

**A MYTHOGRAPHICAL EVALUATION OF KOLA EKE'S POETRY**

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**AN ESSAY SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE  
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF  
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**CERTIFICATION**

I certify that this study was carried out by Sunny Onomrobakpo ADJAKO in the Department of English and Literature, faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City under my supervision.

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**Dr. Clement Eloghosa Odia**  
**Project Supervisor**

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**Date**

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this project to God Almighty, my creator, my strong pillar, my source of inspiration, wisdom, knowledge and understanding. He has been the source of my strength throughout this program and through every aspect of my life. I also dedicate this work to my family and friends, who has helped and encouraged me all the way and whose encouragement has made sure that I give it all it takes to finish what I have started already.

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Unfortunately, I addressed several difficulties in coordinating the activities of this report but I am highly indebted to Mr. Clement Odia for his guidance and constant supervision, as well as for providing necessary information regarding this report and also for his patience with me through out the activities of this report.

I would also like to express my gratitude towards my Dad Chief. Barr Onomrobakpo S. O. Adjako and my mom Mrs. Queen Adjako for all their prayers and financial support in ensuring that I become a graduate.

At last, I will end by thanking my friend Eric who helped a lot during my stay in the university and in finalizing the project within the limited time frame, it's my prayer that the good Lord bless and grant all your heart desires.



## **ABSTRACT**

This essay conducts a mythographical evaluation of Kola Eke's poetry with the intention of exploring how the poet has used myths sourced from the Yoruba, Igbo and Benin ethnic nationalities to envision socio-political change in Nigeria. The qualitative research methodology is employed specifically the textual analytical approach to read the various myths and their functions in the poems. The essay employs the theory of mythography to interpret the various connected to the use of myths. The researcher finds that the poet invokes Yoruba, Igbo and Benin myths for socio-political change. The essay concludes that Kola Eke invokes mythical figures to actualise social control, articulate societal redirection and envision accountability.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Purpose of Study

This essay evaluates Kola Eke's poetry from a mythographical standpoint in order to ascertain the various mythical figures and their source regions in Nigeria. It investigates why these figures are employed and to what end are they deployed. It, finally, sets out to establish how the figures are used to reveal the various thematic preoccupations by focusing on the poetic devices inherent in the poems.

#### 1.2 Scope of Study

Eke has published five collections of poems and they include: *October 1960 and Other Poems*, *June 12 and Other Poems*, *May 29 and Others Poems*, *February 1976 and Other Poems* and of course, *Covid-19 and Other Poems*. However, this essay covers the first four because they contain the use of myths derived from Igbo, Yoruba and Benin ethnic nationalities. The above collections will henceforth be abbreviated thus: OOP, JOP, MOP and FOP respectively.

#### 1.3 Methodology

This essay employs the qualitative research method using textual analytic approach in reading the poems. The poems were carefully read and then selected to express the various ideas carefully encoded in the poems. Later, the poems are

classified into various functional subdivisions as they relate to the main thematic focus.

#### **1.4 Theoretical Background**

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.

What then is a myth? Philip Ball describes it thus:

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. (17)

Ball has highlighted the functions of myths in society. In myths, therefore, 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 J. Mark writes: “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). According to Mark, mythical figures come in diverse forms. They manifest in the stories as ancestors, gods, supernatural beings and heroes with super-human abilities. We have thus far explored the concept of mythography as the theoretical foundation on which the entire argument in this essay is based.

### **1.5 Review of Related Scholarship**

Eke’s poems have attracted some considerable numbers of scholarly engagement and they are reviewed in this section. Ejiroghene Damilola Richard examines history in the context of Kola Eke’s poetry. She argues that “Eke employs history to immortalize eminent personalities, interrogate the past and inspire change as exemplified in the chosen poems” (7). Richard is concerned about the role of history in the poetry of Eke and not, on the mythography of Eke’s poetry which is the main preoccupation of the current essay.

In another essay, Mark Ituanose Kemba explores the allusive nature of Kola Eke’s poetry and explains that “Eke employs literary, historical, mythical and biblical allusions to convey the vision of a better society as represented by the

themes of leadership and feminist liberty” (11). Kemba’s essay highlights the role of allusions in representing themes of leadership and feminist liberty.

However, Kemba concludes that “Eke’s use of allusion is mostly as a satirical tool to mock and correct the ills of the society” and employing it “to buttress his theme and also employing other literary devices to help achieve this” (77). Thus, allusions are central to Eke’s poetic compositions. However Kemba’s essay clearly does not evaluate Eke’s poetry from a mythographical perspective.

