

**Ojo Matthias Olufemi Dada**

matthiasojo@crawforduniversity.edu.ng

**Ayodele, Abel Olurotimi**

heavenlyfocus4grace@yahoo.com

## **The application of Victor Turner's liminality and symbology to the installation of obas among the Yoruba people of south western Nigeria**

### **Abstract:**

This article examines the concepts of liminality and symbology. It borrows from the works of Victor Turner on the two concepts and their application to the study of chief installation among the Ndembu people in Zambia. The article explains the application of liminality and symbology to the installation of kings among the Yoruba people of south western part of Nigeria. The liminality rites like shaving of head, prostrating before the people, wearing of white cloth around the waist, relating the history of the land, swallowing of bullets, and sexual abstinence were thoroughly explained in this article. The article also takes into cognisance, the concept of symbology. The process of 'picking calabash' by the king elect was discussed and the meanings of the items kept inside each of the calabashes were explained. The item that the king picks and the implication of this on his reign was also discussed. The article also treated the symbolic meanings of beaded crown and royal sceptre. Finally, the article recommended that anthropologist and ethnologists should exploit the concepts of liminality and symbology in other cultures of the world.

### **Key words:**

liminality, symbology, king-elect, Yoruba people, rites of passage.

### **Introduction**

The institution of kingship (Obaship) among the Yoruba people of the south western part of Nigeria is one which is loaded with rich culture and tradition. Among these people, the person that may be installed as Oba (king) must come from the royal lineage which may be sub-divided into families. The kingship is based on the rotational principle. The next king must be chosen among the princes from the family which occupies the next turn. Ifa oracle may be consulted in some occasions to choose among those princes or consensus may be reached among them whereby a prince is nominated by the other princes. However, in some instances it may be through keen competition among the princes.

The moment the crown prince emerged, the rite of passage for the installation of the prince as the new king will start in earnest. A critical observation of the rite of passage for the installation of new king among the Yoruba people clearly shows that the concepts of liminality and symbology which Victor Turner had worked on were dully involved in the process.

This article, therefore, derived its inspiration from the work of Victor Turner on liminality and symbology. The aim of this article is not to replicate the work of Victor Turner on installation rites of the Kanongasha of the Ndembu people of Zambia but to prove that the same or similar rites of passage also exist in other cultures. Hence, the Yoruba tribe in the western part of Nigeria has been selected to describe the concepts of liminality and symbology involved in the installation of kings (obas) among these people.

The main contents in liminality and symbology explained by Victor Turner were used to explain the rites of passage among these people when it comes to the institution of kingship in area of king installation. The article clearly shows that the installations of traditional rulers among Ndembu people and Yoruba people did not follow the same cultural ways but yet the concepts of liminality and symbology did exist in the two cultures in the process of installation of the traditional rulers. However, this article did not make any comparison but laid emphasis on that of Yoruba people alone.

### **Victor Turner's Liminality**

The concept of liminality did not originally belong to Victor Turner from the beginning. Turner borrowed and expanded upon Van Gennep's concept of liminality, ensuring widespread usage of the concept not only in anthropology but other fields as well (Shure 2005). Liminality as a concept was formerly used by Van Gennep before Turner borrowed the concept and expanded it.

Victor Turner first formulated his theory of liminality in the late 1960s, and this continued to be a central theme in his work until his death in 1983. According to Shure (2005) three of his principal works dealt extensively with the issue of liminality. They are: "Betwixt and Between; the Liminal Period in Rites de Passage" from the *Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (1967), *Liminality and Communitas from the Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969) and "Passages, Margins, and Poverty: Religions Symbols of Communitas" from *Dramas fields, and Metaphors* (1974).

Shure (2005) argued that Turner saw humanity as a representation of midpoint of transition in a status sequence between two positions. Liminality is the process of mid transition in a rite of passage. During the liminal period, the characteristics of those passing through are ambiguous, for

where they find themselves has few or none of the attributes of either the past or the coming state. They are betwixt and between so to say. In liminality, Turner defined liminal individuals or entities as neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between (Shure 2003).

