

"The Role of Initiation Ceremonies in a Changing Social Environment", in J. S. Akama and R. Maxon (eds.), *Vanishing Cultural Heritage and Ethnography of an African Community: The Gusii of Western Kenya* (New York, The Edwin Mellen Press, 2006), pp.333-350.

ABSTRACT

Although it can be argued that much of the cultural values and social meanings of the *rites of passage* have drastically changed and are no longer relevant due to influences of modernity and technology that has reduced the world into a small global village, rural communities such as the Abagusii still mark the transition of the young from childhood to adulthood through *rites of passage*. This article attempts to show that, through these *rites* an individual earns his/her social identity and a sense of belonging to one's ethnic community. The social identity qualifies the individual not only to assume his/her adult roles in the community, but, more importantly, it enables him/her to engage in inter-ethnic and inter-racial interaction in what has now become a global village. The success or failure of this interaction does depend largely upon the kind of instructions the individual receives during the performance of these *rites*. Since the majority of those now interacting in the small global village grew up in the rural social environment that gave them the social identity with which they interact in a global environment, it is important that the content of these *rites of passage* be understood in order to appreciate their impact upon the individual's behaviour in the global environment.