn pale and she eventually had to die. Approaching an altar for any ritual makes people conscious of the consequences of violating the rules governing religious altars that mark or influence the blessings and curses of any ritual participants.

Consequently the old women are extremely careful in such situations. They take the woman on the material morning of the occasion in the banana plantation to examine and prove whether or not she was 'whole'. This is the only area where menopausal women were allowed to participate in altar ritual events. One reason being that such women are good alarm sounders. Women who participate in rituals sit on their heels, around the shrine.

Moreover, anointing rituals are also extended to first born sons when taking family responsibilities from their fathers and community elders for various services such as warrior leaders, songsters, traditional court agents and those who preside over cattle races, occasion.

4.8.8 Intercessory Rituals

Prayer is the backbone of Abanyole traditional ritual occasions. It is effected through ancestral spirits who interceded on behalf of the community before their Great supernatural being, 'Omungu', the giver of life. Evidence from participants indicates that prayer-worship is a well-defined phenomenon. As a result intercessory rituals form a central part of Abanyole reconciliation rituals.

The ample consecration words are said by the ritual agent at the end of every ritual action. One informant observed that prayer words are considered by those involved to be the most critical elements that placed emphasis on the ritual itself. Besides, elder Angoma noted that prayer in tradition Abanyole is, in reality, worship, and included actions such as vows, recitations and speeches, which at times were accompanied with songs of praise and symbols. The songs that accompany any ritual prayer are composed according to the occasion. The ritual priests, herbalists and healers are assigned duties of leading traditional Abanyole into worship. It is remarkable to observe that prayer is intimately directed to God the Great one, Omungu; it addresses all His diversified attributes through the ancestors by the clan ritual elders.

Informants noted that the Abanyole traditional religion has a unique form of networking between the living, their supernatural being and the ancestral spirits. Hence worship-prayer maintained the authority and prestige of ritual agents.

The youth informants expressed their strong sentiments that, prayer addresses to the ancestors, mostly directed to grandparents or heroes whom they are named after, is real, authoritative, authentic and facilitates immediate healing of the land and the people. Asila, the youth elder who deeply supports Abanyole traditional religion remarked that, he was born to serve the ancestors and as a youth elder is the shield of the ancestors. He faces indiscriminate challenges from his peers who seem not to appreciate traditional religion.

Prayer is incomplete in the absence of sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving petitions. Prayers are said because it is believed that Abanyole did not have their own powers to give and sustain life but the creator's powers or abilities. The effectiveness of

prayer as a means of social order involved activities such as divinations, spitting the chewed herbs, licking special ash from burned leaves, roots and tree barks. The ritual agents-priests who organized and recited prayers must have a thorough knowledge of the situation that prompts prayer. Such knowledge assists them to know precisely how to approach the Supreme Being and the ancestral spirits.

The ritual of prayer sprouts from simple conversation to a complex one in relation to the continual expansion and development of Abanyole social life when interacting with the neighbouring tribes.

Prayer as a basic mode of worship proves the fact that Abanyole believed in the existence of evil. So ritual actions motivated or inspired them to seek audience of their ancestral spirits through prayer-worship to completely quell evil. The end brings about a just community orderly and coherent. The prayer ritual outlaws and vanquishes any source of evil thus maintaining the moral order of the community. Informants noted that Abanyole believed that malevolent forces of nature and misfortunes of life are real. They are associated with the actions of witchcraft, magic and sorcery. Besides, life experiences painted by such malevolent acts are rated as implacable human wickedness and such always reversed the progress of the community. Clan ritual elders make sure that all manifestations of evil are immediately counteracted through prayer-worship rituals. Any evil person is commanded to die with his own evils.

At times co-operate ritual prayer is organized to seek solutions in the cases where a ritual elder had disturbing recurrent dreams – (night mares). It is a serious case especially if the dream's interpretation is at the source of affecting the socio-religious life

of the peoples. For example, prediction of the coming drought, famine, disease outbreak, insect infestations or death.

A prayer ritual agent summons all clan elders to assemble at his homestead. An altar is set, fire lit, a sacrificial he goat availed by the ritual leader, the priest. A mixture of millet and sorghum are poured into a special gourd after being pounded. Grass is stuffed in the mouth of the sacrificed animal after which it is slaughtered. It is believed that the ritual animal gave growth and life; hence grass was not to die but grow again.