Turner (1969) commented that “the attributes of liminality or liminal personal are necessarily ambiguous, since this condition and these persons elude or slip through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space. Liminal entities are neither here nor there. They are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions”.

Turner (1969) argued that liminal entities such as neophytes in initiation or puberty rites may be represented as possessing nothing. To demonstrate that they are liminal beings; they have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing indicating rank, role or position in a kinship system. Their behaviour is normally passive or humble, it is a must for them to obey their instructors implicitly, and must acknowledge arbitrary punishment without complaint. It appeared that they are being lowered or brought down to a uniform condition to be reformed a new and bestowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life. While in the liminal state, human beings are stripped of anything that might differentiate them from their fellow human beings – they are in between the social structure, temporarily fallen through the cracks and it is in these cracks, in the interstices of social structure, that they are mostly aware of themselves. Liminality is a midpoint between a starting point and an ending point, and as such it is a temporary state that ends when the initiate is reincorporated into the social structure (Shure 2005). The transitional – being or “liminal persona”, according to Turner (1964), is defined by a name and by a set of symbol and the same name is very frequently employed to designate those who are being initiated into very different state of life.

The arcane knowledge obtained in the liminal period is considered to change the innermost nature of the neophyte, impressing him as a seal impresses way, with the characteristics of his new state. It is not an ordinary acquisition of knowledge but a change in being. His apparent passivity is revealed as an absorption of powers which will become active after his social status has been redefined in the aggregation rites (Turner 1964). Liminality implies that the high could not be high unless the low existed, and he who is high must experience what it is like to be low (Turner 1969).

Van Gennep’s work on rite of passage brought into limelight the liminal rites. Liminal rites are reflected in rites of passage which are found in all cultures, and are seen as both indicators and vehicles of transition from one socio-cultural state and status to another, childhood to maturity, virginity to marriage, childlessness to parenthood, ghosthood to ancestor-

hood ,sickness to health, peace to war, scarcity to plenty and so on (Turner 1979).

According to Turner (1979), Van Gennep differentiated between the rites performed at life-crises, such as birth, puberty, marriage, death, and those performed at crucial points in the turning year, or on occasions of collective crisis when a whole society faces a major change. Life-crisis rites effect changes of state or station in the lives of individuals or group of individuals. Calendrical rites which is the collective crisis for the whole society mark the passage of society as a whole (Whitehead 2004).

The first set (life-crisis rites) were mainly performed for individuals in secret or hidden places and related to upward mobility. The later (calendrical rites) were performed in public and at times portrayed reversals or inversions of status or confusion of everyday categories (Turner 1979).

Van Gennep has demonstrated that all rites of passage or transition are marked by three phases: separation, margin or limen and aggregation (Turner 1964). The first phase of separation comprises symbolic behaviour signifying detachment of the individual or group either from an earlier fixed point in the social structure or a set of cultural condition (Turner 1964). At this stage, individuals were separated from ordinary social life (Turner, 1979) or in another language, from the everyday world (Whitehead 2004). The second stage is liminal period. At this stage, the state of the ritual subject or the passenger is ambiguous; he passes through a realm that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state (Turner 1964). The subjects of ritual fall into a limbo between their past and present modes of daily existence (Turner 1979). It is a stage of limbo outside the everyday world – a transitional space in which there is suspension or inversion of the normative social order (Whitehead 2004). In the third stage or phase, the passage is consummated (Turner 1964). The individuals returned to the everyday world, transformed (Whitehead 2004). Reaggregation occurred when they are ritually returned to secular or mundane life either at a higher status level or in an altered state of consciousness or social being (Turner 1979). At this stage, the individuals are then re-incorporated into the society with new status (Bigger 2008). When incorporated, they became fully initiated adults and were expected to take up their proper roles as responsible members of society (Whitehead 2004). The liminal individuals, in summary passed through initiation which humbled them before permanently elevating them (Turner 1982). The kind of people in our society who are liminal are teenagers, students, trainees, travellers, holders of new jobs and people who want to assume a cultural sacred position in the society like the Obas (Kings) in some African Societies. This article examines the two types of liminal rites explained earlier on. The life-crisis rites and calendrical rites were explained within the context of rites of passage involved in the installation of kings among Yoruba people of south-western Nigeria. The installation of kings involved the

life-crisis rite for the kings to be installed and the calendrical rite for the passage of society as whole. Both were explained in the latter end of this article.

