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sur l'Afrique (CURA)**

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Couverture : Figure de chasseur bantou de l'Afrique centrale. Statuette collectée par le Laboratoire d'Anthropologie et d'Histoire (actuelle Faculté des Lettres, Arts et Sciences Humaines de l'Université Marien Ngouabi), entre les années 1975 et 1980. Dans les langues kongo de cette sous-région, le bon chasseur est justement appelé « *NTELA* ». Par métonymie, ce nom symbolise l'homme constamment animé par la quête des savoirs et des connaissances ; un scientifique qui cherche, qui trouve et qui partage ses trouvailles avec les autres au moyen de la publication.

Les opinions exprimées dans les différents textes publiés ici sont celles de leurs auteurs. Elles n'engagent nullement la Revue *NTELA*

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Yoruba Mythology in Wole Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*

Anicet Odilon MATONGO NKOUKA*

Herlyn Juverly BALONGANA**

Abstract

This study deals with the categories and functions of Yoruba mythology in Wole Soyinka's plays *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*. The types of Yoruba mythology used in these plays include: the myths of creation, the myths of eschatology and destruction and the myths of high being and celestial gods. Soyinka's works are distinguished by their exploration of the African world view, and are steeped in Yoruba mythology. The characters also have mythological dimensions. Soyinka uses mythology to free black Africa from its subordination to European domination. The use of Yoruba mythology in Soyinka's postcolonial dramatic works fulfils the cosmological, sociological and pedagogical functions. Yoruba mythology is a counter-discourse against the dominant colonialist discursive system. Thus, this study, in four points, uses the Archetypal approach to deal with the steps to the understanding of mythology, how myth works in literary writings, mythology of creation, mythology of eschatology and destruction.

Keywords

Function, Yoruba mythology, creation, eschatology, destruction.

Résumé

Cette étude porte sur les catégories et les fonctions de la mythologie Yoruba dans deux des pièces de théâtre de Wole Soyinka à savoir *A Dance of the Forests* et *The Road*. Les types de mythologie yoruba utilisés dans ces pièces incluent : les mythes sur la création, les mythes de l'eschatologie et la destruction et les mythes sur des êtres

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élevés et des dieux célestes. Les œuvres de Soyinka se distinguent par leur exploration de la vision du monde en Afrique et sont imprégnées de la mythologie yoruba. Les personnages ont aussi des dimensions mythologiques. Soyinka utilise la mythologie pour libérer l'Afrique noire de sa subordination à la domination européenne. L'utilisation de la mythologie yoruba dans les œuvres dramatiques postcoloniales de Soyinka remplit les fonctions cosmologiques, sociologique et pédagogique. La mythologie Yoruba est un contre-discours du système discursif colonialiste dominant. Ainsi, cette étude qui s'étend sur quatre points emploie l'approche archétypale pour montrer les étapes qui conduisent à la compréhension de la mythologie, comment les mythes intègrent les textes littéraires écrits, la mythologie de la création, la mythologie de l'eschatologie et de la destruction.

Mots-clés

Fonction, mythologie yoruba, création, eschatologie, destruction.

Introduction

The concept of mythology offers a perspective for an interpretation of the world, the mysteries and phenomena of existence in general. It attempts to address through narratives, the problems bordering on the origin of the world, man and existence generally. It is taken as belonging to the realm of stories, folktales etc. created by so-called primitive or traditional society to satisfy some emotional and instinctual need. Sandra Giddens and Owen Giddens (2005, p. 4) assert that myth is a traditional story that has its roots in ancient folk belief. It usually attempts to interpret natural events, explaining the culture's view of the univers and the nature of humanity. They keep on arguing that mythology is designed to help people understand the phenomena that influence their daily life. The corpus of Yoruba mythology is a complex metonymic system that serves as a method for the preservation and retrieval of Yoruba cultural history, ideology, and epistemology (Jacob K. Olupona and Terry Rey 2008, p. 191). The main characters in myths are gods, supernatural heroes and humans. The question of this research paper is to examine the way Wole Soyinka uses myths, and the reasons he integrates different functions of mythology in his plays mainly those under scrutiny in this study.

The objectives of this study are to deal with the ways and the reasons Yoruba mythology is used in drama and out of drama, to border on the nature of the myths and how they have contributed to shaping the African way of life.

The study draws data from *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* and falls in the Archetypal approach. Archetypal literary criticism is a critical theory which interprets a text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes in the narrative, symbols, images, and character types in a literary work” (Kharbe, 2009, p. 327).

The tool organisation comprises four parts dealing respectively with steps to the understanding of mythology and how mythology works in literature.

