

# DEMYSTIFICATION OF MYTHIC MONSTERS AND THE PREVALENT NIGERIAN SOCIAL ORDER IN BEN BINEBAI'S *BEYOND NIGHTMARE*.

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## ***Abstract***

*The Nigeria (African) social-economic and political terrain is filled with mythical monsters that have taken the destiny of the continent and nations of Africa hostage. These mythical monsters daily cause nightmares to the people and body polity of the Nigerian federation. The paper explores how the playwright's demystification of myth proffers solutions to political, social and economic problems that bedevilled his society. Ben Binebai's **Beyond Nightmare** is therefore studied as a drama of social quest and political revelations. The playwright, especially, the committed artist uses his work to build his society. The sensitive nature of this responsibility forces him to devise means and techniques that may need further interpretation and those that can speak clearly for themselves. It is the dialectics of reality and fiction, the realm that dangles between actuality and "fictionality" in the telling of the story or in the creation of the play that is the focus of this paper. Using the content analysis approach of the qualitative research method, the paper examines the selected play in order to highlight its relevance to the growing body of Nigerian dramatic literature and the current political situation in the country.*

## **Introduction**

The political climate of Nigerian national life has left little to be desired, as intrigues, cruelty, and mythical monsters continue to hold hostage the present

and the future of the people. The playwright in Nigeria has shown concern overtime patriotically through his work in lending a voice towards the resolution of conflicts within his immediate society. It is in the application of the playwright's text, created fictionally to the social situation around him that relevance is to be sought in the created work. To this end, the committed playwright must, while making his work relevant to his immediate society strive for universality in the treatment of his subject or themes.

Beginning from the time of ancient Greek playwrights to the modern, the art of mythic re-workings has found expression in dramaturgy. Each storyteller reworks materials from mythology, folklore and legends in their own way to tell a unique story. In the Nigerian mythic universe, there has been an excavation by playwrights of traditional myths and an attempt to reconstruct these myths in order to apply them in redefining current social realities. Wole Soyinka, John Pepper Clark, Femi Osofisan, Esiaba Irobi, Ahmed Yerima, Sam Ukala, Sunny Ododo, Austine Anigala and several other playwrights in Nigeria, have used their plays to elicit parallels and symbolically objectify the prevalent social-political and economic situations in Nigeria (Africa). Nigerian playwrights have thus presented in their plays a construction of a social vision with a commitment to mass appeal using myths from the traditional repertory. Often, despotic rulers and leaders have received the butt of these dramatic attacks.

Soyinka's patronage of the myth of Ogun, Osofisan's fascination with the myth of Orunmila and Eshu, Esiaba's romance with Amadioha, and more recently, Adesi's reverence of Egbesu and Agadagba are but few examples of this burgeoning literary style. Most often, the cohesive and hegemonic structures of these myths are dismantled or re-enforced in order to interpret present and contemporary situations that represent reconstructed realities. Abubakar S. Abdullahi states of Soyinka and Osofisan that:

Wole Soyinka, an Ogun disciple, is shown to prefer and adopt the principles of the deity in his dramaturgy while Femi Osofisan favours Orunmila and his messenger, Esu. The philosophies of both divinities permeate Osofisan's dramaturgy (Abubakar 125).

The fictiveness of these myths, folklore and legends creates intellectual shapes that render interpretations that shield the personality and intentions of the playwright. The fictiveness also renders the work of the playwright malleable to several interpretations which might change with time. Abubakar further states of the use of myth by Yoruba playwrights that:

The flexibility of the Yoruba pantheon, for example, made available to generations of Yoruba playwrights, varieties of myths and these myths influence their dramaturgies, in their bid

to meet universal taste and, at the same time, remain contextually relevant (Abubakar 117).

George Franklin in *The Magical Writer: A Writing Intensive in the Reclaiming Tradition* expresses the reason why writers find it useful to explore ancient myths and legends in interpreting current realities when he states that:

Myths embody simple plots, and often share common features such as a call, a challenge, a journey, a period of testing, an initiation, a climate of struggle, and a triumphant return. Myths are remarkably simple. I think of myth as a collection of story element - character, conflict, situations, and possible outcomes – which each storyteller assembles in a unique way (Franklin 1).

Perhaps, no other playwright best exemplifies Franklin's model of myth and dramaturgy in the Nigeria theatre than Soyinka and Osofisan. Osofisan especially follows Franklin's model in his play *Twinkle Twangle: A Twyning Tayle* in which he demonstrates his arguments of the superiority of his model of societal regeneration using the myth of Orumila and Eshu against Soyinka's Ogunian model.

