
MYTHS IN WOLE SOYINKA’S THE BACCHAE OF EURIPIDES AND TOM OMARA’S THE EXODUS

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the role of myths in both Yoruba and Acholi cultures, and their repercussions in contemporary Nigerian and Ugandan societies. Data drive from *The Bacchae* of Euripides and *The Exodus*, and fall in the Psychoanalytic Literary Criticism, New Historicism framework and Post-colonial approach. Soyinka reflects on the impact of the colonial process and on the role of modern day dictatorship in many Third-World countries. His play takes the effects of intertextuality to the extreme, not only by taking the Greek tragedy as hypotext, but by relating Euripides’ subversive criticism of Greek imperialism to his own denunciation of colonization and tyranny. Tom Omara portrays the struggles and conflicts of the Acholi people in their quest for unity and self-determination, as well as the challenges they face in dealing with the colonial powers that seek to control and exploit their land and resources. Specifically, myths in the plays feature themes of migration, conflict, leadership, identity, and resistance to imperialism. Myths are seen as important elements that explain the significance of human existence.

Keywords: Myths, cultural concern, denounce, colonization, tyranny.

1. INTRODUCTION

Myths are seen as important elements of oral literature. They explain and give the significance of human existence. The use of myth is seen not so much in Wole Soyinka’s and Tom Omara’s approach to classical literature as in the action of the play, as well as in their critique of Nigeria’s and Uganda’s contemporary political and cultural scenes. Together, these two case-studies demonstrate the potential inherent in the use of myths as accounts of the origin of societies, particularly in the sphere of postcolonial literature.

In his rewriting of ‘**Euripides**’ best known tragedy, **Bacchae**, Soyinka reflects on the impact of the colonial process and on the role of modern day dictatorship in many developing countries. Interestingly called *The Bacchae of Euripides*. Soyinka’s play takes the effects of intertextuality to the extreme, not only by taking the Greek tragedy as hypotext, but by relating **Euripides**’ subversive criticism of Greek imperialism to his own denunciation of colonization and tyranny. Because of its radical use of imagery —such as the fact that the blood which emanates from Pentheus’ head at the end of the play becomes wine and everybody drinks from it. The concept of myth has numerous definitions. In the same perspective, Jones M. Jaja (2012, p. 9) defines the concept of myth as “a story which is believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people”. This means that myth is a story of ancient times, especially, one that was told to explain natural events or to describe the early history of people”. In the same sense, Britannica Dictionary also defines myth as: “a symbolic narrative, usually of unknown origin and at least partly traditional, that ostensibly relates actual events and that is especially associated with religious belief.

Wole Soyinka's play *The Bacchae of Euripides* incorporates elements of Greek mythology, as well as Yoruba myths and rituals. In the play, Soyinka blends the myths of Dionysus, the Greek god of wine and revelry, with those of Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron and palm wine. The play explores the tension between tradition and modernity, as well as the destructive power of repressed desire. Soyinka's use of myth and ritual in the play reflects his interest in the syncretic cultural landscape of Nigeria, and his exploration of the ways in which traditional belief systems intersect with colonialism and modernization. Overall, the play is a complex and powerful exploration of myth, ritual, and identity in a globalized world. Similarly important, in oral tradition, is the role of the ancestors. Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* and Tom Omara's *The Exodus* (1968) are plays dominated by the presence of the ancestors who have to be appeased, as they influence human destiny. We see in Soyinka and Omara men with single-minded determination to make society face reality.

Many works on intertextuality have been carried out by researchers, but the text and literature have not finished saying everything. It is for this reason that we continue in this perspective to namely an intertextual study.

In the same wavelength in giving the summary of *The Exodus*, it is a play written by Tom Omara. It tells the conflict between two brothers and the misplacement of the Spear, Indeed, the text is based on the tragic life of three bothers cursed because of their jealousy, quarrel and selfishness. *The Bacchae of Euripides* is a play written by Wole Soyinka. It is based on the Greek myth and tells a story of god Dionysus who has traveled across Asia collecting followers before returning to Thebes to punish his mother's family for speaking badly of her. Nouryeh, Andrea J. provides us with another clear résumé of the narrative that contextualizes most important issues or the writing reason, as she writes:

The Bacchae of Euripides is an adaptation of Euripides' *The Bacchae* which is based on Greek myth. But Soyinka contemporizes this play to the political, social, and cultural circumstances of post-independence era of Nigeria. Soyinka's version of *The Bacchae* highlights slave characters, adds two wedding scenes, dance, and ritual performances and also shows the glorious ending in order to link it with Yoruba tradition in Nigerian context. (Nouryeh, 2001, p. 160-171)

The Exodus is a dramatization of the great Luo migration epic that would appeal to Nilotes throughout East Africa. Here Omara has woven the stuff of local tradition into a scripted modern play, and it is an important pioneering attempt by him (http://ir.unishivaji.ac.in:8080/jspui/bitstream/123456789/1938/6/06_Chapter%201.pdf). Mineke Schipper-de Leeuw in "Origin and Forms of Drama in the African Context" (<https://scholarlypublications.universiteitleiden.nl/access/item%3A2882957/view>) states that:

the idea of myth as a genre is difficult to define and most controversial. I would rather call the stories based on myths "stories from the beginning" as Tom Omara does in his *The Exodus*. The events take place centuries ago in what is nowadays called Acholiland, east of the Nile, in the north of Uganda. Originally it was an aetiological story in which it is explained why two related clans do not live on the same side of the river.

Tom Omara's *The Exodus* is a play that draws on the heritage of Acholi folk culture, particularly the myth or "story from the beginning" of the Acholi people. The play is based on the legend

of Labongo and his two sons, Gipir and Lawir, who are said to have founded the Acholi tribe in the region that is now northern Uganda. After reading these two plays, we recognized that the theme of myth is repeated from one story to another. Although, the two writers are different by style and writing, but we easily find a certain number of indices and passages which have the same sense in two works and which have an intertextual link. That is to say, from these works, we do an intertextual analysis focused on myths. So, the question which arises is the following: how is the issue of myths portrayed and tackled in Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* and Tom Omara's *The Exodus*?

