

Classifying Nigerian Folktales: Ethnographic Approaches

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Abstract

This paper is about how ethnographic context, rather than external classificatory yardsticks, was used by the author to arrive at the categories he utilized in classifying the 4000 tales that emerged from the pan-Nigerian tale-collection project that took place from 2013 to 2016. The project, sponsored by the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation, resulted into the publication of three monumental tomes, *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings* (787 pages), *People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: 1000 Folk Stories of Nigeria* (939 pages) and *Gods and Ancestors: Mythic Tales of Nigeria* (221 pages), all of which were published in 2018 and have greatly increased interest in the study of oral literature and other aspects of folklore in Nigeria's tertiary institutions. The paper presents the step-by-step methods, inspired by perspectives obtained from the tale-bearing communities, used by the author in classifying the tales featured in each of the three books. The paper's ethnographic approaches, in illustrating the author's belief that the nature of the tales collected from a given tale-collection exercise should determine the type and number of classes under which the tales should be grouped, constitute operational methods other tale-collectors may want to adopt.

Keywords: ethnographic context, pan-Nigerian tale collection project, tale classification

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Dr Bukar Usman is a leading folklorist from Nigeria and President of Nigerian Folklore Society. He has over two decades of experience in folklore research and documentation. He specializes in folktale research, translation, classification, and documentation. Dr Usman is a bilingual folklorist who has authored more than 30 books and academic papers, including the monumental <i>A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings</i> (787 pages), <i>People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: 1000 Folk Stories of Nigeria</i> (939 pages), <i>Gods and Ancestors: Mythic Tales of Nigeria</i> (221 pages) and <i>A History of Biu</i> (693 pages). His Hausa-language tales are collected in a compendium titled <i>Taskar Tatsuniyoyi</i> (628 pages). He is frequently consulted on the subject of folklore by post-graduate researchers from within and outside Nigeria. Email: bukarusman@gmail.com	Research Interests ○ Folk and Mythic Tales Research and Documentation ○ Preservation of Endangered Languages of Nigeria ○ Research in & Documentation of Biu Emirate Culture ○ Digitalization of Nigeria's Folktales Awards & Recognitions ○ Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) Award, for meritorious services to Hausa language and literature, 2013 ○ D.Litt (Honoris Causa) Award, Ahmadu Bello University, 2014 ○ Ethical and Value-oriented Leadership Award, University of Nigeria, 2016 ○ Jakadan Adabin Hausa (Ambassador of Hausa Literature) Award, National Museum of Burkina Faso, 2017 ○ Noble Patron of The Arts Award, Pan-African Writers' Association (PAWA), 2022 ○ Honorary Fellow of the Nigerian Academy of Letters, Nigerian Academy of Letters, 2024
Titles of Dr Usman's Books on Folklore & History	
➤ <i>A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings</i> ➤ <i>People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: 1000 Folk Stories of Nigeria</i> ➤ <i>Gods and Ancestors: Mythic Tales of Nigeria</i> ➤ <i>Language Disappearance and Cultural Diversity in Biu Emirate</i> ➤ <i>A History of Biu</i> ➤ <i>Folklore and History: The Twin Rivers of World Heritage</i> ➤ <i>Language, Technology and Democratic Culture</i> ➤ <i>Taskar Tatsuniyoyi</i> (Anthology of Tales in Hausa)	

INTRODUCTION

In April 2013, the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation (henceforth, DBUF) inaugurated the Pan-Nigerian Folktale Narrative Research Projects (PFNRP). It was a tale-collection project designed to cover all ethnic and linguistic groups in Nigeria. With a population of over 230 million, and with more than 250 ethnic and linguistic groups, Nigeria covers an area of 923,769 square kilometres (356,669 sq miles). Collecting tales from the culturally and linguistically diverse groups of this country seemed daunting at the beginning, more so when nobody or institution had attempted such an enterprise in the past. But it was a worthwhile enterprise DBUF was determined to undertake in order to achieve the following goals:

