

# An Agenda for a New Nigeria

## The Imperative of Transformation



Edited by  
**Remi Anifowose**  
&  
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## Fostering National Unity Using Parallel Motifs in Nigerian Mythology

\* IWU IKWUBUZO

### Introduction

NIGERIA, as is well known, is a pluralist society. Some have argued that the country is a mere geographical expression, a product of forced political amalgamation of disparate ethnic nationalities with divergent social, religious and cultural backgrounds. Nigeria is also seen as an amalgamation conceived by the British for colonial administrative convenience. This is why Mbabuike (2001:46) thinks "we need to remind ourselves that the Nigerian contract is a colonial imposition in which the colonial masters did not consult the Nigerian people."

The thinking that the structure of Nigeria bespeaks a conglomeration of unrelated peoples and that the union is replete with disparity and imbalance appears to be justified by the many woes that bewilder the nation today. There are frequent ethnic hostilities, cries of social injustice and marginalization, disillusionment about a political arrangement whereby certain political offices appear to be an exclusive preserve of some groups or sections of the country, agitations for resource control due to overt deprivation and exploitation of "the goose that lays the golden egg", etc. According to Banjo (2001), "the incessant cry of marginalization indicates

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that sections of the community rightly or wrongly do not feel that their interests are being sufficiently taken care of and the traditional sources of friction, which in recent times seem exacerbated by the return to civilian democracy, are pluralism in ethnicity and religion."

There is also the observed tendency of Nigerians to easily or readily express more allegiance to their ethnic root than to the nation. Nigerians seem to emphasize what divides them more than what unites them as a nation. Many incidents that occur point to the fact that Nigeria's unity is fragile, hence the continued quest for a truly united nation. Nigeria is still grappling with a lot of difficulties in its march towards authentic nationhood.

In February 2005, President Olusegun Obasanjo inaugurated what he called National Political Reform Conference in response to the wide and increasing agitations by Nigerians for convocation of a Sovereign National Conference, to look at the Nigerian Question and re-examine the basis for the continued unity of the country's component units. Yet, this move was trailed by criticisms, cynicisms and rejections by some groups which suspected that government had no genuine intention and that nothing concrete was likely to emerge from the conference, which some people described as a mere political jamboree and a talk shop.

In spite of its criticisms and the stalemate over the resource control issue that led to the walkout staged by the South-South delegates, the conference has come and gone and its recommendations have been submitted to government. What seems to be the question now is whether government will, on its part, implement the recommendations or allow them go the way of other recommendations in the past thereby giving credence to the people's skepticism about the sincerity of government in organizing the conference.

The solution to the Nigerian problem does not lie with the reform of its political structures alone. It may, of course, go a long way in resolving some of Nigeria's political problems if such problems are sincerely addressed and matched with altruistic recommendations that will uncompromisingly be implemented without arbitrarily favouring or protecting the interests of a



few people or some sections of the country, and if such recommendations must be seen to be immediately impactful on the political and constitutional terrains of the Nigerian polity. Though a good initiative, the political reform conference alone may not achieve the desired unity of Nigerian people. The effort should be complemented by other measures that will aim at emphasizing the traits shared by the Nigeria people.

Nigeria, in spite of its multi-ethnicism and cultural diversity, has some commonalities observable in the folklore of its people. For instance, we have observed some similarities in some Nigerian myths. Myth, a genre of oral literature in the field of folklore, is, according to Akporobaro (2001:61), "a kind of story or rudimentary narrative sequence, normally traditional and anonymous, through which a given culture ratifies its social customs or accounts for the origins of human and natural phenomena, usually in supernatural or, boldly imaginative terms;" a story believed to contain 'deeper truths, expressing collective attitudes to fundamental matters of life, death, divinity and existence (sometimes deemed to be 'universal').

This paper intends to explore how the parallels in Nigerian myths, with particular reference to the Igbo and Yoruba myths, may be exploited to emphasize the all-important issue of Nigeria's unity. It is hoped that if conscious effort is made to create awareness about the similarity of the Nigerian peoples' folklore, it may, perhaps, serve as a strong unifying factor. It may strengthen inter-ethnic relationships and reduce the incidence of discrimination, intolerance, antagonism and clashes among different ethnic groups in Nigeria. So, one measure that is being advocated for the promotion of socio-cultural tolerance among various ethnic groups is taking recourse to the people's folklore.