The ritual leader takes mouthfuls of the mixture from the gourd, spits it around the altar, the shrine boundary, on the sacrificial goat; on the back – chest – hands and head of the dreamer. Elder Adino stated that co-operate prayers are very instrumental as they motivate Abanyole community participants to look far into the future and seek for long lasting solutions to curb the named crises.

The response to such prayer actions reveals the fact that religion wrote the agenda of Abannyole. God is the most favoured when it came to fulfilling human needs. Alternatively the appeal to solve socio-religious issues through prayer rituals was proof enough to reveal that God, *Omungu* and ancestral spirits wrote the Abanyole religious practices and beliefs.

The youth informant Ayimbo observed that ritual prayers prohibit anyone dropping out from the Abanyole rich social life. He went further to reiterate that their real hunger for a documented Abanyole traditional religious content that could make them enjoy religious intimacy and togetherness is wanting.

The religious experience earned from ritual prayers greatly affects man's inner being so that external wants are not excluded but put into a longer term perspective.

There is no constructive substitute for ritual prayers when it comes to group commitment that joined together person-to-person to request the Abanyole Supernatural being and ancestral spirits to stretch their powers to stop evils that affect human life.

The prayers to and through ancestors are recited many times to keep reminding the community of their closeness to ancestors. For example, to you our great one, Omungu and the ancestors, here is our prayer; provide the required power and strengthen to cure the evil diseases and heal our land. This is not our power, it is Omungu's our highest healer and the ancestors our greatest mediators.

Most informants demonstrated the situation clearly when they say that, the way the traditional Abanyole pray to the ancestors has some resemblance to what us in medical disciplines do; we pray to God to provide total healing.

A close observation of Abanyole ritual prayers brings out two overlapping variants. In the first place Abanyole traditional prayer is a means of constructing power relations especially when the power is the authority of God, Omungu and not necessarily from the socio-economic might of the traditional Abanyole nor by the fact that the people have many goats and farm harvests or cereals to offer Him (the Supernatural Being) but His own power is redemptive, its authority was revealed to the people when the land was healed. The community was helpless without the healing power from the ancestral spirits and their Supernatural power. It is both personally and communally redemptive.

In the second practice, the ritual prayer is also conferred, that meant that the ancestors could empower the ritual elders to make prayers effective just as the – ancestors received power from Him. There were neither negotiations nor a search for alternatives

in ritual prayers but to directly invoke the higher powers so as to protect human, plant and animal lives. The traditional Abanyole invoke the names of their ancestors in whatever form of prayers that they can make.

Informants in this research noted that there is nothing wrong when Abanyole recognized the presence of ancestors, in their prayers especially if they live as good people. The research find the traditional Abanyole to be a people who maintain their ties to the earth and worshipped with such fervor, that they completely abandon themselves to possession, the highest state of being for those who believe.

All participants closely follow the instructions of their ritual Priests who directed their ritual actions. They inform the people of the right concoctions that when taken reinforced their protection against evil till old age.

Traditional Abanyole learn from childhood to honour their divine authority, by making a ritual offering to their *Omungu*, asking for daily guidance. The eventual climax of ritual prayer is the accompaniment of music that throbbed into early morning hours; while the people continued to pour libation of water and cereals in order to worship. The ritual agent keeps on praying and uttering words and inviting the ancestors by name to come and direct their actions. The ritual is a very sensitive moral action and required that no participant should leave until the whole exercise is over.

4.8.9 The 'Domestic Beauty' Ritual

Informants observed that such rituals are intended for female children. It is locally known as the forehead bleeding and dripping ritual.

Women go through the bleeding and dripping ritual in order to make them beautiful . The marks are made on the forehead by slightly cutting three marks on the either side of face parts above the eyelids and two marks made in the middle of the forehead. It is part of safeguarding virginity and being morally upright in the community.

The initiation sends messages that beauty is an essential aspect of human life, which had to be appreciated. Once the healing is over, the affected girls participate in a cleansing ritual presided over by menopausal women. Water and some herbs are used to effect the ritual. The concoction is applied to remove blood a stain, smell and the rest of the dirt is rinsed completely with water. After which the girls took a bath. The ritual was sacred because the removal of the bloodstains is symbolic of restoration of life, the pain involved has a value that life is not smooth sailing and apart from the natural body, a woman inclines her body to beauty by dripping beauty blood.

