

Rites of Passage in Ogbalu's Novel, Obiefuna: An Archetypal Analysis

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Abstract

Creative works in Igbo do embody elements drawn from the traditional life of the people. This paper, which discusses the 'rite of passage' in Ogbalu's novel, Obiefuna, looks at it as a cultural phenomenon, which elicits a pattern of transformation and social mobility in traditional Igboman's life as exemplified in the work of art. The paper x-rays the various transitory processes in Igboman's life as illustrated in the novel, and concludes that courage and endurance, which some of the transitory stages require, are essential in human life as one faces the challenges of life. The paper also notes that the incorporation of this traditional material in the modern work of art in the novelist's way of preserving in the Igbo culture and myth.

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Introduction

'Literature', as rightly observed by Ezikeojiaku (2001:48) "does not exist in vacuum; it is imaginative work of art embodying ideas significant to the culture that produces it." Apart from the creative achievement of modern Igbo writers, their works of art still embody a lot of elements found in the traditional life of the people. Ubesie, for instance, who is considered one of the most prolific novelists in Igbo language, is not only seen as "an author who portrays cultural practices but also as a novelist who, in his themes x-rays the Igbo society" (Ezikeojiaku, 47). This observation about Ubesie also applies to many other Igbo novelists such as Nzeako, Ogbalu, Maduekwe, etc. Of these novelists, Ogbalu appears to be the most visible in terms of his commitment to the assertion of Igbo culture as evidenced in his

novels. He is one modern Igbo writer whose works, perhaps, due to his persistent efforts to conserve Igbo culture are often embellished with cultural issues.

A reader who is conversant with Igbo culture can relive different aspects of Igbo culture in Ogbalu's novels. His novel, *Ebubedike*, for instance, is a fictionalised account of the stages in Igbo traditional marriage process. The novel portrays all the nitty-gritty of betrothing and marrying, that is, from the time a young Igboman considered ripe for marriage embarks on a search for a suitable wife up to the point he satisfies all the customary requirements and settles down with his spouse. *Uwaezuoke*, his other novel, is profoundly suffused with traditional motifs. It depicts the life of full-fledged Igboman, and his various accomplishments in life till his death. In *Obiefuna*, which is the focus of this paper, Ogbalu's pre-occupation is again the projection of Igbo culture. Here, the various transitory processes in Igboman's life are x-rayed.

What Ogbalu seems to have done in the three novels mentioned is to channel his creative dexterity to projecting different aspects of Igboman's life and culture through various fictitious characters. This is perhaps to complement his published non-fictional works where he discusses the various socio-cultural life of the Igbo. Rich as Ogbalu's novels are in terms of their anthropological value, no conscious study has been devoted to exploring the cultural elements and discerning the pattern of their presentation in the works.

This paper discusses the 'rites of passage' in Ogbalu's *Obiefuna*. It looks at the rites of passage as a cultural phenomenon, which elicits a pattern of transformation and social mobility in the traditional Igboman's life as exemplified in the life of one of the characters in the novel.

The Concept of the Rite of Passage

Modum (1978: 49) observes that "the life of the traditional African is ordered around a cyclical view of the world." He stresses further that the cyclical conception of life for the African and "the need for man to participate in the mythical acts of creation are symbolized by the agricultural or seasonal cycles."

Modum is right in his observation but we would add that the symbolization of the cyclical conception of life or re-creation for the African is not limited to seasonal cycles. It should also be noted as Kalu (1978:41) rightly points out that:

Life flows in a cycle from birth, naming ceremony through puberty rites, marriage, initiations into ascriptive societies and non-ascriptive or achieved societies, adult roles to death.

This means that the cyclic nature of life also entails some events which in many societies are cultural patterns. Some of these cultural patterns of life are of mythic dimensions in that they reflect the myth that bind the society together in its people's psychological, social and religious activities. One of the cultural patterns is the "rite of passage" which Nnolim (1992:44) acknowledges as a term in myth criticism. Part of the interests of archetypal criticism is to discover "basic cultural patterns which assume a mythic quality in their permanence within a particular culture" (Scott, 1979:248).