Myth and legends are often times used by playwrights as a "heuristic principle, a route of discovery, a way of portraying our assumptions about

ourselves. We take the myths, the earliest and often most potent stories we have and we defamiliarize them” (Allan 60-61). Implicit in mythic reworking is the idea that contemporary man has something to learn from the myths and legends of the past as a way of self discovery. When an author reworks a popular myth or legend, he interprets and manipulates it to suit his artistic vision. The mythical character, removed from human limitations can perform supernatural feats and the audience accepts the characters as such. Set in the distance past, time is of essence in making the myth fabulate and acceptable. When facts about a character are known in oral tradition or written record in too recent memories, it becomes fairly difficult for the playwright to romanticize and take flights of fancy with them. Essentially, “whether a tale is a historical or mythic legend, the essential thing is that the narrator has his creative consciousness set in a recognised historical period and around some acknowledged historical figure as actor” (Okpewho 14).

In “Rethinking Myth”, Isidore Okpewho discusses myth under two approaches. First is the formalistic approach which he considers as “units of ideas which the artist discusses from various traditional sources grouped together into a convenient pattern of narration or performance” (Okpewho 3). The second he regards as the functionalistic approach to the study of myth which he considers as being anthropological. Okpewho define myth as:

That quality of fancy which informs the creative or configuration power of the human mind in varying degrees of intensity; in that sense we are free to call any narrative of the oral tradition – so long as it lays emphasis on fanciful play – a myth. Such understanding enables us account for several generations of the concept of myth, first as oral and now as fanciful idea (Okpewho 19).

It is clear that the playwright proceeds out of a principle to create a picture of society in motion in his dynamic rendering of historical alternatives to give significant insight to current happenings in his society using myth. Thomas Knipp regards as mythopoetic the process through which African writer confronts the “enormous political, social and economic problems that beset the African continent” (Knipp 39). Writers therefore employ this mythopoetic technique in order to create an intellectual milieu within which to define this problems that transverse their world. As the example of Soyinka, Clark, Achebe, Osofisan and others in the Nigerian literary cosmos has shown, the writer is a strong voice in shaping national consciousness and highlighting national realities. The writer is thus drawn to myth in order to construct an intellectual concept that fuses his collective emotions into a story – a mythopoetic construct. If the stories of the past become less clear and

more opaque, it becomes more authorless, less political and more poetic, it becomes a myth.

Benedict Ebimotimi Binebai is an up-coming playwright in Nigeria. Perhaps, Binebai is the most remarkable voice to emerge from the creeks of the Niger Delta after the long rule of J.P. Clark on the Nigerian literary scene. Born in Burutu, Delta State (popularly called Island of no regret) on the 19<sup>th</sup> of May 1968, he hails from Agoro, a community in Iduwini kingdom in the present day Bayelsa State of Nigeria. He has other published plays which include: *Corper's Verdict* (2007) Winner, Taraba State National Youth Service Merit Award 2000; *Seventh Virgin* (2008); *Drums of the Delta* (2010) Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Silver Jubilee Convention drama *Dance of the Ghost* (2010) and *My Life in the Burning Creeks* (2014). Undoubtedly, Binebai is the most strident voice in playwrighting to emerge from the Niger Delta since the generation of J.P. Clark, Sam Ukala, Austin Anigala, Barclays Ayakoromo and others.

### **Myth, Tradition and the Politics of Power in *Beyond Nightmare*.**

Princess Otutu, the only daughter of Pere Ingobai, The Pere (King) of Aghoro Kingdom, is kidnapped and held hostage in the forest of Aghoro by an unknown monster. As the play opens, Ebeyein who is the Chief Mother of the kingdom returns from a mission to the oracle of Abadiama to inform the king, chiefs and people of Aghoro kingdom that the princess

is alive and well but that her captors, as a price for her freedom, demands that the king abdicate the throne and stand naked before the gathering of Aghoro people or else the kidnapers promised to wreck havoc on the people of Aghoro kingdom.

Confused and alarmed by the demand of the kidnapers but considerate of the plight of his people and the life of his daughter, the king decides to comply with the request of the kidnapers.