It is a meticulous ritual technique of power that moulded the beauty of the body. The purpose of this ritualization is to enhance and extend socialization throughout the community.

Most significantly, Owendi the Priestess reiterated that a woman is the network of power and social relations among the people, between family members and the rest of the surrounding communities. The ritual is therefore extremely important, constituting the fact that; it is sovereign and expedient to appreciate the female beauty by making her skin as beautiful as flowers blossoming in the shrine. One informant further asserted that since beauty is the Abanyole prime effect of the woman's power, then the elderly women have to perpetually spend meaningful hours with girls during the dripping cleansing ritual. They instruct them on how to control their passions, body gestures, avoiding

indecent behaviour and how to maintain their individual dignity. The ritual is a social blueprint for the Abanyole female children. It is, nevertheless, one of the rich rituals that preserves the sacredness, dignity and honour of traditional Abanyole morals.

4.8.10 Discarded Rituals

The researcher observed that some rituals are discarded for the sake of harmony. At times such rituals compel one to involve himself/herself in actions that are potentially harmful.

The findings in the chapter suggest that rituals are discarded because they are not within the context of the personal development of the individual. The researcher has outlined factors that contribute in making rituals become discarded in the Abanyole community.

4.8.11 Discarded Swearing Rituals

The Abanyole traditional court procedures takes place at the public and private hearing places. Public cases are heard under a common sacred tree where the council of elders sits to listen to various indiscipline and indecent cases brought before them. Participants closely followed case proceedings from an open field where people ironed out their differences.

All procedures called for faithfulness and honesty. The council of elders believe that honesty is founded in an external commitment to a moral order. Honesty and faithfulness weave the spirit of dignity, a matter that embraces the collective wisdom or the common responsibility spirit of the elders when disciplining errant community

members. It so happens because the spirit they are of, is more important than the institution they employ since it is difficult to take any case for granted.

Errant members who undergo a swearing ritual are referred to a private or seclusive council of elders' chamber. It is a special circular shrine constructed beside the public or common sacred tree where public hearing takes place.

According to elder Ogola the private chamber is a constructed shrine, which has only one entry. Inside are the ritual elder's three legged traditional stool and a pot containing a concoctions mixture of sap from local medicinal and sacred especially the *Euthrina lutea* tree. This is a ceremonial tree whose shiny seeds are medicinal. But the whole tree is symbol of restoring life or destroying it.

The concern of the council of elders is to restore life and make sure that social moral codes governing the community are well obeyed. Hence the fate of any errant member who proved difficult in public hearing is immediately referred to a private elder's chamber for an oath taking ritual which served two fold purposes;

- To cleanse the elders and community members so as not to share in the fate of the errant member.
- For his own condemnation or freedom.

While inside the private chamber, the ritual elder places the pot on the head of the errant member. He is made to take a verbal oath saying after the ritual leader; I swear by the name of my supernatural being, 'Nabulala' and my ancestral spirits declaring that what I said before the public and the council of elders and the ritual priest was true; that I exercised honesty and faithfulness in everything that I spoke.

Immediately the swearing ritual begins, the rest of the community members are set free to go back to attend to their daily work and wait for the outcome.

The ritual elder lowers the pot down from the head of the errant member, dips leaves into the pot and sprinkles part of the concoction on the body of the errant member.

He is ordered to go. It is a risky ritual because whoever takes the ritual oath hypocritically, unfaithfully and dishonestly or knowingly ended up dying on the way before he could reach his destiny. It so happens because the errant member makes the public and private court spaces sacrilege by not being honest. Such types of rituals are no longer in practice but have been discarded.

Besides, rain stopping and hailstorm rituals are losing impact as more and more Abanyole apply modern scientific approaches to such concepts. One informant remarked that the contemporary Abanyole are more litigious and Christian than before and that there exists afar-reaching structure of law, which in many ways defines what is required of them. The contemporary Abanyole cannot be dragged back to support what they believe to be the weird like rituals.