'Rite of passage', as defined by Young (1994: 542), is "a ceremony marking a person's passage from one social category or group to another". Arnold Van Gennep, a French anthropologist who introduced the term in 1909 is said to have used it to cover many ceremonies of status transition found in all societies. These, according to him, include rituals of parenthood, birth, childhood, youth (also referred to as puberty in "initiation" rites), marriage and death. Long (1993: 700) in his own explanation, which is in line with Gennep's position notes that

Myths in the category of crucial events in human life are concerned primarily with birth, puberty, marriage and death. Baptism, name-giving, initiation and ordination are closely related. All are

accompanied by rituals (rites of passage) marking the passage of the individual from one state of being to another.

Long adds that “Baptism, initiation and puberty rites frequently imply the concept of the death of an old life and rebirth in a new one”.

As can be seen from the above explanations, both Young and Long see ‘rite of passage’ as embodying events or ceremonies which mark an individual’s passage from one social status to another. Kalu’s view on the cyclic flow of life mentioned earlier is also in agreement with Gennep, Young and Long’s positions on ceremonies of status transition. Young explains further that the actual content of status and transition ceremonies varies. The initiate, for instance, may be “specially dressed or undressed, secluded or displayed, praised or hazed. He or she may submit to tattooing, scarification, circumcision or clitoridectomy.”

Van Gennep categorises the many component rituals and beliefs associated with rites of passage into three, namely, separation, transition and incorporation. He however points out that the three phases he identifies are not present in all cases but that the classification is still widely influential (Young, 1994).

Wheelwright, according to Nnolim (1992:248), calls the rites of passage “the ceremonies of transition” and also identifies three states that it involves. In place of rites of separation, transformation and return as used by others, Wheelwright adopts the rites of separation, margin (when the candidate for initiation finds himself in the darkness and anonymity of between two worlds) and attainment. His description of the states in the rites of initiation of ancient Eleusis is outlined by Nnolim:

- i. The candidates are separated by a taboo from those who have impure hands.
- ii. The neophytes are introduced into the Eleusinion, but before penetrating the enclosure they must purify themselves with a vase of holy water placed next to the door.

- iii. The neophytes are led to the shore of the sea, wherein they take ritual bath to be washed clean of earlier 'profane' and impure life.
- iv. They return to Eleusis in a holy procession, carrying the Bacchic figure and other sacred objects to various places of agrarian worship en route.
- v. Re-entering the enclosure of Eleusinion, they undergo the ceremony of initiation, which includes entry into a great hall where the sacra were exhibited.
- vi. Finally, there were dances, procession and other ceremonial forms of rejoicing.

Nnolim points out that there are other universal aspects of initiation which Wheelwright does not discuss but Eckert expounds them. They include "the seclusion of the neophytes in a dark and threatening place where they live in imminent danger of being destroyed by the gods; the endurance of ordeals; instruction in the group myth; some rite of marking or scarification; the revelation of certain sacral objects; investment of the neophytes with adult objects of clothing; and finally, a return to society "reborn to higher status." This idea of what the initiation entails agrees with Van Gennep's exposé of the phenomenon as discussed by Young. He also indicates that in many male initiation ceremonies that lead to adult status, "the youth is separated by being taken into a special camp" or "left alone for a period of days, sometimes without food". During the transitional phase, according to him, the candidate may be required to perform onerous ritual tasks as he undergoes tests of strength and courage, in the course of which he learns his community's mythology. As he gets re-admitted or re-incorporated into his community as a man, the members of the community acknowledge his new status by dancing and feasting. Nnolim draws some parallels of these initiatory processes in his archetypal study of Camara Laye's novel, *The Dark Child*.

Rite of passage as a mythic phenomenon is a myth that is as has been pointed out earlier, common to almost all societies and is, therefore, archetypal. Among the Igbo people of Nigeria, the notion of rebirth or regeneration is implied also in the

concepts of ancestral reincarnation and rites of passage. Man, who “participates in the mythical acts of creation” in his performance of certain activities of life (Modum, 49), himself undergoes some processes of transformation as he moves from one stage to another in his societal life. Kalu acknowledges, in the excerpt quoted above, that the cyclical pattern of life is also demonstrable in rites of passage.

Obiefula, the principal character in Ogbalu’s novel, undergoes different transitory ceremonies in his life towards manhood. It is these processes of Obiefula’s transition that we shall examine in the following section of this paper. We shall equally be drawing some parallels of the initiatory processes outlined by Nnolim above.