### **Victor Turner on Symbology**

Turner (1982) in his work on “Liminal to Liminoid, in Play, Flow and Ritual: An Essay in Comparative Symbology” argued that symbology is “the study or interpretation of symbols”. It is also “representation or expression by means of symbols”.

Turner (1982) explained that semiotics is divided into three branches: syntactic, semantics and pragmatics.

1. Syntactic: This is the formal relationships of sign and symbols to another apart from their users or external references; the organization and relationship of groups, phrase, clauses, sentences and sentence structure.

2. Semantics: This relationship of signs and symbols to their referential meanings.

3. Pragmatics: The relations of signs and symbols with their users.

The syntactic Turner called positional meaning, semantics he called exegetical meaning and pragmatics he called perational meaning (Turner 1982).

It is very important for us to examine the concept of symbol itself at this stage.

A symbol is anything that stands for something else (Curran and Renzett 1998) and that something else is its meaning (Hughes and Kroechler 2008). Symbols, therefore, is anything that meaningfully represent something else (Kendall 1996). A symbol represents more than itself (Johnson 1996). Symbols are social objects used to represent whatever people agree they shall represent (Charon 1998).

Johnson (1996) identified four kinds of symbols: symbolic objects (flag representing nations, money representing labour and good); symbolic characteristics of objects (purple for royalty, yellow for cowardice); gestures, action (a wink, a raised right hand) that have meaning in particular cultural contexts; and the vast range of spoken and Written words that make up language. Language is the most important set of symbols in any culture, for it contains the building blocks used to construct ideas.

Symbols tell us how to mark and interpret perceptions, depending on the social situation. We respond to symbols just as we responded to what they represent. Symbols are created, which means there is nothing inherent in any symbol that gives it power over people, its power lies in what it signifies to those who share its meaning (Johnson 1996). Symbols can be used to communicate because they are socially determined meanings. This is to say that culture comes to associate a particular symbol with some

particular aspect of reality (Brandshaw et al 2001). Symbols are the channels through which people communicate their values and beliefs to those around them (Schaefer 2008). The social life that we encounter as we move through the world is a continuous process of using, interpreting, and responding to symbols (Johnson 1996). In summary, symbols both as sensorial perceptible vehicles (significants) and as set of “meaning” (signifies) are essentially involved in multiple variability. Living, conscious, emotional and volitional creatures employ them to give order to the universe they inhabit (Turner 1982). Symbolic thought frees us from being limited in our experience to what we actually see, hear or feel (Giddens and Mitchell 2000)

### **Liminality and Symbology in Installation of Chief Kanongesha among the Ndembu of Zambia by Victor Turner in Brief.**

The work of Turner on installation rite among the Ndembu of Zambia expanded the knowledge of the way the Ndembu utilized and explained their ritual symbols. Turner (1969) argued that senior chief Kanongesha represents both the apex of politico-legal hierarchy and the total community at large. The chief symbolically represented the tribal territory and its resources; fertility and freedom from drought, famine, disease and insect plagues are embedded in his office. During the installation of the Chief Lukanu, bracelet which was made from human genitalia and sinews, soaked in the sacrificial blood of male and female slaves at each installation was used and this represented the supreme symbol of chiefly status. The political fountain head (Mwantiyanwa) symbolized the historical unity of the Ndembu people, and their political differentiation into subchiefdoms under Kanongesha; the timely medication by kafwana (ritual source) symbolized the land. The daily invocations made to it by kanongesha, at dawn and sunset were for the fertility and continuous health and strength of the land, its animals and vegetable resources and of the people (Turner 1969).

Turner (1969) explained that in the process of installation of the chief, a small hut is constructed with leaves and the hut is known as “kafwi” or “katu” and it symbolically represented a place where the chief elect will die from his commoner state – an imaginary death in Ndembu liminality.

