

A Mythography of Kola Eke's Poetry

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Abstract

Recent Nigerian poetry has begun to exhibit features of mythography as they construct socio-political ideas round myths. This attempts to explore how Kola Eke has employed myths to deal with societal issues. Through a sustained use of several myths, the poet invokes mythical figures derived from Igbo, Yoruba, and Benin ethnic nationalities namely Ani, Arochukwu, Sango, Ogun, Ebomisi and several others. The textual analytic methodology is used to interpret the poems drawn from Eke's four collection of poems, namely, October 1960 and Other Poems, May 29 and Other Poems, June 12 and Other Poems and February 1976 and Other Poems. Relying on the theory of mythography, the paper discovered that Eke invokes mythical characters to give the poems folkloric quality and infuse them with visual and thematic power. It concludes that Eke invokes mythical figures to actualize social control, articulate societal redirection and envision accountability in the poems.

Keywords:

Mythography, Social Control, Societal Redirection, Accountability, Invocation and Figures

Introduction

Modern Nigerian poetry has always embraced the use of myths either for thematic reasons or for artistic purposes. Myths are central to African poetic imagination because they help in enriching their texts.

Mythographic representation in Nigerian poetry has a long historiography. Right from the inception especially among the first generation of Nigerian poets myths were integral to their poetry. For example, Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark-Bekederemo, Gabriel Imomotime Okara, Christopher Okigbo and few others are known to have engaged the use of myths for cultural affirmation. The second generation poets like Niyi Osundare, Odia Ofeimun, and Tenure Ojaide have used myths sparingly to embellish their poetic art. Thus mythography has permeated the two previous generations of poetry in Nigeria.

Kola Eke is a recent Nigerian poet who has published well over six collections of poems. They include *October 1960 and Other Poems*, *May 29 and Other Poems*, *February 1976 and June 12 and Other Poems*, *Covid-19 and Other Poems* and *May 27 and Other Poems*. Running through the first four collections listed above is the recurrence of myths. Hence, they form the bedrock of this essay. The purpose of this essay among others is to examine Eke's poetry from a mythographical standpoint in order to investigate how the mythical figures are used to reveal the various thematic preoccupations.

This essay relies on the theory of mythography to read Eke's poetry. Establishing the difference between mythology and mythography, John Lindow writes: "Mythology is the collection of myths of a people, concerning the origins of the people, history, deities, ancestors and heroes while mythography is a depiction of a myth in literature or the arts." (18). Mythography, quite clearly, deals with representation or recreation of myths for certain literary purposes. Hence, most mythographical literary texts employ images, allusion, and imagination as tools of depiction. Thus, the duty of the critic is to tease out the various layers of myths that have been synthesized in literary texts. Although mythology deals with collecting myths, mythography goes beyond that. It encompasses the utilization of myths to create literature.

Robert L. Fowler describes mythography as a field of study which relies on "imaginings, with varying degrees of sincerity, to flesh out the skeleton of a received narrative" (14). Fowler's position is that mythography functions as a style with which a writer composes his narratives. Crucial to Fowler's statement is the relevance of imagination in the recreation process. Thus, the mythographer deploys myths with the strictest sense of sincerity so as not to misinform the reader.

As for Gregory Hays, mythography deals with "the interpretation of myths". To this end, the scholar writes that: "most of mythographers are interested mainly or exclusively in the stories themselves, or even primarily, interested in the interpretation of myth" (60) Myths are essentially stories. Those who concentrate on making something out of the myths, do not ignore the stories because they are the substance. They contain socio-cultural norms and values with which the literary writer adopts to enrich his or her literary creations.

In support of Hays' position, Scott R. Smith and Stephen M. Trzaskoma define mythography as "the interpretation and evaluation of myths" (422). Beyond interpreting and evaluating myths, they add that: "mythography has the aim of making sense of myth in light of other intellectual and philosophical or religious allegory" (425). What they appear to be saying is that, mythography helps the reader to understand the myths by contextualizing them and providing deep insight for the interpretation.

