

GROWING WISE CONCERNING OLD ORIGINS: MYTHOPOESIS IN AYI KWEI ARMAH'S OSIRIS RISING

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ABSTRACT: *Mythopoesis or Myth-making is believed to be the earliest attempt at interpreting natural occurrences that humans made. Myths are traditional stories of heroes or supernatural beings. They also attempt explaining a people's cosmology or aspects of human experience. In contemporary times, literary artists integrate traditional mythological themes and prototypes into contemporary fiction for the purpose of addressing contemporary issues; thus, making myths relevant. Africa has a crop of myth-makers, and Okpewho (1983) classifies them into four: tradition preserved, tradition observed, tradition refined and tradition revised. The first two groups of myth-makers are not too far removed from the traditional myths. The case is however different with the other two. These writers reject the traditional elements and create new stories that fit into new cultural perspectives. This research used Okpewho's definition and classification of myths as a conceptual framework to analyze Ayi Kwei Armah's *Osiris Rising: A Novel of the Past, Present and Future*. It was discovered that Armah used the Egyptian myth of Osiris, god of regeneration, as basis for a new myth that addresses more contemporary pressing issues such as education and the roles of educators and the educated in the process of Africa regeneration.*

KEYWORDS: mythopoesis, regeneration, myth-makers contemporary, education

INTRODUCTION

He who hath grown wise concerning old origins, lo, he will, at last, seek after the fountains of the future and new origins. Thus Spake Zarathustra, LVI, section 25

The art of incorporating classic mythic archetypes into a new modern narrative is known as mythopoesis (Kazlev n. pag.). The etymology of Mythopoesis" is the prefix "myth" and "poesis", a Greek word meaning "the making". Myths are an attempt by humanity to interpret natural occurrences and events in their societies. "They could be considered the highest form of that familiar human activity: story-telling" (Kazlev n. pag.).

Abrams (1999) explains that "in classical Greek, "mythos"(myth) signifies any story or plot, whether true or invented." He explains further that when the central character is human and not supernatural, then the "traditional story is usually not called a myth but a legend. If the hereditary story concerns supernatural beings

who are not gods and the story is not part of systematic mythology, it is usually classified as a *folktale*” (170).

Similarly, Okpehwo (1983) defines myth as:

... not really a particular type of a tale as against another; it is either the spoken counterpart of an antecedent ritual nor is it a tale determined exclusively by a binary scheme of abstract ideas or a sequel order of elements. It is simply that quality of fancy which informs the creative or configurative powers of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity. In that sense, we are free to call any narration of the oral tradition a myth, so long as it gives due emphasis to fanciful play (1).

Okpewho, like Abrams, believes that any story of the oral tradition can be a myth so long as it is characterized by impressive elements of creativity.

Myths fall under various classifications and serve various purposes: creation and analogical myths, Myths as ritual and Myths of origin. Kolaweke (1997) explains some myth types thus:

Creation and analogical myths about human origin explain how man came to be and how some societies are where they are. Analogical myths explain the beginning of natural phenomena logically. Myths of origin explain the beginning of specific societies... Myths as ritual highlight magical and supernatural status of human existence (55).

It is obvious from the classifications that a people's myths connect them to their past, and rationalize and affirm their existence and way of life. This places their existence in a continuum. Furthermore, myths are the channel for the generational transfer of societal norms and mores in that by means of archetypes and their experiences, myths create models for succeeding generations. In addition, the inherent craving in man to understand the inexplicable is satisfied by myths because they explain situations and events that cannot be empirically proven through scientific research and scrutiny.

According to Tobin in *The Time of Myth and History*, “Although myth refers to events alleged to have taken place in the past, its operational value is that the specific model which it describes is timeless. Time cannot affect [it]; it can only affect time” (255). Tobin's assertion reinforces the fact that myths are as significant now as they were then. For instance, myths of origin such as that of the myth of the divine ancestry of Japanese Emperor Jimmu and the myth of the creation of the Ashanti kingdom have been used to legitimize leadership and

retain subjects' loyalty. Undoubtedly, therefore, myths have helped to create and sustain nations.

