

## ARCHETYPAL/MYTHIC PATTERNS IN IZON TRADITIONAL PLAYS: A STUDY AMASSOMA SEIGBEN FESTIVAL OF BYELSA STATE

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Myths and Archetypal elements are significant to the origin and understanding of traditional Izon plays. This is because, there is hardly any Izon festival celebrated in isolation without a link to them. In fact, most Izon festivals are celebrated to unravel the myth behind certain significant events. Seigben festival of the Izon in Amassoma, Bayelsa State falls into that category. It is among many festivals celebrated in Nigeria which has helped to showcase the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of Nigeria and Africa. However, scholars have not paid much attention to its archetypal and mythic elements. Since there is the fear that salient aspects of this festival may soon be lost, this paper examines the archetypal and mythic patterns that manifest in the festival to show their relevance to society, as well as their literary qualities. The paper has done so using the archetypal and performance theory. The significance of understanding the myths behind Seigben festival as well as other Izon festivals and unveiling their archetypal elements makes the study relevant to existing scholarship on Izon scholarship. The paper concludes that Amassoma Seigben festival of the Izon is embedded with archetypal and mythic patterns which give the festival its traditional quality. Thus, the paper recommends further that studies be carried out in other Izon tradition plays. More so, components of these elements are incorporated by writers of Izon extraction.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Archetypal/Mythic Patterns, Izon Traditional Plays, Amassoma Seigben Festival*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The *Seigben* festival of the Izon in Amassoma, Bayelsa State, is among many festivals celebrated in Nigeria which has helped to showcase the rich cultural and spiritual heritage of Nigeria and Africa. However, scholars have not paid much attention to it, despite its richness in archetypal and mythic elements. Since there is the fear that salient aspects of this festival may soon be lost, this paper examines the archetypal and mythic patterns that manifest in the festival to show their relevance to society, as well as their literary qualities. The paper has done so using the archetypal and performance theory. The paper concludes that Amassoma Seigben festival of the Izon is embedded with archetypal and mythic patterns which give the festival its traditional quality.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

#### **Archetypal Approach**

The Archetypal approach looks for the recurrent universal patterns underlying most literary works. It is an interdisciplinary approach that combines the insights of anthropology, psychology, history, and comparative religion. Archetypal criticism

explores the artist's common humanity by tracing how the individual imagination uses myths and symbols common to different cultures and epochs.

A central concept in mythological criticism is the archetype, a symbol, character, situation, or image that evokes a deep universal response. The idea of the archetype came into literary criticism from the Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, a lifetime student of myth and religion. Jung believed that all individuals share a "collective unconscious," (25) a set of primal memories common to the human race, existing below each person's conscious mind. Archetypal images (which often relate to experiencing primordial phenomena like the sun, moon, fire, night, and blood), Jung believed, trigger the collective unconscious. Northrop Frye defined the archetype in considerably less occult terms as "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole" (28). This approach is useful because Amassoma *Seigben* festival is an oral form of art which calls upon myths, images, characters, models, patterns, and legends in human society. The archetypal approach remains the best for this study since it attempts to explore dramatic elements which are present in the art, traceable to the human race, as well as such symbols, characters, myths or images that evoke a deep universal response. This approach will enable the researcher bring out the content of the festival and performance aesthetics that manifest as motifs in the *Seigben* festival.

### Performance Theory

Performance theory was propounded by Richard Schechner in 1985 although the theory originates from a variety of fields, but is most associated with the work of Richard Schechner and Victor Turner. These two authors drew attention to the performative nature of societies around the world, how events and rituals as well as daily life were all governed by a code of performance. From ethnographic studies in different societies in different contexts, these authors highlighted how performances are central to human understanding. Within capitalist, western societies, the importance of performance was revealed through studies of the highly ritualised routine of courtrooms, as well as the elaborate performances displayed in courtship amongst American college students. Schechner states that:

Performance studies examine performances in two categories: Artistic and Cultural Performances. Artistic Performance are marked and understood as art. Solo-performance, performance art, performance of literature, theatrical storytelling, plays, and performance poetry, this category considers performance as the art form. B. Cultural Performance includes events that occur in everyday life in which a (sic) culture values are displayed for their perpetuation: rituals such as parades, religious ceremonies, community festivals, controversial storytelling, and performances of social and professional roles, and individual performances of race, gender, sexuality and class (5).