Transitory Ceremonies in Obiefula’s Life

In the novel, *Obiefuna* (1974), the various incidents in the life of the character, Obiefula, are typical of the Igbo traditional concept of an individual’s transitory processes in life. The novel incorporates the initiatory processes in the rites of initiation of Obiefula from his innocent childhood to adulthood in his society. Obiefula undergoes different transitory ceremonies in his life journey towards manhood.

The Igbo have a tradition of taking care of a mother and her new-born baby shortly after the baby’s arrival. This is called *ilē ọmụgwọ*. It is a period during which adequate provisions of food and other basic necessities are made by the husband for the baby and its mother. Relations and neighbours visit and present gifts to the new-born baby. It is a ceremonial form of rejoicing - an occasion of welcoming the new baby as a new member of its family.

After the ceremony of the child’s reception during which relations and friends express their appreciation for the baby’s arrival, preparation is made for the baby’s circumcision which takes place on the eighth day after its birth. Circumcision is a tradition most societies and religions attach much importance to. As a sign of God’s covenant with his people, for instance, Israelite boys were circumcised eight days after they were born. It can be called the first ceremony proper in the series of

initiatory processes the child undergoes as he grows up. Nnolim (46) notes that it is the “most serious initiation” which is also described by Laye in his novel as “a really dangerous ordeal and no game”. It is also identified as a “barrier between adolescence and adulthood and, therefore, approached by the initiates with both anticipation and dread as each initiate desires to be ‘born, to be born again’.”

The initiate’s desire which Nnolim is talking about here obtains in a culture where circumcision is not an infant experience but a boyhood ritual. In Igbo traditional society as exemplified by Obiefula’s case, the ceremony of circumcision is carried out during one’s infancy.

The experience is an excruciating ordeal for the child. Its painful nature is evident in Obiefula’s pity-evoking yell:

Ọ na-akwa akwa dị imere ebere
ka agụba Lọlọ malitere ọlụ ya.
Ọ na-achị dị ka akpakiri, na-eti
mkpu dị ka onye dara elu. Nne
ya ochie ji otu aka kudo ya
were nke ọzọ na-atụ ya mmiri
ọkụ zara zara iji bilata ya ụfụ.
Ọ na-asị ya, “Ndo nwa m. Die
edie. I bụ dimkpa.” ... E bisie
Obiefula ugwu, kuru ya baa
n’ụlọ kunye ya nne ya. O nyebe
ya ara; Ọ na-anụ, ọ na-elo ya
kpurujii kpurujii dị ka onye si
n’ije ma ọ bụ n’iru ọgụ lata.

(He cried in an agonizing way that deserves pity as Lọlọ’s razor commenced its work. He sounds like thunder and shouts like one that has fallen from a tree top. His grandmother holds him with one hand and with the other hand sprinkles him with

warm water to alleviate the pain. She says to him, “Sorry, my child. Endure. You are a man”. After Obiefula’s circumcision, he is taken inside the house to his mother. She starts to breastfeed him; he gulps the milk voraciously like someone who has just returned from a journey or from war).

The grandmother’s soothing words to the child, “*Ì bụ dimkpa*” (You are a man) is symbolic. Obiefula has exhibited a manly enduring capacity in the course of his circumcision. To begin his journey towards manhood, he has undergone some transformation - a sloughing off of old nature to take on new form. Among the Igbo, an uncircumcised man is not admitted into the men’s cult.

As indicated in the excerpt above, the experience of circumcision is an ordeal comparable to a long journey after which the undertaker is fagged out. After the painful experience, the infant Obiefula is said to be gulping his mother’s breast-milk voraciously like someone who has just arrived from a journey or war, who is in dire need of assuaging his thirst. This indicates how energy-sapping the circumcision ordeal can be.

