

**UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT**

**ACROSS FRONTIERS: COMPARATIVE LITERATURE  
AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION**

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## **DEDICATION**

To all the protagonist of inter-ethnic harmony pitched against a small clique of ambitious and egomaniacal damages despicably exploiting ethnic loyalties for their ignoble, selfish and avaricious end.

**Chidi Tom Maduka**

## Across Frontiers: Comparative Literature and National Integration

Kùkùkù Kùkù  
KùkùKù kùkù

KùkùKùkù Kùkù  
KùkùKùkù Kùkù

(The song of a bird passing judgment on  
human behaviour)

(Human beings are crazy  
Human beings are crazy

Where do they see boundaries?  
Where do they see boundaries?)

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I would like to pay homage to the big masquerades of my clan which have performed here on the village square. We all vividly remember the first one that opened the festivity of inaugural lectures at the University of Port Harcourt. It had two intriguing faces- one in front and the other at the back. The dance steps so mesmerized the spectators that no one could precisely say which side of the masquerade was the front. That was the History-Masquerade which had Professor E. J. Alagoa as the chief attendant. Its movements, we have been told, were dictated by the nature of the discipline which probes into the past in order to illuminate the present and suggest pathways for the future. The topic was “The Python’s Eye: The Past in the Living Present”.

Two other masquerades then followed, each one magnificent in its shape and striking in its decorations. Who does not recall the weird but captivating look of their mouths and ears? The vibrations from the two parts of the body emitted sounds that were at once mellifluous and cacophonous. These were the Linguistics-Masquerades which had Professor Kay Williamson and E. Nnanolue Emenanjo as their chief attendants. The shapes of the masquerades reminded the spectators that in Linguistics it is necessary to

have a hyper-sensitive tongue and very keen ears to be able to distinctly hear, repeat and analyse the sounds of the various languages of the world. Professor Williamson's performance centred on "The Pedigree of Nations: Historical linguistics in Nigeria" while that of Professor Emenanjo was on "Linguistics, Language and the Nation". Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, before I mention the last two masquerades, I crave your indulgence to make a point that even male chauvinists conceded was commendable: in performances of this historical magnitude, gender politics ceases to be of any significance – any person, man or woman who, as our elders say, successfully climbs the iroko tree and fetches firewood from it, automatically plays the chief attendant of a masquerade performance. No person was surprised to see Professor Williamson playing such a role: in fact, she so dazzled the audience with her intellectual acrobatics that she succeeded in putting a nail on the coffin of any form of discrimination in life.

The last two masquerades testify to the richness and complexity of this form of cultural performance from any clan, the Faculty of Humanities. All of us still marvel at the dexterous movements of the two masquerades whose body decorations were exquisitely embroidered to evoke feminine elegance. Light-footed, the masquerades used their dance steps to make curves of various shapes: squares, circles and triangles – all so aesthetically accomplished that the spectators felt bewitched by the spectacle. These were the Literature-Masquerades whose performances were directed by Professor Charles Ekwusiaga Nnolim and Ola Rotimi. Even the scientists in the audience noticed with alacrity that the displays quintessentially dramatized the nature of literature which revels in acrobatic maneuvers with words by quarrying the musical and metaphorical overtones of language. Professor Nnolim's performance focused on "Ridentem Dicere Verum: Literature and the Common Welfare" while that of Professor Rotimi concentrated on finding answers to an intriguing question "African Dramatic Literature: To be or To Become?"

Today is the turn of Comparative Literature-Masquerade. And I have been chosen as the chief attendant. May I express my gratitude to you, Sir, Mr. Vice Chancellor, and all of you in general for the honour. If you look at the masquerade closely, you will notice that it shares many features with the Literature-Masquerades, especially in terms of the decorative designs, movements and rhythm of the instrumentation. Like them, the body is adorned with tassels and headpieces of various types- human, animal and spirit; the dance steps, although slower, are arresting in their dexterity, and the instrumentation is rapturously melodious. Only the Chike Aniakors and Ossie Enekwes can unravel the full significance of the sophisticated masking. However, the three are by no means identical.

The first area of difference is the size. The head, the body and the base are massive and virtually rotund. It is indeed a giant masquerade, an embodiment of nobility. The cylindrical base is bedecked with richly embroidered hanging cloths of various hues, each wriggling like a mini-masquerade. The cloths represent the various literatures of the world, each one with its specific characteristics – for instance, English, French, Portuguese, Chinese, Russian, Japanese, Kiswahili, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Izon, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Edo, Ibibio, Gokhana, etc. we now understand why it does not come out as frequently as the others: any performance takes a toll on the people's time and labour. Those familiar with the Ijele of Igboland, the Odum of Okrika and the Soku of Kalabari know the implications of the statement, for the Ijele in times past used to perform every 25 years, the Odum every 20 years and the Soku every 5 or 6 years.

The other distinguishing feature of this masquerade is the multiplicity of languages used by the attendants in the vocalization. For instance, the song you now hear is in Igbo, although it can be intoned by the attendants in various languages such as English, French, Edo, Hausa, Gokhana, Izon, Yoruba, Ibibio, Tiv and Idoma. In case you have not heard it distinctly, here is what it says:

Ìkùkù éri ihé alá  
Ìkùkù éri ihé alá  
Ákù féchá ò dáára áwò

Ìkùkù éri ihé alá  
Ìkùkù éri ihé alá  
Ákù féchá ò dáára áwò

(The Wind does not eat what belongs to the Ground  
The wind does not eat what belongs to the Ground  
However much the winged termite tries to fly away,  
It must eventually fall to the ground to be eaten by the toad).

Thus the song encapsulates a cross-cultural truth warning dictators, oppressors or even individuals exercising any form of power against the futility of trying to deny their subjects or people placed under their authority their basic rights; for whether they like it or not, their victims will eventually get justice. If you want to understand the implications of this truism in concrete terms, you need only to go to Borno State to watch the caprices of a dust storm. You will not fail to notice that the Wind pays dearly

for ignobly trying to eat what belongs to the Ground: in utter pain caused by a deadly constipation, it is forced to vomit and pour back to the Ground tonnes of dust – years of the fruits of the latter’s toils – which it has callously confiscated from Her and fraudulently displayed to the world as potential raindrops.

As we have seen, the masquerade embodies many languages and literatures. That is why it is **par excellence** the masquerade of unity across cultures. In more mundane terms, it is defined

As the study of literature as an integrated single body of knowledge transcending the frontiers of national literatures and traditional subject areas. Thus a study of a literary phenomenon (e.g. symbol, theme, style) beyond the confines of two or more National literatures (e.g. Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Swahili, Zulu); or even an examination of a feature common to literature and any other discipline such as history, politics, religion, music and Sculpture could be considered comparative  
(*Maduka “Comparative Literature” ...120*)

We are not concerned here with the problems of the definition, scope and methodology of the discipline which have provoked controversies among scholars but with the aspect of the discipline relevant to the current struggle of Nigerians to find a durable foundation for the peaceful co-existence of the various people of Nigeria. It is therefore a response to the charged political atmosphere in the country. The organization of the lecture reflects the spirit of the performance which may sound unorthodox to some of the practitioners of the discipline. It has five parts: the first focuses on the background to the problem, the second on the relationship between structures in nature and the symbolic texture of national literatures, the third on the place of English in the firmament of Nigerian literary life, the fourth on the organic unity of the Nigerian literatures, and the fifth on the recommendations for future action. The pattern of the discourse reveals that Nigeria is an empty geographical expression which has great potentials for becoming a nation. If the linguistic-literary bonds that tie the ethnic groups together are discovered and nurtured to fruition, Nigeria will become a great nation.

