

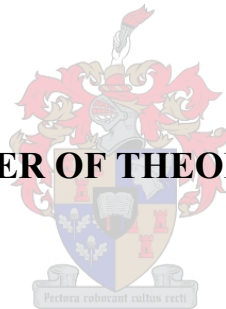
**THE EXODUS AND IDENTITY FORMATION IN VIEW OF  
THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION NARRATIVES OF THE  
YORUBA**

**BY**

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## DECLARATION

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines the exodus event and its impact on identity formation in the light of the origin and migration narratives of the Yoruba people. On the one hand, it is observed that migration is not only an ancient but a universal phenomenon. Its rootedness in Africa and its profound influence on identity formation are therefore brought to the fore by comparing the origin and migration narratives of the Yoruba with those of the Tiv and the amaZulu. The findings show that certain elements of the origin and migration narratives such as a common ancestor, a common ancestral home, a common belief in Supreme Deity etc., provide a basis for identity formation and recognition among these Africans, in particular, the Yoruba.

On the other hand, the study focuses on the Sea event in Exodus 14-15:18 which is composed of both a narrative and a poetic rendition of the sea-crossing by the children of Israel. In the Sea event, Israel acknowledged in story and song that it was Yahweh who as a warrior, delivered its people from the hand of Pharaoh and took them safely to the other side of the Sea. This research shows that a literary consideration of the text and especially of the interplay between prose and poetry points to Yahweh as the main character in the Sea event. Consequently, Israel's identity is defined in Yahweh whose own identity as warrior and deliverer brought Israel victory over the Egyptians and paved the way for a new nation in a new land. In this sense, Israel's identity is assumed to be a theological one.

It is argued that the Yoruba origin and migration narratives help to bring to light the memories of exodus and Israel's recollection of Yahweh as the root of its identity. The narratives help to appreciate more clearly Yahweh's role in the midst of his people and the his centrality to Israel's self-understanding even as they show that these can provide valuable resources in today's world where migration and the struggle for identity are features that are not likely to fade away. Besides, the juxtaposition of cosmogonic myths and migration theories in attesting to the elements of Yoruba identity formation, have a parallel in the blending of both cosmic and migration elements in Exodus 14-15:18. This blending also foregrounds the role of Yahweh in the Sea event.

In addition, the study suggests that the interaction between prose and poetry in the Sea event is an instance of a separate genre which further research may confirm in Yoruba, especially in folk-tales and in *oriki-orilẹ* (praise names/epithet).

## OPSOMMING

Hierdie studie ondersoek die eksodusgebeurtenis en die impak daarvan op identiteitsvorming in die lig van die oorsprong- en migrasie-narratiewe van die Yoruba-mense. Aan die een kant word opgemerk dat migrasie nie net 'n antieke verskynsel is nie, maar 'n universele een. Die gewortelheid/gronding in Afrika en die diepgaande invloed op identiteitsvorming word dus na vore gebring deur die oorsprong- en migrasie-narratiewe van die Yoruba met dié van die Tiv en amaZulu te vergelyk. Die bevindings dui aan dat sekere elemente van die oorsprong- en migrasie-narratiewe, soos 'n gemeenskaplike voorvader, 'n gemeenskaplike oer-tuiste, 'n gemeenskaplike geloof in Oppergod ens, die basis vorm vir identiteitsvorming en herkenning tussen dié Afrikane en veral die Yoruba.

Aan die ander kant fokus die ondersoek op die "See-gebeurtenis" in Eksodus 14-15:18 wat bestaan uit 'n narratiewe en poëtiese vertelling van die see-oorgang deur die kinders van Israel. In die "See-gebeurtenis" het Israel in verhaal en lied erken dat dit Jahweh was wat 'n Kryger was, sy mense uit die hand van Faraó gered het en hulle veilig na die ander kant van die See geneem het. Hierdie navorsing toon dat 'n literêre oordenking van die teks en veral van die interspel tussen prosa en poësie dui op Jahweh as die hoofkarakter in die "See-gebeurtenis". Gevolglik word Israel se identiteit gedefinieer in Jahweh wie se eie identiteit as Kryger en Redder vir Israel oorwinning oor die Egiptenare gebring het en die weg gebaan het vir 'n nuwe nasie in 'n nuwe land. In hierdie opsig word aanvaar dat Israel se identiteit 'n teologiese een is.

Daar word geredeneer dat die Yoruba oorsprong - en migrasie-narratiewe help om die herinnering van eksodus en Israel se onthou van Jahweh as die wortel van haar identiteit aan die lig te bring. Die narratiewe stimuleer 'n duideliker waardering van Jahweh se rol te midde van sy mense en sy sentraliteit tot Israel se self-begrip terwyl hulle toon dat dit kosbare bronne kan verskaf in die wêreld vandag waar die kenmerke van migrasie en die stryd vir "en soeke na identiteit nie sommer sal vervaag nie. Die teenstelling van kosmogoniese mites en migrasie-teorieë in getuienis oor die elemente van Yoruba-identiteitsvorming, het boonop 'n parallel in die vermenging van kosmiese en migrasie-elemente in Eksodus 14-15:18. Dié vermengings bring ook die rol van Jahweh in die "See-gebeurtenis" na die voorgrond.

Die studie stel ook voor dat die interaksie tussen prosa en poësie in die "See-gebeurtenis" 'n voorbeeld is van 'n afsonderlike genre wat verdere navorsing dalk kan bevestig in Yoruba, veral in volksverhale en *oríkì-orílẹ̀* (lofname/benamings).

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I began this study with some apprehension, in part, because of the complex nature of the history of the Yoruba and the possibility that I might be unable to access the necessary materials for the work due to the distance from Yorubaland. After my first two visits to the library, it dawned on me that I would not get enough information on Yoruba history from history alone. As I therefore meandered through a sea of books from various disciplines, I remarked in passing to my supervisor, Prof Hendrik Bosman, that I was not very sure whether I was in history, ethnography, sociology, psychology, anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, art or theology. He responded in characteristic humour that there was no problem with it as long as I could find my way back to the Old Testament. For helping me to navigate through the billows, I say an obvious thank you. But for the many favours you have shown, for your encouragement, patience and ingenuity, words are not enough.

To Prof Louis Jonker, for your support “behind-the-scene” and your invaluable insight and wisdom during the Wednesday seminars, a special thank you. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Prof Douglas Lawrie of the University of Western Cape for his erudite appraisal of this study and his helpful comments. And to the staff and fellow students of the Department of Old and New Testament for a right atmosphere of camaraderie, I offer thanks. To the Dean of the Faculty of Theology in Stellenbosch, Prof Elna Mouton, who chaired my defence and whose role has been an example of a wise and humane leadership, I literally doff my hat. Grateful acknowledgement also goes to South Africa’s NRF for the grant awarded for this research.

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To Délé, Rótìmi, and Ayọ, how do I say thank you?

And Mamma, for your unflinching devotion and prayers, I honour you.

But to Him who performs all things for me, I return my praise!

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

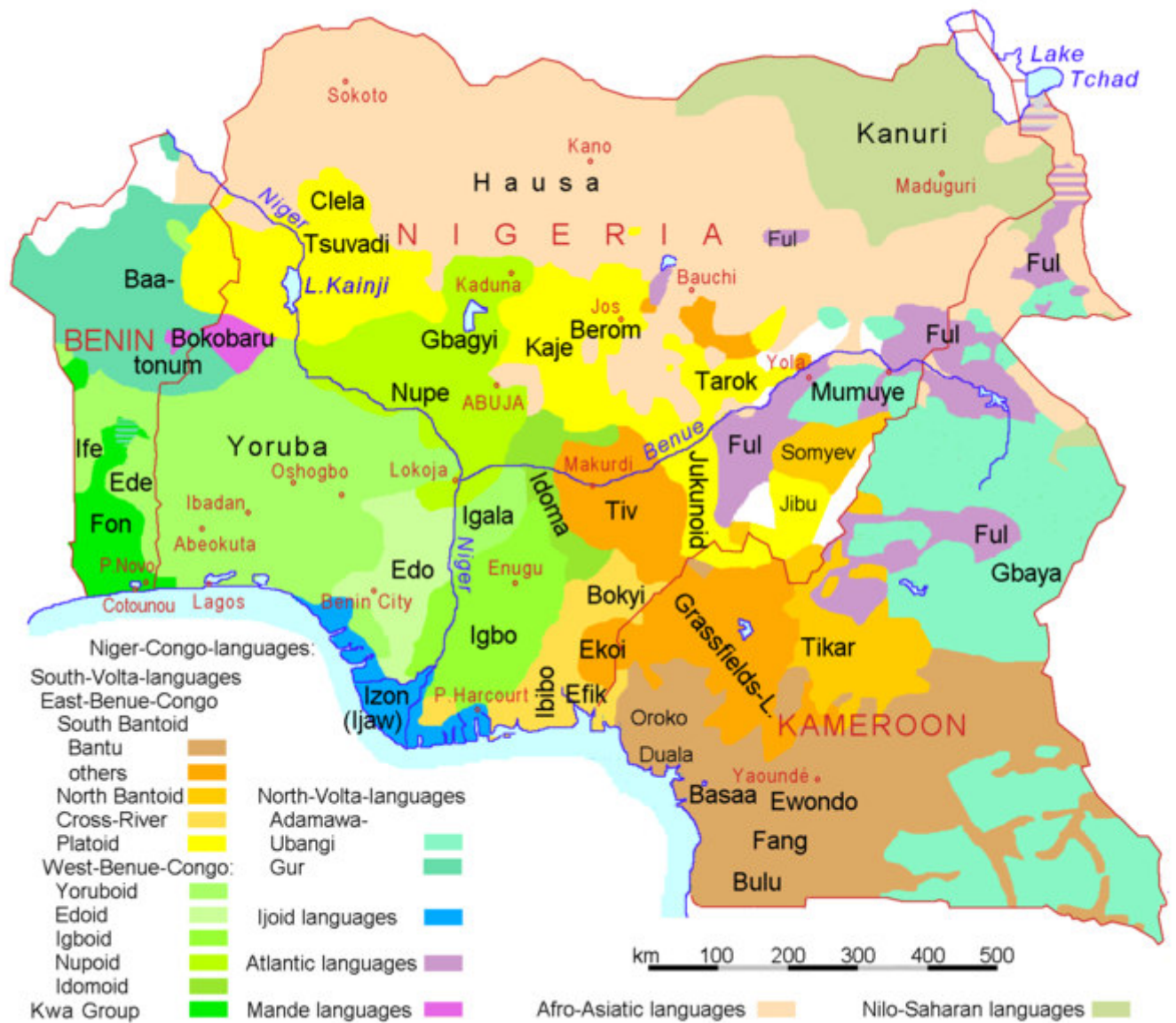
<i>Fig. 1 Linguistic Map Of Nigeria/Cameroon</i> .....	viii
<i>Fig. 2 South African Language Map</i> .....	ix
<b>CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.1 Introductory remarks</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.2 Chapter outline</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>1.3 Problem and hypothesis</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>1.4 Methodology</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>1.5 Concepts and definitions</b> .....	<b>4</b>
1.5.1 Origin and Migration.....	5
1.5.2 Identity.....	6
1.5.2.1 Religion/Religious fundamentalism.....	7
1.5.2.2 Nationalism and ethnicity.....	7
1.5.2.3 Language.....	8
1.5.3 Myths.....	9
1.5.3.1 Africa and myths.....	10
1.5.3.2 Old Testament and the study of myths .....	10
1.5.3.3 Exodus and myths.....	11
1.5.4 History and oral tradition/oral historiography .....	12
1.5.4.1 History.....	12
1.5.4.2 Oral tradition and oral historiography.....	13
1.5.4.2.1 Oral tradition amongst the Yoruba and in ancient Israel .....	13
1.5.5 Memory.....	14
1.5.5.1 Collective memory and orality.....	15

1.5.5.2 Memory and identity .....	15
<b>1.6 Summary of chapter.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>CHAPTER TWO – AFRICAN NARRATIVES OF ORIGIN AND MIGRATION (EXAMPLES OF TIV, ZULU AND YORUBA).....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>2.1 The origin and migration of the Tiv .....</b>	<b>18</b>
2.1.1 General remarks.....	18
2.1.2 Narratives.....	20
2.1.3 Summary of findings.....	22
<b>2.2 The origin and migration of the amaZulu .....</b>	<b>24</b>
2.2.1 The amaZulu – General introduction .....	24
2.2.2 Narratives.....	26
2.2.3 Summary of findings.....	32
<b>2.3 The Yoruba – Origin and migration.....</b>	<b>33</b>
2.3.1 Preliminary discussion.....	33
2.3.1.1 Location and language.....	33
2.3.1.2 Socio-economic structure and religion.....	35
2.3.2 Sources of Yoruba history.....	37
2.3.2.1 Relevant sources.....	38
2.3.2.1.1 Written sources .....	38
2.3.2.1.2 Oral narratives .....	39
2.3.2.1.3 Archaeology .....	41
2.3.2.1.4 Linguistic evidence.....	42
2.3.2.1.5 Other sources.....	42
2.3.2.2 Summary of sources .....	42
2.3.3 Traditions of origin.....	43
2.3.3.1 Myths of cosmogony .....	43
2.3.3.1.1 Olódùmarè.....	44
2.3.3.1.2 Qbàtálá .....	45
2.3.3.1.3 Odùdùwà .....	47

2.3.3.1.4 Ọrúnmilà.....	49
2.3.3.1.5 Other òrìsà .....	51
2.3.3.1.6 Summary of findings .....	52
2.3.3.2 Migration theories .....	53
2.3.3.2.1 “The Yoruba came from Mecca” .....	54
2.3.3.2.2 “The Yoruba came from Egypt” .....	56
2.3.3.2.3 “The Yoruba came from the north east” .....	60
2.3.3.2.4 “The Yoruba and the exodus from Ilé-Ife” .....	62
2.3.4 Link between the origin and migration traditions .....	65
2.3.4.1 Summary of origin myths.....	65
2.3.4.2 Summary of migration theories.....	66
2.3.4.3 Comparisons .....	66
2.3.4.3.1 The primacy of Ilé-Ife .....	67
2.3.4.3.2 The question of Odùdùwà .....	67
2.3.4.3.3 Implication .....	68
2.3.5 Identity formation and Yoruba traditions of origin and migration .....	69
2.3.5.1 Language.....	70
2.3.5.2 Tradition history .....	71
2.3.5.3 Yoruba identity .....	72
<b>2.4 Summary of chapter.....</b>	<b>72</b>
<b>CHAPTER THREE – EXODUS 14 &amp; 15:1-21 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAELITE IDENTITY ...</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>3.1 The book of Exodus – An overview of scholarly research .....</b>	<b>75</b>
3.1.1 Exodus and Genesis.....	78
3.1.2 Exodus – Research history of content, structure and major themes.....	80
<b>3.2 Exodus 14 - 15:21– Demarcation and methodological consideration .....</b>	<b>82</b>
3.2.1 Exegetical consideration.....	84
3.2.1.1 Exodus 14:1-31 – The Sea Crossing.....	84
3.2.1.1.1 Exodus 14 – Brief research history .....	85
3.2.1.1.2 Exodus 14 – Close reading .....	86



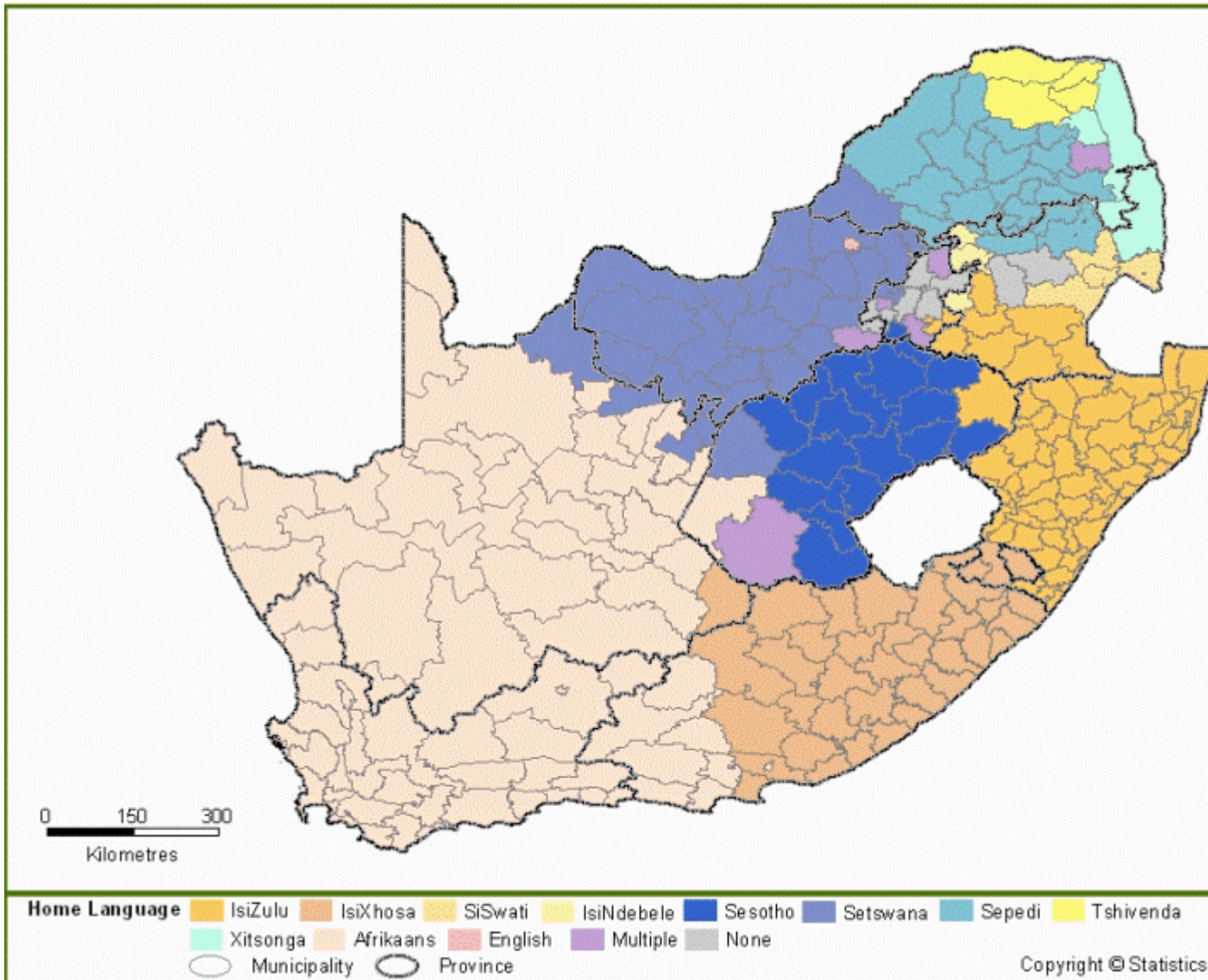
3.2.1.2 Exodus 15:1-21 – The Song of the Sea .....	92
3.2.1.2.1 Exodus 15: 1-21 – Brief research history .....	92
3.2.1.2.2 Exodus 15:1-21 - Close reading.....	95
3.2.2 Dynamics between the prose and poetry accounts.....	100
3.2.2.1 Literary consideration of the two accounts.....	103
3.2.2.2 Poetry of Exodus 15 and the oral discourse .....	107
<b>3.3 On Israel’s identity .....</b>	<b>108</b>
3.3.1 Exodus 14-15:21 – A case for Israel’s identity .....	109
<b>3.4 Summary of chapter.....</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>CHAPTER FOUR - CONCLUSION AND REMARKS .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>4.1 Summary .....</b>	<b>115</b>
<b>4.2 Final reflections .....</b>	<b>117</b>
<b>4.3 Recommendations .....</b>	<b>119</b>
<b>Bibliography.....</b>	<b>123</b>



**FIG. 1 LINGUISTIC MAP OF NIGERIA/CAMEROON**

Map image authored by Ulamm and accessed at 10:38p.m, 2<sup>nd</sup> Dec 2007 from:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Nigeria\\_Benin\\_Cameroon\\_languages.png](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Nigeria_Benin_Cameroon_languages.png)



**FIG. 2 SOUTH AFRICAN LANGUAGE MAP**

Map image from: SALanguages.com © Olivier 2006

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The exodus<sup>1</sup> narrative is considered fundamental to the story of the Jews, their identity and national consciousness. It is the story of the movement of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt and their wanderings in the wilderness as recorded primarily in the book of Exodus in the Bible. According to Matthews (2002:15), whereas the cultural birth of the Hebrew begins in Genesis, the exodus experience is believed to mark their beginning as a nation. He claims that the exodus is a “national origins story” and that “the story of a people referred to as Israel is the result of the exodus experience”. Although the authenticity or historicity of the exodus narrative has been disputed endlessly in scholarly circles (cf. Batto 1992; Finkelstein & Silberman 2001), the exodus remains a reality in the memory of Israel and in its religious records.

In the same vein, a common trend in the history or the story of the peoples and nations of the earth is movement. Many peoples of the world, particularly in Africa, can trace or link their origin to some other lands than those in which they are presently located. Africa is inundated with different stories and narratives concerning the origins and the migrations of its people. Are there any potential heuristic values in the traditions represented by these stories for unlocking new meanings for the exodus?

### 1.2 CHAPTER OUTLINE

The first chapter is a general introduction to the study and consists of the problem and the hypothesis, the method, basic concepts and terms that will be employed in the study and an outline of the chapters. The chapter also includes an overview of existing research and contemporary views on traditions of origin and migration, issues of identity and what constitutes identity formation, especially in an African context.

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<sup>1</sup> The term “exodus” is used throughout this discourse to refer to the event of the migration of the children of Israel from Egypt whereas “Exodus” is used to refer to the Hebrew Bible’s book of Exodus.

The second chapter begins with a discussion of the traditions of the origin and migration of the amaZulu of South Africa and the Tiv of Nigeria. This is followed by a detailed analysis of the various strands of Yoruba traditions of origin and migration. The traditions will be evaluated and classified and the implications of the traditions for identity study will be examined. The findings will then be compared with those of the Zulu and the Tiv.

Chapter 3 of the study focuses on the exodus tradition. The discussion entails a brief history of its interpretation, current trends in exodus research and the possibilities of opening up new meanings for the exodus through contextual interpretation.

The thesis ends with the conclusion, which summarizes the findings from the different segments of the study and the final remarks and recommendations.

### **1.3 PROBLEM AND HYPOTHESIS**

Arguing that theology must be contextual, Bosch (2001:447) stresses that, “the Christian faith never exists except as *translated into a culture*”. Similarly, Gerstenberger (2002:9) notes that, “Our environment is by no means irrelevant, if we are entering into the difficult work of interpreting biblical texts and making theological statements”. It is from this premise of contextual interpretation that we begin our inquiry, and this will take us into the heartland of the Yoruba people who occupy the South West of Nigeria.

It is established among the Yoruba that their ancestors were not occupants of their present location but they came from another land. Where exactly this original home was is still subject of research but there is no doubt that they were migrants. The date of their arrival into the present site also remains unknown but it is evident that the people had settled long before the 15<sup>th</sup> century in the present location as the first mention of the people in written documents was early 15<sup>th</sup> century. Archaeological findings, mostly based on artwork, however, indicate that the people must have arrived in this new homeland at least fifteen hundred years before now (cf. Smith 1969:106-7; Law 1973b:9; Willet 1973:125-8).

Specifically, therefore, our question is: “Is there a way to open up new ways of understanding the exodus in African context by relating the traditions of the origin and migration of the Yoruba to it?” In addition, we shall inquire to what extent the existing description of these Yoruba traditions take into account or compare with other African cultures with regard to origins and migration.

Thus, our hypothesis is that Yoruba traditions of origin and migration influence the process of identity formation in certain ways and that they can be used to interpret the exodus in an African context. The assumption that these traditions influence identity may not be without precedent. Writing from a socio-historical perspective, Benmayor and Skotnes (1994:8) comment that both migration and identity are “profoundly connected”. Further:

Migration – especially for subordinated, racialized groups – is a long-term if not life-long process of negotiating identity, difference, and the right to fully exist and flourish in the new context... Thus, in our usage, the experience and effects of migration are long-term and critical in shaping and reshaping both collective and individual identities (p. 8).

Manning (2005:140) similarly notes that, “the migration of people was central to creating new identities”. He points out that, “Migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, provides more possibilities for identity”. He also stresses “the importance of migration for the definition of individual, ethnic, racial, and especially national identity” (p.138).

This connection has been observed also in the story of the exodus. In his overview of the exodus account in other books of the Old Testament, Peerbolte (2006:105) notes that the reason for narrating the exodus is not always clear but it is narrated as one of Israel’s crucial stories that are responsible for the formation of its identity. The possible connection between the Yoruba’s story and their identity will, therefore, be explored in this study. On a theological level, the goal of the study is to achieve a deeper understanding of the formative impact of the exodus on the religious identity of its readers.

#### **1.4 METHODOLOGY**

In terms of methodology, this thesis entails a literature study of existing research. We shall take into account various writings on the origin and migration of the Yoruba and an overview of contemporary scholarly literature on the book of Exodus to determine their connections. Additionally, we shall consider the related traditions of some other African peoples to ascertain whether there are similarities in their stories or histories with that of the Yoruba. In particular, we shall consider traditions of Zulu and Tiv migrations.

The choice of Zulu is based on two factors, the first of which is the geographic location of this research, that is, South Africa, which is home to the amaZulu. Secondly, the amaZulu are an important Bantu people and the traditions of Bantu origin and migration have become rather crucial in Africa’s history and ethnography in the last century. This is because the Bantu constitute the largest people group in Africa south of the Savannah and the fact of their migration from the northern part of Africa has become equally renowned. Yoruba traditions

of origin also attribute the migration of the people to a descent from the North. On the other hand, the Tiv of Nigeria have been recognized to be of Bantu descent, having migrated away from their kin and settled in their present location on both banks of the Benue River in Nigeria.

It is of interest to us to consider how the stories of these two peoples – one in far away Southern Africa, of Bantu origin, i.e. the amaZulu and the other also of Bantu origin (the Tiv), in the neighbourhood of the Yoruba of the South West of Nigeria – may be compared with the story of the Yoruba to establish a contextual African interpretation for the exodus. The comparison is not so much based on common origin but on the pattern of migration and more importantly on the processes for identity formation. The emphasis will be on the factors that influence the identity formation of the migrant Zulu and Tiv and the way these may be comparable to those of the Yoruba. We shall then investigate the possibilities inherent in our findings for a contextual interpretation of the exodus. In this sense, the methodology here is also comparative.

Further, in examining the book of Exodus, the “five-steps” in tradition history recommended by Gnuse (1999:584) for the biblical critic will be taken into account. What the “five-steps” entail shall be expatiated on in Chapter Three. The literature study will provide a backdrop for a close reading of the text to be considered in Exodus. Clines (1983:33) explains that a close reading enables the critic to focus on specific aspects of a text. It can be mentioned here that the study will not span the whole book of Exodus but will be delimited to Exodus 14-15:21. The reasons for the choice will be clarified in the course of the discussion.

## **1.5 CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS**

Certain terms and concepts will be considered crucial to understanding the present discussion. These include the following:

- Origin and Migration
- Identity
- Myths
- Oral Tradition and Oral Historiography
- Memory



We shall attempt to provide a working definition of these terms in what follows and to see in what ways they have been addressed in the African context and in biblical studies.

### **1.5.1 ORIGIN AND MIGRATION**

In this study, the term origin will be used to refer to the ancestry of a people, their source of departure or existence, their pedigree and, more specifically, their geographic point of departure. Henige (1982:90) remarks that, “No question has so vexed historians over the centuries as that of origins”, that is, whether we talk of the origin of the human species or the origin of specific peoples or races. This is because “we have all measured ourselves, it seems, by our supposed origins, no matter how remote” (p. 90). This suggests that questions of origin are closely connected with that of identity and self-recognition. Karin Barber (1991:136) asserts that, “origin is the foundation of identity”.

On the other hand, migration is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “the movement of a person or people from one country, locality, place of residence, etc., to settle in another”. Migration is a universal occurrence and is a permanent feature of human existence. History, written or unwritten, has ever attested to the migratory activity of the human race. Whether we consider the Dorian invasion of ancient Greece in the 11<sup>th</sup> century BC, the migration of the Maoris to New Zealand in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, the migration of the Serbs from Kosovo in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, or the Great Atlantic migration to New England in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, human migration is a recurrent fact. Manning (2005:6) notes that, “Migrations, whether of long or short distance of duration, are central to the human experience”. However, because of the technical nature of the word, migration, in socio-anthropology, history or other social science disciplines, there is need for greater clarification of its usage in this context.

To begin with, a distinction needs to be made here between ancient and modern migration, as our discussion of migration in this study is essentially a historical one. Nevertheless, since theories of migration are a modern invention, they will be helpful to explain earlier migratory phenomena. Social scientists distinguish between mass migration and seasonal or temporary migration (cf. Amin 1974:69, 73; Jules-Rosette 1981:60). Amin notes that, “modern migrations are periodical migrations of labour, not of people” (p. 66). Not only are the ancient migrations that we shall examine here of people, they are sometimes massive in nature. The story of exodus itself is an account of migration; but whether it was massive or otherwise, is still a subject of on-going research.



Various reasons have been adduced for migration. These include socio-economic and demographic (due to population explosion) factors. Phiri (1982:11) remarks that, “In the course of history people have moved from place to place in search for peace or plenty”. However, the reasons given for the early migrations in Africa, in some cases, appear rather subliminal. Betcher (2005: xi) remarks in his preface to his *African Myths of Origin* that, “The stories tell of migrations for all sorts of causes: to escape a monstrous crocodile, to escape the growing Ashanti empire, to escape a tyrannical father”. Manning (2005:37) claims that, “Migration of whole communities was usually a migration of desperation rather than of hope: most often, it consisted of refugees driven out by drought or by conquest”. Perhaps, the reasons cited for these migrations spring from the peculiar nature of the times in which the people lived and from the fact that the narratives concerning these migrations are usually oral. In the next chapter, we shall examine the reasons for the migrations under consideration.

### **1.5.2 IDENTITY**

The notion of identity is better described than defined, as it is rather fluid in character and nature. Benmayor and Skotnes (1994:11) recognize that, “Identities are not homogeneous or fixed... there are many ways of being black, Mexican American, Chilean... a Jew, a woman... a student, a refugee”. On his part, Castells (2004:6) describes identity as people’s source of meaning and experience”.

In social theory, a distinction is made between individual and collective identity, that is, between the answers to the questions, ‘Who am I?’ and ‘Who are we?’ respectively (Erikson 1963:235; Capozza & Brown 2000:17; Manning 2005:138). Benmayor and Skotnes (1994:11) argue that, “In specific situations and moments, people strategically foreground different dimensions of their individual and collective memories to construct who they are and what they are fighting for”. Essentially, therefore, identity is not only individual or collective; it is constructed or formulated by those concerned:

It is easy to agree on the fact that, from a sociological perspective, all identities are constructed. The real issue is how, from what, by whom, and for what. The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and from religious revelations (Castells 2004: 7).

If identity is constructed, then it is certain that a process is involved. At this point, it might be useful to consider the nature and the processes of this construction. The idea of collective or group identity is often associated with certain key processes such as, religion/religious fundamentalism, nationalism, or ethnicity. In other words, each of these processes is regarded

as a source of identity formation; each determines the way a people define themselves (Castells 2004:12-13; cf. Mol 1976:1-4).

#### **1.5.2.1 RELIGION/RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM**

Castells (2004: 13) notes that, “religious fundamentalism has, of course, existed throughout the whole of human history, but it appears to be surprisingly strong and influential as a source of identity in this new millennium” Similarly, in his case study of the identity formation of the Afrikaners of South Africa, Dalcanton (1973:23) affirms that, “The Trekbeoers were individuals who were united only by their Calvinist religion and by their desire to survive in a foreboding environment”. Calvinism was their most important social bond. It served a “boundary-defining function” (p. 24). This “theological element of the group’s identity... serves to explain the Afrikaners’ relationship to the supreme being” (p. 24).

There is no doubt that a theological element may be a factor in the construction of group identity. In the African context, Mbiti (1990) reckons this to be true. His view is that African traditional religions have played important roles in shaping the identities of its practitioners even though they are currently losing ground to Christianity and Islam. However, he argues that, “Traditional religions must yield more and more their hold in shaping people’s values, identities and meanings in life” (1990:256). We shall be considering the possible ways in which religion was a factor in the construction of the identity of the Yoruba in the course of their migration and in what ways this can be related to the exodus.

With regard to Israel, the theological essence at the core of its identity is unmistakable. Dearman (1992:130, 132) claims that Israel’s identity is rooted not only in the ancestors but also in the Torah. Without the Torah, this identity could not be preserved. In other words, the way in which identity is “sustained in the midst of change and flux” may be a function of religion (Browning 2001:653). Mol’s primary argument in his *Identity and the Sacred* is that “religion is the sacralization of identity” (1976:1). He states that, “Historically, specific religious organizations and orientations in preserving identity seems to be the strategically more important function for explaining social development” (p. 4). In this context, religion is regarded not just as a key process in identity construction but in identity preservation as well.

#### **1.5.2.2 NATIONALISM AND ETHNICITY**

Concerning nationalism and ethnicity, Castells (2004) shows that both concepts can be used as a basis for the (re)construction of meaning. He remarks that, “Ethnicity has been a fundamental source of meaning and recognition throughout human history, as well as of

discrimination, in many contemporary societies, from the United States to Sub-Saharan Africa” (2004:56). In pursuit of identity, people have passionately used the tools of nationalism and ethnicity to articulate their goals. It seems to us that the same thing can be said of racialism. It can also be used as a catalyst for identity formation as shown by the events in South Africa in the recent past.

### **1.5.2.3 LANGUAGE**

Closely related to nationalism and ethnicity is the notion of language in the identity formation process. Castells (2004:55) comments thus:

I would make the hypothesis that language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary... This is, in historical perspective, because language provides the linkage between the private and the public sphere, and between the past and the present, regardless of the actual acknowledgement of a cultural community by the institutions of the state.

Castells illustrates the relationship between language and identity with the case of Catalan, a language in Spain. The people of Catalonia are recognized as being united by the Catalan language and tradition. The Catalan language is clearly distinct from Spanish or from French, even though it has relatively few speakers. Castells shows that the language is the foundation of Catalan identity and for hundreds of years it “has been a sign of identification of being Catalan” (p. 52). He therefore concludes that “it may well be that nations without states are organized around linguistic communities... although obviously, a common language does not make a nation” (p. 52).

Likewise, Mbiti (1990:98-100) notes that African peoples are distinguished one from another, ethnically, linguistically and geographically. In other words, for Africans, language is a source of identity. The majority of African peoples are primarily distinguished by language especially in regions where cultures are closely related.

It should be noted that sources of identity may not be limited to religion, nationalism, ethnicity and language. In this connection, Manning (2005:176) ponders:

What should one assume to be the basic source of identity? Is it one’s national birthplace and citizenship? Is it religion, gender, economic status, work, or styles of cultural expression? Identity operates now on so many levels that it has become a matter of individual choice rather than something assigned according to national and cultural associations.

Viewed this way, Manning’s definition portrays identity as extremely fluid, even porous. The parameters appear open-ended and context-based. Thus, for the purpose of our discussion, we shall examine the processes and the elements of identity construction of the Yoruba in the

light of their migration narratives, from the perspective suggested by Manning's response above, relying on the dictates of the context. This we shall do along with the analysis of Israel's identity, particularly as portrayed in the exodus. However, in a complementary way, we shall first examine the narratives of the Tiv and Zulu people.