Obiefula’s circumcision is followed by his naming ceremony (*igụ ahà*). The Igbo believe that giving a child a name is one way of giving him recognition and identity in his community. This is because a person without a name has no identity in his community. Also in Yoruba society as revealed by Taiwo (1967:32), “without a name, a child is not identified as a member of the family”. During the ceremony, the child’s kinsmen, the eldest man in his patrilineage and the chief priest of his community deity gather together to perform some rituals. Obiefula is brought before them. A kolanut is then presented to the chief priest who begins to invoke all the deities and prominent ancestors in the land to partake of the kolanut (Ogbalu (1974:21 – 22). The chief priest breaks the kolanut into small

pieces and places them on top of the *Okpēsī* deity before the people present are served their own. This is followed by the pronouncement of the child's name by his father. This can be said to be a ceremony of dedicating the child to his community deity and lineage ancestors who are believed to have some control or influence over the lives of the individual members of the community.

The exercise among the Yoruba also involves some comparable ceremonies as indicated by Taiwo (33):

The principal members of the family, friends and relatives assemble early in the morning with various ingredients already prepared, like palm oil, salt, honey, water, etc. (These vary in different families) which are given to both the child and the mother to taste.

Apart from this, a name is given to the child by the family elders and both mother and child are brought to the chamber and a jug full of water from a shrine is tossed up to the roof. The baby in the arms of an elderly female of the family is taken under the eaves to catch the spray; the baby yells and the parents shout for joy. The child's feet are touched by *ifa* nuts. Festivities follow with presents for the baby from everyone present. In some cases, there is also an offering of sacrifice and consultation of the family oracle on the child's behalf.

Another ritual that comes after the naming ceremony is the seclusion of Obiefula. This is a humorous ceremony of *itu amụ* (stimulation of laughter) in which the child is momentarily abandoned by other children in a lonely place before being ‘rescued’ by his mother.

The stimulation of laughter ceremony involves children. In the very night slated for the ceremony, children from the village gather together. They sing, dance and eat. Before they disperse, Obiefula is handed to the children’s leader, a female, who carries him out of the house, shuts the entrance door and sits him on some leaves spread on the ground at a lonely distance. Thereafter, the female leader spews out some chewed alligator pepper on Obiefula’s body and all the children shout: “Let the owner of the child come and carry him Oh.” They abandon him and run to their various homes. The child’s mother opens the door and runs out with a cane on her hand and gives the children a dramatic chase to rebuke them. She quickly runs back to carry her child. From then onwards, the baby-minder begins to carry Obiefula out to join the company of his playmates and they too begin to reciprocate the visits. Ogbalụ describes the incident as follows:

Ịtụ amụ bụ omenala a na-eme
tupu amalite iku nwa ọhụụ pụta
n’ama. Ọ bụ ka e wee chụsaara
ya egwu ndị mmadụ na ndị
mmụọ na iji menyere ụmụaka
ha na ya na-egwurikọ egwu ka
ha wee matakwa ya. (p.23)

(Stimulation of laughter is a ceremony performed before the carrying of the child to an open arena (play ground) formally begins. It is meant to drive away his fear of both human beings and spirits, and to give a treat to

his playmates so that they can recognize him).

This exercise initiates or introduces the child into his peer group. It implies that the child is growing up and needs to be encouraged to gradually begin to withdraw from the confines of the maternal world and be exposed to the world of children. The seclusion is part of the rituals required by the society to instill in children the boldness to overcome fear. Young (1994) tells us that J.N.W. Whiting, Richard Kluckhohn and Albert Anthony interpret male initiation ceremonies as rituals of socialization and control, the aim of which is primarily to break the emotional ties between the boy and his mother. This is also intended to ensure strong and unambiguous sexual identification.

The implication of the chewed alligator pepper spewed on Obiefula as part of this initiatory ceremony needs to be pointed out. The scourge of the pepper which he may feel is a training in hardship and endurance. It is a kind of reminder that the world to which he is being exposed is hard and full of challenges.

The discovery of a new pair of teeth in the child's mouth (*ihu ezē*) attracts its own ceremony which can also be regarded as one of his transitory states in life. When the discovery is first made by the mother, she conceals it in accordance with the tradition and pretends to be ignorant of it until someone else (usually not a member of the family) sees it. The new development is not immediately announced because the Igbo say "the discovery of a child's new teeth is not made with an empty hand" ("*à naghị àgba akā àhụ nwatà ezē*") which means that it must be accompanied with a gift for the child by the discoverer. In Obiefula's case, a kinsman visits their home with wine before announcing that Obiefula has developed new teeth. It is an occasion of joy because the child does not develop upper teeth first. Developing upper teeth before the lower ones is regarded as an abomination in Igbo traditional society. The implication of this is that since Obiefula does not violate the accepted natural order, he is to be accepted as a member of the community. He is congratulated and presented with gifts.