Certainly there is a moral argument open for future discussion over ritual principles that successfully operate in Abanyole traditional religious life. The fact arising from such a situation is that a meaningful or most effective cleansing ritual action is offered in respect to the supernatural being, who Abanyole believed enjoyed seeing His people living in faithfulness, honesty and is present to bless and instantly punish errant members.

Abanyole traditional religion inculcates piety, the proper and healthy respect for the supernatural being and the ancestral spirits as expressed in homage ritual actions.

But on the contrary the informants Anduro reiterated that, even honour has become a discarded concept because modernity among Abanyole has eroded the sense of a moral order to which one is called to be faithful.

Ritual practices that extend to oath taking are each of a religious value to Abanyole. Hence one can equally assume that to break a solemn oath is sacrilegious. In the same vein elders Osotsi and Khakali remarked that deviating from our Abanyole traditional religious ritual practices is in a way obsolete.

The contributing factors to the discarded rituals have been the eventual clearing of sacred thickets, settlement on the ritual sacred fields, the peculiar absence of ritual reformists or the old people (elders) responsible enough to categorically analyse and preserve ritual spaces. The youth who appreciate ritual impact press for knowledge about cleansing rituals from the contemporary Abanyole but in vain. Similarly, Tambiah (1979:119-122) appreciated ritual as a social dimension and underscores the fact that saying is doing and ritual is a mode of social action. He distinguished three ways in which ritual is performative.

- It involves doing things even if the doing was saying
- It is staged and leads participants to have an intense experience.
- It involves indexical features such as the site

The implication in Tambiah's views, (1979:119-122) is that ritual is a performance which must have an impact either against the promiscuous tendencies of community participant or positively broadening the participant's lifestyle. In recent years, it has become difficult to find an experienced and an extremely faithful ritual agent

and Priest who can effectively oversee ritual actions. Besides his involvement in ritual actions he can please Abanyole traditional spirits.

The knowledge surrounding hailstone ritual has been washed away; planting and harvesting ritual have been affected by increasing population, the impact of the new political and administrative systems on the traditional community has made most of the agricultural ritual practices to drastically lose meaning. For example, the harvest, seed that used to be hung above the fire place where a lot of soot, is because of its symbolic meaning is no longer a common practice among the contemporary Abanyole.

It is believed that the fumes and smoke from the fire on which the family food was cooked impregnates the seed with the blessings of the yester years. It goes through a life cycle while hanging above the fire place from times past, linking the farmer to the spirits of those who went before him.

Ndolo, a ritual elder commented that even the food cooked from the harvest, which first had been planted from such a seed, carried the symbolic connotation that appeared in the rituals. He further observed that the more the contemporary Abanyole violate the ritual cycles the more they create conflicts with the spirits. As these conflicts increase so does insecurity. Besides, discarding the existing seed would mean going out from the familiar spheres of life in which everything is meaningful and where man had a security which a few extra commodities could not replace.

It is observed that there are many Abanyole traditional ritual ways of life that have been discarded because they are believed to be hindrances to modern socio-economic progress and that they are not in the framework of present religious liturgies. For example the virginity rituals that qualified brides for marriage, rituals related to the

establishment of new homesteads and the idea of early morning communal prayer led by the clan elder-priest have all been discarded but to some rural communities find it hard to completely do away with such rituals.

4.8.12 **The 'Fading Away' Rituals**

The Abanyole way of rituals reveal a view of life that develops into an organic unity where the participating human body experiences its peculiar surrounding form of life. Nevertheless one of the fundamental principles in the contemporary Abanyole tradition is that of autonomy of people. The contemporary Abanyole are understood to have the right to freedom of actions and freedom of choice.

It is believed that the pursuit of these freedoms do not interfere with the freedoms of others. It has been interesting to realize that the principle of the autonomous people is an ideal, which clearly has not been achieved among Abanyole clans due to absence of traditional ritual practices where coercion and control are routine as well as the spirit of solidarity. Informants asserted that ritual observation cannot take place among the contemporary Abanyole unless one has made a free choice to participate. For example, the traditional Abanyole widows and widowers without freedom of choice were forbidden to enter another person's or families' houses, greet any other person until they undergo cleansing rituals.