### **1.5.3 MYTHS**

The term, myth is from the Greek word, *mythos* and it can be defined primarily as the story of the activities of gods (with men), which includes elements of the fantastic and esoteric; the events portrayed in myths are often beyond the normal boundaries of time and space. For Tikpor (1983:367), a "myth is prehistoric cultures' attempt at answering the most perplexing questions posed by the supernatural and natural in creation". In other words, myths are culturally conditioned phenomena. For Oduyoye (1983:374), "Myths are therefore hypotheses: they are constructed to offer explanations of phenomena. They are literary hypothesis, not scientific hypothesis". Similarly, Humphries (2000:934) defines it as "a story or narrative that conveys the fundamental structure of a knowledge upon which the ideologies and customs of a particular culture rest".

Batto (1992:10) affirms myth as a universal phenomenon that "points to a reality beyond itself that cannot be directly symbolized". This view of the universality of myth appears correct, as diverse cultures, both in ancient and modern times recognize and use myths. To the ancient Greeks for instance, a common way of literary expression is through myths. Greek mythology is known for its numerous myths concerning gods, goddesses and folk heroes. Homer's mythology is composed of tales of endless number of gods and goddesses, from Poseidon, the god of the sea, Aphrodite the goddess of love, to Hermes, the god of thieves. These were some of the twelve gods and goddesses on Mt. Olympus and Zeus was their king (cf. Seton-Williams 2000).

Moreover, because myths are universal, it is difficult to categorise them. Each culture has its own peculiar myths and style of relating myths. Nevertheless, three types of myths can be considered relevant to this study. The first is cosmogonic myths, which are myths of the origin of the cosmos and its peoples. The second is theogonic myths, the myths concerning gods and their activities, while the other type consists of myths that deal with culture or folk heroes. These three types are attested in most cultures of the world. We shall briefly examine the concept of myth in the African context, in Old Testament study and in the book of Exodus.

#### 1.5.3.1 AFRICA AND MYTHS

Africa is replete with endless myths of cosmogony and of theogony. Among the Luyia of Kenya, God created the world in stages, but the heaven was first. After it, he made the sun and the moon, then the clouds and the rain, etc. The Fon of Dahomey claim that men and gods were created from an original pair of male and female, the male being Mawu and the female, Lisa. The Ashanti of Ghana believe that man came into existence when a worm made a hole in the ground from which seven men, some women, a leopard and a dog emerged. The seven days of the week were later named after the men.<sup>2</sup>

The concept of myth is crucial to this research, because in Africa, there is often only a thin line between historical accounts and mythical accounts, especially with regard to traditions of origin. There is presumably a considerable overlap between historical figures and those, who can be considered mythical characters. For instance, among the Yoruba, Sango, the god of thunderstorm was originally identified as a powerful king of the Old Oyo Empire, who possessed strange and supernatural powers. Upon his death, (oral traditions agree that he committed suicide), he became elevated to divine status.

There is, therefore, need to take into consideration, not only traditions of origin that are historically evident (perhaps with mythical flavours), but also mythical traditions, which may consist of historical elements. However, as we have noted, our discussion of myths will be limited to myths of origin and cosmogony, of theogony and of culture heroes, as these tend to contain the elements that account for people's origin.

#### 1.5.3.2 OLD TESTAMENT AND THE STUDY OF MYTHS

In Old Testament study, the discussion of myth is rooted in the *Myth and Ritual School*, a group of authors who adopt a functional view of myth as a spoken aspect of ritual. Their basic position is that the pattern of myth and ritual is common in the Ancient Near East and it was within this milieu that the mythical elements of the Old Testament emerged (cf. Porter's essay on *Myth and Ritual School*, 1999). Batto (1992:128) appears to follow this line as he argues for the literary primacy of Ancient Near Eastern myths over biblical myths and that mythopoesis or mythmaking had its locus in the cults. He considers that, in ancient Israel, mythopoeism or mythopoeic speculation was a standard biblical method of doing theology,

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Betcher's *African Myths of Origins* (2005) and Parrinder's *Religion in Africa* (1953), for more African myths of origin or creation.

using the same techniques or mythic motifs as neighbouring Ancient Near Eastern writers. His argument is that biblical writers reworked ancient Babylonian myths such as the *Gilgamesh epic*, *Atrahasis* and the *Enuma Elish* into a “new and original myth of origins” (p. 44). He insists that, “myth and mythopoeic speculation make up the very fabric of Israel’s core tradition” (p. 126)

In general, Batto seems to affirm Frank Cross’ (1973) position in *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*. For Cross, the term ‘epic’ is the best designation for “the constitutive genre of Israel’s religious expression because it combines both mythic and historical elements” (p. vii). He attempts to show that comparative Ugaritic texts exist to prove that both historical and mythic elements became blended in Israel’s cult leagues (1973:99; cf. Lemche 1998:181-9).

### 1.5.3.3 EXODUS AND MYTHS

The discussion of myth has also been crucial in contemporary studies of the exodus. In his application of his method of mythopoeic speculation to the exodus, Batto regards the exodus as an instance of mythopoeic speculation. His view is that the exodus tradition “has been thoroughly mythologized and re-interpreted as an event of super-historical character through various mythopoeic processes” (1992:103-4). He opines that Israel did not cross the sea on dry ground even though Egypt may have perished in the sea; the notion was imposed by the Priestly Writer who reshaped the exodus story along similar lines as the creation story (which he earlier compared to *Atrahasis*). In addition, the Song of the Sea, (Ex 15) and the notion of crossing dry-shod were not part of the exodus tradition but were promoted by the Gilgal cult and transferred to the exodus tradition. He therefore concludes that the “mythological interpretation” of the events were more obvious than the historical core.

For Cross, as far as the exodus is concerned, it is the ideology of Holy War that makes the blending or the fusion of historical and mythic elements (epic) possible, a point where mythic and historical elements “are combined in a radical tension” (1973:111). In Holy War ideology, heavenly hosts join with the earthly in fighting, such that “the cosmic elements give mythic depth to the historical events of the Exodus-Conquest” (p. 105). In other words, the historical episodes in the exodus have been mythologized “to reveal their transcendent meaning” (p. 144), and the mythic elements have been historicized, to create what he refers to as an epic.

From the foregoing, it is clear that the notion of myth is not only crucial to traditions of origin in Africa but to biblical traditions as well, and specifically to the exodus. Hence, any critical analysis of these traditions will do well to pay heed to this complex but universal category.

Moreover, it is noteworthy at this point, that an important link has been affirmed between myths and identity. Mol (1976:246) claims that myths “provide the fitting contour for existence. They hold arbitrariness and chaos at bay and they reinforce identity” He claims that they are not only conditioned by specific cultures; they condition the cultures in return, they sacralize meaning and identity. They “contribute to the integration of the society (p. 253). Similarly, Betcher (2005: xii) claims that Africans recognize a shared history, a common origin:

What binds individuals into communities is not only the amalgam of shared practices and activities, the daily routine that allows reference to common experience, but also, often, a sense of common origin derived from knowledge of the stories about how the community came into being, how its institutions were established, and how they are justified (p. xiii).

From the above, it can be inferred that myths not only help us to understand a people and its culture, they contribute to the people’s self-understanding of who they are and where they came from.

#### **1.5.4 HISTORY AND ORAL TRADITION/ORAL HISTORIOGRAPHY**

##### **1.5.4.1 HISTORY**

It may be difficult to examine the concepts of oral tradition and oral historiography without reference to history. Miller (1993:11) claims that the term history is not easily defined as most of the data relied on in ancient writing are often “ambivalent and confusing”. He therefore argues that “a proper definition of history would suggest that it consists neither of the totality of past people and events on the one hand, nor of what we contemporaries know (or think we know) about the past on the other, but of an on-going conversation between the past and the present” (p. 11). The classical definition of history by the Dutch cultural historian, Johan Huizinga is worth recalling here. He claims that history is “the intellectual form in which a civilization renders account to itself of its past” (1936:9).

For Robert Smith, the author of the *Kingdoms of the Yoruba*, “history can never be more than a selection, both deliberate and fortuitous, of the factors in a situation” (1969: ix). He reiterates further that, “ultimate history, which would need no addition, correction, or modification..., is an elusive, unattainable – though always attractive – goal”. Chambers (1994:4) affirms the precarious nature of the history of origin (of migrants) thus:

To talk of this inheritance, to refer to history, as to refer to translation or memory, is always to speak of the incomplete, the never fully decipherable. It is to betray any hope of transparency... It always involves a necessary travesty of any metaphysics of authenticity of origins. We find ourselves employing a language that is always shadowed by loss, an elsewhere, a ghost; the unconscious, an 'other' text, an 'other' voice, an 'other world...

Additionally, Mark Smith (2004:125) notes that differences of opinions also exist among biblical scholars over what constitutes history. It is because of the controversial and subjective character of history and its evasiveness that many scholars prefer the term historiography (cf. Van Seters 1983:219), which we shall consider in what follows.

#### **1.5.4.2 ORAL TRADITION AND ORAL HISTORIOGRAPHY**

Van Seters regards historiography as an encompassing term for all historical text types; it "is a designation awarded to certain works that reflect a degree of historical thinking regardless of the form in which it is expressed" (p. 219). On his part, Thompson (1987:31) claims that true historiography does not imply "essential historicity". His argument is that historiography "relates to the form of a text and the intentions of the author. Historicity, on the other hand, relates a text not to an author's purpose but to historical reality".

For Henige (1987:2), however, historiography is defined as "the study of (literally 'the writing about') the past". He notes that oral historiography entails two styles - oral history and oral tradition. Whereas oral history has to do with personal recollections of informants about their experiences, oral traditions "are those recollections of the past that are commonly or universally known in a given culture" and have been handed down for at least a few generations (p. 3). It is the second style that is of immediate relevance to this study as most written sources of Africa's past have their primary sources in oral traditions. The recourse to oral traditions is necessitated by the non-documentary nature of the history of Africa's distant past. For instance, most of the available written data on Yoruba origin and migration relied heavily on oral tradition as their primary sources (cf. Johnson's *History of the Yoruba*, 1921). The situation is more or less the same in other parts of Africa. As Betcher (2005: xvii) remarks, Africa itself "is the continent of orality".

##### **1.5.4.2.1 ORAL TRADITION AMONGST THE YORUBA AND IN ANCIENT ISRAEL**

Various oral genres can be identified among the Yoruba, including myths, folktales, proverbs, anecdotes, *oríki-oríle* (praise names and epithets) and Ifá divination verses. All these play important roles in the oral historiography of the people. Quayson (1997:23) observes that "oral traditions are freely available in the culture". Therefore, "when oral narrators narrate history it is with the repertoire of all the various oral genres available in the culture which



they continually scan to make meaning”. Quayson (1997:24) also refers to Barber (1980), who claims that *oríkì* (praise names) and *itan* (tales or myths), both of which are oral in form, are inextricably linked to the construction of the identities, not only of gods but also of the various clans and personages. It can be assumed from the various oral genres that there is a connection between poetry and oral tradition in Yoruba.

From the perspective of biblical studies, it has been established that “oral tradition played an important role in ancient Israel” (Hess 2005:767). Hess notes that in Old Testament studies, Gunkel’s work laid the foundation for the quest for the oral traditions that lay behind written texts. He believes that Gunkel “was influenced by ancient Near Eastern mythologies” to accredit the origin of the disconnected elements in the texts to an oral mythological tradition (p. 764).

Tradition criticism (from which form criticism later emerged), assumes that biblical narratives had a pre-literary oral stage, as they were stories that were relayed orally for generations before they were eventually committed into writing. Gunkel’s aim was to determine and recover what this pre-literary stage was. Other scholars who followed in the steps of Gunkel included Albrecht Alt, Gerhard von Rad and Martin Noth (cf. Clines 1983:583). Noth, for instance, identified five separate strands of traditions behind the Pentateuch, which later converged into one story. For our present purposes, what is important is the recognition of the presence of oral traditions behind the written traditions. As for the other goal of tradition criticism to recover these oral traditions, that appears to be a lofty one.

#### **1.5.5 MEMORY**

One final concept for consideration is memory. The definition of memory is essential in a discussion of traditions of origin. We have observed that it is ultimately linked to orality, especially in an African context. According to Sutton (2004:1), “memory is a set of cognitive capacities by which humans and other animals retain information and reconstruct past experiences, usually for present purposes”. Le Goff (1992:51) defines memory as “the capacity for conserving certain information...” From a biblical studies perspective, Smith (2004:127) notes that “many biblical texts might be characterized as constituting the record of Israel’s cultural memory” and that the word ‘remembering’ is “sometimes the Bible’s own term for recalling the past”.

#### 1.5.5.1 COLLECTIVE MEMORY AND ORALITY

As in identity, socio-psychology generally distinguishes between individual and collective memory. In his book, *Memory and History*, Le Goff's basic argument is that there is a relationship between memory and history in the sense that "memory is the raw material from which history draws" (1995: xi). He further shows that the dependence is mutual, as he argues that history nourishes memory in return; it "seeks to save the past in order to serve the present in return" (p. 99)<sup>3</sup>. In as much as memory is connected with the past, and the subject of our investigation, traditions of origin and migration, deal with the past, it becomes helpful therefore, to explore the connection more carefully.

Le Goff (1995:54) argues that, of necessity, the study of historical memory must distinguish between societies with oral memory and those whose memory is written and it must pay attention to the translation from orality to writing. Consequently, the term 'ethnic memory' is used to refer to the collective memory of those people without writing and that this collective memory "provides an apparently historical foundation for the existence of ethnic groups or families, that is, myths of origin" (p. 55). In other words, the collective memory of oral cultures is different from that of people with writing and this memory serves as the basis for myths of origin in the former. Furthermore, Le Goff refers to the distinction between 'objective' and 'ideological' history'. He then claims that ideological history is "the collective memory that tends to confuse history with myth" as it also tends to turn attention to the earliest beginnings of a kingdom (p. 56).

#### 1.5.5.2 MEMORY AND IDENTITY

However, memory is not only connected to history in oral cultures, Sutton (2004:1) links it with personal identity. Le Goff also recognizes a link between collective memory and collective identity thus (1992: 58):

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<sup>3</sup> Le Goff's stance here contrasts with that of Maurice Halbwachs. Smith (2004:125) notes that, for Halbwachs, memory "was an unreliable guide to history since it contains distortions of the past" and "history begins where memory ends". Halbwachs reaches this conclusion because, for him, memory is a collective recollection of the past whereas history entails a critical assessment of the past (cf. Smith 2004:127). Collingwood (1946:234-235) also provides another interesting correlation between history and memory. He claims that:

[T]he essential things in history are memory and authority. If an event or a state of things is to be historically known, first of all some one must be acquainted with it; then he must remember it; then he must state his recollection of it in terms intelligible to another; and finally that other must accept the statement as true. History is thus the believing some one else when he says that he remembers something.

In societies without writing, collective memory seems to organize itself around three major interests: the collective identity based on myths, and more particularly on myths of origin, the prestige of the leading families that is expressed by genealogies, and the technical knowledge that is transmitted by practical formulas that are deeply imbued with religious magic.

It is the first of these three that is of interest to this study, that is, that collective memory organizes itself around the collective identity that is based on myths, especially myths of origin. However, this makes us to wonder whether the corollary is not also the case – that collective identity organizes itself around collective memory. We shall investigate the two possibilities in the traditions which we shall be analysing in the next chapter.

## **1.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

In this chapter, we have attempted to spell out the goal of this study and the method, which is primarily literature study. The aim is to determine whether relevant and contemporary interpretation for the exodus could be found by examining the traditions of the origins and migration of the Yoruba in the light of the exodus. In addition to this, basic concepts of the study were considered in order to provide a working definition. These include migration, identity, myths, oral tradition/oral historiography and memory.

From this preliminary discussion, it can be observed that the terms are all interconnected in one way or the other. Migration, myths, oral traditions and memory are all centred on identity. While migration is recognized as common and universal in all human communities, it is also deeply connected with the issues of identity because whenever a people leave their old abode for a new land, they invariably establish a new identity in the new place. For instance, this is true of the Afrikaners of South Africa who are of Dutch extraction. Dalcanton (1973:22) shows that “the Boers were evolving a new identity based primarily on their South African experience. They were losing or already had lost their European identity”.

With regard to identity, we examined the processes for and the parameters involved in its construction. Some of these are religion/religious fundamentalism, nationalism, ethnicity and language, and each of these helps to define individual or group identity. However, because of the fluid nature of identity, it might be reasonable to determine the processes involved in the formation or preservation of identity based on the particular context.

Furthermore, concerning myths, we attempted to review its definition in general terms but, more specifically, in the African context and from the perspective of biblical study. Like

migration, myths are also universal and are interwoven with identity. As Mol suggests, they reinforce and sacralize identity. In as much as the myths of the origins or migrations of a people contribute to a sense of common origin, they are ultimately linked to the sense of who the people are or deem themselves to be.

We also examined the issue of oral tradition, both in Africa and in Old Testament study. It is defined from the point of view of oral historiography, which in a sense is related to but at the same time distinguished from history. The question of oral tradition is considered important to the study as most of the available written sources on Yoruba origin are based primarily on oral tradition and it is assumed that the Pentateuchal narratives of the Old Testament are rooted in oral tradition. In Yoruba, a connection has been observed between some forms of oral tradition such as *oríkì-orílẹ̀* (praise names/epithet) or *itan* (story/tale), and identity formation. Additionally, Old Testament study attests a link between oral tradition and myths.

Finally, we discussed the concept of memory in the context of individual and collective memory. We reviewed Le Goff's work, which shows a connection between memory and history and between collective memory and myths in oral cultures. More importantly, it has been noted that there is a relationship between collective memory and collective identity, especially in societies without writing.

In summary, we have attempted to show that there is a relationship between migration and identity, between myths and identity, between oral tradition and identity, and between memory and identity. In subsequent chapters, our task will include probing the interconnectedness of the above-mentioned concepts in order to enable us to arrive at an appropriate interpretation of the exodus from the traditions that will be examined. In the next chapter, we shall briefly examine the traditions of origin of both the Tiv and the amaZulu before detailing those of the Yoruba.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **AFRICAN NARRATIVES OF ORIGIN AND MIGRATION (EXAMPLES OF TIV, ZULU AND YORUBA**

The discussion in this chapter will focus on the narratives concerning the origin and migration experiences of the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba, in that order. Due to the historical nature of the narratives, recourse to older materials may be unavoidable in the discussions. The older sources appear to be the closest we can get to the original oral traditions of the peoples; therefore, it should not be surprising that some of the data that will be encountered in this chapter, especially on the Yoruba, are over a hundred years old. The reason also is that the scope of the study does not leave room for a first-hand collection of oral traditions in a field research as stated in the previous chapter and, at any rate, many of the contemporary sources are based on these older materials, having no first-hand information of their own.

However, we must admit that some of the ideas in these older sources may be regarded by some modern historians and anthropologists as obsolete, in particular, the techniques used in arriving at some of their conclusions. We therefore use them with caution, being fully aware that some other “more scientific” methods and theories may have since emerged after them. We present the narratives as we find them since our primary concern is not whether or not the events happened exactly as narrated but in the fact that they were narrated in the first place.

#### **2.1 THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF THE TIV**

Earlier, we stated that the traditions of the origin of both the Tiv and the amaZulu would be examined to afford us a comparative base for Yoruba. In this section, we shall consider the Tiv people of Nigeria and their claims concerning origin and migration. It should be noted that our discussion here could by no means be exhaustive because of the nature and limitation of the scope of this study.

##### **2.1.1 GENERAL REMARKS**

The Tiv people occupy both banks of the lower course of the Benue River in the central part of Nigeria.<sup>4</sup> They are found in the present-day Benue, Taraba and Nasarawa states of Nigeria

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<sup>4</sup> See Fig. 1, Linguistic Map of Nigeria above.

and in a part of Cameroon. Their major towns include Makurdi, Gboko, Katsina-Ala, Vaase, Kwande, Gwer, etc. The Tiv, also known as Mitshi, Munchi or Munshi, (considered pejorative in some quarters), are approximately 2.2 million in population and speak Tiv, a language classified as a branch of the Benue-Congo family of the Niger-Congo language phylum (cf. Voeglin & Voeglin 1977: 51-56). Greenberg (1966) classifies Tiv along with other Nigerian languages such as Batare and Mambila as Bantoid of the Benue-Congo sub-family in the Niger-Congo family of the Congo-Kordofanian language phylum, while Kay Williamson (1989) modifies the Bantoid into South Bantoid. Abraham (1933) considers it a semi-Bantu language affiliated to other semi-Bantu languages in Nigeria such as Ibibio, Boki, Ekoi and Nde. It has strong links with the Bantu of Nyaza in East Africa. One thing is clear; Tiv is definitely a Bantu language.

Other than linguistic evidence of a Bantu origin, Abraham (1933) also observes shared socio-cultural traits with the Bantu, in dance and worship, along with physical resemblances. Rounded Tiv huts, which are made of thatch and straw, also resemble Bantu huts. Cicatrisation of the face, skin scarification and teeth filing were other shared practices between the Tiv and the Bantu (cf. Betcher 2005:218; Bohannan & Bohannan 1953:67).

Traditionally, the Tiv are subsistence farmers who practise crop rotation or shifting cultivation and fallowing. Their major crops are yams (which they produce in abundance), millet, beniseed and sorghum. Others include maize, peanuts and, lately, cassava, rice and beans. Generally, they are not pastoralists but they rear goats and sheep as well as chickens. However, their practice of shifting cultivation makes them somehow semi-nomadic in nature as they move periodically in search of fertile grounds for their crops. They use a piece of land for three to four years and then leave it for an indefinite period. Additionally, their economy depends on fishing and hunting.

Sociologically, Tiv people live in patrilocal communities composed of extended family members in clustered compounds. They operate a lineage system in which each lineage, *tar*, consists of between 150 – 1500 people who live together in clans (cf. Bohannan 1957:1). Marriage could be contracted through the payment of bride price, by elopement or through a marriage exchange, a system in which a woman was married into another ward in exchange for another woman married into her ward from the former ward. The two wards would already have a contract or agreement to exchange marriages. This practice was however abolished by the British colonial government in 1927. Polygamy is a common practice and

the family structure is a highly extended one, as there are no terms for cousins or nephews and nieces, only brothers and sisters (cf. Abraham 1933; Bohannan & Bohannan 1953).

Today, the religions of the Tiv are predominantly Christianity and traditional religion. Although first contact with Europeans was in 1854, Christian mission was initiated in Tivland by the Dutch Reformed Church of South Africa in 1911 and the Bible was translated into Tiv in 1964.

### **2.1.2 NARRATIVES**

Consultation on this aspect of the study is limited to the earliest available written sources on the origin and migration of the Tiv. The primary sources that shall be examined here include Abraham (1933); Akiga (1939), which was translated and annotated by Rupert East, and Bohannan and Bohannan (1953). The authors all claim that their accounts are derived from oral tradition.

In Abraham's account, the Tiv are originally a purely Bantu-speaking tribe as evidenced by the ethnological and linguistic affinity between them and the Bantu in other parts of Africa. His view is that the Tiv "penetrated so far to the West as to become cut off from the main body, and isolated among Sudanic-speaking tribes" (1933: i). From the genealogical list of about ten or eleven generations that was collected orally from all the Tiv clans, he reckons that the Tiv must have settled in their present location approximately 200 years from the time of writing, more than 70 years ago. This will amount to a period of approximately 270 years ago.

According to Abraham, the people trace their descent from God Himself, Aondo. Aondo had a son called Shon who became the father of Tiv and Uke. Tiv also had two sons, Chongo and Pusu and it is from these two sons that the whole Tiv people emerged as iChongo, the circumcised people and the iPusu, the uncircumcised (cf. Akiga 1939:18). Abraham (1933:26) notes that the terms, 'circumcised' and 'uncircumcised', "have no actual significance as all the Tiv today are circumcised". Pusu and Chongo in turn had three sons and six sons, respectively. There was another son, Tongo, whose paternity is unclear as some claim he was Pusu's son while others claim he was born to Chongo. At any rate, the claim is that the Tiv descended from these ten sons, which constitute ten lineages.

Betcher (2005:36-41) corroborates Abraham's view that the Tiv believe Aondo to be their progenitor. However, Betcher introduces another personage, Takuruku. One tradition claims that Takuruku was the wife of Aondo and together they bore two sons, Tiv and Uke, while Chongo and Pusu were later born to Tiv. On the other hand, a more popular tradition held that Takuruku was a younger brother of Aondo and man's first ancestor on the earth. Of course, Betcher considers these narratives as myths and for him, the process of oral transmission and mythology "serve to identify the features which the society considers the most significant or problematic or informative about themselves. The traditions are thus a dialogue with the past, in which the present seeks to find its roots in what is remembered, or invented, of the past", (p. xviii). By contrast, for Akiga, "Icongo and Ipusu are not mythical figures of antiquity, but still very much present, as any one may see, in the person of their hundreds of thousands of living representations" (1939:18).

Other variants of the tradition concerning Tiv ancestry recognize Anyamazenga, Keragbe, Shon, Gbe, Aken or Awange as the Tiv's founding father (that is, instead of Tiv or Takuruku; cf. Torkula 2007:14). Whoever the human ancestor of Tiv might have been, it is evident that the tradition that regards Tiv as the original ancestor is the dominant one. This is also affirmed by the fact that the name is used to refer to the entire group today.

For the Tiv, the place of creation is linked with their migration. As in many African societies, the Tiv believe that the sky used to be very close to the earth and the inhabitants of the earth freely interacted with Aondo. Unfortunately, one day, a woman was pounding and hit the sky with her pestle. This prompted Aondo to move the sky away from the reach of humans<sup>5</sup> (cf. Torkula 2007). The place of creation, known as Swem by the Tiv, was the same place where the people began their journey to the present abode (cf. Mbaaty 1995:108; Torkula 2007:15). However, the exact physical location of Swem remains unclear. Bohannan and Bohannan (1953:12) state that the people claim that they migrated from the southeast but Mbaaty notes that some sources regard the point of origin as central Africa. Nevertheless, he claims that the southeast theory appears more plausible if based on linguistic, ethnic and cultural resemblances observed between the people of that region and the Tiv.

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<sup>5</sup> Cf. Parrinder (1969:31-2) for similar stories among the Mende of Sierra Leone, the Nuba of Sudan and other peoples of Ivory Coast, Ghana, Togo and Dahomey. Interestingly, the Dinka of the Southern Sudan have an identical story.



According to Mbaatyo (1995:108), “the question of Tiv origin and migration is still a matter of conjecture”. The popular belief is that when the people departed from Swem, “they wandered from south-eastern, south-central, and west-central Africa, arriving in the Savannah lands of the West African Sudan via the River Congo and the Cameroon Mountain regions” (p.108). Oral traditions have it that the Tiv experienced divine intervention when they were about to cross Africa’s widest river, the Congo, as the green river snake transformed into a log bridge over which the people passed to the other side (p. 108).

These descendants of Tiv later crossed the Katsina-Ala River to their present habitation. In their wanderings, they met the Fulani who helped them and defended them against attackers but after settling down, they were constantly raided and captured by their neighbours, the Jukun. The Jukun, who were more powerful and greater in number, dominated them for a long time (cf. Abraham 1933:18). Akiga’s account shows that they settled on Ibenda<sup>6</sup> hill (cf. Bohannan & Bohannan 1953:12), before the community broke up when the Ugenyi invaded them and when strife broke out amongst the lineages. An alternative account however claims that the people settled in three divisions - one on Ngokugh hill, another in Barakur, Womondo and Ityoughkyegh hills and the third in Ibinda hill. The claim is that these settlements have been confirmed by archaeology (Torkula 2007:15).

Bohannan and Bohannan (1953:54) regard the Tiv as migrant in nature and that their legends are rich in migration accounts. One of the reasons that they gave for their migrations was that it is in their nature to migrate (linking their identity to migration). Another is that they were in search of new or more land and, again, they moved to escape the influence of tyrannical men or groups.

### **2.1.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

From the foregoing, certain comments can be made about the origin and the tradition of the Tiv and the way they perceive themselves. First, in the narratives concerning their origin, the claim is that Aondo was their original progenitor since he was the father of Tiv and Uke. There may be minor differences concerning the name of their ancestor but there is a consensus that they descended from a common ancestor. But why would the people trace their origin back to God and to the place of creation, which they call Swem?

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<sup>6</sup> Ibenda is also sometimes referred to as Ibinda.

We noted above in 1.5.5 Le Goff's remark that collective memory in oral cultures may tend to "confuse history with myth". However, it appears to us that for these people (and possibly many others), at the point when collective memory fails and they could no longer remember or trace the father of that common ancestor (whether Tiv, Takuruku or some other fellow), they have recourse to the 'God-formula'. What is understandable in the narratives is that an aspect of the Tiv's identity is based on the concept of a common origin – they descended from the same place and from the same person.

Another reason for tracing their ultimate descent to Aondo may be the common penchant for Africans to affiliate themselves with the deity or the divine. Mbiti (1991) observes that Africans are very religious people. Idowu asserts the same of the Yoruba (1962:5). Perhaps it is reckoned that affiliation with the deity somehow authenticates their identity. This reasoning might also be behind the claims of divine intervention in the crossing of the vast Congo River by the Tiv.

Second, there is agreement that they were migrants to this present place they occupy; they are not aborigines. Their journey might have taken them from central Africa or from south eastern Africa but they certainly passed through the Cameroon Mountains where an irredenta of the people remains until today. In the people's collective memory, this migration is a fact of history but, of course, the claim is also supported by linguistic, ethnological and archaeological evidence. The discrepancies in the different versions of their origin or in the identity of their common ancestor only affirm the porous nature of human memory. Nonetheless, in spite of the discrepancies, the essence of the claims remains undisturbed, that is, a common ancestor existed from whom the Tiv descended. The people migrated northward having separated themselves from their Bantu kindred in the centre or south of Africa.

Third, in the course of their wanderings, some of the people settled on the way and did not follow them to the final destination. On getting to this present location, they experienced opposition, especially from the neighbouring people, the Jukun. The warfare with the Jukun persisted for a long time. Were their engagements in these battles a means of preserving their identity or of constructing a new one? Could these war dynamics represent what Castells (2004:8) refers to as "resistance identity" or were they just fighting for land? Is their protracted warfare a kind of struggle for identity in the new homeland? Could this struggle be compared to the Dalcanton's understanding of the position of the Afrikaners of South Africa,

whose nationalism and cultural identity he claims is a response to the threats and conflicts around them (1973:6-8, 17)?

On one hand, the language of the Tiv sets them apart from their neighbours. On the other hand, the belief in a common ancestor, Tiv, and in a common God, Aondo, and the shared memory of the experience of their migration, which are all elements of their origin and migration traditions, constitute an important part of their identity construction. In another sense, belief in Aondo represents a religious factor, which Castells (2004:13) recognizes as a key element in the process of identity construction. Their constant struggle with the Jukuns could also be regarded as a way of carving out an ethnic identity for themselves. In the section, which follows, we shall turn to the narratives of the amaZulu origin and migration.

## **2.2 THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION OF THE AMAZULU**

### **2.2.1 THE AMAZULU – GENERAL INTRODUCTION<sup>7</sup>**

Identified as a member of the Nguni subgroup of the Bantu, the amaZulu (or Zulu) are the largest ethnic group today in South Africa, numbering a minimum of 10.6 million according to South Africa's 2001 population estimate. In South Africa, the heartland of the Zulu is the Kwazulu-Natal Province with capitals at Ulundi and Durban but a great number are found in other provinces, such as in the Orange Free State, in Transvaal, but particularly in Gauteng, where almost two million Zulu work and live. Major Zulu towns include Eshowe, Mtunzini, Empangeni, Richards Bay, Gingindlovu and Nongoma.

The name Zulu means 'heaven' or 'sky' and amaZulu, 'the people of heaven or the sky'. The language, which is one of the eleven official languages of South Africa, is known as isiZulu<sup>8</sup>, a Northern Nguni language directly related to isiXhosa, Sesotho, siSwati and isiNdebele but also related, to a lesser degree, to the Southern Nguni languages such as Tembu, Bomvana, and Mpondo, among others. Greenberg (1966) classifies Zulu as Bantu, a member of the Benue-Congo family of the Congo-Kordofanian language phylum. Like other Bantu languages, it is an agglutinative language, in which derivative words are formed through the

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<sup>7</sup> For a general discussion of the amaZulu, see Jenkinson (1882); Bryant (1964); Binns (1974) and Laband (1995:5-10).

<sup>8</sup> See the Linguistic Map of South Africa in Fig 2 above for the location of isiZulu speakers.

addition of prefixes or suffixes. The word 'Bantu' itself is a collective Zulu noun for 'people'.

Traditionally, amaZulu families lived in homesteads (*umuzi*) built of pole and thatch huts (Wylie 2006:57), the floors of which were polished with cow-dung. The huts formed a circle around the kraals with grain and vegetable farms nearby to supply daily food needs. The people have been pastoralists before their recorded history but they also practised rudimentary farming. They planted crops such as maize, millet, sorghum, cocoyam and sweet potato but their staple food is now maize, which was introduced later. The women planted and harvested the crops and the men looked after the herds and engaged in battles when the need arose. Milk and meat were obtained from cattle but the hide was also used for clothing and battle shields, and wealth was measured in cattle. Bryant (1964:11) remarks that a Zulu and his cattle "are inseparable. They were his food, his clothing, his currency". In the rural areas, this pattern is still maintained today.

The Zulu are a patrilineal and patrilocal people. Marriages are exogamous and polygamy is an accepted custom. *Lobola* (also *ilobolo*), a kind of bride price involving the payment of cattle, is offered to the family of a bride during the wedding ceremony. Only after this is paid is a marriage contract considered legitimate (cf. Laband 1995:13). Families are closely-knit and the father is the family head. Several families who descended from a common male ancestor constituted a clan and a chief headed the clan. The people practised cicatrization and tooth filing and major artwork consisted of basketry and bead making.

Today, the two popular religions among the Zulu are Christianity and traditional religion. In their traditional religion, they believe in a Creator God who they call Unkulunkulu but there also exists a strong ancestral cult among the people. Even though they acknowledge the existence of Unkulunkulu, he is regarded as being rather remote and far removed from their daily needs. Rather, it is the ancestors, *amaDlozi*, who are responsible for their well-being and intervene on their behalf in life's crises. Some of the custodians of the traditional religion include the *iSangoma*, who operate in the psychic realm to make contacts with the ancestors on behalf of the people, and the *iyanga*, who are traditional doctors attend to physical disease and sickness. For the Nguni, generally, cattle had ritual importance and rituals and sacrifices are carried out within the kraal.

### 2.2.2 NARRATIVES

The history of the amaZulu before the 16<sup>th</sup> century is complex and open to debate. This is primarily because the theories surrounding the Bantu migration and evolution are diverse and sometimes conflicting. In this study, we shall not be overly concerned with the arguments about dating or whether the events recorded in the oral tradition happened or not because that is a general problem that besets history as an academic discipline. Rather, we tend to agree with Daphna Golan's statement that, "I shall try to understand not 'what really happened' but rather what is the symbolic message in the oral tradition" (1994:118). For us therefore, the implication for identity formation of what is conveyed in the narratives of the origin and the migration of the people we are examining is what is crucial, not the historicity of the narratives *per se*. However, we shall begin by considering the Zulu belief of how they came to be.

A primal myth of Zulu cosmogony claims that Unkulunkulu, the creator or the Ancient One, came down to the primordial reeds called Uhlanga or Uthlanga. He broke off all reeds and gathered every one of them into two pairs, out of which he made the man and the woman. Another version claims that he brought people and cattle with him when he came out of the reeds. In the Zulu pantheon, Unkulunkulu is sometimes conflated with Umvelinqangi, the Sky Father, who is also regarded as being responsible for thunder and earthquakes. Another name for the supreme deity was uThixo. Some other versions claim that Umvelinqangi created the reeds from which Unkulunkulu emerged and others claim that Unkulunkulu married Uthlanga, the mythical marsh through which creation came to be. For the amaZulu, however, there is no clear-cut distinction between Unkulunkulu and their first ancestor. In other words, they believe in some sense, like other African peoples, that they are the descendants of the Supreme Deity.