A myth expresses and confirms society's religious values and norms, it provides a pattern of behaviour to be imitated, testifies to the efficacy of ritual with its practical ends and

establishes the sanctity of cult”. (Ball, 17) Ball highlighted the functions of myths in society. In myths, one finds societal values and norms often in the nature of religion or spirituality. It aids the improvement of good conduct by eulogizing and representing good behaviour for people to emulate.

Providing details about the mythical figures, Joshua Mark writes that: “Myths tell the stories of ancestors and the origin of humans and the world, the gods, supernatural beings (satyrs, nymphs, mermaids) and heroes with super-human, usually god-given, powers.” (408). Mythical figures manifest in the stories as ancestors, gods, supernatural beings and heroes with super-human abilities.

For Efosa Julius Legemah, Eke’s use of language reveals “the three meta functions of language” (63) in order to identify the poet’s perception of transitivity, mood and theme. Legemah avers that Eke’s poems “focus on the societal ills bedeviling the present day Nigeria society” (54). Thus Legemah’s linguistic approach to the study of Eke’s poem is commendable.

Clement Eloghosa Odia has written three essays on Eke’s poem. The first focuses on Eke’s legislative poems in which “the poet legislates against human trafficking, unfair treatment of women and political impunity” (173) as gateway to social change. The second essay examines the figuration of leadership in Eke’s poetry by “denouncing oppressive and corrupt leaders, while envisioning change” (142). The third essay looks at the historiography of women oppression in Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo and Kola Eke’s poetry. Odia notes that Eke’s imagination is replete with images of violence against women” (59).

From the review thus far, Eke is committed to improving society. Previous studies have ignored how Eke has engaged mythography to reform society and actualize social change. A mythographical evaluation of Eke’s poetry shows that the poet invokes mythical figures to achieve social control, articulate societal redirection and envision accountability.

Actualization of Social Control

This section seeks to establish that Kola Eke invokes mythical figures in his poems in order to actualize social control. By social control, Zeinab Abulhul quoting Mannheim explains that, it is “the sum of those methods by which a society tries to influence human’s behaviour to maintain a given order” (98). The overriding purpose of social control is the maintenance of order in society. Abulhul adds that it is carried out to “regulate relationships among individuals and groups through social institutions to ensure promoting the welfare of the society as a whole” (9). It is against this background that Eke’s poems are examined to show how and why mythical figures are invoked.

This section therefore proposes to examine Eke's invocation of Igbo mythical figures in the pursuit of social justice. Three distinct Igbo mythical figures are examined which are entrenched in Igbo myths. These are Ani, Arochukwu and Amadioha mythical characters.

The myth of Ani, for example, recurs in Eke's poems. Ani, the Igbo deity is renowned for safe-guarding public morality and justice. In the poem, with the name of the deity as title, "Ani", Eke addresses the goddess thus:

Ani, are you still
in our midst?
Ani where are you?
to this:
civil servants no longer
Deposit money in banks. (67)

The art of invocation is practiced by Eke in the above poem. Here the poem opens with the speaker's sense of agitation and shock. He comes to the reader with the sense of anxiety. This is heightened by the use of rhetorical question which gives the poem the element of dramatic immediacy. The apostrophe employed in the opening stanza is compelling as it is evocative. Hence this captures the reader's attention. In the stanza, the speaker addresses the deity, "Ani" as if the goddess were alive. The tone that runs through the stanza is one of doubt, surprise and shock arising from the untoward behaviour of some corrupt civil servants thus prompting the speaker to invoke Ani for intervention. To achieve this, the speaker expresses the concern whether Ani is still among them. Thus, the duty of the poet among others is to report social infractions to Ani for the immediate intervention of the goddess.

The Ani myth tells the story of the woman who is considered by the Igbo ethnic nationality as the:

Queen of the underworld
ruler and protector
of men, queen of
human morality. (67)

This poem examines the activities of public servants immediately after the change of government in Nigeria, in 2015. At that time, public expectation was high as people thought the new government of President Muhammadu Buhari would sanitize the public space. This situation led several public officers to abandon huge currencies in "uncompleted buildings, "boots of abandoned cars", and several other places. It is against the above background that the poet summons that mythical figure, Ani, to help the new government to bring sanity and probity to the governance of the country.