1. Steps to the Understanding of Mythology

Yoruba myths function as a meaningful part of everyday life. They deal with universal themes, such as the origin of the world and the fate of the individual after death. Many more spring from the continent's own environments and history; they include supernatural beings who influence human life. Some of these beings are powerful deities or gods. Others are lesser spirits, such as the spirits of ancestors. Several volumes have already appeared on aspects of African myths which include those on death, spirits, invisible beings with powers for good or evil, all humans, animals, and plants, water and fire, rulers and heroes. One of the most common aspects of the African mythology is the focus on ancestors. There is a reciprocal relationship between the dead ancestors and the living community, another aspect African mythology is the presence of animals who interact with humans, covers gods/goddesses, ghosts, spirits, magic, customs and rules. African mythologies include supernatural beings who influence human life. Some of these beings are powerful deities or gods. Others are lesser spirits, such as the spirits of ancestors.

Patricia Ann Lynth and Jeremy Roberts (2010, VII) Humans use mythology to establish a sense of community, identity, and an understanding of their place in the universe. These tools maintain the traditions of a culture and reflect what is most important in people's life. We read myths not only to learn about the culture in which the myth originated but to discover what was in the hearts and minds of the mythmakers. Kwame Anthony Appiah (1992, p. 79) asserts that

Soyinka's plays takes its African – its Yoruba – background utterly for granted. Soyinka is not arguing that modern African writers should be free to draw on Africa, and, in this case, Yoruba, mythology; rather, he is simply showing [...] how this process can and does take place. He asserts in his preface that the literature of the "secular social vision" reveals that the "universal verities" of "the new ideologue" can be "elicited from the world view and social structure of his own [African] people. Wole Soyinka says:

Nothing in these essays [*Myth, Literature and African World*] suggests a detailed uniqueness of the African world. Man exists, however, in a comprehensive world of myth, history, and mores; in such total context, the African world, like any other "world" is unique. It possesses, however, in common with other cultures, the virtues of complementarity. To ignore this simple route to a common humanity and pursue the alternative route of negation is, for whatever motives, to perpetuate the external subjection of the Black continent. (Soyinka, 1976, p. 127).

The quotation above reveals the cultural specificity of African culture which is based also on myth that is the authenticity which has to do with the privileging of the local perspective, and in full recognizance of and articulation with the universal and external.

James Gibbs ed. (1980, p. 200) asserts that in Soyinka's own mythic terms, the difference between his reputation and Achebe's is the difference between the mythic impulse of Ogun and of Obatala, between the heroic posture of 'tragic dare' and of 'harmonious resolution'.

This simply means that Soyinka's abiding concern has been with myth, its significance for contemporary life in Africa. Soyinka's persistent meditation on myth is an attempt to reveal the primal foundations of African cultures. Soyinka is, first and foremost, a mythopoiest; his imagination is, in a quite fundamental sense, a mythic imagination. To recognize this basic interest in myth is to begin to discover the source of Soyinka's creative strengths. Soyinka's own interest in Yoruba mythology is an attempt to communicate the mythic heritage of African man. According to him, the Yoruba are the people perpetually bound to the parallel impulses of two gods, Ogun and Obatala, and to understand the personality attributed to these gods

by the Yoruba is to understand the origins of what is might otherwise be deemed a merely neurotic condition in their contemporary behavior.

Soyinka weaves Yoruba figurative elements together in his lines. He hints at Yoruba sacrifice, and at a similar sacrificial communion between humanity and the gods.

Gods are what we make them. Soyinka uses a fluid and inclusive deity to preside over the creation of a transculturated art form. He a writer for a contemporary African, especially Yoruba, audience. It is through mythology that Soyinka seeks to rekindle the love for ideals.

Knipp sees the value of Soyinka's poetry as residing primarily in its mythic quality. However, he does not locate this mythic element solely in a "primal" Yoruba aspect of Soyinka's poetry. In this version of Soyinka's attitude toward traditional Yoruba myth is a dynamic one. He is a mythopoeic writer in a more organic sense, creating new mythic patterns out of the contradiction between tradition and modernity. (James Gibbs ed., 1993: 185).

Biodun Jeyifo ed. (2001, p. 203) asserts that traditional Yoruba culture is seen as a stabilized entity articulable in its myths. What Soyinka is seen as doing is to have captured the essence of Yoruba culture in his theorizing and to have dramatized it in his plays.

Mpalive-Hangson Msiska ed. (2007, p. 2) writes that Soyinka's concern in *A Dance of the Forests* is the dramatization of myth and history in their specific and mutual articulation with postcolonial African modernity, with the result that the problem of identity is reconceptualized as a temporal and spatial dialectic in which the postcolonial zone, as both time and space, is figured as both continuous and discontinuous with the spatialized and temporalized past as well as future. The ancestors we are presented with in *A Dance of the Forests* bear the stamp of their particular encounters with history and, indeed, through their physical identity. This is evident from the moment they first enter the stage:

An empty clearing in the forest. Suddenly the soil appears to be breaking and the head of the Dead Woman pushes its way up. Some distance from her, another head begins to appear, that of a Dead Woman. They both come up slowly. The man is fat and bloated, wears a dated warrior's outfit, now mouldy. The woman is pregnant. They come up, appear to listen. They do

not seem to see each other. Shortly after, Adenebi enters. He passes close to the Dead Man. (Wole Soyinka, 1973, p. 7).