On the other hand, if we are to consider the origin of the amaZulu from a historical perspective, it may be possible only within the larger framework of what is known as the Bantu migration but specifically within that of the Nguni sub-group. It should be noted that anthropology makes strong claims about the origin of mankind in connection with Southern Africa. Evidence from archaeology shows that the earliest Homo sapiens dwelt in this region and its aboriginal people comprised the Khoi and the San (cf. Talbot 1926:14).

According to Bryant (1964:113), "all African races, of whatever description, seem to have originated" from the north eastern corner of the continent. Similarly, Talbot (1926:15) notes

that some authorities consider that in the early Stone Age, Negroes must have lived in North Africa. During this period, the Sahara was not yet a desert but was a well-watered savannah and as it became progressively arid, people began to move southward where the land was more fertile and there was adequate rainfall (cf. Betcher 2005: xxiv). Part of this great movement of people was what later crystallized into what is known as the Bantu migration or the Bantu trek. In sum, this account claims that the people were driven from the North because of drought or climate change.

A different account of the reason for migration of people southward is provided by Binns (1974), who claims that the Negro stock had entered into Egypt from Gondwanaland from the dawn of history and that the Egyptians themselves had come from Arabia of the South. He notes that due to the Mohammedan Arab invasion and conquest of Egypt, people fled:

Their victories resulted in a vast movement of people. Most of the Negroes, many with a considerable Hamitic strain in their blood, fled for their lives before these all-victorious Arabs, fled in the only direction which offered them any hope of safety – towards the South, where many years before, a limited number of their clansmen had gone when the army was in revolt under Psammetichus, and where others, from time to time had fled, driven from the land by bands of hostile Egyptians. This movement had now swelled to a mighty exodus as men, women and children fled for their lives (1974:37).

For Binns therefore, Negroes had begun migrating southward from Egypt because of persecution but a mass exodus began between 750 and 800 AD, when the Arabs invaded and conquered Egypt. He notes that after the death of Mohammed in 632 AD, numerous conflicts arose within the Caliphate so that many Arabs fled to East Africa, where there have been extensive Arab settlements. Consequently, “slave raiding gangs penetrated far inland all over East Africa, and it seems more than probable that this was one of the main reasons which sent the Bantu careering away from Central Africa in order to escape these merciless hordes”, (1974:45)<sup>9</sup>.

In addition to the Stone Age migration attributed to climate change, Talbot (1926:9-20) claims that during the Bronze Age, migrations from Egypt were set in motion by several events, which included the Nubian wars of Amenemhat I and later the conquest of Egypt by the Hyksos. Among these migrations were found those of the Yoruba people into the west.

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<sup>9</sup> Indeed, some claims point to an Arabic descent of the Zulu (cf. Golan 1994:48; Chidester 1996, for further discussion). Note also that more modern techniques, such as genetic typing, have been used in recent times to debunk the claim of Egyptian origin for the Bantu.

Further, he claims that this influx possibly triggered the migration of the Bantu right across Africa to the Congo watershed.

It is possible to hazard a conjecture that there might have been different or several waves of migration southward, which took place at different periods and which were triggered by different challenges, whether natural or man-made. The common view, however, is that these people settled in Central Africa for a long time before what Binns (1974:52) refers to as the “careering away” to the south. Moreover, Bryant (1964:113-4, 119) notes that the migrants must have followed the Congo and the Zambezi watershed when they took off from somewhere eastward of the Great Lake district of Victoria, Nyanza and Tangayinka. They then turned the Okavango River at its source to beChwana, wandering at the Zambezi for what could have been ages, possibly because of their cattle, which they found difficult to ferry across the river (Bryant 1964:122-4).

Bryant claims that in the course of the meandering of the people around the Okavango, they encountered and intermingled with the Bushmen and the Hottentots (referred to in this study by their current names of Khoi and the San, respectively), from whom some of them acquired their click sounds. The Bantu people were the product of the intermingling of this migrating Negro group with the aboriginal Khoi and San (p.123). With time, some of the people must have surmounted the obstacle constituted by the Zambezi and eventually crossed to the other side of the river. Both Bryant (1964:113) and Binns (1974:17) agree that oral traditions of the Bantu of Southern Africa claim a descent from the north:

An interesting feature of all the Southern African peoples is the fact that though they have no knowledge as to their original home, or the nation from which they have sprung, yet, when questioned, all invariably reply – ‘from the North’ (Binns 1974:17).

This shows that the historical memory of the people still furnished them with the direction from which they sprung, although not necessarily with the details of the journey or the place of origin.

Continuing their journey from the Zambezi after crossing, this group of pastoralists, known as Nguni, entered into their present territory. It is assumed that the people, who must have spoken the same language and emerged from the same parent nucleus, were constituted into independent clans and they began to spread out in different parts of the land (cf. Bryant 1964:119, 126). They claim that they have one eponymous ancestor named Nguni who led the original migration from the north. Phiri (1982:11-12) states that, “They claim descent

from a legendary man called Nguni... who once dwelt in north-east Africa". Bryant (1964:126) also notes that the people, abaNguni, are the same Nguni stock, of one blood and origin. Binns (1974:52) affirms this, claiming that Francis Fynn, a European merchant in the Cape in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was convinced that originally, the tribes, that is, all the abaNguni (including the amaXhosa), were all one nation.

In addition, Binns (1974:55) observes that three migratory waves have been postulated in connection with the arrival of the Bantu in Southern Africa. For Bryant, of these groups of settlers, the Nguni, (as opposed to the Sotho or the Tonga) were the first to settle in the land of the Khoi. His argument is based on the presence of click sounds in the Nguni speech as opposed to the others. The presence of these clicks suggests earliest contact with the aboriginal people whose languages were interspersed by these consonants. On the other hand, Binns (1974:60) supposes that the third wave of the migration involved the Zulu. The Nguni eventually drove out the Khoi.

We shall do well to note that more recent scholarship has criticized Bryant's work, especially his method of taking oral traditions at face value (cf. Wright & Hamilton 1989:53). Wright and Hamilton consider Bryant's usage of the generic term, Nguni as a misnomer because "no 'Nguni' ancestral clan ever existed"; they argue that Nguni should only be used as a linguistic term, not an ethnic designation (p.56). Moreover, they contend that there was no mass migration of the different Bantu groups. Rather, "the historically known African societies of the region did not 'migrate' into it in fixed ethnic units, but emerged locally from long-established ancestral communities of diverse origins and heterogeneous cultures and languages" (p.56).

Similar arguments have been proffered by Vansina (1995), who calls for a complete revision of the hypothesis that there was a single continuous Bantu migration. He notes that new linguistic data and an accumulation of archaeological evidence disprove a massive migration of Bantu speakers, claiming that, "The assumption of a single large-scale migration by the original speakers of Bantu is extremely unlikely" (p.183). Thus, Vansina maintains that there "are many successive dispersals" of Bantu people rather than a single continuous expansion (p.183). The implication for the Nguni group and, accordingly, for the amaZulu can not be disregarded. It is probable that they settled down in families and small groups, not as fixed ethnic entities, as suggested by Wright and Hamilton but only became ethnic groups later in their social history (cf. Wylie 2006:13). Nevertheless, these claims do not particularly disturb



the present discussion since there is no denial of a migration, only that it could not have been a massive one.

With regard to the date of the migrations, naturally, there is no precision. Bryant (1964:24) assumes that the Bantu left East Africa, c.1000 BC and completed its march, c. 1000 AD. For Binns (1974:60), the Zulu arrived at their present location, c.1300 AD. Laband (1995:13) claims that archaeologists believe that the Iron Age people reached Natal and Zululand at least by the third century AD and encountered the Stone Age aborigines who were progressively driven further and further by these new interlopers. In an earlier work, Maggs (1989:29) makes a similar assertion based on the distribution of Matola and related pottery that “the first Iron Age people reached Natal as part of a migration down the eastern side of the continent which had reached southern Africa by the third century AD”. Various other accounts settle for either an 800 AD or 16<sup>th</sup> century migration of the amaZulu to their present location.

The amaZulu believe that they descended from a certain patriarch, Zulu, who was the son of an Nguni chief called Mandalela who led a group from the Congo Basin area and first settled by the Umfolozi River (in present KwaZulu region). Oral tradition claims that Mandalela and his wife Nozinja had two sons, Quabe (also Qwabe) and Zulu. A fight broke out later between the two sons and they parted ways. Zulu later had five sons; one of them was Shenzagakhona, who became the father of the historic Shaka who was born to him by Nandi. Some other version claims that Shenzagakhona was a fifth generation descendant of Zulu, from Jama, Ndaba, Mageba, Punga to Zulu in order of succession (cf. Golan 1994; Laband 1995:17-18).

At any rate, the Zulu settled down, a relatively insignificant people, living in scattered clans in the region of Natal-Zululand. By the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a great drought wracked the whole of south eastern Africa which led to military confrontations amongst the tribes. It was from the great upheavals of this period (known as *mfecane*, that is, the “crushing” or the devastating war) that Zulu began to emerge as a great nation (cf. Phiri 1982:16-8; Laband 1995:14-5). Binns (1974:17) notes that, “the Zulu did not become a great and powerful nation until the advent of Shaka in 1816. Prior to this they were an infinitesimal fraction of the Southern Nguni, who in turn were but a small section of the Southern races”. Shaka, who was a ward of Dingiswayo, an Mthethwa chief, became king in 1816 after the death of his father Shenzagakhona by deposing and killing his younger brother. He had the support of his

mentor, Dingiswayo. War had broken out between the Nguni clans, as a result of a struggle for hegemony, particularly between the Ndwadwe clan, led by Zwide, and the Mthathwe, led by Dingiswayo. Eventually, Dingiswayo was assassinated by the Ndwadwe, and this enraged Shaka, who unleashed full terror on the people (cf. Phiri 1982:16-30; Laband 1995:14-7). Jenkinson (1968:26-7) affirms that:

It is supposed that these people lived in a state of warfare with each other from time immemorial, being perpetually driven, and so like the Arabs, have developed a semi-nomadic life, and dwellings which could be forsaken at a moment's warning with but little loss.

In the course of this perennial warfare amongst the clans, many Nguni families decided to emigrate in groups from amongst their kindred. In the process of what Laband (1995:15) describes as “their violent migration”, these Nguni groups crossed the river and began a northward journey again through Zimbabwe, Zambia, Tanzania and all the way to Malawi. They fought every step of the way, adopting Shaka’s warfare strategy of annihilation of their opponents as they wreaked havoc and spread fear. They attacked and overpowered different communities on the way even as they sought new homes across the Zambezi. Oral tradition mentions some sort of divine intervention when they had to cross the Zambezi. Today in Eastern Africa, these people, who can be regarded as Diaspora Zulu, are referred to as the Ngoni (cf. Phiri 1982; Laband 1995). Margaret Read (1968:7, 1) notes that the journey from Natal took the Ngoni of Malawi forty years, thereafter, they “set up conquest states on the pattern which they had been familiar with in South Africa”.

It should be noted that originally, the amaZulu had no central authority, no united kingdom, for the clans operated as independent kingdoms. Shaka consolidated the empire and brought the Zulu into prominence through his incessant warfare and conquest of the other clans and tribes. His style of warfare was innovative and dynamic and he had an unparalleled army, the *amabutho*, who made use of short spears that were purportedly invented by Shaka, according to oral tradition. Shaka became a rallying point for the Zulu and remains a culture hero of sorts amongst his people until today. After Shaka’s assassination in 1828, he was succeeded by his brother, Dingane. However, under King Cetshwayo, Zululand became annexed to Britain in 1887 after a protracted struggle with the British authority (cf. Laband 1995:29-46, 437-40). The Zulu nation had been reduced to a shadow of its former self.

### 2.2.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

From the narrative and historical accounts concerning the Zulu, there is no doubt about their Bantu stock or their migration. However, the statement concerning the point of departure of the migration, whether from the northeast of Africa, from Egypt or its neighbourhood or from the Great Lakes, is what remains uncertain. For centuries, the people trekked southward, settling at first in the region of Central Africa before continuing their march to the southern part of the continent and to their present abode.

It is reasonable to presume that their migration southward was fraught with violence and warfare. First, we learn that they progressively drove away the aborigines who occupied the land and second, the manner of people they turned out to be in their new settlement, a warring people, both suggest that they must have fought their way through to arrive at this southernmost end of the continent. Additionally, the fact that their kindred, the Ngoni, who separated from them, and marched back upward, fought all the way to acquire new homesteads for themselves probably indicate that they are generically a fighting<sup>10</sup> people. We have seen that the amaZulu rose to prominence and to nationhood with Shaka's relentless, violent campaigns. Could these wars be a way of carving out a niche for themselves? Could the struggle for hegemony and possession of the land be a tacit way of constructing identity for themselves as a people – a form of ethnic assertion? It can be recalled in this connection that Castells (2004:13, 56) identifies nationalism/ethnicity as a major process in identity construction.

Like other Nguni peoples, the amaZulu laid claims to descent from a proto-ancestor called Nguni, but more specifically from Nguni's 'grandson', Zulu, by whose name the people are known today. The two men, whether real or mythical, serve as a source of identity for the people, on a collective level with the rest of abaNguni and on a narrower level amongst their own clans. From a different perspective, however, the people's ancestral claim may be linked to Unkulunkulu, as there is no clear distinction between him and their presupposed original ancestor. A source of identity recognition appears to involve a belief in Unkulunkulu but even a stronger belief in ancestor worship and rituals. For the average Zulu, the ancestors are part of his daily existence and control his affairs through their interventions. However, whether this belief in ancestors was a product of the Zulu immigration experience or it was

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<sup>10</sup> A personal remark from Prof. Douglas Lawrie is that it is also possible that the warfare may have been a late adaptation forced on them by population pressure.

native to him in his original ancestral home in the north is difficult to establish. It is clear nonetheless, that he shares this belief and practice with fellow Nguni members such as, the amaXhosa or the amaPondo. These elements, that is, belief in a common ancestor and Unkulunkulu are crucial to the Zulu identity. They are certainly part of the people's story; extracts from the traditions remain a binding factor for the people. In other words, the traditions can be considered a source of identity to the extent that the elements that make them up are crucial to identity.

In addition to these, a common language, which is not completely dissimilar to other Nguni languages, binds the amaZulu together. The presence of clicks, which they acquired from the Khoisan, shows that part of carving out a new identity for themselves in their new settlement was evolving a new language. The language, though clearly Bantu, distinguishes itself from the proto-Bantu by assimilating new phonemes and lexemes from the language of their new neighbours. In summary, the violent struggles of the amaZulu, a common or shared language, belief in a common ancestor and in ancestor worship<sup>11</sup> can be considered as key processes in the identity formation of the people.

## **2.3 THE YORUBA – ORIGIN AND MIGRATION**

*For in breaking into my own body of speech, opening up the gaps and listening to silences in my own inheritance, I perhaps learn to tread lightly along the limits of where I am speaking from. I begin to comprehend that where there are limits there also exist other voices, bodies, worlds, on the other side, beyond my particular boundaries (Ian Chambers 1994:5).*

### **2.3.1 PRELIMINARY DISCUSSION**

Before we proceed with a discussion of the origin and migration of the Yoruba, it appears reasonable to provide, by way of introduction, a brief account of who these people are, where they can be found and what their practices and customs are. This we shall do in this section.

#### **2.3.1.1 LOCATION AND LANGUAGE**

After the scramble for and partition of Africa at the Berlin Conference of 1886, the region of Western Africa known today as Nigeria became a British protectorate and was given the

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<sup>11</sup> A principal ancestor that has become an identity symbol for the amaZulu today is Shaka. For more on Shaka the Zulu, see Golan (1994).

name Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard. In 1960, Nigeria became independent of British rule and became a republic in 1963. Among the numerous peoples grouped together into a single country called Nigeria, the Yoruba are found. The Yoruba are distinguished from their neighbours primarily on a linguistic basis. The language, also known as Yoruba<sup>12</sup> is spoken in parts of Nigeria, Togo, and the Republic of Benin, but it is also used as a religious language by descendants of Yoruba freed slaves in Diaspora in Cuba, (where it is known as *Lucumi*) and in Brazil. Traces of it could be found in Sierra Leone, where the people are known as *Aku* or *Oku*, and in Haiti and in Trinidad, some Yoruba freed slaves were also settled after the disruptions of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In Nigeria, where the language is predominantly spoken, the people are found between the third and sixth degrees of north latitude and are bounded in the west by the Republic of Benin, in the east and the north by the River Niger, in the south by the Bight of Benin and in the north by the Hausa people. They occupy present-day Lagos, Ògùn, Oyo, Osun, Kwara, Òndó, Èkìtì, and the western part of Kogi states. The vegetation in this region is dual – the north of Yorubaland is savannah grassland while the south is rain forest. Yorubaland is highly urbanized as the people live mainly in large communities. The main cities and towns include Lagos, Ibadan, Ògbómòṣò, Abẹ̀òkuta, Oyo, Ìjẹ́bú-Ode, and Òsogbo. Some others are Ìlòrín, Àkúré, Òndó, Owo, Adó-Èkìtì, Ilé-Ife, Ìwó, Ìṣẹ̀yìn and Ilésà. The high degree of traditional urbanization is considered a peculiar feature that makes the Yoruba stand out amongst the peoples of the Guinea coast and Africa in general (cf. Peel 1968:21; Law 1977:9). In this regard, Drewal *et al* (1989:12) remark that; “their urbanism is ancient and legendary”. Smith (1969:9) also opines that, “they appear to be the most urbanized of the people of tropical Africa” (cf. Bascom 1969:3).

At present, over twenty-two million native speakers of Yoruba are found in Nigeria and they constitute one of Nigeria’s three largest ethnic groups. In addition, it is estimated that over two million second-language speakers of Yoruba live across the country. Yoruba is classified as an agglutinative and tonal language, which also makes use of open syllables. Three tones are recognised, namely high, low and mid. In writing, the high and the low tones are marked as [ˊ], and [ˋ] respectively while the mid-tone is unmarked. Yoruba is one of the four official languages in Nigeria, the others being English, Hausa and Igbo. It is a member of the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo language phylum (cf. Greenberg 1963) and other Kwa languages

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<sup>12</sup> See Fig. 1, Linguistic Map of Nigeria, above.

include Igbo, Ewe, Twi, Ga, Edo, Igala, Fon, Efik and Idoma. The Yoruba language is a dialect continuum with a *koine*, also referred to as standard or modern Yoruba. The dialectal groups are North West Yoruba (NWX), which consists of Oyo, Osun, Ibadan, Egbá North etc.; South East Yoruba (SEY), made up of Òndó, Owo, Ìkálẹ̀, Ilaje and Ìjẹ̀bú; and Central Yoruba (CY), which is spoken in the Ifẹ̀, Ilésà and Ekiti areas (cf. Adetugbo 1973:184-5). To a significant extent, the dialects are mutually intelligible, but in a sense, their differences also represent some cultural distinctions. The language was reduced to writing by Christian missionaries only in the late 1840's (cf. Smith 1969:9).

#### **2.3.1.2 SOCIO-ECONOMIC STRUCTURE AND RELIGION**

Among the Yoruba, lineage or descent is essentially agnatic and unilineal except in parts of the southeast Yoruba where traces of cognatic and multilineal descent are found<sup>13</sup>. The people operate an extended kinship system in which men are the family heads. New families are established through marriage, which is regarded as a contract between two families rather than between the individuals. To seal a marriage contract, a dowry is paid to the family of the bride by the groom's family. This is often only a token and is not exorbitant. Marriage is patrilocal and could be a family arrangement in some cases. Polygamy and levirate marriages are common practices and in the past, divorce was generally discouraged. At present, the marriage system has been highly influenced by culture contact and besides the traditional marriage some other forms have been adopted such as Christian, Islamic or the legal/court marriage. Women had authority over their own affairs and, in most communities, they are headed by the *Ìyálóde*, that is the women leader.

Traditionally, extended families live together in family quarters, so that members of the same quarters considered themselves as brothers and sisters and not as cousins or relatives. Most of the people live in permanent large towns even though they may also belong to villages, near where their farms are located (in case of farmers). These towns (and cities) are typically politically autonomous kingdoms headed by the *Ọba* (monarch) and, in the case of villages, they were headed by subordinate heads who are often answerable to the *Ọba* in the nearest town. Common to Yoruba monarchs is the wearing of conical beaded crowns, *adé*, and beaded slippers. They also carry in their hands beaded flywhisks.

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<sup>13</sup> For details of life among the Yoruba before the twentieth century, see Hopkins (1969), a reproduction of a 1910 report on the Yoruba by the British colonial government, which was preserved in what Hopkins refers to as "the relative obscurity of the Public Record Office in London". See also Llyod (1955) and Bascom (1969) for more details.

In pre-colonial days, the main occupations among the Yoruba were subsistence farming and trading. They planted crops such as maize, yams, cassava, plantain, oil palm, kola nut and cocoyam. Later, when cocoa was introduced from Fernando Po in 1874, it became a major source of income among the people. Eighty percent of cocoa production in Nigeria is from Yorubaland. Farmers also reared livestock, which included goats, sheep and fowls, while hunters went after game, popularly referred to as 'bush meat'. In addition, a good percentage of the people engaged in various crafts such as pottery, iron/bronze smelting and casting, ivory and wood carving, blacksmithing, weaving, and glass and bead making (cf. Bascom 1969). During the period of the Atlantic slave trade, the Yoruba were also major players. Today, however, the Yoruba engage in all types of profession, both indigenous and western, and constitute a large proportion of Nigeria's elite. They are well known for their entrepreneurial spirit and industry, operating a complex market system in which women are in control.

The Yoruba are distinguished by various customs and practices. For instance, the people are characterized by an unparalleled love of ceremonies (cf. Ogunba 1973:87). Rites of passage such as child naming and dedication, weddings, coronations and burials are celebrated lavishly and with great fanfare. The people simply delight in ceremonies. For ceremonies, women and men wear the traditional *asọ òkè*, woven at the loom, usually by women. The women wear the *ìró* (wrapper) and *bùbá* (the upper garment, a free blouse of sort) while the men wear a three-piece outfit consisting of the *agbádá* (a voluminous outer garment), the *bùbá* (inner top) and the *sòkòtò* (trousers). In the past, the dead, especially family heads, were buried inside the house but this practice was later barred by the British. Facial scarification was a means of identifying a person's lineage or tribe but the practice is declining very fast, especially in the urban areas. Circumcision, annual and town festivals, filial duty towards parents and kin, and hospitality represent some of the other customs and practices of the Yoruba.

Perhaps one other feature that exceeds the Yoruba love of ceremony is their religiousness. "The whole people are imbued with a deep religious spirit", notes Johnson (1921: xxii; cf. Lucas 1948:245; Idowu 1962:5). Concerning religion, the Yoruba today are predominantly Christians and Muslims while some practise traditional religion. Although contact with Islam was as early as the fifteenth century (cf. Law 1977:12), Christianity was introduced only in

1843<sup>14</sup> by the Church Missionary Society (cf. Johnson 1921:39), with the return of Yoruba freed slaves from Sierra Leone. Subsequently, the Bible was translated into Yoruba in 1884. In Yorubaland, there is a widespread belief in the existence of a pantheon of *òrìsà* (gods and goddesses) who can be worshipped or contacted through various rituals and sacrifices. At the head of this pantheon is *Olódùmarè* or *Ọlọrun*, the Supreme Deity (cf. Idowu 1962; Lucas 1948). Herbalists, diviners, priests and priestesses serve as ministers to these *òrìsà* and people consult them for solutions to different challenges of life. Traditional religion is also characterised by beliefs in the existence of spirits and witches. It should be noted that relics of Yoruba religion are found in Brazil, Cuba, Haiti and Dominican Republic and, in addition, some communities in the United States, such as *Oyotunji* in North Carolina, are wholly dedicated to the renaissance of Yoruba traditional religion.

With this background, in the following section, we shall consider the nature of the origin and migration narratives of the Yoruba and the possible reasons for the differences in the strands of tradition concerning these narratives. However, before doing that, it is expedient to investigate the sources of Yoruba history and their impact on available traditions of origin and migration.

### **2.3.2 SOURCES OF YORUBA HISTORY**

Identifying the sources of Yoruba history is crucial to this aspect of the study because, on the one hand, it helps to clarify issues of historicity, that is, whether the narratives are historically credible or not. On the other hand, it enables us to compare data from different sources to ascertain whether they cohere or differ in substance. If there is a certain degree of uniformity concerning data from the various sources, then it could help to determine whether there is conclusive evidence for the origin and migration of the people. In other words, the sources can help us evaluate the worth of data available to us. In what follows, we shall consider also the benefits and problems inherent in the sources that are relevant to the traditions in question.

Various sources have been identified for Yoruba history. Some of these are listed as written materials; tradition history; *Ifá* cult literature; *oríkì*; proverbs, songs and poems; ceremonies; and archaeology. Others are art, language; political and social structure; and warfare and weapons (cf. Biobaku 1973). This list of sources from Biobaku (1973) more or less sums up pieces of what other writers also consider as sources of Yoruba history (cf. Smith 1969: ix-x;

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<sup>14</sup> Idowu (1962:209) states that the year was 1841.



Barber 1991; and Quayson 1997, which include in addition, titles, place and proper names, the analysis of the distribution of blood groups or serology, and more recently, genetic typing, as potential sources). The book, *Sources of Yoruba History*, edited by Saburi Biobaku, is a compendium by a dozen authors, and it focuses on the variety of sources of Yoruba history in general, whether the history of communities, regions or dialectal groups. Since Biobaku's treatise is the most comprehensive of studies concerning sources of Yoruba history, we shall review the sources cursorily to determine those that are of direct importance to the present discussion.

However, it is important to note that some of the sources are not particularly significant to this study. For instance, Smith (1973) shows that Yoruba warfare and weapons represent possible sources of historical reconstruction but it is noteworthy that most of the weapons that could serve as evidence of sources are mostly from the 17th century. They do not seem to provide much insight into the earlier histories of origin or migration.

### **2.3.2.1 RELEVANT SOURCES**

#### **2.3.2.1.1 WRITTEN SOURCES**

It is pertinent to note that the Yoruba in antiquity are considered essentially a non-literate society (cf. Johnson 1921:3). The only area where there was evidence of literacy in Arabic, at least as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century, was at Oyo<sup>15</sup>. Even so, there is nothing to show today, of whatever literary culture there was at Oyo in that period. Therefore, it can be envisaged that written sources play little role in the people's earliest history or its reconstruction. In Biobaku's *Sources*, Law (1973b) proffers a concise but exhaustive account of contemporary written sources of Yoruba history. He shows that most of the written sources are from European travellers, traders or missionaries and although there was evidence of their contact with Yorubaland as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> century, their activities were restricted to the coastal areas of Lagos and Ijebu until the 19<sup>th</sup> century when they penetrated inland<sup>16</sup>. However, most of the writings do not contain much useful details of earlier history; some are only references to the people while others are concerned with the commercial activities of these Europeans.

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<sup>15</sup> Islam had begun to spread in the northern part of Yorubaland as early as the 16<sup>th</sup> century and a French trader Landolphe reported in the 17<sup>th</sup> century that some Oyo ambassadors that he met in Benin were literate in Arabic (cf. Biobaku 1973:1-2; Law 1977:12).

<sup>16</sup> Hugh Clapperton and Richard Lander were the first Europeans to penetrate into the interior of Yorubaland in 1825-6 and after the former's death, Richard and his brother, John made a second journey in 1830 (cf. Law 1977:17;

However, in his 1977 book on the Oyo Empire, Law refers to some African sources in addition to the European sources. These include works of Uthman Dan Fodio in 1806 and 1811, which refer to the Yoruba twice, and the writing of his son, Sultan Bello, which contained references of an account of Yoruba origin and migration. Law's view is that the written sources are not very satisfactory, both in quantity and in quality. Concerning Oyo history of c.1600-1836, he observes that, "There is in particular, an almost total lack of first-hand evidence" (1977:12). It is evident that this is equally true of Yoruba history in general.

It is significant that the written sources that provide any serious account of Yoruba early history have relied heavily on oral traditions. For instance, in his classic book, *The History of the Yoruba*, Samuel Johnson notes that his account of Yoruba's past is largely dependent on oral narratives that were obtained from the *arokin*, royal bards from the palace of the Alààfin of Oyo (1921:3). These bards are regarded as national historians of sorts and they are members of a particular family who transmit and recite the history of the people and previous kings from one generation to another. Johnson claims to have obtained most of his account from this group. His other source was what he regards as eyewitness accounts of the events of his time, that is, early and late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Although Johnson's work has become a written source of Yoruba history, as it were, it is primarily dependent on oral sources. Therefore, at this point, we shall turn to what may turn out to be our most important source, oral tradition.

#### 2.3.2.1.2 ORAL NARRATIVES

The second source of Yoruba history attested by Law (1973c) is what he refers to as tradition history. Biobaku (1973:4) describes tradition history as "accounts handed down orally from generation to generation". This appears to be another way of describing oral narratives. As observed earlier, in the absence of conventional historical material, the bulk of contemporary writing on Yoruba history before the 19<sup>th</sup> century has relied heavily on oral narratives. A common aspect of tradition in Yoruba is the use of oral poetry called *oríkì* or its counterpart *oríkì orílẹ̀*. Ayorinde (1973:63) asserts that *oríkì*, that is, praise names or epithets are valuable sources of Yoruba history (cf. Barber's 1991 *oríkì orílẹ̀*). However, these *oríkì* often offer glimpses only into the life of individuals, especially kings or famous ancestors or warriors. *Oríkì orílẹ̀*, on the other hand, are praise songs or cognomens for communities, towns or villages, or even for dialectal groups and offer not much evidence for the origin of the people, collectively. In a separate article, Delano (1973:77) also argue for proverbs, songs and poems as sources for the people's history on the grounds that they often point to specific events "in the life of a community". These sources serve well for the reconstruction of local

or regional histories but offer little concerning the national history of the Yoruba. From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, however, accounts that refer to Yoruba origin and migration have been consistent in their claims that their evidences are based primarily on oral tradition or on written sources that were based on oral tradition (cf. Johnson 1921; Lucas 1948; Idowu 1962; Ellis 1966; Farrow 1969; Smith 1969; Biobaku 1973).

### *Problems of oral narratives*

However, several problems are involved with the use of oral narratives as historical source. In Biobaku (1973), Law's chapter on tradition history focuses on the sort of difficulties inherent in the use of oral traditions as a historical source. For instance, he notes that legends associated with these narratives are particularly susceptible to distortions and fabrications even though they may preserve a genuine tradition. Secondly, he argues that, "Origin myths are frequently tendentious, and suffer distortion for ulterior purposes, seeking to validate claims of superiority or suzerainty or to friendship or community". He cautions, however that, "To say this is not to deny that material of historical value may not be derived from such myths, provided rational principles of evaluation are employed" (Law 1973c:29). He suggests that such stories may be evaluated on the strength of other external evidence (p.29). Furthermore, one other problem with the legends, especially those of migration and creation, is that they often come in numerous versions. However, the author is quick to note that sometimes when the variants are compared, points of agreement may be found, which can be taken as historical fact (p.30).

In the same vein, Biobaku and Beier (1955:16) and Biobaku (1973:4-6) affirm that the problems and shortcomings of using oral history include:

- Using history to justify present claims and situations, which often leads to distortions and fabrications
- Presence of propaganda function in particular stories causing alterations
- The fact that many published oral traditions "often offer a synthesis of the traditions which they have themselves collected with the material published earlier" leading to literary contamination (1973:5)
- Problem of chronology as oral traditions do not provide absolute dates (often, no dates at all)

- Problems of memory - the authors note that, “Memory inevitably selects, and sometimes it falsifies the past in order to serve personal ambition or political ends” (1955:16)<sup>17</sup>.

In spite of these shortcomings, however, Biobaku and Beier (1955:16) are convinced that the contribution of oral history lies in the fact that it can provide important clues which modern historians can take up concerning West African origins. Without any doubt, oral narratives remain the primary source of reconstructing the history of Yoruba origin and migration. This point is buttressed by Vansina (1965:1) as he notes that in non-literate societies, oral tradition represents the main source of historical reconstruction. Regrettably, because of the nature and limitation of the present study, no firsthand oral tradition will be examined; only documented narratives will be considered in determining the origin and migration of the Yoruba.

#### 2.3.2.1.3 ARCHAEOLOGY

In his own article in the *Sources*, Frank Willet argues for the use of archaeology as a source for reconstructing Yoruba history. He notes that archaeology has developed ancillary techniques that can produce evidence of absolute dating. These include radiocarbon dating and thermoluminescence, in which the glow of light released from a heated object is used in dating, especially in pottery (1973:113-15). Archaeological excavations that have acted as clues to earlier history have been done extensively at Ilé-Ifẹ and, to some extent, at Old Oyo, Oyo and at Ilésà in the last century. Willet asserts that radiocarbon dating of various excavations at Ita Yemoo at Ifẹ showed evidence of artwork, some from AD 1470  $\pm$ 100, and others from AD 850  $\pm$ 120. He claims that “the radiocarbon dates indicate that Ifẹ was occupied by AD 800 if not from AD 560” (p.136).

Similarly, Drewal *et al* (1989:47) affirm that radiocarbon dating of archaeological findings at Ifẹ confirms an AD 500 dating and there is evidence of iron working and agriculture at Ifẹ by AD 500 and AD 900. Moreover, radiocarbon testing on some excavations at a late Stone Age

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<sup>17</sup> In this connection, Smith (1969: xi) also remarks that, “Tradition is subject to falsification in several known ways: e.g., to what has been called ‘legendary elision’ (the suppression of the ‘middle ages’ in a people’s history by assigning all events to either the period of the origin of their society or to recent times) and ‘legendary stereotyping’ (the compression of a narrative by reducing and stereotyping the names of persons and places).” Concerning the Hebrew Bible narratives, Alter (1978:363-364) argues that although, the use of type-scenes or stereotype scenes is not uncommon as instruments of characterization and foreshadowing, sometimes, there is a deliberate abortion or suppression of such type-scenes on the part of the narrator. He notes that “the total suppression of a type-scene may be a deliberate ploy of characterization and thematic argument” (p.367). In other words, this suppression may lead to some form of falsification or the other, even when such a falsification is not intended.

site at Iwo-Eleru, near Àkúré, yielded evidence of settlement dating from about 11<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE (cf. Law 1977:26). At the same Iwo Eleru, Drewal *et al* (1989:46) assert that human remains identified as Negroid (although not necessarily Yoruba) dating back to 2800 BC were found. It appears that the drawbacks concerning chronology and dating found in oral tradition can be resolved in some ways by archaeology.

#### **2.3.2.1.4 LINGUISTIC EVIDENCE**

Unarguably, linguistic evidence is another invaluable source for the historian. Language has been used extensively as a tool for establishing common origin of peoples in the modern era. Joseph Greenberg and R G Armstrong are renowned for their breakthrough studies on comparative reconstruction of African and West African languages respectively (cf. Adetugbò 1973:178). The main argument in using linguistic evidence for historical reconstruction is that genetic interrelationship between languages can be used to trace the prehistory and origin of the peoples. By inference, the origin of the Yoruba may not be unconnected with their kindred groups whose languages equally belong to the Kwa group of the Niger-Congo family (cf. Adetugbò 1973:181-3). Smith (1969:13) also corroborates the fact that linguistic data, based on glottochronology, can be a useful source of solving problems of origin.