There are Igbo and Yoruba myths where similar themes or motifs are discernible. For our illustration, we shall look at their creation, hero and earth deity myths. There is recurrence of similar themes, images or motifs in myths across cultures. Such themes or images in myths across cultures are called universal symbols or 'archetypes' because they have common meaning or elicit comparable psychological responses and render similar cultural functions (Guerin, et al 1979; Hardin, 1989). In this paper, therefore, creation, the hero and the earth deity are understood

to be archetypes as they have common meanings in both the Igbo and Yoruba cultures. This is therefore a study in myth criticism.

### The Relevance of Folklore to Society

Traditional beliefs, customs, myths, legends, songs, etc., which a people evolved and handed down orally to their succeeding generations, are all aspects of their folklore. They not only mirror the society but also reflect certain sets of values which the ancestral forebears of the society accepted as an integral part of their ethos and used the same to inculcate good sense of values into the children (cf. Nnabuihe, 2001).

Unfortunately, these days, folklore remains a neglected aspect of our life as the whole attention is now shifted to science and technology. We are now in the computer-Internet age, a stage in human development where little or no emphasis is placed on our traditional values as our youths now take advantage of the facilities provided by the Internet to watch pornographic materials and even indulge in fraudulent practices. It is no longer modish for parents to tell their children traditional stories that embody moral values and other didactic themes.

Some Nigerians are inclined to think that the solution to our numerous national problems such as indiscipline, corruption, bad governance, etc., must be sought externally while others believe that it is better to look inwards for the solution to the problems that plague the nation. Rather than search elsewhere, let us look into our cultures, our folklore and see what it has to offer. We will notice, as Nnabuihe (2001:497) observes, that "the virtues projected by folklore wholly cultivated by indigenes ensured cohesion and harmonious living within the society" in the past. And "the intrinsic qualities enunciated by folklore include compassion, courage, fairness, honesty, humility, loyalty, perseverance, prudence and self-discipline." If we imbibe these qualities and exercise them in the present democratic dispensation, Nigeria will be better than what it is now.

Since the socio-political reality on the ground is not the best for the nation and therefore needs to be re-examined either mildly or strongly, every peaceful avenue should be explored in order to build a truly united



nation characterized by patriotism, nationalism, true federalism, peace and progress.

### Parallel Motifs in Nigerian Mythology: The Igbo and Yoruba Examples

Myth, as we noted earlier, is a component of folklore, which embodies values that are capable of sustaining the society. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where unity and national consciousness are highly demanded, to ensure collective and mutual existence, the study of the similar myths that are found in the folklore of the diverse ethnic groups is relevant. This is because myths reveal a people's origin and cultural identity, and may give hints about the relationship that existed between a people and their neighbours in the remote past.

We have, for instance, Igbo myths that relate the interaction and relationship between the Igbo and their Yoruba neighbour in the remote past. In the version of Igbo myth of origin recorded by Nwosu (1983) in which he (Nwosu) traces the world genealogy from the first man on earth, a hint is given about primordial relationship the Igbo had with the Yoruba. According to the myth, the two ethnic groups are related. Digbo and Onye-Odudu-uwa have a common ancestor, Nkwi, one of the sons of Oji (the ancestor of the black race). Digbo is from the family or tribe of Ikpalas, whereas Onye-Odudu-uwa, the priest who, whenever the need arose, consulted Afa oracle in Oyo, the traditional shrine of the Oji race, is from the tribe of Dughubaghas (the Yoruba) who were priests and herbalists. In this myth, a woman named Ugedo is said to have had an illicit affair with Onye-Ndu-Uwa (or Onye-Odudu-uwa) who used his charm to entice her. To avoid being exposed, Onye-Odudu-uwa asked Ugedo to elope with him and to steal one of the *Ndi Iche Akwa* sceptres, with a promise that if she succeeded, her son would become the king of the world. Ugedo eloped with him along with the whole of Dughubagha tribe to take refuge in a deep jungle.

Upon the discovery of this treachery, Ezemewi, the first son of Digbo had a desire to wage war against Onye-Ndu-Uwa and Ugedo but could not pursue it because of an existing covenant (egba ndu), which forbade any clash between Digbo's children and Onye-Ndu-Uwa

(the Yoruba progenitor who they today refer to as Oduduwa). Their pact is that they should never harm one another.