From the central question, we phrase these hypotheses. The first is that, the understanding of myths roles in Nigeria and Uganda could pass through myths definitions and classification. The second hypothesis shows that beyond features that the plays share, Nigerian and Ugandan could find explanation from myth of creation, myth of destruction, myth of high being and celestial gods. The objective of this study is to demonstrate the roles of myths in the explanation of migration, conflict, leadership, identity and resistance to imperialism in Nigeria and Uganda. This study falls in the Psychological Literary Criticism, New Historicism and Post colonial approach. Two main points are developed in this work. The first deals with the definition and classification of the concept myth. The second is the use of myths in Nigerian and Ugandan understanding of realities.

2. The Concept Myth: Definition and Classification

As for the definition, the term of myth is defined several times by people. Myth has been described as being basically visionary, an expansion of awareness into alternatives realities. The symbols that carry the myth into completion are considered evocative signs leading toward a sense of wholeness, a fullness of being. If this is so, then Heraclitus was right when he wrote that "the unlike is joined together, and from the differences results the most beautiful harmony" (G. Michael, 1982: p. 432). For ancient mankind was undoubtedly puzzled by the great paradoxes, by life and death the altering season, the apparent death when asleep and the peculiar sense of self awareness when awake. Obvious question such as how did life begin? What is death? What are stars, and the black canopy of the night sky? What lay beyond these enormous enigmas? The myths attempted to resolve such profound and confusing questions, and therefore when reading myths we experience not so much an emotional insight as a sensation of watching something marvelous grow in the mind of early mankind.

The renowned mythologist Claude Levi-Strauss cited by Raymond Van Over (1980, p. 1) suggests that mythical thought derives from the awareness that opposition progress toward a natural mediation. Mythology provides a logical model that overcomes contradictions in a people's world view. On a person level it reduces the anxiety one feels during conflicting or paradoxical life experiences. Thus, the myth resolves fundamental paradoxes. How, for example can any one accept that something is created from nothing? It seems impossible contradiction and yet if the logic of ancient man needed reassurance and resolution of this confusion, he could create a god who would have the power to alter it and thereby begin to fill it with "something" "for early man, there was no science of astronomy to explain the movement of the sun, moon and stars. There was nothing to explain a sunrise; no science to explore the physics of an echo, or the reason of rainbow. Without objective science early man used his imagination, his intuition and his feelings to mold the fearsome world of nature into meaningful and acceptable home (Raymond Van Over, 1989).

Myths can be classified as a traditional stories that deal with nature, ancestors, heroes, and heroines or supernatural beings that serve as primordial types in a primitive view of the world.

Myths appeal to the consciousness of a people embodying its culture ideals or by giving expression to deep and commonly felt emotions. This account relate the origin of humankind and a perception of the visible world; the character, attribute, and function of the ancient gods; and stories concerning an individual, an event, or an institution. The systematic collection and study of myths is termed mythology (Guirand, F. Larousse. 1959). It means that myth is simply a traditional story which tells us about heroes, ancestors, and explain spiritual events.

Furthermore, there are several types of myths existing in the world. This work mainly focuses its development on those African ones. Since it is about to provide the sense of the term “myth” in Africa, Jones M. Jaja (2012: p. 14) gives us a clear explanation of this latter, as he writes:

Myths tell us about the reality of the universe and all its components. African myths explain in the context of African cultures, great human concerns and realities such as death, creation, the evolution of living things, man’s relationship with other living creatures etc.

While clearly showing the sense of myth mentioned above, Jones provides us with the purpose of the existing nature of myths in Africa as he goes on writing in these terms: “*It is used to nourish and to buttress the traditions of the ancestors. Myths are also educative in that they teach people especially the younger ones the meaning of the universe and man’s place in it*” (Jones, 2012: p. 14).

Myths in African culture are mostly about spirits such as spirits of ancestors; they embody philosophical reflections, express values and identify moral standards and those myths are transmitted in ritual practice whereas myths in Greek culture are mostly about gods or deities (www.britannica.com).

Nietzsche (1993: p. 109-110) in *The Birth of Tragedy* comments:

Without myth all culture loses its healthy and natural creative power: only a horizon surrounded by myths can unify an entire cultural movement. Myth alone rescues all the powers of imagination and the Apollonian and Dionysian dream from their aimless wanderings. The images of myth must be daemonic guardians, omnipresent and unnoticed, restored well in the rituals, which protect the growth of the young mind, and guide man’s interpretation of his life and struggles. The state itself has no unwritten laws more powerful than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with all social aspects of life.....what is indicated by the great historical need of unsatisfied modern culture, clutching about for countless other cultures, with its consuming desire for knowledge, if not the loss of myth, the loss of the ritual home, the mythical womb.

Soyinka’s rewriting of Euripides is a task that seems to allow full rein to his metaphysical preoccupations. The close association of the world of gods and men is as much Greek as it is Yoruba, with an added advantage that Soyinka uses fully – he dramatizes the Greek city state as one that owns slaves and treats them in inhuman manner. Generally, a myth is a story which is believed to be true and has its origin in the far distant past history of a people. Alagoa (1978: p. 9) argued that they are historical information transmitted orally by processes peculiar to each community. Myths are man-made stories that play explanatory functions in the African understanding of reality. The *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined myth as:

a story handed down in oral form from our forefathers which explain reality, concepts and beliefs and further serve as explanations of nature events such as creations, origin of things, history of a race or a people (p. 1133).

