

CULTURAL IDENTITY AND 'WOMANITY': MYTHIC SEQUENCE AND RITUAL PATTERNS IN FEMI OSOFISAN'S *WOMEN OF OWU*

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Abstract

*This paper presents the relationship between an ethnic group and the traditional myths and rituals deployed by the group, particularly women, in their daily living. In every society, myth and ritual are embedded in its identity as a group. Owu as an indigenous Yoruba community shows the diversity in the worship of gods and goddesses. The myths behind these gods are very much evident in their culture, mode of worship, festivals and history. This goes in line with what Olaniyan (2007) says about festivals and rituals. For him, one major pattern of the "indigenous cultural and artistic institution is the festival, organized around certain deities or spirits, or to mark generational transitions or the passage of the seasons... Each festival dramatizes a story or myth..." (355). Some of the underlying myths to be explored in this study are the myth of origin, the myth of the femme fatale and myth of crime and punishment. The ritualistic pattern shall be explored based on its relationship with their religion or mode of worship. The present study would take the mythic/ archetypal criticism as its theoretical framework, which is the work of every aesthetic object; the ability to hold perception and "give rise to thought" (Ricoeur 1967). This study engages critical thoughts from the perspective of recurrent myth and ritual patterns in Femi Osofisan's dramatic text, *Women of Owu*.*

Keywords: Myth, Ritual, Archetype, Mythic sequence, Ritual patterns

Introduction

The existence of various interpretations of the study of literary texts reinforces Northrop Frye's assertion that "literature is an inexhaustible source of new critical discoveries and would continue to be even if new works of art ceased to be written" (2000). Akwanya (2008) opines that the "interpretation of a text is concerned with patterns of signification which gives rise to an appropriable structure of meaning". It is under this premise that this present study would take its shape and contribution to scholarship in light of the Mythic and Ritual patterns in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*.

Myth has been considered for a long time as a fable, narrative or invention. Sometimes it is passed off as real event due to its exemplarity and its link to sacred tradition. In recent times, myth has been shared in two dimensions of meanings; a story which has a primordial revelation and a sacred tradition with a unique exemplary model. The second dimension of meaning is expounded by historians of religion and ethnologists. Myth as a story is analyzed by Frye as a "human response to recurrence in cosmic phenomena, when it produces for the observer a flash of instantaneous comprehension" (Akwanya 2007).

M.H. Abrams defines myth as one story in a mythology which is a system of hereditary stories of ancient origin which were once believed to be true by a particular cultural group

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which served to explain ... why the world is as it is and things happen as they do, to provide a rationale for social customs and observances and to establish the sanctions for the rules by which people conduct their lives" (230). Mircea Eliade asserts that myth narrates a sacred history; it describes an event which took place during the primordial times, during the fabulous times of the origins.

However, many scholars and critics have written on the issues that have arisen concerning the twin concept of myth and ritual. Many believe that myth is derived from ritual or is closely linked to it while some believe that they are two independent concepts. Akwanya (2007) quoting Strenski elucidates Bronislaw Malinowski's view on myth, stating that myth is "not only a system of beliefs, but also a fount of ethnographic information in as much as it expresses, enhances and codifies belief; it safeguards and enforces morality; it vouches for the efficiency of ritual and contains practical rules for the guidance of men".

Frye (2000) in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, states that the union of ritual and dream in a form of verbal communication is myth. This shows that myth is a narrative while ritual is the re-enactment of myth, for "ritual by itself cannot account for itself" because it is "pre-logical, preverbal and in a sense pre-human" so, "myth accounts for and makes communicable the ritual and the dream". Kasomo Daniel (2009) is of the view that rituals are dramatization, through symbols of belief and aspirations. This however shows that myths are fictive stories about gods; defining their identity and meaning.