Acholonu (1989: 117), who believes that the account as presented by Nwosu's myth is correct, stresses that linguistic evidence attests that many West African tribes have common origins. And to buttress this, she agrees that there are many similarities that one can notice between Igbo and Yoruba languages as illustrated by the list of cognate words in the two languages which Nwosu included in his book, *Ndi Ichie Akwa*. She cites a few examples of these words:

Igbo	Yoruba
Afa (divination)	Ifa (divination)
Obejuru (knife), be (cut)	Obe (knife)
Wa (appear)	Wa (come)
Ito [ato] (three)	Eta (three)
Abo (two)	Abo (half)
O tele (it's been long)	Tele tele (long ago)
Mmi (me) (in Orlu dialect)	Emi (me)
Ogu (twenty)	Ogun (twenty)
Nti (ear)	Eti (ear)
Umu (children)	omo (child)
Ogwu (medicine)	Ogun (medicine)
Iba (malaria fever)	Iba (fever)
Gini? (what?)	Kini? (what?)
Okute (stone)	Okuta (stone), etc.

Acholonu observes further:

*The list is endless. The names of some Yoruba and Benin communities find their equivalents in Igboland. But the most striking is the frequent occurrence of the word Igbo in Yoruba common nouns and even in Yoruba folklore. These are not accidental, rather they point to a common origin and to historical contacts through the ages.*

Acholonu also makes reference to another popular story in Yoruba oral tradition to further illustrate the possible common origin and historical



contact between the two ethnic groups. It is a story of an incident in the remote past when the Igbo who dressed like masquerades and moved through the area, burning houses, destroying property and whipping people, besieged the Yoruba. These attacks were frequently repeated and the Yoruba found no peace, being afraid of the masquerades until a woman, Moremi, volunteered to go to Igboland and learn the secrets of the Igbo warriors.

Whether the myth's validity is accepted or, as would be expected, rejected by some people as one of the Yoruba scholars, Afolabi Olabode (1989) in his review of Nwosu's *Ndi Iche Akwa* has done, its relevance lies in the fact that it gives hint about a possible primeval blood relationship between the Igbo and some of their neighbours. Olabode (1989) himself acknowledges that the myth "ought to generate serious reactions from Igbo neighbours that allusions are made to ... the Yoruba, the Edo, the Itsekiri, the Urhobo, etc. Perhaps with such reactions, some light may be thrown into the whole origin of man on earth," and into the true relationships of these ethnic nationalities mentioned in the myth (emphasis, mine).

Apart from the above myth that gives some hints about a hypothetical primeval Igbo – Yoruba relationship, there exist in both the Igbo and the Yoruba mythological repertoires similar myths which further strengthens the assumption that there might have been some remote link or contact between the two ethnic groups. We shall now examine some examples of these similar myths.

### Creation Archetype

Creation is a universal archetype. Creation myths deal with both how the physical world as we know it came to be and how many features of specific cultures originated. According to Erdoes and Ortiz (eds.) (1984), "legends of human creation and the bringing of culture reflect in myriad of ways a common belief that people are living part of a natural world, brother and sister and the trees...and the world."

The belief in a created universe is expressed in African mythological traditions as we also have it the world over. God is an acknowledged creator of heaven and earth but in most myths both in Africa and elsewhere, God is not portrayed as an independent sole creator. The Igbo and the Yoruba have such myths.

In one of the versions of Igbo creation myths recorded in *Ojaadili*, a dramatic work by the Odunke Artists, God is not depicted as an independent creator. In the myth, which recounts how the cosmos, nature and man are brought into existence, God is rather shown to have worked jointly with some messengers. The myth presents a picture of the beginning when the earth had not assumed its present structure, when the creation processes were still on, and how God operated with the assistance of some agents: Hornbill, Tortoise and Chameleon, to ensure the completion of the work of creation. These agents were sent to earth at different occasions to inspect God's work of creation.

In the beginning when the earth is said to be covered by water, the Hornbill, (*Okpoko*) a primordial bird which happens to be the first messenger to be dispatched by God to go and inspect the state of the earth, cannot find a place to perch as the earth is covered by water. The bird is said to have been in continuous flight while awaiting dry land to emerge.

Another messenger, Tortoise (*Mbe*), is later sent by God to go and inspect the work of creation. But the Tortoise does not return and God sends yet another messenger, the Chameleon (*Ogwumagana*), to go and inspect the earth and report back to Him. *Ogwumagana* discovers that the earth is very soft. This primordial creature, *Ogwumagana*, claims to have been and worked with God alongside the Boa (*Eke Igba*) from the beginning till the task of creation is finally accomplished.