To actualize social control, the poet suggests that public officials who steal from the people and their leaders be paraded before Ani:

of public funds
and
political leaders should
henceforth
be paraded before the
shrine of Ani. (OOP, 68)

This recommendation reveals the poet's belief in the efficacy of Ani to sanction offenders and restore public sanity. The "shrine of Ani" represents the presence of the mythical figures whose power is greatly feared. It can be inferred from the above pronouncement that politicians and public officers do not fear the law of the land, neither are they afraid of the judiciary. They know that the police and the judges can be bought. The traditional African religion which prides itself in deities and gods, ancestors and demons cannot be bribed and as such, they can guarantee justice.

Eke's anger against oppressive leadership is presented in the poem, "there is a president". The poet depicts a particular president who is addicted to violence and monstrosity. In the poet's estimation, such a president should not be allowed to lead the country. Hence the poet writes:

Ani please never ever
Bless us with blood-thirsty
Leaders
Please never never. (82)

The poet presents, Ani, the goddess as having the power to "bless" the people with leaders. Also, the people have the power to pray for the right kind of leaders. The quality of this poem is in the invocative power of language employed to present Ani. The tone of urgency and rejection mixes to articulate the people's desire for good leadership. The repetition of "please" is meant to inscribe the speaker's appealing tone to Ani in order to answer their prayers. The communication between the speaker and Ani is done through apostrophe and it reveals the belief in Ani myth.

Apart from invoking the mythical figure of Ani, Eke also calls upon the long gods at Arochukwu, the Igbo deity, reputed for devouring offenders of social justice. In the poem, "the Mace", the poet frowns at the recklessness of legislators who are in the habit of stealing the mace, which is the symbol of legislative authority. To end this phenomenon, Eke remarks:

From today
Aspiring Legislators
Must swear the
Oath of loyalty

Before Arochukwu shrine. (MOP, 111)

The main point in this poem is in the poet's belief in myth especially the Arochukwu myth. The poet warns against the arbitrary election of aspiring legislators without subjecting them to the ritual of oath taking. The orthodox oath is good but in the opinion of the speaker, it should be replaced with Arochukwu who is a fierce and dreaded deity. In the speaker's view by this measure, the menace of mace theft will not happen again. Their loyalty is to be measured by their relationship with Arochukwu. They are to see the breath of their oath of loyalty to Arochukwu and not to the people. The consequence of this is that in such a case, Arochukwu is expected to visit on the offender great wrath.

The myth of Amadioha also excites Eke. Amadioha is an Igbo god of thunder. Eke's poem entitled 'Amadioha' treats the theme of tyranny employing the image of leopard to depict the activities of military officers. The poem opens thus:

The leopard
Seized power
With his long whiskers
Amputated the parliament. (31)

Aggressive images dominate the above stanza. Firstly, the new power emerges with fierce force seizing power from the executive. Secondly, they "amputated the parliaments". This image draws attention to the total deprivation of function and power. Military forces unleash horror on the democratic process.

To end the frequent military incursions into the democratic space, Eke recommends:

One cannot but invoke
Amadioha
To strike down all
Leopards. (132)

Implied in this stanza is that the people are powerless to help themselves. Hence the speaker invokes Amadioha to help them strike down leopards in order to restore democracy to its pride of place. The force of the language cannot be ignored. The metaphorical power of "strike down" evokes the picture of Amadioha who personifies thunder. The structure of the last stanza is quite informative. A close study of it reveals the poet's clever juxta positioning of "Amadioha" and "leopards" to intensify the need to make Amadioha the opponent of these leopards in power.

The dynamics of Eke's mythographical poetry resides in the invocation of Igbo mythical figures such as Ani Arochukwu and Amadioha. These great personalities are reputed for their great power and sense of justice. In the poems studied in this section, we see

the tone of appeal being made to these deities to help the living overcome their day-to-day challenges.