#### **2.3.2.1.5 OTHER SOURCES**

At least three other relevant sources of Yoruba origin and migration are discussed in Biobaku (1973), namely art in metal, art in wood, and political and social structure. While art in metal consists of various works in iron, bronze and copper, art in wood was essentially woodcarving (cf. Carroll 1973; Williams 1973). It can be noted that iron smelting among the Yoruba has been dated to a period before the first century (Williams 1973:143). Woodcarving is considered valuable, “not as a chronicle but as a record of cultural background” (Carroll 1973:165). Concerning political and social structure, however, Llyod (1973:205-6) remarks that there are striking cultural uniformities and discontinuities in the ethnography of the groups in the Guinea Coast. He argues that these common traits such as sacred kingship, marriage ceremonies, political and religious festivals, can prove useful to the historian as evidence of migration, conquest or diffusion.

#### **2.3.2.2 SUMMARY OF SOURCES**

In the light of the foregoing, the sources identified in Biobaku (1973) can be summarized into five broad categories, that is, for the purpose of this study. The first is written sources, which comprises of both European and African sources, whether contemporary or classic. The

second source is oral tradition, which we shall classify as consisting of Law's tradition history, *oríkì*, *oríkì orílẹ̀* (praise songs, epithets and cognomens), songs, poems and proverbs, and *Ifá* divination poems. It has been noted above that of all these sources, tradition history or oral narrative is most relevant to the present discussion of Yoruba origin and tradition. The third category is the linguistic source while archaeology represents the fourth category. Under archaeology, we choose to include both art in metal and art in wood because most of the evidence from art is obtained from archaeological findings. The last category, which may not serve the present purpose much, is the political and social structure. Under this, ceremonies, warfare and weapons can be included.

In the section which follows, we shall examine various traditions of the origin of the Yoruba and their sources. The sources will help to determine their classification as either authentic history, that is, in the sense of what really happened, or remembered history (cf. Biobaku & Beier 1955:12), that is, what the people believe happened.

### **2.3.3 TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN**

The traditions concerning the origin of the Yoruba are rather complex and diverse. We would like to reiterate that these traditions are all oral in origin even though they have now become documented. Both indigenous and foreign scholars have classified some of the narratives that pertain to the origin of the Yoruba as myths. Bascom (1969:9) regards them as "charmingly ethnocentric". According to Llyod (1955:20), "Myths are virtually the only source of Yoruba history for the centuries before the arrival of Europeans". This statement may not be entirely correct, for myths constitute only a part of the people's oral historiography. As Biobaku and Beier (1955:12) argue, lack of written evidence does not imply that the people have no history. They maintain that, "It is natural for a literate society to conceive history as a written record; but it is mere snobbery to deny the name of history to unwritten accounts of the past".

At any rate, Llyod (1955:21) divides Yoruba myths of origin into two, namely creation stories and stories of conquest and migration. At this point, it is important to note that most traditions link the origin of the Yoruba to creation. This we shall appreciate as we consider the various traditions on creation and origin below.

#### **2.3.3.1 MYTHS OF COSMOGONY**

The diverse nature of the creation and origin narratives of the Yoruba makes it somewhat difficult to classify them or put them in any particular order of importance or of age. To classify them also according to the account of various authors may prove problematic in the

sense that while some accounts pay attention to details, others are terse and of a summary nature. However, one thing is common to the accounts – the names of the characters that feature in the narratives. These include the Supreme Deity himself, that is, Ọlọrun or Olódùmarè, and his ministers, Odùdùwà, Ọbàtálá, Ọrúnmilà, and Olókun, etc. It seems best to us, therefore, to review the various and often-conflicting traditions based on these personalities or characters. This done, it might also prove significant to identify the home or original location of the traditions because of their possible ideological and political undertones. For now, we shall begin our investigation with Olódùmarè, the Supreme Deity and his role in cosmogony according to Yoruba belief.

#### 2.3.3.1.1 OLÓDÙMARÈ

Among the Yoruba, Olódùmarè or Ọlọrun (the owner of the sky) is, without any controversy, the Supreme God. In all narratives, certain remarks about him are consistent. The first is that he is the author of creation and he dwells in heaven (or beyond the sky) as the name Ọlọrun suggests. Moreover, he is regarded as supreme and the affairs and destinies of human beings ultimately rest in his hands. He has no equal, and of the hundreds of gods and divinities (*òrìsà*) acclaimed in Yorubaland, unquestionably, he is above them all. Even though, he is supreme, it has been observed that, unlike the other deities in the land, Olódùmarè is not worshipped, neither is any sacrifice offered to him. There are no priests, temples or altars in his name but he is acknowledged as the power behind all things (cf. Ellis 1966:36; Bowen 1968:313; Parrinder 1969:14, 21). The innumerable *òrìsà* in the land are believed to be ministers or agents of Olódùmarè and they carry out his bidding.

As in most West African creation myths, the belief in some quarters is that in the beginning the heaven was very close to the earth, so that the denizens of heaven and the inhabitants of the earth could commute between the two places, as they desired (cf. Idowu 1962:21; Abimbọla 1973:42; Awolalu 1979:12). This continued for a long time until one day a woman with dirty hands touched the unsoiled surface of the sky/heaven and Olódùmarè, in his anger, withdrew his abode far away from the dwelling of human beings. Some other variant claims that things changed when a greedy person helped himself to too much food from heaven (for the people only needed to reach their hands to the sky to get food whenever they were hungry). However, before these events occurred, it can be assumed that creation had taken place already.

To say that Olódùmarè is creator may not necessarily imply that he created the world with his own hands. Rather, the common belief is that the earth was formed at his instruction<sup>18</sup>. Olódùmarè simply commissioned his agents or ministers to go and create the earth, furnishing them with the necessary resources to do so, as we shall see in the accounts below concerning these *òrìsà* who were involved in creation. As the roles of the major *òrìsà* are considered, the relationship between them and Olódùmarè will become more clearly focused. We shall begin with Ọbàtálá but it should be understood that the order of discussion here has nothing to do with their degree of importance or hierarchy as the prominence imputed to each *òrìsà* varies from one locality to the other and from one era to another.

#### 2.3.3.1.2 ỌBÀTÁLÁ

All the different strands of tradition mention Ọbàtálá as a major role-player in the work of creation but there is not much uniformity about his relationship with other *òrìsà* or his precise role in creation. On the other hand, the traditions agree on certain aspect of his personality and character. He is regarded as a deity and is worshipped throughout Yorubaland; although in some communities, other names such as Orisanla (great deity) or Orisaala (white or pure deity) may be ascribed to him. The worshippers of Ọbàtálá wear white apparel, apparently in conformity to what they believe to be his nature, which is holy, and everything that is used in his worship is also white or painted white. He is regarded as the god of purity or morality (cf. Lucas 1948:90; Farrow 1969:42). Some authors refer to him as the arch-divinity (cf. Awolalu 1979:12; Babatunde 1992:60) or vice-gerent of Ọlọrun (cf. Lucas 1948:89). A few accounts claim that he was made by Ọlọrun who handed over to him the task of managing the earth after its creation or that he was even Ọlọrun's son (cf. Farrow 1969:43, 167).

Several writers categorize the *òrìsà* into major and minor deities (cf. Ellis 1966:34-5). Ọbàtálá is regarded as one of the major deities in Yorubaland (cf. Ellis 1966:38). Awolalu (1979:21) classifies him as a primordial divinity. According to an oral tradition,<sup>19</sup> while Olódùmarè resided in heaven, below was a watery surface. He therefore sent Ọbàtálá with a snail shell (or a napkin in other accounts) filled with loose earth, a hen (some traditions say it is a rooster) and a pigeon.<sup>20</sup> On arrival, Ọbàtálá poured out the sand while the hen and the

<sup>18</sup> Note that Lucas (1948:89) and Parrinder (1950:229) mention a tradition that attributes creation to Olódùmarè but afterwards, left it for Ọbàtálá to finish off by creating man. However, this tradition does not appear widespread.

<sup>19</sup> This tradition is recorded by Idowu (1962:18-21). See also Parrinder (1969:30) and Awolalu (1979).

<sup>20</sup> Some writers recount that Olódùmarè let him down from heaven with a long chain (cf. Llyod 1955:21).



pigeon spread it with their claws on the watery surface so that land appeared. A chameleon was then sent to inspect the work and it brought back a report to Olódùmarè that the earth was wide enough, Ile Ifẹ or the place of spreading. The place where this took place thus became known as Ilé-Ifẹ (or Ifẹ), the centre of creation from where human beings, and the Yoruba, in particular, began their dispersal. Later, Ọbàtálá was sent back with Ọrúnmilà, another *òrìsà*, to equip the earth. As part of his task, Ọbàtálá was to mould human bodies from clay and present them to Olódùmarè to breathe life into the finished forms. For this role, he is known as “the sculptor divinity” (Idowu 1962:21). After moulding the lifeless bodies, he would store them in a place pending the time Olódùmarè would come and breathe into them (cf. Bowen 1968:314).

Awolalu (1979:12-13) continues this account thus:

For the purpose of equipping the earth, he was given the primeval palm tree to be planted. This was to provide food, drink, oil, and leaves for shelter. He was also given three other trees that are full of juice to supply drinks for the inhabitants of the earth for as yet there was no rain.

From this point, however, traditions diverge in details. An Ifẹ tradition claims that Ọbàtálá was a lover of palm wine and he used to drink to the point of intoxication. On his way to carry out Olódùmarè’s instruction, he was so drunk that he fell into a stupor. When he delayed, as he would not wake up on time from his drunken sleep, Odùdùwà was sent to investigate what went wrong. Finding Ọbàtálá in deep sleep, Odùdùwà collected his equipment for forming human bodies and just went ahead and fulfilled the task himself, thereby supplanting Ọbàtálá and becoming the creator of solid earth in the place of Ọbàtálá (cf. Idowu 1962:22; Parrinder 1969:27; Awolalu 1979:13).

Another tradition claims that while Ọbàtálá was drunk, he started creating misshapen human bodies and it was from these, that albinos, and other deformed persons such as the lame, the blind, dwarfs, and hunchbacks were formed. These are all considered sacred to Ọbàtálá and are called *ẹni òrìsà*, that is, those consecrated to the deity (cf. Johnson 1921:27; Awolalu 1979:21; Drewal *et al* 1989:44). They are his special devotees and priests and are not to be despised because they also are the products of the sculptor divinity (cf. Babatunde 1992:60). Perhaps as a result of his primordial error, devotees of Ọbàtálá are forbidden from taking palm wine. Nevertheless, they attribute to him the formation of a baby in the mother’s womb (apparently, following from his role as sculptor divinity) and barren women sometimes sacrifice to him to enable them conceive (cf. Ellis 1966:39; Awolalu 1979:21).

#### 2.3.3.1.3 ODÙDÙWÀ

If conflicts appear in the Ọbàtálá myths, the Odùdùwà myths show even greater complexity and divergence as Odùdùwà is a controversial figure both in Yoruba history and religion. In spite of this complexity, certain beliefs about Odùdùwà are uniform and established. He is regarded as the progenitor of the Yoruba and a major divinity in the Yoruba pantheon. That he is also regarded as human is a matter we shall investigate later in this study. For now, our focus is on his primeval role in the consortium of Olódùmarè and as a mythical personage.

Ifẹ mythology regards Odùdùwà as the son of Olódùmarè, the Supreme Deity who sent him to create the earth (cf. Johnson 1921:143; Biobaku & Beier 1955: 14-15; Law 1973:30). Earlier, in 2.3.3.1.2 it was noted that an Ifẹ tradition attributed creation to Odùdùwà instead of Ọbàtálá, claiming that while the latter was in a drunken sleep; Odùdùwà usurped his role and carried out the task of creation (cf. Bascom 1969:9-10). A variant of the Ifẹ tradition, recounted by Smith (1969:11), tells of Odùdùwà being let down from heaven by Ọlọrun with a heavy chain. He landed on the primordial ocean and spread a handful of soil with the help of a rooster. He planted a palm nut, which later grew into sixteen branches, representing crown rulers of his house.

In a different account, Adegboła (1983:409) describes two versions of tradition, one of which relates to Odùdùwà. The first one claims that Odùdùwà was a human being who was sent with Ọbàtálá, the agent of Olódùmarè in creation. The other version claims that that first man was Ọrúnmilà and not Odùdùwà. Adegbola (1983:409) remarks that:

The *Odùdùwà* version is part of a mythological charter of tribes and clan-heads. *Odùdùwà* was a kind of crown prince in heaven. He was sent to carve a “kingdom” for himself out of the watery waste which was then the earth. He had sixteen divinities or personified heavenly beings (*òrìsà*) with him as his companions and servants.

The story continues with the creation of the earth by Odùdùwà from laterite and iron that was spread by the hen. The place where this occurred became known as Ilé-Ifẹ (Ifẹ) and it is regarded not only as the ancestral home of the Yoruba, but the cradle of creation in Yoruba mythology.

Yet another variant of the myth claims that Odùdùwà was Ọbàtálá’s younger brother, and after he usurped the work of creating the earth from Ọbàtálá, they quarrelled. Olódùmarè had to intervene and to placate Ọbàtálá; Olódùmarè then decided to appoint him the special task of moulding human bodies with clay. In essence, Odùdùwà created the earth and he was

given authority to rule over it but Ọ̀bàtálá created mankind (Bascom 1969:10). This is also an Ifẹ̀ tradition.

However, it appears that the main source of controversy in the Odùdùwà myths is the issue of gender. While some traditions hold that Odùdùwà is a male divinity, others argue that he is female. Parrinder (1953:23) narrates that at Ifẹ̀, “both the Oni of Ifẹ̀ and the chief priest... were insistent that Odùdùwà was male” but in some other parts of Yorubaland such as among the Ekiti, Odùdùwà was readily assumed to be female.<sup>21</sup> Some Ifẹ̀ accounts that make Odùdùwà male also hold that his wife was Olókun, the goddess of the sea (cf. Biobaku & Beier 1955:14-5). Most of the traditions that make Odùdùwà female claim, in addition, that she was the wife of Ọ̀bàtálá (cf. Parrinder 1950:229; Ellis 1966:41; Awolalu 1979:25) and that Ọ̀bàtálá is the chief male deity, while Odùdùwà is the chief female deity. Each half of the calabash used in Ọ̀bàtálá worship is regarded as representing both Ọ̀bàtálá and Odùdùwà and is symbolic of the union between the heaven and earth (cf. Lucas 1948:96; Parrinder 1969:27; 1953:23; Ellis 1966:41).

For Lucas (1948:93-4), the myths that depict Odùdùwà as male are later in origin whereas those depicting her as female “are more original in character, and are more widely accepted”. He further argues that:

There is hardly any doubt that Odùdùwà was originally a female deity. With her adoption as the progenitor of the Yoruba race, there seems to have arisen a tendency to regard her as a leader and as a “hero”, in consequence of which late stories transforming her into a male deity were invented (p.94).

On the other hand, Awolalu (1979:26) points out that Lucas seems to have overlooked a problem that arises from his view and that is the fact “that the progenitor of the Yoruba race is never regarded as a female – not a heroine but a hero”. His own solution to the gender crisis is the theory that Ọ̀bàtálá was probably worshipped originally at Ifẹ̀ as creator but when Odùdùwà (the human Odùdùwà) came with his migrating band, the worship of Ọ̀bàtálá was suppressed and that of Odùdùwà was embraced after he was deified in death (p.27).

More importantly, beyond the dispute over Odùdùwà’s sexual identity and of primacy over Ọ̀bàtálá in the work of creation is the issue of political motivation behind some variants of the myths. Biobaku and Beier (1955:19) argue that deliberate modifications of myths are particularly frequent in political myths and that a good example of such modifications for

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<sup>21</sup> See also Idowu (1962:25) for a similar view.

political reasons is the *Odùdùwà* myth and the creation of the earth. They point out that the story is told differently at *Oyo* (that is, from *Ifẹ*) noting that at *Oyo* it was *Orànyàn*<sup>22</sup>, not *Odùdùwà*, who created the earth (p.20). No doubt, political motivation is a strong factor responsible for the (sometimes regional) variations of these traditions. Conversely, *Awolalu* (1979:25) comments that:

Yet another tradition, which *Ifẹ* people dislike, claims that long after *Ifẹ* had been created and peopled, a group of wanderers led by a warrior, who came later to be known as *Odùdùwà*, reached *Ifẹ*, conquered the original inhabitants and settled there.

Of course, there is no way this tradition would be entertained at *Ifẹ*, where a strong *Odùdùwà* male divinity cult is attested. For the reason that the tradition ascribes creation to some other personage, implying that *Odùdùwà* was a mere migrant, it would automatically be discountenanced at *Ifẹ*. In addition, *Drewal et al* (1989:45) confirm that the opposing versions about *Ọbàtálá* and *Odùdùwà* and their many variants “are shaped by various socio-political and religious agendas. They express the essence of flexibility, action and openness in Yoruba society, as well as the ways in which the fabric of society can stretch and adapt, rather than rupture...”

Concerning the two personages, therefore, *Adegbola* (1983:411) concludes that:

On closer examination, it is evident that there has been a grand mix-up between the story of *Ọbàtálá* and those of *Odùdùwà* and also between the personalities and events which they represented. The *Ọbàtálá* stories have to be regarded as the older ones connected with the myths of the origin of the earth. The *Odùdùwà* stories should be taken as later, representing a migrant *Odùdùwà* who invaded and conquered the people among whom *Ọbàtálá* myths, culture and cultism were current.

His reference to an invading *Odùdùwà* shall be discussed later in this study under the migration accounts. Suffice it for now that both *Ọbàtálá* and *Odùdùwà* are associated with the creation of the earth and its inhabitants and that the centre of this event was regarded as *Ifẹ*.

#### 2.3.3.1.4 ỌRÚNMÌLÀ

Another personage associated with the work of creation who is also considered a major deity in Yoruba belief is *Ọrúnmìlà*, known as the father of the people’s divination oracle. The divination system is called *Ifá*, while *Ọrúnmìlà* presides over the system but he is also sometimes referred to as *Ifá* (cf. *Drewal et al* 1989:15). In the previous sub-section, we noted that one of the cosmogonic myths identify *Ọrúnmìlà* as the man who accompanied *Ọbàtálá*, *Olódùmarè*’s agent in creation, to the earth. Some supplementary version sees him as

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<sup>22</sup> *Orànyàn* is the short form of *Orànmíyàn* and refers to the same person.

Olódùmarè's son whose duty was to be the latter's deputy and oracle on the earth (cf. Parrinder 1969:138). He is considered variously as the god of divination, the divinity of fortune telling, the oracle divinity or the god of wisdom. One of his appellations is *akere finu sogbon*, that is, the diminutive one who is the essence of wisdom. The belief is that because Orúnmìlà was present when men were being created and their destinies being sealed, he is qualified to counsel and guide in matters of life and destiny. He is the mouthpiece of Olódùmarè and the other divinities.

It is believed that he first made his appearance at Ilé-Ifẹ but his real home is Ado, where he made his residence. However, the Ifá cult is widespread in Yorubaland. The Ifá literary and divination corpus is transmitted orally among his priests with great care. A priest of Ifá is known as *babaláwo* and is an expert in divination, relying on the sixteen verses in the Ifá corpus for his oracles and on sixteen sacred palm-nuts (cf. Abimbola 1973). This number sixteen is sometimes associated with the palm-nut that was brought from heaven when Orúnmìlà came with the consort of Ọbàtálá to assist in the work of creation. When the palm-nut was planted on the laterite that was spread on the watery mass, which became dry ground, it grew into a palm tree with sixteen branches.

Another account of the origin of the sixteen sacred palm-nuts states that Orúnmìlà left heaven in the company of other principal deities and he arrived at Ifẹ, where he resided for a long time. After his death, there was famine and confusion on the earth, prompting his eight children to go up to heaven to plead with him to return to the earth. Orúnmìlà refused to return but rather gave the children sixteen palm-nuts to be used as instruments of divination whenever they needed to consult him (Abimbola 1973:44-6).

In spite of the status of Orúnmìlà amongst the Yoruba deities and the reverence accorded the Ifá cult among the people, another view claims that Orúnmìlà was not at all a primordial divinity but a deified mythic founder of Ifá. It is argued that he was a mere mortal of Ifẹ parentage, who became deified after his death (cf. Awolalu 1979:23-4; Drewal *et al* 1989:15). According to Johnson (1921:32-4), the Ifá cult was introduced into the Yoruba country from Nupeland by one Sẹtilu, who was born blind but possessed strange and supernatural powers. He wandered to and settled at Ilé-Ifẹ after sojourning at Ọwọ and Ado. He then introduced his craft to Odùdùwà and his people at Ifẹ. However, Johnson's account does not address the relationship between the name Sẹtilu and Orúnmìlà or how Orúnmìlà came into the picture and became the central character in Ifá mythology and religious practice. Nevertheless,

Adegbola (1983:409) also attests that some traditions claim that Ọrúnmìlà was not divine but human and there are many stories that tell of his human experiences and even of his children. Some of these stories are also retold in Abimbola (1973:42) and in Awolalu (1979:23-4).

Additionally, several accounts by other writers which point to the humanity of Ọrúnmìlà (Ifá) are cited in Lucas (1948:73-4). Lucas quotes a story from a pamphlet published by one Oyesile Keribo of Abeòkuta that claims that Ifá was a native of Ìtase at Ifẹ of poor parentage who had to fend for a living by begging. An old sage later taught him the art of divination and with this, earning a livelihood became easier. Another 1909 article by Feyisara Sopein (also cited in Lucas 1948:74) affirms that Ifá was born at Ifẹ. Ellis (1966) also tells of a tradition that Ifá was a fisherman who used to forage for food because life was difficult at that time. Èsù later counselled him to take to divination and that in whatever offerings he got from his clients; he (Èsù) would have a share.

It appears to us that Ọrúnmìlà indeed was a man but became deified after the Ifá cult became established and a religious rallying point among the Yoruba. This can be supported by the observation that not much is really known or said about his role or place in primeval events other than that he accompanied Ọbàtálá and other deities to the earth from heaven. Perhaps he became an addendum of sorts in the mythological accounts of creation after it was established that Ọrúnmìlà was an important ancestral hero.

#### 2.3.3.1.5 OTHER ÒRÌSÀ

In addition to the major personages discussed in the foregoing, various other mythical characters are associated to a lesser extent, with the creation of the earth and of human beings. One of these other òrìsà is Olókun, the goddess of the sea. An account recognizes her as the wife of Odùdùwà and says that Ọrànmíyàn and Ìṣẹdálẹ were their children (Johnson 1921:143; Biobaku & Beier 1955:14-5). If Olókun was the wife of Odùdùwà, then it can be presumed that she also was there from the beginning. However, this type of account creates more conflict than already exists, especially in a situation in which different narratives describe Odùdùwà as female or as the wife of Ọbàtálá. It is interesting to note that among the Bini, where a powerful cult of Olókun exists, Olókun is regarded as the first son of the Supreme Deity, Osanobuwa, and an arch-divinity (Babatunde 1992:30-1, 76-7).

Another *òrìsà* indirectly associated with cosmogonic myths is Èṣù,<sup>23</sup> the god of mischief, so named because of his cunningness and tricks. Tradition regards him as partner to Ọrúnmìlà (cf. Babatunde 1992:74), a minister to both human beings and divinities (Awolalu 1979:29) or as a consort with Ọbàtálá who was sent to create the earth. One other personality earlier mentioned in connection with creation is Ọrànmiyàn. Biobaku and Beier (1955:20) note that Ọyọ tradition claims that Ọrànmiyàn and not Odùdùwà created the earth. For Biobaku and Beier, this account was politically motivated. Nevertheless, it is not a popular tradition and can be discounted for all useful purpose since the person of Ọrànmiyàn is widely accepted as a historical figure.

#### 2.3.3.1.6 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

At this point, the discussion of the various strands of traditions of Yoruba cosmogonic myths can be summed up. Although the traditions are complex and conflicting, the position of Olódùmarè or Ọlọrun (the Supreme Deity) as the author of creation is not in doubt. Tradition narrates that several personages, regarded as *òrìsà* or primordial divinities, were involved in the creation of the earth and of human beings. These include chiefly, Ọbàtálá, Odùdùwà and Ọrúnmìlà, and to a lesser extent, Olókun, Èsù and Ọrànmiyàn.

The conflicts in the tradition centre primarily on the roles of the characters. Whereas some accounts claim that Ọbàtálá was sent by Olódùmarè to create the earth and that he had Odùdùwà (or Ọrúnmìlà) with him to assist him, other accounts narrate that Odùdùwà was led down with a heavy chain from heaven to create the earth. Another tradition states that Ọbàtálá was supplanted by Odùdùwà when he fell into a drunken sleep and did not carry out the task assigned to him. Again, while some tradition holds that Odùdùwà was the first man who was sent to assist Ọbàtálá in creation, another claims that it was Ọrúnmìlà and not Odùdùwà who was sent with Ọbàtálá.

However, another major conflict concerns the sexual identity of Odùdùwà who is regarded as either male or female in different traditions. Some traditions that represent Odùdùwà as female also claim that she was Ọbàtálá's wife or that she represents the chief female deity and Ọbàtálá, the chief male deity. Additionally, Ọrúnmìlà, Olókun, Èsù and Ọrànmiyàn have been associated with the task of creation. Scholars have proffered an explanation for some of

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<sup>23</sup> It should be noted here that the Yoruba Bible translation of Satan or Devil is Èsù, which many commentators have described as erroneous but has come to stay in Christian circles.

the divergence in the accounts, that is, they are politically motivated since it is evident that geographic source of the myths often determine their final forms.

Without a doubt, there are gaps and inconsistencies in the narratives but there is some degree of uniformity in the account of the process of creation and of man. The earth was created out of a watery mass and the place of creation was Ilé-Ife, which has become the ancestral home of the Yoruba and which is regarded as the cradle of human beings. Human beings were moulded from clay after which Olódùmarè breathed into the lifeless forms. In summary, Yoruba mythology insinuates that the people were the first of God's creation and that the dispersal of human beings began at Ilé-Ife. Their ancestor, Ọ̀bàtálá, Odùdùwà or Ọ̀rúnmilà, also descended from God.

To the extent that these traditions are the products of oral transmission, the role of memory in their final form cannot be underplayed. For instance, the office of the royal bards from whom Johnson (1921) obtained most of his account, is hereditary and the bards rely on memory as they transmit the stories to their children who in turn pass them on to their own children. However, memory can become selective and this is not only applicable to personal memory but to collective memory. The final product may not be what it was originally due to this selectivity (and oftentimes to memory failure) but the elements will remain because of the recitative nature of the traditions.

Biobaku and Beier (1955:12) remind us that "African history was (and is still largely) *remembered* history, handed down from one generation to another. The technique was constantly to keep alive the memory of the past". Whether these traditions are regarded as myths or authentic history is immaterial here; as long as they are part of the people's past, they represent a part of their heritage and that cannot be denied.

#### **2.3.3.2 MIGRATION THEORIES**

In as much as the cosmogonic myths examined above attempt to account for the origin of the Yoruba, other theories of where the Yoruba come from exist, which we shall consider in this segment of the study. There is no gainsaying that the question, "Who are we?" or "Where do we come from?" is a perplexing one among most peoples of Africa. The question evidently defies any easy answer, especially among non-literate peoples. This is due to the paucity of the documentary histories of the earliest beginnings of such peoples. Consequently, reconstructing a people's history mainly from oral traditions and hearsay materials is no mean task. It can be expected that such reconstructions will be fraught with presumptions,



speculations or even prejudice. Certainly, identifying or reconciling various theories pertaining to the origin or the migration of the Yoruba of West Africa becomes a challenging enterprise.

Where then do the Yoruba come from? Various theories have emerged in the last two centuries concerning the origin of the Yoruba or their migration to their present homeland. Even though the accounts to be examined here are from written sources, most writers claim their evidence was obtained from oral tradition. Some attempt to confirm their theories through archaeology, linguistic reconstruction or art but these only often serve as clues and not as evidence. They do not tell the story; they only serve as pointers to the story. Theories about the origin of the people include those that tell of a descent from Mecca in Arabia, of Egyptian extraction, of Sudanese origin, and of Nupe affinity. A more cautious theory claims that the Yoruba are from the north eastern part of Africa.

From the various theories and their sometimes disorganised and disparate evidence, the question of where the Yoruba came from appears to remain on a conjectural level. In the discussions which follow, we shall investigate the major scholarly theories that are available on the historical origin or migration of the people. We have reorganized them into four classes.

#### 2.3.3.2.1 “THE YORUBA CAME FROM MECCA”

The tradition that the Yoruba came from Mecca is expounded in Samuel Johnson’s work, which has become a reference point for subsequent works on Yoruba history. Johnson’s book, *The History of the Yorubas*, was completed in 1897 but due to various delays, it was not published until 1921, after his death<sup>24</sup>. As noted above (2.3.2.1.1), Johnson claims that his accounts were derived mainly from the testimonies of the *arokin*, the royal bards and ‘national historians’ at the palace of the Aláàfin of Oyo. While admitting that the origin of the Yoruba “is involved in obscurity”, he proceeds to relate the tradition which he claims have been universally accepted (p.3).

In Johnson’s *History*, the story is told of Lámúruḍu, a king of Mecca whose descendants were Odùdùwà, the ancestor of the Yoruba and the kings of Gogobiri (that is Gobir in Hausaland) and of Kukawa (in Bornu), both of which are in the north of Nigeria. The period of

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<sup>24</sup> Johnson died in 1901. His brother, Dr. Obadiah Johnson ensured that the manuscript was published posthumously after the first two that were sent to the publishers in London got lost in transit.

Lámúruḍu's reign is presumed to be after the arrival of Islam. Johnson records the account as related to him and is worth quoting here:

The Crown Prince Odùḍùwà relapsed into idolatry during his father's reign, and as he was possessed of great influence, he drew many after him. His purpose was to transform the state religion into paganism, and hence he converted the great mosque of the city into an idol temple, and this Asara, his priest who was himself an image maker, studded with idols.

Asara had a son called Braima who was brought up a Mohammedan. During his minority, he was a seller of his father's idols, an occupation he thoroughly abhorred, but which he was obliged to engage in. But in offering for sale his father's handiwork, he usually invited buyers by calling out: "Who would purchase falsehood?" A premonition this of what the boy will afterwards become (p. 3-4).

The narration further states that when Braima grew older, one day, in the absence of his father, he used an axe to destroy all the idols and the images that were desecrating the mosque. When this act was discovered, the people ordered that Braima be burnt alive. This resulted in a civil uprising in which the Mohammedans gained the upper hand and subjugated their opponents.

Lámúruḍu the King was slain, and all his children with those who sympathized with them were expelled from the town. The Princes who became Kings of Gogobiri and of Kukawa went westwards and Odùḍùwà eastwards. The latter travelled 90 days from Mecca and after wandering about finally settled at Ile Ifẹ where he met Agbo-niregun (or Seṭilu) the founder of the Ifá worship.

Odùḍùwà and his children had escaped with two idols to Ile Ifẹ. Shaibu being sent with an army to destroy or reduce them to submission was defeated, and among the booties secured by the victors was a copy of the Koran (p.4).

This tradition details the account of how Odùḍùwà, a supposed prince of Mecca, escaped with his men after a religious uprising and migrated to Ilé-Ifẹ (cf. Smith 1969:11). From the account, it can be inferred that Ilé-Ifẹ was already inhabited at the time of their arrival. This Odùḍùwà, the son of Lámúruḍu and the older brother of the kings of Gogobiri and of Kukawa, was the progenitor of the Yoruba people, according to this tradition. Of interest is the fact that in the tradition we encounter Odùḍùwà as a human being with human parentage, in contrast with his portrayal as a divinity in the cosmogonic myths that were earlier examined.

In his comments on this piece of tradition, Johnson argues that it is improbable that the Yoruba came from Mecca because "no such accounts as the above are to be found in the records of Arabian writers of any kings of Mecca; an event of such importance could hardly have passed unnoticed by their historians" (p.5). Moreover, in this connection, Biobaku and Beier (1955:19-20) mention that in many smaller Yoruba towns, several versions of this story

do not claim an origin from Mecca but a migration of Odùdùwà and his men from beyond a great river. They further remark that:

It is not uncommon for people to link up their history with some other place of renown. The Roman tradition, for example, that they descended from Aeneas, the hero of Troy, is known to be fictitious. The Roman myth of Aeneas fleeing from Troy and settling (after an adventure in Carthage) in Italy, does not reflect an historical truth, but simply the desire of the Romans to link up their own story with that of the much admired Greeks. In the same way it was possible that the Yoruba drummers telling the story of Odùdùwà added the name Mecca to their story, *after* Mecca had become a place of legendary fame through Yoruba pilgrims who had returned from that town.

Recapitulating the view of Biobaku and Beier (1955), Law (1973b:30) notes that, “The claim to origin from Mecca is not an original element of the tradition, but a later elaboration, intended to link the Yoruba to the prestigious civilizations of the east” (cf. 1977:28-9). In addition, Law (1977:29) notes that a common origin with Kukawa (Bornu) is doubtful as Kuka, the capital of Bornu was only founded c1813. Overall, the theory that the Yoruba must have migrated from Mecca to Ilé-Ifẹ has met with disapproval among scholars.

#### 2.3.3.2.2 “THE YORUBA CAME FROM EGYPT”

The theory that the Yoruba came from Egypt has been a fascinating subject in scholarly discussion of Yoruba historical reconstruction. The tradition appears to be a long-standing one but it has equally been subject to deep controversy. A major exponent of the theory is Olumide Lucas whose 400-page volume, *The Religion of the Yoruba* (1948), is wholly devoted to the task of tracing a connection between the Yoruba and Egypt. His main thesis is that the Yoruba must have resided in Ancient Egypt<sup>25</sup> for a long time before moving to their present location, and that origin accounts for the similarities between the Yoruba and ancient Egypt. The theory is not based on oral tradition per se, but on pieces of evidence from written documents, which he uses to develop his argument based on other parameters than the written evidence.

Although Lucas claims that, “the Yoruba themselves have no definite knowledge of their origin” (p.14), he himself a Yoruba, proceeds with the task of forging a history for the people. For Lucas, the Yoruba certainly migrated into their present country and the migration took place at a very early date. He does not mention Odùdùwà in connection with this migration but his discussion of Odùdùwà is only in a mythical sense, claiming that the derivation of the

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<sup>25</sup> Lucas claims that, “It is probable that the Yorubas lived on the bank where the White Nile flowed unmixed with the Blue Nile” (p.93). His sole evidence is the belief that Ọbàtálá is a god of purity and the colour white is used in his worship. In essence, that purity must have come from the White Nile!

name can be traced to Egypt (p.95). For him, Odùdùwà is a female deity and that “she is the survival of the goddess Nuit or Mut the ‘Mother’, a popular deity in Southern Egypt” (p.96).

Using a kind of folk etymology, Lucas argues, first, for a Yoruba connection with Egypt based on what he refers to as similarity or identity of language (pp.18-20). He alleges that fifty percent of Yoruba vocabulary is of Egyptian origin or root and to illustrate his point, he considers words from five short paragraphs that he claims were randomly selected from some Yoruba literature. His conclusion is that at least half of the words in the passages are Egyptian in origin. In his words, “all the important words are survivals of Ancient Egyptian words” (p.343).

Lucas’ second point is that the Egyptian connection is based on similarity or identity of religious beliefs and the third argument, which is similar to the second, is similarity or identity of religious ideas and practices. According to him, some of these similarities include the names and attributes of the gods of both peoples, belief in life and judgement after death, deification of kings and the belief in guardian spirits (pp. 20-26). In short, Yoruba religion is a survival of ancient Egyptian religion and it stands in genetic relation to the latter (p. 344). Finally, he argues that a connection can be established based on survival of customs, and names of persons, places, objects, etc (pp. 26-30). These include among other things, elements of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, emblems and other symbols in Yoruba (especially, Ifẹ) art and craft.