Ebeyein: Pere, the goddess in need of amusement, if given sadness, knows nothing beyond destruction. What is it we cannot do for you? If the rhythm of the drums of captivity cannot spur you to dance for the freedom of our kingdom, stay on why we, the people and your daughter dance the eerie dance of death.

Pere: Speak no more, Ebeyein! Why must my people perish? Why must my only daughter die in captivity? I did not inherit a troubled kingdom from my forebears neither shall I leave behind a throne on fire... (12).

In Pere Ingobai valedictory speech, he exhorts his people to be united. Amid crying and wailing accompanied by a mournful dirge, Pere Ingobai proceeds to disrobe before his people.

But before he could totally disrobe himself, Olotu, the Chief Generalissimo of Aghoro kingdom stops him



and opts for war with the kidnappers of the princess as a way of resolving the looming crisis. Olotu says:

Olotu: Don't do it! I am humiliated, Pere. You shall not honour the will of the captors

Pere: Why Olotu?

Olotu: Peace and happiness have been our dear brothers and sisters since you came to the throne. We are not weary of their companionship. So, no one will be allowed to a chance to destroy our kingdom. Let the Princess die in captivity if there are no mannish men in and messiahs amongst us. I Olotu, the military Generalissimo of Agoro Kingdom advocate that war is the solution. (15)

On consultation with the other chiefs and the people although opposed by Ebeyein, the kingdom in council decides that brave young men be sent out to the forest where the princess is being held hostage to search for her and rescue her from the fangs of her captors. Seibiri, Ebeyein's son, Adidi, Olotu's son and Alaska, the hunchback son of Tonkepa volunteer to go to the forest in search of the princess. The king makes a public proclamation that whoever returns with the princess will be crowned prince of Letu province of his kingdom and will have the princess as wife. Before living for their mission, Orukariwei, the chief priest of Egbesu, the war

God of Aghoro kingdom, is asked to fortify the young men for their mission.

Seibiri and Alaska are next seen in the forest of Aghoro quarrelling over whose right it is to be on the mission. Seibiri insults Alaska calling him a coward. As they gear up for a fight, Adidi enters and separates them. Seiberi turns to Adidi and insults him. The voice of the princess crying for help is heard thus putting to a halt further quarrels from the three young men. Alaska is quick to sight the monster and he hides while Adidi and Seibiri go their separate ways in search of the princess. The monster confronts Adidi and tricks him to his death.

Meanwhile, back at the palace, Pere Ingobai who is fast asleep on his throne dreams that Koboye, the wife of Bebareowei, Chief spokesperson of the kingdom leads the women of Aghoro kingdom in revolt against the king. In a ritual contest enacted with charms, music dance, movement and incantations, Pere Ingobai gains the upper hand and succeeds in dislodging the rebellious women. Roused from his dreams, the king orders the arrest of Koboye and her husband contrary to the counsel of Queen Ingobai.

The next action in the play takes us back to the search party in the forest of Aghoro where monster is dragging away the body of the slain Adidi as Alaska comes out of hiding to challenge him. Alaska, the hunch back son of Tonkepa, defeats the monster through physical manoeuvrings and wits. Together with the

Princess, Alaska ties the body of the monster firmly to a tree trunk. As they are about leaving the forest, Princess Otutu advises Alaska to take the bangle the monster is wearing from its wrist as proof of his conquest. Surprised that Alaska could risk his life to come and rescue her, Princes Otutu, in a state of elation expresses her love for Alaska. As they embrace, Seibiri who has been hiding cowardly, eavesdropping on their conversation stealthily moves in on Alaska and strikes him down from behind. Afraid for her own life, the Princess follows Seibiri home.

Back at the community, dawn is creeping in on the kingdom, Tuku, Ebeyein's daughter that is married to Amakiri in a neighbouring community enters wailing and informs her mother that her husband is missing. Ebeyein who initially scolds her daughter for not being much of a loving wife, however consoles her and advises her to return home with the assurance that her husband will soon return home safe and sound. As Tuku, exits, Seibiri enters with the Princess. Ebeyein is delighted with the tale told by Seibiri of his exploits, conquest and rescue of the princess from the hands of the monster in the forest of Aghoro. Strangely, the Princess confirms the story. Ebeyein, visibly elated, sings and dances for joy.