This shows that myth is not just a product of human imagination but a direct expression of reality. Anyanwu (1987: p. 241) citing Houndtonji says that “man cannot live without myths”. The reason is quite obvious: man is a being that cannot bear to live with certain questions unanswered that is why he sits down to formulate myths to make those questions answerable. Thus man is a myth-making animal (Anyanwu, 1987: p. 280). Some thinkers have rightly observed that myths are pre-philosophic in nature; that philosophy started where myths stopped, which presupposes that philosophy has its roots in myths (Jaja, 1994: p. 125). It is pertinent to point out that myths are results of the revelation of “thou” and are often founded upon an original experience that reaches beyond the sensorial and rational, but they are not illogical. They are mostly susceptible to rational analysis and logical interpretation. An analysis of many myths as shown here shows that actions of gods and heroes often presuppose a keen analysis of given circumstances and are based on rational decisions (Kirk, 1974: p. 60). It can be argued that some myths represent complex logical systems which are different from those which are usually found in contemporary western societies. Nevertheless, according to a common view, there is a radical separation between mythos and logos, between myth and philosophy. Myth is associated with the mysterious and illogical, and philosophy with the rational and logical (Apostel, 1981). Myths are part of a way of life and state precedence and models for human actions, but they do not seek to explain them on a rational basis. Myths use images, philosophy, concepts. Philosophy asks generalized questions, relies on systematic reasoning, and rejects the supernatural explanations of the world, but mythological societies are unsystematic and deal with the sacred (Apostel, 1981).

Myth is a wholeness attained to the world as a whole because those who live in myth and are guided by it are engaged on many different planes with the whole of which the myth is an integral part. By teaching man and by regulating the way of his living in devotional engagement with the whole and by gradually disclosing many layers of its meaning, myth reveals the knowledge of the whole. But the knowledge of the whole is not merely theoretical. It is not merely a partial, intellectual knowledge, but it embraces the whole of life. Myth reveals the knowledge for which philosophy in a proper sense looks. But it does not disclose this knowledge without appropriate devotional engagement. Myth is completed already at the beginning, whereas philosophy seeks to be completed at the end. Mythical societies live in eternity rather than in historical time. The societies in which philosophy and science play an important part constantly seek their completion and are in a permanent dissatisfaction with the results of their findings. They live in history and are time oriented. Myth corresponds to eternity, philosophy to the discovery of history.

Myths are seen as vehicles conveying certain facts or truths about man’s experiences in his encounter with the created order and its relation to the super-sensible world. For Abanuka (1994: p. 45), myth tells of the super human experiences of the community. Myth exposes the fact that man’s misfortunes on earth as well as his hardships are attributed to disobedience to the divine commands and moral codes of the deities as a point in his life.

Generally, myths contain three kinds of stories namely, stories of origin, explanatory stories and didactic stories. Each of these stories is meant to explain a particular phenomenon. Myth is not an intellectual explanation or an artistic imagery but living chronicles in the minds of Africans. They contain and express the history, the culture and the inner experience of the

African himself. Africans use myths to explain how things came to be through the efforts of a supernatural being. It is concrete and expresses life better than abstract thought can do.

It is indeed surprising that up till this age 2011 (J. M. Jaja, 2014: p. 10), some scholars still doubt the existence of African philosophy. The reason being that some philosophers having basically studied Western philosophy treated African philosophy from a typical western standpoint. It is necessary to remind this class of scholars that in traditional Africa there are individuals who are capable of critical coherent and independent thinking. This school of thought is the philosophic sagacity. Philosophic sagacity retains the basic tenets of the professional school. However, unlike it, it is an exposition of the wisdoms and beliefs of the individuals who have not been schooled in the formal educational system. It consists of wisdoms and views of those who are professionally trained philosophers that is neither classroom – taught nor self taught. A sage can be a very formally educated and literate person (Oruka, 1995: p. 177). Philosophical sagacity is an expression of the view that amongst the various African communities, exist individuals who despite the fact that they have not had the benefit of having contact with the so-called Aquinas Russell all western philosophy (such as Plato) are nevertheless, critical independent thinkers who guide their thought and judgment by the power of reason and inborn insight rather than by the authority of communal consensus (Oruka, 1990: p. 16).

Myths play a very important role in the African understanding of reality. African philosophy cannot operate in a vacuum; therefore myths provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for an authentic African philosophy. They provide the solid foundation on which African philosophy hinges (Iroegbu, 1994: p. 119). One must note that they are the fertile ground for African philosophizing. They constitute expressions of the inner side of individuals and their relationship with others, nature and with the supernatural. It is the philosophical reflections of the people in past, preserved and handed down to society through myths; if indeed the past is unintelligible and conveys meaning only in the light of the present, then myths convey meaning only when they establish a coherent relationship between the past and the present. The reason is quite simple. A people's world view cannot be studied in isolation of their past and the past is as important as the present in deciding the future. Given this scenario, we can deduce that myths bring to light the past experiences of the people and from there the present African philosophy sees an avenue for philosophizing.

Uduigwomen (1995: p. 40) observed, in African epistemology, myths serve as a means of acquiring and transmitting knowledge, for knowledge has a prominent place in the African mind. It enables the African to recollect past activities of men and societies which make it possible for the individual and societies to orientate themselves. There have been disputes and disagreements as to the role and place of myths in African philosophy. Some have argued that myths cannot be regarded as philosophy because they obviously fall short of empirical verifiability and logical consistency, but Horton, (1987: p. 100) debunked this and admitted myths and rituals into the general corpus of experience which is capable of exhibiting a logical and consistent structure. Similarly, if African philosophy is a reflection on African experience and myths are stabilizing factors to African experience, it then follows that African philosophy is a critical reflection on myths as stabilizing factors. So the critical analysis and the awareness of the relevance of myths proverbs, folklores, etc. would go a long way in inculcating in Africans the habit of critical reflections on issues bordering on life (Jaja, 1995: p. 29). Myths are the essential and ready tools for thinking and communicating in African philosophy. Through their meaningful and communicative features, myths exhibit and enhance the

coherence, stability and continuity of the society. They play the role of literature and fill the lacune created by lack of literature on past history and supplement the oral culture of African experience (Jaja, 1995: p. 28). Myths connect the past with the present. The vestiges of what truth is in African epistemology are traceable to mythological depositories and other conventional values. Hence myths serve as sources of truth. Some myths are authoritative and appear to have a compelling force of obedience on the people. Myths also play an important role in the moral education of the society. Generally, beauty is regarded as a form of moral goodness. The value of beauty and goodness is mostly couched in myths. In conformity with this, African aesthetic value is circumscribed in moral beauty. This is epitomized in myths in African culture which focuses on values, virtues, attachments, loyalties, faith-fulness, diligence and other social and religious virtues (Jaja, 2001: p. 99).