The widow faces the worst experience because no outsider, except for a specific elder chosen by the clan, serves her. If the cleansing ritual is not done then the man who remarries her definitely dies for breaching the Abanyole traditional taboos governing marriage ritual in relation to the principle of widowhood and widowerhood. It was

abominable for a widow or widower to remarry before each underwent cleansing ritual actions.

This is the ritual of restriction that allows no principle of autonomy of persons to make their own choices. It involves a matter of adhering to rules, which are not applicable to the contemporary Abanyole. The ritual is discarded through the efforts of integration of Christian practices and rituals, the human rights activists and the Kenya government democratization processes. Alongside the restriction ritual is that of the breastfeeding women who are forbidden to preside over any ritual action. They were only distant participants in such occasions. It is believed that such a responsibility caused the death of the breastfeeding baby.

Anjichi, an informant and a scholar, noted that the contemporary Abanyole families that lean towards individualism than being communal have discarded all traditional ritual activities. Those particularly cited and identified include;

- The symbolic entrance, to the homesteads has been relegated.
- Pollution rituals in relation to body contacts such as avoiding seeing patients suffering from chronic diseases, the secluded deformed or disabled people such as the lame, or the deaf. Coming in contact with any secluded patient was abominable, *Omusilo* in traditional Abanyole families.

The idea of children not viewing any corpse is fading away and yet in traditional Abanyole clans children were forbidden to view the copse because it is believed that the dead spirits would haunt them through dreams.

However the Abanyole transition period in the ritual life pattern is likened to death. According to elder Esiaba death is a symbol of a crisis that occurred suddenly in

the life cycle of an individual and its negative impact is felt across the entire community. The differentiation and conflicts which have taken place in ritual practices correspond to the general development in most of the Abanyole clans specifically the Abamutete and Abasikhale clans. The general development in this context includes the socio-political and economic development. Abamutete clan is the earliest to collaborate with European missionaries. Their, (missionaries), socio-religious life greatly affected the clan lifestyles.

The Abasikhale clan have gone through a transition period in their ritual approaches to life because of their nearness to Kisumu-Siaya/Busia roads and to Luanda market. The clan encounters cultural integration that influences it to adapt new forms of religious life styles. The clan eventually lost some but not wholly the Abanyole ritual ways of life. Abanyole began to loosen social ties through secularization, a concept that is enhanced by cultural integration between clans who lived near the main roads and the outside visitors traveling along these roads. For example some Ugandans and Asians who are business oriented settled among the Abanyole clans and intermarried, thus creating a new culture that could not observe traditional rituals of Abanyole.

But elder Otichiro and Ambuyo asserted that the cultural integration or encounters does not guarantee a complete turn away from the Abanyole ritual practices.

So far Radcliffe-Brown (1939), Turner (1975) and Beidelman (1964) have drawn attention to the ways in which forms of ritual are transmitters of culture in different dimensions which are generated in social relations and which, by their adaptations, exercise a constraining effect on social behaviour.

Nonetheless Beidelman (1967) when examining the Ngulu and Kaguru rituals practices in Eastern Tanzania and comparing similar studies done by Turner (1975), it can be observed that there seems to exist a basic pattern in the ideological systems of Bantu speaking peoples of East Africa and thus the symbolic patterns and actions expressed in basic rituals have striking similarities. These similarities follow the characteristics of rituals found in Traditional African Religion where a ritual undergoes a process, involves symbols and spoken words. The Abanyole rituals as they are performed in all clans demonstrate that ritual is both a conservative and adaptive element in a community. Even though ritual roles are slowly changing among the contemporary Abanyole because of Christian integration, the traditional ritual ways of life are still apparent and continue to affect life experiences of some clans. One of the most interesting findings from our interviews was the youth's on going search for meaning and integration in their religious practices. Most of them are trying to find some consistency between their contemporary Christian beliefs and some of their Abanyole traditional religious beliefs and practices. They are looking for assistance in integrating the best aspects of religious traditions in their lives. On the other hand contemporary Abanyole continue to face conflicts with the traditional clan elders in the community over ritual practices.

But research should make Abanyole aware of the changing attitudes towards the roles of traditional ritual actions. There is need to respect and understand the experiences of both traditional and contemporary approaches towards ritual actions in order to live within a common boundary that is traditional conflict free. Furthermore it is noted that the ritual way of life is been based on the unity of experience, which gives strength and

cohesion to life in traditional communities. Therefore in the framework of the research findings, it should be perceived that the Abanyole ritual practices still have some significance today.