In the last scene of the play, drums summon the community to the palace of Pere Ingobai amid festivities. On being summoned by the Pere to be formally presented to Seibiri as the only survivor from

the team of three dispatched to rescue the Princes, Princess Otutu breaks down in tears and tells the story of how Seibiri murdered Alaska and claimed her for himself. As the only survivor and as the crises deepens as to who really is the true rescuer of the princess, Alaska suddenly appears, his hunchback gone. Pleasantly surprised, Princess Otutu runs to Alaska. Alaska presents the king with the bangle he collected from the hand of the monster. The bangle is identified as belonging to Ebeyein. As the crises thicken further, a messenger enters to inform the gathering that hunters have discovered the body of Amakiri and Adidi in the forest. Ebeyein confesses her role in the plot to overthrow the king and claim the throne for herself. Angered, the king pronounces death on Ebeyein but on the plea from Queen Ingobai, Ebeyein's death sentence is commuted to banishment. Koboye and her husband are released from prison and Alaska is crowned Prince of Letu province of Aghoro kingdom with Princess Otutu as his Queen. The play ends with the celebration of the royal marriage and the survival of the princess from the hands of her captors.

Written in 1998, *Beyond Nightmare* was first performed in 2001 by the African Temple of Creativity Theatre Troup of the University of Ibadan under the artistic direction of Abiodun Olayiwola. The play was published by Kraft Books Limited, in 2008.

## **Demystification of Mythic Monsters in *Beyond Nightmare***

In dramatising myth and ritual, Binebai proposes that the sacred and the profane are two aspects of the same action. He thus presents a re-examination of ritual and mythic practices, opening them up for public scrutiny and questioning in a typical Osofisan's style. Thus the monster in the forest of Aghoro is demystified and de-masked. Its identity revealed as Tuku's husband and the cousin of Pere Ingobai, who in connivance with Ebeyein, his mother in-law, kidnapped Princess Otutu in an attempt to force Pere Ingobai to abdicate the throne. Thus Binebai avows that there are no mythic monsters inhabiting the forest of human social, political, or economic lives except those created by men in order to cow and frighten humanity into submission and keep society in perpetual subservience in its dislocated status. In order to relocate society therefore, the dislocating factors has to be dislocated for the dislocated to be relocated. By unmasking the monster and revealing his true identity and the political plot of Ebeyein, Binebai enlightens his audience on the true state of society's slavish conditions and reveals the identity of those holding society's past, present and future hostage. By opening up the myth in this way, the playwright hopes to restore the masses from a dislocated status while dislocating the factors that has dislocated the people over time. Here lies Binebai's thesis in his plays!

In Africa, where despair deepens in the practice of politics and in the lives of the ordinary people, the writer must represent the vanguard of the armies that will liberate the masses from ignorance and cultural stagnation and restore for them their earlier attachment to life (Awoonor quoted in Knipp 48).

In this play, as all mythopoetic poets do, Binebai returns to his tradition and cultural roots for inspiration in navigating contemporary realities that bedevil his society. He thus uses myth and ritual as an interpretative framework built on symbolism upon which he erects the structure of the play. As observed by Thomas Knipp, “myth and metaphor operating together occasionally achieve statements of great compression and resonance” (Knipp 53).

The Oracle in African mythology is an infallible arbiter. But here Binebai reveals the hand of the humans behind the oracle in a typical Osifisan’s style, manipulating the gods and the oracle. Binebai is thus saying that the instability plaguing Nigerian political system has identifiable and known manipulators. He is therefore calling for the unmasking of the thieves of the popular will and a rejection of forced political marriage of the people to politicians and political positions for justice and progress to be enthroned. The conflict in the play is woven around Ebeyein’s betrayal and her un-

inhibited love and quest for power which results in the kidnap of Princess Otutu and an attempt to force and intimidate Pere Ingobai to abdicate the throne. Binebai demonstrates that “deception and manipulation are possible because humans are susceptible to them” (Enekwe 3). He thus exposes the pattern of current political intrigues in the Nigerian national life.