Background

Over half a century of post-colonialism, the continent of Africa lumbers under a myriad of issues; mostly negative. One key issue that has consistently surfaced in discourses on the African situation is poor leadership. The educated elite in leadership positions have on many fronts been a disappointment leaving many citizens disenchanted. Ayi Kwei Armah inquires: "How long will Africa be cursed with its leaders?" (80). Achebe elaborately articulates the situation in his essay *The Trouble with Nigeria*. Although Achebe's focus is Nigeria, it goes without saying that the challenges of leadership failure, corruption, tribalism, lack of patriotism enumerated in his essay are common to Africa.

The pursuit of functional solutions to the existing socio-political challenges of Africa has resulted in numerous scholarly as well as non-scholarly propositions and inclinations. In *Ethiopia Unbound*, the first Ghanaian novel, for instance, J.E. Casley Hayford devotes the last four chapters to advocacy, propaganda, and promulgation of his ideologies and aspirations for the black race. Among the salient issues are the need for education premised on African culture and a common language.

Another African who has remained consistent in his quest to find and propose functional solutions to issues confronting Africa is Ayi Kwei Armah. In his narratives, Armah discusses the African situation: past, present, and future. He remains unwavering in his critique of the colonial invasion and its destructive impact on the African. He goes further to provide ways of escape and a vision for a renaissance. The framework for Africa's emancipation and renaissance, according to Armah, can be gleaned from ancient myths and the lessons they teach. The Akan myth of Anowa and the Egyptian myth of Osiris form the basis for his novels *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising*, respectively.

Fictional myths, like the other classifications, have maintained their significance to modern society. In contemporary times, literary artists integrate traditional mythological themes and prototypes into contemporary fiction for the purpose of addressing contemporary issues; thus, making myths relevant. Works such as *Ulysses* by James Joyce, Eugene O'Neill *Mourning Becomes Electra*, and *Osiris Rising* by Ayi Kwei Armah are examples of literature within the methopoesis genre. This research explores the use of a traditional Egyptian myth – its plot, conflict and characterization – by Armah to analyze the African situation as it used to be, as it is and as it could be.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this analysis is Okpehwo's classification of mythologist. According to Ophewho (1983), a myth is basically that quality of fancy which informs the artistic powers of the individual's mind at varied levels of intensity. In that regard, any oral narration which gives attention to fanciful

play is a myth. In an analysis of African mythologers, Okpewho groups them into four under the labels tradition preserved, tradition observed, tradition refined and tradition revised.

The first group, according to Okpewho, is African writers who preserve the literary tradition by simply recording existing tales into foreign languages or restructuring the tale into what, from their perspective, is a better form. Examples of these works are Bessie Head's *The Deep River* and J.P. Clark's *Ozidi*. Tutuola's *The Palmwine Drinkard* and Fagunwa's *Akara-Ogun* fall under the second group: tradition observed. Their tales "are little more than a pastiche of folk tale episodes built around a more or less contemporary hero"(2). These two groups in sum have not fallen far from the oral tradition tree. The case is however different for the second two: tradition refined and tradition revised. Their works are marked by what Okpewho calls "socio-political imperatives". Consequently, the elements of entertainment found in the traditional tales give way to "a tone of painful criticism." Soyinka falls within the third group labeled tradition refined. His connection to the traditional is however not entirely severed. This can be seen in his use of the Yoruba Ogun figure. The fourth group is the most revolutionary of the four. They reject the traditional and create new stories that fit into a new cultural viewpoint. In their work, we find an intensification of the critical spirit, an urge to overhaul the foundations on which the old social outlook is erected, resulting in an energy directed at creating a new mythology that offers the projected or emergent society a firmer road to self-realization than is found in the older tradition (3).

Ayi Kwei Armah is one such mythologist in the tradition revised category, creating new myths from old ones as seen in his novels *Two Thousand Seasons* and *Osiris Rising* with an intense critical spirit and the passion for a total yet gradual overhaul of the system beginning with the educational system. How does Armah exhibit the critical spirit and to what end? What recommendations does he make for the overhaul of African society? What is the emergent society like? Of what relevance is the traditional Osiris myth to contemporary times?