In another version of Igbo myth, a culture hero, Eri, or an agent simply referred to (in yet another version of the same myth) as the first man that came down by a ladder, is credited with the completion and ensuring



the fitness of the world. When God sends Eri down from heaven he discovers that the earth is waterlogged and unfit for human habitation. He complains to *Chukwu* (God) who sends down an Oka blacksmith to dry the water. The ika blacksmith dries up the water by blowing on the earth with his bellows.

A Yoruba creation myth recorded by Parrinder (1967:20) also presents a picture of the nature of the earth at the beginning of time and how God employed the services of some creative agents. It relates that at the beginning, the world was all marshy and watery. Living in the sky above it with other divinities is God, *Olorun*, the owner of the sky. One day, *Olorun*, the Supreme Being, invites the chief of divinities, *Orisa-Nla*, before His presence and tells him that He wants to create a solid ground. He entrusts him with the task. *Orisa-Nla* is then given a snail shell, which contains some loose earth, a pigeon and a hen with five toes. As he comes down, he throws the earth from the snail shell into a small place and puts the pigeon and the hen on it. They begin to scratch it and spread it about. Not long they cover much of the morass ground thereby forming a solid ground.

Here we notice that this motif of ensuring the solidification of the earth by an Oka blacksmith is parallel to the role played by *Orisa-Nla* alongside the pigeon and the hen – which are all creative messengers – in Yoruba mythology.

The Yoruba story goes on to say that when this creative agent reports to the Supreme Being, the latter sends a Chameleon (*Agemo*) to go and inspect the work. After the first inspection, the Chameleon reports that the earth is wide but not dry enough. When he is sent again, he reports this time that the earth is both wide and dry.

*Orisa-Nla* is later sent to earth by the Supreme Being to plant trees, give food and wealth to man. He gives him the palm-nut of the original palm tree whose nuts give oil and whose juice supplies drink. The first men are said to have been created in heaven and sent to earth. *Orisa-Nla* is entrusted with part of making men. He makes human beings from earth and moulds their physical features, reserving the

task of bringing the dummies to life to the Supreme Being alone. In another story that appears to be a variant of the above, *Orunmila* is said to have directed the work of creation under the orders of God. It is said that after God has prepared the elements of creation, He sends the Morning Star to go and invite the gods. Only *Orunmila* responds to the call. The Morning Star informs him that the materials of existence are kept in a snail shell, which is in the bag of existence, lying between the thighs of God. *Orunmila* collects it and comes down below. He scatters the soil and gets a hen and pigeon to spread it about.

In yet another version of Yoruba creation myth, it is the enterprising god, *Obatala*, who first thinks of creating a habitable world out of the watery domain of *Olokun*. *Olodumare* permits it and *Obatala* descends to earth by chain, lands at Ile-Ife and succeeds in creating a world. However, while on a trip to the abode of the gods to report his success, *Olokun* in jealous rage floods the new earth. The destitute first men have to bargain with shrewd *Esu* to carry their message to *Olodumare*. *Orunmila* intervenes and the earth is saved.

From the Igbo and Yoruba myths cited above, we could notice, among others, the incidence of the following similar motifs:

- (i) the motif of the earth being originally covered by water before the emergence of dry land;
- (ii) the motif of inspector – messengers being dispatched to earth by God to assess work of creation.

The archetypal animal, Chameleon, sent by God to inspect the state of the earth during creation is found in both the Igbo and Yoruba myths. In Yoruba mythology, the Chameleon is (the sky) God's messenger whom He sends to find out how the work of creation is progressing. The Chameleon first finds out that the earth is not dry enough but on his second trip reports that the earth is both wide and dry – a report similar to that given by the same animal in the Igbo myth after God had sent 'him' on an inspection mission to earth.

Apart from the similarity of role played by the Chameleon in the Igbo and Yoruba creation myths cited above, there are also similar aetiological myths



told about the peculiar feature of this animal in both mythological cultures. They are the tales of why the Chameleon walks slowly. These stories usually include the story of another animal which also has a peculiar feature. The Igbo version, for instance, goes with the story of "Why the Hornbill's head is big".