Articulation of Societal Redirection

The concept of redirection is anchored on changing the direction of society, preferably from evil to good, from chaos to peace and stability. Eke articulates societal redirection by invoking Yoruba mythic deities. Five such deities are invoked in Eke's poems and they include: Sango, Ogun, Eshu, Sonponna and Obatala.

In Yoruba mythology, Sango is the god of thunder and lightning and one of the most worshipped Yoruba gods all over the world. Sango was a royal ancestor of the Yoruba as he was the third king of the Oyo kingdom. His symbol is a double-headed axe, which represents swift and balanced justice. Eke invokes Sango in the poem, "super-rich civil servants" to save the country from the hands of corrupt public officials who embezzle public funds without conscience. The speaker in the poem employs pollen grains as metaphor for stolen funds:

Investigation reveals
Transfer of pollen grains
From banks to
Banks. (65)

The historical context of the poem is necessary here. It was anchored on the president of Nigeria's assumption of office. Then huge sums of money were traced to bank accounts of government officials. Several of them became super-rich at the expense of the country.

Angered by this situation as well as concerned with the need for societal redirection, the speaker invokes Sango to wreak havoc on those who steal public funds:

Looters of pollen grains
Must face the wrath of
Sango. (65)

Eke's invocation of Sango functions as a means of societal redirection in the face of weak legal institutions in Nigeria. The speaker believes in the efficacy of Sango to ensure swift justice on those who continue to loot public funds. Also, public officials fear the wrath of Sango more than the criminal justice system in Nigeria. As this exists, it is only natural that the society will experience change from looting to accountability. This explains why the poet seems to be recommending the invocation of mythical figures to eradicate public theft while indirectly articulating societal redirection in Nigeria.

Another mythical figure Eke invoked is Esu. In the Yoruba mythology, Esu is both an Orisha and one of the well-known deities. Esu is a spirit of chaos and trickery, and is saddled with the responsibility of leading mortals to temptation and possible tribulation. Eke invokes Esu in the poem, "Food for all". The poem exposes corrupt enrichment of public funds and

appropriation of public properties and shared among the political class. This infuriates the speaker who invokes Esu thus:

Listen
there is a clarion call
on Esu
to descend on
politicians. (OOP, 18)

The call on Esu is an admission of defeat and sense of helplessness on the part of the people and the legal and judicial structure to deal with corruption. It also shows the African belief in traditional African religion where wicked acts are left in the hands of African deities to avenge. Eke calls on the people in the next stanza:

here and there
towns and
villages
and houses
clarion calls are on
to erect
Esu shrine and invoke
Curses on
politicians
Esu will ultimately
Answer. (OPP, 18)

Implied here is the reason for politician's boldness in corrupt enrichment as a result of lack of fear for the law. Therefore, Eke directs the people to invoke curses on politicians and that Esu will ultimately answer their maledictions. The import of this exercise is that such an invocation of Esu mythical figure ensures the redirection of society from corrupt enrichment by politicians to true societal development by the political class.

Sonponna is the next mythical figure which Eke invokes to unleash havoc on those who abuse public trust. By the way, Sonponna is the Yoruba deity of small-pox and the avenging god on behalf of the unjustly treated. In the poem, "Songthrush", the poet evokes the image of tyrants especially the Haitian leader who unleashed the reign of mindless brutality on the people. The speaker in the last stanza echoes the voices of the people:

I can hear
Voices
Calling on Sonponna
To strike down songthrushes. (MOP, 30)

The poem reveals scenes of cruelty reminiscent of Hitler's days or even of Idi Amin, the Ugandan ruler. It shows a regime which repressed the people to the extent that the poet is able to hear "voices" of the people calling on Sonponna to help them strike down "Songthrushes". The image of a Songthrush is meant to activate the wickedness of the leaders. What we can infer from the stanza above is that Eke wishes Sonponna to afflict such cruel leaders with small pox and bring their wicked reign to an end. Therefore, the end of such leaders will open the society to the need for change and better way of conducting government affairs. This is the pedestal on which societal redirection is built. Thus, the invocation of Sonponna mythical figure guarantees new consciousness and societal development.