## I

It is important to remember the title of the performance “Across Frontiers: Comparative Literature and National Integration”. “Across Frontiers” underscores the cross-cultural

character of the values that inform the in-group consciousness of each of the ethnic groups and “National integration” refers to the **act** or **process** of welding the constituent cultural units of Nigeria into an **integer** – a corporate, solid whole. The term “national integration” can thus be understood in two ways: first, as an **act**: something that has been completed, done – from the supine **ACTUM** of the latin word AGOERE-EGI-ACTUM: TO DO. From this perspective, all the ethnic groups which have been arbitrarily forced into a political and geographical entity by the fiat of our European imperial masters in 1884/85 and the fortuitous amalgamation of the North and South by the astute Lord Lugard in 1914 have succeeded in forging a united, indivisible unit whose integrity, as is popularly said, has become sacrosanct. Second, as a **process**: something that has been started but not yet completed, an **action** that is yet to be realized – etymologically, the suffix “-TION” normally projects a reality that is in the process of self-actualization. This latter perspective points to the gradual forging of links between the various heterogeneous ethnic units of the country with a view to creating a common identity out of motley of peoples.

The first meaning which has shaped the ideas of most of our political leaders is a legacy of colonialism. The Europeans, after massacring themselves for centuries, finally learnt a little from their barbarous acts – **a little not much**; for if it were much, they would not have continued to stockpile deadly weapons for future use. Their horrid experiences made them realize that each person has dignity and each people identity, hence the importance of entrenching the principles of fundamental human rights and self-determination of peoples into the charter of the United Nations. A Charles V had no longer any right to play the Holy Roman Emperor to any people unwilling to share a common political boundary with him.

It is remarkable how the Europeans religiously apply these principles to themselves. For instance, we witnessed with admiration how the small Denmark was recently given concessions by the bigger European nations so that the Maastricht treaty could be ratified. We also noticed the relatively peaceful breakup of the former Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. It is even surprising that the Soviet Union that armed Nigeria to the teeth during the civil war in order to help her preserve her territorial integrity avoided bloodshed when it was her own turn to fight for such integrity. She only elected a champion the cause of the formation of a very loose socio-economic association known as Organization of Independent States, a gesture that clearly indicates that unity is indispensable to peoples.

Nigerian leaders, like their counterparts elsewhere in Africa, uncritically inherited the idea of territorial integrity from our colonial masters without matching it up with the recognition of the importance of the principles of human freedom and the inalienable

rights of peoples to determine their destiny. They hypocritically invoke the idea in order to play the Charles V to peoples anxious to free themselves from a state of serfdom.

A close reading of the non-fictional literature on the civil war and the utterances of many of our political leaders on the annulment of the June 12 elections, as well as on the Ogoni debacle clearly reveal that the war was not fought for unity but for the enthronement of ethnic interests. The works of such writers as Samson Amali, E.A Ayandele, Ola Balogun, A.B Akinyemi, Alexander A. Madiebo, Olusegun Obasanjo, Adewale Ademoyega, Nelson Ottah, Ben Gbulie, A. M. Mainasara, Bernard Odogwu and David Ejoor depict in glaring terms the ethnic character of the conflict. The position of Mainasara is typical:

It seems that history is once again repeating itself. We are beginning to witness what happened in the 1940's, in 1953 and again in 1966. On each of these occasions, the Igbos bore the brunt of the pent-up hatred of other Nigerians, which they, the Igbos, through blind followership, unleashed upon themselves. They should in their own interest, think again or as the Yoruba would have said, 'Igbo Ronu' (57).

The overriding reason for the waging of the war was less to get Nigeria united and make it great than to ensure that the wings of the Igbo were clipped.

The enterprise was successful, for the social, economic, political and human resources of the Igbo were wrecked. Consequently, they have been so psychologically battered by the traumatic experience that the best they can boast of in the present stage of their recovery is to play second fiddle to other ethnic groups and even to become the errand boys of the Hausa-Fulani, the dominant power wielders of contemporary Nigeria.

Still, the caging of the Igbo has not succeeded in bringing unity to the country. While the most formidable of the groups – the Hausa-Fulani – tenaciously fight to maintain its hegemony over the others, one of the weakest, the Ogoni, writhe under the pains of an unjust exploitation.

Our writers have ceaselessly pointed out that Nigeria is a conglomeration of ethnic groups which are yet to come together to form a nation. Chinua Achebe, Chukwuemeka Ike and Cyprian Ekwensi have used the theme of marriage to dramatize the point. Contracting marriages is a sphere of human experience that reveals the degree of readiness of a group to assimilate elements that are alien to it. The author's portrayal of the various couples shows that each ethnic group fights hard to preserve its purity by



preventing its sons and daughters from choosing their partners outside the group. The words of Ekwensi in **Iska** are educative.

She was Ibo, he was Hausa. Between Ibo and Hausa at that particular time the gulf was wide. Normally, the Ibo man worked like a steam engine, multiplied like a guinea-pig and effervesced with honesty. The Hausa was tolerant, philosophical, accommodating, believing that whatever would be would be. Both had lived peacefully together for a hundred years. Then came politics – the vulture’s foot that spoils the stew (14)

Ekwensi suggests here that the ethnic groups are islands unto themselves with no bridges to link one to the other. And in doing so, he gives what he believes are the personality traits of the Igbo and the Hausa. He is however tolerant enough to stress the positive ones rather than the negative, for stereotyping lies at the root of the crisis of mutual misunderstanding plaguing the social interactions of the various peoples of Nigeria.

Each group ascribes opprobrious attributes to members of other groups, thereby denying full humanity to them, but pours encomiums on itself as an embodiment of enviable qualities. The following song popular with the primary school children in multiethnic urban areas is instructive:

Kalaba idiankpo  
Ibo play wayo  
Awusa begi-begi  
Yoruba shit for pot.

“Kalaba” in popular imagination stands for the Efik and the Ibibio; in the song, it evokes the Calabar woman notorious for her love potion- whenever a young man plans to settle down in Cross River or Akwa Ibom he is advised to guard against the activities of the **femme fatale** who can prepare special delicacies for him in order to enslave him and eventually disorient him in life. The Igbo man is portrayed as being quintessentially dishonest, the Hausa man as lazy and prone to mendicancy, and the Yoruba as being very very dirty since he can even defecate inside a pot. The song underscores the pettiness and xenophobia informing the collective attitudes of the adult population to their fellow Nigerians. The parents have a lot to learn from their children who celebrate

their togetherness by completely ignoring the perfidious message encoded in the song. What is serious appears comic to them, thereby pointing to the existence of a potential platform for forging viable inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria.