African vision of the universe is entrenched in various creation myths, which basically serve etiological purposes. They thus explain how and why the different natural phenomena came into existence, the forces behind their perfect working and the relationship that existed and still exists between man and the creator God and the universe. Myths tell us about the reality of the universe and all its components. African myths explain in the context of African cultures, great human concerns and realities such as death, creation, the evolution of living things, man's relationship with other living creatures etc. However, the purpose of a myth is far more than being explanatory. It has many values in the African societal setting. It acts as a socializing agent. It is used to nourish and to buttress the traditions of the ancestors. Myths are also educative in that they teach people especially the younger ones the meaning of the universe and man's place in it. They place the world before us as an object of indifferent investigation, a world to be known not just as an abstracted object but as a wholistic real entity. A universal knowledge arises from man's effective engagement with the world and myths help explain the great human concepts of his time.

The term classification is neither absolute nor isolated, nor is it a self-contained act. We always classify an entity with respect to something else. It is thus relative. According to FIDICR, in a definition agreed upon by the Elsinore International Conference on Classification Studies and Research, "By classification is meant any method creating relations..., between individual semantic units" (Atherton, 1965). Classification is thus a mode of expression, correlation and display of relations. It is relatedness and connectivity.

There are actually many different types of myth, not just three. The theoretical study of myth is very complex. Aetiological (sometimes spelled etiological) myths explain the reason why something is the way it is today. The word aetiological is from the Greek word *aetion* (αἰτιον), meaning "reason" or "explanation". Please note that the reasons given in an aetiological myth are NOT the real (or scientific) reasons. They are explanations that have meaning for us as human beings. There are three subtypes of aetiological myths: natural, etymological, and religious. A natural aetiological myth explains an aspect of nature such as lightning and thunder by saying that Zeus is angry. An etymological aetiological myth explains the origin of a word (<https://uen.pressbooks.pub/mythologyunbound/chapter/three-types-of-myth/>). We could explain the name of the goddess Aphrodite by saying that she was born in sea foam, since *aphros* is the Greek word for sea foam. A religious aetiological myth explains the origin of a religious ritual. People could explain the Greek religious ritual of the Eleusinian Mysteries by saying that they originated when the Greek goddess Demeter came down to the city of Eleusis and taught the people how to worship her. Historical myths are told about a historical event, and they help keep the memory of that event alive. Ironically, in historical myths, the

accuracy is lost but meaning is gained. The myths about the Trojan War, including the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, could be classified as historical myths. The Trojan War did occur, but the famous characters that we know from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* (Agamemnon, Achilles, Hector, etc.) probably did not exist.

Psychological myths try to explain why we feel and act the way we do. A psychological myth is different from an aetiological myth because a psychological myth does not try to explain one thing by way of something else (like explaining lightning and thunder with Zeus' anger does). In a psychological myth, the emotion itself is seen as a divine force, coming from the outside, that can directly influence a person's emotions. The illustration is that, the goddess Aphrodite is sometimes seen as the power of erotic love. When someone said or did something that they did not want to do, the ancient Greeks might have said that Aphrodite "made them" do it.

3. THE USE OF MYTHS IN NIGERIAN AND UGANDAN UNDERSTANDING OF REALITY

Myths play a very important role in the African understanding of reality. African philosophy cannot operate in a vacuum; therefore myths provide the necessary analytic and conceptual framework for an authentic African philosophy. They provide the solid foundation on which African philosophy hinges (1994: p. 119). One must note that they are the fertile ground for African philosophizing. They constitute expressions of the inner side of individuals and their relationship with others, nature and with the supernatural. It is the philosophical reflections of the people in past, preserved and handed down to society through myths; if indeed the past is unintelligible and conveys meaning only in the light of the present, then myths convey meaning only when they establish a coherent relationship between the past and the present. The types of Yoruba mythology used in the plays under scrutiny include: the myths of creation, myths of eschatology and destruction and myths of high being and celestial gods. In relation to the functions of mythology, Mircea Eliade (1960: n.p.) argues that myth should be seen as foundation of social life and culture; it establishes models for behavior. By telling or reenacting mythology, members of traditional societies detach themselves from the present and return to the mythical age, thereby bringing themselves closer to the divine. Similarly, Lauri Honko (<https://www.coursehero.com/file/p49q4fs/55-+James-Frazer-an-anthropologist-has-a-similar-theory-He-believes-primitive/>, (July, 2019) asserts that, in some cases, a society will reenact a myth in an attempt to reproduce the conditions of the mythical age.

3.1 Myth of Creation in Nigerian and Ugandan Understanding of Reality

The myth of creation which is also called the cosmogony myth refers to the origin of the world in a neutral fashion, and also to something created. Myths are things that never happened but always are. To explain how African theatre can reenact African myth, Soyinka himself has written several essays dealing with the mythic sources of Yoruba ritual, like *The Bacchae of Euripides*. In fact, many similarities link both plays in matters of myths. In *The Bacchae of Euripides*, the myth of the creation of the world and humanity is prominent, for the play opens with the story of Dionysus' birth, which is recounted in the opening scene. Dionysus was born from the thigh of Zeus, considered as the creator of humankind according to the Greek origins, after he had impregnated Semele, a mortal woman. This myth is referenced in the play when Dionysus speaks of his mother's death and his own birth: "I am Dionysos. Accept. A seed of Zeus was sown in Semele my mother earth, here on this spot" (W. Soyinka, 1973, p. 235).

While reading Tom Omar's *The Exodus*, one notices that the story of the world creation intertwines with that of what previously mentioned above. Omara paints it as follows:

[...] Long, long ago, before anyone was born, God, the Moulder, the nameless One, lowered to earth, the First Man. Lwo was his name. Then the world was bare, like an egg's surface. There was nothing like buildings, cars, clothes, or even people except for this single man, Lwo. So that from Lwo spring all the people now alive, you and me (T. Omara, 1972: p. 48).