In his argument of attributes of luminal entities, Turner (1969) pointed out that liminality and the ritual powers of the weak among Ndembu people came under two aspects: First, kafwana and the other Ndembu commoners are revealed as privileged to exert authority over supreme authority figure of the tribe. The supreme political authority is portrayed “as a slave”. The chief has to exert self control in the rites that he may learn to have self mastery thereafter in face of the temptations of power. His role here is a recurrent theme of luminal situations. It is the stripping off of preliminal and post liminal attributes.

The Kumukindyila rites also exposed the liminality involved in the installation of chief. The chief and his wife are dressed identically in a ragged waist-cloth and share the same name Mwadyi (a term used for boys undergoing initiation or a man's first wife in chronological order of marriage). These attributes of sexlessness and anonymity are highly characteristic of liminality (Turner 1969).

The concept of liminality was also shown in the chief submissiveness and silence. The chief has to submit to an authority that is nothing less than that of the total community which is the repository of the whole gamut of the culture's values, norms, attitudes sentiments and relationships. The ordeals and humiliations, often of a grossly physiological character to which chief are submitted to represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of their essence in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges (Turner 1969). Another liminality exhibited in the Ndembu installation rites is sexual continence. The chief is denied of engaging in sexual intercourse during the rites and indeed, the resumption of sexual relations is usually a ceremonial mark of the return to society as a structure of statuses. Liminality is reflected by the discontinuance of sexual relations (Turner, 1969).

Finally, according to Turner (1969) the pedagogic of liminality, therefore, represents a condemnation of two kinds of separation from the generic bond of *communitas*. The first kind is to act only in terms of the rights conferred on one by the incumbency of office in the social structure. The second is to follow one's psycho-biological urges at the expense of one's fellow. A mystical character is assigned to the sentiment of human kindness in most types of liminality, and in most cultures this stage of transition is brought closely in touch with beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or greater than human beings or powers (Turner 1969). This, of course, is reflected in the installation of kings among the Yoruba people as explained later in this article.

### **Liminality and Symbology in king's (Oba) Installation among the Yoruba People of south-western Nigeria.**

The institution of kingship among the Yoruba people was a powerful one before the people had contacts with the western world through slave trade and colonialism. Obas (kings) in Yoruba land were considered to be the next to the gods of the land (Alase Ekeji Orisa). The words of the kings were orders and there were no questions to be asked or other counter decisions to be raised. It was a taboo to query the sources of the kings' orders or authorities. To ask them, such did not exist (*Kabiyin ko si o*) among the Yoruba people.

The positions of the kings were very sacred because of the political power and the religious power that they controlled among their people. Such political power and religious power made them semi-gods before their people. Even, some kings i.e. Alaafin of Oyo kingdom were seldom seen by the common people except during some public occasions or socio-cultural or socio-religious events. Hence, the heads wearing the crowns among these people were considered to be the next to the gods of the land and next to the ancestors that had gone world beyond.

As I explained earlier on at the beginning of this article, the laymen who have no royal blood flowing in their veins cannot be installed as kings.

The king-to-be must be chosen from the royal lineages which are usually through patrilineal lineages. The choice of the king to be installed can be done through three ways:

- (1) through the consultation of the Ifa Oracle
- (2) through a nomination of consensus candidate among the princes
- (3) through a strong competitions among the princes- where the chiefs-in council responsible for king's nomination, pick, and this may be through election conducted secretly by those chiefs.

It is very imperative to stress a point here that only the princes can be made kings among the Yoruba people. The princesses cannot assume the position of obaship neither can men whose their mothers are princesses be installed as kings. However, in some parts of Yoruba land i.e. Ondo, a daughter who is a princess can be temporality installed to assume the position of a regent after the demise of her father before a prince is eventually nominated to occupy the position permanently as he lives.