It is pertinent here to point out what our field work has revealed about the pejorative terms associated with the various ethnic groups. Owing to the limitations of time and space, it is restricted to the Igbo, Hausa, Fulani, Yoruba, Kalabari, Ogoni, Urhobo, Ibibio, Bini and Kanuri. The Igbo are chosen first because as the title of Amali's booklet emphasizes – **Ibos and their fellow Nigerians** – they are the common targets of the other groups in this exercise of mass vilification. In the echo-chamber of the sensory perceptions of the Nigerian peoples, it is firmly believed that the Igbo man is greedy, aggressive, selfish, dishonest, clannish, arrogant and crudely materialistic – it is even said that he so likes money that a simple way of determining whether an Igbo corpse is really a corpse is to put money by its side; if it does not turn to pick it up, it can safely be concluded that it is in fact a corpse; the Hausa man is lazy, servile, Beggarly, credulous, simple-minded, conservative and happy-go-lucky, although he is gradually being associated with arrogance, selfishness and hypocrisy; the Fulani is haughty, overbearing, egoistic, intolerant, feudalistic and aristocratic; the Yoruba is crafty, noisy, cowardly, clannish, extravagant, untrustworthy, reliable and mendacious – it is believed that being very wily he is a knife that cuts both ways; the Kalabari is lazy, self-centred, domineering, chauvinistic, easy-going, hedonistic and lascivious – it is said that the Kalabari man so likes women that one does not need the services of a doctor to declare a person dead: the simplest thing to do is to put a woman by his side; if he does not turn to caress her, it can safely be said that he is really dead; the Ogoni, who is often associated with the term **pio pio**, is simple-minded, violent, bellicose and quick-tempered; the Urhobo- generally called **Urhobo wayo** – is petty, devilish, dishonest, unreliable, materialistic, inhospitable and quarrelsome; the Ibibio is wicked, mean, peevish, narrow-minded and vindictive; the Bini is selfish, malevolent, diabolical, temperamental and war-like; and the Kanuri is avaricious, abrasive unaccommodating, belligerent and untrustworthy. It is well-known that there is no ethnic group that has no penchant for fetishism, yet it is tenaciously held that the Yoruba, the Bini, the Urhobo, the Ibibio and the Ogoni are the adept manipulators of metaphysical powers in Nigerian society; similarly, playing the 419 is a cross-cultural phenomenon, yet is widely believed that the Urhobo, the Kanuri and especially the Igbo are the exclusive practitioners of the vice. Thus each ethnic group perceives others as having despicable qualities while seeing itself as the repository of virtues – any person from its fold is quickly qualified as kind, generous, hospitable, tolerant, benevolent, trustworthy, open-minded, etc. nothing good thrives on the pan-ethnic land, Nigeria – a no – man's land, it is morally, spiritually and psychologically barren to sustain values that make for

nationhood. That is why public officers who have served it discredibly are unbelievably welcomed back to their ethnic homelands as heroes/heroines.

Nigeria is a pot-pourri of peoples with divergent and conflicting interests. It is a nation without nationals, a country without patriots. It is yet to be created.

Performing the task reminds us of the advice given by two European essayists to their countrymen. In his essay "National Prejudices", Oliver Goldsmith denounces the chauvinism of the English who believed that "the Dutch were a parcel of avaricious wretches; the French a set of flattering sycophants; that the Germans were drunken sots and beastly gluttons; and the Spaniards proud, haughty, and surly tyrants; but that in bravery, generosity, clemency, and in every virtue, the English excelled all the rest of the world" (95). He then advises them to be much more sober and impartial in assessing others; if not they will fail to observe that

The Dutch were more frugal and industrious, the French more temperate and sedate, than the English; who, though undoubtedly brave and generous, were at the same time rash, headstrong and impetuous; too apt to be elated with prosperity, and to despond in adversity (96).

And Montaigne warns the French against the practice of pouring scorn on foreigners especially the West Indians and the Latin Americans whom they regard as cannibals. His countrymen see as barbarous and savage anything that is foreign to them. Otherwise, they would have noticed the highly cultivated qualities of these people who have "...la parfait religion, la parfait police, parfait et accompli usage de toutes choses" (262). ("...perfect religion, perfect police, perfect and accomplished use of everything").

The virtue of tolerance has to be cultivated among the peoples of Nigeria just as it has been done in Europe, although it must be said that it took the Europeans centuries to accomplish. That is why they allowed themselves to split into smaller nations before discovering that it is necessary to come together and form a large political bloc of United States of Europe. Nigeria is a mini-Europe which does not need to break up before realizing that **unity is a natural imperative**. She has a historic mission to teach mankind how peoples with diverse histories, cultures and destinies can pull resources together and co-exist harmoniously in a large political unit sustained by forces that only incorruptible, patriotic leaders with vision, will-power and sincerity of purpose can discover. A probing mind will readily exploit the rich mines of unity lying unexplored in the institution of literature, especially its component Comparative literature.

In the firmament of world cultural heritage, each national literature is like a celestial body with chemical properties and specific laws governing its rotation around its orbit. It uses rhythm to capture the essence of the principles holding the creative order in equilibrium. Rhythm is a musical term denoting the pattern of distributing notes in sequences of beats. Although it is frequently distinguished from such related terms as melody, harmony and counterpoint, in literature it can be used generically to include these terms, such that it denotes the patterned flow of the sounds of words, features of syntax, lexicon and semantics in a text. Its use goes beyond the art forms unfolding themselves in time such as music, dance and literature; it encompasses the space-based art-forms such as painting and sculpture, and even such art-related forms of human activity as fashion design, architecture, photography, horticulture and floriculture. In horticulture, for example, it means a “sequence or a repetition of similar elements – as a double row of trees” (**Encyclopedia Britannica** 19, 656). Balance, harmony, structure, symmetry, equilibrium, organization and proportion are essential to the proper functioning of rhythm.

Literature echoes in words the rhythm of existence embedded in the marvelous structure of nature revealed, for instance, in the delicate and enigmatic balancing of the celestial bodies, the intricate and labyrinthian composition of the earth’s crust, and the baffling anatomical and morphological constitution of the organisms in the biological sciences. This is probably why authors are frequently referred to as creative artists with powers of mini-gods who can only function effectively under the influence of a Muse or a compulsive supernatural force.

Let us present some rudimentary facts about an aspect of nature, the cosmic system, so that we can fully understand the significance of the cosmological image we earlier used in connection with national literature. The universe is made up of billions and billions of celestial bodies comprising the “stars, planets, satellites, meteors, comets, nebulae, clusters, galaxies, etc”. (Shunwu 8). The intricate network of constellations in the firmament, billions of which are visible to the most sophisticated telescopes ever invented by scientists makes astronomers shrug in wonder and accordingly declare that the universe is infinite in terms of time and space.