DISCUSSIONS

Osiris Rising is Armah's sixth novel. Although his first two novels *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* and *Fragments* focus on the disillusionment and anguish citizens of Africa in the immediate post-independence period endured, his novels have taken a hopeful turn, visiting the distant past for inspiration and instruction for the present and the future.

Osiris Rising is a transposition of the traditional myth of Osiris. In Egyptian mythology, the deities, Shu and Tefnut, the god of the air and the representative of moisture and order in the physical world, respectively, give birth to Geb, the earth, and Nut, the sky. Geb and Nut in turn give birth to Isis, Osiris, Nephthys and Set. Osiris, the god of the afterlife, embodies the male creative force in nature, while Isis represents the female creative force. During Osiris' reign, he

revolutionizes Egypt which at the time is steeped in barbarism, educating them in law, agriculture, and religion among others. Osiris is husband and brother to [Isis](#). He is assassinated by his brother, Set, god of evil, who rips Osiris' body into fourteen pieces and scatters them throughout Egypt. In one account of this myth, the motive for Set's action is a grudge he harbors against Osiris for giving him a kick. Yet another narration attributes Set's grievance to the fact that Osiris had an affair with his (Set's) companion, Nephthys. Isis retrieves Osiris' scattered parts, puts them together and with the regenerated body, conceives a son, Horus who avenges his father's death by killing Set.

The Remaking of a Myth

In *Osiris Rising*, Asar, an African who studied abroad returns home to Africa to fight for a social revolution on the continent. Seth, another African (a brother in that sense) and school mate of Asar from childhood through to the university, also returns to Africa. He, on the contrary, has the ambition to maintain the status quo of despotism, corruption and thievery. Asar takes up an appointment as a teacher while Seth joins the national security. Seth is threatened by the mere existence of Asar because he is everything he never can be. Asar is Seth's antithesis just like Osiris is to Set in the ancient myth.

Ast (Isis), a 27-year-old African American professor in Egyptology with a childhood vision of returning to Africa, undertakes the journey. Both Asar and Seth are Ast's mates at the university. Ast is the woman Seth desires to have; he is obsessed with her, but Ast chooses Asar over him. Seth attempts on two occasions to rape Ast. At the second attempt, Asar comes to Ast's rescue and in the process, kicks Seth in the head. Seth threatens Asar and when he carries out the threat, it is a barrage of bullets that rips him into fourteen fragments, and just like the Egyptian myth, Asar lives on in the child Ast is carrying.

Time

The concept of time is of principal import in the novel mainly because a critical look at the past is essential to the African's self-actualization process. The past, broken into various epochs: the traditional era, distant past and colonial times, is the foundation upon which the new Africa rises. This sequencing of the past locates and establishes the African's existence in antiquity thereby legitimizing it. The retrieved knowledge of where we have come from, what/who we used to be can re-shape our concept of ourselves.

The author uses certain elements to establish the mythical nature of the narrative. To begin with, he narrates the entire story in the first chapter before unfolding the events. The reader is exposed to the background to the protagonist's journey to Africa and the turmoil in her soul. This chapter is titled Nwn. The chaos in Ast's soul at the beginning is summed up by the word Nwn. Nwn in ancient Egyptian religion refers to the chaotic state of the universe before Ra began creating and putting order to things. What is more, this places the story in the past right away and gives it standing as a myth. Another chapter that has a heading in this ancient language which sums up the chapter, adding a mythic tone

to the story is the last chapter: Dwat. In Egyptian mythology, Dwat is the realm of the dead, the realm of Osiris and it is in this chapter that Asar (Osiris) is murdered by Seth.

The narrative however does not begin from the traditional past but rather the distant past. Nwt's, response to Ast's question about the ankh takes us to the era of the slave trade: "Do you know that our people were sold into slavery?" The answer to Ast's question about the ankh should have brought some foreclosure to her. Instead, Nwt (Ast's grandmother) creates an imbalance in her granddaughter's soul which provides the impetus for the quest for self-actualization. Ast knows that the creating of answers to the soul-bothering questions must take place on home soil, *A Journey to the Source*, and not in the camp of the slave master.