They both inhabit the materiality of their death, its sordidness and brutality: its particular moment unmediated by the law of antecedence, of genealogy. In this Soyinka frustrates his audience's horizon of expectation by dwelling on the physical form of the spirit rather on its state as a spectre produced within the conventional representational language of spectral identity. In this context, Soyinka juxtaposes the temporality of myth to that of history in his play. In addition, the invitation to the ancestors is produced within an anthropocentric value-system in which ancestors are conceived of as specimens of perfection and wholesomeness, and where the possibility of ancestral blemish is denied. Here Soyinka highlights the extent to which the human conception of the spirit-world is in fact a projection of human desire, an imaginary construction that dehistoricises and dematerialises both the subjectivity and the universe of the spirit-world, ultimately making myth an instrument of human self-interest. However, as *A Dance of the Forests* demonstrates, myth also serves as a bearer of a vision of justice, especially when it is assigned a radical political role within a modernized African traditional cosmology, continuing to function not only as a point or reference for a people's sense of ontological location in relation to their past and the supernatural, but also illuminating the origins of the present social and political contradictions and offering a reminder of their reproducibility in the future.

The Road touches metaphysical issues. The central problem of life and death dominates the dramatic action. More important still, the world of the central character, the Professor is that of dream, which extends to the universe of myth. Wole Soyinka is using in *The Road* the traditional collective myth as the organising principle of his individual symbolic framework and as a channel for his artistic vision. However, what appears to constitute its basic symbolic structure is the fusion of the image of the road with the Yoruba in a traditional stage between life and death expressed in the Agemo cult which the play itself defines simply as a religious cult of flesh dissolution (Soyinka, 1973, p. 149). The play writes:

[...] My roots have come out in the other world.
Make away. Agemo's loops
Are pathways of the sun?

Rain-reeds, unbend to me, quench
The burn of cartwheels at my waist!
Pennant in the stream of time – Now,
Gone, and Here the Future
Make way. Let the river woo
The thinning, thinning Here and
Vanished Leap that was the Night
And the split that snatched the heavy-lidded
She - twin into the Dawn.
No sweat – beads droop beneath
The plough – wings of the hawk.
No bottle finds a hole between Agemo's toes.
When the whirl wind claps his feet
It is the sundering of the.... Name of no ills....
Of the Not-to-be
Of the moistening moment of a breadth...
Approach. Approach and feel
Did I not speak ? Is there not flesh
Between the dead man's thumbs ?
(W. Soyinka, 1973, p. 150)

Reading through this song reveals an aspect which is linked to the passage of human life to death; it is the dissolution of the flesh the Professor is negatively determined to know the reality through his search of the Word. Metaphysical concepts as well as a series of vivid images are used in this song. The most important thing in this song is that, it brings out the quest of man for the essence of death, which alone will explain the meaning of life. In addition, it denounces the fact that savage gods are masters of human life. The play is about the road and the accidents that take place in the total unawareness of the travellers whose lives are transformed to death. We may evoke a kind of uncertainty as to the possibility to reach the destination. The first persons concerned by this situation are the characters in play. They are users of the road because they are touts, drivers, thugs, proprietors of lorries, etc.

This means that in Soyinka's plays Yoruba mythology, Yoruba culture and tradition are not taken for granted. Soyinka draws confidently on the resources of his tradition. Furthermore, in relation to the functions of mythology Joe Campbell summaries them as they cover much of the ground.

First of all, mythologies fulfil metaphysical function in the extent that they explain humans' relationship to the supernatural, show how

people relate to the unknown/spirituality, and cover gods/goddesses, ghosts, spirits, and magic.

Then, mythologies fulfil cosmological function because of proto-scientific accounts of how the world came to be, and why it is the way it is. They deal with skies and seasons, life cycles and death and after, how the elephant got its trunk, explain human relationship to the physical universe, explain the hierarchy of the world (are animals higher or lower than people?), cover animals, plants, nature, objects like desks or mountains, the weather, and time. After, mythologies fulfil sociological function when they make people value their community custom, rules and culture by linking them to the cosmic and natural orders; they explain humans' relationships to each other, explain how humans should interact in groups and relationships, the place of the individual in relation to society, and people in relationships with other people. Next, mythologies fulfil pedagogical function to the extent that they provide models (mythical characters and/or narratives) for your own development: become an independent adult, find a mate, have children, get old, connect some people with other people in the past who had similar problems. Last but not least, mythologies fulfil psychological function.

In addition, they deal with humans' relationship to themselves (Man vs Self), explain how humans should relate to themselves. How we are supposed to grow and change as people, how the society expects people to deal with problems and everyday occurrences, how people can become who they are really meant to be. They cover people growing and changing within themselves, people learning things themselves, overcoming personal obstacles.