The bodies undergo constant changes in structure which often take centuries to accomplish; that is why we do not perceive them since our very short stay on earth generally spans a period of less than a hundred years. They are also constantly in motion, each one according to the specific nature of its orbit. For instance, the sun, a very small star but the super-power of our galaxy – the solar system – travels at the rate of 250 kilometers per second and makes a full circle in about 250 million years. Under its gravitational pull are planets, each one travelling around it according to the

constitutive elements of the velocity of its orbit. The nine major ones – in order of their distance from the sun – are Mercury, Venus, the Earth, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. The earth, our habitat, completes its traverse totaling 940 million kilometers in 365 days, 6 hours and 9 minutes and 10 seconds without our noticing it. We owe our life on earth on the trip, as well as our days and nights, and of course our seasons: rainy season, harmattan and dry season or as in temperate regions of the world, spring, summer, autumn and winter. The earth being a relatively small planet has one satellite, the moon, rotating around it according to the forces regulating its orbit and the earth's gravitational pull. The symmetry with which the countless celestial bodies float in space and forge innumerable networks of interrelationships through the forces generated by their mutual gravitational pulls gives one the impression that time and space have emerged to form one entity, time becoming particles of space in motion and space successions of motion in stasis. The spectacle bewitches the imagination of artists and scientists.

Although some scholars may dispute it, the symbolic texture of works reveals that authors consciously or unconsciously yearn for the application of the fabulous structure of the universe to human affairs. Each national literature –in its oral or written form – is a galaxy of images, symbols and structures deriving their inspiration from the planetary systems and other spheres of the creative order. Of course, these features, as literary history demonstrates, reflect the character of the historical experiences of peoples and undergo changes from age to age. However, in spite of the heterogeneous nature of the features, a significant point emerges which shows that human beings belong to the same family: through the permutations and combinations of human passions dramatized in texts, we learn that each human being has dignity and each people identity. Above all, a common bond ties man to man and other elements of nature. For example, in the oral literature of the various Nigerian peoples, the symbolic structure of the proverbs, riddles, dirges, songs, incantations and narratives encompasses a world in which human beings, animals trees, plants the sky, the earth and the spirits interact and exchange ideas. In a version of the aetiological tale on death, for instance, human beings and animals hold a meeting to find a solution to the problem of death which has become a scourge to them. On the advice of a diviner, they decide to send the dog and the chameleon on a mission to God- the dog to tell Him that death living beings would like to come back to life and the chameleon that they would not like to change their state again. Their hopes dash to the ground when out of gluttony the dog whom they confidently believe would reach God's abode first stops on the way to lick the remnants of oil left by some people. When he meets God later with the message, he is dismissed with the information that the chameleon's request has been accepted for the world.

There is no disputing the fact that the world is so integrated that any act of indiscipline by an individual usually affects the lives of others.

The Chinese have a fascinating tale on the two stars Altair and Vega which are on the opposite sides of the Celestial River, the Chinese glamorous name for the Milky Way. Altair becomes the Cowherd who falls in love with the Weaving Girl, Vega. But a divine decree orders that they meet each other once a year when flocks of magpies assemble to construct a bridge across the Celestial River. Faithfulness in love is predicated on patience and steadfastness of purpose, as is demonstrated in the positioning of Altair and Vega in the Milky Way.

In written literature, we are going to bypass the science fiction which is obvious to what we are saying and focus on Voltaire, Saint-Exupery, E. T. A. Hoffmann, T.S. Eliot, Niyi Osundare and Chinua Achebe – six authors from the mainstream of literary establishment. Voltaire, a French 18<sup>th</sup> century writer of outstanding intellectual versatility uses **Micromegas** which is a narrative on interplanetary travels to shock his reader into realizing that the microscopic human beings have benefitted nothing from the order and harmony in the universe; that is why they spend their time killing one another and ascribe an undue importance to themselves by stupidly believing that the earth is the centre of the universe. Saint-Exupery, another French writer, declares in his novel **La terre des hommes** that mankind belongs to one fold, a vision of the world that so fascinated the Canadian Government that it used the title of the work as the catchword for the international Exposition held in Montreal in 1967.

E.T.A. Hoffman, a German author writing in the tradition of the European Romantics quarries the mysteries of the geological depths of the earth's crust in "Mines of Falun" in order to proclaim the infiniteness of time and space and the immorality of the soul.

T.S. Eliot ties the efficient workings of the heavenly bodies to human survival in the opening lines of one of his poems:  
The Eagle soars in the summit of Heaven  
The Hunter with his dogs pursues his circuit  
O perpetual revolution of configured stars  
O perpetual recurrence of determined seasons  
O world of spring and autumn, birth and dying!  
The endless cycle of idea and action,  
Endless invention, endless experiment,  
Brings knowledge of motion, but not of stillness

Human progress cannot be realized without man paying a scrupulous attention to the operational efficiency of the universe.

In **The Eye of the Earth**, a prize-winning volume of poetry, Niyi Osundare endows the earth with the gift of sight and makes it see through the economic despoliation of the poor by the heartless rich and the pollution of the environment by the “Profit factories” which recklessly dump its industrial wastes on an impotent population. The callous manipulators of the crude capitalist institutions destroy the source of man’s existence on earth by senselessly cutting off the umbilical cord that ties man to nature. In blunt terms, the Government is being warned of the imminent danger that lies ahead of us, if it does not take urgent steps to alleviate the sufferings of people living in the industrial regions or oil-producing areas of the country.

And Chinua Achebe draws a parallel between cataclysm in nature and the rulership of the African military dictators in **Anthills of the Savannah**. The military dictator is the drought that deadens existence for the people by systematically depleting the ozone layer of the people’s political life. The warning is clear: unless the soldiers leave the political scene in Nigeria, the country will irrevocably collapse because they scorch to death the principle of the rule of law which is the moving spirit of any viable nation. Their present avowed mission of laying the foundation of democracy for the people is a farce because as a Latin aphorism says **Nemo dat non quid habet**: no person gives what he does not have.

Literature enhances man’s awareness of the interlocking relationship between human freedom, self-determination of people and progress in society and the necessity of erecting systems that sustain the life of social the life of social institutions. Each national literature encodes values which guide the people towards the development of effective mechanisms of response to the challenges of civilization in the modern world through the acquisition of such qualities as grace, poise, finesse, patience, gentility, urbanity, tolerance, benignity, sense of fair play and justice. Our national life is in chaos because there is no poetry in the hearts of our leaders.

We need a vibrant national literature that will nurture such values in the populace. How do we build up such a literature? Should English provide the heart-beat of such a literary life?