Efosa Julius Legemah is interested in Eke’s deployment of language to convey meaning. To this end, Legemah examines “the three meta functions of language” (63) in order to determine Eke’s perception of transitivity, mood and theme. Understandably, Legemah argues that Eke’s poetry collections “focus on the societal ills bedeviling the present day Nigeria society” (54). For this reason, Legemah explores “the structure of the language of Eke’s poems” (54). Legemah’s effort is commendable for his linguistic approach to the study of Eke’s poetry.

Moving on to the literary approach to the study of Eke’s poetry, both Esther Iria Jamgbadi and Edefe Mukoro look at religious violence in Eke’s poems and how this can be eliminated. They aver that Eke “starts his verse by evoking vivid pictures of religious violence, then, there is the infusion of dramatic images of moral solutions to the unpleasant phenomenon” (19). This articulation of solution to religious violence recurs in several of the poems. However, this essay

departs from what Jamgbadi and Mukoro have done, by looking beyond religious violence to the mythographical possibilities in the poems and how myths are employed to adumbrate a better social order.

Clement Eloghosa Odia has written three essays, each examining different aspects of Eke's poetry. Firstly, Odia looks at Eke's presentation of the social change through his legislative poems. The essay identifies three pieces of legislation namely, legislation against human trafficking, unfair treatment of women and political impurity. The critic concludes that:

The brilliance of his poetry is in the area of unambiguous use of language with which he legislates against socio-political irregularities as a pre-condition for actualizing utopian (ideal) change in Nigeria. (173).

Odia is of the opinion that the poet has a crucial role to play in the reconstruction of society. He opines that this social change can be effected through appropriate poetic legislation against untoward practices in society.

Secondly, Odia examines the figuration of leadership in the poetry of Eke by denouncing examples of dictatorial and corrupt leaders, while envisioning change. Odia writes that:

One major trait of Eke's poetry is his denunciation of oppressive leaders. This is carried out through is deployment of animal images

which exemplify the nature of dictatorship exhibited by Nigerian political leaders. (142)

Odia affirms that Eke's unsparing in his satirical denunciation of bad leadership as an avenue for seeking change. The animal images employed seek to represent the gradual descent by the leaders to the level of animals especially wild animals.

Finally, Odia examines another idea in Eke's poems, this time, the historiography of women oppression in Akachi Admora-Ezeigbo and Eke's poetry. The essay is a comparative analysis. Odia writes concerning Eke's poems that "Eke's imagination is replete with images of violence against women and through his poems, he portrays women as victims of violence" (59). This position is true and, however, Odia's essay does not extend to explicating Eke's use of myths to construct a better society.

From the bulk of criticism on Eke's poems, there is a yearning gap in scholarship and it is in the area of the essence of Eke's deployment of mythographical materials to improve society. This has however, necessitated the need for the present essay.

## **1.6 Thesis Statement**

A mythographical evaluation of Eke's poetry reveals that the poet invokes mythical figures to actualize social control, articulate societal redirection and envision accountability.

## CHAPTER 2

### ACTUALIZATION OF SOCIAL CONTROL

This chapter 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.

One distinct quality of Eke’s poetic art is the invocation of mythical figures for social control. The poet invokes myths to inspire the people and convey the vision of an alternative society. This chapter 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. (OOP, 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 arises 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 women who is considered by the Igbo ethnic nationality as the:

Queen of the underworld

ruler and protector

of men, queen of  
 human morality. (OOP, 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 sanitise 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:

Regues 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 these institutions can be bought with money. The traditional African religion which prides itself in deities and gods, ancestors and demons cannot be bribed and as such, they can guarantee justice.

In Eke's poem, "Family Affairs" the issue of domestic violence is presented. It appears the poet is interested in eradicating this social scourge and this explains why in several stanzas, detailed descriptions of each case of violence are presented. The speaker presents the first case thus:

We recall one Ngozi  
Whose face was painted  
With acid sprayed by  
Her uncle's wife. (MOP, 104)

What is so impressive about this poem is that, despite the engaging power of the theme, and the prejudiced account on which he drew, the speaker does not take violent sides. This stanza is unrelenting in the presentation of domestic violence. In short, the whole poem is couched in terms of a recollection where Ngozi suffers acid bath. Thus the eye of the poet seems to be on every aspect of the people's social life. The unacceptable conduct of the said wife in the above stanza is presented with dispatch and with the sense of condemnation. Eke wants the

reader to rise up against this kind of human wickedness where a woman sprays acid on the face of another women especially the niece of the woman's husband.

The poet goes further to present another case. This time, it is:

The case of one  
 Wicked wife who  
 Stabled her husband's genitals  
 Seeing a text message on his phone. (104)

Eke highlights the trivia nature of the offence that often ignites violent actions to question the wife's emotional intelligence and sense of tolerance. The above idea is sustained by the poet's recourse to alliterative versification. Also the narrative mode helps to make the case for reform as it concretises and vivifies the crime.