Both scholars draw the attention of society to the importance of performance but in this study, Victor Turner's brand of performance theory was adopted. This is because Turner's views about performance seem to be objective. Schechner believes in the universality of action across cultures, traditions and races. Therefore, to Schechner what obtains in one culture is the same in other cultures. Whereas, Turner does not see traditional activities as some ordered set of actions across cultures but culturally conservative, which means that two cultures must not display the same performance or activities. According to Turner, such activities are liminal. In his book, *The Ritual Process* (1969), Turner called liminal activities "anti-structure", opposing the "structure" of normal cultural operations, a concept indebted to Van Gennep (qtd in Marvin Carlson, 23).

Turner adds further that normal cultural activities are “liminoid” devoid of imitation as opposed to liminal activities (22). He stressed that such situations, that is, liminal activities, provide a space removed from daily activity for members of a culture “to think about how they think in propositions that are not in cultural codes but about them” (qtd in Marvin Carlson, 23; emphasis mine). It therefore means that liminal activities are imitational activities. They are actions that are elastic or limited. Whereas, liminoid activities are normal daily activities that is to say that, they are inelastic. Liminal activities are learnt while the liminoid are not learnt. Thus, when a performer, say a masquerade performer performs and runs into the bush or goes beyond his boundaries, we say, he is under the influence of some spirits. This kind of unexpected action is what Turner calls *liminoid*. While those pre-planned activities like singing, dancing even masquerading without the influence of any spirit is what he calls *liminal* activities.

Thus, Turner’s *liminal* and *liminoid* experience in performance is best for this analysis because, *Seigben* is culture-bound and distinct from others hence, conservative. More so, the activities that take place are mostly *liminoid*, that is, under the influence of some water spirits. Therefore, Turner’s theory will suit this study as it attempts to explore the content (themes) and performance aesthetics or elements that feature in *Seigben* festival and account for their intent, significance and relevance to social and cultural development.

## REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

An archetype is a universal pattern or design, image, or a model. It is a typical character, an action, or a situation that seems to represent universal patterns of human nature. More so, an archetype also known as “universal symbol,” may be a character, a theme, a symbol, or even a setting. Many literary critics are of the opinion that archetypes which have a common and recurring representation in a particular human culture, or entire human race shape the structure and function of a literary work.

According to Carl Jung, the Swiss psychologist, the root of an archetype is in the “collective unconscious” of mankind. The phrase “collective unconscious” refers to experiences shared by a race or culture. Such experiences include such things as love, religion, death, birth, life, struggle, and survival. These experiences exist in the subconscious of every individual, and are re-created in literary works, or in other forms of art (qtd in Meyer Abrams, 12). Jung states further that archetypes are primordial images, the “psychic residue” of repeated patterns of common human experience in the lives of our very ancient ancestors which, he maintained, survive in the “collective unconscious” of the human race and are expressed in myths, religion, dreams, and private fantasies, as well as in works of literature (qtd. in Meyer Abrams 13).

On his part Meyer Abrams defines archetypes as:

Recurrent narrative designs, patterns of action, character-types, themes, and images which are identifiable in a wide variety of works of literature, as well as in myths, dreams, and even social rituals. Such recurrent items are held to be the result of elemental and universal forms or patterns in the human psyche, whose effective embodiment in a literary work evokes a profound response from the attentive reader, because he or she shares the archetypes expressed by the author (12).

It is true that these universal patterns or recurrent motifs or models are found or embedded in the myths of the people.

To Claude Levi- Strauss myths are types of tales which stand midway between history and fiction (folktale or literary fiction that is characterized by being based on firm structure of binary oppositions which is progressively lost to either of those

other genre (qtd. in DeboAdejumo 57). Myths can also be defined in the words of DeboAdejumo as that aspect of literature, oral or written, that encapsulates with the help of fiction, the aesthetic and imaginative experience in the lore of the people (57).

To smart, myths are not totally false accounts as is being preached today but stories with some atoms of reality. He concludes that myths are stories concerning divinities; typically, in relationship to men and the world as seen in many myths like the myth of Moremi in Yoruba mythology (83; emphasis mine).