Next to be invoked is Obatala. In Yoruba mythology, Obatala is the father of all Orishas (gods). He is Olodumare's representative on earth and the shaper of human beings. Eke invokes Obatala in the poem, "The Hyena". The poem catalogues the atrocities of Siad Barre, the Somalian leader. According to the speaker, the said leader:

Proclaimed himself
Scientific socialist
Prohibited the existence
Of political association. (MOP, 38)

Eke cleverly outlines the features which appear to weaken the leader's credibility. Barre is a self-confessed socialist who turns out to be a ruthless. This is noticed in the unilateral prohibition of political associations. Eke prepares the mind of the reader to appreciate the depth of the leader's wickedness. In the subsequent stanza, Eke adds:

Hyena
Possessed powerful jaw
With which he crushed
Bones of three clans. (38)

The hyena metaphor is appropriate in depicting the tyrannical disposition of the leader. The reference to powerful jaws is meant to draw attention to the leader's Secret Armed Forces with which the leader unleashed terror on the people. History has it that Said Barres decimated three clans who opposed the leader. These are the Mageerteen, the Hawiye, and the Isaaq.

Also, the said leader employing the secret police killed the citizens:

Sprouted
Red Berets
Ate Somalian calves
Ate Somalian Gazelles. (38)

The “Red Berets” refer to the secret police who were used to kill Somalians. That they “sprouted” is to show the sudden way they emerged into national consciousness. They helped carry out Berres’ atrocious missions. The implication of the animal images, when Eke uses “calves” and “Gazelles”, is to express the helplessness and defenselessness of the victims. They are indeed calves which suggest children and young people. The Gazelles are the old ones who the secret police also killed.

Consequently, Eke advises:
Gazelles and calves
You may wish
To consult Obatala
To cripple hyenas. (39)

The animal imagery represents the poet’s representation of the collective struggle to end repressive tendency. The young and the old represent the people of Somalia who must strive to end tyranny and that this situation cannot be done by human effort alone. They are by this last stanza summoned to consult Obatala, the Yoruba deity entrusted with the affairs of all human beings. This powerful being is the only one who can defeat Barres. Also it shows the powerful nature of their leader. The image of a cripple is meant to activate the sense of total destruction. This metaphor is powerful as it reveals the urgency in ending the terrible government represented by the hyena in their country.

Finally, Eke invokes the mythical presence of Osun in the poem, “behold the Bulldozers”. Osun is the Yoruba deity of fertility who is reputed for the ability to solve other human problems. The image of a bulldozer is used to present ruthless political despots in Nigeria. The poem begins thus:

Behold the bulldozers
Hired thugs
To extinct
Electoral opponents. (MOP, 19)

The language of the above stanza conveys the sense of violence. The bulldozer is the first in this category. The irony of this image is that the bulldozer is used to pull down unwanted edifices in order to erect better ones. In the context of this poem, the bulldozers pull down their political opponents. They do this with the help of thugs they have hired to extinct them.

To immediately stop this human carnage, Eke recommends as follows:

Let us consult
Iya Osun
Let up consult
Olosun
Let us walk down

The bank of
River Osun
With prayers and offerings. (MOP, 20)

The above two stanzas convey the poet's solution to the political recklessness and abuse of power. "Iya Osun" refers to the chief priestess of Osun who mediates between the people and the deity. The people are expected to consult this woman in times of repression to find out what must be done to put an end to their affliction. Eke adds that the people are expected to offer prayers and offerings to Osun to have pity on their suffering.

In order to prevent the recurrence of terrible political leaders from emerging in our national life the poet suggests:

Let us summon
Aspiring candidates
Before Osun
To pledge violence-free elections. (20)

Eke is sure that when the above recommendation is heeded there will be violence free elections. The situation, where aspirants of all the political parties swear before the shrine of Osun that there will be no violence, will ultimately put an end to electoral crises in Nigeria. The implication of these is that the invocation of mythical figures will produce societal redirection from a society riddled with violent elections to one steeped in peaceful co-existence, civilized behaviour and credible electoral outcomes.