The passage clearly provides the reader with a complementary intertextual link with that of Wole Soyinka. Another myth that goes in both plays is the myth of the origin of death and suffering. *The Bacchae of Euripides* explores the myth of Pentheus. Pentheus was a king who opposed the worship of Dionysus and was eventually torn apart by his own mother and the other women of his city who had been driven mad by the god's influence. This myth is referenced throughout the play, particularly in the scenes where Pentheus is confronted by Dionysus and where the Bacchae describe their violent desires. Dionysus who is willing to reign freely in Thebes leads King Pentheus to death. The author recounts the scene of Pentheus's death who is killed by her own mother: "[...] *Tore the arm clean off the shoulder. The tongue of Pentheus stretched out in agony, his mouth ran blood. But no sound came. Ino, on the other side of him began to peel his flesh*" (W. Soyinka, 1973, p. 299).

However, Tom Omara's *The Exodus*, also has this similar story of death: Gipir claims for his precious bead swallowed by Labongo's child. The story is about Gipir who wants to take revenge on what his twin Labongo did to him due to his spear that Gipir lost in the forest. First, Labongo attempts to cradle his brother to accept the replacement, but Gipir refuses. He therefore, decides to cut open the child in order to get back the bead, that what is done. Omara contextualizes the scene through a conversation between twins:

I implore you, accept a replacement. Gipir: Labongo, what do you think I am made of? Do you think I can easily forget your wrath? Did you ever care into what hazards you spurned me when you refused to accept another spear? [...] As if I had most grossly wronged you before. You did not know I would have my turn for revenge. (T. Omara, 1972, pp. 63-64)

This revenge that Gipir has taken on his brother is what happened in Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* when god Dionysos revenges his mother Semele over the Bacchae, people of Thebes. This introduces another myth of rebellion, hatred and power. At the very beginning of the play, Dionysos has a vision to achieve, that leads him to set up his authority as a truly son of Zeus in Thebes, a city ruled by king Pentheus: "*It is time to state my patrimony even here in Thebes. I am the gentle, jealous joy. Vengeful and kind*" (W. Soyinka, 1973, p. 235).

Finally, Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* and Tom Omara's *The Exodus* do not only speak of merely myths in African traditions. Both plays utilize myths to explore the theme of struggle for freedom. They also analyze the quest for unity and self-determination, as well as the challenges they face in dealing with the colonial powers that seek to control and exploit their land and resources. Tom Omara's *The Exodus* unfolds with one of its interesting myths, that of the creation of mankind. The story is found in when the narrator began to tell the story to the audience, the work of creation was finally completed on the sixth day when The Moulder, Unnamed one created the single man low (T. Omara, 1972, p. 49).

In addition, animal spirit guides, protects and helps a person or a group of people. It is the case of Gipir with this wife in the forest. It is used in *The Exodus* to tell about an African folklore which is the story of the three brothers born from the offspring if the first man that God put on

earth which is compared to egg's surface and they ended up being cursed because of their jealousies, quarrels and whom the power was based on objects:

Long, long ago before any one was born, God, the Moulder, the nameless one, Lowerd to earth the first man Low was his name. Then the world was bare, like a eggs surface. There was nothing like buildings, cars, clothes or even people except for this single man, Low. So that from Low spring all the people now alive, you and me. Low had a grand daughter who born forth triplets'' (T. Omara, 1972, p. 49).

The Exodus drew on the heritage of folk culture, following Okot p'Bitek's technique of transposing oral poetry into a written culture, to develop formidable political satires such as *Song of Lawino* and *Song of Ocol*. In just such a way Omara used folkloric culture to construct a theatrical piece to warn Ugandans of the triviality of tribalism and to underscore the consequences of irreconcilability. Omara's accurate analysis of ethnicity in Uganda at the time of independence qualified him as one of the earliest prophets of his time.

The dialogue in *The Exodus* was immersed in traditional oral culture, setting this play apart as a new art form, a type of hybrid, one distinctively different from Western theatre. The narrator's opening lines underscore the oral roots of the play:

NARRATOR: Tell me my Children, tell me whether we people of east of this mighty Nile, think of those living to the west or south of it as brothers.

FIRST BOY: Why should we not be like brothers?

Why shouldn't they? (T. Omara, 1972, n.p)

Indeed, this question is the main thrust in Omara's treatment of the Acholi mythology of Gipir and Labongo, leaders believe to have caused the break of one tribe into what is now known as Acholi and Lango. In so doing, Omara reflects on many other tribes whose political past echoes the issues that are presented in the text. Omara's play (Cook and Lee, 1968) also includes stage directions such as, "The narrator sits among a group of children, either in front of the curtain, or among the audience." This direction discloses Omara's knowledge of the practical details of traditional theatre and reveals his stylistic recovery of the arrangement on traditional stages. So began the evening with the story of [the Spear and the Bead](#); which is the story of the beginning. But the story of the beginning is also the story of the calamity that befell a society through the action of its leaders.

Rather than simply recite the story the children at the fireside decides to enact the drama of the tragedy. Tradition demanded they open the play by singing the anthem of calamity. And so they do. A moving and more heart wrenching song there never was.

Can na! can na! Wilobo Mumiya

Can na! can na! Wilobo Mumiya

Atima ango ci! Anga makonya

Adok kwene! Anga makonya. (T. Omara, 1972, p. 45).

The story of the Spear and the Bead unfolds. The two brothers quarrel over Labongo's Ancestral Spear that Gipir in an emergency, hurled after a marauding elephant in the fields. The elephant disappears with the spear still stuck to its body. Labongo wants his spear back. He will not

accept a replacement! Ancestral Spears are not negotiable! Gipir is compelled at great perils to his life to roam through forests infested with wild animals in search of Labongo's spear. Three long years go by and Gipir is not back. People fear he is dead eaten by wild beasts. After much hardship, with the help of a friendly spirit of the forest, Gipir recovers the lost spear and returns home alive. But he is a man consumed with rage for what he has suffered. Gipir roamed dangerous forests in search of the Spear Time passes, calm and peace return between the brothers. The community prospers. When one day Labongo's young daughter accidentally swallows a piece of royal beads that a kindly spirit of the forest had given Gipir and bade him not to part with. Despite Labongo's pleas Gipir would not accept a replacement, gifts from the gods are not negotiable! The die is cast. Dark clouds hung over the land. With a knife Labongo rips open the belly of his own daughter and restores Gipir's lost bead. Women are in tears! The community is devastated. Only in the death of the totally innocent kid do the brothers wake up to the enormity of the horror their own deeds had wrought. They could not live together anymore. They make a vow to split and never to meet again except as enemies on the battle field. Gipir and his followers cross the Nile to the west bank. Labongo and his people remain on the east bank. Today in the 21st century within the same country armed soldiers guard a crossing on the Nile: Tell me my children. Tell me tonight whether it is true that we today, whether it is true that we people east of this might river, think of those living to the west or south of it as brothers.