- To collect and preserve in writing the folktales of various Nigerian ethnic groups as the age-old tradition of transmitting and preserving such tales from generation to generation through oral narration is fast disappearing.
- To publish in English, without prejudice to possible indigenous-language publications, the outcome of this research, in order to make it available to a wider audience.
- To develop some aspects of the research findings into entertaining and informative story books targeted at the youths with the aim of enhancing their appreciation of folk narratives as a worthwhile cultural heritage.
- To promote across Nigeria awareness of the shared cultural values the nation's folktales represent and to, thereby, promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect.
- To employ the moral probity espoused by the tales as a tool for the moral regeneration of the larger society.
- To utilize the outcome of the research in any other way that will enhance the realisation of the above objectives.

It took DBUF and the more than 10 tale-collection project teams that it constituted about three years (2013-2016) to collect thousands of tales from various parts of Nigeria. By 2016, about 4000 tales had been collected, translated into English and partially edited. The tales were different in several respects; there were simple folk stories, fairies, fables, legends, myths, among many others. As the overall editor of the tales, the obvious next challenge for me was how to classify and group the tales into separate manuscripts before sending them to DBUF's publishing partner, Klamidas Communications Ltd. Klamidas, who had earlier published my books on Biu under the Biu Emirate Studies Series (BESS), suggested that another new series should be appropriate for the envisaged tale anthologies. So, we created a new sequence called Treasury of Nigerian Tales (TNT) series.

This paper is about how I used ethnographic context, rather than external classificatory considerations, in arriving at the categories I used in categorizing the 4000 tales that emerged from the pan-Nigerian tale-collection exercises, which were sorted into five volumes of tales, three of which (TNT 002, 003, and 004) have been published. The last two volumes, which constitute TNT 001, are yet to be published. This paper is derived from the chapter in tale classification recorded in *My Folklore Journey*, my on-coming book. I am using this global open-access platform to share my collector-driven approaches with all

researchers, including those from different cultural traditions who may find comparative value and operational guidance in the method I used in classifying and anthologizing the output of Nigeria's first nationwide tale-collection undertaking.

WORKING OUT WAYS OF CLASSIFYING THE COLLECTED TALES

Need to Avoid Inappropriate Categorizations

The need to work out ways of classifying the tales collected from the pan-Nigerian tale-collection exercises arose because many of the tales from the country's indigenous communities could not strictly fit into tale-types recommended and used in the Western world. I discovered that the seven categories of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther tale-type index (ATU index) would not perfectly serve the purpose of classifying the tales in accordance with the narrative traditions of the communities that produced them.

As I had earlier mentioned, Klamidas Books, the publishing partner of the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation's pan-Nigerian tale-collection project, had suggested that the way the tales are classified should be the basis for grouping them into three or more manuscripts to be published as separate books. Being the editor of the envisaged anthologies, I had the burden of coming up with acceptable ways of classifying the over 4000 tales placed before me. Based on reports submitted by collectors that worked in the various communities, I knew that whatever methods I use should be ethnographically relevant. As Shaw (2025) recently said:

Ethnographic research...systematically studies social and cultural phenomena within their natural contexts. It involves observing and recording human behavior, practices, and beliefs, often through immersion in the field, participation in activities, and in-depth interviews with participants. Ethnography aims to understand the experiences, perspectives, and culture of the people being studied.

The nature of the tales collected from the fields and the ethnographic perspectives communicated by some tale-collectors indicated that home-grown methods of classifying the tales should be adopted. The variety and cultural contexts of the tales did not make it easy for me to adopt wholesale any of the collector-derived classification systems I was somewhat familiar with at that point in time. I knew about the classification used by Albert Helser in his compilation of Bura Tales in the 1920s, where he identified his sets of Bura tales using terms such as "home and social life folk-lore", "health folk-lore", "agriculture and livestock folk-lore", and "crafts folk-lore". Aside from his use of the word "folk-lore" instead of "folktale", his range of classification would be

too narrow for categorizing the thousands of tales collected across Nigeria. His method would only cover social-life folktales, health-related folktales, agriculture folktales, and craft-making folktales, all of which constitute a very narrow range of tales.