Lucas theory is summarized in his own words thus:

It would appear that the Yorubas migrated gradually from Northern Egypt to Southern Egypt, and then to Sudan<sup>26</sup> until they reached their present home... Suffice it to say that from the point of view of language, religion, magic and other elements, as well as from the point of view of physiognomy, Yoruba culture and the typical Yoruba bear a close resemblance to the culture and the physiognomy of the Ancient Egyptians respectively, thereby supporting the theory that the home of the Yoruba for several centuries must be traced to Ancient Egypt (pp.353-4).<sup>27</sup>

But Lucas is not alone. Before him, Talbot (1926) had proposed that events in Egypt such as the Nubian wars had triggered off mass migration of Negro people southward and that it was likely that craft was brought into Nigeria from Egypt. He apparently linked a Yoruba

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<sup>26</sup> In ancient accounts, the term Sudan was used variously to refer to territories of ancient kingdoms, such as Kush, Meroe, Nubia etc.

<sup>27</sup> He actually argues further that other West African peoples who are closely related to the Yoruba (such as the Ibo, Fanti, Gan, Twi, Egun, Ewe etc.) must have also migrated from Egypt (p.354-8).

migration to Ifẹ with this same movement of the Negro southward (pp.18-9, 26) as mentioned earlier in 2.2.2. Other theories of possible Egyptian origin are often based on the sophistication of art, iron working and the institution of divine kingship in Yorubaland<sup>28</sup>.

Similarly, after disputing the Mecca theory, Johnson (1921:6-7) argues that the Yoruba emigrated from Upper Egypt to Ilé-Ifẹ. His evidence includes the sculptures known as Ifẹ marbles and the “Phoenician” characters on *Ọpá Ọrànmiyàn*, an ancient granite obelisk over 18ft high at Ifẹ (p.6). He concludes that the most probable origin of the Yoruba is:

1. That they sprang from Egypt or Nubia;
2. That they were subjects of the Egyptian conqueror Nimrod, who was of Phoenician origin, and that they followed him in his wars of conquest as far as Arabia, where they settled for a time;
3. That from Arabia they were driven, on account of their practising there their own form of worship.

With the last point above, Johnson attempts to harmonize the Mecca theory with his own Egyptian/Nubian theory. In other words, the Yoruba originated from Egypt/Nubia, followed Nimrod, (who Johnson claims is the Nimrod in the Mecca story) into Arabia, were driven from there, and escaped to Ilé-Ifẹ.

Another argument in support of the Egypt theory is from a short article by Biobaku<sup>29</sup> in which he notes that:

The highly-developed indigenous political system of the Yoruba might well have its prototype in the all-black kingdom of Meroe in Upper Egypt. Their migration links up with the well-known Kisra migration and might have been part of the general migration which took place in the 10<sup>th</sup> century and diffused the Moslem culture of North Africa among the peoples to the immediate south (1955:17).

It appears that Biobaku later develops this argument in his book, *The Origin of the Yoruba* (1971),<sup>30</sup> cited in Adegbola (1983:410). Adegbola notes that:

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<sup>28</sup> See Smith (1969:11) for more details.

<sup>29</sup> Saburi Biobaku (1918-2001) was a professor of history and a former vice-chancellor of the University of Lagos, Nigeria.

<sup>30</sup> Unfortunately, this researcher was unable to access this material.

According to another group of stories, Odùdùwà migrated from somewhere in the region of the lower Nile, and historical evidence of particular migrations has been shown to correspond with the oral tradition. For example, Biobaku suggests two waves of migration to bring the Yoruba from their original homes in Upper Egypt or beyond. The first migration, according to this suggestion, was part of the Kiswa migrations in the 7<sup>th</sup> century A.D which settled the Yoruba around Idah and in the Ekiti country. The second was the Odùdùwà migration at the end of the 10<sup>th</sup> century A.D which settled more Yoruba in Ilé-Ifẹ (p.410).

From the arguments presented above, neither Johnson nor Biobaku posits the Egypt theory with any great degree of certainty. Whereas Johnson suggests Egypt or Nubia as the take-off point for the Yoruba, the latter talks of Egypt or beyond. At any rate, the Egypt theory has not been clearly established as reliable.

Concerning Lucas' work, on the surface it appears rather fascinating to the uninformed but it has been highly criticized for its unscientific procedures. For instance, in a review of Lucas' book, Wescott (1957:11-12) claims that the author's methods are patently unsound (cf. Bascom 1969:7) and his knowledge of technical linguistics are sketchy, especially regarding sound correspondence and phonetics. He remarks that when the author "seeks to derive common nouns or other ordinary words in Yoruba from Egyptian proper names, Dr Lucas strains all credulity" (1957:13). Wescott shows that the three main facets on which the thesis of the book is based - language, race and culture – are open to systematic criticism and the observations misleading and erroneous. His view is that, "To induce a trained scholar to commit such an elementary logical fallacy, some powerful non-intellectual motive must, I think, be at work. In Dr Lucas' case, the most plausible motive is tribal patriotism". He concludes that the work is an attempt to explain the author's genealogy by associating it with some ancient pedigree.

Adetugbo (1973:201-3) supports Wescott's criticism of Lucas work, noting also that the work is most unreliable the folk etymology on which the whole of Lucas' claim is based is almost worthless. In the same vein, Awolalu (1979:7) rejects Lucas' position, noting that another scholar Oyin Ogunba<sup>31</sup> believes that Lucas' "mistakes, monstrous and disconcerting, are more of ignorance than of patriotism". Again, Ogunba (1973:91) maintains that the widespread story on an Egyptian ancestry cannot be credited.

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<sup>31</sup> Adegbola quotes from Ogunba's (1967) University of Ibadan PhD Dissertation, *Ritual Drama of the Ijẹbú People*, p.29.

### 2.3.3.2.3 “THE YORUBA CAME FROM THE NORTH EAST”

As the two theories of Meccan and Egyptian origin became increasingly unpopular, a third position, which is not unrelated to them and which is not so specific, gained more ground. This is the theory that the Yoruba came from the north eastern part of Africa. This theory might have been triggered by two different written accounts, a work originally written in Arabic in 1812 by Sultan Muhammad Bello of Sokoto (1779-1837), the grandson of Uthman dan Fodio, the founder of the Fulani Empire and the Sokoto Caliphate, and Leo Frobenius' *The Voice of Africa* (1913).

#### Bello's Arabian Theory

Bello's writing was obtained by Clapperton and his travel companion, Denham, and a part of it is an account of what was purported to be the origin of the Yoruba, whom Bello referred to as Yarba. An extract from Bello's work is cited in numerous writings such as Johnson (1921:5-6); Lucas (1948:15-16); Biobaku and Beier (1955:16); Hodgkin (1960:58-9); Bowen (1968:267-8); and Bascom (1969:9). It seems appropriate to recite it here as well.

The inhabitants of this province [Yarba], it is supposed, originated from the remnant of the children of Canaan, who were of the tribe of Nimrod. The cause of their establishment in the west of Africa was, as it is stated, in consequence of their being driven by Yaa-rooba, son of Kahtan, out of Arabia<sup>32</sup> to the western coast between Egypt and Abyssinia. From that spot, they advanced into the interior of Africa, till they reached Yarba, where they fixed their residence. On their way, they left in every place where they stopped at, a tribe of their own people. Thus it is supposed that all the tribes of Sudan, who inhabit the mountains, are originated from them, as also the inhabitants of Yauri. The people of Yauri resemble those of Nufe [Nupe] in appearance...

Bello's account of Yoruba migration quoted above, which has been regarded as fanciful (Lucas 1948:16; Law 1977:15), states that the Yoruba are descendants of Nimrod who were driven out of Arabia (or Iraq) to West Africa through Sudan. In essence, Bello records a Middle East origin and a migration through the Sudan for the Yoruba. In an attempt to interpret Bello's account and harmonize it with the Mecca theory obtained from oral tradition, Johnson claims that the Lámúrudu in the oral tradition refers to Nimrod and that Arabia must be the same as the Mecca of the oral tradition. He argues that, “the descendants of Nimrod (Phoenicians) were led in war to Arabia, that they settled there, and from there were driven by a religious persecution to Africa” (p.6). For Johnson therefore, the Yoruba originated from Upper Egypt/Nubia (as noted in the previous discussion on Egypt), spent some time in Arabia, and escaped to their present homeland after being driven from Arabia.

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<sup>32</sup> The account in Hodgkin (1960) translates Arabia here as Iraq and Abyssinia is explained in its footnote as Ethiopia.

In his comment on Bello's account, Lucas (1948:16) casts doubts on the view regarding it as based on mere hearsay, and as erroneous. Bello noted that the people called Yaarooba were in turn driven from Arabia by a man named Yarba. Lucas' argument is that if there is a connection between the two names Yarba and Yaa-rooba, then it is improbable that the people would adopt the name of their persecutor. Further, he identifies a discrepancy in the claim that the Yoruba are descendants of Canaan of the tribe of Nimrod. He notes that Cush and Canaan were brothers and Nimrod was the son of Cush not of Canaan. He therefore, urges that the Arabian theory be rejected (p.17).

#### Frobenius Atlantic theory

In 1910-11, the German professor of anthropology, Leo Frobenius, was at Ilé-Ife on expedition and conducted excavations on some sites. His report on the excavations and the subsequent publication of his two-volume work, *The Voice of Africa* (1913), drew world attention to the historical and archaeological significance of Ife. The sophistication and the naturalism of the artwork excavated at Ife made Frobenius conclude that he had discovered the survival of an ancient West Mediterranean colony on Africa's Atlantic coast:

I maintain I have re-discovered Atlantis, the Emporium of the culture of the West on the further sides of the straits of Gibraltar, that Atlantis, whose walls, as Solon informs us, held within them Poseidon's Castle, where there was a wealth of luxuriant vegetation; where treelike plants grew which gave forth food and drink and unguents [the palm oil]... The elephants lived there; that bronze or brass, was worn there (as still recently was so, behind the Yoruba mountain range); that the natives wore blue garments, and that they had a somewhat foreign style of architecture. Therefore I lay claim to Yoruba, so tropically lush and rank in its vegetation; Yoruba, with its channelled network of lakes on the coast and the reaches of the Niger; Yoruba, whose peculiarities are not adequately depicted in the platonic account – this Yoruba, I assert, is Atlantis, the home of Poseidon's posterity, the Sea-God by them named Olókun; the land of a people whom Solon declared: They have even extended their lordship over Egypt and Tyrrhene! (1913:345).

Frobenius' hypothesis was that there must have been some Etruscan influence on the Atlantic coast in the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, the relics of which he had found at Ilé-Ife. The people must have arrived at the west coast by way of the sea through fleets from North Africa and the remains of that Mediterranean culture can be found in different aspects of Yoruba art and culture such as the use of the handloom, the bow and arrow, and drums with a distinctive North African imprint. Others include the construction of water storage and of houses with ridge roofs as in North Africa.

The hypothesis has been considered untenable, not only in archaeological circles but in historical and religious ones. For instance, the archaeologist Willet considers Frobenius'



declaration a guess (1973:119). Lucas argues that it implies that Yoruba come from the North by way of the Atlantic Ocean. He regards this as unlikely and rather settles for the migration from Egypt through the Sudan theory (1948:349) even though he had earlier noted that, “The general trend of opinion among writers is that the Yorubas and some other West African tribes came from the north-east” (p.15).

However, it should be noted that there is often confusion between the locations, the northeast of Africa and the Middle East, in the accounts and references are sometimes vague. For instance, Adetugbo (1973:182) states that, “The belief that is current among the Yorubas is that they migrated to their present home from somewhere in the Middle East or Lower Egypt in different waves between the seventh and eleventh centuries A.D.” It is generally an either/or situation as we noted earlier of Johnson’s Egypt/Nubia and Biobaku’s Egypt/beyond theories.

In addition to this, various other traditions claim that the Yoruba originated from the east of the Niger (cf. Bowen 1968:266), from the Sudan, parts of Asia (cf. Lucas 1948:15), from across a big river (Biobaku & Beier 1955:19) or from a far country (Farrow 1969:21). Beier (1955:26) also attempts to prove that the Nupe country was one of the stages of the Yoruba migration. For Bascom (1969:8-9), linguistic distribution “suggests that if the Yoruba came from the east it was not much beyond the Niger and that the probability is considerably greater than that, if they migrated from anywhere, their direction of movement was also from west to east”.

Another writer, Modupe Oduyoye (1983) searches for a Semitic link with Yoruba using pseudo-linguistic criteria. He uses the Bible to trace evidence of what he believes to be a survival of ancient Hebrew in the Yoruba language. His method does not appear to be much different from Lucas’ and his observations have not been taken seriously. Evidently, most of these theories are merely speculative, at best tendentious, and do not hold much promise for a definitive reconstruction of Yoruba origin.

#### **2.3.3.2.4 “THE YORUBA AND THE EXODUS FROM ILÉ-IFE”**

The discussions so far indicate that the consensus among scholars is that the Yoruba migrated from someplace to the present location. Whether this place of origin was Mecca, Egypt, Arabia, Sudan or some other place is the point that needs resolution. Beier (1955:25) notes that, “Most Yoruba traditions seem to agree on one point; that the Yorubas migrated into their

present country from somewhere North of the Niger”. Similarly, Ogunba (1973:91) remarks that:

In the case of Yoruba, even if one cannot credit the widespread story of Egyptian ancestry, it will certainly be a stretch of imagination to think that they have always occupied their present land. Conditions prevalent all over Africa before and since the Christian era are not likely to have encouraged such stability.

The inference is that there must have been a Yoruba migration from an unconfirmed location north of the Sudan. Oral traditions also fully support the idea of a migration. However, a secondary and internal migration, subsequent to this original migration, has additionally been posited. This secondary migration took place from Ilé-Ifẹ.

We have noted from the mythical accounts that Odùdùwà, the progenitor of the people, arrived from heaven. However, various traditions regard Odùdùwà<sup>33</sup> as a mortal man and the leader of a group of people who arrived at Ifẹ. In an account by Johnson, Odùdùwà’s eldest son was Ọkànbí, who in turn had seven sons out of whom the tribes of the Yoruba sprang up. The princes dispersed, founded their own kingdoms, that is, different Yoruba towns and wore beaded crowns. The youngest of them was Ọrànmíyàn who was absent from home at the time inheritances were shared and nothing was left for him except the land. He later became the most prosperous of all his brothers and reigned in Ifẹ for some time before leaving to found the town of Ọyọ (1921:7-9, 143). The account further relates that there were people at Ifẹ when Odùdùwà arrived there with his group and these aborigines must have been conquered and assimilated by Odùdùwà’s troop (p.15). Johnson’s account is regarded as an Ọyọ tradition.

Several variants of this tradition exist. An example is a tradition related by Farrow (1969:17-8), which claims that Ọkànbí (not Odùdùwà) and fifteen others were sent from a far country to Ilé-Ifẹ. An Ifẹ tradition claims that Odùdùwà landed on Ọrà Hill at Ifẹ with sixteen companions, one of them, Ọbàtálá (cf. Smith 1969:17). Another version states that when Odùdùwà was old, he became blind and so he sent his sixteen sons to get water from the ocean to treat his eyes. All of them returned with fresh water except the youngest, Obòkun, who returned with salty water from the ocean. Odùdùwà washed his eyes with this and his sight returned. Obòkun became king at Ilèsà, wearing a beaded crown as reward for his deeds (Bascom 1969:11).

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<sup>33</sup> Beier (1955a:25) notes that other personages than Odùdùwà are sometimes linked with this original immigration. These include Ọbalufon, Ogiyan, Ọgún and Ọrànmíyàn.

Moreover, while some traditions claim that Odùdùwà's sons founded the new kingdoms and dynasties, others hold that it was the grandsons. The number of these sons (or grandsons) also varies. The original number is often given as seven (Johnson 1921:7) but some claim they are sixteen (Bascom 1969:11) or even six (Bowen 1968:266). The seven are identified as the *Obas* (kings) of Oyo, Benin, Sabe, Ketu, Popo, Ìlá-Ọ̀ràngún and Òwu. Those who hold that they are sixteen would include the Ọ̀ni of Ifẹ and rulers of some other major towns and cities. However, a tradition, which is vehemently refuted by the people of Ifẹ, states that the Ọ̀ni was not one of the sixteen descendants of Odùdùwà but he was the son of a slave, Àdímú. Àdímú was left by the sons (or by Ọ̀rànmíyàn) to tend the shrine and the palace at Ifẹ, while the sons were away to found new kingdoms (cf. Johnson 1921:11-12; Bascom 1969:11).

In spite of the variations, the traditions seem to agree that there were aborigines in the land when the migrants arrived (cf. Idowu 1962:63; Smith 1969:98; Law 1973b:31). Beier (1955:25) remarks that, "There are sufficient myths of war and conquest linked with the Odùdùwà immigration to prove that there must have been people living in the country before, who were driven out, or absorbed or assimilated by the Yorubas". Some traditions identify these aborigines as the Ugbos or Igbos,<sup>34</sup> who were at war with Ifẹ for a long time and now dwell in the Ilaje district in Òndó State (cf. Johnson 1921:147-8; Awolalu 1979:26). The presence of an aboriginal population is supported by archaeology. We noted earlier that radiocarbon dates show that Ifẹ was occupied as early as 500 AD whereas the original migration has been dated much later (c.10th century AD).

It can be surmised that the dominant tradition is that Odùdùwà led a group of people to Ilé-Ifẹ, which was at that time home to an aboriginal population. A secondary migration took place after his death, possibly in waves, and the people were dispersed to different parts of the present Yorubaland. Beier (1955:26-7) is of the view that not all the groups dispersed from Ifẹ. In the original Odùdùwà migration, some of the people split off from the main body before they arrived at Ifẹ and founded some Yoruba towns. He notes that the traditions of these towns (e.g. Ìdànrè and Òndó) attest to their earlier settlement before the later exodus from Ifẹ.

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<sup>34</sup> This is not to be confused with Igbo/Ibo, a major Nigerian group.

It should be noted that traditions of most Yoruba towns commonly trace their lineage to Ilé-Ife (cf. Llyod 1955:23). The right to wear a beaded crown is understood to be a sign of legitimacy, that is, it validates the claim to the Odùdùwà lineage (cf. Law 1977:28). Presently, there are scores of rulers in Yorubaland who wear beaded crowns and claim descent from Odùdùwà. Traditions of many towns relate their migration stories but the stories often refer to Ife, either directly or indirectly. Additionally, the *oríkì orílẹ̀* of many of these towns relate their migration experiences from Ife or secondarily (in the case of younger towns), from some other towns, which claim descent from Ife. Barber (1991:136, 145-9) illustrates this with the town of Òkukù where many families migrated from different Yoruba towns such as Ofà, Otan, Oyo, Òsogbo or Àrá-Orin but each family can easily trace its root from its *oríkì orílẹ̀*.

Nevertheless, the kingdoms have always been autonomous and despite the claims to Ife as the original home of the Yoruba, it has been noted that in the past, this did not signify political unity (cf. Eades 1980:2; Babatunde 1992:5). Biobaku (1973:1) remarks that it is doubtful that the various groups ever constituted a single political entity. This point is buttressed by the internecine wars that ravaged the land in 1817-1893 and eventually brought the Yoruba nation to a standstill.

#### **2.3.4 LINK BETWEEN THE ORIGIN AND MIGRATION TRADITIONS**

The question that arises at this point is, “Is there any way in which the traditions of origin share a connection with the migration theories considered above? Alternatively, are they just two separate unrelated pieces of information about a people’s (supposed) past?” In fact, some accounts attempt to harmonize or conflate both traditions. Law (1977:27) states that such accounts relate how “the Yoruba migrated from another land, came to a vast expanse of water across which they set out, either by wading or by canoe, and ultimately created dry land in the middle of it” (cf. Smith 1969:17 for such an account). Perhaps a careful examination of possible similarities and dissimilarities in both sets of accounts will throw some light on the answer.

##### **2.3.4.1 SUMMARY OF ORIGIN MYTHS**

- Olódùmarè, the Supreme Deity is the author of creation.
- Creation of both the earth and its inhabitants occurred at Ilé-Ife.

- The agent of creation was one of Olódùmarè's *òrìsà* (ministers) who was let down from heaven by Olódùmarè, and this was either Obàtálá or Odùdùwà.
- Some other divinities were also indirectly associated with the task of creation.

#### **2.3.4.2 SUMMARY OF MIGRATION THEORIES**

- The Yoruba were immigrants from outside their present homeland.
- They migrated from a location that is subject to controversy.
- This point of migration could have been Mecca, Egypt, the Sudan or the north eastern part of Africa.
- The migration primarily took the people to Ilé-Ifẹ.
- The leader of these migrants was Odùdùwà who is today recognized as the progenitor of the people.
- There were aborigines at Ifẹ, who were either conquered or assimilated when the migrants arrived.
- A secondary or internal migration took place after the death of Odùdùwà, which resulted in the founding of other Yoruba kingdoms and towns.
- These towns and cities commonly trace their descent to Ilé-Ifẹ, regarded as their ancestral home.

#### **2.3.4.3 COMPARISONS**

From the points enumerated above, two issues stand out that need to be investigated further. The first is the primacy of Ilé-Ifẹ. While the cosmogonic accounts claim that creation took place at Ifẹ and from there people fanned out to other places, the migration theories equally point to Ifẹ as the place where Odùdùwà and his entourage first landed. The second issue concerns Odùdùwà. The origin accounts recognize Odùdùwà as a divinity who was instrumental to the creation of the earth but the migration accounts consider him as a mortal who led a group of migrants to Ifẹ and after his death he became a deified ancestor. These two subjects will be expounded below.

#### 2.3.4.3.1 THE PRIMACY OF ILÉ-IFE

Virtually all the traditions accord Ilé-Ife a central position among Yoruba towns and cities. It is often referred to as the cradle of Yoruba civilization, the ancestral home of the Yoruba, the place where the day dawns, and so forth. Idowu (1962:14) clearly articulates this:

Yes, Ilé-Ife, according to the beliefs of the Yoruba, is the earthly origin and fountain of all... The Yorubas are still largely positive about that. Ilé-Ife is the origin and centre, not only of the Yoruba world but also of the whole world of nations and peoples.

Likewise, Smith (1969:31) affirms that, “the primacy of Ife in the life of the Yoruba – their religion, their political system, their culture – is unlikely ever to be contested... For the Yoruba, Ife remains the centre of his universe”.

Ilé-Ife is regarded not only as the point of creation and subsequent dispersal of the people; it is also the origin of Yoruba kingship. Royal dynasties throughout Yorubaland and as far as Benin derived their authority and recognition from Ife (cf. Beier 1955:25; Law 1977:26-30). The importance of Ife in Yoruba antiquity seems to be supported by archaeology. We noted earlier that on getting to Ife in 1910, Frobenius exclaimed that he had discovered the “lost Atlantis” because of the sheer sophistication of the bronze and terra-cotta sculptures that were unearthed there. Unique ancient artworks have been discovered at Ife aside the fact that it was also home of an extensive glass making industry and bead-work, particularly the blue glass bead (*segi*) and other glass beads such as *iyùn*, the red bead (cf. Bascom 1969).

On the other hand, whereas the primacy of Ife is an established fact, the same cannot be claimed for the *Ọ̀ṣoni* of Ife, the paramount traditional ruler at Ife. Some traditions, especially of the Ijesa and the Oyo, claim that the *Ọ̀ṣoni* was not one of the sons of Odùdùwà but that he was a descendant of one of his slaves, Àdìmú (cf. Bascom 1969:11; Smith 1969:19). Those who hold this view argue that the *Ọ̀ṣoni* cannot claim primacy because of this issue. The struggle for primacy has existed between the *Ọ̀ṣoni* and the *Aláàfin* of Oyo (the Oyo monarch) and as a way of resolving the matter, they propose that the *Ọ̀ṣoni* is originally the spiritual head of the Yoruba and the *Aláàfin* is the political head.

#### 2.3.4.3.2 THE QUESTION OF ODÙDÙWÀ

It has been established that the cosmogonic myths identify Odùdùwà as a primordial divinity but the migration accounts consider him as a deified ancestor, a mortal man that became elevated to the realm of gods and goddesses after his death. About Odùdùwà, Smith (1969:19) writes:

Tradition is silent about the death of Odùdùwà. His twofold role as emissary of the Creator and as leader of a migration is reflected in the reverence paid to him both as a principal member of the Yoruba pantheon, a god of indeterminate sex who is nearly everywhere worshipped... and who is widely regarded as a symbol of Yoruba unity...

As a man, therefore, Odùdùwà is deemed a rallying point for the Yoruba, the progenitor of the people and a political symbol. As a mythical figure, also, the same personage, Oduduwa is deemed to be an ancestor of the Yoruba. Both mythical and migration accounts link him to the ancient town of Ilé-Ifẹ. Some later researches have cast doubts on the authenticity or historicity of the person of Odùdùwà but Smith (1969:99-100) argues that, "Every movement has its leaders, and it is their names which are usually recollected"; suggesting in essence, that in this case, actual memory has been preserved.

Again, it is important to note the political significance of the so-called Odùdùwà legend. Oyo tradition maintains that Ọrànmiyàn was Odùdùwà's last born and he founded Old Oyo. At Odùdùwà's death, his brothers divided their father's inheritance in his absence; they allocated all movable property to themselves but left for him only the land. This turned out to be in his favour, as the brothers eventually became his tenants and paid him rent and tribute for permission to live and farm on the land, hence the saying, "*Alààfin l' o ni ile*", that is, the land belongs to the *Alààfin*, the king of Oyo (Johnson 1921:8-9; Law 1977:24). This appears to be an attempt to justify a land claim through the narratives. Although at Oyo descent from Odùdùwà is acknowledged, Ọrànmiyàn appears to be the hero and most Oyo traditions are modified to reflect him as such. On the other hand, the Ifẹ worship Odùdùwà and tailor all narratives in his favour. Perhaps this ideological inclination is the rationale behind the Ifẹ cosmogonic tradition that recognizes Odùdùwà rather than Ọbàtálá as the creative agent.

#### 2.3.4.3.3 IMPLICATION

From the discussions above, it can be inferred that the Yoruba account for their origin both from the perspective of cosmogony and from the migration traditions. The two perspectives point to Ifẹ and to Odùdùwà as rallying points for the people. However, one may wonder what function the juxtaposition of the two forms of tradition is supposed to serve. Law remarks (1973b:30) that:

It is not clear what significance should be attached to the coexistence of migration and creation legends. Possibly the creation legend is no more than a mystification of the special position of Ilé-Ifẹ. But it is possible to interpret it as a claim to autochthonous status. The different myths could be explained as originally referring to different elements in the population, the Ifẹ legend to an autochthonous element, the Oyo legend to later immigrants, who perhaps conflated the historical tradition of their own migration with the indigenous myth of origin from Odùdùwà and Ilé-Ifẹ.

Law's argument in essence is that the myths probably function to mystify Ife's status as unique and to present its claims as original and the others as a later development assimilated into what was already there. In another sense, Biobaku and Bier (1955:14) explain that:

The human mind is prone to romanticising; it produces myths and legends in order to preserve ancient historical experiences or elucidate complicated abstract notions. As the past receded, the hero became a god, and memories of ancient migrations became identified with speculations about the tantalising subject of creation.

This view can be interpreted as history becoming transformed into myths with the passage of time. The past gradually turns into 'the good old days' until some of the historical elements in the story acquire new mythic status. This deduction appears logical and indeed, memory, mystification and autochthonous claims can be rightly used to explain the juxtaposition and sometimes conflation of the two forms of tradition.

In addition to these, however, we are inclined to infer that a desire to balance religion with politics may also be a factor in accounting for the coexistence of these traditions, especially for a people for whom religion is a way of life. In fact, Ife's status, its more than 401 gods and goddesses, its countless shrines and groves, and its reputation as the origin of Yoruba kinship seem to illustrate this point. Ife is a place where religion and ideology flourish and it is not surprising therefore, that traditions of origin and migration coexist. Considered alone, the myths could have suggested that the people were aboriginals on their land and migrated from nowhere, but the coexistence of the migration accounts, fashioned from oral traditions, written accounts or linguistic and archaeological reconstruction, invalidates this conclusion.

In view of the above discourse, the final stage of our inquiry on Yoruba origin and tradition leads us to the question, "What are the implications of these traditions for identity recognition and formation among the Yoruba?" We shall attempt to answer this question in the next section.

### **2.3.5 IDENTITY FORMATION AND YORUBA TRADITIONS OF ORIGIN AND MIGRATION**

At this point, we shall attempt to investigate the parameters that are crucial for the identification of the Yoruba in an individual or a collective sense. We shall consider the ways that the traditions of origin and migration of the people influence the people's self-understanding and identity.

Earlier, in 1.5.2 we noted that certain parameters help to define individual or group identity. These parameters include religion/religious fundamentalism, nationalism, ethnicity and



language. They constitute in part or in whole, some of the processes involved in identity formation. Of the Yoruba, several criteria can be used to define their identity. We have alluded to Barber's remark that, "origin is the foundation of identity" (1991:136), in the first chapter of this study. However, by extension, it is also possible, to a certain degree but certainly not in every case, to infer that a common or shared origin could be the foundation of a common or collective identity. The elements in the Yoruba origin and migration stories that represent the basis of identity need to be addressed at this stage of the study.

#### **2.3.5.1 LANGUAGE**

It has been noted that language is a primary factor for distinguishing the Yoruba not only from their neighbours but also from other peoples. More importantly, it is a proof of a common or shared origin. Smith (1969:10) asserts that, "Their language, despite its many dialects, provides the main evidence of a common origin and cultural heritage". Law (1977:4) also observes that, "The Yoruba are distinguished primarily on linguistic criteria". For the Yoruba, the language is an important tool of identification, even among the descendants of freed slaves in Cuba and in Brazil; the language has been preserved to some degree, in worship.

Certainly, language can be a powerful criterion for identity formation or preservation as we noted in the case of Catalonia in Spain. However, for the Yoruba, language alone may not be a sufficient distinguishing factor, although it is an important one. There must be more to Yoruba identity than language. This is because millions of people today who are not Yoruba also speak the language and conversely, hundreds of thousands of Yoruba, especially in the Diaspora, do not speak the language but lay claim to the identity.

What then is the basis of their claim? Could it be religion? Perhaps not, as it is evident that even in antiquity Yoruba religion was diverse and heterogeneous; and today, with Christianity, Islam and other New Age religions being peddled everywhere, one can hardly mention religion as a serious factor on issues of Yoruba identity<sup>35</sup>. Does the answer lie in origin? Do the traditions of origin and migration determine identity in any remarkable way? It is of significant interest to examine this question and this brings us to a crucial point concerning the traditions that we have examined thus far.

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<sup>35</sup> Religion can be considered a factor possibly in the sense that Olódùmarè or Ọlọrun is held supreme and in charge of the affairs of human beings.

### 2.3.5.2 TRADITION HISTORY<sup>36</sup>

With reference to the migration of Odùdùwà to Ilé-Ife, Beier (1955:26) notes that it “must be understood as the desire of a group of interrelated tribes to stress their cultural and linguistic unity”. Likewise, Bascom (1969:10) states that the origin myth “provides the charter for Yoruba people, providing them with a sense of unity through a common origin” (cf. Llyod 1973:219). Similarly, Smith (1969:10) regards the existence of a cycle of myths and legends concerning the creation of the world as evidence of a common origin of the people while Adegbola (1983:410) affirms that it remains historically true that Odùdùwà’s migration story “has created the Yoruba people and some of their neighbours”.

From these statements, it can be deduced that traditions of common origin of the people function as a symbol of identity. In fact, Gbadegesin (1997) states this connection more plainly, claiming that the myths “serve the function of providing a basis for communal identity and solidarity. The legends of Odùdùwà serve these purposes effectively for the Yoruba”. If these assertions are deemed accurate, the elements in the traditions that define identity are worth investigating. In comparing the traditions of migration and origin in 2.3.4.3, we noted that two elements are common to the two forms of tradition, namely the primacy of Ife and the Odùdùwà factor. It would appear that these two common elements also serve as the basis for identity among the people.

There is not only a clear mythical but an emotional, historical and religious attachment to Ilé-Ife among the Yoruba. They identify with the place and consider their identity rooted there as well. However, the facts make it reasonable to conclude that for the Yoruba, it is not affinity with an indeterminate point of departure (Mecca, Egypt, Sudan or northeast Africa) that defines his or her identity in terms of origin, but the ancient attachment to Ife, the place of a ‘second exodus’ of the people. It is not an attachment to that place of long ago, of which nothing is remembered in the collective consciousness of the people but to this latter place, a physical entity they can identify with and revisit.

On the subject of Odùdùwà, there is no doubt that he remains a symbol of identity among the people. His name is used in different contexts in which the Yoruba seek to distinguish themselves from their neighbours, especially in matters of politics and ethnicity. In such

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<sup>36</sup> The term tradition history is used here as defined in 2.3.2.1.2, in the historian’s sense of oral account handed down from one generation to another and is not to be confused with its usage in Old Testament studies, which refers to a particular exegetical method that grew out of form criticism (cf. Gnuse 1999:583-4).

situations, the Yoruba come out boldly to identify themselves as “*Ọmọ Odùdùwà*” (the descendants/offspring of Odùdùwà). In this connection, several interest groups and socio-political clubs exist under the auspices of the name of Odùdùwà. These include *Ègbẹ Ọmọ Odùdùwà* (The Society of the Descendants of Oòduà) and *The Oòduà People’s Congress* (OPC).

Adegbola (1983:410), echoing Bascom (1969:11), confirms that, “Belief in Odùdùwà as the progenitor of the Yoruba people has had the effect of binding together the Yoruba people wherever they may be found”. Therefore, the myths not only trace the origin of the people to Ilé-Ife but to one ancestor, Odùdùwà.

### **2.3.5.3 YORUBA IDENTITY**

It seems reasonable to conclude from the study so far that apart from the Yoruba language, the traditions of origin and migration of the Yoruba serve as basis for the people’s collective identity. Additionally, the features of those traditions that act as pillars for the construction of identity are a common ancestral home, Ilé-Ife, and a common ancestor, Odùdùwà<sup>37</sup>. We noted in the first chapter Mol’s remark that myths of origin reinforce identity or sacralize meaning and identity (1976:246, 253). The case of the Yoruba myths of origin that we have examined so far seems to reinforce this assertion.

Furthermore, it is established that the Yoruba migrated to this present country from another. It is apparent, however, that they evolved a new identity in the place and that they must have suppressed the identity of the aboriginal population they met on their arrival. We submit that that identity is different from the old, whatever it was, because the new identity has its roots in the stories of their origin and migration, especially the secondary migration from Ife. Whatever identity they had in that former place is no longer known and is not a part of the people’s collective memory.

## **2.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

In this chapter, we have examined in brief the origin and migration traditions of the Tiv and the amaZulu and, in detail, those of the Yoruba. Our findings concerning the three groups can be summarized as follows:

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<sup>37</sup> This is not to deny the possibilities of other unifying factors, especially cultural factors.

- The Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba are all migrants to their present locations.
- The Tiv claim descent from a common ancestor, Tiv; the amaZulu are also descendants of one man, Zulu, a grandson of a proto-ancestor, Nguni, and the Yoruba equally consider Odùdùwà as their progenitor.
- The Tiv trace their origin to a place of creation called Swem, which is unknown today. The Yoruba also trace their origin to a place of creation called Ilé-Ifẹ. However, migration theories of both peoples and of the amaZulu link them with the north eastern part of Africa.
- To settle down in their new homes, all three groups had to contend in battle with neighbours or with aborigines. The Tiv fought with the Jukun for a long time, the Zulu with the Khoi/San and the Yoruba with the Ugbo at Ifẹ.
- It is interesting to note that the migration theories of the three peoples mention the crossing of a great river. Whereas the Tiv crossed the Congo River, the amaZulu (the Nguni) crossed the Zambezi and the Yoruba came from beyond an unnamed great river (presumably the Niger).