Envisioning Accountability

The main thrusts of the two previous sections are round the themes of social control and societal redirection. This section proposes to examine the invocation of Benin mythical figures in order to envision accountability in our society. Three Benin deities, namely Olokun, Ebomisi and Esu are invoked to help outwit enemies of state as well as achieve social change through holding erring members of society to account for their misdeeds or offences.

The first mythical character invoked in Eke's poems is Olokun. The name, "Olokun" comes from two Benin words. The first is "Okun" which means ocean. The second is "Olo" which refers to "the head of". Thuso Okun literally means the head of ocean or marine kingdom. It is a water goddess who is reputed for the ability to favour people with wealth and good fortune. Equally worthy of note is that the deity is considered to be a deadly marine spirit and sea demon.

One of Eke's poems, which have come to seem especially significant in this regard, is "supreme commander". The poem treats the subject of power and the way leaders' abuse and display arrogance.

The speaker narrates thus:

Motorists vacated the
Streets
Caught sight of
The leader's convoy
Over protected with
Twenty-one armed outriders
Hundreds of soldiers
And sniffer dogs. (FOP, 68)

The picture one sees above is reminiscent of the totalitarian state. The leader is seen with several cars in the convoy. For the motorcade to pass, motorists are condoned off the road. The people are in a state of frenzy to see the leader who appears from the stanza above, overprotected. The man is surrounded by twenty-one armed outriders, hundreds of soldiers and sniffer dogs. The image of the leader is one who rules tyrannically.

The leader is:

Infatuated with power
Built a cabinet of
Fifteen ministries
Took possession of three. (68)

The leader's obsession with power is described as infatuation. The leader has a cabinet comprising fifteen ministries and took (leadership of) three of them. Apart from depicting the leader's penchant for power, there is the picture of corruption. To take possession of three ministries is clearly borne out of pecuniary motive.

To save the people from the hands of their leader, Eke suggests:

Throngs of people
Bowed before Olokun
To rescue them from
The claws of 'supreme commanders. (69)

The poet compares the way the people thronged the streets to have a glimpse of the supreme commander then to what he expects them to do now, that is, to call on Olokun to help them. The poet expects them to bow before Olokun who has power to rescue the people from their ruler. The fact that the man has "claws" demonstrates that the commander is tyrannical. Olokun is a mythical power who has the ability to intervene on behalf of the people. Eke expects the people to accept Olokun by surrendering to it. By this singular action, it becomes easy for Olokun to compel tyrannical leaders to account for their evil deeds. In the words of M. Khotami, accountably basically provides a very important role in creating a good

governance activity as a part of improving public confidence in government performance” (1). Following the notion of accountability as presented above, the purpose is to produce good governance by making erring members of society improve their consideration for others as they get rid of selfishness.

The second mythical figure invoked in Eke’s poems is Ebomisi. The myth of Ebomisi is one of the most fascinating in Benin mythology. This Benin deity is found in Ugoneki area of Edo State and known for upholding social justice. Eke, in several poems either, summons public officers to appear before Ebomisi, to swear an oath or calls on the deity to visit judgment on them. A good example is found in the poem, “Bird Flu” where Eke uses the image of the bird flu to represent the tyrants in Benghazi, in Libya and other parts of the world.

The poet also employs livestock as symbol of their victims and the oppressed:

In Benghazi
Bird flu
Attacked and destroyed
Livestock
In Tripoli
Bird flu
Shot cockerels and roosters
With BMZI Grade Rockets and tanks. (MOP, 119).