The past also goes far back into antiquity. This era of African history is marked by the myth of Osiris. Osiris, during his reign, ensures that his people, who at the time are barbarians, obtain educated in law, science, agriculture, etc. It documents and denotes a civilization unparalleled in its day. This myth is significant in that it places the black race's existence and civilization in antiquity; point made in numerous ways that African civilization pre-dates Western.

The era of foreign invasion is discussed backed by documentary evidence. A document Ast discovers at a library in Manda reveals how African societies operated before and during the invasion of the continent by first the Arabs and then the Europeans. According to a slaver, Ah-Poo, African societies were egalitarian: "... was ruled not by an autocratic chief but by a species of consensus arrived at through open discussion. It had a Chairman or President... who did not inherit his position; but, was elected by his savage peers on a rotational basis" (Armah 177/8). Ama Tete confirms this when she says "There was a time when every household sent one man and one woman to a monthly meeting to determine how to manage the affairs of the town, and each town or group of villages sent ten people to a larger meeting at the end of each cycle of forty-two days" (Armah 255). The evidence proves wrong western propagated beliefs that Africans were undemocratic and that democracy was introduced to Africa by the west. One democratic organization mentioned is the companionship of the ankh. This is a sect created to combat slavery. Its aim: "to work for life and creation, against death and destruction here in Africa" (Armah 264). Members swear an oath never to partake in slavery, to protect the Africans against both African and foreign slavers. They go as far as killing slavers and their African factors to serve as deterrents.

History is not portrayed only in the plot, but also in the characterization. The character Ama Tete, whose name Tete translates as ancient in the Akan language, represents the proverbial old lady of Akan tradition. Her character is outstanding because besides obtaining a Ph.D., she is very educated in traditional ways. Her traditional education which commences very early in childhood is obtained from an eccentric grandmother and an aunt. Tete, like the renowned Malian griots, is

a living repository of African history. Her area of specialization is the history of African families who passed through the ancient town of Bara. It is obvious that education, the type that churns out people like Ama Tete, is a model the author proposes in that western education supplements rather than erode her "Africanness". This makes Tete's character a credible one. In that regard, the quest for self-actualization of some descendants of natives sent into slavery in America would have been incomplete without an audience with Tete. Ras Jomo Cinque Equaino, an African American, goes to Tete for confirmation of his "royal" ancestry. He initially believed that his ancestors were African royals and comes to Tete for confirmation only to be told of his ancestor Ah Poh, the traitor.

Cinque is not the only African American in a quest for answers. Ast is also in Africa to find information, a history that will help her create meaning for her life. She creates meaning on two fronts: in her shared vision and work for Africa with like-minded people, and in her love and companionship with Asar which results in a new life. The child though unborn at the end of the narration gives hope of another generation of fighters for the course of Africa.

The need to seek ancient ways in this narrative is necessitated by the dissatisfaction with the present. To give an objective diagnosis of the myriad of issues coursing dissatisfaction, two perspectives are worth discussing. The first is Seth's. Seth is a top security expert who after acquiring education from an American university returns to Africa to maintain the status quo. It is obvious that he is aware of some of the major issues confronting the state but he would rather the system remained so the few elite take advantage of the masses. No effort is, therefore, being made on his side of the divide to correct the situation because he and leaders of his caliber are afraid of the power that knowledge brings. Netta explains: "We analyze our social problems day in, day out. But when it comes to the way we live, we prefer to be a part of the problem" (Armah 72).

Seth also explains the reality thus: "... in Africa, everything is at the opposite pole from the ideal. The way our system is structured, the best brains first try to get out. If they fail, they go into other fields not teaching. Teacher training here were set up to absorb boarder-line cases. Kids unable to make it into secondary schools" (Armah 32). Evidence from Tete's grandmother buttresses the fact that education is not a recent western phenomenon. She explains that Africans had had schools where pupils were taught to write and count. These arts and sciences were however lost due to the foolishness of African rulers and foreign robbers

The teaching profession which Armah sees as the cornerstone upon which the system could be rebuilt is manned by "Kids unable to make it into secondary schools." The irony is in the fact that these semi-literates are given the task of educating the masses, creating a cycle of a half-baked population. The better educated, who can be of immense benefit to the development of the continent, take their expertise outside the continent. The system turns the best into self-protective skeptics. This major social structural defect which still obtains in most