### III

It is now generally accepted in the country that English is the lingua franca of the nation. This means that it is serving the economic, political and cultural needs of the country. In short, it is the language of national integration with which the country thinks, feels and ensures interaction among the various ethnic groups. Even our social scientists who have played a prominent role in forging the administrative structure of the country have taken it for granted that English is the language of our national development. But the linguists have consistently insisted that in a multilingual country like Nigeria English spoken by about 12% of the population “cannot be rightly assigned the role of a full-fledged lingua franca, it is not our national language because it is not... an indigenous language of our national culture and cultural identity” (Adekunle 13). The Linguistic Association of Nigeria has been issuing communique after communique at the end of its annual meetings on the sad linguistic situation in the country but its laudable ideas have not caught the fancy of the politicians and social scientists.

The literary life of the country has been the worse for it because literature in English is gradually establishing itself as the national literature of the country. The effect of the bombshell sent by Obi Wali about thirty years ago to the effect that only literatures written in African languages are distinctly African is hardly felt any longer. Ngugi wa Thiong'o who is virtually shouting himself hoarse over the issue seems to be losing the fight.

Everywhere the position of Chinua Achebe holds sway. Chinua Achebe has succinctly argued that although European languages have been imposed on the African by the colonialists, the African writer using them for literary expression should domesticate them in capturing the soul of African civilization. For him there are so many African languages that it is virtually impossible to develop any of them into becoming the language of any country's national literature. Only European languages can play such a role. Accordingly, in Nigeria for example “the national literature... is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc, etc” (56). He however makes a pronouncement which clearly shows that he is aware of the political implications of the decision:

All I have done has been to look at the reality of present-day Africa. This ‘reality’ may change as a result of deliberate, e.g. Political action. If it does an entirely new situation will arise, And there will be plenty of time to examine it (57)



Unfortunately, writers and critics have not paid any attention to this remark which seems to me crucial in giving a satisfactory solution to the problem. Even Chinua Achebe himself seems to be convinced that the time has not yet come for a country to take a bold political action on the issue. His recent interviews on the issue tend in fact to rule out the possibility of such a situation ever arising in Africa.

The perpetuation of the situation in Nigeria is reinforced by the international prizes awarded to such notable writers as Gabriel Okara, Chinua Achebe, Tanure Ojaide, Niyi Osundare, Ben Okri and Wole Soyinka. These prizes motivate younger writers and consolidate the attitudes of the established ones towards the use of English as the vehicle of literary expression in the country.

It is not surprising that our newspapers such as **The Guardian, The Punch, Daily Times, The Vanguard, Daily Champion, Sunray** and other State papers, as well as journals give prominence to essays, short stories and poems written in English in their various publications.

Even the prestigious ANA – Association of Nigerian Authors- concentrates its attention on English-language texts in its publications and annual awards. It seems to be saying that excellence in creativity can only be achieved through the use of English language.

Nigerians are currently unable to liberate themselves from their enslavement to the English language because they are not yet mentally emancipated. The historian E.A Ayandele articulates it properly by asserting that the educated elite in Nigeria are agents of British imperialism because, among other things, they revere “the English language, the greatest instrument for the diffusion of English ideas, and till this day Britain’s greatest colonial legacy”(92). They are so intellectually, politically, economically, culturally and psychologically attached to the values of the white man that one can safely say with Frantz Fanon that they are white men in black skin. Their dress habits, food habits and even speech habits are white to the core.

One can therefore understand why various reasons have been evoked by many influential writers for the continued use of English as the dominant language of literary expression in Nigeria. The first is that it has now become our language because of our long association with it. This line of reasoning is preposterous, for it is difficult to see how the language of the colonizer has metamorphosed into the language of the slave. Throughout the world, various peoples colonized in one way or the other have recognized the importance of language in transmitting the cultural values of any people; that is why they have successfully recovered their destiny by sticking to their languages and using them as the instruments of their cultural development. In fact, they recognized that their languages are like celestial bodies which specific identities in the

firmament of world culture. We all remember the struggle of the Finns, the Welsh, the Italians, the English, the French, the Arabs, the Vietnamese, the French Canadians, etc, for the survival of their languages. From this perspective, one can disagree with Achebe for asserting that our various “languages will just have to develop as tributaries to feed the one central language enjoying nation-wide currency” (58), that is the English language. This tantamount to what geographers would call cultural river capture. Existence among river systems is characterized by a keen competition for territory, the stronger ones amassing territory at the expense of the weaker. For instance, a powerful tributary stream with a very strong precipitation can invade the head of an adjoining stream and divert the source of its flow to the channel of the strong one. In this way the adjoining stream which is now captured loses its autonomy and empties its waters into another trunk stream through the channel of the conquering stream.

The second reason is that our languages are so undeveloped that they cannot sustain the rigours of sophisticated literary creativity. This is a prejudice which has its roots in the ideology of racism. Max Black has effectively discredited this fallacy in the **Labyrinth of language**. As he puts it,

The indispensable role of speech in human culture may help  
To explain the surprising fact that all known societies, however  
“primitive” in other respect, possess fully developed languages.  
The African Bushman and the Australian Aborigine command a  
vocabulary and a complex grammar that strain the learning capacity of an  
expert linguist (10).

Our politicians and writers need not fold their hands and complain about the inadequacies of our languages. They need to take concrete measures to ensure that the languages have well-developed literatures without which they cannot realize their potentials fully.

Throughout the world writers have contributed a lot to the growth of specific languages. Shakespeare, Dryden, Dr. Johnson, Swift, Sheridan, Defoe, Shaw. etc expanded the frontiers of the English language through their works; Du Bellay, Rabelais, Racine, Pascal, Bossuet, Voltaire, Rousseau, Balzac, Flaubert, Mallarmé, Valéry, etc. helped build up the stature of the French language; and Ivo Andrić of the war-torn Bosnia who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1961 forged new life experiences in Serbo-Croatian words for the Bosnians. Let us hear Reed’s remarks on Goethe and the German language:

Goethe is above all else a poet. He was the first to explore

fully (which means that he virtually created) the expressive registers of modern German. His phrasing, cadences and rhythms mark out the emotional bounds of the language and establish its poetic character as Shakespeare's do for English and Pushkin's for Russian (8).

Our writers Christopher Okigbo, Chinua Achebe, Cyprian Ekwensi, Wole Soyinka, Ola Rotimi, Femi Osofisan, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Ben Okri, Gabriel Okara, Elechi Amadi, Ken Saro-Wiwa, Flora Nwapa, etc have been using their creative talents to develop the English language and not our various neglected languages.

The third reason centres on the multiplicity of languages. The reasoning is that the languages are so many that it is impossible to pick up one that will serve the needs of the country. It is true that the number of our languages baffles human imagination. Some may even be only seen with the aid of powerful telescope. Still, each one has an identity and specific laws determining its own movement around its orbit. And in terms of the dominant cosmological metaphor we have so far been using, all of them are tied to one another by means of mutually related cultural gravitational pulls, such that none can effectively exist without the support of others with which it shares a constellation of values and needs.