Mircea Eliade (1962) asserts that ritual effects a transition from the realm of the profane to that of the sacred. In ritual acts, it is believed that there is a kind of elevation of the soul during such performances. Ritual therefore alleviates the individual from the "burden of selfhood". This ritual act embedded in religion has a way of dealing with "individual and collective experience and particularly, its potential to modify the sense of individual identity". Similarly, ritual and religion can be considered as the oldest forms of human escapism from the self.

Ritual performances over the ages have always required a "sacred space" which is symbolic for a territorial model. "Sacred spaces" marked out for rituals are as important as the ritual act itself. In that it is filled with symbolic or sacred items and activity, and are considered, together with ritual as "most effective set of techniques to manipulate identities for the sake of tribal loyalty". Sacred space can be marked off by significant objects like stones, mountains, actors, music, scents (of animal blood or incense), human or animal skulls, temples and so on. These sacred objects have helped in the elevation of the spirit of the performer. In ritual acts, one can assume the identity of a god as in the cases of possession and trance. This is evident on Christianity as Apostle Paul admonishes the believer in Romans 6: 6 – 8: "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin for he that is dead is freed from sin. Now, if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him" (King James Version). According to Mircea Eliade, "every ritual has a divine model, an archetype; all religious acts are held to have been founded by gods, civilizing heroes or mythical ancestors. For Eliade, every act of human society particularly that of ritual "repeats an act performed at the beginning of the time by a god, a hero or an ancestor".

Aims and Objectives

The general aim of this study is to bring to light the ritual mode and the mythic structures underlying the Osofisan's *Women of Owu*. The specific objectives are:

- i to show how these can be recurrent in literature and the connectedness with the myth of a people;
- ii to examine the religious myth and rituals of the Yoruba pantheon as evident in the text;
- iii to discover the role of the gods in shaping this society and the dramatic text in particular.

Literature Review

Meyers Daniel in his paper; "Myth as Ritual: Reflections from a Symbolic Analysis of Numic Origin Myths", carries out a research of myth and ritual on the Numic culture of the Great Basin region. He asserts that "sacred stories or myths are told within a strict ritual setting. Through this research, he examines three ritual events from a series of Numic origin myth. He notices that rites appear to be fundamental to all Numic groups whether it is individualistic or pertaining to life-crisis situation. His research however focuses more on the transitional rites of childhood to adulthood and the ritual processes that ushers each of these significant stages of an individual's life in. These ritual processes are cyclic and classified according to gender variations. The ritual of childbirth, menstruation, male and female puberty, death, dance, marriage ceremonies, communal rabbit and antelope hunt and so on are examined.

Furthermore, Derek Wright (1992) in his 'Ritual and Revolution: Soyinka's Dramatic Theory' depicts the thoughts of Wole Soyinka concerning Ritual acts in his essays and dramatic texts. He asserts that Soyinka is of the view that 'Ritual equates the divine (super human) with the communal will, fusing the social with the spiritual.' In his research, he shows that Soyinka's metaphysical theory is dominated by Ritual which serves as a platform for the meeting point of the 'human and the divine.' His dramatic works are influenced by the Ogun deity of the Yoruba Kingdom, 'the pathfinder deity who bridged the abyss between gods and men' also known as 'the god of transition.' Obatala, the god who is 'the embodiment of the suffering spirit of man' (40). For him, Yoruba ritual drama has sacrificial motifs that take primal positions depicting 'Suffering' which must be ritually performed in order that 'prosperity be restored to the community, fertility to the earth and the continuum of life maintained' (41).

Similarly, Akwanya (2018) in "We must insist that the world is what we have always taken it to be: Disruption in T.S. Eliot's *The family Reunion* and Wole Soyinka's *Death and King's Horseman*" entails that the 'social life-world' although under severe threat on the captivity of the Elesin who is charged to fulfill the cultural function of suicide ritual, the community must insist 'that the world is as they have always taken it to be' by Olunde, the 'Sap-laden plantain' undertaking this ritual sacrifice that 'both repairs the broken system and supplies the emissary the dead king needs at his service.'