The installation of the king will commence immediately a prince has been nominated to be the king elect or the king select as it may be. The first step is the commencement of the rites of passage for the new king. A particular place would be nominated by the new king where the rites of passage shall be performed by the high chiefs. Such a place is called different names by different Yoruba people. For instance, among some Oyo speaking people it is called "Ilofi" and among the Ijebu people it is called "Ipebi". Ilofi or Ipebi is a prototype of the hut which is known as 'Kafu" or Kafwi" a place where the chief-elect dies from his commoner state according to Turner (1969). However among the Yoruba people, Ilofi or Ipebi is a place where the king-elect meets with the past ancestors and where purification is done for the king-elect. It is a place where the king-elect strips off the image of ordinary person and takes on the supernatural power which gives the king-elect the power over the people and the spirits under his ruling domain. He receives the power over both the terrestrial powers and the powers operating in the air. Power that would make both the peo-

ple and spirits subject to him for the oba (king) itself means “he who has overlord power”.

During the period which the king-elect would be in “Ilofi” or “Ipebi” there are some liminal rites which occurred. In the first place, the head of the king may be shaved to accommodate some ritual rites. Shaving of the hair is a sign that the king is a neophyte that needed to be transitioned into another phase of life. Another thing is that, the king elect would be made to be in a particular cloth. Plain white cloth is usually worn by the king-elect and a strip of white cloth is usually tied round his waist when the rituals are being performed in “Ilofi” or “Ipebi”. The costly attires are usually denied the king elect. The period at this place of rites of passage is not meant for luxury or display of wealth through costly attires. It is a place where the pride and ego of the king-elect are broken to accommodate the power and the spirit from the ancestral realm that would enable him to carry out both the political functions and the religious functions of the land. Hence, denial of costly attires during the rites of passage in this sacred place is a sign of liminality. Turner (1969) also examined the similar issue when he argued that the chief-elect and his wife among the Ndembu people would wear ragged waist cloth. The differences are that among the Yoruba people the wife of the king-elect is not part of the rites of passage but only the king elect. The king-elect is only the focus of the ritual not his wife, unlike among the Ndembu, where both chief-elect and the wife would undergo the ritual together. Again, the king-elect among the Yoruba people would only tie new white cloth round his waist and this is when the rituals are being performed, not a ragged waist cloth as explained by Turner (1969). However, the similarity of the liminality can be seen in that among the both tribes, the chief or king elect would be denied the wearing of costly attires while the rituals of passage last.

At “Ilofi” or “Ipebi”, the king elect is considered a novice who needs to be trained, instructed and groomed culturally, traditionally and historically. The knowledge of culture, tradition and history that the king elect might have acquired is treated with disdain. The king-elect is downgraded into a small child that needs to acquire the culture, traditions and the history of the land and the people he would rule upon. The chiefs-in-council performing the rites of passage for the king-elect are bound to tell him the history of the land, the culture of his people and the traditions of the land. He would be told who were the founders of the land, the ancestors of the land the gods and the spirits of the land and how to worship them. The emphasis would be laid on the ancestors of the land. The king-elect must know his forefathers who had occupied the same position he is about to occupy in the past. The similar thing was applicable during the installation of chief of Kanongeshas among the Ndembu people of Zambia as explained by Turner (1969). The past kings who had transformed into the ancestors of the land must be known by the king elect one after the

other. He must know them off hand how they succeeded one another. This is considered part of the fundamental rituals, especially among the Oyo people when new Alaafin of Oyo is to be installed. It is called “counting and recitation of the prowess of the past kings” which must start from the first king to the newly elect one.

Turner (1969, 364-365) wrote: “Another luminal theme exemplified in the Ndembu installation rites is sexual continence. This is a pervasive theme of Ndembu ritual. Indeed, the resumption of sexual relations is usually a ceremonial mark of the return to society as a structure of statuses”. It is very important to mention here that abstinence from sexual intercourse during the rites of passage for the king-elect among the Yoruba people is a luminal theme exemplified among these people. It is forbidden for the king-elect to be sleeping with his wife during the period when he is undergoing rites of passage in “Ilofi” or “Ipebi”, such a place is not a place of abode for feminine being. It is a general belief that presence of women or having sexual intercourse with women may spoil or hinder the efficacy of some rituals among the Yoruba people. Hence, a king-elect who is undergoing rites of passage must abstain totally from sexual intercourse when the rituals last.