In this Igbo aetiological myth, the Chameleon (*Ogwumagana*) and Hornbill (*Okpoko*) claim to have witnessed the form of the earth when it newly emerged. Whereas *Ogwumagana* claimed that the earth was still very soft and had solidified not when 'he' saw it, *Okpoko* claimed that when 'he' saw the earth, it was still covered by water and there was no land (earth). In Yoruba mythological corpus, the same myth with a worldview parallel to that of the Igbo exists. The only variation noticed in the Igbo and Yoruba versions is in one of the characters' names. The Chameleon (called *Ogwumagana* in Igbo, and *Agemo* in Yoruba) features and plays the same role in the two versions. But the Hornbill (*Okpoko*), the other character that features in the Igbo version, has 'his' place taken up by Shrew (*Asin*) in the Yoruba version.

In these two cultures – Yoruba and Igbo – this myth is an attempt to explain the reason why the animals have certain peculiarities with which they are known today. The Chameleon walks slowly or carefully to avoid 'piercing the earth' which 'he' met in a soft state. The Hornbill (Igbo version) has a big head because he is said to have buried in his head the corpses of his parents who died while he was still in flight awaiting dry land to emerge. The Shrew (Yoruba version) has an offensive stench because 'he' claimed to have carried 'his' parents' corpses on his body until they decomposed, as there was no earth to bury them.

Other common features in the Igbo and Yoruba myths cited above include:

- (i) the motif of employing the services of creative agents to ensure the solidification and fitness of the earth as seen in the roles of the Oka blacksmith in the Igbo myth, and *Orisa-Nla* accompanied by the Pigeon and Hen, in Yoruba myth;
- (ii) the motif of the first man or a supernatural being sent down from heaven by God is observed in the myths of both cultures (*Eri*, in the Igbo myth and *Orunmila* or *Obatala*, in the Yoruba myth);

- (iii) the motif of the Supreme Being sending *Orisa-Nla* to earth to plant trees and give food to man in the Yoruba myth has a parallel in one of the versions of Igbo myths. In the Igbo version, the culture hero, *Eri*, (the first man sent down from heaven by *Chukwu*) is said to have on *Chukwu*'s command immolated his first son, daughter and servants when his people were about to be wiped out by hunger, and later, yam, cocoyam, palm tree, breadfruit, etc., sprouted from their graves and provided food for the Igbo progeny; and
- (iv) the motif of creative agents' participation in the creation of man. *Ogwumagana*, in Igbo myth, claims to be co-creator with God in the making of everything on earth including man. *Orisa-Nla*, in Yoruba myth, is said to be entrusted with part of the work of making man. He moulded human dummies, which God in turn gave life.

In these examples cited, we notice that in the Igbo and Yoruba cosmologies, God, the Supreme Being, is conceived as the author of life and other aspects of creation, but He delegated different agents to bring the task of creation to completion.

It is fascinating to note that there is a striking similarity between the Igbo and Yoruba creation myths. These instances of similarities raise the question of possible common sources for tales, which, with local adaptations or variations, are found not only in Igbo and Yoruba folkloristic traditions but also in different communities in the African continent, again illustrating the universal nature of myth.

### Deliverer/Hero Archetype

The deliverer or the hero is another motif that we find in the myths or legends of both the Igbo and Yoruba cultures. The hero though, is a universal archetype of deliverance. Through the hero's action or death, his people may be liberated from oppressions or problems and challenges that threaten their existence. The problem from which a hero saves his people may be that of famine, killer or deadly disease, war, extermination, captivity or incessant raids (Ikwubuzo, 2000).

Across Africa, we have myths of the hero where the heroic feats of certain personages are related. In different societies such myths share some



similarity in having a theme of a deliverer or a culture hero/heroine. One of the Igbo stories that has this theme is that which is told about Njoku, the first son, and Ada, first daughter of Igbo (also referred to as Nri in another version of Igbo myth) who were sacrificed for the survival of the Igbo primordial family when the people were about to be exterminated by hunger. Njoku and Ada, according to the myth, had their bodies sliced into pieces and buried in mounds on the orders of *Chukwu*. Later, yams and cocoyams sprouted from the mounds where Njoku's and Ada's bodies were interred respectively. The Igbo people ate these crops and were saved. This is the myth of the origin of yam, a chief and highly revered crop in Igboland. There is a yearly *Ahiajoku* festival celebrated in Igboland in honour of Njoku, the sacrificed son of Igbo.

