

## PUBERTY RITES FOR GIRLS AND BOYS IN SELECTED AFRICAN NOVELS

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**Abstract:** Puberty rites are indispensable in African social and organizational life. They serve as channels through which African children are exposed and taught how to cope/ behave to be considered as dignified sons and daughters of their parents and societies. But the influences of Western education, modernization, and Christian missionary counter-teachings in Africa have put an obstacle to such traditional practices which serve as suckle of good mores among African children. Today, the African children are left without benchmarks and this has led them to social vices observed in African societies. Since writers, among others, serve as custodians of events in societies according to time and space, girls' and boys' puberty rites have been reproduced in the fictional writings of African writers like Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Nyantakyi's *Ancestral Sacrifice* (1998). This article has examined how the above African writers have reproduced the puberty rites for girls and boys in their novels through the concept of rites of passage. As findings, the African writers have proved via their major characters that

puberty rites for boys and girls are more or less one of the strong African traditions where the young adults are taught socio-cultural expectations of their society and how to meet up with future challenges ahead. Indeed, the girls' and boys' puberty rites are built on formal teaching in initiation ceremonies and on informal teaching through watching and imitating. So, the puberty rites for boys and girls start from informal teachings at home and before being societal formal teaching. On the one hand, right from home, parents associate the boys and girls who have reached the puberty stage around them to teach them things that are socially accepted in their community. Parents spend and make their boys and girls their friends. In this period, boys are encouraged to sit with their fathers and girls with their mothers to learn from them. On the other hand, it is societal when the boys and girls take part in the puberty ceremonies established for boys and girls in their community. But the conflicts of religious ideology between the whites and Africans have served as a bottleneck to the order of things in the novels. In short, the African writers have painted a vivid picture of these rites in their works so that it could not easily disappear because of globalization which is seducing most Africans to copy and paste the foreign ways of doing things. Remarkably, it seems the writers attempt to say to contemporary Africans to examine all things but retain what is good by allowing some of their radical main characters to die and by permitting the temperate ones to live to juxtapose good things in the Christian ways and both in African traditional ways.

**Keywords:** Puberty rite, boys, girls, African tradition

## 1. Introduction

*The BBC English Dictionary* argues, “Puberty is the stage in someone’s life when they start to change physically from a child to an adult” (Harper Collins, 1992, p. 926). It is a stage of life where boys and girls want to show to those in their surroundings that they are no more kids. It is also a stage of life where the young boys and girls are curious and even ready to defy every established rule and regulation in their society, so they need to be guided if not they can easily copy bad habits. As a result, much attention is given to boys and girls at this stage of life in traditional African societies. An instance of the attention given to young adults is puberty rites.

Puberty rites are indispensable in African social and organizational life. They serve as channels through which African young boys and girls are exposed and taught how to cope/ behave to be considered as dignified sons and daughters of their parents and societies. But the influences of Western education, modernization, and Christian missionary counter-teachings in Africa have been put an obstacle to such traditional practices which serve as suckle of good mores among African children. Today, the African children are left without benchmarks and this has led them to social vices observed in African societies. Since writers, among others, serve as custodians of events in societies according to time and space, girls’ and boys’ puberty rites have been reproduced in the fictional writings of African writers like Ngugi’s *The River Between* (1965), Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Nyantakyi’s *Ancestral Sacrifice* (1998). This article has examined how the above African writers have reproduced the puberty rites for girls and boys in their novels through the concept of rites of passage. The outline of the article is as follows: abstract, introduction, theoretical framework, puberty rites for girls and boys in the selected African novels, conclusion and references.

## 2. Theoretical framework

This study draws its theoretical underpinnings from the concept of the rites of passage. The above concept has been argued on but a handful of them will reveal in this part of the article. According to Arnold Van Gennep (1909), a rite of passage is a ceremony or ritual event that marks a person’s transition from one status to another. The concept of rites of passage was pronounced firstly and formally as a general theory of socialization by Van Gennep in his book entitled *Rites of passage*, which he published in Paris in 1909. The Belgian anthropologist observed that all cultures all over the world have prescribed ways for an individual and society. He called the transitional stages in one’s life as rites of passage. These rites do not only mark the transition of an individual’s life but also empower the dominant religious views and values of a culture. These rituals also mark the transitional phase between childhood and full inclusion into a tribe or social group. He mentions that the rites of passage have three phases which are separation, transition, and reincorporation. He stresses that having gone through the rite and occurred their new identity, that is to say, that one is reborn into society with one’s new status.

Gaining insight from Van Gennep’s anthropological thought, Kathleen Graces-Foley in *Death and Religion in a Changing World* published in 2006, writes that the concept of the rite of passage is also used to discuss and relate different other turning points in an individual’s life, for every marking transitional step, when one’s social status is altered. She also accentuates the turning points in one’s life from puberty, coming of age, marriage, and death. Furthermore, she argues that the initiation rituals like baptism, confirmation are considered important rites of passage for people’s respective religions in

some communities. Rites of passages demonstrate to anthropologists how social values and beliefs are important in specific cultures as far as hierarchies are concerned.

Accordingly, Victor W. Turner (1969), a well-known British cultural anthropologist also in his book, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti- Structure*, mentions the three stages Van Gennep developed and explored that, in the first phase, people retire from their current stage and prepare to go on from one level or status to another. From Van Gennep's Rites of Passage, Turner found the basis for further development of his ritual analysis: Not only is ritual situated within a process of social drama, but the ritual itself is also procedural in form. He further says that the transition phase is the period between states, during which one is prepared to join another and s/he has not yet joined. The next stage attributes of liminality are necessarily ambiguous. In the third stage, the passage is done by the ritual subject.

Likewise, John Samuel Mbiti in his books, *African Religions and Philosophy* (1969) and *Introduction to African Religion* (1975), says that before a man is born into the world, there is a religion which precedes and accompanies him throughout the stages of life and follows him even after he departs from the world of the living where he enters the spiritual world. He also deals with the rites of passage in various ethnic groups by insisting on the different rituals performed for mothers and their babies to protect them from evils and this way, such mothers and their babies wear protective amulets to prevent them from spiritual attacks from their enemies. This is to show that they perform rituals because human beings know that they are not alone. They are surrounded by various spirits that are malevolent and benevolent. He again mentions that, when women get pregnant, they are made to go through some rituals by observing certain taboos and regulations in order not to offend the gods but to benefit from their protection. He goes further by stating that, initiation during puberty is a crucial way to prepare for marriage. He talks about the meaning of marriage in African societies, death and thereafter and how Africans remember the departed through various spiritual ways. All these are done through consultation with the help of diviners.

Similarly, Geoffrey Parrinder in his book, *West African Religion* (1961), discusses rites of passage in various ethnic groups in West Africa like the Yoruba, Ibo, Akan, and others. In his book, he deals with puberty, marriage, and death. As far as death is concerned, he mentioned that on the sixth day after the dead had been buried, offerings are taken to the cemetery as part of the ritual process. When the ritual is finally done, it is believed that the way back home is closed and so they lay a creeper across it, to stop spirits to follow the mourners.