It is observed from the foregoing chapters that each ritual has its shortcoming, which must be recognized, and each also offers a positive contribution to the store of knowledge and its systematization. Rituals are therefore pointers that designate Abanyole forms of worship as an integral part of African traditional religion. They offer insights showing that Abanyole are interested exclusively in those things and actions that repeat and restore transcendental models. They develop Abanyole religious beliefs and enhance virtues that inculcate individual respect.

Further more ritual recognizes and emphasizes the complexity of social behaviour enshrined in community moral laws. Rituals contribute to the patterning of every day behaviour and interaction among various Abanyole clans.

Abanyole ritual actions are unique and significant because sacred spaces must be preserved in the existing environment for ritual enactment in the community. Sacred spaces bridge the Abanyole relationships between the supernatural being, ancestral spirits, the spirits of the living dead and the living. Emile Durkheim (1915:41) observed that, sacred things are those, which the interdictions protect and isolates, profane things are those to which these interdictions are applied and which must remain at a distance from the first. Rituals have assisted Abanyole to keep evils at a distance thus establishing a health community, enhancing closeness, care and creating a conducive-working atmosphere.

5.0 CHAPTER FIVE: Summary Of Findings, Conclusion And Recommendations

5.1 Summary

The aim of this study was to analyze and show that ritual practices are still of paramount importance among the rural clans of Abanyole. The study justified the fact that something essential was conveyed through the means of ritual, if it was accepted that social behaviour fell in certain patterns and was meaningful.

The study on ritual practices was chosen as the main theme after it became evident that, among Abanyole, there still exists a unity of experience, which finds expressions in the social symbols of various ritual activities. The key methods in the fieldwork were face-to-face interviews and participatory observation. There was intent to maintain in the methods of approach the unity, which existed in the life of Abanyole whose mode of life was ritual. In the analysis, the description of the community in the light of its socio-religious development, gave the necessary background for finding comparisons between the changing Abanyole religious structural aspects and social attitudes on one hand and the symbolic expressions through rituals on the other hand. The establishment of ritual practices that were given special attention and the ways in which they reinforced Abanyole socio-religious structure is presented in chapters two and three of this study. The research contends that there is need to empower ritual agents and priests to effectively and successfully control and organize ritual activities at all levels of life. It is evident from the foregoing chapters that the altar and the sacred shrines played major roles in sustaining Abanyole socio-religious substantial expectations for livelihood. First and foremost both increased the Abanyole awareness about their self-esteem and

moral responsibility towards the Supreme Being and others. Secondly, installation and confirmation of ritual leaders could only be done at the sacred altar and shrines. Thirdly, both served as sources of life, strength, security and power hence they became to be the most revered Abanyole sacred spaces.

Lastly but paramount all reconciliation rituals were held at every altar for appeasing conflicting persons. The significance of ritualization was to restore harmony and unity by first reconciling with one another then the ancestors, the Supreme Being and the rest of creation. Ritualization also empowered participants to respect the clan's wise men who instilled values of collective responsibility, interdependence, mutual assistance and co-operation.

Anybody who breached such solemn reconciliation resolutions risked the curse of the ritual elders as well as of the Supreme Being. Ritual elders were believed to have direct access to the spiritual powers and whatsoever they spoke was final. Any failure to offer ritual sacrifices was equivalent to a bad omen, an act of selfishness and thanklessness.

The research in these chapters revealed that all root causes of pandemic outbreak, famine or drought that affected life values were identified from the core rituals facilitated by the ritual agents at the altar and sacred shrines. Some of the shrines were so inspirational such that villages were named after them, for example Emuhaya village is named after omuhaya sacred tree.

The study shows that all ritual participants had to be presentable, as a sure anecdote for humility and respect to the Supreme Being and ritual actions.

The succeeding research discussions acknowledges the fact that Abanyole elders' wisdom was found embedded in their intelligent wise sayings and expressions. They willingly and critically engaged Abanyole in discourse on ritual issues whole-heartedly.