African countries is highlighted strongly and in many instances in the story. It is one of the areas that need redress. This is how Netta cynically explains the situation: "Here the educated people use their intelligence to avoid risk, to accumulate power, money, privilege. We call it security. That makes our choices sound less cowardly, not greedy" (Armah 71). She goes further:

The elite are interested in something else, belly level. Like money. Like power. The magic ability to fly high above famine, inflation, civil war. The charmed life while the continent burns. Money. Politics. The bureaucratic trip. Local directorships in multinational cooperations. Diplomatic posts. Lucrative positions in international organizations to fight illiteracy, disease, whatever (Armah 76).

With such an attitude, it is little wonder systems are dysfunctional. The clock at the airport, the first traffic light at HAPA and the civil service do not work. The civil service, which is qualified by adjectives like "useless and parasitic," is governed by unwritten conventions. First, a day's work should be done in a month and second, work on a file must begin only when the individual in question is right in front of you. Citizens cannot count on the structures of the service to work.

Unfortunately, the civil service is not the worse of the lot. To maintain the status quo a large network of spies has been set-up and that is a huge drain on the national treasury. Also the national security services are a law unto themselves. If they consider a person uncooperative, they jail, harass or even kill him/her without recourse to the law.

On the political front, although slavery has been abolished, the African continent is still under foreign influence. This interference exists in the form of largess to the government. An example is a presidential garage, an armory in aid of despotism.

The economy also needs attention. . The economy is a mess. There is scarcity of foreign exchange which fuels black marketeering. There is also a shortage of basic goods like mirrors, toilet paper, ketchup, etc. there is also no foreign exchange, creating room for both the unscrupulous and the opportunists to indulge in all manner of fraud. Morals have been thrown to the wind to an extent that those with any little of it are the odd ones out. The situation in the state appears very disorganized and hopeless. It is at this lowest estate that the need for a renaissance is a welcome call taking lessons from the past.

Using the omniscient point of view, Armah tells a difficult story. After reading, the reader gets the impression that s/he is missing out on some vital detail. This self-imposed deficiency created in the reader cannot be necessarily attributed to difficult diction because to a large extent the choice of diction is apt and comprehensible; they are chosen carefully to suit each character, atmosphere and imagery. Akhmemokhan records Whitman's response after he had read this

novel: “Although I found it absorbing to read, there were things in its symbolism and its message that gave me critic’s block, and my un-understanding translated itself into inaction” (Akhuemokhan 65). Whiteman is not alone in his opinion of Armah’s *Osiris* project. Ogede observes that the work is a nationalistic-cum-continental assignment pursued with intense commitment (Ogede 114). He finds the ambitiousness nature of *Osiris Rising* stunning. “It dramatizes material so large in scope it is seldom encountered in a single novel” (Ogede 130).

Soyinka says of Armah’s literary and social vision,

Armah’s work is intensely committed to the substitution of another view of *active* history, with re-creating humanistic perspectives as inspirational alternatives to existing society. His vision consciously conforms to no inherited or imposed religious doctrine and attendant ethics, frees itself of borrowed philosophies in its search for a unifying, harmonizing ideal or distinctive humanity. (86/7)

Another literary scholar, Anyidoho, of Armah and his works, gives an apt summary:

The argument, to put simply, is that Armah’s chosen objective is a revolutionary and visionary ideal; the visionary ideal is not simply a retrieval of a past ideal but a reshaping of a future world free from the destructive factors of past and present conditions. A historian with his eyes on the future is under no obligation to merely reconstruct past events. (41)

The Overhaul

Armah advocates an overhaul of the system, a remaking of the African continent. The renaissance must begin from the educated elite, from individuals and bodies willing to come together to sacrifice, share experiences and work towards achieving a common goal. The call is to the present generation and not to some other generation yet to come; that outlook is defeatist.