It was the genius of Tom Omara that he took a well known Acholi legend that he knew from his childhood days at Anaka near Murchison Falls, and clothed it in the theatrical garb of the stage.

We would rather call the stories based on myths "stories from the beginning" as Tom Omara does in his *The Exodus* (1968: p. 48). The events take place centuries ago in what is nowadays called Acholiland, east of the Nile, in the north of Uganda. Originally it was an aetiological story in which it is explained why two related clans do not live on the same side of the river. The play as Omara wrote it some years ago, is introduced by a narrator who sits among a group of children, before the stage or among the audience. The children ask questions and are answered by the narrator, until they arrive at the point where the play is taken over by the "real actors". Omara adds explicitly that this first scene of the play can also be substituted by a narrator summarizing this part, as it surely has been done traditionally. In the version with the children, an old song forms the obligatory transition to the performance of the ancient events:

3rd Boy: The story of the beginning. Yes, I know it.

Narrator: Tell your brothers and sisters, then. Tell your generation. Your mothers should have told you this. My mother told me; and my mother's mother told her. That is how the story has lived on. Tell them, my son.

3rd Boy: Long, long ago, before anyone was born, God, the Moulder, the Nameless One, lowered to earth the Fust Man. Lwo was his name. Then the world was bare, like an egg's surface. There was nothing like buildings, cars, clothes, or even people except for this single man, Lwo. So that from Lwo spring all the people now alive, you and me. Isn't that right? (T. Omara, 1972: p. 48).

Narrator goes ahead, boy, you know the story:

3rd Boy: Lwo had a grand-daughter who bore forth triplets. These brothers lived a life cursed by their own quarrels and jealousies among themselves. And one day there was such a big quarrel among them that they split up, and for ever

after lived on opposite sides of the great river (...) But we could put this story on the stage and act it, sir.

Narrator: So that these people would come back reclothed like spirits of our ancestors, do you mean? (...) Then let us sing the song that tradition says must precede such a revelation.

They sing the Acholi song Canna. Our attention moves to the stage. (T. Omara, 1972: p. 48).

Myth symbolism in *The Bacchae of Euripides* is depicted through Dionysus, the god of revelry also as having a salvage element in his being. As for the intertextual myth aspects in both works, the myth of creation in *The Bacchae of Euripides* presents Cadmus who is the founder of Thebes. Father of Semele and Agave and grandfather of Dionysus and Pantheus. In *The Exodus* by Tom Omara, the world is conceived as the work a God also called the Unnamed or Nameless and the Moulder and the world would initially resemble an egg surface.

3.2 Myth of destruction in Nigerian and Ugandan Understanding of Reality

Myths of destruction are myths which relate the exploit of the man, most frequently the son of the good and a mortal, or of a goddess and a mortal, endowed with extraordinary values and destined to carry out glorious exploits especially an act of protection or rescue. The structure of the myth of the hero has gradually been deduced from the analysis of classical works. The structure common to representations of the myth establishes the characteristic elements of the development of the hero: - conception from illustrious parents, either divine or representatives of the divinity; amazing deeds, oracles, miracles, or prophecies that generally threaten the father prior to the birth of the infant; - the birth of the hero: the threatening prophecies justify the abandonment and exposure of the child hero and the time of birth in a hostile universe once the secret of his origin has been established; - the ordeal and epiphany of the hero: critical confrontation (the monstrous) force the hero to confront persecution and depressive anxieties and transform him into a recognizable hero; - the recognition of his triumph, of his glory and brilliance (solarity): his apotheosis as an immortal alters him.

This is explicable in the following terms: the heroic myth is a myth which explains the existence, triumph, glory and brilliance of the her. It is noticed in the *The Exodus* when Gikir went to the forest in the search of the spear and faced to the forest difficulties:

Gikir: we have been brought up in the wilderness.
 Our mother reared us in the forest wilderness.
 But the forest, the wilderness I met was different.
 [...] That would make the skin of a cow itching fear and wonder. A beast,
 a sadist by nature, a beast”
 “ I survived because I went always forward.
 I was bent, I was determined to find the spear.
 I followed the footprints of the elephant.
 [...] I was beaten by rain and hailstones.
 Without even a cave to shelter me.
 My finger and toes grew numb at times (T. Omara, 1972: p. 60-61).

In addition, in *The Bacchae Euripides* we also read: ‘reveal yourself Dionysos! Be manifest! O Bacchus come! Come with your killing smile! [...] Hunt this game to ground, come

Bromius! (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 296); ‘‘all power to Bromius: victory on this first day of his homecoming’’(W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 297).

In the excerpt above from the play, heroism is noticed when Dionysos came to Thebes in though born in Thebes has been travelling in Asia and is considered a foreigner by Pentheus. Although his worshippers, the Bacchantes, are Asian, Dionysus is a mediating figure between Hellenistic and Asian cultures. Dionysus is not the anti-Apollo that Nietzsche considered him to be. He is in the center between opposite poles, not the god of change, but the god of dichotomy. He is in the middle between man and woman, between Asia and Europe, between Hellas and the barbarian world, between heaven and hell (according to Heraclitus, his other name is Hades), between death and life, between raving and peace.¹⁸ Comparing this with Soyinka’s description of Ogun in *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, the chthonic god of metals, creativity, the road, wine, and art: no other deity in the Yoruba pantheon correlates so absolutely with Dionysus, through his own history and nature, with the spiritual temperament of the fourth area of existence which he identified as the abyss of transition.