Accordingly, Peter Akwasi Sarpong, through *Ghana in Retrospect: Some Aspects of Ghana Culture* (1974), clarifies that meaningful rituals and ceremonies are performed at the three milestones of a human being's life. The time a person enters the world of the living through birth, -when he or she comes of age and enters the world of the adults, and when through death, he or she goes from the world of the living and enters the world of ancestors. He also tries to explain that from pregnancy to the delivery of the baby, rituals are performed to chase away the evil spirits. Then the child after his or her birth is protected and fortified through special herbal medicines prepared for the occasion. Later, in the life of the child, initiation ceremonies are held to lead the child into adulthood. After the performance of one's puberty rites, one has the right and he or she is allowed to do certain things that he or she was

not allowed to do before. Moreover, there are also times when rituals are performed to the dead and thus rituals are observed with attention. Apart from that, he says that all the three main stages of a man's life, there are very important ceremonies that are performed to ask for blessings or to hinder spiritual attacks. He has the same opinions about the rites which differ from one society to another. Last but not least, KwakuNkansa-Kyeremateng describes, through *The Akans of Ghana: Their Custom, History, and Institutions* (2004), that the most important rites in the life of any individual and which ceremonies must be held and are part of the religion of life are birth, naming of a child, puberty, marriage, death and the veneration of ancestors.

### 3. Puberty Rites for Girls and Boys in the Selected African Novels

#### 3.1. Puberty Rites for Girls

Puberty is fragile a stage of life of every human, especially of every girl's life. It is a stage of life where every change whether mentally, physically and emotionally starts occurring in her life. That is why much attention is given to the girl's rites, in traditional African societies. As a result, in traditional African societies, girls go through various initiations and learning to become a woman. The initiations and learning are done through many levels when climbing the ladder of womanhood. Since writers sometimes serve custodians of events in societies according to time and space, girls' puberty rites have been reproduced in the fictional writings African writers like Ngugi, Achebe and Nyantakyi.

Nyantakyi, a Ghanaian writer, in his novel *ancestral Sacrifice* has depicted an interesting rite relating to a girl reaching the age of puberty in the Dipo custom of the Krobo people. Dipo was an institution set up to train the girls to enable them to become good housewives, mothers, and useful members of the society generally. Every year in the Kroboland in modern Ghana, girls reaching the age of puberty were sent to selected old ladies who kept their wards in huts and instructed them in the skills of house-keeping, motherhood, housecraft and other industries such as spinning, weaving, basketry, and religious observance. On the account of how girls' puberty rites are carried out in Akanland, he has tried to depict Ghanaian cultural reality through a young girl called Nana Boatemaa who has decided to carry out the ceremony. The narrator informs the reader in the following excerpt from the novel:

For six days Nana Boatemaa was confined to the house and AwoYaaAkoto gave her instruction on duties of a woman. Early on the seventh day, Nana shaved her armpits and her genitals and AwoYaaAkoto trimmed down her long, black hair. The news was spread around the village, and girls of her age who had experienced the puberty rituals rushed to congratulate her. At noon they blindfolded her and led her to the village river. Amidst puberty rhymes they pushed Nana Boatemaa into the river, and still blindfolded, she struggled her way out. The girls stripped her naked, and with a new sponge and a new towel, they bathed her. After that, she was drenched to the skin with shea-butter lotion. They clothed her in woman cloth and blindfolded her again. They led her from street to street chanting puberty rhymes. People ran from their houses to take a peep at the new woman. She would grow to become a queen-mother, some said; she had such charm and beauty (Nyantakyi, 1998, pp.17-18).

It is important to show that after passing the tests with flying colors, the girls are fitted to marry. After these rituals of initiation into womanhood, the young-women may face another problem in their lives if they get married in the future and they are unable to produce children. That is when there is the need to

check whether they are productive as far as children are concerned to treat them from the very beginning of their adulthood. Nyantakyi again through *Ancestral Sacrifice* has given another example. He writes:

Back in the house, the female members of the Council of Elders asked her to sit on Asesedwa. Taking their turns, they advised the new woman on how to behave herself. She should not play whore so that a wealthy, responsible man would pick her for wife. AwoYaaAkoto puts bead around her ankles, wrists, and neck. It was now time to swallow the hard, boiled egg so everyone stepped back. It was the most difficult part. Its success or failure could determine the new woman's chances of having or not having children [...] Nana Boatemaa was made to feast alone and when the feast was over, the elders congratulated her, and gradually, everyone left (Ibid. p.18).

It is good to notice that Africans are very serious about marriage and this is why girls are advised about the various behaviors as far as marriage is concerned, especially before, during and even after marriage. And from that perspective, many pieces of advice are given to the future wife and mother. Furthermore, it is important to mention that a child is important in marriage and the lives of Africans.

In traditional African societies, the treatment of a new married woman who could not afford to give birth in the future was given to experienced elderly people, mostly women who had special knowledge in treating that. Sometimes also, these women are in charge of delivering baby thus they played the role of midwives. They learned their trade from the older generation and they were also accomplished by herbalists. Normally a pregnant woman stayed in her own house and visited the midwife either for examinations or to obtain medicine to relieve her of any discomforts. But if she was the type who experiences difficulty in giving birth, a pregnant woman might be confined in the house of the midwife for observation and treatment. Some herbs were rubbed on the stomach, apparently to induce an easy birth. After birth, the midwife would cut the umbilical cord and ensure that the woman did not retain the placenta as this might result in the death of the mother. The midwife also baths the baby and rubbed it with women's sweet-scented herbs before the mother was allowed to go home. In the case of the new mothers, the midwife would teach her how to bath, rub and handle the baby for several days before she was allowed to go to her own house.

The medicine men play an important role in the traditional ceremonies, especially where it comes to NgugiwaThiongo's *The River Between* written by a prolific Kenyan writer. The knowledge of these people is also highly described in Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya* as far as the circumcision is concerned. Kenyatta gives an account of how the initiates are prepared before, during and after the rites. He observes before the operation on the girls, certain conditions must be fulfilled to prepare them for that:

About a fortnight before the day of initiation the girl is put on a special diet, namely, njahi and ngimayaogembe, composed of a particular of Gikuyu bean (njahe), and together with a stiff porridge made of a small kind of grain (ogembe) ground into flour and mixed with water and oil. This diet is used in order to prevent the loss of blood at the time of initiation (physical operation) and also to ensure against the blood poisoning (Kenyatta, 1938.p. 136).

The knowledge of traditional ways of keeping the wealth of the initiates is not only applied before the physical operation of circumcision but also during and after it. The mention of the brewery of the special

beer with sugar-canes during the ceremony to keep the gods awake is part of the knowledge acquired by these Africans and they are transmitted during the rituals which are given from one generation to another.