In another stanza the speaker balances the gender of the violence by presenting male characters unleashing violence on women. The purpose of this gender balancing is to make the point that violence has no gender but that it is an ingrained human problem that requires serious sanction and social control. Consequently, the poet presents the case of one Tina:

Tina had her face  
 Lacerated by her husband  
 On the excuse of lack of  
 Fish tail in his meal. (105)

One important factor which Eke seems to canvass as being responsible for domestic violence is compatibility issue. All the causes of the violence are flimsy and trivia. Thus the violence does not meet the offence. That it festers leaves several unanswered questions.

To actualise social control, Eke writes:

To stem the flood of  
 Violence  
 Couples to take oath of harmony  
 Before the shrine of Ani. (105)

It is Eke's belief that when couples swear on oath to remain in harmony with their spouses mediated by Ani, the goddess of public morality that, the incidence of domestic violence will cease. The poet's imagination is thus suffused with Ani myth to which the speaker in the poem keeps referring. The mythical figure of Ani operates in this poem as agent of social control. Ani is reputed to have the power to regulate the conduct of people and as such, it is expected that as society comes under the control of Ani, there will be better and improved social relations.

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. (MOP, 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 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 l egislators

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 Arochkuwu. 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

Leopalds. (MOP, 132)

Implied in this stanza is that the people are powerless to help themselves. Hence the speaker invokes Amadioha to help them strike down leopalds 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 juxtapositioning of “Amadioha” and “leopalds” to intensify the need to make Amadioha the opponent of these leopalds in power.

The dynamics of Eke’s mythographical poetry resides in the invocation of Igbo mythical figures such as Ani Arochkuwu and Amadioha. These great personalities are reputed for their great power and sense of justice. In the poems studied in this chapter, we see the tone of appeal being made to these deities to help the living overcome their day to day challenges. Myths recur in Eke’s poems and they function as agents of social control.

### CHAPTER 3

#### ARTICULATION OF SOCIETAL REDIRECTION

Eke's poems do not only seek to actualize social control, they also strive to articulate 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. We shall examine each deity and how they are invoked to articulate societal redirection in this chapter.

The first mythical figure is Sango. In Yoruba mythology, Sango is the god of thunder and lightening 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. (JOP, 65)

The historical context of the poem is necessary here. It was anchored on the president of Nigeria assumes 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. The image of pollen grains is meant to ingrain on the reader's mind the volume of cash stolen as well as contextualize the innumerable transfer of cash that occurred then.

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.

Also in the poem, “The Eagle”, the poet presents the activities of a known dictator who rigged the election and got into power. This politician moved on to tyrannise political opponents. Through the image of the eagle, the poet presents this tyrant. As a way of ending the culture of dictatorship, Eke enthuses thus:

N doubt

Eagles worldwide

Will not escape

The wrath of Sango. (MOP, 134)

The poet universalizes the efficacy of Sango when it is invoked to destroy “eagles worldwide”. The allusion to Sango is effective in handling such public figures who oppressed political opponents. Eke instills the fear of Sango into the hearts of the reader. If the situation will change, it must be by force injected by the Sango deity. Thus, the poet-persona believes that the Sango myth is a veritable tool in actualizing societal redirection. The wrath of Sango functions as a metaphor for change. By this, society is expected to experience a new way of behaviour. Therefore, with the myth of Sango, it is easy to build a better society.

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 speaker appears to be speaking on behalf of the people. 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)

The poet persona calls on the people to build Esu shrines in their houses, in their villages and towns in fact in every place in order to reintroduce the worship of Esu. Also 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 sonthrushes. (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 Songhrush 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 meniac. 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 collectivization of the 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 bulldozer is an excavator. This implies the ability to pull down. 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 women 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 all 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.

This chapter has examined the importance of myths and mythical figures who represent deities in African mythology. The crux of this essay is the interplay of myths and poetry. It reveals how both can be employed to improve society and achieve social redirection in order to improve the behaviour of political elite in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

## CHAPTER 4

### ENVISIONING ACCOUNTABILITY

The main thrusts of the two previous chapters are centred round the themes of social control and societal redirection. This chapter 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 word. The first is "Okun" which means ocean. The second is "Olo" which refers to "the head of". Thus Olokun 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 commander's. (69)

The is the comparison between the way the people thronged the streets to have a glimpse of the supreme commander to what the people must do. 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" demonstrate the fact 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 on 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 descriptions 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.

By 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 envisioning 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 sued to bring everyone to account for their bad behaviour.