Although there are similarities<sup>38</sup> in the traditions as elicited above, the traditions of each people are peculiar. It should be stressed here that comparing the migration narratives of the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba does not imply a lack of sensitivity to the integrity of the separate cultures and the dissimilarities that may be inherent in them. Barton (1979b:194) confirms that, “There is continuity as well as discontinuity between cultures,” noting further that relativity is not only present between contemporary cultures but even individuals in the same culture (p.197). The discontinuity therefore accounts for the differences in cultural and linguistic experiences. In Barton’s words, “relativism... reminds us to respect the otherness of the past” (p.198). In our view, it is in the peculiar and dynamic character of the traditions that the concept of identity thrives. Regarding identity, therefore, our findings for the three sets of people are as follow:

- For the Tiv, a common or shared language, the belief in a common ancestor and in a common God and the shared memory of the experience of their migration constitute

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<sup>38</sup> Other similarities include for instance, the belief that heaven was near the earth in the beginning and that the Supreme Deity was responsible for creation.

the elements in their identity construction and recognition. All of these elements are contained in their traditions of origin and migration.

- For the amaZulu, on the other hand, a common or shared language, their violent struggles<sup>39</sup>, belief in a common ancestor and ancestor worship can be considered as key processes in the identity formation of the people. These elements also are contained in the people's traditions of origin and migration.
- Lastly, for the Yoruba, a common or shared language<sup>40</sup>, a common ancestor and a common place of origin entrenched in common myths of origin and migration, constitute the principal elements in the process of identity construction.

In concluding, two other points in connection with identity are worth mentioning. We noted earlier in 1.5.2 Castells' remark that identities use different building materials, of which collective memory constitutes a part (2004:7). In the case of the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba, it can be stated that collective memories of their origins and migrations have played vital roles in the preservation of the narratives and hence in identity recognition and construction. Additionally, memory serves as the vehicle for the myths of origin and of migration. It is safe to conclude that the traditions of origin of the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba confirm Le Goff's (1992:58) assertion that collective memory organizes itself around the collective identity that is based on myth.

The next chapter will focus on aspects of the book of Exodus, Israel's origin and migration narratives, and the implication for the people's identity.

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<sup>39</sup> The struggles of the amaZulu appear more marked than those of the Tiv and the Yoruba do.

<sup>40</sup> The notion of common language as a mark of identity in the cases of the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba corroborate Mbiti's observation that language is a distinguishing factor among the peoples of Africa (1990:98-100).

## CHAPTER THREE

### EXODUS 14 & 15:1-21 AND IMPLICATIONS FOR ISRAELITE IDENTITY

*“Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand,  
so are you in My hand, O house of Israel!”* (Jer. 18:6)

#### 3.1 THE BOOK OF EXODUS – AN OVERVIEW OF SCHOLARLY RESEARCH

A discussion of the traditions of Israel’s origin and migration needs to be set in a proper context, and at first, it may appear that a good starting point is Israel’s beginning as narrated in the book of Genesis. The necessity for this background will be clarified in the course of the discussion, but at this point it is sufficient to note that Israel’s origin and migration story as a nation is rooted in the exodus and the exodus event was foreseen in the book of Genesis which is regarded as a prologue to the book of Exodus (cf. van Seters 1994:1).

In an attempt to answer the question, “Who were the early Israelites and where did they come from”, Dever (2003:7) asserts that the exodus is “the beginning of the history of Israel as a nation”. His affirmation is not without precedent as other writers have earlier made similar claims (cf. Dearman 1992:43; Lemche 1998:46; Matthews 2002:15). Even though the narrations concerning Israel and the creation of the world began in Genesis, the account of the origin and migration of Israel as a nation is located in the book of Exodus. The focus of this inquiry into the origin and migration of Israel will therefore be on this second book in the Pentateuch, the book of Exodus.

The exodus, the story of the exit of the children of Israel from Egypt, as recorded in the book of Exodus, is of central importance to Israel’s faith, identity, and historical consciousness. The event is fundamental to the formation of Israel as a nation (Kitchen 1992:704), and to show its centrality to Israel’s faith numerous references to it can be found in the Old Testament (cf. Josh 24:5-7,17; Judg 2:1-3, 12; 6:7-10, 13; 1 Sam 10:18-19; Mic 6:3-4; Jer 2:6-7; Ps 78; 80:8, etc). Collins (2005:59) asserts that, “No event is more central to Israelite and Jewish identity, as expressed in the canonical Hebrew Bible, than the Exodus from Egypt”. Similarly, Durham (1987: xxiii) recognizes the impact of the Exodus on other books

of the Hebrew Bible and concludes that, “No other biblical book surfaces in the OT as frequently as the book of Exodus does”. The event defines Israel’s faith and is paradigmatic of God’s dealings with his people (cf. Daube 1963:11; McConville 1997:601; Brueggemann 2003:53).

More than a hundred years ago, the general consensus among biblical scholars was that biblical narratives were essentially historical in nature, that is, the Hebrew Bible was regarded as essentially the history of Israel and its emancipation as a nation under God. In modern and post-modern times, however, there are diverse opinions about the historicity and the authenticity of Bible stories, and as a corollary, of the exodus. For some scholars, because the historicity of the stories have not been proven scientifically, (or archaeologically), Israel’s own writing has been classified variously as epic (cf. Cross 1973); myth (cf. Batto 1992); aetiological narrative, historiography and legend, amongst others. Their view is that the account of the exodus is a literary construct that has no historical basis or evidence. For instance, Lemche (1998:61) argues that:

...The biblical portrayals of Israel’s earliest history (or protohistory) – set in the larger contexts of Mesopotamia, Syrian Palestine, and Egypt – are literary compositions rather than historical sources... A literary analysis of the Pentateuch proves incontrovertibly that its narratives are not reliable sources for the study of antiquity; rather, they are works of art.

In other words, if the narratives are not useful for historical reconstruction, they should not be regarded as history. Similarly, concerning the exodus, Collins (2005:59) claims that, “There are some grounds...for speaking of the exodus, as an invented tradition” while Dever (2003:232) reckons that at best, the narratives could be regarded as myths but definitely not as “factual history”. Two of the reasons scholars consider as crucial for rejecting the narratives as history are: First, there has been no archaeological evidence for the exodus from Egypt (Dever 2003:5) and second, there is no mention of the event in the Egyptian archives. Indeed, the earliest reference to Israel outside the Hebrew Bible is found in the Merneptah Stela inscription (dated ca. 1210/1270), which was discovered at the tomb of Pharaoh Merneptah in Thebes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (cf. Dearman 1992:12; Matthew 2002:16; Dever 2003:201-202). However, it has been argued that the reason for this absence of the exodus event in Egypt’s records could be that to Egypt, it represented a defeat and, naturally, who would be eager to publish defeat?

For their part, Finkelstein and Silberman (2001:56-63) attempt to show that there is no archaeological presence of Israel in Egypt around the 13<sup>th</sup> century BCE<sup>41</sup>, the time some scholars appropriated for the exodus. Moreover, though there was a general influx of people from Canaan to Egypt, which was regarded as a shelter for driven immigrants during the Bronze Age, there was no archaeological evidence of a nomadic presence of a large group wandering through the Sinai Peninsula. In addition, they argue that excavations showed no city-walls or fortifications as claimed by the Bible for that period, c.1220-1230 BCE, and that there was no proof that Israel exited from Egypt. Their verdict, therefore, is that there was no mass exodus from Egypt, no violent conquest of Canaan, “and most of the Israelites did not come from outside Canaan, they emerged from within it” (2001:118). Finkelstein and Silberman have made a lot of strong claims but often backed up times with weak arguments. As a matter of fact, their conclusions have been widely criticized for the often misleading and contradictory claims. For instance, Dever (2001:60) considers their study “an ideological manifesto, not judicious, well-balanced scholarship”. Later, Dever criticizes Finkelstein for flirting with revisionists<sup>42</sup> (2003:204).

Of course, traditional Jewish and Christian view is that the events narrated in the book of exodus are historical; hence Ashby (1998:2) sounds a note of caution:

What is described in the book of exodus was seen by the writers and by succeeding generations of Hebrews as history. This must not be ignored, however much the intricate details have been exposed to the findings of archaeology and biblical criticism. Whatever modern scholars may make of the book of exodus, the Hebrews saw it as their history. We need to consider and understand this before we investigate the actual details, because exodus proclaims God to be in control of all history.

According to Durham (1987: xxv), it may be impossible to provide historical confirmation for the events and the characters in the book of Exodus but this is “not to say that the events and persons referred to by Exodus are not historical, only that we have no historical proof of

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<sup>41</sup> Dever (2003:8) asserts that, “The specific time frame for the Exodus is now confirmed as the middle to the late 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, not the 15<sup>th</sup> century BC as formerly thought” (cf. Kitchen 1992:703). It appears that this assertion contradicts claims that the event cannot be located historically and shows the apparent confusion in scholarly circle concerning certain issues. It does indeed contradict Dever’s own statement noted above that the narratives should be regarded as myths and not “factual history”.

<sup>42</sup> Revisionists, also known as minimalists as opposed to maximalists, are biblical critics who have concluded that Israel’s history cannot be written or those who consider that there is little or no history in the biblical text (cf. Dever 2003:137; Smith 2004:124-5). Dever labels extreme minimalists nihilists and he considers Niels Lemche and Thomas Thompson as examples of such (2003:139-141). He regards Kenneth Kitchen, on the other hand, as a conservative and a maximalist (p.28).



them”. He argues that it is better to be content with the “historical context that we *can* have rather than longing for specific historical proof we *cannot* have, at least until some dramatic new evidence is presented”. More importantly, Durham contends that, “The single most convincing biblical testimony to the historical rootage of the exodus experience is the formative and extensive influence of exodus faith upon the theology of the OT” (p.184-5). Matthews (2002:16) also concedes that if one takes a middle ground on the issue, it “could be that we have simply not yet discovered what is lying out there hidden away and waiting for the archaeologist’s trowel”.

Thus, we are inclined to support Durham’s claim that “the subject of historicity must not be a primary interest” (1987: xxvi) since the “primary burden” of the book of Exodus is theological (p. xx) not historical. Indeed, as we noted earlier in 2.2.2, the implications of what is conveyed in the narratives, rather than “what really happened” is more salient to our present discussion.

Again, while we acknowledge the importance of historical criticism in biblical hermeneutics, it is also crucial to allow the text to “speak for itself”. The final form of the text should not be ignored in criticism. In this regard, Childs (1977:224) argues that, “The final literary production has an integrity of its own which must not only be recognized, but studied with the same intensity as one devotes to the earlier stages” (cf. Durham 1987:26; Fretheim 1990:152; Brueggemann 2005:25). Thus, this present chapter will stay close to the text in its final form.

### **3.1.1 EXODUS AND GENESIS**

Earlier, it was mentioned that the national story of Israel began in Exodus but its very beginnings could be traced to the book of Genesis. In this section, we shall attempt to explore the link with Genesis but not in any great detail. Generally, two narrative blocks are recognized in the book of Genesis (cf. Lemche 1998:3; Matthews 2002:2-3). The first part (Gen 1-11) deals with primordial history, an account of the creation of the earth and of human beings, the disobedience of the original couple, the destruction of that first world in a flood and the promise of restoration after Noah and his family were saved from the flood. The second part of the book (Gen 12-50) contains the patriarchal narratives – the stories of Abraham, Isaac and of Jacob, of Joseph and of the entry of the children of Israel into Egypt.

In the first part of the book, Genesis 1-3 tells of the story of the creation of the earth and all its fullness in six days while God rested on the seventh day. The earth originally was formless

and void and there was darkness upon the face of the deep. Out of this confusion, God began the work of creation by his word. He created light and darkness, heaven and earth, sun and moon, plants and animals. On the sixth day, man was created in the image of God and after his likeness. He was first formed from the dust of the earth before God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Soon after, the woman also was made and from this first couple, the man Abraham (Abram), subsequently descended.

The reader of Genesis encounters Abraham for the first time in the second part of the book in the twelfth chapter. God called him out of Mesopotamia, from among his people and out of his father's (Terah's) household. Together with his wife Sarah, he left Mesopotamia with his possessions and staff in search of the new land the Lord had promised him and where he had commanded him to migrate. This new land turned out to be Canaan. Matthews (2002:5) notes that, "The point made in Genesis 12:1-3 is to place the first ancestors within a particular geographic region and then to provide the basis for their migration to Canaan". God made a covenant with Abraham that would entitle his descendants to become the people of God and to possess the land God promised him as a gift (Gen 15). In Canaan, Abraham became the father of Isaac after many years of waiting for God to fulfil the promise of a son and Isaac in turn became the father of Esau and Jacob. Jacob (otherwise known as Israel) became the father of twelve sons from whom the whole nation of Israel descended. In the course of time, Jacob relocated to Egypt with his entire family following a great famine which forced all neighbouring nations to seek food in Egypt. His favourite son who had been sold into slavery by his brothers became the Prime Minister in Egypt and sent for his father. Thereafter, Jacob lived and died in Egypt but his descendants remained there.

Reference to the book of Genesis is important here as the first part of the book is often regarded as an "origin story" because it details the origin of human beings and of the earth (cf. Matthews 2002:2, 13) and shows God as the creator of all things. The ancestral narratives (Gen 12-50) show the genealogy of Israel's patriarchs and how they are linked to the original couple. Moreover, the narratives catalogue the migrations of these patriarchs and how the Israelites finally ended up in Egypt. The story of how Israel got his name is also recounted in Genesis 32:22-32. Jacob wrestled with the angel of God all night and refused to let go unless the angel blessed him and changed his name from Jacob to Israel because he wrestled with God and prevailed. The story is considered an aetiological tale which points to how the name Israel, which later became a national name, was derived (cf. von Rad 1963:318-9; Dearman

1992:15; Walters 1992:605). The book concludes with the death of Jacob, the blessings with which he blessed his children and the death of Joseph in Egypt.

The book of Exodus begins with these offspring of Jacob who had multiplied in Egypt and who were being oppressed by their hosts of 400 years. The story follows up with the conclusion of the Genesis narratives (Gen 50), implying that there is an inter-textual link between it and the primeval-patriarchal history. However, Brueggemann (2005:25) remarks that:

The relationship between the books of Genesis and Exodus is important but uneasy. On critical grounds, it is clear that the community of the Exodus has no direct (historical) connection to the “ancestors” of Genesis. Nonetheless, the text itself gives considerable attention to that connection, which is theologically crucial.

In the same vein, Durham (1987:8) affirms that “the opening section of the Book of Exodus establishes continuity with the theological history of the fathers and describes their descendants’ situation in the intervening years...” Although in a sense Genesis contains stories of origin and migration, they are stories of the origin of humanity and of the individual migrations of the patriarchs and their households but Exodus focuses on a people or nation (cf. Fretheim 1990:22). Van Seters (1994:1) views these stories as a prologue to Exodus and he argues that the gap between the patriarchal and the exodus traditions was bridged through the work of a single antiquarian author, the Yahwist. Elsewhere, he maintains his position against Schmid (1999)<sup>43</sup> who argues that the gap between the two traditions was bridged as a result of editorial activity.

However, the emphasis in this chapter will be on the book of Exodus which deals in essence with the origin and migration story of Israel as a nation and as a people of God, not on family migrations as attested in Genesis.

### **3.1.2 EXODUS – RESEARCH HISTORY OF CONTENT, STRUCTURE AND MAJOR THEMES**

Some scholars have considered the book of Exodus as an exilic/post-exilic composition (cf. Childs 1977; van Seters 1994:468), with its final redactional form taking place possibly after of the sixth century BC (cf. Finkelstein & Silberman 2001:23, 300-302).

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<sup>43</sup> Van Seters’ paper in the 2006 book in honour of Cornelis Houtman largely attempts to debunk Konrad Schmid’s thesis that the connection between Genesis and Exodus is mainly redactional and post-P. Schmid’s study is *Erzväter und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (WMANT 81; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999) and is cited in van Seters (2006).

Childs (1977) divides the book's forty chapters into three parts: The Exodus from Egypt (1:1-15:21); The Wilderness Journeys (15:22-18:27) and the Covenant at Sinai and its Ordinances (Ex 19-40)<sup>44</sup>. In a similar way, Durham (1987: xxx) divides the book into three major parts based on the "location of the people of Israel in the narrative sequence" but he argues that the outline also presents the book of Exodus as a unified composition. The divisions are, Part One: Israel in Egypt (1:1-13:16); Part Two: Israel in the Wilderness (13:17-18:27) and Part Three: Israel at Sinai (19:1-40:38). Moreover, the author identifies the "Presence" (of Yahweh) as a major theme in Exodus and this binds up two additional themes, namely Deliverance/Rescue and Covenant.<sup>45</sup>

In a slightly different way from Childs', Dillard and Longman (1994:62) also divide the book of Exodus into three parts: God Saves Israel from Egyptian Bondage (1:1-18:27); God Gives Israel His Law (19:1-24:18) and God Commands Israel to Build the Tabernacle (25:1-40:38). The authors claim that the structure indicates the concern of the book of Exodus with salvation, law and worship. As an alternative, some other scholars prefer a two-way division of the book into Exodus 1-19 and Exodus 20-40 (cf. Kitchen 1992:700 but also Propp 1999:37-38 for a different two-way division). Lemche (1998:47) regards Exodus 1-19 as a coherent unit that describes Israel's wanderings from Egypt to Sinai.

In terms of content, the book of Exodus not only begins with the appalling condition of the children of Israel in Egypt long after the death of their fathers; it further relates the birth of Moses who was to become God's special prophet and Israel's deliverer from the house of bondage. Yahweh (the God who was yet to be revealed to his people Israel) called Moses out of the burning bush (Ex 3) while he was in exile in the land of Midian and commissioned him to go to Pharaoh the king of Egypt and demand that Israel be released from bondage. Reluctantly, Moses went ahead to do Yahweh's bidding but Pharaoh refused to listen to Moses and refused to let Israel go. To compel Pharaoh to release Israel, Yahweh sent a series of plagues upon Egypt but Pharaoh would not budge. Yahweh also would not relent and after a final stroke that devastated the Egyptian community, Pharaoh hurriedly discharged Israel from Egypt on the night that Israel celebrated its first Passover (Ex 12-13).

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<sup>44</sup> Cf. Sarna (1991: xii-xiii) for a similar outline.

<sup>45</sup> In his survey of Exodus, Brueggemann (2005:25-6) names four major theological themes that provide focal points for interpretation, namely Liberation, Law, Covenant and Presence.

At Yahweh's command, Israel moved to the edge of the יַם־סוּף, literally, the Sea of Reeds where a pursuing Pharaoh and his army thought to edge the people in. Yahweh came through for his people by opening up the sea so they crossed on dry ground while the Egyptians attempting to do the same became submerged in the water. The people moved on to Sinai where Yahweh manifested himself to them and made a covenant with them. The Torah and the pattern of the tabernacle were given to Moses and Israel continued its sojourn in the wilderness. At different points in the journey when difficulties arose, they complained and grumbled but Yahweh came through each time, supplying them with food or potable water as needed. From the movement out of Egypt after 400 years in slavery into the heart of the desert on the way to a new land, it is clear that something definite had happened to this people – a nation had been born! Lemche (1998:46) asserts that:

The liberation from Egypt is a critical moment in the history of Israel. A nation and its religion depend upon it. Without it, Israel's nationhood would have been a historical footnote, and its faith in Yahweh as the God of Israel would have remained insignificant. The Exodus represents more than a national liberation; rather, it marks the birth of a nation and justifies that nation's very existence.

To the extent that the events of the exodus represent the formation of a nation and the creation of a new identity for the people of Yahweh who had all along been exiled in Egypt, this study will investigate the elements of this identity. In other words, what is it about Israel's origin and migration in the book of Exodus that contributes to or defines Israel's identity? To be sure, it does not appear wise or even feasible for a study such as this to investigate the whole book of Exodus which on its own has attracted numerous commentaries and reviews over the centuries and in which several themes have been attested. Rather, we need to stress the necessity to delimit the scope of the study to Exodus 14 and 15:21, the Sea tradition, for reasons which we shall clarify in the course of the discussion which follows. Further research history will be examined in the discussion of chapters 14 and 15.

### **3.2 EXODUS 14 - 15:21– DEMARCATION AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATION**

The combination of Exodus 14 and Exodus 15:1-21 in the history of interpretation is what is referred to as the Sea event, with chapter 14 known as the Sea Crossing and chapter 15:1-21 referred to as the Song of the Sea<sup>46</sup> (cf. Childs 1977; Fretheim 1990:152). The choice of

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<sup>46</sup> It is also known as the Song at the Sea or the שִׁירַת הַיָּם (short form, the שִׁירָה; cf. Sarna 1991:75).

Exodus 14 and 15:21 in this study is informed primarily by two factors. The first is that the Sea event has been considered the “heart” of the exodus tradition and was annually rehearsed as part of the exodus story in the Passover ritual (cf. Childs 1970:406-7; 1977:221, 223)<sup>47</sup>. Likewise, Dozeman (1996:153) asserts that, “The Song of the Sea is the cornerstone of any tradition-historical study of the exodus, and indeed, of the Pentateuch in general”. Moreover, from a structural perspective, some scholars also consider the Sea event, at least the poetic aspect, as the centre of the book of Exodus. For instance, Propp (1999:37-8) views the book as a bipartite structure or a “diptych” with 15:1-21 as the centre. He argues that the Song of the Sea (15:1-21) summarizes the first half of the book of Exodus and opens the second half, anticipating the issues such as Covenant and Tabernacle Building. This kind of conclusion suggests that the Sea event is crucial to the exodus. Secondly, the other factor behind the scope of the study is a theological consideration that the event of the crossing of the sea is what actually carved out a new identity for Israel as a nation. Ashby (1998:17) writes that:

The Hebrew slaves, whether they were all Hebrews or not, had lost their identity in their anonymous slavery. They are now about to find a new and yet an identity (*sic*), and it is this identity, rather than the actual genealogical descent, that is important to them. The giving of identity and the revelation of God both happen together in the great event of Exodus-Sinai.

We therefore propose that the major catalyst for this new identity is the Sea event and for this reason, we now turn to this event that can be regarded as one of the most significant in the memoirs of Israel.

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<sup>47</sup> This position is carried over from Noth (1962:104) by Childs who also notes that Coats (1967:253) argues that the crossing of the sea is part of the wilderness wanderings rather than of the exodus tradition as shown by the J account. Nevertheless, Childs affirms Noth’s position as valid not only because the sea-crossing functions as an integral part of P but also based on its association with the Passover (Childs 1977:222-3). In an earlier treatise (1970:409), he argues, in addition, that there is a close connection between the crossing and the plagues as well as the hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, both of which form part of the exodus tradition. He rejects Coats’ position, claiming that the latter’s further attempt to disprove Noth’s point (Coats 1969:1) is unsuccessful (1970:410). It appears to us, that the Sea Crossing can actually be considered as a bridge between the two traditions, seeing that it shares elements of both.

Alternately, van Seters (1994:139-145) argues that the whole exercise of determining whether the crossing belongs to the exodus or to the wilderness tradition is futile because there is no ancient tradition behind the crossing in exodus but it was a literary creation by the exilic Yahwist composer who worked on a theme he received from the Deuteronomistic tradition. Van Seters’ outright denial of any pre-exilic tradition on central topics such as the exodus or the Passover has been criticized as extreme (Dozeman 1995:246) and his overall conclusion concerning the Yahwist is regarded as perplexing (Ska 1996:141). As we have maintained, however, we would rather work on the form of the text as it has been delivered to us.

In considering the Sea event, therefore, it is important to spell out a clear exegetical methodology. We are inclined to align with Gnuse's (1999:584) recommendation that, "In assessing a particular passage the critical scholar might envision five stages of development worthy of consideration and, depending on the text, might focus intensely on one or more of the stages". The five steps in tradition-history suggested by Gnuse (pp.584-6) are as follow:

- Consideration of Ancient Near Eastern or Hellenistic parallels to the biblical passage;
- Consideration of possible oral pre-history of the biblical text being studied i.e. form critical analysis;
- Envisioning how the text might have grown into its present literary context; how it fits into the greater cycle of texts in terms of meaning i.e. source or literary criticism;
- Reflection on how the great cycle of narratives was connected to an even larger segment of literature in terms of the editorial or redaction process;
- Consideration of how the text fits into the entire biblical canon and into biblical theology as a whole i.e., canonical criticism (pp.584-6).

In what follows, we shall take into consideration the above recommendations in one way or the other but not necessarily in the same order and it may not be expedient to examine each of the steps in detail. In addition to this, a "close reading" of the text will be carried out to scrutinize some aspects of its language and style and the relation to other texts (cf. Clines 1983:33). Clines notes that close reading enables the exegete to "bring into sharp focus, in turn, this, that and the other detail, juncture, or relation in our total response..." (1983:33). The close reading of Exodus 14-15:18 will therefore enable us to focus on what is salient in the text for the purpose of our discussion.

### **3.2.1 EXEGETICAL CONSIDERATION**

We shall begin here with an exegetical analysis of Exodus 14 and then proceed to Exodus 15:1-21.

#### **3.2.1.1 EXODUS 14:1-31 – THE SEA CROSSING**

Exodus 14, an account of the crossing of the sea by the children of Israel after their departure from Egypt, is preceded by the events of Israel's last night in Egypt. Through Moses and Aaron, the Lord instructed the entire congregation of Israel to celebrate the Passover feast and the people complied (12:1-36). That same night, there was an outcry from the land of Egypt as the Lord struck to death the first-born son of every household. This compelled

Pharaoh to urge the people of Israel to depart from the land (12:37-42). In Exodus 12:43-13:16, the people of Israel were reminded of the ordinance of the Passover and encouraged to pass it on to their descendants. The final part of the chapter (13:17-22) recounts God's instruction on the route the people were to follow and how He himself led them by the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night.

### 3.2.1.1.1 EXODUS 14 – BRIEF RESEARCH HISTORY

It appears quite acceptable to regard Exodus 13:17-22 as composite with part of the larger Exodus 14-15:21 unit (cf. Childs 1977:221-3; Durham 1987:182; Sarna 1991:68; Van Seters 1994:128; Houtman 1996:233; Propp 1999:476)<sup>48</sup>. The unit is unarguably a narrative piece (cf. Fretheim 1990:152; Patterson 2004:45).

In terms of source critical analysis, there are no easy answers to the question of sources concerning Exodus 13:17-14:31. Scholarly view is rather divergent and complex and we shall therefore be content here with a few illustrations. For instance, for van Seters (1994:128-34), the whole unit of Exodus 13:17-22 is assigned to J<sup>49</sup> while chapter 14 is considered an admixture of J and P. However, when chapter 14 is broken down into smaller units, 14:1-4 is shown to be P; 14:5-14 contains a J text interjected by 14:8-9a which is P; 14:15-18 is also P and 14:19-20 is J. Further, 14:21 and 22b are marks of P; 14:22a and 23 belong to J but are expanded by P; 14:24, 25b, 27, 28 and 30-31 are all assigned to J but the author is silent on 14:25a, 26 and 29. It should be taken into account however, that van Seters' thesis is that the "basic presentation of the crossing of the sea", and indeed of the life of Moses, belongs to J. He considers J as the work of an ancient Judean scholar who lived among his fellow Babylonian exiles (1994:133, 468).

On the other hand, Propp (1999:476-81) identifies four source divisions in the Sea account, namely J, E, P, R. While he assigns 13:17-19 to E, he admits that 13:21-22 "is more difficult" and notes that some scholars assign it to P but he would rather argue for J or E. He therefore ends up with what he tags "JE with a question mark". For Propp, 14:1-4 is either P or R; 14:5 is "probably E"; 14:6 is JE but probably E; 14:8-9 is P; 14:10-14 is JE. Additionally, he

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<sup>48</sup> Note however Houtman's observation that some exegetes believe 13:17-14:31 is not a homogenous unit because of the use of the divine name, Elohim, in 13:17-19 (1996:234).

<sup>49</sup> The notations of J, E, P and R in Wellhausen's classical Documentary Hypothesis and its modifications represent the Yahwist, Elohist, Priestly and Redactorial sources, respectively (cf. Smith 2004:9-12). It should be noted that the Documentary Hypothesis itself has become increasingly unpopular in contemporary scholarship.



argues that there is a “temptation” to assign 14:15a to P while 14:15b is likely to be JE but more likely P. He assigns 14:16-17 to P; 14:19 is E while 14:20 is considered difficult; 14:21 could be P or JE; 14:22 fits into P and 14:23-25 is labelled JE. Finally, he classifies 14:26 as P; 14:27 as P material surrounding JE; 14:28a is P while 14:28b is E; 14:29-31 is “probably Priestly, although it might conceivably be a Redactional summary connecting P with JE” (p.481).

From the two illustrations above, it is sufficiently clear that the issue of identifying the ancient sources for the crossing of the sea event is not only cumbersome but inconclusive. Other varieties of source division have been proposed by other scholars (cf. Child 1977:220; Durham 1987:183-4, 190, 195; Houtman 1996:234-5). We do maintain that our point of interest is the final form of the text and not the separate layers of tradition that might have converged in the narrative. Nevertheless, the consideration of the text in the New Testament context deserves mention.

Childs (1977:230-2) comments that Hellenistic interpretations of the crossing of the sea exist; as in Josephus’ account of the exodus from Egypt or Philo’s treatise of the tradition in the Wisdom of Solomon. He claims that both Josephus and Philo seemed to have been influenced by the midrashic tradition which tended to emphasize God’s special protection of Israel and his redemption of Israel because of the promise he made to the patriarchs. Childs further explains that the New Testament interpretation of the exodus tradition (and the crossing of the sea) emerged from the Hellenistic milieu (p. 232). He notes, for example, the similarity between Philo and Paul’s allegorical use of the Sea Crossing in 1 Corinthians 10:1, arguing that, “The reference to the supernatural Rock which followed them reflects quite clearly a midrashic tradition” (p. 233).

#### 3.2.1.1.2 EXODUS 14 – CLOSE READING

In this segment, we shall follow the division of the pericopes by the New International Version (NIV) Bible for interpreting the unit under consideration. Whereas 13:17-22 is taken as a pericope, 14:1-31 is divided into eight paragraphs thus: 14:1-4; 14:5-9; 14:10-14; 14:15-18; 14:19-20; 14:21-25; 14:26-29 and 14:30-31. For clarity of context, we shall include and begin with Exodus 13:17-22.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 13:17** When Pharaoh let the people go [וַיְהִי בְשֻׁלַח פְּרַעֲהוֹ אֶת-הָעָם], God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt." **18** So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt armed for

battle. **19** Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place." **20** After leaving Succoth they camped at Etham on the edge of the desert. **21** By day the LORD went ahead of them in a pillar of cloud to guide them on their way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, so that they could travel by day or night. **22** Neither the pillar of cloud by day nor the pillar of fire by night left its place in front of the people.

Now, Israel has been despatched into the wilderness by Pharaoh but it was Yahweh who led the way. Sarna (1991:68) notes that the Hebrew word *נָחַם*, translated as 'let... go' in 13:17 "carries the double juridical sense of divorce and emancipation of a slave and is highly evocative". This can be interpreted to mean that Israel is doubly free, free to be separated from the image and shadow of Egypt and of Pharaoh. Pharaoh's "letting go" also shows that he was finally ready to obey Yahweh's initial and persistent plea (Ex 3:18; 5:1; 7:16). It sounds ironical that while Israel was busy preparing for war, (being armed when they left Egypt), Yahweh was planning a way in which Israel could escape battle. This verse (17) shows Yahweh as a tactician. For Fretheim (1990:154), the emphasis here is on divine planning while Sarna (1991:68) remarks that, "not Moses but God is the supreme actor". The reference to Joseph's bones in v.19 indicates that the narrative is definitely linked to the patriarchal stories in Genesis 50:22-26 (cf. van Seters 1994:129).

By Exodus 13:21-22, Yahweh had begun to lead even in a more concrete way, that is, by the classical pillar of cloud by day and of fire by night (Num 10:33; Deut 1:33). Propp (1999:549) comments that cloud and fire signify divine presence. For Durham (1987: xxi), the crux of the book of Exodus is the theme of divine presence: Yahweh is present in the midst of his people (cf. Sarna 1991:70).

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:1-4**

<sup>1</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, <sup>2</sup>"Tell the Israelites to turn back and encamp near Pi Hahiroth, between Migdol and the sea. They are to encamp by the sea, directly opposite Baal Zephon. <sup>3</sup>Pharaoh will think, 'The Israelites are wandering around the land in confusion, hemmed in by the desert.'<sup>4</sup> And I will harden Pharaoh's heart, and he will pursue them. But I will gain glory for myself through Pharaoh and all his army, and the Egyptians will know that I am the LORD." So the Israelite did this.

This passage portrays Yahweh as the one in charge. He spoke directly to Moses who, in turn, was to relay the message to the people. The message was that the people should change route and encamp but the place names there cannot be identified today with certainty (cf. Sarna 1991:70). Durham remarks that "this eccentric change of route by Yahweh" (1987:186) was deliberate and it was not the location that was important to the author but the purpose. The

geographical information is lost on us because “Yahweh guided his people away from the shortest and most logical route into an eccentric series of turns designed to depict confusion...” so as to trick Pharaoh as well as to delay the people’s entry into the new land (p. 187). Yahweh had foreseen the possibility that Pharaoh would pursue Israel because of his hard heart; therefore, Yahweh asked them to take a clumsy route, that is, in addition to avoiding war on the way (cf. Fretheim 1990:154).

In v.4, Yahweh repeated that he would do what he had been doing all along to Pharaoh’s heart (cf. Ex 4:21; 7:3; 9:12); he would harden it in order to gain glory for himself through Pharaoh’s defeat. Yahweh would gain glory at Pharaoh’s expense (Durham 1987:187). Brueggemann (2005:280) notes that, “As Yahweh ‘gets glory’ over Pharaoh..., the book of Exodus intends to wean Israel away from the glory of Pharaoh to an alternative glory encountered on the mountain of covenantal law”.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:5-9**

<sup>4</sup>When the King of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!" <sup>6</sup> So he had his chariot made ready and took his army with him. <sup>7</sup> He took six hundred of the best chariots, along with all the other chariots of Egypt, with officers over all of them. <sup>8</sup> The LORD hardened the heart of Pharaoh King of Egypt, so that he pursued the Israelites, who were marching out boldly. <sup>9</sup> The Egyptians - all Pharaoh's horses and chariots, horsemen and troops - pursued the Israelites and overtook them as they camped by the sea near Pi Hahiroth, opposite Baal Zephon.

It appears Pharaoh had just woken up from his slumber. He suddenly realized that Israel had truly left and it was for good, it was not just to go and sacrifice in the wilderness for the three days that it would take them to do so had elapsed and they had not returned. Egypt’s source of slave-labour had disappeared. The tempo in his court changed as Pharaoh swung into action and mustered his sophisticated cavalry in readiness for a pursuit. However, it was Yahweh who stage-managed Pharaoh’s sudden change of heart (Durham 1987:190). He fulfilled the promise he earlier made in verse 4 that he would harden Pharaoh’s heart. Israel had marched out into the wilderness with confidence, oblivious of the new plot by Pharaoh and his courtiers and now Pharaoh’s forces had located their camp.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:10-14**

<sup>10</sup>As Pharaoh approached, the Israelites looked up, and there were the Egyptians, marching after them. They were terrified and cried out to the LORD. <sup>11</sup> They said to Moses, "Was it because there were no graves in Egypt that you brought us to the desert to die? What have you done to us by bringing us out of Egypt? <sup>12</sup> Didn't we say to you in Egypt, 'Leave us alone; let us serve the Egyptians'? It would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the desert!" <sup>13</sup> Moses answered the people, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see

the deliverance the LORD will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again.<sup>14</sup> The LORD will fight for you; you need only to be still."