The second aspect of the traditional medicine that needs to mention (in this article) as far as the initiation of girls is concerned is the precaution of applying for traditional medicine during the circumcision. Here again, Kenyatta gives this time the spiritual aspect of the traditional ceremonies rather than the normal ones because this is the right time when the communion between the initiates and the gods is going to be tied. So this time it is more spiritual and here the gods are called to make the physical operation easily. Kenyatta says:

The ceremonial doctor (mondo-mogowamamburu) goes round the site sprinkling brownish powder called rothuko on the ground, to counteract any evil design which might be directed against the candidates. This is followed by the elders who sprinkle honey beer (njoohiyaooke) on the ground to appease the ancestral spirits and to bring them into harmony with those of the living when the elders have completed their works of purifying the ground, the initiates enter the ground accompanied by their sponsors, relatives and friends, adorned with ceremonial dresses and green leaves; all of them begin to dance. The crowd which gathered for the great event forms a thick wall around the arena. While the dancing and singing is going on a ceremonial horn is blown at intervals, and before it is sounded, a little medicine (itwanda) is rubbed inside; this medicine is believed to have power of chasing away evil spirits and preventing them from doing harm to the initiates (Ibid. 139).

These ceremonies are very important in the life of the Gikuyu because a lot of energy is involved in the rituals and the whole community is also involved, from the medicine man, the elders, through the initiates, to the family members and friends. Apart from that, it is also necessary to mention also the participation of the gods or ancestors. The conclusion must be drawn that circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu ways of life.

Jomo Kenyatta has made it clear above that the gods and the ancestors play prominent roles in the life of Africans. They believe that there is a world beyond, where all their ancestors live a life similar to life on earth. This conception is implicit in the many rites of Africans. The ancestors are believed to be constantly watching over their living relatives. Hence in many households, the aged used to offer the morsel of food and pour a drink on the ground for their ancestors before they taste them. They are supposed to punish those who break the customary laws or fail to fulfill their obligation. On the other hand, those who obey the customary laws and help their kinsmen receive help and blessing from ancestors; their business and other undertakings prospered and many children were born to them. KaakyireAkosomoNyantakyi tries through his novel *Ancestral Sacrifice*, to paint a vivid picture of the situation when writing:

[... ] As she poured the gin on the floor in drops; I, YaaBotwe, a native of Asana, swear by the spirit of our ancestors that my heart dwells with my son in the sacred forest. That by swearing herein, I put myself under Ancestral oath to support the Ancestral Sacrifice and all rituals therein for a search in the sacred forest for my beloved [...] Supreme God of Saturday, Mother Earth of Thursday, I give you drink, and pray that my son be found and returned to me in good health. She attempted to pour the remaining drink [...] (Nyantakyi, 1998, p. 15).

The communion between the living and the spiritual world is expressed through the above passage and libation. Libation is very important in the spirituality of traditional Africa because when it is done, it awakes the spirits especially the ancestors. In his literary memoir entitled *The Eloquence of the Scribes: a Memoir on the Sources and Resources of African Literature*, the Ghanaian writer, AyiKweiArmah estimates that “this legend explains the rise of a propitiatory custom found everywhere on the African continent, the pouring of alcohol or other drinks as offerings to ancestors and divinities”(2006, p. 207).

The gods were also believed to be closer to the Supreme Being and derived their power and authority from him. The connection between the living and the gods through the ancestors is highly depicted in African literature. There are many African novels in which this ideology is well-depicted in it. Before getting some of the examples from African novels, there is Mazisi Kunene who on his side extends the idea of the uniqueness of the Igbo religion to be the whole of Africa through a publication he entitled “The Relevance of African Literature Cosmological Systems to African Literature Today.” After having defined African literature as a celebration of man’s life and all living creations in the cosmos, he affirms that:

The gods are not worshipped in Africa but revered. They are participant in man’s life as allies. They themselves may sometimes enlist the services of special men and women to convey their will. Man equally has the right to appeal for the destruction of a person enemy unless it can be demonstrated that the opponent has violated a fundamental ethic. The gods are forces that link men with the unknowable Supreme Creator. This does not mean that man must approach the Creator through them but rather that they are delegated by the Creator with specific power creative and divine responsibilities. The gods utilize this potential on behalf of man. Man can appeal to them for gifts but their power is limited for man already has a direct relationship with the Creator through the agency of his ancestors(Kunene, 1980, pp. 192-193).

This observation made by Kunene can be summarized simply through some of the African novels particularly through *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe and KaakyireAkosomoNyantakyi’s *Ancestral Sacrifice*. In his novel Achebe writes:

[...] We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We appear to pay greater attention to the little gods but that is not so. We worry them more because we are afraid to worry their Master. Our fathers knew that Chukwu was the overlord [...] (1986, p. 129).

This statement is a speech made by an African to show a missionary that Africans knew the existence of God before the arrival of the Europeans. The belief in the Creator of all things was central to the religious thought of the ancient African. His existence needed no proof or demonstration. He was not worshipped and had no priest or intermediaries because everybody had access to him, all had to do was to speak to the winds. There is one Supreme God who made heaven and earth. He made the entire world and the other gods.

Coming back to Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, it is good to make a good observation of how traditional medicine played an important role in the post-operation of the girls during their initiations. The Gikuyu people after the ritual of girls' circumcision, the community in which the operation was held must attend to the initiates to have them healed as soon as possible. Therefore, the treatment of the wound has called for specialists in the domain. In his book *Facing Mount Kenya*, Kenyatta describes how the initiates are treated after the operation. He gives an account of this by saying:

At the time of the surgical operation the girl hardly feels any pain for the simple reason that her limbs have been numbed, and the operation is over before she is conscious of it. It is only when she awakes after three or four hours of rest that she begins to realize that something has been done to her genital organ... When the girl wakes up the nurse who is in attendance washes her with some kind of watery herb called mahoithia (drainers or dryers). After washing the wound is attended with antiseptic and healing leaves called kagutwi or matei (chasers or banishers). The leaves are folded together...then they are dipped in oil maguta ma mbariki (Gikuyu castor oil) to prevent them sticking on the wound and also to prevent the wound from shrinking. The bandage is then placed on the wound between libiamajora to keep the two lips apart and prevent them from being drawn together while the wound heals (1938, pp. 147-148).

Through the above description, Kenyatta has given an account of the traditional knowledge as far as the Gikuyu medicine is concerned. Furthermore, in the same regard, the initiates must observe some religious observance as far as their health is concerned after the post-operation. Traditional medicinal practitioners had clear ideas about their trade. They had the notion of physical cures and treatment. They used green leaves, barks of trees, charms to treat ailments and to prevent people from being attacked by evil spirits. They were conversant with the beliefs and thought systems of their people and so they resorted to magico-religious acts in the treatments of diseases and illnesses.

Concerning Girls' initiation into adulthood, many African writers try to show the importance of African culture through their works. The rites of passage that are important in the life of Africans are also highly described in African novels. Moreover, as far as these puberty rites are concerned, NgugiwaThiongo's *The River Between* tells more about girls' rituals that take them to new levels in their social status.