Another collector-derived grouping system I knew was that used by the Herskovits in their 1958 *Dahomean Narrative* book. They ordered their 155 multifarious tales into the following 9 groups: Exploits of the Gods, Divination tales, Hunter Stories, Enfant Terrible Tales, Yo Stories, “Historical Tales”, Tales of Women, Explanatory and Moralizing Tales, and Miscellaneous Tales. Although this was more specific and more elaborate than Helser’s classification, it did not cover all the various tales collected from Nigeria, and none of the stories we collected fitted into one of Herskovits’ classes termed Yo Stories.

After considering other options, I realised that no fixed method of classifying tales would be appropriate for every set of tales as cultural peculiarities, which must be taken into consideration, might make it inadequate. Even celebrated classification systems cannot fit every set of tales. As I had observed elsewhere,

Of the best-known folktale classification systems, none can claim to be adequate enough to be applied universally. These systems are the Aarne/Thompson index (AT index), Aarne/Thompson/Uther index (ATU index), Stith Thompson’s Motif Index of Folk Literature and Vladimir Propp’s Morphology of the Folktale. Indeed, none of these has captured in its system all the vital aspects of the folktale... Within the context of their originating Western tradition, these systems (especially the ATU model) are probably adequate for classifying most traditional tales from the Western and, to some extent, Asian worlds. Elsewhere, particularly in Nigeria where we have extensive research to rely on, the ATU index is inadequate, and this is not surprising since tales from Africa were not part of the data used in deriving its classes. (Usman, 2022)

I concluded that it is the nature of the tales collected from a given tale-collection exercise that should determine the type and number of classes under which the tales should be grouped.

Classification based on General Ethnographic Tale Types

To undertake the classification of the tales according to the tradition of the communities from where they were collected posed its own challenge since traditions differ from one ethnic group to another. Fortunately, there were general ethnographic types. So, firstly, I set out to classify the tales according to identified general types. I discovered, while going through the tales in their raw form, that most of them were the typical fictional “tales by moonlight” tales while the rest were narrated as what most of the communities regarded as true-life stories about “historical” or “non-fictional” events and personages.

Therefore, I started sorting out the stories into two general types: fictional and “non-fictional” tales.

Table 1: Dual General-Type Classification

4000 tales of the pan-Nigerian tale-collection project	
Fictional tales Over 3,000	“Non-fictional” tales Less than 300

Ethnographic Criteria adopted in Grouping the Non-Fictional Tales

There were thousands of tales under the fictional tales group while the non-fictional tales had less than 300 tales. There was an obvious need to further categorize each of these two groups in a manner similar to how animals and languages are classified – from the general type to the specific type. And it was important to ensure that derived types were ethnographically relevant.

The next step was to sort out the stories in each typological group into specific sets of stories. I put aside the “non-fictional tales” and began to sort out the thousands of fictional tales into specific sets of stories. I share below the criteria I used in classifying the tales.

a. Classification derived from Thematic Considerations

From the reports and stories sent in by the coordinators of the PFNRP mini projects, it was clear that in the various communities from where the tales were collected theme was deemed to be of pre-eminent importance. As I had stated in one of my published introductory comments,

So intrinsically is a folk story connected to theme that every story, not just a fable, is expected to have or inspire some moral at the end of the tale. A tale may not be entertaining and its narrator may not be a good oral performer but, if it teaches a great lesson, the audience may overlook the shortcomings of its narration merely because of the powerful impact of its theme. In the various cultural environments where the tale-collecting research took place, tales are culturally distinguished by their themes. (Usman, 2018; p. 64)

So, I pencilled down thematic focus as a basis for classifying the folktales. I noted some themes as I read the stories. After going through the stories, I had more than 30 themes listed, which were subsequently pruned down by merging similar themes.