Father-son relationship myth manifests in *Seigben* festival of the Amassoma people. Oral sources on the origin of Amassoma have it that Ogboin was one of the sons of Izon and the father of five sons that make up the Ogboin kingdom. Amassoma was founded by Oboro the second son of Ogboin. Other sons of Ogboin were Akama and Ekpai who also founded other neighboring towns of Otuan and Amatolo respectively but the rest did not. Oboro and his brothers were living with their father Ogboin until their father sent them all out for a hunting expedition, to kill an animal for their father to sacrifice to his gods. They all left for hours without return until much later, the youngest son brought home an animal for the sacrifice. On his arrival, the father went ahead to prepare the meat for the sacrifice with the rest of his children without his eldest son, Akama. When Akama returned, he saw that the sacrifice was already done. So he asked his father where the head of the animal was as it was traditional that, the head is only eaten by the eldest son. His father could not explain to him or tell him who had eaten it; with that anger he left his father and went his separate way because according to him, his father did not love him. While he concluded plans to leave, his other brothers left also but to different locations. Oboro also left in anger and travelled eastwards, some distance away from home, and settled. From there, he founded Amassoma (Anonymous, 2). The above account brings to play the concept of rebellion by the male characters against the father figure. However, in the case of Akama, he did not make attempt to kill or harm his father but left in anger. This goes to substantiate the Freudian ideology that male characters have always antagonized their fathers and developed an insatiable desire for their mothers.

More so, the death rebirth theme or myth is often said to be the archetype of archetypes, and is held to be grounded in the cycle of the seasons and the organic cycle of human life; this archetype, it has been claimed, occurs in primitive rituals of the king who is annually sacrificed. Widespread myths of gods, who die to be reborn, abound in a multitude of diverse texts, including the Bible, Dante's *Divine Comedy* in the early fourteenth century, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in 1798. Among the other archetypal themes, images, and characters that have been frequently traced in literature are the journey underground, the heavenly ascent, the search for the father, the Paradise-Hades image, the Promethean rebel-hero, the scapegoat, the earth goddess, and the fatal woman (Abrams13).

The death and rebirth myth is a universal myth that features as a motif in the lines of literary compositions. It is related to the Christ like figure in traditional belief. The myth is concerned with the cycle of life the king goes through who has become a god and an archetype. Death and rebirth myth is anchored on the belief that the kings or dead fore-fathers, heroes as well as all dead people in traditional society reincarnate after being buried. Therefore, it is believed that the dead comes back to life through the womb of another woman or the same womb. This is what Wole Soyinka brings to manifestation in his *Abiku* where the kindred spirit refuses to remain after birth but returns (dies) after and comes back (reincarnates) through the same womb giving the woman stress and mental trouble. In this poem, Soyinka demonstrates how this stubborn spirit boasts of how many times it has come and returned and that any attempt made to stop it, rather brings it closer to the door of the womb. The spirit speaks as the poet persona thus:

In vain your bangles cast,  
 Charmed circles at my feet  
 I am *Abiku*, calling for the first  
 And the repeated times (Lines 1-5).

John Pepper Clark also weaves another version of the same myth as he puts it:

Coming and going these several seasons  
 Do you stay on the baobab tree,  
 Follow where you please your kindred spirits  
 If indoor is not enough for you (Lines 1-5).

The carrier myth is another universal myth that dates back to times immemorial. Christ was a perfect example of the carrier and has remained the most typical archetype of salvation from which all other carrier myths are modelled. The carrier myth is hinged on the belief that society is full of evil and that someone needs to sacrifice himself to voluntarily cleanse society from pollution and evil. The myth of the carrier has over the years attracted diverse and serious scholarly attention in non-western cultures. This is due to its deep socio-cultural implication. For instance, Wole Soyinka adapted the myth and applied it in a number of his plays. They include, *The Bacchae of Euripides*, *Death and the Kings Horseman* and *The Strong Breed*. Soyinka in the aforementioned texts emphasises the need and importance of the carrier for social regeneration. The playwright stressed in these works that there are people in society who must sacrifice themselves for society to grow to the next level. Commenting on *The Strong Breed*, Soyinka has his to say:

In *The Strong Breed*, for instance, I talk about the ritual of purification at the end of the year, which again is tied up with the whole business of sacrifice, of self-sacrifice, the acceptance of the role of the carrier in society on whatever level... the fact is that there are beings in society who accept the role of sacrifice (108).

According to Soyinka there are people in society who belong to the lineage of the strong ones like Eman in *The Strong Breed* and Elesin in *Death and the King's Horseman* among many other characters in his other plays. Soyinka projects a pessimistic and bleak vision for society if a carrier does not volunteer to take his role. This agrees with Chris Egharevba that "Soyinka's carrier interest becomes so obvious. Soyinka uses the ritual to project a pessimistic vision of man and society" (30). Egharevba further observed that:

Soyinka's emphasis in *The Strong Breed* is on the gradual psychic build-up in the protagonist towards the essence of his tragedy, towards the awareness of this destiny of doom. There seems to be no escape route from his tragic destiny. Eman's inability to understand the urgency in Sumna's tone goes to show how he has been destined to suffer for a strange people in a strange land. The carrier myths manifest in different forms. In some society they use animal while in other places, human beings are used especially in primitive society. Today, most communities use animals to substitute for the use of human beings (30).