Rituals performed for the king-elect also signified the liminal theme in some circumstances. They showed that the king-elect is powerless and must be made powerful through the rituals processes. The rituals showed that they are the only way through which a natural being like the king-elect can be spiritually transformed into supernatural being who is above the natural beings and who can communion with the past ancestors and have fellowship with the gods of the land.

Under this liminal theme, I would specifically mention the installation of every Alaafin of Oyo who was considered the head of the kings among the Yoruba people, politically (before the adventure of the colonial masters). The installation of every Alaafin called for many rituals. But the one I would specifically mention here is the ritual involving the swallowing of two hundred and one bullets spiritually prepared to strengthen both the physical and spiritual being of the newly elect Alaafin. The two hundred and one (201) bullets would be prepared for the rituals which, of course, the processes involved in their preparation are far beyond the knowledge of uninitiated. However, when the bullets were prepared, each of the two hundred and one bullets would be taken one after the other with Ifa Panegyrics spoken on it before given to the newly elect Alaafin to swallow. Hence, we have two hundred and one bullets with two hundred and one different Ifa Panegyrics spoken on them. Each bullet would carry Ifa Panegyric different from others.

This ritual teaches some lessons to the newly elect Alaafin apart from the spiritual power it would bestowed on him. In the first place, it teaches patience to the new king. The king is thought to always have patience. It

would take time before the priest involved would complete the ritual and the king-elect must wait patiently for the completion of the ritual.

Secondly, endurance was involved. The process of swallowing two hundred and one spiritually prepared bullets would call for endurance and great perseverance on the part of the newly elected Alaafin. For instance, a bullet (see figure 1) is not a palatable thing to swallow. Hence, it is a matter of patience and perseverance to do this.

The last ritual of the rites of passage normally involved the act of making pledge and offering of prayers and petition by the king elect. For instance, Turner (1969) explained clearly that the chief-elect among the Ndembu people has to pledge himself to serve the weak and the distress and to mediate on his own unworthiness and that his subsequent power springs from this profound immersion in humility. The same is exemplified among the Yoruba people. The king-elect at the completion of the ritual, would be requested to pledge his loyalty to his people, the land and the gods of his ancestors. He would be requested to pray for good health, peace, prosperity and the abundance of good things for himself and his people. In some Yoruba towns a kind of charm may be prepared that would activate the prayers of the king-elect and make what he has requested to come to pass. Among the Oyo people, when Alaafin is to be installed, the charm called "Afun" which is a prepared charm with the feathers of a parrot is usually given to the Alaafin-elect to perform these ritual prayers.

The rituals that are usually performed at "Ilofi" are life-crisis rites performed to change the state or station in the life of the king-elect. They are the ones mainly performed for the king-elect in secret or hidden place which relate to his upward mobility (Turner 1979). However, after this life-crisis rites the calendrical rites which mark the passage of society as a whole would follow. The society did not have an enthroned king before now but the new one has been installed. The era of the preceded king has gone and the installation of the new king has opened another era, a new one in the history of the society. These calendrical rites are called public rituals by Turner (1979). They do not involve initiatory secrets. They are public rituals where public events come under the lens of luminal attention. The next stage after the secret rituals performed for the king-elect are public rituals and the public presentation of the king to the people.

The public rituals and the public presentation of the new king are usually done at the town square which is usually located at the centre of the town or city or any strategically located place accessible to the people from the nook and cranny of the town or city.

There are series of events at the public rituals for the newly elected king among the Yoruba people. If, I decide to write on all the events, the results would be volumes of write-ups. However, I would discuss specifically, the ones related to liminality and symbology so that this article

would not miss its focus. The liminality rite involved in the public rites of the presentation of the new king in Yoruba land is the “prostrating rite”. Under this rite, the king would be requested to prostrate to all the people present at the public rites – the old and the young, men and women indigenes and non-indigenes, the rich and the poor. The new king would prostrate three times that day. This is to humble him and to pass the information that, after all, he is not greater than the people that make him the king over them. However, after prostrating three times, he would never again prostrate for anybody as long as he lives and remain the king. This affects his parents and the other installed kings like him. It is a life-crisis liminal rite performed in the public (an open air rituals).