Among the Yoruba, the story of Moremi and her son, Olu-Orogbo<sup>1</sup> also has a theme of giving up a son to achieve a worthy purpose – the deliverance of the Yoruba race. Moremi pledged her son as a sacrifice to a river deity, *Esinminrin*, (*Osimiri* is also a river deity among the Igbo) for the liberation of her people of Ife when they were constantly invaded, terrorized and looted by a people who disguised themselves as Egunguns and came from a distant city on pillaging expedition to Ife. To achieve this, Moremi first of all offered herself to be taken captive by the enemies. During her sojourn, she unravelled the real identity of the 'Egunguns' and escaped back to her city to reveal the secret, which led to the defeat of the raiders on their later pillaging trip to Ife. Moremi made good her promise by sacrificing her young son to the river deity. With her sacrifice, her people were liberated, as the raiders never came again to harass and loot them. This theme of sacrificing a young son (Moremi's son) is similar to the sacrifice made of Njoku and Ada (Nri's son and daughter) in Igbo myth. Both sacrifices were made to ensure the salvation or liberation of the people.

#### Earth Deity – The Archetypal Woman

The concept of Earth deity occurs in almost all the mythologies of the world. Across cultures, the figure is portrayed as both a creature and a creator. It is associated with life principle, birth, fertility, growth, abundance, protection, morality, etc. Parrinder (1967), who describes

the conception as a belief in the spiritual power animating the earth, also notes that the belief is almost universal and found all over Africa. In different cultures, it is called by different names but acknowledged to play a similar role.

The deity, as Parrinder also rightly points out, is usually conceived in some cultures as female and sometimes as the wife or partner of a celestial deity. This deity occurs in Igbo and Yoruba myths (*arusi* is the Igbo word for deity and *orisa*, the Yoruba counterpart). Among the Igbo, this earth deity is called *Ala* and conceived as a mother, the mythical wife of *Igwe*, 'sky'. But Ugonna (2001) explains that the conception of *Ala* as only female is not general among the Igbo. He traces the concept of *Ala* as female to Western usage, which tends to see *Ala* as female. Guided by what they read about the Western archetype, Earth goddess, many Igbo writers proceeded to brand *Ala* the Igbo Earth goddess. Ugonna explains that though the Igbo conceive the deity as female, in reality they primarily conceive it as male because they do talk of both *Oke Ala* (Male Land) and *Nne Ala* (Mother Land). However, he notes that there is basically only one *Ala* deity, which "could manifest himself in any shrine or any other place and at any time either as *Nne/Oke Ala* or *Nwunye/Nne Ala*". Igbo myth portrays *Ala* as both a creature and a creator. According to Okafor (1992:18), "the concept of the world as made by God and Ana [*Ala*] ... is recurrent motif in Igbo cosmology."

*Ala* is held in high esteem. She is believed to be a ruler of men, a source of morality and protector of harvest. She is responsible for giving fertility to both crops and human beings. *Ala* is also the queen of the underworld who receives the dead into her womb. According to Ugonna (2001), "all life springs from the earth and ultimately returns to it. Vegetable life springs from the earth. Animals live and die on earth and there is an endless earth-centred cycle of regeneration."

In Yoruba culture, the deity is called *Orisa-Oko* and conceived as male. A calabash-carrying female called *Iyawo Orisa-Oko* represents 'his' wife. Like *Ala* of the Igbo, *Orisa-Oko* makes crops flourish and human beings supplicate 'him' to make their yams and grains grow. In Yoruba



myth, there is another *Orisa* called *Osun*, a river deity, which is also believed to possess the power to give fertility and children.

If we look at the above examples of the Igbo and Yoruba myths closely, we can elicit some significant didactic elements:

#### (i) Didactic Import of the Creation Myths

In the creation myths of the two ethnic groups, 'order' rather than 'chaos' is preferred. Efforts were made, as we see in the stories, to ensure the prevalence of cosmic order and stability. The value of order and peace is recognized. The Supreme Deity (*Chukwu/Olorun*) and His creative agents in their joint work of creation show us the beauty of working together – a situation where everyone, both big and small, has a role to play in the scheme of things to ensure success, stability and create a friendly and habitable environment. Such joint work is demanded from Nigerians to create a friendly, stable and habitable Nigerian society, a society where peace and order thrive, where unity other than disintegration will be desirable.