The Igboman believes in taking personal defensive measures against both known and unknown enemies. The preparation of a series of charms for Obiefula's protection attracts an elaborate ritual. Obiefula's parents invite a renowned medicine-man to provide the child with adequate magical resources to repel both visible and invisible enemies. The serious nature of the charm-protective measure is revealed in what the medicine-man assures his clients on one of the occasions:

Aga m eghe Obiefula n'uju ka o
wee sie ike na mmadu ka amusu
o buka ma nke mmadu ma nke
mmuo ghara inwe ike ojoo n'aru
ya; o puta n'ogbo, o buru nkume
(42).

(I shall fry Obiefula in a pot for
him to be a strong person so that
no human and spiritual witch
will have evil power over him;
if he comes out in the public he
will be a stone).

The medicine-man pounds some herbs in a pot and adds various items which include vulture's feather, antelope's and wren's tongues, crocodile's bone, tortoise's, snake's part, etc. He mixes them with the blood of a fowl which he slaughters in front of *Agwu* shrine and then cooks them in a pot. When it is done, the pot is allowed to cool and Obiefula is put inside the pot and rubbed with the concoction. A number of wrapped charms are also given to Obiefula's parents with some instructions on their applications.

With this ritual, the child becomes initiated into the group of people with occult powers. And it is intended to give the child both physical and spiritual fortification as he grows up and gets integrated into the mainstream of his community's social life. In the traditional view of life, this kind of magical resource which he has acquired has transformed and elevated him to a sphere higher than that of an ordinary man.

As Obiefula matures, he begins to make his presence felt in his community through his active participation in social activities such as dancing, masquerading and wrestling. Another initiatory process Obiefula enters in his bid to attain adulthood in his society is *ibū àmànwurū*. In Igboland, there are recognized titles a man can acquire in the course of his life. *Ibū àmànwurū* is one of the preparatory ceremonies towards the acquisition of *Ọzọ* title in Igboland, but it is in itself a distinct title that earns the recipient some social recognition. After his initiation into this group, the next stage of rite which Obiefula undertakes is the *Ékwú* or *Ọzọlọ* ceremony. Basden (1983:261) describes it as “the preliminary order leading to the most important of all and is never taken except by men proceeding to the Awzaw (sic) orders”. It is regarded as a minor aspect of *Ọzọ* ceremony which does not involve the whole community but the initiatory processes are long and highly demanding. The processes take a number of years during which a lot of wealth is expended.

On the last day of the rite, all the initiates or holders of *Ekwuulo* title converge at the new candidate’s house for elaborate feasting. It is a ceremony which empowers the recipient to carry the insignia of his order so that he can receive the courtesy salutation attached to it. The ceremony gives Obiefula the privilege of being invested with some of the insignia of titled men like wearing of shoes and holding of *ngwu agiriga* (iron staff forked at the top and spear-pointed at the bottom) when walking. But since Obiefula is still a young man at the time the title is conferred on him, he does not hold it except during an occasion of title-taking ceremony.

Another important phase in Obiefula’s transitory processes is his marriage, which its importance among the Igbo is emphasized in the following excerpt:

One thing that cannot be joked with is marriage. If a man acquires wealth, builds a house and does all other things but does not marry, he is not reckoned with. In the same vein,

if a woman is very beautiful but does not marry, she is not recognized as a person (Translated from Ogbalu, 1983:23).

Marriage is a custom that is encouraged in every society of the world. In Igbo traditional society, a man is not yet recognized as a full-fledged member of his community no matter how elevated he is socially or how viable he is economically until he is married. There are responsibilities which an unmarried man cannot be allowed to assume in the society.

Obiefula has attained some social heights in his community but he is not yet fully recognized as a full-fledged man in his community. He, therefore, marries as he progresses in his journey to adulthood so that he can be fully absorbed into the men's fold.