The novel can be also described as a conflict of culture in colonial Kenya. The introduction of Christianity had taken over some of the Kenyans who in turn had relegated their culture and had torn the people that were once united apart. The church has played by and a large prominent role in destroying the African cultures. To divert people from their former ways of living the new faith had to demonize every aspect of the African culture and they use this as a psychological jumping board to brainwashing the colonized Africans. It is not a surprise when NgugiwaThiongo'o comments on the disruptive influence of the missionaries on the African life in this way through his book, *Homecoming: Essays on African and Caribbean Literature, Culture and Politics* when writing: "Christianity as an organized religion is corrupt and hypocritical: besides acting as an agent of imperialism, it exercised a highly disruptive influence on African life and was the chief villain in alienating the African from his own culture" (1972. p. 31). He makes an observation of the conditions that affect the central theme around which he develops his novels and paints a vivid picture in telling the manners of cultural exploitation of the Europeans on the Africans.

The main controversial problem in *The River Between* is that the girl's circumcision which Ngugi best describes in his work. It is crucial to denote that the Christians of that time when the novel is set were not fighting as the Non-Governmental Organizations are doing now against female excision. They were fighting as a spiritual reason. This is because, in *The Holy Bible*, there are verses that talk about circumcision, especially in the Old Testament. The circumcision is a ritual that is carried by the Jews in the olden days. The spirituality about the conflict is shown through Joshua, the African gospel preacher. Joshua and his wife Miriam had gone through the same ritual before the introduction of the new faith into their community by the white missionaries. The novelist tries to say that even though, Joshua and his wife had embraced the new faith, and the wife still had some feeling for the Gikuyu traditions. Ngugi explained it in this way:

She was a peace-loving woman and she never liked unnecessary tension in the house. Her injunction to her children was always: 'Obey your father.' She did not say it harshly or with bitterness. It was an expression of faith, of belief, of a way of life. 'Your father says this-'and she expected his children to do that, without fuss, without resentment. She had learnt the value of Christian submission, and she thought every other believer had the same attitude to life. Not that she questioned life. It had given her a man and in her own way she loved and cared for him. Her faith and belief in God were coupled with her fear of Joshua. But that was religion and it was the way things were ordered. However, one could still tell by her eyes that this was a religion learnt and accepted; inside the true Gikuyu woman was sleeping (1965, p.34).

The conflicting situation has reached its peak when the daughter of a gospel preacher, Muthoni has run away from home to join her aunt in Kamenno to be 'circumcised'. The Gikuyu tradition demands when a girl reached a certain age, she must go through circumcision to be recognized by the Gikuyu society. And to conform to that traditional demand; Muthoni has to leave her parents and their religion to go the traditional ways. And when she asked about her departure from her parents, she answered in this way:

'No one will understand. I say I am a Christian and my father and mother have followed the new faith. I have not run away from that. But I also want to be initiated into the ways of the tribe. How can I possibly remain as I am now? I knew my father would not let me and so I came [...] I want to be a woman. Father and mother are circumcised. But why are they stopping me, why do they deny me this? How could I be outside the tribe, when all the girls born with me at the same time have left me? [...] I want to be a woman made beautiful in the tribe; a husband for my bed; children to play around the hearth [...] Yes – I want to be a woman made beautiful in the manner of the tribe [...]'(Ibid. pp. 43-44).

This various speech from Muthoni has said it all. First of all, the adoption of the new faith has brought them far from the tribe because they cannot do things of the tribe, so the people from the tribe will not allow them to partake in their various social deeds and automatically they become outcasts. This is an example of how Christianity breaks the community that was once bound together because of their doctrines. Secondly, in order to find a man or woman in the Gikuyu community, you must get circumcised. That is why the girl has gone to the tribe to be circumcised in order to find someone that she loves and not the one that will be imposed by her father's religion.

Furthermore, the novelist tries to show the importance of traditional African culture in his work. In the olden days, before marriage, there is a need for the young ones to come at age. And before people know that you have come to age, it is through the puberty rites that are prescribed by the community in which the young adults live. Without going through that, there is no way for them to find a sweetheart. So the conclusion must be drawn that, the rites are very important in getting through the other rites of passage in the life of Africans. The following passage has given a meaning to what is mentioned:

He came back to tell the people of the white man. But they would not listen. Even when the white man came to Siriana, people would not hearken to change's word. When Kabonyi and Joshua were converted, he broke off their former relationship. These Christians would not come to any good, he always said. He saw more than any other could see. These followers of Joshua would bring so many divisions to the land that the tribe would die. Were these Christians not now preaching against all that which was good and beautiful in the tribe? Circumcision was the central rite in the Gikuyu way of life. Who had ever heard of a girl that was not circumcised? Who would ever pay cows for a girl? Certainly it would never be his son. Waiyaki would never betray the tribe (Ibid. pp.37-38).

Apart from the importance of puberty rites before marriage which is demonstrated in the above passage, there is also the demonstration of how Christianity has affected African communities, especially the unity among the African people. This same problem is shown in Kaakyire Akosomo Nyantakyi's *Ancestral sacrifice*. This is what is written to back up the same problem with the people of Kameno in Ngugiwa Thiong'o's *The River Between*. The narrator reveals:

Apart from religious differences which sometimes divided them, the people of Asana had very much in common. They were united in a common cultural heritage until the catholic missionaries established a school and a church, everything changed like a sudden shift of wind. The Christian converts began to condemn Ancestral worship and called on the village chief to abolish it, and that started the conflict between the traditionalists and the converts (1998, p.12).

This means that the people that were unified are now divided with the introduction of the new religion by the white missionaries who did this just to implant their ideologies and subdue the Africans in a way that would ease their doctrines which paved ways to the colonial governance.

Muthoni, the daughter of the pastor Joshua who has run away from her Christian parents, has passed away after the ritual of circumcision. There may be factors behind her death. There religious conflict between Joshua's people who are Christian converts and the people of Kameno, the African traditionalists. With the doctrine of their new religion, they are against the rituals of the land and especially the most important of the tribe. Even though her father's preaching is against the rites of the tribe, Muthoni goes against her father to be circumcised and in the end, she faces death.

The reasons behind her death according to various religious groups in *The River Between* are; firstly, on the Christian side, it is believed that it is a punishment from God Almighty because the girl has once been His servant and suddenly she turns to be the followers of Murungu through the rites of the tribe. Furthermore, she disobeys God than her father because like in any other religion, it is stated that everybody must honor his/her father but Muthoni goes against this golden rule and she has paid with her life.

On the other hand, according to the traditionalists, the reason behind the girl's death is that from a moment to now, Joshua who has gone through the rites of the tribe has been criticizing the rites of the tribe through his new religion. So the gods of the tribe get angry with him and to be appeased with themselves have diverted the girl from Joshua and his religion and in the end, she is sacrificed to fulfill their appeasement. The other version of the death according to these same people is that, when she disobeys her father which is a very bad practice in the land, she has been cursed by her father and has been affected and died.