#### (ii) Didactic Import of the Hero Myth

The hero myths in the two cultures depict acts of sacrifice, patriotism and selflessness. The personages in the stories considered the overall welfare of their peoples, their common good first, and laid down their lives – a supreme sacrifice – to actualize it. By so doing, they achieved the salvation and liberation of their peoples. Lack of sacrificial, patriotic and selfless spirit in the present leaders and the people is the bane of the Nigerian society. Most of the people in power are very well known for their insensitive disposition to the plight of the citizens – the masses. They pursue individualistic agenda other than show any concern for the welfare of the people. If only our leaders and Nigerians as a whole can be imbued with such sense of responsibility, spirit of sacrifice, patriotism and selflessness as exhibited by our culture heroes and heroines, there will be no greed and selfishness which drive our leaders, past and present, to amass the nation's wealth and siphon it outside the shores of this land. Similarly, no energy will be dissipated in organizing campaigns, conferences, or television jingles to persuade Nigerians to tolerate and accommodate

one another now that there is an overt clamour by the marginalized and exploited Nigerians for a re-definition of the basis of Nigeria's unity while those who plunder the nation's resources are saying that its unity is not negotiable.

#### (iii) Didactic Import of the Earth Deity Myth

As pointed out, *Ala* in Igbo cosmology is the source of morality. Ugonna points out that *Ala* is also the deity of social harmony, peace and prosperity, and that its "import in Igbo society is such that the people regard whatever that is lawful, legitimate and customary as *omenala*, that which happens in the land ... Everything that is forbidden, obnoxious or tabooed is not *omenala*." And *Ala* frowns on such an act.

If Nigerians can go back to their root, what obtains in their culture, they will discover that most acts of indiscipline, moral laxity and corrupt practices that pervade the Nigerian society today were in the past prohibited with sanctions imposed on any offending member of the community. Certain actions were prohibited with the aim of promoting social harmony, peaceful coexistence and unity. In Igbo culture, both men and spirits are believed to be under the rule of *Ala* and because of her role in punishing any breach of moral code, the deity fosters a disciplined society.

Part of the problems that Nigeria has today is that its people have abandoned the traditional ethical values and no longer exercise self-discipline or comply with the restrictions imposed by their cultures.

*Ala* is the source and custodian of Igbo law and order and morality. And like the Yoruba *Orisa Oko*, she is also responsible for giving fertility to crops and human beings. Implicit in the myths is the notion of the responsibility of the powers-that-be to safeguard society's moral values and punish those that contravene the laws, to see that justice is done, and also to provide food or the basic need of the people in order to ensure their sustenance and continuity.

The well-being of the people of Nigeria should be the concern of the government. The people should not be subjected to endless



oppression and hardship occasioned by misrule, mismanagement of the economy, incessant hike in the prices of petroleum products and other essential commodities as is the case in Nigeria today.

*Arugba*, the virgin who plays the role of *Iyawo Orisa-Oko* in the Yoruba myth symbolizes purity, which is a quality that enables one to shun any act of immorality. If there is a high level of moral rectitude in Nigeria, corruption, which is the nation's major undoing and a regular cause of national embarrassment, will be minimized.

### Conclusion

The knowledge of such myths as the ones cited in this paper which could also be found among other ethnic groups, is capable of reawakening the people's sense of natural affinity, which may have been forgotten. The study of Nigerian myths can, therefore, serve as a vehicle of not only projecting the socio-cultural values embodied in the myths of each group but also creating awareness that all the peoples have something in common, and that there are observable similarities in their literary tradition. More researches into as many areas of such similarities as possible should be encouraged.

Any reform programme that is not people-oriented is not very likely to succeed. Nigeria, in its quest for national cohesion and integration, should identify and emphasize the cultural, social and other traits commonly shared by the different ethnic nationalities for on that would the foundation of a truly united country be laid. The ultimate concern of government should not be to reform only the political institution. The people's unfriendly attitudes – intolerance, antagonism, discrimination, etc. – against one another, and the negative perception of one ethnic group by the other need also to the 'reformed.'

We therefore recommend, as we have consistently done (see Ikwubuzo, 2002, 2005) that at the primary and post-primary institutions, Nigerian folklore, especially the oral literature, should be taught our youths. A course with the title, "The Myths of the Nigerian Peoples" should be designed and introduced as part of GST courses that are now compulsory in our tertiary institutions. If Nigerians can through their

folklore identify common bonds of humanity, which transcend cultural and religious differences, and begin to see themselves as one people, the issue of their unity should not be a problem. The singsong shall be, 'one people, one nation!'

### Note

1. This may be another version of the Moremi myth mentioned earlier in this paper.

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