In *The Exodus* Labongo kills his own child to recover the precious pearl of his brother that the baby swallowed because of their conflicts: ‘‘help, Gipir, quick. My husband is cutting open the child [...] oh he is finished. Oh he, my child! [...] now you can get your prized thing...’’ (T. Omara, 1972: p. 65)

The underlying motif and the major theme of *The Exodus* is the drama of the mythical conflicts between the two great ancestors of the Luo people of Eastern Africa which led to these people’s political disintegration from a unified society into rival communities. The presentation of Lawino, wife of one of the ancestors, shows the author’s conviction that if women’s political participation was allowed, this disintegration would have been avoided.

Lawino has no right to touch on political matters even on behalf of her husband when the latter is away. Her position as a woman is expressed in her response to Gipir, the second ancestor, when the latter comes to borrow his brother Labongo’s ancestral spear. She says:

‘‘I have no ruling over the spear of Labongo. He is your brother and I am nothing But a woman, a wife to him’’ (T. Omara, 1972: p.).

Although Lawino is not allowed to participate in political matters, it is interesting to note how easily she is blamed when things go wrong, in this case, when Gipir loses the ancestral spear. We notice Labongo’s chauvinistic attitude towards women which he uses to back up his claims that Lawino gave away his ancestral spear:

Lawino: But Labongo, a replacement...

Labongo: What? Replacement?

You have been lured into giving him my spear

You woman, with rhythm.

Gipir: I have not lain with her.

Labongo: How do I know you did not?

What other act is so sweet as to move a woman

Into giving away a sacred possession?

Lawino: You bring shame on me. (T. Omara, 1972: p. 65)

Lawino’s attempts to act as a peacemaker are rewarded with insults. Later in the play she has to bear the pain of watching her innocent baby slaughtered by her husband in order to retrieve his brother’s precious stone from the baby’s stomach and prove that he is a man.

The playwright satirizes the two men. As an illustration, in the scene where they perform the oath of separation ceremony with great enthusiasm and flourish in complete oblivion to Lawino's weeping after the slaughtering of her baby. The stage directions write:

LAWINO is weeping; OTEKA leans against her, also crying.
LABONGO and GIPIR swing round simultaneously, back to back, their spears rasping apart, and exit in opposite directions... (T. Omara, 1972: p. 66)

Throughout the play, Lawino's character is contrasted with that of the men; where the men are for competition and conflict, the woman is for peace and love. Lawino cares for healthy family relationships at the risk of losing her name as a chaste woman. The two brothers, on the other hand, put family ties and welfare secondary to political ambitions. This contrast illustrates the playwright's view that if women were allowed to participate in the political affairs of their societies their contribution would go a long way in preventing disasters.

The Bacchae of Euripides reveals the powerful feature of the nature depicting it as destructive and protective harmony and life provider.

3.3 Myth of High Being and Celestial Gods in Nigerian and Ugandan Understanding of Reality

The other aspect the myth in both works is noticeable by the invocation and appearance of gods and spirits, very often they invoke or mention spirits, ancestors or gods to help them or to thank them for a good thing. *The Exodus* we read: "and for I must go the river-bed. I must build a shrine there. I must take there a white goat for sacrifice. The Moulder must know we rejoice in in your home-coming." (T. Omara, 1972: p. 59), and in *The Bacchae of Euripides* we have these words: "Now we shall see the balance restored. O justice! O spirit of equity, Restitution be manifested! A sharp clear sword with bold on its edge-drive to the gullet of Pentheus" (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 295). On top of that, we consider the communication between gods, spirits and men which constitute a real manifestation myth. In *The Exodus*, an elephant turned into a old woman in order to talk with Gipir and to help; a spirit of a elephant is seen here as a guide, a protector, a garden: "Then suddenly, I saw a dismal figure, big as elephant it quickly turned into a old, old woman... Then she gave me a bead white as a baby's tooth to wear as a garden against the forest beast" (T. Omara, 1972: p.61).

Meanwhile in *The Bacchae of Euripides* the writer uses also a myth about the story Dionysos or Bromius who is a god, talk to people and help them as a protector: "All power to Bromius..." (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 297)

Accordingly, in these two plays, myth also appear in these words: "the herdsman goes off the same way as he entered... the music of Dionysos" (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 238). *The Exodus* writes: "just a beat the leopard drums for the ritual ceremony, beat them loud" (T. Omara, 1972: p. 56). In the world, rites are considering as myth it is what these writers showed to the reader.

The myth starts first with Dionysus the Greek god of fertility, later known as the god of wine and pleasure, called Bacchus by Romans. This son of the supreme Zeus and Semele, the King's daughter (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 235). Then, the play writes:

A Seed of Zeus was down in Semele my mother, here on this spot (...). Semele is Dionysus' mother, is the daughter of Harmony, Ares and Aphrodite and Kadmos King founder and Legend of Thebes. She's Ino, Autonoe and Agave's sister. Zeus in ancient Greek religion is chief deity of the pantheon, a sky and

weather god Jupiter; Kronos' son and Dionysus' father. Kronos' wives are mentioned by the Herdsman as example. Zeus' father placed in the hatred and revenge signs, immortal king (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 237).

Rites are rules and ceremonies practiced in a given religious community. The Leader, as a matter of fact, was permanently afraid because sacrifices had to be made as every single year the villagers was to choose victims to be offered at the same period as it is mentioned: (...) Leader, because the rites bring us nothing! Let those who profit bear the burden of the old year dying (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 236 – 237). During the so-called rites, the villagers had to choose victims (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 238). The victim is Tiresias known as the Blind Priest of Thebes during a long period, he accepted Dionysus' service in the town. When he was chosen as victim when Dionysus appears to save him (W. Soyinka, 1973: p. 238 – 242). Rites of Eulysis are a series of seven public invocations. We also see this fact of Vestals of Eulysis as they are called, are heading up the annual procession of ritual beating when Dionysus appears in Thebes (Wole Soyinka, 1973: p. 238). Maenads are wild women which accompanied Dionysus flush with wine (shoulders draped a fawn priestess. They were priestess who killed King Pentheus among them we have Agave king's mother, Ino and Autonone. They were priests of Eulysis. Although powerful, Dionysus is initially seen as a weak and feminine god by Pantheus "the king" who does not really believe in him as a god.