In the previous pericope, it was Pharaoh and his men who wondered, wondered why they let Israel go. Now it was Israel's turn to wonder as they realized for the first time that the picnic was over. "Surely, slavery was better than uncertain freedom," they concluded. Their emotion underwent immediate transformation as boldness was replaced by sheer terror and by despair. They realized that Yahweh was their last hope and for the first time on the journey, Israel spoke – it was against Moses. They blamed him for their distress and wished they had not left Egypt. Just as the people had been oblivious of Pharaoh's plan, it became apparent that they were equally oblivious of Yahweh's plan. Only Moses was unperturbed (cf. Durham 1987:192); he was confident that Yahweh would act in their favour. All Israel needed to do was to be calm and to watch. Moses encouraged them to change their focus; they should begin to see Yahweh instead of the Egyptians, for very soon, they would see the Egyptians no more. There was no cause for fear; they did not need to run away or be agitated because that very day would mark a turning point in their lives. Yahweh would do the fighting and deliver them forever. This was the first hint from Moses on this journey that Yahweh is a fighter (cf. Deut 1:30; 3:22).

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:15-18**

<sup>15</sup>Then the LORD said to Moses, "Why are you crying out to me? Tell the Israelites to move on. <sup>16</sup>Raise your staff and stretch out your hand over the sea to divide the water so that the Israelites can go through the sea on dry ground. <sup>17</sup>I will harden the hearts of the Egyptians so that they will go in after them. And I will gain glory through Pharaoh and all his army, through his chariots and his horsemen. <sup>18</sup>The Egyptians will know that I am the LORD when I gain glory through Pharaoh, his chariots and his horsemen."

At this point, Yahweh reprimanded Moses for repeating the prayer of the people in his ears (cf. Houtman 1996:266; Zornberg 2001:203). This was no time to pray or to stand still. It was time to act. Israel needed to move forward, needed to confront the obstacle in front and not worry about what is behind. Yahweh then instructed Moses to also do something. It was no time to stand aside and look as he did at Horeb (3:3); rather, he should raise his staff and stretch his hand out to the sea. It would appear that Yahweh required some human co-operation to achieve his divine strategy. Yahweh assured Moses that this time he would extend the hardening of heart to Pharaoh's men as well (cf. vv 4, 8). The result would be what he had earlier determined – Pharaoh's defeat would advertise Yahweh's glory.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:19-20**

<sup>19</sup> Then the angel of God, who had been traveling in front of Israel's army, withdrew and went behind them. The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, <sup>20</sup> coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.

With the latest instruction, another personage is introduced to the scene. The angel or messenger of Yahweh, who must have been hidden from the people and who was hitherto unknown to the reader, took position behind Israel's army (cf. Is 63:9). The pillar likewise relocated from the front to the back, both becoming Israel's rearguard. Yahweh was making some divine moves. The pillar did more than guide; Yahweh decided to use it as an additional tool to create a barrier between the children of Israel and the Egyptians (Propp 1990:550). Van Seters (1994:137) claims that the appearance of the pillar was a form of theophany but it was also used as "a decisive force in the military encounter". He also remarks that "the theophany here only anticipates the greater event at Sinai in Exodus 19-24 and 32-34" (p.139). Houtman (1996:228) affirms that, "By making a separation between Israel and Egypt YHWH emphasizes that Israel belongs to him". The pillar was used as a symbol of this contrast. While it created light for Yahweh's people, it brought darkness to the Egyptians. After all, Yahweh had earlier declared in Exodus 11:7 that he makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel! The strange sight between them and the darkness that prevented the Egyptians from seeing far put Egypt at bay and it dawned on them that that was going to be an unusually long night.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:21-25**

<sup>21</sup> Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and all that night the LORD drove the sea back with a strong east wind and turned it into dry land. The waters were divided, <sup>22</sup> and the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left. <sup>23</sup> The Egyptians pursued them, and all Pharaoh's horses and chariots and horsemen followed them into the sea. <sup>24</sup> During the last watch of the night the LORD looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion. <sup>25</sup> He made the wheels of their chariots come off so that they had difficulty driving. And the Egyptians said, "Let's get away from the Israelites! The LORD is fighting for them against Egypt."

Moses then stretched out his hand in obedience to Yahweh's instruction but it was Yahweh himself who drove back the sea. Not only man and God were in partnership here, even nature was co-opted in the execution of this miracle (cf. Fretheim 1990:159). The wind blew all night causing the water of the sea to congeal into two walls on the right and the left. It all

looked too simple at first – Israel walked on dry ground, therefore the Egyptians followed them into the middle of the sea (cf. Ps 66:6). Propp (1999:499) concludes that the act of pursuing Israel into the sea must have been the result of the Egyptians hardening of heart because “it would appear incredibly audacious of the Egyptians to rush between danger’s jaws, without considering how and why the Sea had parted”. Consternation followed as Egypt’s horses and chariots were rendered immobile in the heart of the sea. Suddenly, the Egyptians realized that something unnatural was happening to them. They were being opposed by some force beyond them and there was need to flee. In that last cry from the Egyptians, there was no longer any hint of the gallantry they displayed in v.23, only a sudden awareness that the opposition was from Yahweh. They realized too late what had been made apparent to Moses all along – that Yahweh is a fighter (14:14)! Would Egypt escape?

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:26-29**

<sup>26</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Stretch out your hand over the sea so that the waters may flow back over the Egyptians and their chariots and horsemen." <sup>27</sup> Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at daybreak the sea went back to its place. The Egyptians were fleeing toward it, and the LORD swept them into the sea. <sup>28</sup> The water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen - the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived. <sup>29</sup> But the Israelites went through the sea on dry ground, with a wall of water on their right and on their left.

As Egypt decided the next course of action, Yahweh also carried out his next instruction. Moses was to repeat his former action and leave no room for Egypt to flee. The water was released. Just as Yahweh was the principal actor in the splitting of the sea, so Yahweh it was who swept Egypt back into the sea as the people attempted to flee. They were all submerged; there were no survivors. By contrast, Israel survived in spite of the fear of the desert graves. The people went through without recording a single casualty. Propp (1999:501-2) notes that the use of the expressions, “dry land” and “the Sea” in verse 29, which are ordinarily opposites, “heightens the paradox” that the Israelites’ walked on dry ground while the Egyptians drowned.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 14:30-31**

<sup>30</sup> That day the LORD saved Israel from the hands of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. <sup>31</sup> And when the Israelites saw the great power the LORD displayed against the Egyptians, the people feared the LORD and put their trust in him and in Moses his servant.

The last two verses serve as an epilogue to the event at the sea. Yahweh had indeed saved his people; Yahweh is saviour! Durham (1987:197) acknowledges that, “*Yahweh* rescued Israel that day from the power of the Egyptians. The manner of his doing it is incidental to the fact that *Yahweh* is the one who made the rescue. Not tides, not storms, not bad planning, not tactical error, not bad luck or good luck, but *Yahweh*... *Yahweh* did it”. Moses had told them that they would *see* Yahweh’s salvation and now the reader is informed that Israel *saw* the Egyptians lying dead on the shore. What was salvation for Israel was destruction for their enemies. Again the Israelites not only *saw* the destruction of their pursuers, they *saw* God’s great power at work (p.197). This evoked in them a familiar reaction – fear. This time however, it was not the terrifying dread of the enemy but an awesome reverence of him who alone parted the sea. Zornberg (2001:214-5) asserts that, “Their fear is based on the knowledge that they are not different from the Egyptians, that they are flesh and blood, vulnerable to punishment... the knowledge that their lives tremble on the verge...”

### **3.2.1.2 EXODUS 15:1-21 – THE SONG OF THE SEA**

With Exodus 14, we have seen the narrative account of a series of event that began in 13:16-22 with the flight of the children of Israel from Egypt, their pursuit by their erstwhile taskmasters, their desperation on sighting their pursuers and the miraculous parting of the sea that spelt deliverance for Israel and doom for the Egyptian army. The first verse of chapter 15 therefore continues the narrative with the first line but changes into a song of triumph and celebration which the narrator attributed to Moses, to the people of Israel and to Miriam. In contrast to the prose account of 13:16-14:31, the Song of the Sea, the שִׁירַת הַיָּם, is a poetic rendition (cf. Fretheim 1990:152; Sarna 1991:75).

#### **3.2.1.2.1 EXODUS 15: 1-21 – BRIEF RESEARCH HISTORY**

In terms of genre, Childs (1977:243) points out that the Song of the Sea has been described variously as a hymn, an enthronement psalm, a litany, a victory psalm and a hymn, and a thanksgiving psalm, etc. He notes that “no one form describes the entire song or does justice to the variety within the poem. Furthermore, the author maintains that like the Sea event, the Song also belongs to the exodus tradition rather than to the wilderness tradition as claimed by some other scholars (p.244; cf. Durham 1987:203). It should be noted, however, that this

song which has been a part of early Jewish liturgy<sup>50</sup> has been the focus of much debate in Old Testament scholarship in the last two centuries. This is primarily because the source analysis of the song is rather complex.

Concerning the source analysis, therefore, Childs (1977:245) notes that many scholars argue that the poem has combined features of J and P and this view is supported by van Seters (1994:147-8), who holds that the song has a direct literary dependence on both J and P. Propp's position, on the other hand, is that although some scholars classify the song as either J or E, it is safe to regard it as belonging to JE with the exception of Exodus 15:19 which is possibly the work of a redactor (R) or the Priestly writer. He notes in addition that v.19 forms a frame with 14:29, which is P and that both verses report in identical language that Israel's sons walked on dry land in the midst of the sea (1999:482). Again, whether the song in the final analysis, is classified as J, P, or JE is not crucial to this study.

In terms of dating, some scholars previously posited that the Song of the Sea is a late poem (cf. Noth 1962). Childs (1970:411) states that he would agree with Mowinckel in assigning a date to the poem about the ninth century. By contrast, Cross (1973:121-5) views it as an archaic poem composed some time in the 12<sup>th</sup> century or early 11<sup>th</sup> century BC but which was first put into writing in the 10<sup>th</sup> century BC. He proffers six criteria for dating the song, such as the typology of its language; the typology of its prosody; the history of tradition etc. His principal argument is that the language of the poem "is more consistently archaic than that of any other prose or poetic work of some length in the Bible" and says the poem itself was originally separate from its present narrative context (1973:121; cf. Weitzman 1997:4). For van Seters (1994:148), the song is a post-exilic composition. Even though there has been no clear consensus about the date of the poem, (cf. Childs 1977:245-6), the general tendency in scholarship is toward an early dating (cf. Propp 1999:482).

Both structurally and by content, Cross (1973:125-31) argues only for Exodus 15:1-18 and holds that it has two major divisions, that is, 15:1-12, which describes Yahweh's victory over the Egyptians at the sea, and 15:13-18, which details the guidance through the desert and the entry into the land (cf. Brueggemann 1997:66). Cross then breaks the two sections into nine

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<sup>50</sup> In this connection, Coats (1969:10) claims that the *Sitz im Leben* of the poem is the cult, "in all probability, the autumn festival".



smaller units, each marked off by a change of metre. However, Durham (1987:204-5) points out the disadvantage of using metres to identify the structure of Hebrew poetry, noting that because it is an application of a foreign English or European category, it creates problems. He suggests that the “poem is a composite of at least two (vv 1b-12 and vv 13-18) and perhaps three (dividing vv 13-18 into 13a, 14-16 and 13b, 17-18)” (p.205). Although he classes the whole of Exodus 15:1-19 as the *שִׁירָה*, Sarna (1991:76) identifies it as containing four main strophes but excludes v.19. The first, 15:1-10, celebrates God’s great triumph over the Egyptian foe; the second strophe tells of the incomparability of God; verses 14-16 describe the impact of the extraordinary events on the surrounding peoples, and the last, 15:17-18 are forward-looking because they anticipate future developments.

Some scholars limit the *שִׁירָה* to 15:1-18 (cf. Cross 1973) while others include verses 19-21 (cf. Durham 1987; Fretheim 1990; Houtman 1996). For van Seters (1994:147), the whole of Exodus 15 constitutes the song and for Sarna (1991:76) the focus is on verses 1-19. In the case of Propp (1999:502), the *שִׁירָה* extends from 15:1b to 18, and includes verse 21. However, the term, the Song of the Sea will be employed to cover Exodus 15:1-21 in this study. We need to stress that when the scope is extended to verse 21, the *שִׁירָה* is regarded as containing two songs of praise, the first being 15:1b-18, which Childs (1977:246) refers to as the Song of the Sea which Moses sang, and the other is 15:21, the Song of Miriam (cf. Fretheim 1990:161).

Another important point that should be mentioned about the Song of the Sea is its comparison to the mythic cycle of *Ba'al* and *'Anat* which are a set of 14<sup>th</sup> century ancient Ugaritic cuneiform texts. Cross (1973:112-140) observes that the Song of the Sea and biblical Hebrew poetry, in general, share common themes with these *Ba'al* texts and Phoenician traditions. In other words, certain features of the poem can be regarded as contiguous with Western Semitic mythopoeic patterns. Specifically, the author claims that cosmogonic and divine warrior features in the poem that portray Yahweh as a man of war are comparable to the Ugaritic myth in which *Ba'al* smote Lotan the ancient dragon and destroyed the crooked serpent (p.118-9)<sup>51</sup>.

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. Batto (1992:104-5) also compares the Song of the Sea to *Enūma eliš* in which the divine warrior overcomes the watery face of chaos. Additionally, Propp (1999:554-62) mentions the relationship of the Song

Moreover, like the narrative of Exodus 14, the interpretation of the Song of the Sea in the New Testament context has been attested. Childs (1977:234) reflects on the song of Moses and of the Lamb in Revelation 15:3 and remarks that there are certain parallel features between it and Exodus 15 such as between the crystal sea and the Red Sea, between the elders with harps and the victorious Israelites, and between the conquered beast and the defeated Egyptian army.

### 3.2.1.2.2 EXODUS 15:1-21 - CLOSE READING

#### <sup>NIV</sup> Exodus 15:1-3

<sup>1</sup> Then Moses and the Israelites sang this song to the LORD: "I will sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea.<sup>2</sup> The LORD is my strength and my song; he has become my salvation. He is my God, and I will praise him, my father's God, and I will exalt him.

The opening line of this chapter is clearly in continuity with the prose of the previous chapter. It is easy to consider the שִׁירָה as the poetic version of the prose account of chapter 14 but Sarna (1991:75) cautions that this could be misleading as the song takes for granted that the reader is already acquainted with some facts in the prose account and therefore they bear no repetition. Yahweh had just miraculously delivered his people from the host of Pharaoh in a historic move that silenced the enemy forever. It was time for the people of Israel and their leader to sing a song of victory and of thanksgiving unto their saviour. The song is then introduced as a personal testimony (cf. Houtman 1996:227) in grateful response to Yahweh's great acts. It was sung unto Yahweh; and for this reason, Childs (1977:250) considers the song not just a victory song as in Judges 5, for example, but a hymn that was sung to Yahweh. Durham (1987:205) rightly notes that Yahweh is both the subject and the object of the song because the hymn is about him and for him. It is a celebration of Yahweh (p.210).

In v.2, the personal testimony shows that Yahweh is the reason for Israel's song and he is shown as Israel's saviour. Fretheim (2005:103) links this theme of salvation here to Genesis, claiming that in the aftermath of the flood (that is, of Noah), God is portrayed as the saviour – of both human beings and animals. The author is certainly correct to state that God's saving activity comes to a climax in the deliverance of his people from slavery in Egypt (14:30) and that this is made evident in the salvation language employed in Exodus 15:2.

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to some Ancient Near Eastern texts, in particular, to Ugaritic texts (see also Weitzman 1997:20; Bosman 2005:870).

The reference to Yahweh as their father's God is also interesting. Israel seems to declare, "Indeed we have an ancestor, but this is no ordinary ancestor because he has a powerful God who can deliver his descendants in a time of distress. This God is Yahweh; he is an ancestral God and not some new god that we acquired on the way or even in Egypt".

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 15:3-7**

<sup>3</sup> The LORD is a warrior; the LORD is his name. <sup>4</sup> Pharaoh's chariots and his army he has hurled into the sea. The best of Pharaoh's officers are drowned in the Red Sea. <sup>5</sup> The deep waters [תְּהוֹמוֹת] have covered them; they sank to the depths like a stone. <sup>6</sup> Your right hand, O LORD, was majestic in power. Your right hand, O LORD, shattered the enemy. <sup>7</sup> In the greatness of your majesty you threw down those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble.

This same Yahweh, the God of their fathers (15:2), is then described as a fighter as if to echo Moses' earlier assurance to the people in 14:14 that Yahweh would fight for them or the confession of the Egyptians in 14:25 that Yahweh was fighting for his people (cf. Deut 20:1-4; Josh 10:8-11; Judg 4:14; Ps 24:8 for other depictions of Yahweh as a warrior; cf. also Brueggemann 1997:242 for Yahweh's characterization as warrior). Brueggemann (1997:242) affirms that Exodus 15:1-18 is "a lead case" for Yahweh as warrior. Additionally, Propp (1999:515) comments that sometimes Yahweh is shown to battle alongside Israel (cf. Deut 20:1-4; Josh 10:8-11; Judg 4:14); but here at the Sea, Yahweh fights alone.

In verse 4, the song begins to recount the details of the victory. First, the Egyptian army was thrown or hurled into the sea, and then they were drowned in the same sea. The Hebrew word translated as 'the deep waters' is תְּהוֹמוֹת, which is the plural form of the noun תְּהוֹם (cf. Sarna 1991:78) and is the same as the great primordial or cosmic and chaotic waters of Genesis 1:2. Houtman (1996:232) remarks that, "It causes no surprise that the crossing can be described in terms of the creation event, the taming of the powers of chaos, and opens up the perspective of a new creation". In other words, just as the chaotic waters of the Genesis 1:2 was overcome in creation, so was Pharaoh overpowered at the יַם־סוּף. Fretheim (1991:357; 2005:123-4) claims that the language and style of the song has long been recognized as similar to the creation myths of the Ancient Near East. For him, Egypt is considered as an embodiment of anti-creational forces of chaos which threaten to undo and subvert God's creation. Thus cosmic language is employed to describe the drowning of these forces and Yahweh's victory over them. Fretheim (2005:124, 191) therefore considers Yahweh's victory at the Sea as cosmic in scope and that Israel's redemptive experience is described by the

language of creation employed here in the song. Propp (1999:523) corroborates this point; for him, “the Sea event symbolically recapitulates Creation”.

Certainly, this was no accidental drowning; someone actually threw them as one throws a stone and ensured that they drowned. Incidentally, the hand that threw that stone was indeed Yahweh’s! Durham (1987:207) notes that Yahweh’s right hand is used as a metaphor for divine power. We should add here that the Hebrew Bible is replete with this metaphor (cf. Ps 17:7; 20:6; 44:3; 45:4; 118:15-16; Is 41:10, 13; 48:13; Lam 2:3; Hab 2:16 etc.). Furthermore, verse 7 reveals Yahweh’s emotional state at this point – he was pent up with fury against the unrelenting Egyptian army. When he released that anger, it was like a fire that devoured its target.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 15:8-10**

<sup>8</sup> By the blast of your nostrils the waters piled up. The surging waters stood firm like a wall; the deep waters congealed in the heart of the sea. <sup>9</sup> "The enemy boasted, 'I will pursue, I will overtake them. I will divide the spoils; I will gorge myself on them. I will draw my sword and my hand will destroy them.' <sup>10</sup> But you blew with your breath, and the sea covered them. They sank like lead in the mighty waters.

The piling up of the water here corresponds with what is recorded in the prose (14:22). The division of the water is compared to a wall. The image of fire immediately gives way to and contrasts with that of water and of freezing as the anger oozing out from Yahweh’s nostrils congeals or freezes the water. The NET Bible explains that, “The phrase ‘the blast of your nostrils’ is a bold anthropomorphic expression for the wind that came in and dried up the water” (Ex 15:8, n.24). The fire and the blasts of Yahweh’s nostrils represented Yahweh’s weapons of war<sup>52</sup>. Fretheim (2005:124, 161) recognizes it as the use of non-human forces to fight. He remarks that, “At the Red Sea, the nonhuman creatures – wind, waves, sea, clouds, and darkness – are key divine means in and through which the Egyptians are immobilized and destroyed in the process of Israel’s redemption” (2005:280). For the first time, the reader also discovers that Egypt was actually boasting and threatening the children of Israel before they realized that the battle had turned against them. The enemy meant to destroy Israel with his hand but the destroyer himself was destroyed by a greater hand.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 15:11-12**

<sup>11</sup> Who among the gods is like you, O LORD? Who is like you - majestic in holiness,

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<sup>52</sup> Cf. The “storm weapon” or the tempest wielded by Marduk against Tiamat in *Enuma Elish* with which he wrought victory for the gods (Jacobsen 1968:104-5).

awesome in glory, working wonders?<sup>12</sup> You stretched out your right hand and the earth swallowed them.

The poet momentarily switches from recounting the event to focus on Yahweh's incomparability among gods. The rhetorical refrain "Who is like you" or its paraphrastic form "There is none like you" is quite popular on the lips of Israel (cf. 2 Sam 7:22; 1 King 8:23; Ps 71:19; 86:8; 89:6; Jer 10:6). To Israel, Yahweh is unique, unique in holiness, unique in his works. Again, there is a focus on Yahweh's right hand here. Propp (1999:529) points out that although the prose never mentioned Yahweh's arm/hand, the corresponding moment in the prose would be when Moses stretched forth his hand to cause the sea to return. He argues that, "The Song thus clarifies the symbolic nature of Moses' gesture: God is the real miracle-worker".

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 15:13-18**

<sup>13</sup> In your unfailing love you will lead the people you have redeemed. In your strength you will guide them to your holy dwelling.<sup>14</sup> The nations will hear and tremble; anguish will grip the people of Philistia.<sup>15</sup> The chiefs of Edom will be terrified, the leaders of Moab will be seized with trembling, the people of Canaan will melt away;<sup>16</sup> terror and dread will fall upon them. By the power of your arm they will be as still as a stone - until your people pass by, O LORD, until the people you bought [קִנִּיתָ] pass by.<sup>17</sup> You will bring them in and plant them on the mountain of your inheritance - the place, O LORD, you made for your dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, your hands established.<sup>18</sup> The LORD will reign for ever and ever.

The poem takes another turn in verse 13, from reflecting on the event to anticipating the future. Yahweh would guide his people to an unspecified dwelling. Durham (1987:208) shows that the phrase 'holy dwelling' is ambiguous as it could refer to either Sinai or Zion or even both. Israel was also aware of the possibility of threats from the nations on their route to the land but was confident that this single accomplishment by Yahweh was sufficient to paralyse them with fear when they would hear of the approaching Israel. Israel then reminded Yahweh that he would need to continue to use his arm to defend his people whom he purchased קִנִּיתָ or created<sup>53</sup>, or acquired as his own. He would ultimately lead them to his sanctuary. This part of the poem ends with an affirmation of Yahweh's eternal kingship (cf. Ps 29:10; 97:1-2; 99:1). It is in this sense that the Song is regarded as prophetic or looking forward (cf. Sarna 1991:76; Propp 1999:37-8).

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<sup>53</sup> Cf. The Ba'lu epic in which the battle between Baal and Yam or *Enuma Elish* in which the battle between Marduk and Tiamat is regarded as a creation story.

<sup>NIV</sup> **Exodus 15:19-21**

<sup>19</sup> When Pharaoh's horses, chariots and horsemen went into the sea, the LORD brought the waters of the sea back over them, but the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.<sup>20</sup> Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.<sup>21</sup> Miriam sang to them [לָהֶם]: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."

The narrative resumes briefly in verses 19-20 recalling once again the victory over Pharaoh's army and the same expression that the Israelites walked "through the sea on dry ground" is employed here in verse 19 as in the prose account (14:29). In a curious way, the same Miriam that was mentioned in the introduction to the poem is said to lead the women in singing and dancing with her tambourine (or hand-drum) in her hand. Miriam is referred to as a prophetess and Aaron's sister in verse 20. It is interesting that she is introduced as Aaron's and not Moses' sister. Propp (1999:542) observes that because women had to be associated with a male guardian in ancient Israel, Miriam had to be associated with Aaron because "he is her senior brother". However, it seems probable to us that identifying Miriam as both a prophetess and Aaron's sister in this verse was a literary strategy meant to place her on the same pedestal as Moses the prophet and as Aaron the high priest. Perhaps, it was designed to show that women were not completely left out or behind concerning leadership roles in this male-oriented and male-dominated narrative.

Miriam's song in verse 21 is more or less identical with 15:1 except for the opening verb which is in the second person plural imperative as opposed to the first person imperfect of the opening verse (cf. Coats 1969:3; Durham 1987:209). Several interesting comments have been made about this last bit of the שִׁירָה. Houtman (1996:293-4) regards verse 19 as a later addition that is repeated for emphasis and says that in Israel women often sang the victory songs after a battle was won<sup>54</sup> (cf. Judg 5:1; 1 Sam 19:35). This observation has led some scholars to conclude that the entire Song of the Sea was in fact Miriam's song (cf. Sarna 1991:82; Janzen 1992:211-220). Janzen contends that Miriam actually led the whole congregation in the singing and that the opening line of the Song of the Sea, "*I will sing*", was in fact a response to Miriam's command, "*Sing!*" which opens verse 21 (p.216). He

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<sup>54</sup> Weitzman's comment on the presence of men or the fact that they sang arouses interest. He claims that, "If in Exodus 15 Moses and the sons of Israel join in the singing; it is because in this extraordinary case God alone has done all the fighting and he alone deserves all the praise" (1997:29). The implication is that the men join in the singing (an 'inferior' task ordinarily reserved for 'inferior' womenfolk), because a superior being led this battle and won.

explains that the fact that Miriam's song came after the main song was as a result of a narrative technique called analepsis that temporarily withholds some information and introduces it later to create a literary effect (p.214).

Another view is that the שִׁירָה was sung antiphonally; Moses led the men and Miriam led the women in the singing (cf. Sarna 1991:76). On this point, Zornberg (2001:219) notes that, "Indeed, the women's separate song casts a shadow of ambiguity back over the first song, song by *the Israelites*" as it suggests that only males sang the first song. She also adds that the text describes Miriam as responding to the men, that is, לָהֶם (them) as opposed to a response to women, לָהֶן in verse 21. For Zornberg, whose reflections on the Exodus are from a Midrashic perspective, the omission or lack of specific interest in the feminine in the text is redressed in Midrashic comments (pp.7-8). She claims that in the Midrash, "women figure as having a separate, hidden history. In effect, the Midrash makes the reader aware of a mistaken reading: all along, women have been really absent, really elsewhere" (p.9). Zornberg therefore advocates an alternative history, the Midrashic history of women. And it is on this feminine note that we turn to consider the dynamics between the prose and poetic accounts of Exodus 14-15:21.

### 3.2.2 DYNAMICS BETWEEN THE PROSE AND POETRY ACCOUNTS

The Song of the Sea is the first encounter with poetry in the book of Exodus. We have seen that the prose account of the crossing of the יַם־סוּף is immediately followed by a poetic rendition of the same (cf. Bosman 2005:871). Other analogues in which a narrative account is interjected or followed by a poem are also attested in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Judg 5; Deut 32; Josh 10:12-13; 2 Sam 22; Dan 3). Evidently, there is some interplay between the prose and the poetry of the Sea tradition since linguistic and thematic correspondence that cannot be denied exists between the two accounts. The question is: What form does the relationship take?

Houtman (1996:243) suggests that determining which came first - the poetic or the prose version - can provide a clue to the nature of the relationship. While some scholars assume that the song emanated from the prose tradition, others (cf. Childs 1977:245) believe that they both share some basic features and, in addition, a common tradition. Childs (1970:412) believes that the poetry tradition represents initially a parallel development with the prose account. However, Propp (1999:482) points out that, "Most scholars consider the Song an

older independent work incorporated by one of the Pentateuchal authors or editors, rather than a fresh composition". The author himself later admits that his position on the matter would be "something of a middle ground" (p.553), that is, the Song was originally independent but that it cannot be interpreted based on internal criteria alone.

Houtman (1996:243) considers that the poem was composed to complete the prose version and that the extent to which the writer(s) drew from old traditions cannot be determined. However, he shows that about forty terms and orthographies are peculiar to Exodus 15 which are not found anywhere else in the book of Exodus. He claims that the phenomena are indications of the poetic nature of the text (p.244). In our understanding, this last observation appears to cast doubt on his position that the poetry was composed to complement the prose. It rather shows that the issue is not as clear-cut as it seems and further evidence would be needed to prove whether the poetry depends on the prose, was an archaic piece that was inserted in the prose or originate from the same tradition as the prose.

On the relationship between the prose and the poetry accounts, particularly noteworthy is Weitzman's (1997) exhaustive study which focuses on song and story in biblical narrative. The author argues that a biblical literary form exists which cannot be confined within the literary category of either prose or poetry. This form is found in texts such as Exodus 15, Deuteronomy 32 and Judges 5. He claims that previous studies often view prose and poetry as distinct categories and they regard the Bible's fusion of both as "an act of miscegenation... an effort to convey what the medium of prose could not communicate by itself" (pp.2-3). Weitzman considers the Song of the Sea as an insertion, a separate composition that was incorporated into its present literary context and the language of which seems older than that of the surrounding prose and is comparable to Late Bronze sources such as Ugaritic literature and the Amarna letters (pp.4, 15).

Weitzman notes that the mixing of song and story is not peculiar to ancient Israel and he draws examples from Icelandic sagas, Broadway musicals and mediaeval period's French narratives to show that lyrics are inserted into narratives in other kinds of texts (p.7). His proposal therefore, is that the mixing of song and story in biblical narratives is a "kind of scripturalizing revision, a reshaping of biblical narrative" which is triggered by the canonization process (p.13). To him, the insertion was the final stage of a literary evolution, a literary strategy designed to fill a disturbing lacuna in the biblical text, that is, a lack of songs



in its narratives (p.93). He claims that the author of the exodus narrative was faced with the challenge of convincing the reader that God was the hero of the battle, that he indeed defeated the Egyptian army (p.26). The song of Exodus 15 therefore appears “to reflect the narrative strategy of using character testimony<sup>55</sup> to make explicit God’s role in the battle” (p.27). We consider this statement rather crucial to our deliberation and further reference shall be made to it in the case for Israel’s identity below.

To explain the relationship between Exodus 14 and 15, Weitzman alludes to the Ancient Near Eastern context, particularly the Egyptian inscription, the Piye Stela, which combines prose and poetry. In the Piye Stela, the contents of its two victory songs are imputed to characters within the narrative. The author argues, therefore, that there is a literary practice shared by Egyptian and Israelite scribes and that the significance of the similarities between the Piye Stela and the Song of the Sea can be appreciated in the light of Ancient Near Eastern royal propaganda as the Stela is a victory song in celebration of Piye’s war victories (pp.17-19, 21). He claims that, “What is striking about Exodus 14-15 and the Piye Stela, therefore, is not simply that they both contain victory songs of similar content but that these songs appear at similar points within similar narrative settings”; both of them follow battle accounts – in one God fought and in the other Piye fought (p.21).

Weitzman’s analysis of the relationship between the song of Exodus 15 and the narrative of Exodus 14 is remarkable, especially its comparison of the text to the Egyptian Piye Stela<sup>56</sup>. However, the author fails to show or prove that the victory song in the Piye Stela was inserted into its narrative setting since he argues on the premise that the Song of the Sea was a later insertion in the narrative context. In our view, if it is established that the presence of this mixture of song and story in several other texts of the Hebrew Bible (and indeed of the whole biblical canon) is comparable to a literary practice in the Ancient Near Eastern world and

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<sup>55</sup> The testimony referred to here is the song which in the text was sung by Moses, Israel and Miriam.

<sup>56</sup> Weitzman is not alone in comparing the relationship between song and story in Exodus 14-15 with the Egyptian Piye Stela. Patterson (2004:42-3) similarly affirms that “in Egyptian literature poetry often occurs within historical prose narrative” and that the aim is to provide dramatic detail in direct speech. In addition, he considers the combined effect of both the prose and the poetry as providing a fuller picture of the event at the sea (p.54).

especially in Egypt, it is possible that we are dealing with a peculiar literary genre<sup>57</sup>. Perhaps the issue should not therefore be whether the song was inserted or not or whether it came earlier or later; rather it should be a consideration of that particular genre of story-telling and its potential heuristic significance for biblical hermeneutics. We shall return to this point in our concluding remarks but, in the meantime, further exploration into some literary aspects of the two accounts of Exodus 14 and 15:1-21 shall be attempted.

### 3.2.2.1 LITERARY CONSIDERATION OF THE TWO ACCOUNTS

From a narratological perspective, Exodus 14 and Exodus 15:1-21 exhibit certain similarities and dissimilarities. Houtman (1996:243, 244) observes that there are similarities in terms of terminology (even though the Song demonstrates some other terminological and orthographical distinctiveness which it does not share with other parts of the book of Exodus). In affirmation, Patterson (2004:49) mentions that there is an essential unity in the two accounts “in several matters of theme and vocabulary”. For instance, both accounts relate that the Egyptians perished in the sea and that the waters piled up on either sides of the sea bed. An obvious dissimilarity between the prose and the poetry accounts is that the latter makes no clear mention of Israel crossing the יַם-סוּף. Propp (1999:537) notes that 15:16 has a polyvalent reading as it does not state exactly what Israel crossed although it may be assumed that reference was being made to the יַם-סוּף. By contrast, a unique feature of the prose account is the claim that the Israelites walked on dry ground through the parted sea (cf. Patterson 2004:50).

That Exodus 14 is a narrative is without question but the poetry of chapter 15 is also set in a narrative context with Exodus 15:1a acting as a prosaic prologue to the poem. Verses 19 and 20-21a are equally prosaic with verses 20-21a serving as an introduction to Miriam’s Song. Patterson (2004:45-6) notes that chapter 14 has all the elements of a good prose narrative and has an observable plot with three observable units, each of which is introduced by the phrase,

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<sup>57</sup> The term genre is regarded by some as unstable (cf. Felluga 2003:494-495). For Derrida, there are no pure genres but each genre is governed by certain laws which may not be transgressed. He claims that, in a way, what characterizes a genre defies categorization and that as soon as a genre identifies itself, degenerescence follows even though there are no genreless texts. He concludes with the connotation that determining a particular genre is somewhat subjective: "There, that is the whole of it, it is only what 'I,' so that say, here kneeling at the edge of literature, can see. In sum, the law. The law summoning: what 'I' can sight and what 'I' can say that I sight in this site of a recitation where I/we is" (Derrida 1980: 55-57, 65-66, 81).

‘Then the Lord said to Moses’ (14:1, 15, 26). Moreover, according to Tolmie (1999:7), different aspects are involved in the textual organization of a narrative<sup>58</sup> text, namely narrator and narratee, characters, events, time, setting and focalization. He argues that all these help to define “the overall textual strategy of the implied author”.