The starting point for this revolution is education because the system colonialism left behind is Eurocentric and molds Europhile teachers ignorant of world history. The overhaul of the education structure is therefore very important. The first of three fundamental aspect of African educational structure that need immediate consideration is to redirect the focus of study from the West to African. Secondly, studies should be universalistic in orientation and not Eurocentric and third, African history must feature strongly in the Renaissance. The African history mentioned in the third part refers largely to Egyptian history. Egypt is the bedrock of African civilization upon which the overhaul is built. What is worthy of note is that the courses under consideration are all in the liberal arts. These courses are significant in that they broaden students’ world perspective in line with the group’s second agenda to universalize education.

In view of the myriad of challenges and the Obvious enormity of the work to be done requires cooperate participation. An informal meeting at Asar's apartment turns out to be the first gathering in the endeavor in support of the Renaissance, a modern variant of the companion of the ankh. The faculty of like-minded Africans creates committees that draft the new syllabi upon which the new broader educational system will be built. They draft proposals, present to faculty and get it endorsed. Some students also lend support to the vision individually by introducing democracy at the classroom level, and as a group when they fight for Asar's release from unlawful arrest.

The narrative is allegorical in that "agents and actions, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived by the author to make coherent sense on the "literal," or primary, level of signification, and at the same time to signify a second, correlated order of signification" (Abrams 5). For instance, the three major characters, Asar, Seth and Ast, play the role of the Greek gods Osiris, Set and Isis respectively. The unfolding of events as narrated alludes to the biblical creation story. Again the present state of affairs alludes to the chaotic situation that God had to straighten out by creating the present well-ordered system we enjoy today. Only this time Asar is the lead creator calling for the restructuring as Osiris did. Asar, like Osiris, is the male creative force behind the revolution. The investigations by the security operatives headed by SSS prove that work towards the overhaul begun in earnest when Asar gained employment at the university. Earlier, talk on the need for change had come up; but, little action had taken place. Asar is portrayed as a messianic figure. He is said to be a genius who instead of looking for a lucrative job after his university credentials, joins the liberation struggle in the South. His decision to lend his excellent academic achievements to the liberation struggle toward a better continent makes him an unspoken criticism of his contemporaries who wish to maintain and benefit from the status quo. He is a non-verbal statement that says to the others: "if you had brains and guts, you wouldn't be running after dollars, You'd be working day and night to liberate your continent, which is so rich the owners of the world draw a lot of their power from her" (Armah 77). The powers that be feel threatened by him especially because he is not participating in the greed, non-sacrificial game and this makes him the demon to be exorcised. And exorcise him they did, eventually.

Also, Ast, who is named after the most intelligent divinity, is a 27-year-old professor of history. She is the female life force of the revolution. She volunteers to do the difficult and unwanted job of a secretary to the modern day "companion of the ankh". In creating the new educational system, Ast's expertise in Egyptology will be the cornerstone for the foundation. The two life forces, Asar and Ast, contribute their quota with no illusions as to the dangers that lurk in the dark minds of enemies of the revolution. In actuality, before alighting at the airport, there is a foreshadowing of upcoming events. She lives through this event, a foreshadowing of events, on an ethereal plain before everything begins unfolding in the earthly realm months later.

She tried, fighting revulsion, to understand Set, stormy rager, desert outcast, exiled from love by the accident of a body blistered by sunlight, driven desperate by laughter, discovering the terrible power of revenge in the freedom to fill the passage of hurt time with games of war. She saw Asar off on the first of humanizing journeys, carrying not weapons of destruction but ideas to support new life, images to feed love of the universe. From a world awakening she fell down the abyss of Set's intoxicating deception, the destruction of Asar. Bereaved in soul, she followed her namesake in persevering sorrow, saw her raise the fruit of years of patient effort, and learned to contain sorrow for the murdered, using the energy of mourning to build new strength for future achievement. (Armah 8)

Seth, the protagonist in the narrative, represents the sons of the continent who resist change because they do not want to sacrifice for the good of the society. Their place of prestige is for self- aggrandizement and not for the common good of the citizenry. They are corrupt, conniving, ruthless and power-hungry. Emanating from this stance is the desperate desire to eliminate any individual who does not condone their behavior. But Seth's vendetta against Asar is also personal. Asar is everything he would have loved to be, including being Ast's lover, but can never be. So while Asar and Ast put their effort into overhauling the fossilized decayed system, replacing them with new ones, their brother Seth attempts destroying what they build.