Subsequently, Derek maintains that ritual drama appears to lead an uncertain hovering existence somewhere between the mask-drama of festival rites and the mythological theatre in Duro Ladipo and Soyinka's plays. As a result, he asserts that myths are made drama in their enactment by rituals and are themselves accumulations of folklore which supply the incantatory chants and praise songs of festivals. He goes further to say that Soyinka's theory of ritual as 'drama of gods who watch over all transitional crossings' is a narrowly selective one because 'Ritual does more than enact myth and there is more than one myth.' For him, 'not all rites enact transition.' However the kind of myth and ritual studied here focuses only on

transitional rite. It does only focus on one type of mythic and ritual performance depicting the archetype of the “carrier”. The current study will explore all available mythic and ritual patterns in *Women of Owu*.

Astrid Van Weyenberb's (2013) in her book, *The Politics of Adaptation: Contemporary Drama and Greek Tragedy* connects *Women of Owu* as an adaptation of Euripides' *Trojan Women* which is ethical. The critic opines that Osofisan in his play calls for a political change. She insists that this Greek tragic play has served as a kind of vehicle to address political issues and inspire change for the playwright.

She pursues the issue of mourning in her research bringing out the similarities and differences in the two texts. She, quoting Nicole Loraux says that Euripides' play moves beyond a representation to a performance of mourning, conveying “a mourning that nothing can appease, not even the repetition of its own voice nothing except its own enormity”. For her, the laments and mourning in the plays are “purely gendered”. The mourning in *Women of Owu* “takes centre stage” and through oral rendition were able to know the history and culture of the Yoruba tradition. The mourning that takes place in *Women of Owu* is similar to that of the *Trojan Women*. Erelu and Hecuba express their suffering by recounting how they have lost their sons, husbands and city. The critic points out that the main object of lamentation is not so much about the women but rather their men in “relation to which they define themselves”.

Weyenberg however points out the differences in the plays. For her, mourning in *Women of Owu* focuses on their stories of how they are victimized rather than praising their heroes and city, but the Trojan women sang in praise of their men and about Athens. She also aligns her research on the vulnerability of women in the face of war. Women are left to their fate and oftentimes tell the tale. In war, women are raped and subjected to inhumane acts which leaves them traumatized sometimes; death becomes the best option in this kind of fate. The kind of chants and folksongs used in the play are ones peculiar to Yoruba culture and it is through these that the women bewail their pains and history as a people. The critic practically sees slavery as an effect and cause of war. The Owu people became drunk with prosperity and sold other Yorubas into slavery.

Ndubuisi Nnanna (2016) in his essay, “The Demonization of Women in Femi Osofisan's *Women of Owu*” argues from a historical perspective, using the Reader-Response approach to show how the Owu war of the 17th century reflects in the text and how it portrays the cultural identity of the women of owu. His Reader-Response approach allows him to freely make a historical descriptive research which relies totally on ‘words’ as a historical data and which manifests from the ‘mental and direct assertions of the reader.’ The play for the critic is influenced by the Iraq war of 2003. This leads us back to the historical outcome of this brutal war led by America to punish Saddam Hussein for his unrepentant anti-imperialism. It also shows the allusive connection of *Women of Owu* to the Iraq war in which the allied forces of Ile Ife, Ijebu and Oyo mercenaries invaded Owu city on the pretense of liberating it from Oba Akinjobi. The critic as a reader and in his own contribution demonizes Lawumi, the queen mother and Iyunloye, the errant wife of Maye Okunade as the instigators of the Owu war. Furthermore in the essay, Lawumi is depicted as a goddess drunk with revenge and counter attack. On the one hand, she punishes Owu for pride and haughtiness and on the other hand, seeks to punish the allied forces for desecrating her shrine. He asserts that the play demonizes

'Yoruba womanhood' in that the historical Yoruba women were respected therefore should not be depicted as cause of war.