Binebai also appropriates the myth of Seibou (evil forest) as the political terrain known only to a select few who, by their knowledge of the workings of the evil forest, keep other humans out of it why they themselves live and rule society from such evil enclaves. The ignorance of the populace becomes the secret to their ability to subjugate society. Ebeyein, while insisting that it was a monster that kidnapped Princess Otutu and insisting on the abdication of the throne by Pere Ingobai, was actually the unseen hand behind the human monster created by her in an attempt to forcefully take over the kingdom of Agoro. Binebai thus says that the political players in Nigeria create evil forest within the national polity from where they manipulate the will and economy of the nation. An unmasking of these “Ebeyeins” in society becomes imperative to humanity’s ability to take its destiny further and free itself from these mythical monsters that hold its national polity hostage. The fact that Ebeyein is a chief and a prominent member of Pere Ingobai’s cabinet underscores current happenings in Nigeria political terrain in which President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan made mention of the

fact that there are Boko Haram apologists in his cabinet as reported by Olalekan Adetayo in *Punch Newspaper* of 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012 when he states that:

Some of them are in the executive arm of government; some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the arm forces, the police and other security agencies. Some continue to dip their hands and eat with you and you won't know the person who will point a gun at you or a bomb behind your house. (Adetayo, *Jonathan- Boko Haram has Infiltrated my Government*)

From this point of view Boko Haram insurgency and acts of terrorism is manipulated by political big-wigs. Retired General Andrew Owoye Azazi before his death in December 2012, as National Security Adviser to President Goodluck Jonathan, during the South-South Economic Summit held at Asaba, Delta State on April 28<sup>th</sup> 2012, blamed the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) for Boko Haram insurgency in the country. He categorically stated that:

PDP got it all wrong from the beginning, from the on-set by saying that Mr. A can rule, Mr. A cannot... according to PDP's convention, rules and regulation and not



according to the constitution and created a climate for what has manifest itself this way... But, then I must be quick to point out that today, even if all the leaders we know in Boko Haram are arrested, I don't think the problem would end, because there are tentacles. ( *Azazi, Boko Haram is PDP and PDP is Boko Haram*)

Within the politics of the political parties in Nigeria, there has been accusations and counter accusations as to who is responsible for the Boko Haram menace. Thus it has become a negotiating tool in the hands of politicians. It is very instructive that as in *Beyond Nightmare*, one of the demands on President Jonathan by Boko Haram is for him to abdicate the seat as president of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. Like Ebeyien, one can clearly see a form of faceless, shadowy political negotiations using terrorism as a tool.

The play clarifies the fact that monsters are myths that creates other myths in other to entrap man in their web. Clearly, Binebai is pointing to current global issues in this mythologized drama. Through the character of Ebeyein, he reveals the sponsors of state terrorism as people living within the corridors of power and exposes their economic and political motives. The global stance of no negotiation with terrorists is made apparent in Tonkepa's advice and in the resolution by the community to go to war with the kidnappers of the

princess instead of paying the price stated for the release of the princess. Alaska's confession to Princess Otutu on the nature and existence of monsters is very telling in this regards. He says:

Alaska: The world is full of monsters,  
Monster do not live only in the forest,  
They are not only those eerie mythical  
Creatures with double heads and  
Many hands. They are in our very homes  
and

Everywhere a man lives. Monsters  
Also are we humans. Sometimes  
They do not take the shape of men.  
Princess, every human game has a titled  
Monster. To succeed in life you must gain  
Freedom. Like Olotu said,  
"If men do not think of freedom, freedom  
Cannot think of men." Monsters in  
whatever form They manifest must be  
fought and Defeated to gain freedom  
(Binebai 43-44).

Furthermore, the myth of Egbesu, the Ijaw retributive god of justice is sustained as Egbesu's claim of infallibility is proven as the playwright demonstrates that Egbesu never fails his supplicants only the individual supplicant fails through miss-use of the powers of Egbesu. In doing this, the playwright sustains the animist worldview of his Ijaw people.

Several forces enabled Binebai to shape his own unique drama based on a philosophical foundation that affirms Africa's contribution to myth, legends, and folklore of the world civilization. In the preface to the play, Dapo Adelugba states that:

In this period when women's rights are becoming more and more a theme of political valorisation, the playwright makes two important points: first that some women could be treacherous but not all women are treacherous; secondly, that the mythic monsters which people our fictions, dramas and narratives are not necessarily creatures of the woods and wilds, but, sometimes, our own brothers and sisters, nephews and cousins and townspeople in disguise (Adelugba in Binebai 6-7).

*Beyond Nightmare* is steeped in the tradition and myths of his ethnic Ijaw people of the Niger Delta region of Nigeria. His desire to reconstruct society along Marxist ideals renders the play capable of defining a different conception of the relationship between drama and society. He "joins the group of African/African American writers and thinkers who believe in arts functional, committed, and collective attributes" (Okur 2-3). As clearly articulated by Okur:

The goal of liberation movement was not simply political independence from the colonial powers but rather control over national resources for the benefit of the masses. Likewise our, literature, drama would need to start its operations from the center of culture, located in its historical values in order to educate the masses. Art needed to reflect the society's values, it has to be collective and functional (Okur 3).

