

COMPLETED DOCTORAL DISSERTATIONS

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PhD Defended in December 2011

An Investigation into the Role of Xhosa Male Initiation in Moral Regeneration

This study in Mdantsane (East London), Whittlesea (Hewu), Njiveni (Libode) and Cala sought to investigate the role of the amaXhosa male initiation in moral regeneration focusing on socio-cultural, educational and religious aspects related to moral values. The role of the amaXhosa male initiation as a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood, how it was viewed in the past, its impact upon the initiates and its contribution to the moral upholding of values were investigated. It was further intended to establish whether westernisation and urbanisation brought a shift of meaning and emphasis to the current initiation practice and, if so, to what extent has the ceremony departed from traditional norms and what challenges the ceremony has to face at present.

This ethnographic field research was carried out using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (formal interviews and informal discussions) and participant observation. The research findings suggested that in the past the amaXhosa male initiation played a role in the instruction of moral values. However, this study identified a shift of meaning in the practice which has been more evident in urban than in rural areas. The shift suggested that the instruction role has changed in prominence and there is less emphasis on teaching and appropriate adult behaviour. Moreover, the *amakhankatha* (guardians), who had the major role in teaching of the initiates, are now participating in making the role less effective and sometimes introducing influences that are destructive to the initiates. Such negative influences include abuse of alcohol and drugs, promiscuity among the youth and disobedience of elders. It is argued that revisiting the teachings surrounding male initiation may cultivate productive debates on how young males are taught morality in today's society. Furthermore, if the Xhosa male initiation could be contextualised, it can play a role in the instruction of boys as they graduate to manhood and can contribute to moral regeneration in South Africa.