#### **Commenting on Some Common Basic Features of the Carrier, Brad Buchanan Writes:**

Part of the curse of being one of the "strong breed" is that one's wife must always die in giving birth to one's male child. This

strange certainty is perhaps a sign that Soyinka believes that the close familial and tribal ties that Sunma being a woman, must value above all else (as she herself admits) vanish at the appearance of a more universal other-directed, multicultural conception of human identity embodied by the “strong breed” who define themselves as outsiders much like the osu in Achebe’s fiction (15).

The critic has shown in the above statement that the carriers lose their parents and they are usually very strong people who must come from outside of the community they must cleanse. Soyinka insists that communal regeneration can only come through the cleansing offering of the carrier which is not negotiable.

This significance of the carrier cannot be over emphasised. This was why in pre-colonial times across the globe it was done in every society. In ancient Bonny Kingdom, a young virgin is periodically sacrificed to cleanse the evils of the community. This young damsel was entitled to carry anything from everybody’s home after which all that she has taken will be put in a canoe, taken miles away from the community and thrown away by the priest. When this is done, the sins of the community are cleansed. A similar thing was done at Onitsha in pre-colonial times where a secret ceremony was held and a woman will be killed to cleanse the sins of the king. The woman will be tied and all sorts of stones will be thrown at her and finally she will be dragged to the king’s palace after which she will be casted away into the river. While the people throw these stones, they pray that she carries their sins and never return to the village. She is declared vanished and not expected to return to the community (ObageliObasi 19-25). This is similar to the sacrifice of Elesin in *Death and the King’s Horseman* where Elesin has to die to allow the dead king a passage to the underworld.

Similarly, masquerades myths are also universal patterns, images that exist in the unconscious mind of a people in every society. It is true that masquerades are replicas of the spirit world, but their places of origin and modes of manifestation may vary from society to society. Among the Igbo, it is believed that the gods dwell among them but reside mostly in the forest as we see in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* where sacrifices were carried out in the forest at the shrine of the Oracle of the Hills and Caves (TFA, 10). It was in the forest Ikemefuna was sacrificed to appease the gods. This is an evidence to show that the gods in Igbo society predominantly live in the forest since masquerades are original images of the gods and ancestors. A few of them also live in the water as we see in Flora Nwapa’s *Efuru*. In the novel, Efuru is dedicated to and serves as the water goddess of wealth but on the condition that she cannot give birth. We find a similar situation in Elechi Amadi’s *The Concubine*, in the character of Ihuoma, the jewel dedicated to the god of the sea. These two evidences further reveal that in Igbo society, masquerades originate from either the forest or water. Therefore, it is believed in Igbo land that the masquerades manifest in the guise of the spirit of the forest or water.

In Yoruba land, masquerades originate from the gods who predominantly live in the forest as demonstrated in Wole Soyinka’s *A Dance of the Forests*. In this play, Soyinka brings to play the union between the dead ancestors and the living. This means that the masquerades originate from the forest. There are various masquerades types in Yoruba land, some of which are the Eyo, Egungun and Agemo masquerades to mention but a few. Although a few of them may have their roots in the river however, most of them have their roots tied to the forest.

#### **According to Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa:**

Symbolism relating to warfare and violence pervades masquerades. Though most maskers only play at being blood thirsty spirits, they carry weapons and spend a good deal of their time chasing spectators. Headpieces often represent predatory fish, menacing reptiles, and composite ‘water monsters’. They have names like fanupele (fence cutter), angalapele (mangrove cutter), pelekere-biye guru (when it cuts it is happy), bighebighepele (‘cut without inquiring’) etc. which

reinforce the idea that they are ready to attack anyone who gets in their way. Their drum rattles, like those of Izon warriors communicate qualities like strength, vindictiveness, and invisibility. For example, Eleke, the most powerful mask in the region is praised as Toni Seigheseighe bite, the cloth that does not fade; his son is called Indikoribosikokorighe, 'you cannot catch a fish by the fin', the slave bears the title of Ominiloloaseibi, 'a slave's vexation knows no limit'. Though highly entertaining, these performances communicate messages about socially acceptable behaviour (26).