Thus, Binebai aligns his cultural myths along these paradigms in attempting to reconstruct society by making society aware of the need to free itself from foreign political, ideological, and cultural domination for an upward movement towards self realisation in order for society to be able to control its destiny. In attempting to generate a located insight, Binebai uses a cultural analysis that is formulated around authentic cultural elements which do not deny the contributions of the contemporary to the mythoforms that generates his located insight. By doing so he rejects hegemonic structures erected by man that holds society hostage and captive for his own erected structures and proposals which liberates his characters from bondage and allows them to grow within a reconstructed insight.

In the play, Ben Binebai adopts a combination of myth and folk traditions to tell the story. By so doing situates his play in the realm of fiction while actually pointing his critical guns at certain social, political and

economic Machiavellians in the Nigerian society. The success and strength of the play is in its universal application of the quest for power and the desire by man to ascend power at all cost.

Defamiliarization is a device adopted by the playwright to make the myth look unfamiliar. It is a radical process of looking at the same story from a radically different angle and forcing new meanings and re-reading into old and familiar myths and legends while using them to interpret contemporary situations. In *Beyond Nightmare*, Binebai uses the myth of the monster and the forest of Agoro to critique the villains of the Nigerian society. The myths of the monster in the forest of Aghoro, Seibou, the Oracle of Abadiama, and Agadagba as used by the playwright becomes liberating because they provide a structure for looking at the present in a defamiliarizing light. At the end of the play, Binebai demystifies his myth by revealing the identity of those behind the myths and thus giving the audience an alternative interpretation of the myths in order to construct a new social reality. Binebai's drama like that of *Osofisan* is set in reconstruction, "ritual and tradition initiates a re-interpretation and revalorisation of both the old and the new" (Okur 3). His use of oral tradition serves to illuminate the power of the African society as an educational tool as well as a philosophical one. A strategy he uses effectively in swaying his argument. Allan Wall stresses that:

This mixture of ancient and contemporary language and sensibility is at the heart of our modern reworking. We intermingle the present with the past; this mixture, this incongruity, a species of intellectual miscegenation generates energy (Allan 61).

In the playwright's vision, a re-ordering of society is needed in order to bring change, succour and progress to the oppressed peoples of the world. Tonkepa's speech the deliberation by the council of chiefs on how best to free Princess Otutu from her abductors aptly demonstrate this summation in the following statement by Tonkepa:

Tonkepa: Pere, we find no fault in your throne.

It shall be a bitter miscarriage of royal respect

If you dance to the will of the enemies

I ask you Pere and people,

Hear me out.

What is the guaranty that

The Princess will be released

After this costly and cursing ritual?

Your highness, if men do not think of freedom

Freedom cannot think of men.

Every wrong thinking given action sets

Humanity backward. We will perish here

Every minute if we do not think properly.  
Our survival requires a strong spirit and  
Vision but it shall crumble  
Where there is none (Binebai 16).

Binebai shows a consistent concern in his plays for the economically, ecologically, politically and socially destabilized peoples of the Niger Delta region and seeks to use the Niger Delta problem in his plays as a metaphor in highlighting the Nigerian problem and dramatically postulating and professing on the Nigerian project or union. As Mazisi Kunene states; “there is some truth in the claim that change is possible only through myth, for myth can take many forms. It can reorganize the historical context in terms of modern perspectives” (Kunene 190). Binebai uses the process of mythification and symbolism as a strategy to broaden the interpretative base of his characters and thematic preoccupation. In this context “men and women in society are seen not as individuals who must be inspired to a wider world but as individuals perpetually intertwined in a cosmic context and cosmic continuity” (Kunene 200). *Beyond Nightmare* dramatises man as the centre of social order. Ebeyein’s action of orchestrating the kidnap of the princess though individually perpetuated, threatens the coherent existence of a social order. Individual actions become intertwined in a chain that links everybody together in a social continuum. The opening up of the myths becomes a process of demystifying evil for societal awareness. It is this form

of awareness that results to the questioning and challenging of existing systems that can relocate society from their dislocated status and bring them in harmony with the progressive cosmic and social focus.