Both towns, Benghazi and Tripoli are in Libya known for open repulsion and rebellion against dictatorship. Also, it is the home of tyranny and opposition to organized protest during the Ghadaffi era. Eke’s poem revolves round images of livestock with which the speaker in the poem uses to in various ways, sometimes for connotative purposes, at other times for propagandist intentions as when the speaker uses Bird flu to intensify the unabatedness in the destruction of victims and the use of livestock as targets of the ruthlessness. To further contextualize the point, Eke resorts to military hardware to express the sense of militarization of Libya as mention is made of BMZI Grade Rockets and tanks which are employed to destroy livestock. Hence, it is clear to the reader that Eke is not talking about the internal livestock but about human beings. For this reason, livestock and Bird flu function as connotative words to express the poet’s anger against tyranny in Africa and in the world. In the concluding stanza, Eke advises the people thus:

Hens and cocks
Cockerels and pullets
To summon Bird flu
Before Ebomisi. (120)

The above stanza makes an iconic allusion to the Ebomisi myth. As we have already seen at its simplest, the device of repetition well handled, is a pregnant source of symbolism, and it expresses the need for the people to rise up and act. The point is by embracing the reality and potency of Ebomisi to deliver them from the tyranny perpetrated by tyrants symbolically referred to as Bird flu, Eke records with precision and accuracy the African landscape. Rarely is the writing simply descriptive as they evoke strong images that present the appalling and reckless display of power. It is apparently so in this poem, perhaps because its almost lyrical brevity permits minimal speculation. The economy of words here better exposes the sudden visual impact which is the mark of the successful poetic image. It is a remarkable fact that Eke presents tyranny with images of the rural life which expresses the common spread of the phenomenon. It proposes that the wicked decimation of the people has become endemic to Libya to the extent that there is no longer any escape from it.

Parading purveyors of tyranny and violence before Ebomisi is akin to presenting them to give account of their evil deeds. Thus, the invocation of Ebomisi is to be seen in this regard as functioning as helping to actualize accountability in our society. A society where wickedness flourishes without restraint creates the sense of impunity. In the olden days, the reverence of deities is sure to bring everyone to account for their bad behaviour.

Esu is the third and last mythical figure Eke invoked to improve leadership accountability and social development in Nigeria. Eshu and Esu are one and the same. The difference is that the Yoruba people pronounce it as Eshu, while the Benin people call it Esu. This figure is the personification and embodiment of evil in Benin worldview. In the poem “potter’s field”, Eke recreates the Nigerian political scene especially the voting arena.

The speaker explains:

Electoral atmosphere
Like Gethsemane
Presence of political thugs
Hostage taking. (MOP, 88)

Eke compares the Nigerian electoral scene to Gethsemane, a biblical allusion to the place of extreme suffering before Jesus Christ’s eventual crucifixion. The irony of the situation is that the electorates are the ones being victimized. They, like Jesus Christ, bear the violence unleashed by political thugs. Even in extreme cases, many are taken hostage. This situation breeds fear thereby scaring away potential voters.

According to the poet, the above situation affects every Nigerian as:
It brings shame on

Us and our leaders
Polling booths
Converted to Golgotha. (88)

Still reveling in biblical allusion, Eke compares voting centres to Golgotha, the place of crucifixion. Eke believes that the above smacks of collective embarrassment to both the followers and the leaders. This is why Eke calls on the electorate to act:

The electorate
Must invoke Esu
On politicians and
Political thugs. (88)

The electorate, thus, have the moral and spiritual responsibility to salvage the situation. They are advised to act by invoking Esu on politicians and political thugs. The reason is that they are the enemies of democracy. Esu is presented here as the punisher of evil people. The way Esu is portrayed and invoked is meant to instill in the reader the need for justice. It expresses the poet's displeasure at the security agents whose duty it is to protect lives and properties. That the legal and judicial institutions cannot be relied on, points to the need for Esu to rescue the nation's nascent democracy from ruin.

Conclusion

The essential argument in this paper is the application of mythographical techniques in arriving at Eke's preoccupations in the deployment of myths. Mythography as used presupposes the representation of myths in Eke's poetry. We have argued that Eke invokes mythical figures in his poems in order to achieve some thematic purposes for societal cohesion and development. In the opinion of the poet, accountability in positions of leadership can be attained when the leaders are made to swear before these deities. Evidently these mythical figures are highly functional in upholding public morality. Society will become better if the myths of our various ethnic nationalities are harnessed for nation development. It is crucial that mythography is studied in a much deeper level and applied in reading literary texts in order to develop society.

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