He however makes a distinction between the historical women of Owu and women in classical Athens. For him, women of Athens were not respected; they are seen as 'objects', treated as 'chattels' and taken into 'marriage by capture or contest'. The Yoruba women for him are integrated into political economy and were in control of huge commercial enterprise. He therefore makes a feminist differentiation of two cultures using the two texts. This for him, is a historical misrepresentation in that the playwright in his bid to create anew has "extrapolated the cultural essence of a society that had little regard for women into the cultural history of an African community where women enjoy a lot of respect".

Mythic theory

Mythic/Archetypal criticism looks at the structural, recurrent patterns that are recognizable in a sequence. It is one of the oldest literary theories that engage a text focusing on the relationship it has with myth on the basis of recurring patterns. The word "Archetype" originates from a Greek word *arche* meaning "beginning" and *typos* meaning "imprint". The theory is rooted in two academic disciplines social anthropology and psychoanalysis, each contributing to literary criticism. However, the theory was popularized by the works of Frye breaking away from Frazer and Jung and makes it distinct from their views of archetypes. Carl Jung sees the "collective unconscious of the human mind as the "central power" where archetype takes place. (Walker 4). Frazer's account of the archetype is from an anthropological standpoint dealing with cultural mythologies. He identifies that the death-rebirth myth is present in almost all cultural mythologies and acted out in terms of seasons and vegetations. Other scholars who have contributed to the archetypal myth are Ernst Cassirer, Maud Bodkin, Joseph Campbell, Claud Levi-Strauss, Paul Ricoeur, Robert Graves, Richard Chase and so forth.

However, the present study shall take Frye's archetypal criticism to trace the recurring patterns of myth. He describes archetypes not as an imitation of nature but as an imitation of other poems. Frye is only interested in "the universal nature of mythic structure" (Dobson²). By archetype, he means "a typical or recurring image, symbol which connects one poem with another and thereby helps to unify and integrate our literary experience" (99). Moreover, the study of conventions and genres attempts to fit poems into the body of poetry as a whole.

Furthermore, Frye's view on archetypes is concerned to interpreting texts (a novel or drama) in relation to the myth and archetypes that could be seen in the text in form of narrative, symbols, images, allusions and so on. This can however show the recurring or conventional actions which show analogies to rituals. He asserts that the principle of recurrence in the rhythm of art seems to be derived from the repetitions in nature that make time intelligible to us (105).

Methodology

This study used the qualitative study paradigm rules with the content analysis method.

Analysis

One of the "primal symbols (Ricoeur) of myth and frequently recurrent in literary tradition is the portrayal of the gods and the relationship they share with humans. In Hesiod's *Theogony*,

the gods are portrayed in their genealogy, giving account of the birth of the gods and the creation of the cosmos. In *Women of Owu*, the characters hold their gods in reverence and sometimes with contempt and disdain for their inability to save them. The gods are perceived as being mythic and are held in awe.

In *Women of Owu*, the gods are so much involved in the lives of the people. These gods mingle and interfere in the way of living of the characters and equally share a god-man relationship. For instance in scene one, Anlugbua, the ancestral father of *Owu* descends from his celestial abode in form of an old man to inquire from the women what has befallen the city of *Owu*. Anlugbua in human form speaks thus:

Anlugbua: Tell me, dear women you seem to come from there. What's the name of the city I see smoldering over there?

Woman: Stranger, you don't know? Look at my tears! That was once. The proud city of *Owu*, reduced to ruin Yesterday (scene 1)

From the above discourse, the divine form of the god is well concealed in his physical manifestation hence; they speak to him as a stranger who is quite old. They advise him to leave the premises for "if they catch you, your life won't be worth a beetle". However, their awe and sense of reverence came when he reveals himself as Orisa Anlugbua (3); they whimper and address him as their ancestral father:

Woman: Sword! That would have served little purpose. This time, I tell you! Because – eh! Yeh !ooo Yeh! What did you say? You... You... Mo gbe! Ooo Is it you...? Have I stumbled upon ...Impossible! My eyes have not seen a ... No! Impossible.

Anlugbua: Calm yourself, my dear woman. You have nothing to fear!