The next ritual at these public rites is the “picking of the calabash”. Three calabashes would be covered with an item placed in each one of them. The items that are usually used are: water, honey, salt and pepper (see figures 2, 3, 4 and 5 respectively). Two, out of water, honey and salt, would be selected while the third one would be pepper (three calabashes) in all. Picking of a calabash is the rite where symbology as a concept comes in. Water is an item which symbolizes refreshment and friendliness. A person who is thirsty and eventually gets some water to drink would know what refreshment is. Additionally, everybody uses water. No man would say he is an enemy to water. There is a proverb among the Yorubas that “No one keeps malice with water”. In Yoruba context, therefore, water is a symbol of refreshment and friendliness. The next item is honey. Honey is a very sweet item world over. Honey is a symbol of sweetened life. A life which is full of happiness, joy and prosperity, life which has no sorrow, bitterness and suffering. Salt is another item. Salt is a symbol of revitalisation of good flavour and good taste in life. It gives taste to a tasteless food, adds flavour to it and bring the good taste of the food out.

The last item is pepper. Pepper as an item symbolizes sorrow, suffering, hardness, bitterness, poverty, pain etc. It is a direct opposite (meanings) of water, honey and salt as explained before.

During this public ritual, each item (two of them from water, honey and salty) would be placed into two calabashes. The third calabash would usually contain pepper. Therefore, each of the three calabashes would contain: water, honey or salt and pepper. The king-elect would be asked to pick one out of the three calabashes. The item inside the calabash he picks, will tell how his reign would be. The item symbolizes what would happen during his tenure or era as a king.

Yoruba people are very conversant with the uses of symbols. Symbols are “a class of social objects”. Symbols are social objects we are able to describe to ourselves and to others and we are able to apply them to thousands of situations where they seem to fit.

Understanding symbols means that we understand their representation. Symbols are therefore social objects used by the actor for representation

and communication (Charon 1998). According to Charon (1998) symbols are significant. They are used intentionally and not by mistake.

The items mentioned earlier on (water, honey / salt and pepper) were social objects or symbols. All the adult Yoruba people know the symbolic meanings. Hence, when a king-elect picks a particular item in a calabash, it is socially believe that the meaning that the item represents would be the event that would happen during the king-elect's reign. Therefore, where a king elect picks a calabash contain water, honey or salt. It is usually a celebration of highest order among the subjects, with drumming and singing.

My maternal grand mother told me a story of the king who reigned in my home town between 1942-1987 (King Boladale Oyegunle – Late Akire of Ikire in Osun State, Nigeria). The said king picked a calabash containing water and a critical examination of his reign showed easy and refreshed life among his subjects. A song was said to have been composed when he picked the calabash that contained water:

Igba omi logbe (2ce)  
Boladale Omo Oyegunle  
Igba omi logbe.

Meaning:

You picked the calabash containing water (2ce)  
Boladale; the son of Oyegunle  
You picked the Calabash containing water.

Symbology as concept is also exemplified in the crown that the high chief would wear for the king at the public rites. Usually, Yoruba Obas (kings) normally wear beaded crowns (see figures 6 and 7). Crowns are symbols of authority and anybody that wears a beaded crown must be a king. There is a saying among these people:

Ade la fi mo Oba  
Ileke la fi mo Ijoye.

Meaning:

A king would be known by a beaded crown on his head.  
A chief would be known by coral beads round his neck.

Finally, a beaded traditional sceptre (see figure 8), symbolising authority would be presented to the king. A beaded traditional sceptre of authority is the king himself. Wherever, the sceptre is taken to (like place of ceremony), the sceptre represents the king, if the king is unable to attend. The beaded traditional sceptre symbolizes the king's authority and the image of the king himself. The sceptre must be treated with respect and dignity wherever it is taken to, as the king himself. It is a theme of symbology in public rites for king's installation in Yoruba land.

### **Conclusion**

In this article, I have discussed the concept of liminality both in luminal rites and public rites through the works of Victor Turner. Moreover, the concepts of symbology and symbol have been examined. The application of liminality and symbology to the chief's installation among the Ndembu in Zambia, by Victor Turner, has been explained to pave way and assist in the illustration of liminality and symbology in king's installation among the Yoruba people. Finally, this article has demonstrated the liminality rites, the public rites and the act of using symbols during the king's installation among the Yoruba people.