2. How Myth Works in Literary Writings

John B. Vickery, ed. (1966, ix) writes that, one of the most distinctive trends in contemporary literary study is that of myth criticism. Literature emerges both historically and psychologically. As a result, literary elements such as plots, characters, themes, and images are basically complications and displacements of similar elements in myths and folktales. Myths get in literature to the extent that they both stimulate the creative artist, and provides concepts and patterns which the critic uses to interpret specific works of literature. Knowing the grammar of myth, it is argued, gives a greater precision and form to the reading of the language of literature. Mythic features reside

beneath as well as on the surface of a work. The ability of literature to move readers is due to its mythic quality, to its progression of the mystery in the face of which they feel an awed delight or terror at the world of man. The real function of literature in human affairs is to continue myth's ancient and basic endeavor to create a meaningful place for man in a world oblivious to his presence. Myths help the unique features of literary works.

Geoffrey Milles (ed.), (1999, p. 10) asserts that to preserve Latin inevitably meant preserving classical mythology. This posed a serious problem for the Church and Christian readers the myths were an integral part of the literature they loved and preserved.

Furthermore, related to mythology are terms such as *legend*, *folktale* and *fable*. A legend according to Abrams (1999, p. 171) is a story in which "the protagonist is not a supernatural being but a human being." Abrams defines folktale as "a short narrative in prose of unknown authorship which has been transmitted orally." David (2000, n.p.) also subscribes to the definition cited above regarding a legend. However, he defines a folktale as a hereditary story that does concern supernatural beings who are not gods and that the story is not part of the systematic mythology of a people. A fable is basically a short didactic story, often involving animals or supernatural beings stressing plot above character development, whose subject is to teach a moral lesson (Kirsznner and Mandell; 2004). While a fable is said to be short, it is not always that it turns out so. What is most outstanding from the above discussions is the idea that a myth is a story or a 'story item' in mythology. Mythology therefore, as Abrams has suggested, should be looked at as an 'all encompassing' system of all narratives handed down through generations. An interesting feature of myth that needs to be pointed out here is that of repetition. Because of the idea of its being handed down from one generation to another, myths are repeated throughout life. The term 'narratives' has been used because these myths have been a part of humanity since time immemorial as there was no writing in the old times. These myths were handed down from generation to generation by word of mouth. The narratives here should be taken to be oral narratives. The mention of narratives is in this case tied to orality, another term which is related to the concept of myth.

According to the original claims of mythology, the myths were as real as the humans that discussed them themselves. This is how real

the characters of the bible such as Adam, Eve, Noah, Abraham and others are. It is this reality that qualifies the claim, on the first argument that these characters are not fictive. The second argument is that the characters have actual human qualities. They are endowed with the power to behave like humans do; they can talk, eat, get happy or angry, and so on. This means that these characters are real and not fictive. The conclusion from this understanding is that literature can easily be seen as fiction apart from the argument that really it is the imagination of the creator of the literature.

Wole Soyinka makes much use of myths to express his ideas. This constitutes his own approach to free black Africa from its subordination to European domination. The use of Yoruba mythology in Soyinka's postcolonial dramatic works is a counter-discourse against the colonialist discourse.

In addition, to evoke mythology in the African context, for a long time before African countries won political independence from their European colonizers, African culture was misunderstood and misrepresented. Words such as savage, primitive, sub-human group, slaves, dark continent, mentally inferior, incapable, lowest of all races, were used to describe them by foreign scholars and philosophers. New independent countries undertook to reexamine the policy by which they had been governed, and also the image of their culture that had long been advertised by outsiders.

We will analyze mythologies in two plays of Wole Soyinka: *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road*. The types of Yoruba mythology used in these plays include: the myths of creation, myths of eschatology and destruction and myths of high being and celestial gods.

Each type of mythology has the so-called cause-effect relationship with other types. This situation does not help elaborate on one type alone. The mythology of creation is linked to the mythology of eschatology, destruction, high being and deities. The reason for this is that Ogun, for example exhibits two significant aspects of his personality: a positive side represented by his innovation, benevolence, and creativity; and a negative side of violence, destruction; he is a god-character. These mythologies fulfil the function of education through the explanation, justification or validation of principles, be them moral, cultural, social, religious, political, etc. Proofs in the works will be given below in the lines of

this study dealing with the application of mythology in literature. 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 Honko¹ asserts that, in some cases, a society will reenact a myth in an attempt to reproduce the conditions of the mythical age.

Therefore, it is interesting to focus on its typology, its function in relation to the plays in which that mythology is more apparent. Then, *A Dance of the Forests* and *The Road* clearly typify a number of aspects of mythology.