The research findings maintained that ritual practices structured the Abanyole conception to the Supreme Being, perception of ancestral power and ways of praying. Moreover the backbone of Abanyole traditional healing was that of saying prayers through ancestors who in turn embraced the prayers to the Supreme Being, to restore life. The whole mechanism proved that rituals were mainly religious functions which positively affected the behavioural and communal well being of participants.

Chapter Four of this study discussed the implications of discarded rituals. Foremost among discarded rituals includes, the de-widowing and widowing, to be inherited and to inherit. The ritual is extremely strenuous, scaring, and frustrating because it bore the curse of widowhood and nobody is ready to risk loss of life just by closely associating with the widow before she completed participating in de-widowing rituals.

Another discarded ritual pattern is the physical expressions of beauty that involved the steady marking of miniature cuts into the skin of unmarried female youths. They took various shapes, for example, *tsimohero*, were three circular beauty marks tattooed on either side of the forehead; while the *amatimu* were three stroke marks made above each breast and three ring marks made on the bosom above the navel. Areas between the marks were to be decorated with various beautiful colours when the virgin-bride wedding ritual was performed. Such marks subjected the participant to extreme pain and bleeding. The ritual has been discarded.

There are several factors that contribute to the discarding of Abanyole rituals. For example, the contemporary Abanyole are undergoing cultural, social, economic and religious transformations or secularization hence over subjecting Abanyole on rituals is not necessary today. Furthermore some rituals have proved to be health hazardous on the participants and cannot be accepted in the changing Abanyole clans. Another model is that most elders do not live to attain the age and status of becoming a ritual priest, priestess or agent.

The research findings echoed that it was impossible for Abanyole to live without altars and shrines. Besides ritual actions could not take place in the absence of the altar. Rituals serviced and reactivated altars so that through them, life could be preserved.

Each altar had a monitoring agent, who made sure that the altar remained active and free from contamination. He understood the demands and mysteries of the Supreme Being, the ancestors and the spirits of the living dead. Therefore altars linked the Abanyole to their Supreme Being and the ancestral spirits as directed by the monitoring agent.

Ritual sacrifices and offerings are brought at the altar through the monitoring agent to drive away any fateful event that emerged to negatively affect the livelihood of the community.

Furthermore the research revealed that healing rituals have remained relevant among the contemporary Abanyole because of their close link and dependence to nature. As Nyawara the Priest, pointed out that nature cannot die and when it dies so shall ritual practices die, meaning that there are ritual still in practice among the Abanyole.

The research showed that the socio-religious setting of traditional Abanyole is not any different from other traditional African societies where ritual activities formed part of their religious structure.

It is noted that ritual is a major force in maintaining the traditional social structure and providing mechanisms for social reintegration especially where conflicts threatened to break up the existing relations. Furtherly, the research reveals that modern socio-political and economic developments have fairly disrupted the Abanyole ritual approaches to life especially with the influx of Islamic and Christian religious ritual practices in the community. But most of the basic elements of ritual observations are still intact especially among the rural Abanyole clans. Along the same thinking, Oranya remarked that his lineage is that of traditional herbalists which has been in existence from ancestral days and hence cannot be interfered with by neither Christian nor Islamic ritual powers. Ritual activities gave Abanyole social force, cohesion and strength to selfishly maintain their own culture especially socio-religious rights. Abanyole rituals are in line with African traditional religious ritual practices. Each ritual performed enshrines symbols, follows a particular process and speeches or potent words are said.

The research findings revealed that most of Abanyole traditional songs are religious in nature and communicate religious beliefs. They accompany ritual actions. However the analyzation of the religious content of the songs is open for further research.

5.2 Findings

The research found out that ritual practices are the ultimate concerns of Abanyole Community. They form the central values of the community in relation to the power of the supernatural being and the ancestral spirits. Abanyole have particular sacred spaces for religious expressions; mainly sacred hills, trees and shrine, which are either man made or natural thickets.

The research analyzed each ritual performed from various sacred spaces and found out that rural Abanyole are strongly attached to these sacred spaces unlike the contemporary Abanyole who value contemporary religious structures as worshiping spaces. For example, mosques and churches.