Therefore, in Izon, all masquerades are representatives of either, water spirits (BeniOru), forest spirits (BouOru) or the gods. This corresponds with the view of Leon Underwood that the gods are the inherent characteristic of masks in West Africa as standing in its original right, as an individual expression of the likeness of the deity or spirit represented (qtd. in MangiriGolikumo and Kquofi Steve, 270). Golikumo and Steve add further that these masks are produced in diverse ways. One of such ways of producing water spirits masks was through dreams. The form or style of the mask is shown in dreams to a person or priest of a shrine ordered by some spirits to have their image carved and worn (274, my emphasis). These various spirits are archetypes from which the masquerades are modelled or carved to recall such spirits and gods to mind always. They are ancient figures whose roles cannot be forgotten in a hurry, hence, the Izon man will carve a mask that looks exactly like those original spirits or gods seen in the dream or through live encounter and also to have them dwell among the living whenever they are called upon to do so. This is the reason why those who wear these masks suddenly go wild some times because the spirit of the gods have been invoked on them. Some of these archetypal figures of masquerades according to Alagoa listed above are *fanupele* (fence cutter), *angalapele* (mangrove cutter), *pelekere-biye guru* (when it cuts it is happy), *bighebighepele* ('cut without inquiring').

The significant of *Angala-peleOwu* masquerade is that it recalls the archetype of the war god of the Izon people. It reminds them of their past wars at sea with the colonial masters. It recalls their spirit of resistance and bravery. This god also has the power to bless those suffering and release others who are bound. AkinwumiAzeez further notes the significance of masks and masquerades when he said that masks represent gods, spirits, village heroes and the dead who serve as a link between the dead and the living as well as the gods and the people (qtd in Golikumo and Steve 279). They strengthen the ever existing union between the ancestors and humanity.

Symbolically, the sea has long been perceived as a hostile and dangerous environment populated by fantastic creatures like the gigantic Leviathan of the Bible, the shark-like Isonade in Japanese mythology and the ship swallowing Kraken of Norse mythology (qtd. in Theoi Project, 2). According to *Theoi Project* the Greek mythology of the sea includes a complex pantheon of gods and other supernatural creatures. The god of the sea, Poseidon, is accompanied by his wife, Amphitrite, who is one of the fifty Nereids, sea nymphs whose parents were Nereus and Doris (para.1). The Tritons, sons of Poseidon, who were variously represented with the tails of fish or seahorses, formed Poseidon's retinue along with the Nereids (Para. 2). KarolyKerenyi, further reveals that the sea is peopled by dangerous sea monsters such as ScyllaPoseidon himself had something of the shifting character of the sea, presiding not only over the sea, but also earthquakes, storms and horses. Neptune also occupied a similar position in Roman mythology.

Coming to the works of the psychiatrist Carl Jung, the sea symbolizes the personal and the collective unconscious in dream interpretation (122 and 192). It is a reservoir of spirits and primordial images. This myth is not different among the Izon.

Furthermore, seven as a number is universally significant to humanity. A week made up of seven days is part of our modern global culture, but according to Jayne Lutwyche, a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reporter, its origins date back to ancient civilisation, especially the cradle of civilisation, Mesopotamia now in modern Iran or Iraq. Their culture was most prominent in the first and second millennia BC before the rise of Greece or Rome (Para. 1)

Among the Yoruba in South West of Nigeria, the same thing happens. According to Akintoye Samuel Olaoluwa(7), the Yoruba have four days in the week. The four days that are dedicated to the Orisa go as follow:

Day 1 is dedicated to Obatala (Soponna, Iyaami, and the Egungun)

Day 2 is dedicated to Orunmila (Esu, Ifá and Osun)

Day 3 is dedicated to Ogun (Osoosi)

Day 4 is dedicated to Sango (Oya)

To reconcile with the Gregorian calendar, Olaoluwa reveals further that Yoruba people also measure time in seven days a week and four weeks a month. The four-day calendar was dedicated to the Orisas and the seven-day calendar is for doing business. The seven days are: Ojo-Aiku (Sunday), Ojo-Aje (Monday), Ojo-Ishegun (Tuesday), Ojo-Riru (Wednesday), Ojo-Bo/Alamisi (Thursday), Ojo-Eti (Friday) and Ojo-Abameta (Saturday)(7).

Finally, rituals and sacrifices are universal myths, themes and motifs in every society. This myth is anchored on the belief that blood sacrifice brings about regeneration in life. An anonymous paper reports that in ancient Rome, sacrifices were performed to gods. The idea behind this type of sacrifice was not pain, suffering, or death. Rather, life was being returned to the divine world so that the gods, in turn, would continue to give life to the human world (Anonymous, Para, 1).