In such a system it is fallacy to think that an ethnic group has special right or privileges because of its size or imagined importance. What matters is what the group puts into the constellation of collective needs to enable it function effectively, not what it greedily takes out of it. The sun is the centre of the solar system because of its immense contributions to the operational efficiency of the system. Service to others and not hegemony over them is the catchword of existence in the human constellation.

We have serious political problems because we have not yet tried honestly to know ourselves, to understand ourselves. It is important to study our languages and the literature in them and make them the foundation of our national development. This is the time to take a bold political action to ensure that we discover that make each one unique and at the same time an inseparable part of the whole. It can be done through a close study of the cumulative insights provided by such disciplines as the Arts, Linguistics, History, Literature, Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, Political Science, Education and Sociology. They will enable us to map out the forces that determine the patterns of cultural borrowings and the forging of new elements out of a motley of ideas and values from various ethnic groups. The present practice of forming political groupings such as Southern minorities, or Middle Belt peoples is a sham because it is

artificially conceived. Efforts should be made to make it possible for each Nigerian to speak, write and read at least four Nigerian languages and to understand the literatures written in them.

English cannot effectively serve as the language of our national integration. In fact, in the contemporary society, it is used as a language of mass deceit, hypocrisy and national betrayal, for most Nigerians use it when they want to mask their feelings in public but switch over to their mother tongue whenever they want to discuss issues that touch them deeply with members of their ethnic kindred. It lacks the powers to erect the foundation of our national survival. But as a world language it has important functions to perform in our society – and these can be properly streamlined.

The national literature of Nigeria is not the literature written in English by Nigerians. The literature, being a variety of world literature in English like Canadian, West Indian, Anglo-Indian, Australian, New Zealand and American literatures is a satellite of English literature which constitutes the super-power of the literature in English in the firmament of world literature. In short, Anglo-Nigerian literature focuses its audience on the crop of Nigerians who are the by-products of the British economic, political and cultural imperialism in Africa. It can still be studied because, being an osmosis of the African and European cultures, it has a role to play in world culture.

The real national literature of Nigeria is the aggregate of the elements running through the various ethnic literatures in the country. It can only be studied from the angle of comparative literature which is a component of literary studies focusing on the international or ethnic relations of literatures.

#### **IV**

As we have already stated earlier, the function of comparative literature is to champion the cause of unity among the various peoples of multi-lingual country, a continent and the world. This is what it has been doing in Europe, North America and Asia. It can serve the same purpose in Nigeria which is in fact a mini-Europe in terms of the diversities of peoples and cultures.

A preliminary remark is necessary about the linguistic competence of the comparatist interested in this area of scholarship. He has to acquire a literary knowledge of the languages forming the cornerstone of his scholarship; literary knowledge of a language implies a mastery of the connotative nuances of words in their various contexts of discourse. It is unsatisfactory for a scholar to depend on translators for such an

enterprise because the texts produced by translators for such an enterprise because the texts produced by translators are not accurate renditions of the originals; they are the products of the translator's critical biases- a translator is invariably a critic of texts. Besides, only a fraction of the texts in one's core area of scholarship get eventually translated. It would also be profitable if the scholar had a command of not less than three languages so that he will be firmly placed to marshal out the affinities running through the literatures of many ethnic groups. We need scholars who can do for this literary zone of the world what the Edmund Wilsons and Rene Welleks did for Europe. Of course, it is always better to think in terms of team scholarship because it can achieve much in a relatively short time.

The areas of research cover the oral and written forms of the literatures. The scholarship could focus on aspects of the various genres-poetry, prose narratives and drama. A close study of the texts will reveal the similarities between the worldviews of the various peoples and suggest the areas of kinship that should be stressed in mapping out the political, economic and cultural values that will constitute the durable foundation of relationships between the ethnic groups of the country.

In oral literature such forms as riddles, lullabies, proverbs, tongue twisters, narratives, poetry, and drama will occupy the centre stage of serious scholarship. What has been done in these areas on specific ethnic groups will now be extended to others. For instance, in Yoruba, Olatunde O. Olatunji has written in highly informative book on Yoruba poetry with emphasis on the sub-genres of **orìkì**: praise poetry; **Èṣẹ Ifá**: Ifa divination poetry; **Ofò**: Yoruba incantations; **Òwe**: proverbs in Yoruba; and **Álo Ápamò**: riddles in Yoruba. Many Yoruba authors have of course done highly specialized work on these and other aspects of Yoruba poetry: for example, 'Wande Abimbola has done a lot on **Ifá** and Bade Ajowon on **Íjálá** and **Írémòjé**, funeral dirges of Yoruba hunters. A comparative study of these aspects of poetry could be done with similar ones from other cultures, even though no ethnic group has so far done as much as the Yoruba in this area of research in particular and oral literature in general. However, in Igbo some significant work has been done on poetry by such authors as Romanus Egudu, Donatus Nwoga and Uzochukwu. Egudu in particular has just brought out a stimulating book on Igbo masquerade poetry. And a doctoral candidate from UNN, Chibiko N. Okebalama has just finished a researched on the "Content and style of Igbo Hunting Poetry" which reveals striking similarities with the Yoruba **Íjálá** and **Írémòjé**. Although it is important to call attention to the necessity of doing comparative studies on the drum poetry which is a sophisticated art form among the ethnic groups, we shall dwell a little on satire which is mode used by various oral artists to attack deviant behavior of individuals in society.

It is of interest to mention two works done by two M.A. candidates from the universities of Port Harcourt and Nigeria, Nsukka. The one from the University of Port Harcourt (done by Ngaage) focuses on **Ákòò, Nkòròtò** songs of the Ogoni while that from Nsukka by Chukwudile deals with the satirical songs of Umuomaaku Igbo. A section of each of the works presents the bitterness of the people over the running of our affairs by the soldiers and their civilian allies in the country. In fact, if the sentiments had been widely disseminated to the public their authors would have provoked the ire of the governments. Let us first of all see the attack on SAP by the Gokhana song:

1. Sánnì Ábáchá aa boo kpòtéé yeo òo
2. Waá yoò aa boo kpòtèì yee òo
3. Bábángìdá aa boo kpòtèì yeì oo
4. Waá yoo yoo aa boo kpoteiyeo oo
5. Gbo kíl leé
6. Bábángìdá naa koò gbò párwìn aga dena garri o
7. Waá yoò yoò aa boo kpòtèiyéoo oo
8. Kíl léé wáa yoò yoò
9. Bábángìdá gìmma párnwìm giimù kane o
10. Gbò kíl waá yoò yoò (96)

1. Sanni Abacha leave the throne
2. Trickster leave the throne
3. Babangida, leave the throne
4. Trickster, leave the throne
5. Go away
6. Babangida has made it difficult for children to eat garri.
7. Trickster, leave the throne
8. Go, tricker
9. Babangida cheats both young and old
10. Go away trickster

And here is the one in Igbo

O yeesu, oji achia eze

A ka na –eji unu?