3. Mythology of Creation

The mythology of creation is also called the cosmogony mythology. It refers to the origin of the world in a neutral fashion, and also to something created, it is used in *A Dance of the Forests* with the purpose of educating people by explaining the facts and conditions that contribute to the creation of a new nation. The gathering of the tribes is an entity in Soyinka's Yoruba creative mythology. He draws it upon for the aesthetics of his literary work under consideration. The gathering of the tribes as the mythology of the Yoruba cosmology that Soyinka exploits in his play is an aesthetic feature because he successfully makes the gathering of the tribes a mythology of the Yoruba cosmology, and corresponds to the birth, creation of a new nation. This narrative technique distinguishes him from other writers.

Reading through intertextual variations in this play, we come to discover that the gathering of the tribes is the mythology of the Yoruba creation mythology. The reason for this is that, the gathering of the tribes and its organization make use of scattered elements of the universe, symbols with the essence of Yoruba culture. We refer to the forest that is the setting of the celebration, the so needed totem, the characters composed of gods, deities, spirits, other creatures, and human beings.

¹ <https://www.coursehero.com/file/p49q4fs/55-James-Frazer-an-anthropologist-has-a-similar-theory-He-believes-primitive/>, (July, 2019).

The action of the play that mentions this mythology tells about the human community composed of characters such as Demoke, Rola, Adenebi and Obaneji. They are celebrating the gathering of the tribes. Then, they have requested the presence of illustrious dead people from their past, the 'builders of empires' and 'descendants of 'great nobility' in order to celebrate all that is 'noble in our nation.' But the spirits sent two restless souls to the surface: a Dead Man and a Dead Woman, both victims of the same glorious past, to confront the descendants of their killers. As things do not go according to their wish, the human characters complain that they ask statesman and they were sent accusers. When the play opens, the gathering of the tribes is about to take place. Three humans find themselves in the forest with the Dead Man and the Dead Woman, Demoke the carver, who has just finished carving the splendid totem for the gathering of the tribes, Rola, a beautiful prostitute, and Adenebi, a counsellor. A fourth man announces himself as Obaneji, a filing clerk for the court, but in reality he is forest head or the supreme deity. "The gathering of the tribes" is the celebration of the Independence Day, and the people have invited the dead to take part hoping for representatives who will confirm the glory of the ancient lost empires. To their disappointment, the Dead Man and Dead Woman who turn up are nothing but illustrious in appearance. As we see, "the gathering of the tribes"(W. Soyinka, 1973, p. 5) includes the living people, the dead people, the supernatural beings, the half child, the unborn, etc. Participants to the feast belong to different and opposed worlds, generations, etc. ensuing conflicts leading to the birth of the Half-Child, the death of Oremole who was pushed down from a tree by Demoke, the protagonist, and the struggle between Ogun and Eshuoro.

In addition, this part of action has some kind of allegorical overtones in regards to composition of the characters, the setting and the ideas conveyed. This is actually a mythology, especially a Yoruba creation mythology that Wole Soyinka uses as his own approach to the creation of a new nation. The essential is first of all a true unity without any exclusion of people, be them wrongdoers, then the participation of the ancestors from the past, the spirits, as well as the gods in the organization of the extraordinary gathering of the tribes to bridge the chasm between them, next a correct reading of past events: good and negative happenings, justice, forgiveness, collective consciousness, etc. As clear as it appears, Soyinka's Yoruba

imaginary mythology of the gathering of the tribes fulfils the function of creating a new nation. This is the mythology of the people's awareness of all the mistakes of the past so that history does not repeat itself.

In *A Dance of the Forests*, the mythology of Ogun can be associated with the mythology of the totem. The characters are the human beings Demoke and Oremole, his apprentice who does appear in the entrance of the play, but is only mentioned, Ogun the god of creativity. The mythology of Ogun is closely linked to the mythology of the gathering of the tribes. In fact, to celebrate of the historic gathering of the tribes Demoke the carver in wood might carve the totem. His inability to climb the tree and cut it to carve the totem leads his apprentice Oremole who, from the top of the tree mocks at Demoke. Ogun is an important deity, he is a protector of orphans, roof of homeless, terrible guardian of the sacred oath; he stands for a transcendental, human but rigidly restorative justice. Demoke is servant to Ogun. He is human and he appears in person and is material while Ogun is a god, he is intangible and abstract. Demoke is in several ways like his master Ogun. Demoke is endowed with special gift of creativity for which Ogun is renown. Eshuoro and Oro are gods, they are not represented as positive.

The above facts about the story in *A Dance of the Forests* are actually a Yoruba mythology. Character like and Ogun is based on gods inspired from mythology. Additionally, in the Yoruba mythology, the gods are believed to inhabit trees, it is the case of Oro and the araba tree in the play. The Yoruba mythological issue finds a place in this play through the belief of transition from the human to the divine essence. The mythology that involves Ogun and Demoke against Eshuoro, Oro and Oremole explains the antagonism between the gods, and the humankind. According to the Yoruba mythology, Wole Soyinka assigns the roles of creativeness to Ogun.

In *Myth, Literature and the African World*, Wole Soyinka focusses on the importance of Ogun. Soyinka's use of Yoruba gods is very essential. This fact is an important aspect of African Negro aesthetics. Through the mythology of Ogun which is based on the binary forces - Ogun's destructive and creative forces, Soyinka wants the human being be aware of their condition in order to better face socio-political problems.