The last stage of Obiefula's initiatory processes as depicted in the novel is his taking of the highest traditional title in Igbo society – the *Ozo* title. This is performed when Obiefula has settled down as a man and has children. It is the most expensive title and attracts quite enormous expenses connected with all the paraphernalia associated with the conferring of the title. The degree of honour and recognition accorded the holder of this title in his society is indicated in what Obiefula's father tells him:

Kama ichi *Ozo* ga-ewetara gi
ahuhu, o mee ka anya ruo gi ala.
I sonye na ndi nwere agba na
onu okwu n'obodo. A gaghị
awa mwuwa n'ulo gi nke i ga-
adikwa n'inu iyi asaa (sic) na iyi
ori. I ga-awabido ndi ogbo gi oji
ebe o bula e nyere unu oji

(Instead of bringing you
suffering, the conferment of

Ọzọ title (on you) will make you more responsible. You will be one of the influential people in the society. Your house will not be trespassed on nor would you take part in swearing concerning issues of lying and stealing. Among your peers, you will reserve the right to break a kola nut first wherever you are served a kolanut ...).

Basden (1983:262) highlights some other benefits the Ọzọ title-holder enjoys:

The peculiar benefits that accrue to members of the order are: absolute exemption from all forms of manual labour; immunity from bodily insult from any native whether from his own town or another. He has the right to inflict punishment on any man who tampers with his wives. He sits upon the council which exercises jurisdiction in civil and criminal cases in the town and which regulates customs; promulgates laws, etc.

To be fully initiated into the Ọzọ society, Obiefula undergoes a series of rites: “washing of Ọzọ staff” (“*isācha arọ Ọzọ*”), “wearing of ankle thread (“*igbanye ọwuru*”), “entering the spirit realm” (“*ikpu mmuọ*) and ‘parading the market’ (“*ipu ahia*”). Each of these states attracts some ritual ceremonies during which the older initiates or holders of Ọzọ title are entertained. It is the ceremony of *igbanye ọwuru* that

distinguishes one from non-initiates because it gives the titleholder his identity. He wears the *owuru* on his ankle until his death.

The ceremony of wearing the ankle thread involves the ritual of ‘entering the spirit realm’ (*ikpu mmuḡ*). The candidate for initiation is led by the leaders of the *Qzḡ* order into the middle of the night to be instructed on the group’s rules. This is a form of seclusion which involves some purification rituals: “oath-taking” (*inḡ iyi*) which restrains him from divulging secret; ‘making an incision on the initiate’s tongue’ (*ika mma n’ire*) which signifies that he is expected to be a man of integrity; ‘cleansing of the eyes’ (*ijucha anya*), which signifies that he must expose any evil he notices, and ‘cleansing of the mouth’ (*ijucha onḡ*) which signifies that he cannot eat any defiled thing. All these are indicated in the following excerpt:

Uḡochi Obiefula kpuru mmuḡ
Qzḡ di juḡ; mkpotu adighi ya
karija egwu Qzḡ a no n’ohia Udḡ
na-eti n’etiti abali. Ndi isi Qzḡ
duuru ya n’etiti ndeli mee ka ḡ
mata ogologo na uhie di n’Qzḡ;
inḡ iyi di ya nke mere na onye
Qzḡ adighi agba ama; ika mma
n’ire mere na ḡ dighi ire abuḡ;
ijucha anya nke mere na ḡ hu
ihe ojḡḡ ḡ ghaghi ikwuputa ya;
ijucha onḡ nke mere na ḡ dighi
eri ihe ruḡ aru (115).

(The day Obiefula entered the spirit realm was serene; there was no noise except for the *Qzḡ* dance that was on in *Udḡ* forest at midnight. The leaders of the *Qzḡ* order led him in the middle of the night to instruct him on the pros and cons of *Qzḡ*; there

was an oath-taking which makes an Ozo member not to divulge secret; an incision on the tongue which makes him a man of integrity; a cleansing of the eyes which makes him expose evil when he notices it; a cleansing of the mouth which prohibits his eating of defiled things).

It could be said that it is in these ceremonies that the codes of conduct which his new status demands are spelt out. All this is intended to inculcate in the mind of the initiate, the morality and responsibilities demanded by his new status. The reader of the novel learns that an individual needs to maintain some level of discipline as he assumes a greater responsibility in his/her community or nation.