The article has taken time to explain judiciously the luminal rites that a king-elect must undergo and the public rites that must be done for him during his installation as a king. A careful understating of this article would show that rites of passage exist in every culture and among the societies of the world, one way or the other and that they are not limited to any culture. These may exist during initiation, puberty stage, birth, burial, marriage or installation of a traditional ruler as discussed in this article.

### **Recommendation**

This article, based on the premises that rites of passage exist in every culture of the world and that luminal rites, public rites and uses of symbols do exist in such cultures, recommends that more anthropological and ethnological studies be carried out on the luminal rites, public rites and the uses of symbols which exist during these rites in every culture. There is a need for this because it would expand and widen the horizon of rites of passage in anthropological and ethnological studies of the people of the world. By doing this, the western world would understand more, the cultures of the other people of the world without prejudice and the other people of the world would understand the western culture more deeply.

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Figure 1 A calabash with some locally made bullets. The new Aalafin to be installed must swallow 201 of them as part of the luminal rites for the king installation. This teaches patience and perseverance to the king.



Figure 2 A calabash containing water. Water is a symbol of refreshed life and friendliness. A king who picks this calabash would have an easy and a refreshed reign over his people.



Figure 3 A calabash containing honey. Honey is a symbol of happiness, joy and sweetness. A king who picks this calabash would have a kingship era which is full of happiness, joy and sweetness of life among his subjects.



Figure 4 A calabash containing some salt. Salt is a symbol of revitalization, good flavour and good taste. A king who picks this calabash would add good taste, flavour and revitalize people' lives with good thing of life.



Figure 5 A calabash with some pepper. Pepper is a bad social symbol which depicts sorrow, bitterness and suffering. A king who picks this calabash would have a reign period which would bring sorrow, bitterness and suffering to his subjects.



Figure 6 Some types of beaded crowns in Yoruba Land. It is only the kings who have the authority to put on these beaded crowns among these people. It is a taboo for someone who is not a king to wear these beaded crowns.

Sources: [www.commonwealthonline.org](http://www.commonwealthonline.org); [www.hamiligallery.com](http://www.hamiligallery.com); [www.emeagwali.com](http://www.emeagwali.com); [www.rebirth.co.za](http://www.rebirth.co.za)



Figure 7 A king in his full kingship regalia: with a beaded crown on his head as his symbol of his traditional authority over his people. Source: [www.crown-art.com](http://www.crown-art.com)



Figure 8 A king holding a beaded traditional sceptre in his right hand. It is a symbol of authority and the sceptre represents the king himself wherever the sceptre is taken to. Source: [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)

**Матијас Олуфеми Дада Оцо  
Абел Олуротими Ајоделе**

**Примена Тарнерових концепата лиминалности и симбологије у проучавању постављања *обаа* код народа Јоруба, у југозападној Нигерији**

Овај чланак испитује концепте лиминалности и симбологије, позајмљујући их из радова Виктора Тарнера, у којима су примењени у проучавању постављања поглавице код народа Ндембу у Замбији. У чланку се тумачи примена лиминалности и симбологије на постављање краљева код народа Јоруба, у југозападном делу Нигерије. У њему се темељно објашњавају обреди у вези с лиминалношћу, као што су: бријање главе, падање ничице пред људима, ношење беле тканине око појаса, ритуали у вези са историјом земље, гутање метака и сексуална апстиненција. Такође, у чланку се тумачи концепт симбологије. Разматра се процес током којег изабрани краљ „бира калабаш“ и објашњава се значење предмета чуваних у сваком од калабаша. Расправља се и о предмету који краљ бира, као и импликације које то има на његову владавину. Поред тога, у чланку се разматрају симболичка значења круне украшене перлама и краљевског скиптра. На крају чланка, препоручује се антрополозима и етнологима да користе концепте лиминалности и симбологије и у проучавању других култура света.

**Кључне речи:** лиминалност, симбологија, изабрани краљ, народ Јоруба, обреди прелаза