Woman: It's not you, is it/ let me not Go blind today! It's not you. Anlugbua? Not our ancestor they talk so much about (4).

Their encounter with epiphany as an act of the deity leaves a "mental construct for the interpretation of the outside events of the text (Akwanya 151). As we have seen, "the god is now capable of acting and suffering like a human creature and engages in all sorts of action... as an independent subject (qtd in Akwanya 137).

Furthermore, some characters in the play are shown to have a special link with the gods whom they serve as their personal deity. And these individual characters; Okunade, the general of the allied forces is endowed by Obatala with the gift of creativity to shape wood and stone into new forms. Orisaye from birth is the "vestal votary" of Obatala, the bride of a god, not to be defiled by any man. However, Balogun Kusa, one of the war lords, has been eyeing the food meant for the god, for he believes as a portage of Ogun, he would not be harmed (24).

However, the relationship the gods and man have in the fictive world of the text is one the gods cannot do away with. Also we see man in constant need of the divine as the gods also need man to worship and revere them:

Anlugbua: Without a shrine, without worshipers, what is a god? Who will venerate us? Who will sing our praises among these ruins?(Scene 1, P. 9).

From the above discourse it is obvious that the god is forlorn and understands that he is insignificant without worshippers. In a like manner, Lawumi the god mother feels irate at the destruction of shrines and lives who ran to it for safety. Although she punishes *Owu* for a committed crime, she feels remorse for the abject destruction wrecked by the allied forces.

The Yoruba *Owu* society is a polytheistic one, with a belief in diverse gods leading to the construction of several "sacred spaces" for the worship of these gods. And these gods manifest their power and reality in the activity which they are known for. Anlugbua, the ancestral father and former *Owu* war leader, before leaving the earth, dipped his sword into the earth and became a mountain. He leaves them with a promise to always return when they pull his chain and "call my name three times and I shall be back, sword in hand, to defend you" (4). From the text, Edumare is the almighty father, the god-head of the cosmos who reigns mightily above all things. All other gods come under him in the hierarchy of the gods (5). Oduduwa, the progenitor of the Yoruba race together with Lawumi, the ancestral mother of *Owu*, Alugbua her grandson and his great uncles Obatala; god of creativity, Orunmila; god of wisdom, Ogun; the god of metallic ore; Esu; OrisaOko, the hunter's god all make up the hierarchy and genealogy of the Yoruba pantheon gods.

The Myth of Pride and Fall

This is another notable mythic structure in the dramatic text. Sin has always been in existence even before man and man is considered to have continued in evil (Ricoeur). There are indications of sin and crime in *Women of Owu*. Crime, here, means the deviation from laid down rules and not heeding to the instructions of higher authorities. The movement of crime and punishment is in a "chronological order, one thing happens, then another - the crime, then the punishment (Akwanya, *Discourse Analysis* 2008). Paul Ricoeur (1967) in this context, posits that "sin as alienation from oneself is an experience even more astonishing, disconcerting and scandalous". Nonetheless, crime is the manifestation of evil; hence punishment is to be found along the path of thought initiated by the consciousness of evil.

However, the suffering of *Owu* pertains to the crime they committed in the past. *Owu* in their prosperity became drunk with pride and arrogance. In Scene One, one of the women who met Anlugbua reveals this and consequently sets the stage for the exposition of the crime committed. She says: "... that was once the proud city of *Owu* reduced to ruin yesterday" (1). The *Owus* are depicted as being proud, which for Lawumi is a sin in itself because she complains bitterly to Anlugbua: "Arrogance that was their sin An insufferable display of arrogance towards me, towards Ile Ife, where we all come from!..." (18)

In another instance of a discussion between the god mother and Anlugbua, we see more inkling into the crime committed:

Lawumi: *Owu* forgot its history, forgot its origins! Your people became drunk with prosperity! And in their giddiness, they dared to send their army against Ile Ife! Imagine it. They razed the town down and reduced it to dust!