Also, hunters generally sacrificed animals, such as sheep, goats, chickens, and cattle to their gods. Certain types of animals were regarded as the most appropriate sacrifices for particular purposes or for particular deities. Dark-coloured animals, for example, might be offered to deities of the underworld, while an all-white animal might be seen as the best gift for a sky god (3).

## ARCHETYPAL / MYTHIC PATTERNS IN SEIGBEIN FESTIVAL

### Father–Son Relationship Myth

The father figure represents both divine protection and provision in *Seigben* festival. Oboro is a father-figure, having founded Amassoma and becoming its first king. He is seen as the archetype of protection and provision in Amassoma. This is because while the people were challenged with fish to cook with the food to entertain the guests that will come to mourn with them, Oboro made a provision for them by blessing them with a good catch at the fishing expedition. This is why his death is celebrated yearly for performing that miracle of fish provision. No wonder, there is the belief in feeding the ancestors (fathers and mothers) by their children. This is done on the first day of the festival in the evening hours after the fishing expedition at the lake. It is done in stages. The food is given to all dead fathers and mothers whether the good or evil ones. However, it is carried out differently. For those good dead, their children will prepare sumptuous yam porridge with the fish caught from the fishing expedition. This yam as well as the fish will be crushed and placed on clothing. For the dead father, a man's clothing will be used to represent him. This crushed food is accompanied by a piece of a dry stick called *Avoo Ten* which means covenant stick. These items are all folded and placed on a mat and left to decay. While for

the women, it is the same process but a woman's clothing is used to represent womanhood. But for those childless and ill-fated ones, theirs is prepared with the leftover bones from the good ones with yam and thrown outside for them to scramble for. For those considered witches and wizards, no matter their wealth on earth, their children will give no food to them; instead, all kinds of ignominious treatment are given to them. They are only served with *Kaikai* (the native drink), the crown drink of the festival by their children. This drink will be served to them some few metres from the shore of the river. The belief is that they have been excommunicated from the comity of good souls among the dead and so are not expected to be among the good souls especially at this time that no evil is expected. This is further strengthened by the belief that they were buried in the evil forest across the river.

The ancestors' feeding practice is very significant to the worshippers of Adegbe as well as member of the community. It brings the ancestors closer to the people each year as they perform the sacrifice. The gods as well as the ancestors and the dead parents obtain satisfaction after this ritual and in-turn bless the people in many different ways, like giving them a bountiful harvest that year, fertilizing those infertile women who cannot conceive and also drawing political and economic opportunities to the community, among many other benefits.

In fact, one can conclude from the above that the myth of father-son relationship is indeed a universal pattern that is unconsciously found in the subconscious of mind of every individual. The act of rebellion against paternal control is also a universal pattern that lies at the core of the human psyche, giving rise to migration and dispersal among others.

### **Death-Rebirth Myth**

Death-rebirth myth manifests in Seigben festival. Oboro died and was buried but is celebrated each year. It believed that Oboro still lives among the people though he is dead. This is why each year; he is invited to dine with his children. It should be noted that it is not only Oboro who visits the community; he comes with also other benevolent spirits and ancestors who form his entourage. Oboro as well as those benevolent ancestors is believed to be alive among the living. This is also the reason behind the offering of sacrifices to him during the festival and feeding him with humanly prepared food by his children.

The significance of this myth cannot be over emphasized. It further bridges and strengthens the link between the Oboro deity and the Amassoma people. The myth further proves the dependent nature of the Amasoma people on Oboro for life, protection and provision. It gives them that sense of supernatural presence.

### **The Myth of the Carrier**

Like other traditional festivals in Nigeria, an animal sacrifice is used. A live male dog is used for this cleansing sacrifice. This dog will be tied to a short rope and hauled around the town with incantations by the Adegbe priest and finally put into a roughly carved canoe and pushed away to float into the Ocean. It is believed that when this ritual is carried out, the dog, like Christ, has heaped on himself the evils of the community and taken them to a faraway land thereby leaving the community cleansed. Soyinka observed further that if this is not done yearly, the sins of the people will hover around their environment and can lead to various disasters. One thing that is common to this ritual is that members of a community are not used but total strangers who bear in their bodies the mark of the strong breed like Eman and Biokun in *The Strong Breed* and *No More the Wasted Breed* respectively. This is why in Seigben festival; a dog is used also because he is not a member of the community.