Eke employs the poem, “The Mugabes” to vilify tyrannical leaders in Africa through the images of weed and crops. The weeds are the tyrants and the crops are the people. this is presented in the opening stanza:

Weeds have grown

All over Africa

Have germinated and spread

All over Africa

The Mugabes are all over. (JOP, 25)

The poet persona is miffed at the pervasive nature of tyrants in Africa. This is conveyed through deliberate repetition of the sense of proliferation. Words like “grown”, “germinate” and “spread” imprint the sense of their entrenched presence. This is complemented by the repetition of “All over Africa” and “all over” to emphasise the sense of place. The allusion to the Zimbabwean former president,

Robert Mugabe is quite instructive. Running through the poems are the names of different presidents, namely Idi Amin (the late president of Uganda), Mobutu Seseseko (the late Zainean president), and Samuel Doe (the late Liberian president). Common to these former presents is their penchant for perpetuity in office. Their tenures ushered massive corruption, draconian laws, repression, mass murder and economic strangulation which choked the people. Eke appears to be offended by the continued reproduction of these types of leaders on the African continent.

Eke also dreams of change in the offing:

Hear the crops  
 Screaming aloud for  
 The wind  
 To carry the weeds  
 Away. (25)

As already noted above, the “crops” stand for the people. This metaphorical equivalence clearly indicates the need to preserve them from destruction. The people are here conveyed as being in pain screaming for change. This change is constructed round atmospheric metaphor – “The wind”, an image of violence which is expected to dislodge the tyrants from office. The image of weeds is apt because the tyrants are unwanted in Africa. Hence, the wind of protest and revolt will sweep them away from their exalted positions.

To complement the instrument of protest and revolt, the poet invokes Ebomisi to flush them out of office:

The Idi Amins  
 The Mugabes  
 Must appear before  
 Ebomisi. (JOP, 26)

It is instructive to also add here that Ebomisi is considered as a powerful force that will help the people get rulers like Idi Amin and Mugabe out of office. The people are expected to physically drag their leaders before Ebomisi to swear on oath that they will never emulate the ilk of Idi Amin, Robert Mugabe and others who are terrible examples of leaders in Africa. Eke's recommendation is preventive in nature and amounts to fostering accountability in governance.

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 "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 electorate 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. Esu's portraiture and invocation 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.

Eke also invokes Esu in the poem, "Forest Soldiers" to compel government officials who promised the Niger Deltan militants amnesty welfare packages to fulfill them. Before the invocation, the speaker sets the stage to help the reader to understand the betrayal of the militants:

Reneged on promises  
 Militants itch to  
 Go back to  
 The creeks  
 Amnesty promises  
 Electrocuted  
 Rehabilitated plan  
 Murdered. (MOP, 106)

The speaker hopes to convey through the above two stanzas the failure of government officers to handle the amnesty programme with the sense of accountability. By reneging on the promises, the militants lose faith in the programme and decide to return to the creeks to further their sabotaging insurrection against the state. The image of electrocution and murder are employed to implicate the officers of deliberately refusing to fulfill their promises.

To compel them to do the rights thing, the poet invokes Esu thus:

We must parade

The fox

Before Esu

To fulfill amnesty promises. (106)

The animal image, “The Fox” in the above depicts the stratagem and deceit contrived by the corrupt officers to deny the militants their rights, Eke believes that these officers deserve to be paraded before “Esu, the mythical figure who is the repository of cruelty and evil. The poet wants Esu to force them to fulfill the promises or worse still, suffer untold penalty.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

The essential argument in this essay 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.

Firstly, this essay posits that Eke invokes mythical figures from Igbo myths to actualise social control of society. Three of such mythical characters are Bri represented, namely, Ani, Arochukwu and Amadioha. These are deities famous for their fierce and unrelenting nature in pursuance of public morality and justice. Poem after poem, the poet recommends that where the leaders and members of the society fall short of expectation they should be dragged before these deities in order to regulate the conduct of such public office holders. Relying on the artistic power of rhetorical question, apostrophe and alliteration, the poet represents mythical figures invoked to instill proper conduct against dictatorship, domestic violence, and other sundry infractions.

Secondly, the poet represents mythical figures in the poems in order to articulate societal redirection. It is evident through the poems that the society has skidded off course and that there is need for some form of redirection to stem the tide of public theft, political recklessness and military dictatorship. To achieve

this, Eke evokes mythical figures in Yoruba myths, such as Sango, Ogun, Eshu, Sonponna and Obatala. Eke believes that society can change for the better if we return to our traditional African myths for direction. Relying on metaphor allusion, animal imagery and irony, the poet contextualises the power of the above mentioned mythical figures when sought for help through invocation. The various speakers represented call the erring leaders to be summoned before the deities and swear to uphold good leadership tenets.

Finally, Eke invokes mythical figures from Benin myths and they include, Olokun, Ebomisi and Esu. All these deities are regarded as extremely powerful and feared by all and sundry. 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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