Furthermore, the mythology of creation in Soyinka's *A Dance of the Forests* passes also through the mythology of reincarnation, a phenomenon which invites allegorical interpretation. Here mythology describes reincarnation as allegorical. Reincarnation is a necessary implication of the doctrine of reminiscence. Plato believed that people have latent knowledge of the forms which can be remembered. This implies they have the forms previous to this lifetime. In this respect, the mythology of reincarnation means the mythology of recounting past life memories. In fact, past life regression is a technique whereby people are induced into a hypnotic trance-like state. They are guided by a hypnotherapist to search for memories of past lives causing them remember accurate details of preceding events through the process of the spiritual possession. In addition, past life regression therapy is also about people who have lived past lives in the future. This supports the concept of eternity where past, present and future are said to exist simultaneously in completeness.

The mythology of reincarnation that is also the mythology of recounting past life memories which appears in *A Dance of the Forests* is twined with crisis situation in the play epitomizing a contest between good and evil. This scene is peopled by characters from underworld or the world of the dead. In addition, a volley off questions follow, revelations commence with the voices of reincarnated figures, an interpreter figure assists in further developments until an elaborate group of spirits speak out their prophecies. There is the Spirit of the Palm who speaks of punishment for those who have sinned. That is the essence of his exclamation: "I, Spirit of the Palm/ Now course I red. / I who suckle blackened hearts, know/ Heads will fall down, / Crimson in their red!" (p. 64).

The Spirit of Darkness joins in and speaks of the doomed. He said: "I, Spirit of the Dark, / Naked they breathe me, / foretelling now/ How, by the dark of peat and forest/ They'll be misled/ And the shutters of the leaves/ Shall close down on the doomed/ And naked head." (p. 65) In addition, the Spirit of the Precious stones says how it promises eternal wealth but in the very next instance, deludes or incites lust in order to befool and deceive. He says: "Still do I draw them, down/ Into the pit that glitters, I/ Spirit of gold and diamonds/ Mine is the vain light courting death/ A-ah! Blight this eye that threaded/ Rocks with light, earth with golden lodes/ Traitor to the guardian tribe, / Turn to lead!" (p. 65) Then, the Spirit of Pachyderms

complains of the theft of ivory in the following terms: "Blood that rules the sunset, bathe/ This, our ivory red/ Broken is the sleep of giants/ Wanton raiders, ivory has a point/ Thus, thus we bled." (p. 65) After, the Spirit of the Rivers repents for the lust of human beings in exploiting the environment. He says, "From Limpopo to the Nile coils but one snake./ On mudbanks, and sandy bed/ I who mock the deserts, shed a tear/ Of pity to form palm-ringed oases/ Stain my bowels red!" (pp. 65-6) As for the Spirit of the Sun, he complains of an untimely eclipse while the Spirit of the Volcanoes says that he has lost the capacity to emit larva. Last not least, there is an Ant Leader who complains that his race is perpetually tramped under foot by humans.

The above described action from *A Dance of the Forests* is actually a mythology of creation. It also sounds allegorical. The ideas we have mentioned earlier are readable. This action presents a group of reincarnated characters (all of them are Spirits) recounting their past life memories and their past life regression. They are actually induced into a hypnotic trance-like state, and guided by the hypnotherapist, Ant Leader (who narrates their dilemmas) and Forest Head (who is there to supervise the programme of listening to them) to search for memories of past lives causing them remember accurate details of preceding events through the process of the spiritual possession. Their past life regression therapy is also about people who have lived past lives in the future.

The mythology of creation which passes through the mythology of reincarnation, past life regression and past life regression into the future analyzed above fulfils a twofold function: explanation and revalidation. The function of explanation is fulfilled to the extent that it explains the importance of understanding the African cosmological union between the living, the dead, and the spirits that control the African universe. As for the function of revalidation, it is fulfilled in the sense that through this mythology the African background, culture, belief systems, forests and groves setting are presented as they had always been from the beginning of times. In addition, the peoples are asked to rebirth in their conscience to protect and preserve them.

We come to discover that Africa has had, since time immemorial, traditions that should be respected and a culture to be proud of. This also means that through the use Yoruba mythology, Wole Soyinka envisioned a new Africa that would escape its colonial past by grafting the technical advances of the present into the stock of its own

ancient past. Wole Soyinka's use of mythology seeks to reformulate and accommodate contemporary reality so that they serve as the foundation stone of the future. At this level, Soyinka's view through the use of Yoruba mythology sounds the philosophy that counters the white man's unjustified and unproved superiority to the black people, both in the minds of the white men and in the black people's, duly those who face the dilemma of choosing between their ancestor's heritage and the material values from Western countries.