Thus myth is man's creation in attempting to explain the mysteries of life and make sense in the complexities of existence. While Binebai sees myth in this play as cohesively communal, he advocates individual approach to dismantling and dislocating the cohesive communality of myth in generating societal change in a Marxian mode. Implicit in this approach is the individual's responsibility in bringing about change and social renewal. In the banishment of Ebeyein, the people of Agoro kingdom accept the judgement of Pere Ingobai and progressively work together towards positive communal change which came about as a result of an individual ambition. The main point at the end of the play is that cultural renewal is implanted as societal positive dispositional consciousness. This is the point at the end of the play in which mythic monsters are finally demystified when Pere Ingobai makes the following statement:

Pere: Tonkepa, your wisdom cools my heart. The women of Agoro shall have their place in my kingdom. Ebeyein is hereby banished. In her place I publicly pronounce Koboye, the wife of Bebearowei, the new Mother of the Kingdom. Our son Adidi who died to



rescue my daughter shall be given state  
burial as a mark of honour. (65-66)

Since kingship is central to the people's consciousness, history and evolutionary principle of communal progress, the Pere's pronouncements mark a final sanction of the new order in Agoro kingdom. *Beyond Nightmare* is thus a penetrating deduction on the nature of ambition, power and politics in their joint interaction in society. It is informed by a philosophy that is partly Marxist and partly African.

Binebai decries internal forces of colonisation and subjugation. He sees segments of the Nigerian nation colonized and appropriated by a certain privileged group within the country. He observes that that group is not satisfied with merely holding the other groups within the country in its grip but by using a kind of perverted logic, the group seeks to distort, disfigure and destroy the past, present and future of the oppressed groups within Nigeria of which his Niger Delta people forms a majority. He thus resent the political estrangement of the Niger Delta from the centre of political power which he sees as fundamental to social and economic emancipation of the region and takes sides with subversive mass uprising that will revive regional consciousness and lead to greater self determination for the people of the Niger Delta while remaining within the Nigerian project. His *Drums of the*

*Delta* prophesied the emergence of a Nigerian president of Niger Delta extraction.

Thus present in all his plays is the dominant figure of the exploiter either as an individual or as a group of persons who could always be appropriated as the Nigerian nation. In *Corper's Verdict*, it is Chief Okafor against the workers in his factory that he keeps in perpetual poverty and servitude; in *Beyond Nightmare*, it is Ebeyein who holds a kingdom hostage; in *Dance of the Ghost*, it is a group of person masquerading as ghost; in *Drums of the Delta*, it is the Queen of Odokoland and her majestic forces against the helpless children, men and women of the Niger Delta; while in *Seventh Virgin* it is the kidnappers of Anetorufa, the Seventh Virgin that hold hostage the people and kingdom of Ogokiri. Binebai has written over fifteen other plays which have been staged and awaiting publication. Perhaps it is only when the corpus of his plays is fully published and available to the public can his true position as a prolific literary icon be established.

### **Conclusion.**

It is clear that Binebai attempts in the play to link Nigeria's present disconnectedness and social-politico-economic impoverishment, terrorism and acts of political brigandage to the irrelevance of ancient and past traditional superstitious beliefs and ritual practices, seeking to use the past to interpret the present. He sees in the demystification of myth a parallel in demystifying

present social-politico-economic realities. If therefore as Enekwe contends,

the main function of art are intensification, clarification and interpretation of experience, and drama and fiction clarify and deepen for us emotional incidents of familiar human situations and incidents and make ideas intimate and alive (Enekwe 11).

Binebai succeeds in the play in opening up the intrigues that hinder the progress of the Nigerian state. Current happenings in Nigeria occur very closely to the dramatic. The emergence of Boko Haram which some have linked to fallout of recent politicking and electioneering is a case in point. The recent kidnap of Chibok school girls and the seemingly intractable nature of the terrorist cell has become a nightmare to Nigerians, the Nigerian government, and the security forces. Binebai seems to have prophetically foretold and warned against these happenings in his play.

Binebai has been active in writing a series of social dramas of ritual-like processes in which ethnic and national identities are dislocated for the purpose of reconstruction of a new social order. The plays feature an imposition of a re-constructed new social order on the worldview of his characters. This becomes a form of negotiated resistance to the dislocating forces within the body polity of the Nigerian nation. *Beyond Nightmare* therefore features the moral accounting metaphor as a

way of jolting society from stupor occasioned by dislocating forces into a state of self awareness prompted by readings in the actions of his dramatic characters.

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