### **Commenting on Some Common Basic Features of the Carrier, Brad Buchanan Writes:**

Part of the curse of being one of the “strong breed” is that one’s wife must always die in giving birth to one’s male child. This strange certainty is perhaps a sign that Soyinka believes that the close familial and tribal ties that Sunma being a woman, must value above all else (as she herself admits) vanish at the appearance of a more universal other-directed, multicultural conception of human identity embodied by the “strong breed” who define themselves as outsiders much like the *osu* in Achebe’s fiction (15).

The critic has shown in the above statement that the carriers lose their parents and they are usually very strong people who must come from outside of the community they must cleanse. Soyinka insists that communal regeneration can only come through the cleansing offering of the carrier which is not negotiable.

The role of the carrier is very important in *Seigben* festival. This is because without that annual sacrifice performed in the land of Amassoma, it is believed that calamity will come upon the land, as Oroge rightly observes in *The Strong Breed*. The sacrifice is to ensure that the sins of the previous year are not carried over to the next year. That is why the ritual is performed before the beginning of the festival to cleanse the community and sanitise her for the visit of the ancestors and other benevolent spirits that will come in the company of *Oboro* to witness the festival. This ritual reveals the sanctified nature of the festival. The purity of the festival is further revealed during the youth candle night before the eve of the festival proper. These young men as discussed in chapter one above are all adorned in sparkling white apparel with each holding a candle stick.

Several other minor cleansing rituals are carried out before the festival and at the last day of the festival. The *Tamo-Pomo* and *Tubro Pomo* rituals are further done before the festival as follow up ritual to the carrier ritual. This ritual as discussed earlier is intended to cleanse the eastern and southern quarters of the community.

### **Commenting on the Unbending Position of Soyinka, Obi Maduka Avers that Soyinka is a Cultural Revivalist:**

Soyinka, in *The Strong Breed* and in several of his plays, has portrayed the need for the society to be regenerated and that rebirth and regeneration can only be achieved through the offering of a carrier. That is why Soyinka’s carrier motif or the theme of the scapegoat runs through a number of his plays such as *The Bacchae*, where Pentheus is torn into pieces by the Maenads on mountain Kithairon “as an embodiment of Dionysus who was torn to pieces by the Titan; and by his death he purges the guilt of Thebes for its failure to recognize the new, god, Dionysus (qtd. In Buchanan, 9).

This significance of the carrier cannot be over emphasised. This was why in pre-colonial times across the globe it was done in every society. In ancient Bonny Kingdom, a young virgin is periodically sacrificed to cleanse the evils of the community. This young damsel was entitled to carry anything from everybody’s home after which all that she has taken will be put in a canoe, taken miles away from the community and thrown away by the priest. When this is done, the sins of the community are cleansed. A similar thing was done at Onitsha in pre-colonial times where a secret ceremony was held and a woman will be killed to cleanse the sins of the king. The woman will be tied and all sorts of stones will be thrown at her and finally she will be dragged to the king’s palace after which she will be casted away into the river. While the people throw these stones, they pray that she carries their sins and never return to the village. She is declared vanished and not expected to return to the community (ObageliObasi 19-25). This is similar to the sacrifice of Elesin in *Death and the King’s Horseman* where Elesin has to die to allow the dead king a passage to the underworld.

The carrier symbolizes new beginning, rejuvenation and regeneration among the Amassoma people as applicable to other societies. It is a sacrifice that brings about new hope of the gods' visit to bless the people.

### The Myth of the Sea

This myth is not different among the Izon. Among the Izon, the sea is a reservoir of primordial images and spirits. It is a place where the shared images are kept or stored. The festival artistic beauty is only complete with masquerade performance. These masquerades in Izon are believed to be replicas of water spirits as discussed above. More so, the festival usually commences with the fishing expedition at the Lake, this gain further reveals the dependence of the Izons on water for survival. This is because; it is believed to be the abode of spirits: good and evil ones. Again, the final ritual: *Seidugo* where embers of fire used during the ritual are thrown in the river is significant. This is done to chase away all the evil spirits that may have come to witness the festival. The sea, is believed to be a cleanser among the Izon, since, it is the abode of the water beings (beni-out). This can be seen from John Pepper Clark's *The Raft* where we are made to understand that the Izon river is like other rivers is an abode of the gods and of all manners of creatures. For example, Clark reveals the presence of Osikoboro, a sea god of the Izons in his play *The Raft*, thus:

**Ibobo:** we are in the hands of Osikoboro (109).

### Clark Reveals the Present of Other Sea Creatures in the River, Thus:

**Ibobo:** Ogro remove your leg out of the water quick. Do you want shark or crocodile to snatch at it? (105).

The significance of the myth of the sea is that it further reveals the relationship between the Izon nation and spirits of the water. This is why an Izon man hardly dies in the river if he or she believes in the Izon traditions as captured in Clark's *The Raft*:

**Ibobo:** Not many will believe that when the story is told. And you know as well as I do

That an Ijawman's death, especially by water,

Drags like ivy (114).