In addition, Soyinka's mythology serves the quest for moral regeneration and reinforcement. He uses Yoruba mythology to awaken black consciousness regarding their changing society under Western culture's influence and to help Africans renew with their cultural values. In plain words, Soyinka resorts to Yoruba mythology as an examination and affirmation of African cultural values, and a resistance to European indoctrination of African society.

4. Mythology of Eschatology and Destruction

In *A Dance of the Forests*, the mythology of Ogun is associated with the mythology of the totem. Apart from the characters who are the human beings namely Demoke and Oremole, his apprentice who does appear in the entrance of the play, but is only mentioned, Ogun the god of creativity, there is also Eshuoro, the god of destruction, and Oro, the Yoruba god of punishment and death who is only mentioned through the tree sacred to him. Demoke pulls Oremole his apprentice who, from the top of the tree that they have carved together mocks at him because of his inability to climb the tree and cut it to carve the totem needed to celebrate "The Gathering of the Tribes". Demoke kills his apprentice Oremole. As a consequence, Eshuoro seeks vengeance for the death of Oremole, a devotee of Oro. Ogun, the patron god of carvers, defends Demoke. Character like Eshuoro is based on god inspired from Yoruba mythology. According to this mythology, Wole Soyinka assigns the role of destructiveness to Eshuoro, and Oro.

Furthermore, the mythologies of eschatology and destruction are also used in *The Road* in the sense that it deals with the end, but not, in a wider sense, the end of the world in *The Road*. This type of mythology in *The Road* means first and foremost the origin of death. The mythology of eschatology and destruction in the context of *The Road* means the mythology of death. It is about the origin of death, for

which an added explanation has to be found in the sense that death is not seen as automatically the end of life. In Wole Soyinka's *The Road*, the mythology of eschatology explains the inexistence of death in the primordial time, and that, death arose as the result of an error, as punishment, or simply because the creator decided the earth would get too crowded otherwise.

The keys to our understanding of the mythological dimension in *The Road* is first of all the fact that this play is prefaced by a poem, entitled "Agemo" which alludes to the dissolution of the flesh that occurs when a person passes from physical to spiritual essence. Secondly, Ogun, the god of war, death and roads is ever present in *The Road*. He dominates the play with his presence. Ogun provides the ideal for Soyinka's heroes. In the play *The Road*, the basic conflict opposes man to destiny, that is also will opposed to tradition. The two actions of *The Road* in which we find indications of death mythology involve three characters Professor, Ogun and Murano. All of them take part in the first series of events in the play, whereas, in the second death mythology action, there are only two characters from the previous group: Professor and Ogun. These two characters are joined by Say Tokyo Kid.

To begin with the first action, it is about the death of Murano. Wole Soyinka himself says that Murano represents the suspension of death. He is a mute and personal servant to the Professor. The later and his followers conduct a kind of communion, not to confuse with that administered in a church. They shared palm-wine served by Murano. While he is taking part in a religious feast in honour to Ogun, Murano is possessed by god. He runs across the road. He runs over Kotonu, who is driving a lorry, and is unable to apply the brakes on time. Professor is happy to keep Murano with him, as he feels that Murano is close to death. In that state of being possessed by god, Murano has been stuck and knocked down by Kotonu's lorry.

We find it important to mention that, in the action above from the *The Road*, and about the death of Murano, the message that Wole Soyinka conveys is the inevitability of the temporary transition between life and death. This appears clear that, this action taken in the context of the mythology of death, which is our concern in this subsection, explains that death arose because the creator decided the earth would get too crowded otherwise.

Above all, there are a certain number of aspects to point in this action about Murano's death. First of all, he is possessed when he has been serving the palm-wine to the community of Professor and his companions; the palm-wine he serves is of great importance in the worship of Ogun; when he is possessed, Professor feels that Murano is closed to death, but he is happy to keep him; the Professor himself is never possessed; Murano dies on a road accident, and Ogun is the god of road; etc. From these observations, we find out the situation weakness on Murano, and strong-mindedness on the side of Professor and Ogun. They seem to have the control of Murano's life and decided on the day and hour of his death.

As for the second action, it deals with Professor death. In fact, in *The Road* the character of the Professor is on a quest to find "the Word." This obsession with the search for the knowledge of death ultimately leads to the Professors destruction. The Professor attempts to discover the Word by all means of destruction. He is a proprietor of the Aksident Store where he sells motor spare parts and other things, even blood spotted clothes of the victims, he collects from a road accident. He removes road sign which causes accidents. He forges driving licenses. He drinks palm-wine excessively like a fish and mismanages the church funds, which leads him be expelled from the church.

In addition, the wrongdoings that cause the Professor's death are those closely linked to his commerce of spare parts in his own Aksident Store. In relation to this practice, we consider the character of Say Tokyo Kid; he is a timber-truck driver and captain of thugs. In the action of the play, we meet him when a policeman, Chief-in-Town comes to look for thugs to hire. Then, the thugs have an accident, and Say Tokyo Kid one of them is abandoned in the bush by his terrified men who does not realize he is still alive. Later, Say Tokyo Kid resurfaces, pouring contempt on his men, and then in the final scene, where Professor has everyone stupefied with fear by forcing them to participate in the Ogun masquerade dance of death, Say Tokyo Kid resists him boldly. He then, inadvertently, kills Professor in the course of a scuffle over a knife on his back. Professor falls dying as the play ends.