The death of Muthoni has intensified the religious conflict between the people because it is an evil practice that needs to be abolished. As it is always demonstrated in many African novels, the colonial government has always been on the side of those who supported their institutions. This is how NgugiwaThiong'o describes how the Christians intensify their intention to abolish the circumcision rites in *The River Between*. He writes this:

And Joshua's followers gathered. They talked and sang praises to god. Muthoni was an evil spirit sent to try the faithful. It was now clear to all that nothing but evil could come out of adherence to tribal customs. Joshua, their leader, was inspired. He now preached with vigour and a strange holiness danced in his eyes. He had been to Siriana and explained the situation to Livingstone. Livingstone had understood. Now Joshua came with a new message. Circumcision was wholly evil. Thenceforth nobody would ever be a member of Christ's Church if he was so much as found connected in any way with circumcision rites. The fire in Joshua gave new strength and hope to his followers. The white men in Siriana and other places were behind them. And with them all – God (1965, p. 59).

European colonial rule in Africa not only represented the imposition of a new form of government but it was also part of a project of the fundamental reordering of African society. This project of new governance led to new forms of economic interactions, gender relations, and social norms by incorporating aspects from both the imposed European and indigenous African orders.

Furthermore, the death of Muthoni after the operation supposed to reunite the tribe but it does rather intensify the conflict. For instance, in Nyantakyi's *Ancestral Sacrifice* the death of the Christian boy rather reunited the people of Asana instead of dividing the community (1998, p. 139). The real question here that needs to be investigated is whether Muthoni has gone through the ritual of 'the second birth' before going for the circumcision because from the novel, all the initiates have gone through that and during the time of that ritual Muthoni might still live with Christian parents. And the sponsors of the rites might be happy just to welcome the girl as the lost girl who wanted to come to the tribe. And they could not investigate the other aspects of the rite before the operation. Spiritually that might cause her death if one of the procedures of the puberty rites is missed. Unlike the girls' puberty rites in Ngugi's *The River Between* and Nyantakyi's *Ancestral Sacrifice* which are basically built on formal teaching in initiation ceremonies, the Igbo's girls' puberty rite is centered on informal teaching in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*.

In fact, the Igbo tradition lays more emphasis on the role of parents especially the mothers in girls' puberty rites. Girls who have reached puberty stage are not allowed to wander around but they are encouraged to stay with their mother(s). The basic objective of doing that is for the girl to start learning, directly and indirectly, from her mother how to do domestic works and even if her mother is a trader she will learn the trade. Another point is to prepare her for being married to a happy home. So, more focus

is placed on domestic education because if a girl in the Igbo land fails in this domain, no man will like to marry her. As Emmanuel Obiechina argues:

Before the introduction of western literary education, African children were inducted into traditional way of life into ways: by formal teaching in initiation ceremonies and by informal teaching in seeing and following the examples of the grown-ups- through watching and imitating (1974, p. 4).

As a result of this, right from the age of nine or ten, girls are always expected to help their mother with the domestic chores like going to the stream to fetch water, daily sweeping of the compound, dishwashing, laundry, collection of firewood and preparation of food. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ekwefi, one of the wives of Okonkwo, is depicted sitting with her only daughter, Ezinma and aged ten, in a kitchen. As the narrator stipulates "Ekwefi and her only daughter, Ezinma, sat near fireplace waiting for the pot to boil"(1958, p. 28).

By sitting around their mother(s) they help their mother(s) with the cooking and do errand activities to assist the mother. For instance, in the novel, when the first wife of Okonkwo is in need of some fire and her children are not around she calls Ekwefi and asks her to give the fire to Ezinma to bring it to her (Ibid. p.29).

Accordingly, they are trained on how to behave like a woman as in how to sit down, tie wrapper, wear beads, etc. In fact, in African societies especially in the Igbo society, a girl is not expected to sit down while her private parts are being exposed. She is taught how to cross her two legs together. For instance, if it happens that a girl or a woman is sitting on a mat, she must bring her two legs together and stretch them in front of her. Notably, they are reprimanded immediately when it is noticed that they are not putting into practice what they have been taught either by their parents or relatives. For instance, Okonkwo shouts on his daughter, Ezinma, on this issue: "Sit like a woman! Okonkwo shouted on her (Ibid. p. 32).

Last but not least, as we have mentioned before, a girl can be initiated into any activities her mother may be doing to sustain herself during the puberty stage. If the mother is a trade or a farmer the fact that she spends much of her time with her mother she may, directly or indirectly, learns how to do the trade or farming. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, although plant yam and their wives help them, women have their farm where they grow women crops like coco-yams, beans cassava, pepper, etc. Okonkwo's sisters work with their mother to grow those crops. The narrator informs the reader that "Okonkwo's mother and his sisters worked hard enough but they grew women crops like coco-yams, beans, and cassava"(Ibid. p. 16). Remarkably, in the Igbo land, growing yam is considered as men's job but women planting coco-yams, beans, cassava, pepper, etc are to assist their husband in family economic duty by feeding the children and fending for themselves if their husband is penniless.

In a nutshell, girls' puberty rites are in two folds in traditional African societies. It is based on formal teaching initiation ceremonies and informal teaching in seeing following the examples of the mothers. The girls' puberty rites in Ngugi's *The River Between* and Nyantakyi's *Ancestral Sacrifice* which are basically built on formal teaching in initiation ceremonies, the Igbo's girls' puberty rite must be centered on informal teaching in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. Since the puberty stage is an issue that also concerns boys, we are going to examine how cases of boys' puberty rites are carried out.

### 3.2. Puberty Rites for Boys

The transition from childhood to adolescence was also marked by several ceremonies in traditional African societies. For boys in the puberty stage, they are encouraged to take part in masculine activities like wrestling, farming, killing a wild animal, bared-handly uprooting a tree, resisting flogging, etc. Notably, these activities vary from one African society to another and are determined by factors such as the geographical location and nature of the land where the adolescent is living. For instance, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, chapter one of the novel starts with wrestling between Okonkwo and the Amalinze the Cat. The victory of Okonkwo over the great wrestler called Amalinze the Cat at the age of eighteen has brought him honor and has made him be known throughout the nine villages and even beyond (Achebe, 1958, p. 3).

Accordingly, in the novel, Okonkwo gets married and becomes a father. His firstborn is a boy called Nwoye. He also has an adopted boy called Ikemefuna living with him in his household. On account of the puberty rites carried out with the young adults, they are encouraged to sit with their father in his hut and the father will gradually tell them masculine stories. As the narrator informs the reader in the following:

So Okwonko encouraged the boys to sit with him in his *Obi*[hut], and told them stories of the land-masculine stories of violence and bloodshed. Nwoye knew that it was right to be masculine and to be violent [...] he knew that his father wanted him to be a man [...] And when he did this he saw his father was pleased [...] so Nwoye and Ikemefuna would listen to Okonkwo's stories about tribal wars or how, years ago, he had stalked his victim, overpowered him and obtained his first human head [...](Achebe, 1958, p. 37).

The above interpersonal relationships between the young boys with their father, Okonkwo make them feel grown-up and lend about the realities of life as an adult to be. The narrator further informs the reader that they (boys) no longer spend the evenings in the mother's hut while she is cooking but now sit with Okonkwo in his *obi* [hut] or watch him as he taps his palm for the evening wine (Ibid. p. 37). In this vein, the cordial relationships between Okonkwo help the boys to learn how to become a responsible person or man. This is shown in the way he associates them in repairing the wall of a hut. As the narrator stipulates:

Okonkwo worked on the outside of the wall and the boys worked from within [...] and through these Okonkwo passed the rope, or *tie-tie*, to the boys and they passed it round the wooden stays and then back to him; and in this way the cover was strength on the wall (Ibid. p. 39)

The fact that Okonkwodisposes his time to the boys has helped him to know some weaknesses and strengths of each one of them which can help or serve as a handicap to them in meeting the challenges ahead.