### The Myth of Seven Days

Ajieretuwo (para. 3) writes on *Nairaland* that the same seven days practice is observed among the Izons. In Izon, there are seven days in the week as seen below:

Oruene: Sunday

Orueneobuu: Monday

Kala feniibiene: Tuesday

Ogunufeniibiene: Wednesday

FeniObuuene: Thursdays

Feniibiene: Friday

Kala oruene: Saturday

It is true from the above that Amassoma *Seigben* is celebrated in seven days because each day is dedicated to a deity in Izon land. Seven days a week in Izon calendar is equal to a year. And it is also believed among the IZONS that the gods visit and dine with the living after one-year interval. Aside these days, the gods only manifest on a call or summon by performers with drinks and other sacrificial items like sliced raw plantains (among many other sacrificial items) to perform specific assignments and return to their abode. They visit the living and dwell with them only after another year. Each time they visit, especially during festivals like *Seigben*, they come with different other good spirits. That is why during this seven days, people are not expected to die. The sick are rather healed of their sickness and infirmities. Therefore, to the IZON, each time, the gods visit, they leave with the loads of their sins. It is a complete cycle of life for the IZON man within these seven days. It is also believed that the gods leave after this seven days period to rest to renew their strengths after heaping on themselves the communal sins which they throw away in far distant rivers. Therefore, the seven days is a period of new beginning in IZON land. It is a very significant week and important to the people of Amassoma. The seven days gives the people an opportunity to renew their lives and start afresh. No wonder within these days various rituals are performed to please the gods who are present as invisible spirit guests as well as through masquerades. Hence, the seven days represent a complete cycle of life in IZON mythology that signifies completeness.

### **The Myth of Rituals and Sacrifices**

Rituals and sacrifices are central to the worship of ancestors and gods among the IZON as it is elsewhere. It establishes the link between the living and their ancestors. This was why OGBOIN sent out his five sons for a hunting expedition to kill an animal and bring it home for the sacrifice. Some hours later, OGBONO the youngest son returns with an animal and the father went ahead with the sacrifice without the eldest son AKAMA. When the oldest son arrived, he was told of what happened and his father gave orders that his share of the food and drinks be taken to him. When the food was brought, the head of the animal was not found. As the eldest son of his father, it was his right to eat the head of the animal. This is because traditionally in OGBOIN kingdom, as well as in the entire IZON nation, it is the eldest son of both the father and mother that eats the head of an animal that is killed and used to prepare food. So AKAMA requested for the head of the meat but his father could not give account of it. It was a terrible matter. Thereafter, he grew annoyed and had misunderstanding with his father. He spoke bitter words to his father as a result. The father then looked for the head of the animal but it was nowhere to be found. It was due to this misunderstanding that AKAMA took the decision to leave his father's homestead and begin his own life. According to him, his father did not love him if he had, he would not have carried out the animal sacrifice in his absence. Therefore, as he was leaving, the rest the children followed his example, but to different locations.

The significance of the myth of sacrifice and ritual cannot be overemphasized. It attracts the blessing of the gods on the people. When sacrifices are made it re-kindles the relationship between the people and their ancestors. Sacrifices and rituals are mediums through which the gods are appeased when humans err. Sacrifice and rituals bring protection and sanity to a community. Above all, they bring about re-generation as evidenced in the carrier ritual among others carried out before, within and after *Seigben* festival.

## CONCLUSIONS

The paper has examined mythic and archetypal element using the archetypal and performance theory. The of the myths behind *Seigben* festival as well as other Izon festivals and unveiling their archetypal have also been examined in this paper as well as it relevant to existing scholarship on Izon scholarship. In is the conclusion of this paper that AmassomaSeigben festival of the Izens is embedded with archetypal and mythic patterns which give the festival its traditional quality. Thus, further investigation be carried out on other Izon tradition plays. More so, components of these literary paraphernalia be incorporated by writers of Izon extraction.

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