Oji na igbo gwuru chineke wayo n’uzo

Ma chukwu gbara ama n’oge

Ma oji achisi eze, agha ga – ada  
Obara ga –apu  
Oji na Igbo gwuru Chineke wayo n’uzo (72)

(“O yes, the Blacks rule as kings  
Are you restrained anymore?  
Blacks and Igbo played trick on God on the way,

But God revealed this in time  
That if the Black rule, there will be war  
If Black takes over rulership, there will be war  
There will be bloodshed  
The Blacks and Igbo played trick on God on the way”  
Author’s translation).

The two recordings dramatize the anguish of the masses over the running of their affairs by those in power at the three tiers of government. It is shameful to notice that, as an ex-Governor of a State was once constrained to assert, the people have been so psychologically brutalized that they have erroneously internalized the racist idea that Blacks cannot rule themselves. Our leaders have disgraced the Black race and mankind.

There is no need giving more examples from drama and prose narratives, for there abound topics in themes, plot, language, narrative stances etc which can be fully explored by scholars.

In written literature, the Hausa, Igbo and the Yoruba are ahead of the other ethnic groups on the texts available for comparative studies. These works could be subjected to analysis from as many points of view as possible. The works of the following authors come readily to mind: Hausa – Abubakar Imam, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Bello Kagara, Mohammadu Gwarzo, Tafida, S’aadu Zungur, Mu’azu Hadeja, Abubakar Tunau, Shehu Shagari, etc; Igbo – Pita Nwana, Leopold Bell-Gam, D.N. Achara, J.U.T. Nzeako, L.N. Oraka, Uchenna Tony Ubesie, Chukuezi, etc, and Yoruba – Fagunwa, Oladejo Okediji, Adebayo Faleti, Olu Owolabi, T.A. Ladebe, Kola Akinlade, etc. Efforts should be made to encourage the writing of text in other languages.

An interesting area to explore is the study of the literatures centring around language clusters such as Edoid, Igboid, Ijoid, Yoruboid and Ogoni. Edoid literature

encompasses the literatures in Edo, Esan, Ora-Emai-Luleha, Yekhee, Uneme, Ghotuo, Okpe-Akuku-Idesa, Oloma, Emhalhe, Okpamheri, Uhami, Ehueun, Ukue, Uvbie, Urhobo, Okpe, Isoko, Eruwa, Epie-Atisa, Egene and Degema; Igboid: Igbo, Ika, Ekpeye, Ikwere, Ogbah, Egbema, Ndoni, Echie;Ijoid: Kalabari, Bile, Okrika, Nembe-Akassa, Izon, Kolokuma, Biseni, Okodia, Defaka; Yoruboid: Yoruba, Itsekiri, Igala; Ogoni; khana, Gokhana, Eleme and Ogoni. Such studies may improve relations among the members of the various groups and eventually lead to the merging of orthographies around a central one, thereby minimizing the menace of nationalism which has frequently led to the existence of splinter-groups of languages asserting their autonomy more out of political than linguistic-literary reasons.

We now close this section by dwelling a little on the literaro-cultural relations between the Ijo and the Igbo. Their relationship which dates back centuries ago is characterized by an intriguing love-hate syndrome. The hate aspect of the relationship revolves around the fear of the Ijo that the Igbo might exercise political and economic hegemony over them. Robin Horton has shown in his study of the Kalabari that during the time of the slave trade there was a fear among the kalabari that the large number of the Igbo slaves in their midst might lead to the loss of their cultural identity, and in the 40s the average Kalabari man was so apprehensive of the takeover of their economic activities by the Igbo that a physical attack was unleashed on the Igbo which led to the Igbo exodus from the Delta in 1947. This animosity towards the Igbo has shaped the voting pattern of the kalabari during elections (see Afigbo 89-94) and might explain the tenacity with which they defended their position on the Abandoned Property debacle which they saw as historically justified, even though the Igbo agreed with George Orwell that such a euphemism was an abuse of language dishonestly deployed to hide the significance of such a horrendous act – a crime against humanity:

Defenseless villages are bombarded from the air, the  
Inhabitants driven out into the countryside, the cattle  
Machine-gunned, the huts set on fire with incendiary  
bullets: this is called **Pacification**. Millions of peasants  
are robbed of their farms and sent trudging along the  
roads with no more than they can carry: this is called  
**transfer of population or rectification of frontiers**.  
People are imprisoned for years without trial, or  
shot in the back of the neck or sent to die to scurvy



in Arctic lumber camps: this called **elimination of unreliable elements**. Such phraseology is needed if one wants to name things without calling up mental pictures of them (175).

Still, there are positive sides to their relationship. First, the Akwete cloth has been a source of fruitful interaction between the Ndoki Igbo and the Ijo communities of Nembe, Kalabari, Okrika, Bonny (and Opobo). Lisa Aronson has demonstrated in her study “Akwete Weaving: A Study of Change on Response to the Palm Oil Trade in the Nineteenth Century” that the Ijo traders were the main consumers of Akwete cloth. Accordingly, the Ijo provided some of the motifs which the weavers incorporated into the fabric of the cloth’s design in order to please their customers. Even aspects of the motifs were got by the Ijo from Ijebu-Ode through trade links with the Delta peoples. The tight bond of the commercial relationship between them which has extended to the cultural domain even persists till today. A significant part of the sophisticated cloth holdings of many an Ijo family is woven by the Akwete weavers and the motifs on the designs are largely provided by the Ijo families. The full cultural implications of the relationship are yet to be investigated.

Second, the quest motif in the aetiological **Kiabara** tale which is common to the folklore of the peoples of the Rivers State also abounds in Igbo tales. **Kiabara** is the Khana name for the bird Kingfisher, who loses all his possessions in search of happiness in life. The protagonist sets out to understand something he is ignorant of in life. He is tricked into a decision by an antagonist who wants him to understand life in a hard way. The lesson is finally learnt. In the Izon version, the protagonist is the Kingfisher (**Asìme – opopò**), which the antagonist is the Tortoise; in the Nembe tale, the protagonist is the Kingfisher (**Egbeìntekelaba**) who is a man, while the antagonist is a woman with fairy-like qualities; and in the Igbo tale from Nri, the protagonist is a very small bird called **nkenu**, while the antagonist is his **chi**, but the object of the quest is patience and not Yeseiye, something-bad, the father-in-law of the Kingfisher in the Nembe version, nor sorrow as in the Izon version. In spite of the differences, all of them stress the importance of humility, patience and perseverance in life. There are points of convergence in the value systems of the Ijo and the Igbo – in short, the Igbo blood flows in the veins of the Ijo and vice versa. To strengthen the bond, the Ijo have to study the language and literature of the Igbo and the Igbo the languages and literature of the Ijo. Here also lies the key to the mutual understanding between the warring ethnic groups in Rivers State, such as the Ogoni and the Andoni; the Okrika and the Ogoni, and the Okrika and the Ikwere; or

going beyond the State, the Tiv and the Jukun, the Efik and the Ibibio, the Urhobo and the Itsekiri, etc.