Okonkwo is a farmer. Not only has his understanding of the boys' puberty rites helped to observe if they really know how to prepare seed-yams for farming but it has also allowed him to teach the boys how to prepare seed-yams for farming. In this way, this has allowed him to reproach them and even correct them through threatening if they are not well. As one can read in this excerpt from the novel Sometimes Okonkwo gave them [the boys] a few yams each to prepare.

But he always found fault with their effort, and he said so with much threatening. [...] ‘Do you think you are cutting yam for cooking?’ He asked Nwoye. ‘If you split another yam of this size, I shall break your jaw. You think you are still a child. I began to own a farm at your age. And you,’ he said to Ikemefuna, ‘do you not grow yam where you come from?’ (Ibid. p. 23)

Furthermore, it has also helped him to detect that his eldest boy, Nwoye is a lazy boy. The narrator informs the reader that “Okonkwo wanted his son to be a great farmer and a great man. He would stamp out the disquieting signs of laziness which he thought he already saw in him”(pp. 23-24).

In short, boys’ puberty rites are a gradual issue. It starts with fathers’ availability to educate them in a masculine way and even associate them in matters regarding their family and society. For instance, in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, Obierika’s sixteen years old boy named Maduka, is seen the gathering for the bride-price negotiation of Akueke, his elder sister. As the narrator informs the reader “There were seven men in Obierika’s hut when Okonkwo returned. The suitor was a young man of about twenty-five, and with him were his father and uncle. On Obierika’s side his two elder brothers and Maduka, his sixteen-year-old son”(p.49).

Nevertheless, there is another boys’ puberty rite called Ozo. In the Igbo society in Nigeria, the Ozo title is an indigenous institution that is regarded as the melting pot of African religious practice through which the people of the Igbo land engage questions about the meaning of life. Chinua Achebe has talked about this institution in *Things Fall Apart* through the main character of his novel. Okonkwo is very keen on his religious beliefs and he never approves anything that goes against his beliefs, especially about the imported institutions which have come to destroy the indigenous institutions. He dreams of initiating his male children in the Ozo society but his dream has not come due to his exile, for seven years, in Manta, his motherland. Before he returns from Mbanta, his eldest son, Nwoye has joined the Christian religion. The above attitude of Nwoye is considered as an abomination and this has caused Okonkwo to renounce him as his son (p. 121).

It seems the parents who succeed in initiating their male children in the Ozo society are respected and feared in the Igbo society. On other occasions, Okonkwo, on his return from exile has always wanted to initiate his other two sons into Ozo society since his first son, Nwoye has failed him. But he does not succeed because the period has passed before his arrival in Umuofia and he will have to wait for two years. The narrator stipulates:

If Okonkwo had immediately initiated his two sons into the Ozo society as he had planned he would have caused a stir. But the initiation rite was performed once in three years in Umuofia, and he had to wait for nearly two years for the next round of ceremonies [...] Okonkwo was deeply grieved. And it was not just a personal grief. He mourned for the clan, which he saw breaking up and falling apart and he mourned for the warlike men of Umuofia, who had so unaccountably become soft like women (Achebe, 1958, p. 129).

The Ozo title, according to Francis Chucks Madukasi in his article entitled: Ozo Title: An Indigenous Institution in Traditional Religion That Upholds Patriarchy in Igbo Land South-Eastern Nigeria says:

Ozo Title as a sacred institution performed by initiated men only which upholds patriarchy [...] the Ozo Title as a sacred institution has two significant and related

functions. The first one is that it enables the initiates to bridge the gap between the visible and unseen world of the ancestors and thus making possible an Igbo understanding of those forces that are believed to control the destinies of man. Secondly, Ozo title as a sacred institution of the Igbo is believed to uphold and sustain the Igbo religious system, and a complex of traditional religious rituals which uphold the privileges of those men who have been initiated into the ancestral cult (Madukasi, 1998, p. 40).

Like most African communities, the notion of patriarchal society is dominant. And the Ozo title is awarded to men or men-to-be and the Igbo society is highly patriarchal and this is through the protagonist of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Okonkwo. Moreover, the novel does not allude to women's initiation contrary to NgugiwaThiong'o's *The River Between*. *The River Between* deals round with the puberty rites, especially the circumcision of both boys and girls in the Kikuyu community in Kenya. According to the Kenya philosopher and writer, John S. Mbiti (1991), the blood which is shed during the physical operation binds the person to the land and consequently to the departed of his society. The circumcision blood is like making a covenant, or a solemn agreement, between the individual and his people. Until the individual has gone through the operation, he is an outsider. Once he has shed his blood he joins the stream of his people, he becomes truly one with them. This same assumption is demonstrated in *The River Between* by another Kenyan writer and activist through his work. He writes:

His penis had shrunk in size and, as Waiyaki looked at it, he wondered if it really belonged to him. Waiyaki was not alone. All along the banks the other initiates sat, waiting for the 'surgeon'. All his life Waiyaki had waited for this day, for this very opportunity to reveal his courage like a man. This had been the secret ambition of his youth. Yet, now that the time had come, he felt afraid. He did not, however, show it. He just stared into space, fear giving him courage. His eyes never moved. He was actually seeing nothing. The knife produced a thin sharp pain as it cut through flesh. The surgeon had done his work. Blood trickled freely on the ground, sinking into the soil. Henceforth a religious bond linked Waiyaki to the earth, as if his blood was an offering. Around him women were shouting and praising him. The son of Chege had proved himself. Such praises were lavished only on the brave. Waiyaki sat still after the surgeon had left him. He was now covered with a white sheet (Ngugi, 1965, p. 44).

The above analysis shows the spiritual bond between the initiates, the gods and the ancestors because the blood is very precious in traditional African ceremonies. Here Waiyaki has shown his spiritual growth by going through the imposed ritual which would allow him to grow from boyhood into adulthood.

Unlike the Girls' circumcision, the boys' one seems to be a normal thing and so many negative aspects were not written about it. Even in Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, in the subchapter entitled "Initiation of Boys and Girls", much more emphasis is put on the girls' circumcision rather than that of the boys'. He describes once again the importance of the initiation of both sexes. He writes:

The initiation of both sexes is the most important custom among the Kikuyu. It is looked upon as a deciding factor in giving a boy or a girl the status of manhood or womanhood in the Kikuyu community. This custom is adhered to by the vast majority of African peoples and is found in almost every part of the continent. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the facts attached to this widespread custom to

have some idea why the African peoples cling to this custom which, in the eyes of a good many Europeans, is nothing but a “horrible” and “painful” practice, suitable only to barbarians (1938, p. 134).