Anlugbua: But are you forgetting, mother? It was the Ifes who first attacked *Owu* at the market of Apomu –

Lawumi: Because the *Owus* were selling other Yoruba into slavery! It was a law, wasn't it laid down by your royal, uncle and my son Sango there no Yoruba should ever sell

other Yoruba into slavery. But the Owus would not listen! Flagrantly at Apomu, they broke the law and the only way to stop them was by force. (Scene 3, P. 18 – 19).

According to Kasomo, the Owus have committed a “moral sin” of meting out inhuman treatment to others as well as manipulation for their personal gain. This hubris was a result of their success and prosperity. The gods had “silently lent their energies in the building of *Owu* into a fortress, it became the most flourishing cities in Yoruba land and in their glory rejected the ways of other Yorubas (5). Erelu’s discourse shows this:

Prior to the sin of arrogance committed by the *Owus*, Erelu committed a crime out of a mother’s love for her child. It was revealed through prophecy at the birth of prince Dejumò that he will bring destruction to his society. The instruction was to terminate his life as a baby to save the city from annihilation but instead Erelu hid him and nurtured him into adulthood. Adumaadan, Erelu’s daughter-in-law complains bitterly to her: “... right from birth that man brought the curse of death with him from heaven. But against the priest’s instructions, you refused to have him destroyed. Now it is he who has destroyed us all, exactly as predicted. Because of you, because of your pride which you disguised as a mother’s love...” (Scene 5, P. 40).

In another instance, Iyunloye, the errant wife of Maye Okunade accuses Erelu of being the cause of the war:

Iyunloye: Since you are looking for blame, why not start with this woman here? She, it was after all, who mothered the man who captured me. Ask her, and she herself will confess that at his birth, the priest ordered his immediate execution. They warned that he was evil, that if he was left to grow up, he would bring disaster to *Owu*. They said he would seduce a woman, and through that act cause the death of many. But she chose instead to hide him and nurse him to manhood. (Scene 5, P. 51).

Ricoeur opines that one thing leads to another and when sin is accumulated, “punishment falls on the man in the guise of misfortune and transforms all possible sufferings, all diseases, all death, all failure into a sign of defilement”.

However, punishment would not escape the allied forces because “they too; they have no regard for me” (21). Their disregard for the female deity and the burning of shrines is enough crime that deserves punishment from the goddess. Moreover, these allied forces of Ijebu and Ife and the Oyo mercenaries are too brutal in the killing of people and the destruction of property. They are left at the mercy of fate because the gods are involved. Lawumi designs the kind of disaster that will come upon them:

Lawumi: I want their journey to be filled with grief: Human beings, it is clear learn only from suffering and pain. Already, Esu has promised me, there’ll be such confusion at every crossroads. They’ll never find their way or will be stomach of beasts. You, my son, can make their journey even more agonizing. By unleashing your terrible storms on them... let everyone of them perish till human beings everywhere learn that the gods are not their plaything (Scene 3, P. 21 – 22).

The gods are unpredictable and they continually trick man to their downfall. Just like the goddess Athena in Sophocles' *Ajax* edging Ajax on to his destruction, so that he commits a crime and then suffers. Lawumi instigates the allied forces of Ijebu and Ife with the Oyo mercenaries to camp outside the walls of Owu for seven years. She is depicted as a god drunk with revenge and counter-revenge. She incites the Owus to commit more crimes after they sacked Ife and seized the Apomu market by attacking the Ijebus while looting their stalls and selling them into slavery (20). On the other hand, she plans to punish the allied forces for defiling her shrine and that of the other gods at Owu (21). Erelu realizes the inconsistency of the gods, so being happy is a mirage because the "gods employ it as a mask to trick us each time they are about to plunge us into grief" (37).