All in all, a vigorous comparative study of the various Nigerian literatures by scholars will help in laying the solid foundation for the socio-political stability of the country, especially as literature is a ready instrument for underscoring the bonds of unity tying peoples together. The task is forbidding but it must be faced head-on if Nigeria is going to exist as a nation.

We now make some recommendations for the effective development of comparative literature as a discipline capable of making contributions to the development of a pan-ethnic culture in the country.

## V

Comparative Literature programme is very difficult to mount because of the dearth of manpower in the discipline and the difficulty of overcoming the problems of inter-departmental rivalry characteristic of the leadership of the language departments which serve as the tributaries to the discipline. The University of Port Harcourt is the only university in the country which has successfully set it up for the training of M.A. and Ph.D candidates in the discipline. It is worthy of note that the Co-ordinator of the programme who happens to be the speaker has also helped the University of Yaounde, Cameroon, to re-shape the theoretical foundation of its programme. He has in addition contributed ideas to the establishment of the one at the University of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.

The programme is run by four departments; English Studies, Creative Arts, Foreign Languages and Literatures, and Linguistics and African Languages. It has a Co-ordinator who is a statutory member of the Board of the School of Graduate Studies.

Its focus is on Africa and the Diaspora. Accordingly, it tries to establish links between the various literatures of the peoples of African ancestry.

The admission requirements demand a knowledge of English, French and an African language. We are strong in the Anglophone and Francophone literatures of Africa and the Diaspora but very weak in African-language literatures. This is because it is difficult to get students or lecturers with a competent knowledge of the literatures in African/Nigerian languages. As things stand now, the programme cannot cope with the challenges of introducing comparative studies in Nigerian Literatures, unless certain recommendations are meticulously carried out. These recommendations are

national in scope and not restricted to the University of Port Harcourt. They are in two broad categories: those that are university-based or academically oriented, and those that require bold political decisions on the part of the government

First, we recommend that the departments of Linguistics and African/Nigerian languages which are in charge of these literatures take steps to encourage the teaching of these literatures. One problem we face now in the country is that these departments are dominated by linguists who have little or no expertise in literature.

Second, it is necessary that the departments of English and Foreign languages consider the feasibility of integrating into their programmes courses leading to the award of combined Honours degrees in literature in English/French and a Nigerian language. It may also be useful to make it mandatory for students specializing in these foreign languages to take courses in a Nigerian-language literature.

Third, it is necessary that the universities liaise well with the National Institute for Nigerian Languages, Aba, which is charged with the responsibility for training our undergraduate and graduate students in Nigerian languages and literatures. This will enable them to benefit from the resources of the institute.

Fourth, it is pedagogically sound that examination bodies like WAEC insist that students taking courses on Nigerian languages and literatures answer questions reflecting these two aspects of the courses in their examinations. Language and literature always go together – it is dangerous to neglect any part in favour of the other.

We now come to the second category of recommendations which are targeted at the Government. First, it is important that the Government take a bold political decision to make Nigerian languages and literatures the corner-stone of our political development and ensure that the Cultural Policy of Nigeria is reformulated to reflect this new orientation. English should be given new roles to play in the society. Accordingly, efforts will be made to make Nigerians polyglots in Nigerian languages in order to break down the barriers of mistrust plaguing the society.

Second, it is logical to expect that Nigerian languages should serve as the languages of debate in monolingual local government legislatures and state assemblies. The President of the country should be able to speak four or five Nigerian languages, if not he will be ineligible for the post.

Third, it would be a good idea to introduce the policy of paying language allowance to public servants. The amount of allowances to be paid should vary in direct proportion to the number of languages and literature an official can speak, write and

read. The Institute for Nigerian languages could oversee the issuance of certificates to eligible officers.

Fourth, the present policy of restricting the staffing of Federal institutions between levels 1-6 to indigenes of the state in which they are situated is not patriotic for it vitiates the principle of using Federal institutions for national integration. Citizens of all categories should be allowed to interact fully among themselves in their various languages.

Mr. Vice Chancellor, Sir, it is now time to point out the main movements of the performance.

## VI

Nigeria is not yet a country: it is a mere geographical expression made up of competing ethnic groups trying to come together to form a nation. The symbolic texture of literature reveals that authors yearn for the application of the principles sustaining the fabulous structure of the universe to human affairs. The visions of life revealed in the texts have implications for our national life: first, each person has fundamental human rights and each ethnic group the right to self-determination; second, military governments are like cataclysms in nature because they use decrees, task forces and special Committees to roast the populace to death by vitiating the principle of the rule of law which sustains the life of democratic institutions and guarantees freedom to individuals: the place of the soldier is in the barracks; third, it is false to imagine that some ethnic groups can use their size to determine the fate of the nation since each ethnic group is like a celestial body with a specific identity which cannot be arbitrarily taken away from it; fourth, no ethnic group can arrogate powers of leadership to itself because in the constellation of the group interactions what matters is each group's contributions to the survival of the whole not what it takes out of it- the mechanism of the solar system illuminates the point; any gang- up of the groups to destroy a part of the whole will be a fruitless exercise as the one organized against the Igbo during the civil war has clearly shown: sixth, the formation of specific bodies by smaller groups will eventually collapse because the members are strangers to themselves – they first have to discover and understand themselves through the study of one another's languages and literatures; seventh, the secession of any unit from the whole is not necessary because, in spite of what a prominent leader once said, **the basis for unity exists:** structures in nature provide models for putting it in place and ensuring its routine and efficient operation. Nigeria owes mankind the historic duty of proving that peoples with diverse cultures can live

together harmoniously in a well – articulated political entity with a functioning constitution.

English does not function effectively as the language of national integration because it is a foreign language which many Nigerians use to mask their real feelings and intentions. They rather prefer to use their mother tongues in barring their hearts to members of their ethnic group. It is therefore imperative that the nation take the bold step of breaking down the barriers of the language enclaves by making Nigerian languages the tools for our national integration and working out an appropriate role for the English language in the country. In fact Nigerian languages ought to be the languages of debate in the legislatures of local government councils and states, especially the monolingual ones. Respect for every language in the country will minimize opposition to the use of Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba in the National Assembly.

The national literature of Nigeria is not the literature written in English but the aggregate of the elements running through the various literatures in Nigerian languages. The literature in English is a variety of world literature in English which has English literature as its fountain-head. It is therefore one of the satellites of English literature. The prize won in it by eminent Nigerian writers are victories for the English language and not for the Nigerian languages.

Comparative literature can play a significant role in underscoring the points of convergence between the various literatures of the country's ethnic groups, thereby helping to build a country in which the Wind does not attempt to eat what belongs to the Ground. Nigeria should be a pan-ethnic entity with a tapestry of values sustaining the hopes and aspirations of every citizen. As the bird's song reiterates,

Kùkùkù Kùkù  
KùkùKù kuku

KùkùKùkù Kùkù  
KùkùKùkù Kùkù (2 times)

(Human beings are crazy  
Human beings are crazy

Where do they see boundaries?  
Where do they see boundaries)

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