Some of the stories were categorized based on umbrella terms that state what the stories were generally about. Folktale categories derived in this manner included Contest, Explanatory, Fortune, Friendship, Magical, Marital, Moralizing, and War tales. Pointedly back-to-sender stories were classified as Boomerang tales. Such broad categorizations were made without prejudice to specific themes or morals derivable from the stories.

b. Classification derived from Geographic Setting

Reading the stories also brought to the surface an important component of some of the folktales that could serve as a common denominator under which they could be classified, and that component was setting. Some of the settings identified were: forest, spirit world, river, and palace. I ended up without having forest tales, river tales and spirit world tales among the classes because none of the folktales took place from beginning to the end within the forest or river environment. In most of the stories, the forest or river mainly served as a place of conflict which in many cases was not resolved there. The same argument weighed against the use of spirit world as a basis for grouping some of the stories.

In the end, the palace became the only setting directly used in naming a folktales category. This is because so many folktales relied on the palace to provoke, bring out or resolve their conflicts. The palace in most folktales serves as a symbol of order, authority and justice (or injustice in some instances). Events in the palace or even the mere utterances of the king can throw the entire kingdom into frenzy.

Determining what constitutes a Palace Tale

Caution must be exercised before placing a tale in the Palace Tales category. Otherwise, every story which features the king or his palace would be included here. For instance, a number of the Trickster, Marital and Contest tales had something to do with the palace. There is hardly any folktale category in Nigeria that would not include a story associated, in one way or the other, with the king or the palace. So, where should one draw the line? How should one determine which stories should be included among palace tales and which stories should not? I was faced with this dilemma.

I had to define what should constitute palace tales using the insights gained from the collected folktales. I noticed that while many stories featured or mentioned the king, there were a few stories where the conflict of the story was centred on the king, his family members, associates or courtiers. I also noted that such stories, though about the palace, did not emanate from the palace but were rather narrations emanating from the common folk. And I asked, why are some of these stories from the lips of the king's subjects flattering while others are

critical? All these considerations helped me to delimit the kind of folktales which should fall into the Palace Tales category. The following key points, stated in the Palace Tales “Thematic Snapshot”, guided my choice of tales featured in this category:

The palace is accorded its due reverence in the public imagination and is rightly the hub of noble and momentous activities but, at times, unseemly, degrading or curious things do happen there. At such times, it becomes the setting for tales, palace tales, among the ordinary folks. Palace tales, though fictitious, reflect the foibles and festering issues simmering around the king and his inner circle of family and friends. The community’s open interest in the affairs of its royal family indirectly diminishes the propensity of the king or a key member of his household to engage in scandalous escapades. The king is revered but can be reviled if he indulges in ignoble acts capable of sparking off communal revolt against him... Palace tales...serve as the people’s way of informally setting and entrenching in the communal imagination the right standards of conduct for those who rule them. (Usman, 2018; p. 604)

c. Classification derived from Character’s Occupation

The occupation of a tale’s major character can be used in classifying the tale if that occupation is pivotal in the unfolding of the tale’s plot and in the resolution of its main conflict. Because so many of the stories had something to do with forests and rivers, where the major characters practised their occupation, it became necessary to carve out categories associated with these settings, and the result of this consideration were the Hunter and Fisherman tales categories.

d. Classification derived from Character’s Endowment/Social Status

The unique and consistent role of certain folktale characters, in terms of the part they play in creating or resolving conflicts in many of the stories, make it necessary to use them in grouping certain stories. The roles played by such characters, reinforced by their natural or supernatural endowments, by their under-privileged status that draws sympathy from others, or by their duplicity make their stories uniquely recognisable. Many of the stories collected from the various communities of the country that featured the old woman, the enfant terrible, the orphan, or the trickster so stood out in this sense that each set of stories was accorded an independent-class status. They were classified as Old Woman, Enfant-Terrible, Orphan, and Trickster tales.

Still, there were interesting stories that appeared not to fit neatly into any of the above categories. I resisted the temptation to create endless classes of tales by grouping such stories under Miscellaneous Tales.