The purification exercise in Udo forest is an important aspect of the initiatory processes. It has some implications which deserve mention. It is a symbolic transformation of the personality of the initiate, a rebirth in the sense that the initiate vows to forsake any 'profane' attitude characteristic of human nature and take on a new life as he rejoins his community. The experience creates in the life of the candidate a new consciousness and self-awareness that will help him to assume the responsibilities of his higher status.

The climax of the Ozo ceremony is the new title holder's marching round the market place (*izu ahia Ozo*) which is attended by a great euphoria – dancing, eating and drinking. This is a form of "a return to society" after prolonged transitory initiatory processes and their concomitant ordeals. After his title-taking ceremonies, Obiefula is accorded full recognition as an adult member of his society.

The initiatory paradigm described by Wheelwright and Eckert which Nnolim outlines are, as our above analysis shows, realized in the various incidents of Obiefula's rites of passage. He experiences seclusion or separation from his mother and from his peer group during the ceremony of *Itu amu* (stimulation of

laughter). This involves his removal to a lonely spot where he is seated on leaves spread on the ground and abandoned. His entry into the spirit realm which “involves a midnight journey into Udo forest constitutes another form of separation. Instruction on the group’s myth is realized in Obiefula’s oath-taking and some forms of purification that indicate the moral standard he is expected maintain. His scarification is in the form of circumcision which is a painful experience and a training in endurance. Obiefula’s investment with adult objects are seen in his investiture with some insignia of title-holders such as shoes (*akpukpoukwu*), iron staff (*ngwu agiriga*), ankle thread (*owuru*), etc., all of which are symbols of his elevated social status. The final dances, procession and other forms of rejoicing are actualized in Obiefula’s marching round the market (*izu ahia Ozọ*) which climaxed his initiation into the exalted *Ozọ* order. It symbolizes his return to society as a transformed individual – an individual reborn to higher status.

With reference to the initiatory paradigm described by Laye in his *The Dark Child*, Nnolim describes this kind of initiation modes as the

community's symbolic method of sanctioning transition from boyhood to adulthood. By separating boys from their mothers, sisters and sweet-hearts, society thereby affects a break with the maternal world and all effeminizing influence. Instruction in the society’s myth, ritual, religion, mores and responsibilities of adulthood orients the initiates into their new roles with weighty ceremony divorced from frivolity. It is also one way of maintaining tribal cohesiveness and continuity by ensuring that

the myths and mysteries of society are preserved and transmitted intact (47 – 48).

The Igbo society, like other societies, has its myths and mysteries, its philosophy and ideology reflected in these myths and mysteries which the members of the society are expected to imbibe. As children are born into the Igbo traditional society, they are gradually oriented through various initiatory processes into the collective conscience and expectations of their society.

The idea of rites of passage is that man's existence is in constant flux. Man, like the society in which he is born, is dynamic. All the transitory processes and their accompanying rituals are ways of ensuring his social mobility as he progressively moves from one social status to another. He learns, in the course of all this, how to tolerate and consort with others; he learns the moral values embodied in the myths and rituals of his society; he matures and becomes a master of himself, and finally, he accepts his roles in his society.

Obiefula as portrayed in this novel, in the end after all the ceremonies of his transition, becomes an accomplished man who, by all standards, in Igbo view of life, is qualified to be given a befitting funeral rites (though not indicated in the novel) whenever he joins his ancestors preparatory to his reincarnation – another form of rebirth.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined one of the Igbo concepts of rebirth – rites of passage – as demonstrated in the life of a character in Ogbalu's novel. Though fictitious, the character embodies the personality of a typical traditional Igboman, and the novelist artistically uses him to illustrate the transitory processes with their concomitant rituals which an Igboman undergoes in his mobility from one social and spiritual status to another. The implication of all this is that in man's life, there is a continuous process of renewal in the course of which he is purged, enlightened and elevated both socially and spiritually.

This kind of initiatory processes in Obiefula's rites of passage can also be seen as the novelist's way of ensuring the continuity and preservation of society's culture and myths. Another lesson drawn from the life of the character, Obiefula, in this novel, is that courage and endurance are essential in man's life as he moves from one stage to another, and faces different challenges of life some of which may be excruciating.

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