Further analysis of ritual activities revealed that the individuals' religious beliefs are strengthened by the existence of symbols, colour and fetishes. Nevertheless, music and dance are rich sources that enhance Abanyole religious beliefs and practices. The research found out that most cleansing rituals are communal functions officiated by ritual agents, priests and priestesses.

Abanyole rituals involved; doing things in a logical way, staging and using specific media to enable initiates communicate to the sacred through the ritual priest or priestess, and using a chosen site where elaborate activities are observed. More so, the study of Abanyole transcendent experiences show, that African traditional religion enshrined in transcendent reality; where the religious source is in the supernatural being or the extraordinary being.

The findings through observations from specific rituals such as incestuous ritual suggest that Abanyole had people highly knowledgeable in ritual activities. Some of the

aspects of their religious knowledge were secretive such that they are not allowed to reveal it to anybody.

5.3 Conclusion

The study presents an account of how Abanyole are adapting ritual forms in the present socio-political changing era. The field research sample included 250 respondents. All were asked similar questions. Given the Christian influence in the lives of most of the interviewees, a conscious effort was made to keep them focused on the questions asked of their traditional ritual practices and not their contemporary Christian practices or any other religious rituals.

Evidently, the research shows that, it is not easy to restrict or drive out Abanyole from ritual practices. Ambuyo, the elder pointed out that ritual forms are in their blood veins and forcing them out is like squeezing blood from their veins.

When studying the ritual structures of the Chinese, Watson (19:109-34), concluded that, the genius of the Chinese policies for national unity lay in their imposition of ritual structures (form) not dogmatic beliefs (content). He pointed to the importance of ambiguity in ordering and unifying diverse groups.

The study concludes that ritual practices give life, are gateways through which the Abanyole reach their supernatural being and the spirits of their ancestors. They incorporate all clan members into a new life at each ritual stage and cemented clan solidarity. Abanyole traditional religion had one characteristic, which is unique to itself, that is, the establishment of a form of networking between the ancestors and the people to provide accurate knowledge about peoples behaviour towards ritual matters.

Nevertheless, prayer is the notable backbone of all ritual practices that existed among the Abanyole clans. All cleansing rituals are performed outdoors and had an instant impact on the entire community. All ritual actions had guidelines to be followed without which heavy punishment would be given to the offenders. Therefore ritual actions focused on the social problems, which the participant faced. It developed a spirit of concern and impressed the moral teaching – ‘I am because we are’. The experience mobilized people to strategically approach life thoughtfully and confidently, not being evasive. The meaningfulness, honesty and competency in life of Abanyole was enhanced by the circuitous practices or observations of cleansing ritual actions.

5.4 Recommendations

This study presents how Abanyole adopted ritual forms, whereas infact the burden of social control in all clans, which was borne by the norms of polite behaviour, was relatively formalized, invented and induced by ritual devices. Since cleansing ritual activities are still prevalent in some rural Abanyole clans, it is recommended that available sacred trees, shrines or what used to be ritual spaces such as *Omuhaya Omukhunzulu* and *Omukhuyu* sacred trees as well as Emukusa Shrine and Abasiekwe Shrines should be preserved for appreciation of traditional ways of life. They can also be sources of income for the community especially if the Ministry of Culture and Social Services takes the initiative of preserving them as cultural, religious and historical sites. Besides, the government should recognize the surviving ritual agents and probably a Cultural Centre set up for them, so that researchers can easily reach them to gather information from them. Traditional African Religious Scholars should do more research

on Abanyole rituals and document the work as an affirmative plan to benefit religious and literature scholars, even the contemporary Abanyole community itself.

The search in Abanyole religious rituals should be a continuous practice. It will enhance knowledge and awareness to certain aspects of Abanyole rituals which still remains a mystery. For example, the powers behind potent words of the ritual priest that can drive an errant member of the clan to death is an area that requires in-depth research.

Further, this study should lead to more extensive research in crucial areas that disrupt the ritualized activities in people social and personal daily lives. More so, the concerns can establish new ritual theories not only in any other world community. Such recommended areas of further study includes, floods, terrorism and kidnapping, earthquakes, rise of modern electronic learning, influx of religious institutions especially mega-churches, street families, poverty and gender power in social relations. In essence future studies will go far to introduce more integrated knowledge in relation to patterns of behaviour in religious practices and address new structural social life beyond Abanyole community.

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