The main conflict in this play is between Dionysus and some humans in Thebes, namely Pantheus and his mother Agave and Dionysus' aunt who claims throughout the play that Dionysus was born out of human intercourse and her son Pantheus wants to stamp out the Maenads' worship of Dionysus through violence. Dionysus is enraged and seeks revenge.

Through myth, revenge is according to our understanding of the play, the main theme of *The Bacchae of Euripides*. In fact, Dionysus the god of intoxication, has revenge on his mind towards the family of Cadmus, his mother's father who refuses to consider him as a god and claims being the son of Zeus and Agave has been spreading rumors about Semele Dionysus' mother. Dionysus is a mediating figure between Hellenistic and Asian cultures. Dionysus is not the anti-Apollo that Nietzsche considered him to be. He is in the center between opposite poles, not the god of change, but the god of dichotomy. He is in the middle between man and woman, between Asia and Europe, between Hellas and the barbarian world, between heaven and hell (according to Heraclitus, his other name is Hades), between death and life, between raving and peace (Siegfried Melchinger, 1973: p. 189).

Comparing this with Soyinka's description of Ogun in *Myth, Literature, and the African World*, the chthonic god of metals, creativity, the road, wine, and art: no other deity in the Yoruba pantheon correlates so absolutely with Dionysus, through his own history and nature, with the spiritual temperament of the fourth area of existence which he identified as the abyss of transition. Ogun is also the master craftsman and artist, farmer and warrior, essence of destruction and creativity, a "recluse and a gregarious imbibor", "a reluctant leader of men and deities". His was the first rite of passage through the chthonic realm (W. Soyinka, 1976, p.). In Soyinka's view of tradition, the Yoruba believe that the spiritual turmoil of the gods began when a slave rebelled and hit the original being, Atunda, with a rock, shattering him into fragments that turned into beings. The description of Ogun, in Soyinka's play makes it evident that the god's effect on mankind is favourable and spiteful, gentle and terrible, as Euripides said of Dionysus. Both gods mediate between earthly and heavenly realms, but whereas Dionysus represents dichotomies Ogun is transitional. The difference, according to Soyinka, lies in European and traditional African conceptions of reality. European thought has tended to operate in Manichean terms, opposing good and evil, reason and emotion, and so forth, whereas

the Yoruba have what Soyinka calls a “cohesive cultural reality” (W. Soyinka, 1976: n.p). Furthermore, whereas Euripides’s Dionysus is soft and effeminate, Soyinka’s is “a being of calm rugged strength”, one who merges both Apollonian and Dionysian characteristics. Soyinka considers myth to be part wish fulfillment through hero projections and elaborates it to be an outline for action, especially for groups within society who have experienced loss and deprivation. Soyinka’s denial of revenge as a fitting impetus for Pentheus’s sacrifice in favour of the king’s death is to serve as the means for purification and subsequent rebirth as a fitting way to restore the “sacrificial logic of the play”. The play is the reconstruction of those facts that are not written in historical narrative.

Nietzsche in *The Birth of Tragedy* comments: Without myth all culture loses its healthy and natural creative power: only a horizon surrounded by myths can unify an entire cultural movement. Myth alone rescues all the powers of imagination and the Apollonian and Dionysian dream from their aimless wanderings. The images of myth must be daemonic guardians, omnipresent and unnoticed, restored well in the rituals, which protect the growth of the young mind, and guide man’s interpretation of his life and struggles. The state itself has no unwritten laws more powerful than the mythical foundation that guarantees its connection with all social aspects of life. . . . what is indicated by the great historical need of unsatisfied modern culture, clutching about for countless other cultures, with its consuming desire for knowledge, if not the loss of myth, the loss of the ritual home, the mythical womb (Nietzsche, 1993: p. 109-110). Soyinka’s creation of his play world, in its suggestion with a Yoruba deity named Ogun filled a cultural role similar to that of Dionysus, which enriches the implications and evocations of his play. In my view the political dimensions of Soyinka’s play are integral to myth and borrows a lot from the native performative pattern of the rituals, since Soyinka seems to believe in the involvement of the total community.

In *The Exodus*, revenge is concerned read in *The Exodus* when Gipir is sent forcefully to death asking him to retrieve the spear in the Elephant by his brother, he promises to be his brother’s enemy when he is back and make a vow on this. His abuses on his younger brother would cause the latter to enrage at him, he qualifies him as coward, weakling as quoted (...) Labongo: you coward, you weakling a man unable to hurl a spear even at hare, how do you come to challenge me? (T. Omara, 1972: p. 64). In *The Exodus*, we have The Ancestral Spear and Spirits Labongo gives such a huge importance to the Ancestral Spear which comes to be seen as what protects him from evil according to his belief as the Spear went from generation to generation. As for Spirits, we have River Spirits and Spirit which are seen as Symbols of Peace, War and Nature.

4. CONCLUSION

One may fairly conclude that, Nigerian and Ugandan drama ignore the phenomenon of Art for art’s sake as it has been used from time to time in European literature. They have regularly shifted in response to shifting culture and political climates. After independence, theatre opposed the new forms of oppression with a series of plays designed to elude political assassinations, serious political dramas gave way to musicals and farces, histories, satires, symbolic and wordless plays. It is worthy reminding that the intertextuality between Tom Omara's *The Exodus* and Wole Soyinka's *The Bacchae of Euripides* is evident in their use of myth to create narratives about revenge, rebellion and the struggle for freedom against oppressors. Indeed, the issue of myth is evident from the beginning to the end in both text. This is notified by aspects such as the story itself, rites, epi acts, heroism and the invocation of spirit and gods. Going through and reading the plays, we realize that drama at certain times served as markers for the whole range of cultural practice. When a new government wanted to teach

the people how to rebuild their social order, didactic dramas, in both new and old interactions, were hauled back for use. Through their use of well-known myths and characters, both authors are able to tap into cultural and historical knowledge to convey deeper meanings and explore complex ideas. This intertextuality is a testament to the power of storytelling and the enduring nature of mythology in modern literature. Traditional Ugandan performances meant for some, at certain times, strong cultural roots that evoked a proud heritage.

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