The understanding of this passage is that Kenyatta tries to show the importance of the circumcision of both boys and girls in the African communities but the operation of the girls is what is more or less some African peoples and Europeans are fighting against. He even shows in his book that the colonizers went further by preventing this custom of puberty by colonial laws. Apart from the colonial laws which were tailored to stop these rituals, and as it is mentioned earlier, there were also several attempts to stop or banish students who had gone through those rituals from colonial schools (Ibid. pp. 130-1).

It is not only through Kenyatta’s work that colonial schools have been in conflict with the African customs but also in other works by African writers. For instance, in the *Ancestral Sacrifice* by KaakyireAkosomoNyantakyi, there are many instances where the author shows many conflicts between the missionary schools and the traditional customs. First all when the missionaries came, they did not think that African had education and their first aim was to educate the African: “We came here to work with you. Our main aim is to educate your children so they can compete with the outside world in the future”(1998, p. 14). But history has taught us that before the advent of the Europeans to the African continent that literacy was so high that there were universities in certain African countries. This is to show that there was standard education in Africa before the arrival of colonization in Africa. This is confirmed through Walter Rodney’s book *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*:

Along the Nile, in North Africa, in Ethiopia, in the Western Sudan, and along the East African coast, a minority of Africans became literate, producing a situation comparable to Asia and Europe before the latter part of the 19th century. As in other parts of the world, literacy in Africa was connected with religion, so that in Islamic countries it was a Koranic education and in Christian Ethiopia the education was designed to train priests and monks. Muslim education was particularly extensive at the primary level, and it was also available at the secondary and university levels. In Egypt, there was the Al-Azhar University, in Morocco the University of Fez, and in Mali, the University of Timbuktu – all testimony to the standard of education achieved in Africa before the colonial intrusion (1972, p. 17).

In pre-colonial African societies, pre-colonial African education was centered on the community through different means. There was no separation between education and productive activities. The child learned progressively by observing and learning from the elders of the community where he lived, to fit into the society progressively. That was the type of education that the pre-colonial Africans inculcated into their children.

Some aspects of the pre-colonial education may be said to be formal because there were programs specifically designed by the teachers who were the elders of the community to suit the students who were the youth in the community. The programs were gradually designed for the child according to the age to initiate the ritual of the society when he or she comes to the age needed for a specific ritual or work. Even in later stages in life, the youth becoming adults learned progressively by joining other secret societies or brotherhood. Some communal educations dated back in pre-colonial Africa, examples are

the hunting sections, the religious and the traditional medicine which is laid down from a family or a clan from one generation to another.

Furthermore, with the introduction of colonial schools into the life of Africans and with the conflicting situation with the indigenous traditions, Africans were still keen on their traditions that were passed from one generation to another. Most of the students had been brainwashed in the colonial schools but parents have resisted the various temptations by the colonizers to forbid the customs by painting them as devilish ones. In *The River Between*, the young Waiyaki who has been going to the mission school where they forbid them to undergo the puberty rites which are part of the land. The author makes the reader know that the boy has gone through the ritual but he still fears the white man because he is willing to have his education. This fear is for the fact that he may be sacked out from the school where his dream to acquire the white man's knowledge will come to its end. The novelist puts the feeling of the protagonist this way:

He was now covered with a white sheet. All was well. Yet the pain came and shook him to the roots. What was Muthoni feeling, he wondered. He thought that if he had been in her position he would never have brought himself into such pain. Immediately he hated himself for holding such sentiments. He was of the tribe. He had to endure its ways and be inside the secrets of the hills. His childhood days came and fled by. Many things clouded his mind; his early adventure; the years at school. He thought of Livingstone. What would he now think if he found waiyaki sitting there facing the river, holding his penis with blood dripping on to his fingers, falling to the ground, while a white calico sheet covered him? Waiyaki wanted to laugh at the monstrous idea of Livingstone standing and watching all [...] A shout and cry mixing with suppressed groans of pain! Women were shouting and singing their bravery. All was over. The new generation had proved itself. Without a single blemish (Ngugi, 1965, pp. 45-6).

Above all, several African theorists think that the colonial system of education has done more harm than good and it is in this perception that the famous Kenyan activist and writer NgugiwaThiongo'o through his book *Decolonizing the mind: The politics of Language in African Literature* shows his anger toward isolationist feeling the colonial education causes. He states:

The process annihilates people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves from that wasteland of non-achievement and it makes them want to distance themselves from that wasteland. It makes them want to identify with that which is the furthest removed from themselves [...] (1997, p. 21)

The new type of education by the missionaries, on the other hand, stimulated values and practices which amounted to informal education. The colonial system of education is the type that never uprooted out an environment that is African's or that was planned to promote the most rational use of material and social resources. This was not an educational system that was designed to give African youth confidence and pride as members of the African society but it rather inculcated them the values of the imperialist powers that seemed to be superior to that of the Africans. In *Ancestral Sacrifice*, KaakyireAkosomoNyantakyi shows the link between the mission schools and the traditions. He mentions:

Gradually, the Christians refused to associate with traditionalists, although they allowed all children in their schools. Tension heightened when they would not take

part in communal labour and refused to recognize the power of the chief because they said he associated with the Stool – House which contained an Ancestral Shrine that was believed to protect the souls of the villagers. In revenge, the traditionalists withdrew their children from school and stopped them from watching foreign films with they claimed that the children might be brainwashed (1998, p. 12).

Like Nyantakyi, the same problem is raised in Jomo Kenyatta's *Facing Mount Kenya*, and the indigenous Africans established their schools which were entirely free from missionary influence, both in educational and religious matters. The establishment of the Kareng's school was due to the cry schools after the mission schools tried to establish rules to prevent the indigenous that underwent or were favorable to the customs of the land to attend their schools. The fictive aspect of Jomo Kenyatta's establishment of the indigenous school is also described in *The River Between* where NgugiwaThiong'o gives an account of the situation. The novelist writes:

The whole grass compound was full of women and men from every corner of the country. Some came to hear the report on the progress of their children. Others came to see the famous Marioshoni School. But others came to see the Teacher. They had heard of this young man, but had never, seen him. This was a chance not to be missed. 'The Teacher' they whispered from hill to hill and the name came to signify only one man – Waiyaki [...] Everyone saw him as the reincarnation of that former dignity and purity – now lost [...] and the people saw everything in it, the outcome of their efforts, the symbol of their defiance of foreign ways [...] Their children could speak a foreign language, could read and write. And this had been done in spite of Siriana's stern action in refusing to admit the children of those who would not abandon the ancient rites (Ngugi, 1965, p. 92).