In the process of regeneration, we find two symbols, the ankh and maat, playing important roles by adding depth to the text. The Ankh means life. "From far off, it looked like an ellipse mounted on a cross. Close up, it was a female form, arms outstretched, head capacious enough to contain the womb". In Greek mythology, it represents Isis, Osiris and their son Horus. The female form represents, Isis (goddess of fertility and motherhood) who has the ability to regenerate Osiris (god of the underworld) in two instances, albeit temporarily, to reproduce a son. The circle represents Osiris who dies and is regenerated. His continuous existence through Horus indicates that death and regeneration is a natural progression of life and completes the cycle. Horus is represented by the womb.

The ankh which is taken from Egypt to various parts of the world wherever Africans are taken is kept for posterity as seen in Ras Jomo's case. The ankh does not die; it lives on in the hearts of the present generation. When the moment arises, it is the uniting force that will cause Africans to shine.

It is the ankh on the logo of an article that provides Ast the needed impetus for the return home to Africa. The instant Ast sets foot on African soil, the ankh leads her into an encounter with Seth. From then onwards, she chances upon the it severally: the ankh as a key-holder at the dock, as a pendant belonging to Ras Jomo and at the center of the roof of Ama Tete hut. It is Tete who enlightens her

on the ankh's significance. Its history dates back to thousands of years to a group of far-seers devoted to the protection and preservation of life. They were together to serve a common purpose through the sharing of ideas and their implementation through hard work. From Tete's explanation, the ankh represents equality, unity in diversity, knowledge, industry, perseverance. These values, unfortunately, have been lost by the present generation: becoming consumers instead of producers and creators. According to Tete, "The pattern of its life is not an unbroken line crossing the ages. It has known weakness growing to strength, vigorous life waning to suspension. At times it died. It has known birth and death and rebirth, over and again" (Armah 261). It is eternal and so is Africa. It goes without saying then that metaphorically the story of the ankh is the story of Africa. Osiris is Asar; Asar is Africa. Africa was a civilization in itself. Its people were self-sufficient, creative and productive. This phase of Africa's growth is stifled by Seth, Europe, the envious brother who usurps the leadership role of Africa. Seth is the one in the myth who blows Asar up into pieces. Europe divides the continent into pieces: Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, etc, weakening the united front, vision and creativity. Seth embarks on this agenda because to him the ankh is a symbol of subversion; a symbol of a dangerous secret society who attempted destroying social and political institutions that favored those at the helm of the social strata.

Another symbol used in the text is the maat. In ancient Egyptian mythology, it is a goddess. She orders the stars, seasons and human actions and inactions. As with all Egyptian gods, she personifies some traits; maat is justice, truth, law order, morality and balance. It is in this spirit that justice is dispensed in Egypt. The citizenry, irrespective of their status trust in maat for fairness. The same cannot be said for contemporary times. Netta, laments the quality of leadership, "What I'm trying to tell you is this: our rulers have made moral issues irrelevant in our lives" (Armah 56). A society in this state is in chaos. Unfortunately, to Seth, "...justice is a vogue concept, meaningless except to intellectuals" (Armah 37). This is why Armah places the onus on the intellectuals to lead the social revolution. Maat is complementary to the ankh for maat is necessary for peace and order without which Osiris cannot rise.

CONCLUSION

Myths have maintained their relevance generally because authors are still using them to contemporary ends. Their significance is also in the fact that they tell stories that affirm and connect people to their past. Based on Okpewho's classification of African mythopoeists which places Armah among the class with a strong desire to fix the old foundations upon which the system exists, this research explored how Ayi Kwei Armah used the ancient Egyptian myth of Osiris to address critical issues confronting Africa today. According to Armah, the Osiris myth is the framework upon which Africa can be regenerated using education as the medium. The teacher and the educated elite have the responsibility of overhauling the system. Although *Osiris Rising* is a novel with

a vision that remains ideal, a lot can be gleaned from it to help Africa in its quest for regeneration.

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