The Feminine Power

The feminine power is an evident part of the discursive formations of the literary text. It is typical of the myth of the femme fatale and figures like Iyunloye and Orisaye depict it evidently in the play. The male counterpart is usually at the mercy of these figures – by falling to their doom or some form of misfortune. In *Women of Owu*, Maye Okunade has "besieged our city because of a woman, and would not go away" (7). Iyunloye leads her lovers into compromising and dangerous situations. Both Okunade and prince Dejumoo are caught in this web of dangerous situation which also affects the city of Owu in general, therefore leading to the death of all the males in the city including the new born Aderogun. Okunade on the one hand leaves his artistry to join the army in order to get his wife back:

Woman:...But when his favourite wife, Iyunloye, was captured and brought here, and given as wife to one of our princes, Okunade became bitter and swore to get her back... He abandoned his tools and took to arms. And so fierce was his passion for killing that he rose rapidly through the ranks, and soon became the Maye! An artist? He's a butcher now, (Scene 1, P. 6).

On the other hand, Dejumoo meets his peril by marrying Iyunloye and also bringing disaster to his community. Erelu complains to the general "it was my son, your wife bewitched and led us to this calamity" (47). She (Erelu) wishes the immediate death of Iyunloye because for her she is the source of the calamity which has befallen them; she implores Okunade to take immediate action to punish Iyunloye.

Erelu: Maye I know what I am saying! Women like her are dangerous, especially to their lovers. One they catch you, you're hooked for ever: They have such powers of enchantment, eyes that will set cities ablaze. You know what I am talking about. The proof is over there, one look at her again. Believe me, and all your anger will melt away. (Scene 5, P. 48)

Erelu equally confirms that Iyunloye is a bewitching beauty; a beauty that can ensnare men and set cities ablaze. Helen of Troy in Homer's *Iliad* is depicted as having "unmatched beauty that drives many suitors wild with love for her... a beauty that ignites sexual desire and hides a dark heart of betrayal." (Ayman 87). Sometimes the femme fatale acts on the basis of socio-economic reasons, to "get power or social class; the femme fatale embodies socio-economic problems such as abandonment, poverty (Ayman 86). This is typical of Iyunloye as

she uses her beauty to scale through many obstacles during the invasion of Owu at the Apomu market. She goes further to entice Okunade with his past artistry life in order to escape the punishment he plans for her:

Iyunloye: Do you miss it – I mean, your former life? It's what has helped me survive, I can tell you. I mean, during these years of ours separation!..." (Scene 5, P. 49).

A femme fatale figure can go to any level to get the attention she needs and this is what Iyunloye does by pressing so hard on Okunade both with soft and subtle words. She appeals to his senses and reminds him of his past with her, striking at his weakness – love for her and art. However, Erelu continually strives to prevent Okunade from giving way to love and beauty.

Iyunloye: ... And how many times I tried to run away. To join you! On a number of nights I climbed up the walls, tied ropes together, and tried to escape. But the guards found me out each time and stopped me. It's the truth! I had to bribe them to keep it to themselves. Ask them, they are my witnesses! I really tried, my husband! Look into my eyes see if I am lying to you!

Chorus Leader: Don't look into her eyes, General! All you will find the danger and deceit.

Woman: Speak up quickly Erelu, for all of us! Don't let her get away with it! Her honey tongue is about to betray us all!

Erelu: I will answer her, have no fear. Perfidious woman, why do you mock the dead like this? So you tried to climb over our walls to escape! And the guards caught you several times and stopped you ... Have you forgotten then that I myself came to you on many occasions during the siege, appealing to you to leave the city and return to your husband. (Scene 5, pp. 53 – 54).

Passage and Ritual Chants

In *Women of Owu*, the five scenes are infused by ritual songs which are comprised of dirges, bride chants and oriki. The oriki is a praise oral poem uttered in praise of a person at specific occasions. Erelu Afin, mother of five dead princes and queen of Owu utters this praise song when Adumaadan, the widow of Lisabi brings her news of the dead Adeoti; one of the princesses of Owu. Initially she is made to believe that Adeoti is fortunate and has gone to a "safer place where pain cannot longer reach her" (24). Erelu did not understand what the message means until Adumaadan comes to explain that "I found her body lying at the entrance of the shrine of the goddess Lawunmi." (40) She sings Adeoti's oriki:

My child Adeoti Descendant of Anlugbua Daughter of Anlugbua... Even without royal necks beads She gleams and gleams like brass! Ah, my slim and pretty daughter Rest in peace O there in heaven, don't eat worms Don't eat millipedes Eat only what they eat there...(75).