Taken in its narrative sense, therefore, we shall examine a particular narrative feature that is common to both the prose and the poetry accounts which is crucial to our discussion, that is, the characters. To begin, four main characters are attested in the text under consideration. These are Yahweh, Moses, the children of Israel and Pharaoh, in the order in which they are first encountered in the narrative (Ex 14:1-3). In the Hebrew Bible, the word **יהוה** occurs 16 times in Exodus 14 and 13 times in Exodus 15:1-21 and **יִשְׂרָאֵל** occurs 17 times in chapter 14 and twice in chapter 15:1-21. The word **מִצְרַיִם** occurs seven times in Exodus 14 and once in chapter 15 while **פְּרִעָה** occurs seven times in chapter 14 and twice in chapter 15:1-21.

Propp (1999:32) asserts that Exodus has three heroes – Moses, Israel and Yahweh, and to some extent, we consider this valid. However, we would add that Exodus (by extension chapters 14-15) also has an anti-hero, that is, Pharaoh. Pharaoh carried out one good deed in his entire career – he let Israel go (Ex 13:17)! Regrettably, he was not renowned for this act. Rather, he is most remembered for his legendary stubbornness and his ultimate defeat in the heart of the sea when he chose to pursue Israel instead of submitting to Yahweh’s wish.

Israel was a target, a target of both Pharaoh and of Yahweh. To Pharaoh, Israel was an object of slavery but to Yahweh, Israel was a candidate of redemption, a people he could call his very own. Having just escaped from the hand of Pharaoh, they suddenly discovered that their ordeal was not yet over. In their despair, they cried (Ex 14:10). Who would have thought that their crying was not yet over! Earlier in Egypt, they cried (Ex 2:23; 6:5) but even after the mighty escape, their fountain of tears would not dry. Their being caught literally between the devil and the deep blue sea simply demonstrated the turmoil and the desperation that characterised Israel’s story. For these people, there seemed to be no respite. Was Israel a pawn, a pawn in the hands of two masterful players?

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<sup>58</sup> Note that Gunn and Fewell (1993:2-3) define a narrative heuristically in terms of character, plot and word-play.

As for Moses, even though his name was not mentioned in the *שִׁירָה* except in its narrative introduction, that he played a pivotal role in the Sea event is evident from the account of chapter 14. Moses was Yahweh's representative to his people. He took instructions from Yahweh's mouth to the people (14:1, 15) in his capacity as a prophet. However, we also see him performing a pastoral role, assuring the people of Yahweh's deliverance and allaying their fears even when they turned against him and blamed him for their woes (14:11-14).

Moreover, Moses was commanded to lift up his rod and stretch his hand over the sea to divide it (14:16) in preparation for Yahweh's move (14:21). Again, Moses stretched out his hand in response to Yahweh's command so that the water returned (14:26-7). It is baffling to discover that for all of Moses' effort, he got no credit. The hand that Moses stretched out was only cosmetic, the rod that he raised a mere sign. The *שִׁירָה* reveals that it was indeed Yahweh's hand, his right hand, that was stretched over the sea (15:12; cf. Propp 1999:497). What is more, apart from a single mention of Moses' name in the narrative introduction of the *שִׁירָה*, his name is not at all mentioned in the song as a partner in the miraculous deliverance. This fact has not escaped the notice of scholars (cf. Child's 1977:249; Fretheim 1990:163; Sarna 1991:75; Janzen 1992:213; Propp 1999:485; Dever 2001:235). It is not surprising, therefore, that Moses was later described as more humble than all the men on the face of the earth (Num 12:3). He had no reservation about giving all the credit and glory to Yahweh.

The last character to be considered is Yahweh. We have noted that the name Yahweh appears a total of 29 times<sup>59</sup> in the text: 16 times in chapter 14 and 13 times in chapter 15:1-21. Propp (1999:509) notes that, "*Yahweh* is the Song's dominant word..." He also remarks that, "In addition to the divine name, the Song's major theme is Yahweh's 'hand, arm', mentioned five times with varying terms..." (p.529). In our view, this recurrence seems to underscore the importance that the narrator places on the role of the character. Yahweh is at the centre of the whole event as the song clearly suggests. All that happened at the Sea revolves around Yahweh, even though his actions have an effect upon Israel who is the object of the deliverance. The Song appears more focused on Yahweh than the narrative. As Sarna (1991:75) shows, while in the narrative there are some other intermediaries between Israel

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<sup>59</sup> This occurrence does not include the abbreviated form of YHWH, Yah in 15:2 or Adonai in 15:17, for instance.

and Yahweh, such as the angel of Yahweh, the cloud, darkness and Moses, “by contrast, the ‘Song at the Sea’ celebrates God’s direct, unmediated, personal incursion into the world of humankind”. The author further notes that it is its dominant God-centred theme that distinguishes the *שִׁירָה* from its narrative analogue (p.76). We shall consider aspects of Yahweh’s role below:

- To begin with, the narrative opens with Yahweh who instructed Moses to give direction to the children of Israel concerning their journey (14:1-2; cf. 14:15, 26). Yahweh guides his people (cf. Durham 1987:187).
- Yahweh claimed he would harden Pharaoh’s heart (14:4, 17) and he actually did (14:8).
- When the children of Israel became afraid, to Yahweh they cried (14:10) and he responded (14:15).
- To assure this distressed people, Moses made them aware that Yahweh had a plan (Childs 1977:226) – it was to fight for them and to save them (14:13-4). To show that he meant to carry out that plan, he had sent his angel ahead of them (14:19).
- Yahweh then drove the sea apart even though Moses stretched forth his hand over it (14:21). The *שִׁירָה* gives further details of this, noting that the sea parting was accomplished by the breath of Yahweh’s nostrils (15:8).
- Yahweh looked down on and troubled the Egyptian army (14:24).
- Yahweh overthrew the Egyptian army in the midst of the sea, causing both the chariots and the riders to drown (14:27-8; 15:1, 4-5, 10, 12, 19, 21). Houtman (1996:238) comments that, “Only Yahweh engages the Egyptians in battle. Israel has no part in it, not even in the pursuit of the enemies”.
- Yahweh saved Israel (14:30; cf. Durham 1987:197).
- Ultimately, Yahweh’s action would not be limited to the event at the Sea; the singers believed that he would guide them (*nhl*) like a shepherd does his sheep, to his holy dwelling (15:13; cf. Propp 1999:532).

From the foregoing, it can be inferred without a doubt that Yahweh is the main character at the Sea (cf. Patterson 2004:46). Yahweh was the hero of the battle as Weitzman (1997:26) correctly observes, but we would add that he was indeed the hero of the entire Sea event. Even later allusions to the Sea event in the Hebrew Bible affirm that it was Yahweh who acted in Israel's favour to accomplish the victory at the Sea (cf. Josh 2:10; Neh 9:9-11; Ps 74; 106:9-12; 136:13; Isa 43:16-19; 51:10; 63:11-13 etc). Fretheim (1990:164) remarks that, "What God has done reverberates throughout the earth, calling attention to this God's identity". More specifically, he argues that, "the song insists that the Creator God is the decisive factor in the event" (p.165). This assertion echoes Durham's (1987:196) claim that, "this event is set up, managed, and brought to its dramatic conclusion by Yahweh... Even the Egyptians are reported to have taken the point".

### 3.2.2.2 POETRY OF EXODUS 15 AND THE ORAL DISCOURSE

Before we go on to consider the implications of our text for Israelite identity, one other point that is worth examining is the connection between the poetry of Exodus 15:1-21 and oral tradition. The traditional caption for the text, the Song of the Sea, suggests orality since a song is normally sung or recited. In Vansina's view, poetry would be an aspect of oral tradition which he defines as consisting of "oral statements spoken, sung or called out on musical instruments" (1985:27). This view implies that the text of Exodus 15:1-21 was used in an oral context. As earlier noted, Coats (1969:10) claims that the *Sitz im Leben* of the song was the cult. More significantly, however, Sarna (1991:76) indicates that the *שִׁירָה* was part of the early Jewish liturgy and that, "In the days of the Second Temple, it was customary for a Levitical choir to accompany the priestly *tamid* offering on Sabbath afternoons with a singing of the *שִׁירָה* ..." He also observes that a daily recitation of the *שִׁירָה* was part of the morning service of the Jews in Rome after the destruction of the Temple. This *Sitz im Leben*, therefore, clearly spells out an oral context for the Song at the Sea.

Vansina (1985:15) shows that there is a connection between poetry and memory because poetry "is of necessity memorized, if it is to be reproduced exactly". He claims that oral tradition consists of information that exists in memory (p.147) but he also notes that memory changes over time, resulting in variations in words or metric form. Input of new items in memory forces memory to reorganize or reappraise its data (p.161, 176). This becomes a limitation of oral tradition as a historical source. Perhaps it is this re-appraisal of data that is

responsible for the couplet that is found in Exodus 15:1 and 15:21 in which Miriam's Song is buried.

It is remarkable that this piece which has been transmitted for generations in its written form has oral roots. That its rendition has been strongly associated with Miriam (or with women) appears even more profound. For Miriam and her hand-drum, as well as all the women with their hand-drums, to spring up in the middle of nowhere in this essentially male narrative is rather astonishing.<sup>60</sup> Could this interjection imply that without these women, the picture would not be complete – that without this oral rendition, this male narrative would not be climaxed?<sup>61</sup>

In her *Oral World and Written Word*, Susan Niditch identifies an orality-literacy continuum to which “all extant Israelite literature belongs” (1996:78). For her, there is a gradation or scale through which a text can be considered oral, written or mixed such that the text can be at either end of the continuum or in the middle. Interestingly, the text of Exodus 14-15:21 appears to us to flow through this continuum with the bulk of chapter 15:1-21 decidedly at the oral end. Niditch claims that ancient Israel belonged to the oral end of the continuum but she has been faulted for overly emphasizing the oral dimension while downplaying “the fact that the Bible is, in the end, a written text” (Schniedewind 2000:328).

### 3.3 ON ISRAEL'S IDENTITY

It is important to note that Israel's identity has been linked with various aspects of its national history and struggles. Earlier in the first chapter of this study, reference was made to Dearman's claim that Israel's identity is rooted in the ancestors and in the Torah (1992:130). He argues that the ancestral accounts in Genesis 12-50 define Israel's family and regional identities as well as the bedrock of subsequent “national and even post-national identity” (pp.12-14). On the point about the Torah, Lemche (1998:220-1) notes that for those who claim an early dating of 10<sup>th</sup> century BCE for the writing or collating the Pentateuch, it would

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<sup>60</sup> We shall raise this issue again in our final remarks.

<sup>61</sup> It is striking that women often appear in the midst of praise (cf. Judges 5 and Deborah's Song; 1 Sam 18:7 and the women's song after David's victory; 2 Sam 6:14-23 in which Michal accused David of dancing in the company of women).

be obvious to assume that the Pentateuch was written to establish the identity of a new nation<sup>62</sup>.

Furthermore, closely linked to the issue of ancestors is what Lemche (1998:15) refers to as “the acquisition of property and land rights”. He claims that “A national identity requires a concrete physical space within which to develop” (p.46). For the children of Israel, the issue of land and its ownership is a crucial part of their history as their struggles are ultimately connected to the land of Palestine. Thompson (1987:24) remarks that the exodus tradition “in all of its parts, and as a whole understands Israel as homeless outside of Palestine”. Matthews (2002:6) notes that “land becomes identified with a particular people through their living there and as a resting place for their cherished dead”. He further shows that ethnic stories, such as those found in Genesis 12-50, legitimize the people’s claims to land (p.9). For Christine Pohl, “Israel’s covenant identity includes being a stranger, an alien, a tenant in God’s land” (1999:16).

In addition to ancestors, the Torah and land, Israel’s identity has been associated variously with the covenant with Abraham, with circumcision (Foerster 1964:141; Pohl 1999:138) or even with the Sabbath (Foerster 1964:145). Lemche (1998:51) goes as far as stating that “Moses’ role as catalyst decides Israel’s peculiar self-identity”. As noted in chapter one of this study, the open-ended nature of the definition of identity is shown by Manning (2005:176). The various criteria that have been associated with Israel’s identity mentioned in the foregoing seem to confirm this fluidity in definition.

More importantly, we have referred at various points in this study, to the crucial fact that the exodus has been regarded as the source of Israel’s identity. In particular, we have indicated that there are reasons to argue that the crux of this claim lies in the accounts of Exodus 14 and 15. We shall attempt to explore the basis for this claim at this point.

### **3.3.1 EXODUS 14-15:21 – A CASE FOR ISRAEL’S IDENTITY**

According to Brueggemann (2003:58), “The narrative of chapter 14 is matched by the poem of 15:1-18, commonly regarded as a primal scripting of the entire plot from slavery to the

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. Foerster (1964:142, 150) who links Jewish exclusiveness to Scriptures.



land of promise”. In addition, it can be recalled that for Propp (1999:37-8), the book of Exodus is a diptych that is hinged in chapter 15, which concludes the first half of Exodus and opens the second half (cf. Gowan 1994:170). The song summarizes chapters 1-14 and anticipates the Covenant, Tabernacle Building, etc; it looks both backward and forward at the same time. These assertions grant us sufficient room to inquire deeper into the possibilities that the source of the identity which has been linked to the exodus may actually be located in this central text. What then are the implications of our text for Israel’s identity?

In terms of the event, we have noted in 3.2 that the act of crossing the יַם־סוּף carved out a new identity for Israel (cf. Ashby 1998:17). As long as Israel remained in Egypt, its identity could only be that of a slave. Thus, crossing the river marked for Israel, the beginning of a new identity. Houtman (1996:232) affirms that, “For Israel, the crossing was the transition to a new existence”.

To buttress this view, the comment of Dillard and Longman III (1994:66) that “the exodus deliverance was one that helped mould Israel’s self-understanding that they were God’s people” is also noteworthy (1994:66). This can imply that the deliverance helped them to realise that they were God’s people, that their identity was in God. For his part, Mafico (1995:52) argues in his article, *God’s Name Yahweh Elohim and the Unification of Israel*, that the people of Israel were forced by political expediency to adopt two names, Yahweh Elohim and Israel in order to forge a tight tribal confederacy. His point is that originally the Israelites served various ancestral gods, *’ēlōhê hā’ābôt*, but had to coalesce their individual deities and adopt a unifying appellation Yahweh Elohim to counter the threats from the powerful Philistine forces (p.52). While we agree with his claim that Yahweh Elohim was a unifying name for Israel, his explanation that they adopted it to counter external threat in the monarchy period appears specious. Israel had long adopted the name Yahweh as far back as the time of the rescue at the sea and their identity had been shaped in that name since the Sea event.

In connection with the major characters or role players in Exodus 14-15:21, some remarkable points have also been observed. Although Pharaoh, Moses and Israel are important characters in the text, the main character and the (super) hero is Yahweh. This primacy or supremacy of Yahweh is reflected throughout the book of Exodus. The move to deliver Israel from the house of bondage was at Yahweh’s instance (Ex 3:7-8) and all the mighty acts done in Egypt

by the hands of Moses and Aaron were at Yahweh's instructions. Brueggemann (2002:74) confirms that, "The exodus event is singularly YHWH's work... The exodus narrative characterizes YHWH as creator and redeemer and characterizes Israel in parallel as the definitive recipient of YHWH's concern".

According to Gowan (1994:2-3), apart from Exodus 1-2 in which there is no mention of God or what God is doing, in the rest of the book of Exodus, "God is depicted as the dominant figure" because he is both vocal and active throughout the book. For instance, in commenting on the variety of verbs employed to describe "all the destructive activity that is reported" in the Sea event, Gowan (1994:131) shows that it all has God as the subject; he notes that:

At the Sea, the Lord fought against the Egyptian army (*lhm*, 14:14, 25), confused them (*hmm*, 14:24), and shook them off into the returning sea (*n'r*, 14:21). Then the Song of the Sea abounds with violent language. God threw (*rmh*) horse and rider into the sea (15:1); he cast (*yrh*) Pharaoh's chariots and army into the sea (15:4). He shattered (*r'ts*) the enemy (15:6), he overthrew them (*hrs*), and his fury consumed them (*'kl*, 15:7). When he blew (*nshp*) with his wind, the sea covered them (15:10).

Gowan argues that God is presented as divine destroyer not just in the Sea event but in the whole of Exodus 5-25, which is considered as a coherent unit because "it is dominated by the single theme" – God's action of destroying by means of the powers of nature (p.130). He claims that the chapters are "filled with destruction and death, all of it the work of Yahweh" (p.132).

Besides, the major theological themes in the book such as Liberation, Law, Covenant and Presence (cf. Brueggemann 2005:5-6) are all profoundly connected to Yahweh in one way or the other. Yahweh is the deliverer but he is also the lawgiver. He is the God of the covenant with the fathers and the one who manifests his presence throughout Israel's wanderings – giving instructions, providing direction, food, water and security.

Indeed, the certainty of Yahweh's role in the life of Israel is not confined to the book of Exodus. The entire Hebrew Bible seems to reflect this precedence. In his celebrated, *Old Testament Theology - Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, Brueggemann (1997) demonstrates with copious data from the Hebrew Bible that Yahweh is at the centre of the Israelite world and rhetoric. He claims that:

Yahweh is taken to be an accepted, unquestioned and indispensably key character in Israel's rendering of reality... Indeed, the reference to Yahweh cannot be removed from the rhetoric

without the disintegration of Israel's testimony. Without Yahweh, Israel has nothing to say and no subject about which to speak... Therefore, Israel must, in giving account of its life, always refer to Yahweh (1997:132).

This is a rather strong statement in support of our argument here. As a matter of fact, concerning the exodus, Brueggemann shows that "Yahweh is the subject" of all the rich and varied verbs used in Israel's testimony of "Yahweh's Exodus activity" (p.176).

Therefore, on the basis of Yahweh's most significant role and control of the events at the **יַם-סוּף** which point to the fact that Yahweh fought for and delivered Israel; of the complete focus of the **שִׁירָה** on his praise; of the narrator's recurrent reference to his name; and even of the Egyptian's acknowledgement that Yahweh made things to happen for Israel, we submit that Israel's identity is rooted in Yahweh, the God of Israel. Israel's identity is established in the identity of Yahweh who has been portrayed in the Sea event as the Creator God who fights for his people, delivers, sustains and guides them.

It is crucial that in considering the role of Yahweh in the events at the **יַם-סוּף**, the importance of the interface between the prose and the poetry accounts is not overlooked. We refer again to Weitzman's (1997:26-7) claims that the author of the exodus narrative was faced with the challenge of convincing the reader that God was the hero of the battle, that he indeed defeated the Egyptian army and that the song of Exodus 15 therefore appears "to reflect the narrative strategy of using character testimony<sup>63</sup> to make explicit God's role in the battle" (p.27). In other words, the narrator deliberately employed the **שִׁירָה** to foreground Yahweh's role as the battle hero. This interpretation appears acceptable to us especially in the light of the focus on Yahweh throughout the rendition of the song. In our view, the aim of the interaction was to impress upon the children of Israel (in whichever way would catch their attention, whether by prose or by poetry) that their survival and identity would not be found outside of Yahweh. The combination of both accounts was to immortalize in the memory (and on the lips) of the people, not only the event at the Sea but the reality that the foundation of their identity is built on the one who controlled that event, whose identity they recognize as Yahweh.

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<sup>63</sup> The testimony referred to here is the song which in the text was sung by Moses, Israel and Miriam.

We therefore surmise that without Yahweh there was no crossing, without Yahweh there was no victory and without Yahweh there was no nation. Israel's distinct identity as a nation was from Yahweh (cf. Ex 11:7). They were called Yahweh's people (cf. 15:16) because their identity was formed and confirmed in Yahweh. Houtman (1996:230-1) asserts that, "Through her liberation from Pharaoh, Israel has become YHWH's people". Consequently, it is possible to extrapolate from this understanding that Israel's identity is a theological one (cf. Dearman 1992:35).

### **3.4 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER**

This chapter began with an overview of scholarly research on the book of Exodus, which contains the narrative of the migration of the children of Israel from the land of Egypt and the birth of a new nation. Although Israel's origin story began in Genesis, the story of the migration from Egypt is found in the book of Exodus. On a general note, the exodus event is shown to be central to Israel's faith, identity and national consciousness. However, the scope of the study has been delimited to Exodus 14-15:21 both on structural and theological grounds. In assessing the text, different stages of development (recommended by Gnuse 1999) are considered under the research history as well as the close reading of both Exodus 14 (which is a narrative account) and Exodus 15:1-21 (which is essentially a poetic rendition).

Subsequently, the interplay between the two accounts is examined focusing especially on their literary consideration and the connection between the poetry of Exodus 15 and the question of orality. There is a clear indication of thematic and literary correspondence between the Sea Crossing (Exodus 14) and the Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1-21). A close examination of the key characters in the text shows that Yahweh is not only the chief role player in the event at Sea but he is the (super) hero. While acknowledging some other claims concerning Israelite identity which include their links with the ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; with the land of Palestine; with the Abrahamic covenant and circumcision; with Moses and with the Torah amongst others, a case for Israelite identity based on the text of Exodus 14-15:21 is then argued.

The main thrust of the findings from the text is that Israel's identity is a theological one, rooted and defined in Yahweh, the God who parted the sea for his people to cross on dry

ground and to whom they directed their praise. He is the Divine Warrior, who fought to secure Israel's identity at the יַמ־סוּף.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### CONCLUSION AND REMARKS

This chapter represents a summary and an evaluation of the findings of this study in the light of the hypothesis that was spelt out at the onset of the study. It also serves as a conclusion even as it offers some reflections and recommendations for future research.

#### 4.1 SUMMARY

The study began with the hypothesis that Yoruba traditions of origin and migration influence the process of identity formation in certain ways and that this implication for identity may contain certain heuristic values that can be used to interpret the exodus in a contextual way. The scope of the investigation is also extended to include the origin and migration narratives of the Tiv people and the amaZulu to establish in what ways they may confirm or disprove findings from the Yoruba narratives. The first chapter, therefore, provides an outline of the study as well as the definitions of key terms such as origin and migration; identity; myths; oral tradition and oral historiography; and memory. We have attempted to show that the terms are interconnected in the sense that origin and migration; myths; oral tradition and oral historiography; and memory are all centred on identity.

In Chapter Two of the study, the inquiry begins with the narratives of origin and migration of the Tiv people of Nigeria and establishes that the Tiv's self-perception is based on a common ancestry which they trace ultimately to Aondo. The people believe that Aondo was the father of their human ancestors, Tiv and Uke. It has been noted that this belief in a common ancestor, a common language and the shared memory of their migration experience all constitute important elements of their identity construction. In addition to the Tiv narratives, the chapter considers the origin and migration narratives of the amaZulu of South Africa, who like the Tiv, are of Bantu extraction. The narratives indicate that the amaZulu's source of identity recognition revolves around their violent struggles, a common belief in Unkulunkulu and in ancestor worship as well as a common language. Like the Tiv, the amaZulu (along with other Nguni people) also claim a proto-ancestor called Nguni, but more specifically, an affinity with his descendant, Zulu.

The last part of Chapter Two is a discussion of the narratives of origin and migration of the Yoruba of South-West Nigeria concerning which two separate sets of accounts co-exist, namely myths of origin and migration theories. The myths of origin ascribe the work of creation to Olódùmarè through one of his ministers or *òrìsà* who was let down from heaven to Ilé-Ifẹ where creation of the earth and of human beings took place. On the other hand, the migration theories affirm that the Yoruba were migrants to their present homeland even though the precise point of departure remains a matter of speculation. The migration took them primarily to Ilé-Ifẹ and the leader of the migrants was Odùdùwà who is today conceived as the progenitor of the Yoruba people. Although the Yoruba language represents a powerful criterion for identity formation, it has been argued in the chapter that certain elements or features in the traditions of origin and migration of the people provide a more definitive and defining basis for identity formation and recognition. The features include a common ancestral home, Ilé-Ifẹ, and a common ancestor, Odùdùwà.

In the third chapter, the story of Israel's emergence as a nation from the perspective of the book of Exodus is appraised. It is shown that although Israel's origin has its roots in the book of Genesis, it is the exodus event and the migration from Israel that marked the beginning of Israel's identity as a nation. The study is then demarcated to Exodus 14-15:21, the narrative of the Sea Crossing and the poetic rendition, the Song of the Sea both of which detail the transition of Israel from a slave-people to a free people as Yahweh, the God of Israel moved on their behalf to deliver them at the יַם-סוּף. It is argued that even though Israel's identity has been linked to various factors such as the ancestors, the land of Palestine, the Torah, the covenant with Abraham, the circumcision or the Sabbath, etc., from the point of view of the book of Exodus and especially of Exodus 14-15:21, in which prose interacts with poetry, Israel's identity can be considered to be a theological one, rooted in Yahweh, the "God who performs all things" for Israel (Ps 57:2).

In the light of the foregoing discussions, therefore, the question is: Is there any way in which the identity features of the Yoruba (and the other African) narratives of origin and migration that were examined in Chapter Two contribute to a contextual and relevant understanding of Exodus 14-15:21 and of the book of Exodus in general?

## 4.2 FINAL REFLECTIONS

In an attempt to answer the above question, first, it should be noted that the African narratives in Chapter Two share certain similar features which represent factors of identity formation among the different peoples. These features include, primarily, a common ancestry as noted in the case of the Tiv, of the amaZulu and of the Yoruba and a common belief in God. In the case of the Tiv and the amaZulu (and to a lesser extent, the Yoruba), their languages represent a rallying point for the people in addition to these other features. On the part of the Tiv, however, a peculiar feature is the shared memory of their migration, whereas for the Yoruba, a common ancestral home represents a peculiar feature. The ancestral home, Ilé-Ifẹ, has its foundation in the people's origin myths and the migration theories. The similarities and the peculiarities in what constitute features of identity formation and recognition in these African narratives seem to attest the multidimensional and fluid character of identity, especially of collective identity.

This multidimensional character is also reflected in Israel's story and the fact that its identity is hinged on several features. However, from the perspective of Exodus 14-15:21, our submission is that Israel's identity is theological, in that it is rooted in Yahweh, the God who brought his people out of Egypt and delivered them at the Sea. We have also mentioned that the importance of Yahweh in Israel's identity is accentuated in all the major themes of the book of Exodus.

Even though the children of Israel also claim a common ancestor like the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba, it is of interest to note other shared features in the stories of the people. We noted in the summary of Chapter Two that all the African narratives which were considered point to the fact that the people were migrants to their present location and to the crossing of some great river by the people. The same applies to the children of Israel, as our text confirms. Israel crossed the יַם־סוּף in a miraculous<sup>64</sup> way after their exit from Egypt. Further, the migration accounts in Chapter Two indicate that the Tiv, the amaZulu and the Yoruba all contended in battle with aborigines in the land and or with neighbours. Israel's engagement in battle in the Sea Crossing was in an indirect way, in the context of a Holy War. Although the people were armed for battle when leaving Egypt, they did not use those arms – it was

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<sup>64</sup> We should recall that the Tiv also claim a miraculous deliverance when they crossed the Congo River.



Yahweh who fought for his people. These African narratives therefore can be deemed to foreground the role of Yahweh as Divine Warrior in the Sea event in the sense that while other nations fight for themselves to establish an identity, Yahweh fought for his own people. The narratives help to appreciate Yahweh's role more clearly and why he is so central to Israel's self-understanding.

Additionally, it is significant that just as the African narratives point to a common ancestor, Exodus 15:2 also recognizes that the children of Israel equally have an ancestor, but more than that, Yahweh is the God of this ancestor. The Tiv recognize Aondo as the father of their progenitors, Tiv and Uke and for the amaZulu, there is no clear distinction between their first ancestor and the Supreme Deity. In the case of the Yoruba, their ancestor who was involved in the work of creation was descended from the Supreme Deity and thus regarded as divinity. We have noted in 2.1.3, that at the point when collective memory seems to fail and people could no longer remember or trace the father of their claimed ancestor, there is a recourse to "the God-formula", that is, God becomes the father of the ancestor. Tracing their ancestry and linking it one way or the other to God appears crucial to all the peoples, whether African or Israelite.

In the African narratives, there is no doubt that God is an important feature of the peoples' identity especially with respect to the work of creation; each group believes it began from its domain. However, for the children of Israel, the other features of their identity such as the land or the covenant seem to serve as the basis for their relationship with Yahweh; Yahweh is the centre of their national identity, not just a mere religious entity. In this sense, Israel's identity becomes unique.

At this stage, we can safely conclude that the African narratives in question, (in particular, Yoruba narratives of origin and migration), offer valuable insight into the book of Exodus with respect to Israelite identity in that they help to foreground the inimitable role of Yahweh in the Sea event and to show him as the source of this identity. To the extent that this study has determined the significance of the African narratives to the recognition and formation of the peoples' identities and how they bring to light the basis of Israelite identity in the book of Exodus (especially in chapters 14 and 15), it can be stated that our research hypothesis has been validated.

### 4.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

In concluding this study, a few remarks will be in order at this point.

First, in the text of Exodus 14-15:21 under consideration, it has been shown that the interplay between prose and poetry played a crucial role in focusing Yahweh as the central role player in the events that took place at the יַם-סוּף. This has also proven crucial to the recognition of Israel's identity. We have suggested that the interaction between prose and poetry in our text may be more than just an insertion of a poetic version of the prose into the account. Rather, it may smack of an entirely separate genre from either prose or poetry as it combines the features of the two. This observation can be confirmed in different aspects of Yoruba oral tradition in which prose and song become fused in the same account. Examples abound in *itàn*, stories or tales and in children's folk-tales in which story and song are invariably meshed. When the narrator tells his or her story, the listeners or other participants are not passive - they interject or respond in songs. Even in *oríkì orílẹ̀*, there is often a tinge of a mix of both genres. In this regard, Barber (1991:3-4) notes that:

Quoting an *oríkì* often leads automatically to a historical narrative... The *oríkì* are not just the trigger which sets off a separate discourse; they are the kernel of the discourse itself, which will not take place except with reference to the *oríkì*. They are thus, in many cases that only route into the subject.

Moreover, the connection between the poetry and oral tradition is striking, but especially, the interjection of the Song of Miriam in Exodus 15:21 in an essentially male narrative. It is of considerable interest to note that among the Yoruba, oral poetry, in particular the (re)citation of the *oríkì orílẹ̀*, is primarily a female enterprise. In her book, *I Could Speak until Tomorrow: Oriki, Women, and the Past in a Yoruba Town*, Karin Barber shows through firsthand data from Okuku, a Yoruba town, that when it comes to *oríkì orílẹ̀* performance, women are in charge. Not only are they the custodians of the *oríkì orílẹ̀* of their various lineages, they are also performers. A curious inference from Barber's work is that in the chaotic aftermath of the Yoruba internecine wars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *oríkì orílẹ̀* was a means that the refugees who were scattered all over Yorubaland used to keep a grip on their identity and was a "full-blown expression of their loss and yearning" (1991:151). The connection between women and poetry (songs) and between songs and the identity of immigrant or displaced people could open up interesting areas for further research. Since

identity formation is an on-going process and cannot be considered fixed or completed, the remark above is not likely to be the last word on this matter.

Indeed, identities do change and there may be different recollections and images of the past. However, it is clear that in a way, Israel's recollection of Yahweh in the exodus narrative, and in fact, the Hebrew Bible, as saviour, warrior, deliverer, creator and guide, among other characterizations, has continued to define the people's identity. As identities change and are redefined, Yahweh remained constant in Israel's memory and testimony. Brueggemann (1997:229) notes that, "Israel assigns to (or recognizes) in YHWH elements of constancy and substance that make YHWH in some ways knowable to Israel". He refers to it as an affirmation of "a kind of substantive constancy about YHWH" on the part of Israel. Again, from a Christian perspective, one would suggest that in today's world, where there are shifting definitions of who a Christian believer is, believers in Christ may do well to note the way Israel's identity remained rooted in Yahweh in different seasons of life in the Old Testament. If Yahweh is constant, then he and his Christ should remain constant in the identity of today's believers who are inheritors of those things that are written for our example and admonition (1 Cor. 10:11; Rom 15:4).

Second, as observed in 2.3.4.3.3, is the significance of the juxtaposition of cosmogonic myths and the migration theories in attesting to elements of identity formulation among the Yoruba. It is equally noteworthy that the cosmic implication in the Song of the Sea has been found to have a parallel in Genesis 1-9, which contains the account of the creation of the earth in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Fretheim 2005:112). In Exodus, the Sea Crossing in chapter 14, a migration narrative is juxtaposed with the Song of the Sea, which contains both cosmic and migration elements. In Fretheim's view, "A creation theology is built into the very structure of the book of Exodus" (2005:111). This blending clearly resonates with the juxtaposition of cosmogonic myths and migration theories of the Yoruba and is worth future investigation. Further, the invocation of cosmic images at that point in Israel's itinerary seems to suggest that the same Yahweh who was responsible for the work of creation is able to providentially sustain his creation in time of trouble when they identify with him.

Third, it has been noted that migration is not just an ancient but a global phenomenon. Human beings have been moving from one place to another since pre-historic times and will continue to do so, whether as individuals, families or groups. There is a need to accept this

human trait as inevitable as far as the social or global web is concerned. For this reason, the necessity for mutual acceptance and hospitality cannot be ignored whether on national or international levels. This is especially crucial in multi-racial and multi-ethnic contexts where there is a tendency to treat migrants as the *other* without full rights or claims as the supposed 'owners' of the land. Regrettably, the recent xenophobic attacks that resulted in the death and displacement of many foreigners in various parts of South Africa seem to undermine this concern. However, if it can be recalled that one's own ancestors were former migrants or aliens in the land where ownership is being claimed, then the words of Yahweh to Israel (Deut 4:34-38; 15:15; 16:11-12) to remember that they were slaves in Egypt and a migrant people, would take on a new meaning. The memories of exodus will become more relevant in a world where globalisation and technology have facilitated immigration and movement.

In this connection, it is also crucial that migrants be made to understand that they have an ethical/moral obligation to respect and preserve the dignity and lives of the people of the land in their effort to carve out a new identity for themselves. The recent restitutory act of the Australian parliament toward the descendants of the aborigines is a commendable case that illustrates this point. Europeans began to settle in Australia from 1788 onwards but the attitude of these settlers toward the aborigines is characterised as that of "brutality and neglect". In the New York Times of January 31, 2008, Tim Johnston reports that, "Tens of thousands of Aborigines died from disease, war and dispossession in the years after European settlement began in the late 18th century". The Aborigines were not allowed to vote in national elections until 1962 and their children were placed with white families or in state institutions to assimilate them as a result of a government policy which was abolished only in 1969. On Wednesday February 13, 2008, the Australian Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd apologised to Australia's minority population of aborigines for past wrongs and misdeeds against them. He called it removing "a great stain from the nation's soul" (cf. Johnston 2008). Consequently, in the parts of the world where new settlers and migrants have tended to oppress and destroy the original inhabitants of the land, it is imperative to acknowledge wrongdoing and to desist from such, as the Australian government has recently done. The command in Genesis 1:27 to subdue the earth does not imply a destruction of its people or its resources. Establishing one's identity does not have to entail the dissolution of the identity of the *other*.

Finally, a question that comes to mind is: Why do a people struggle to carve out an identity for themselves? Is this merely based on a desire to be different and to stand out from the *other*? In our judgement, part of the struggle for identity may be primarily a struggle for the resources of the earth. Every people, every nation, wants a part. The claim to a particular land or resource would seem to require some form of legitimation or the other. It would therefore appear logical to claim rights to a particular resource of the earth because of your connection to the owner. If a people claim descent from the Supreme Creator or have their identity rooted in him, surely it would not be out of place to claim a right of ownership with respect to his property! The same thing can apply to identities rooted in ancestors – “We are here because our ancestors left us this place as an inheritance”.

Therefore, in as much as people would seek and continue to legitimize claims for their identity in their struggles for the earth’s resources which in some cases appear not to go round, there would be a need to account for these resources in a responsible way. This should be especially so in situations where people claim affinity with God. The struggle for these resources should be carried out ethically and in the fear of this same God.

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