The action above from *The Road* actually deals with the eschatological mythology, the mythology of destruction, which is also the mythology of death. In this story the situation of the characters is

very different from that is described in the first action: Murano dies in a dance masquerade to Ogun after he has been possessed by the god; he dies during the driver's festival, that is also Ogun feast because he is the god of roads; this also means, Murano's death grows, both Professor and Ogun's happiness. Whereas, in the second action about the mythology of death, Say Tokyo Kid resists the Professor, refuses to participate in the masquerade dance of death. That is the way he saves his own life, but now, kills the Professor by plunging him a knife on the back. Professor falls and dies. This situation places Say Tokyo Kid above Murano and the Professor. Ogun remains the god of death who feeds himself from the blood. The masquerade dance of death has power over Murano and the Professor, but not over Say Tokyo Kid.

The mythology of eschatology, destruction or death in *The Road*, and through the second action described above, fulfil the function of punishment. In this regard, death is explained as the result of an error. we see the Professor's death as the intervention of Ogun for the purpose of annihilating all the menaces the people undergo. In their turn, the people who wants to get at the truth must surrender themselves to Ogun, even at the risk of their lives. In addition, the relation that Ogun draws between death and life is revealed in the sense that, he accepts death be the prelude to life. To raise the equivoque, Ogun is not in favor of death as a result of political violence and carelessness.

Furthermore, the Professor social statute and his ignoble practices call our attention, and thing about the possible message that Wole Soyinka, the writer of *The Road* conveys. In fact, the Professor stands for civilization and literacy. He has the power of the Word, and this power sustains him above his fellows, and leads him to a kind of institutionalized corruption. At this level, Wole Soyinka through his literary creativity, which makes himself be guided by Ogun the god of creativity, satirizes the behavior and actions of the Professor, in the play, and of all the leaders be them political, religious, military, administrative, etc. In the same time he calls for the awakening of consciousness on the side of all the ordinary people to resist in the manner of Say Tokyo Kid. In so doing, we see Wole Soyinka using the performative art, drama, to shape and regenerate the culture and political identity of the people and the nation.

We find it also important to evoke the relevance of Wole Soyinka above action from *The Road* under consideration in the perspective of both postcolonial concepts of art and political, and cultural self-projections by nations in a postcolonial situation. It comes out that Wole Soyinka in this text, contextualizes colonialism as a matter of modern history and allows art and culture to go beyond and deeper into the innate human soul to find its sources of creation. The colonized peoples must not always be seen as only existing in opposition to a colonial force. The self-definition of a culture can also arise out of its own cosmic history.

Conclusion

This study is a discussion on Yoruba mythology in Wole Soyinka's selected plays. The work has shown, through the Archetypal approach, a critical theory which "interprets a text by focusing on recurring myths and archetypes in the narrative, symbols, images, and character types in a literary work" (Kharbe, 2009, p. 327) we realize that all literary pieces are based on mythology; they are all allegorical. The types of mythology examined in this study are: the myths of creation, myths of eschatology and destruction and myths of high being and gods. The Yoruba mythology used fulfil the pedagogical function through the explanations of facts and conditions that contribute to the creation of a new nation, the explanation and revalidation of truthfulness as a virtue, a quality, a moral obligation, a strict adherence to a policy of honesty and openness. The mythology of creation passes also through the mythology of reincarnation, a phenomenon which invites allegorical interpretation. Through mythology, it seems clear that colonized peoples must not always be seen as only existing in opposition to a colonial force; they also call for the awakening of consciousness on the side of all the ordinary people to resistance. Yoruba mythology in the plays also fulfil metaphysical function in the extent that they explain humans' relationship to the supernatural, show how people relate to the unknown/spirituality, and cover gods/goddesses, ghosts, and spirits. As drama is based and drawn from the society that it represents and feeds, whatever is discussed in drama is a reflection of the society. In this case, the mythology used show members of society what they would not see without the mirror which is drama itself.

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Cette première livraison de la Revue NTELA rassemble des textes originaux analysés dans une perspective multidisciplinaire. L'homme est placé au cœur de l'action pour qu'il demeure à jamais un rejeton capable de donner sens à la vie. Là où la musique et la littérature accusent la violence sous ses formes diverses, les questions de santé interfèrent avec les mobilités et les identités humaines, les discours savants se construisent dans la vallée de l'imaginaire, de l'absurdité, du fantastique, et où les mythes sont expression d'une vision du monde. Ainsi, dans tous les textes publiés dans ce numéro, il apparaît une évidence : la vie est une complexité, comme dans un jeu de puzzle.

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