The transitional rite is cut short by war and in their anger, the women curse the allied forces, sometimes baring their breasts, singing a ritual of malediction (38). The baring of breasts by women in an African setting is believed to make the curse very potent. The Oriki is also uttered for Aderogun, the grandson of Erelu after his head is battered at the 'Araba tree' (58).

My son Aderogun! You become my father today! When you get home, give them my greetings: Aderogun, brave one Farewell, till we meet again! Son of the warrior Jaqunmoly Offspring of Owu's ancestors... (77).

The death of Aderogun transits him into ancestorship cadre of the community. He is the last hope Owu has for a chance of survival but eventually he is killed. Consequently, he could not complete a full life-cycle transition of: Childhood – Adulthood – Marriage – Ancestorship (Ampim). The chorus sings their dirge for him:

Woman: ... Boys of your age should be learning how to say your firstwords.

Woman: Learning the riddles the Owu alone speak to the wind to tame it.

Woman: Boys of your age should be growing muscles for handling spear.

Woman: A chest to dare danger, and a heart to hold tender moments.

Woman: But here you are already a corpse, far from your initiation night!(Scene5,P.60).

It is important to this society that the dead must be sent home. Their religious belief requires them to hold a ritual for the dead. Although there are no priests or diviners to perform this ritual, it falls on Erelu, the queen mother, "The only mouth we have left now to speak to our ancestors" (62). This ritual for them must be performed to "save our future from eternal damnation". It is a duty one cannot evade or refuse. However, the ritual requires that one should be spiritually and physically strong if he "seeks to meet the dead" (63). It is obvious that the city has a strong belief system pertaining to their uses of dirges and ritual songs that affect their emotions. Richard is of the view that the songs and dances help them reunite with their primordial essence, thereby "reaffirming their Yoruba identity.

During the ritual process, the women chant and dance to the dirge which slowly conducts them into a trance (63). They begin the invocation, calling on their ancestor Anlugbua for a final encounter with him and for the repose of the dead. So, with the destruction of their shrines and sacred places of worship, they resort to dirges and chants to uplift their spirituality. Prior to the war, they would have poured libation for the dead and carry out a rigorous ritual tradition, but the war has cut these performances short. They have to make do with the only asset they have to a ritual performance by singing and dancing the way their mothers taught them to dance the "Dance of the days of woe!" (17).

Conclusion

Myth and ritual patterns are frequent recurrent issues in literature, especially African literature. It has been discovered that playwrights tend to dramatize their historical past and cultural background in order to portray their cultural hegemony. For instance, the war which breaks out in Owu is a punishment meted out on them by Lawumi, their ancestral mother who believes that no sin should go unpunished. This however links to the prophetic doom that was said at the birth of prince Dejumò but out of mother's love Erelu preserved her son's life and nurtured him to manhood where the fall took place. Their ritual songs embody their sorrows which are best known to them. The city before the invasion was agog with marriage songs and preparations for weddings. Erelu's daughters were getting ready to be married off to their husbands but this ended in mourning. They therefore curse the invaders by their gods because their happiness has been taken away from them and they know that, in the words of Ola Rotimi (2013) "the gods are not to blame".

The identified mythic symbols and ritual patterns that qualify the text as having recurrent myth and ritual were explored using some individual characters and the characters as a group. It has been established that man in his human nature always seeks for a higher power for protection from natural occurrences and these divine beings constantly interfere and intermingle with the activities of man; sometimes prospering or punishing them. This dramatic text is obviously rooted in mythic and ritual sequence with a common exposition of the classical Greek literature which serves as a model in the study of literature.

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