Furthermore, the colonial system of education taught the indigenous people how to read, write, and calculate in the Europeans' languages. In addition to that, other subjects were added such as the civilizations of the colonialists. Ngugi shows through his novel that the protagonist has gone to the white man's school to acquire their knowledge at the expense of the Africans. The protagonist shows a dilemma of when to choose between the white man's desire and his father's. But at the end of the day, it is his father's own which carries the day but the fear for the white man still instill in him by fearing that he may be stopped from attending the school because he has gone through the puberty rites which is an important institution in the land before the arrival of the white. Ngugi develops the feeling of the protagonist in this way:

The sacrifices went hand in hand with the preparations for the coming circumcision. Everywhere candidates for the initiation were gathering. They went from house to house, singing and dancing the ritual songs, the same that had been sung from the old times, when Demi were on the land [...] Waiyaki was one of the candidates. He now a young man with strong, straight limbs [...] After all, it was soon after his second birth that he had gone to Siriana, and he had lived there for all those years, although he normally came home during the holidays [...] Yet he worked hard in school. He was now in the senior class in Siriana Secondary School and he was able to meet boys from all over Kenya [...] Waiyaki's absence from the hills had kept him out of touch with those things that most mattered to the tribe. Besides, however much he resisted it, he could not help gathering and absorbing

ideas and notions that prevented him from responding spontaneously to these dances and celebrations. But he knew that he had to go through the initiation... Not that Waiyaki disliked the idea of circumcision. On the contrary, he looked forward to it. It was his boy's ambition to test his courage at the ceremony. In fact, he considered Livingstone, for all his learning and holiness, a little dense in attacking a custom whose real significance in the tribe he did not understand and probably never would understand (1965, pp.39-40).

It is good to acknowledge that the Waiyaki, the main protagonist of Ngugiwathiong'o's *The River Between* has fulfilled his father's burning desires by being a man through the puberty rites of the tribe and also by acquiring the white man's knowledge through his education where he becomes the leader of the movement which is in charge of educating in the tribe. Ngugi writes the following passage about his protagonist:

Education was really his mission. This was his passion [...] They called him a savior. His own father had talked of a Messiah to come. Whom was the Messiah coming to save? From what? And where would He lead the people [...] Education was the light of the country. That was what the people wanted educational schools. Education, he did not see any connection between what his education mission [...] Joshua and his followers were now completely identified with the white man (1965, p.110)

The importance of boys' circumcision is not only described in East or West Africa but it also goes beyond those boundaries. And it even covers almost the whole continent. In his book, *Long walk To Freedom*, the former South African Head of State and the Nobel Prize Winner, Nelson Mandela gives an account of how circumcision plays an important role in the life of his ethnic group in South Africa. As Xhosa man, Nelson Mandela talks about his culture especially the ritual of circumcision in this way:

A thin elderly man emerged from a tent and knelt in front of the first boy. There was excitement in the crowd. I knew that the ritual was about to begin. The old man was famous incibi, a circumcision expert, from Gcalekaland, who would use his assegai to change us from boys to men with a single blow. Suddenly I hear the first man cry out, 'Ndiyindoda' (I am a man) which we had been trained to say at the moment of circumcision. Seconds later, I heard Justice's strangled voice pronounce the same phrase. There were now two boys before the incibi reached me, and my mind must have gone blank because, before I knew it, the old man was kneeling in front of me; I looked directly in his eyes. He was pale, and though the day cold, his face was shining with perspiration. His hand moved so fast they seemed to be controlled by an otherworldly force. Without a word he took my foreskin forward, and then, in a single motion brought down his assegai. I felt as if fire was shooting through my veins, the pain was so intense that I buried my chin in my chest. Many seconds seemed to pass before I remembered the cry, and then I recovered and called out 'Ndiyindoda'. I looked down and saw a perfect cut, clean and round like a ring. But I felt ashamed because the other boys seemed much stronger and firmer than I had been; they had called out more promptly than I had. I had now taken the essential step in the life of every Xhosa man. Now I might marry, set up my own home and plough my field. I could now be admitted to the councils of the community; my words would be taken seriously. At the

ceremony, I was given my circumcision name, Dalibhunga meaning 'Founder of the Bungha' the traditional ruling body of the Transkei. To Xhosa traditionalists, this name is more acceptable than my two previous given names, Rlihlahla or Nelson, and I was proud to hear my new name pronounced: Dalibhunga (1994, pp. 25-6).

From the very long and above quotation, there is a sense of what Nelson Mandela has defended. The ritual is about the Xhosa people's culture which they respect a lot especially the rites of passage which is also a prominent stage in the life of every Xhosa person. The Xhosa people are an ethnic group of people of Southern Africa mainly found in the Eastern and Western Cape, South Africa. The circumcision like any other rites of passage has its importance in the life of the community and it changes everything at the moment it is performed.

First of all, circumcision is the foremost ritual of transition from boyhood into adulthood and at the end of the ritual, the initiates would have their words to be heard by the community because they have become grown-up people. They have the right now to build a home by getting married and do everything the adult people could afford to do because they are no more children, therefore, they have to join a new life, the world of the adult.

The ceremony requires that after the circumcision a new name should be given to the initiates. It is even mentioned that the new name given after the ritual has more meaning and it has great importance in the community than the other names that were given to the initiate when s/he came out from her mother's womb some years back. Apart from that, it is important to denote that the importance of the meaning of the name that is acquired after the ritual has its significance because as it is mentioned in an earlier chapter about the importance of receiving names. The new name 'Dalibhunga' that was given to Nelson Mandela after the ritual has also its significance in the sense that, Nelson Mandela became some years later the founder of the new Post-Apartheid South African nation which backed up the name that was given to him after the ritual of circumcision: Founder of the Bungha, the traditional ruling body of the Transkei in South Africa.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Puberty is fragile a stage of life of every human. It is a stage of life where every change whether mentally, physically and emotionally starts occurring. That is why much attention is given to boys and girls' puberty rites, in traditional African societies. But these African traditions face problems when Africans have come into contact with the missionaries who try to demonize them to the extent they have started disappearing in day to day living contemporary Africans. Since writers, among others, serve custodians of events in societies according to time and space, girls' and boys' puberty rites have been reproduced in the fictional writings of African writers like Ngugi's *The River Between* (1965), Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and Nyantakyi's *Ancestral Sacrifice* (1998).

This article has examined how the above African writers have reproduced the puberty rites in their novels through the concept of rites of passage. As findings, the African writers have proved via their major characters that puberty rites of boys and girls are more or less one of the strong African traditions where the young adults are taught socio-cultural expectations of their society and how to meet up with future challenges ahead. Indeed, the girls' and boys' puberty rites are built on formal teaching in initiation ceremonies and on informal teaching through watching and imitating. So the puberty rites for boys and girls start from informal teachings at home and before being societal formal teaching. On the one hand, right from home, parents associate the boys and girls who have reached the puberty stage around them to teach them things that are socially accepted in their community. Parents spend and make their boys and girls their friends. In this period, boys are encouraged to sit with their fathers and girls with their mothers to learn from them. On the other hand, it is societal when the boys and girls take part in the puberty ceremonies established for boys and girls in their community. But the conflicts of religious ideology between the whites and Africans have served as a bottleneck to the order of things in the novels. In short, the African writers have painted a vivid picture of these rites in their works so that it could not easily disappear because of globalization which is seducing most Africans to copy and paste the foreign ways of doing things. Remarkably, it seems the writers attempt to say to contemporary Africans to examine all things but retain what is good by allowing some of their radical main characters to die and by permitting the temperate ones to live to juxtapose good things in the Christian ways and both in African traditional ways.

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