After several weeks of going through the over 3000 tales that fell under the category of “Folktales” (as opposed to the about 300 tales tagged “Historical

Tales”), the under-listed 18 folktale classes were identified. Of the 18 categories, 14 classes were, broadly speaking, theme-related; three were related, directly or indirectly, from setting while one is the miscellaneous class. Apart from the latter, other categories of tales were featured in the book in alphabetical order, beginning with the Boomerang Tales set.

Table 2: TNT 002 Folktale Classes

Theme-Related Folktale Class	Setting-Related Folktale Class
Boomerang Tales	Palace Tales
Contest Tales	Fisherman Tales
Enfant-Terrible Tales	Hunter Tales
Explanatory Tales	Miscellaneous Class
Fortune Tales	Miscellaneous Tales
Friendship Tales	
Heroic Tales	
Magical Tales	
Marital Tales	
Moralizing Tales	
Old Woman Tales	
Orphan Tales	
Trickster Tales	
War Tales	

Out of the three sets of tales in the setting-related folktales class, only the Palace category was directly determined on the basis of setting while the Fisherman and Hunter categories were indirectly related to setting because they were unavoidably connected to the river or the forest. It should not be forgotten that in all the categories every story was set in some environment. So, the volume of tales that resulted from the above classificatory procedure was titled, *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*. To further stress the importance of setting and enable the reader identify the geographical zone of the country where the stories were collected, it was decided that a notation to that effect would be made at the end of each story. Hence, each story featured in the collection was identified as coming from the North Central, North East, North West, South East, South-South, or South West zone of Nigeria.

Since an anthology of over 3000 folktales would be too bulky for most practical purposes, a decision was taken to select and publish two separate collections of folktales. It was decided that the second book should not be a continuation of the first but rather an independent anthology whose stories would be classified using different grouping process. 700 stories were selected for inclusion in *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*, the first collection to be published in the series of anthologies tagged Treasury of Nigerian Tales (TNT) series. The collection was code-named TNT 002.

After typesetting and submitting to Klamidas, our publishing partner, the

manuscript of *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*, work on classifying 1000 folktales selected for inclusion in the second publication immediately began. Having used theme and setting criteria in determining the 18 categories of stories featured in TNT 002, I focused on characterisation as the component upon which the 1000 folktales of the second anthology, code-named TNT 003, would be classified. Since all the stories have characters, they could be classified based on the type of characters featured in each story.

Stories are about characters and one can say that without characters there would be no folktales. As I noted in a published paper, characters are social mirrors:

Writers and narrators mirror the realities of their environment through the various aspects of their story, namely theme, setting, plot and characters. But no matter how profound the theme of a narrative, how exotic its setting, and how excellent its language, it cannot succeed in delivering a competent story without a character or group of characters.

Characters energize stories; they awaken and sustain our interest in the plot. Indeed, a story's plot cannot unravel without characters. Those actions or inactions which make reading fiction worth it all happen around the characters in the story. A story moves from one episode to another because of the activities of its characters. (Usman, 2022)

In folktales, characters function as social mirrors due partly to their symbolic importance in a given cultural setting. Folktale characters have static symbolic values that hardly change no matter the number of stories in which they appear; in other words, they don't generally develop as characters, the way characters in modern short stories and novels develop. This ruled out the idea of classifying the stories based on how the characters in a set of folktales developed from the beginning to the end of the story.

I realized that the stories could be classified based on the nature of the characters featured in the stories. So, I adopted a character-type classification based on the kind of set of characters or combination of characters featured in the stories. Examining the kind of characters featured in the 1000 stories set aside to make up the second publication, I noted four sets of character groups:

- human beings
- animals
- spirits, and
- objects.

Each character group has various kinds of characters listed under it, as shown in

Table 3. You might note that every example listed under a character group differs from other examples in the group in terms of at least one peculiar attribute. It is what generally unites the examples in each group, not what basically separates them, that counts; this is why “anthill” and “egg” are grouped together as objects.

Table 3: Character-Type Classification

Character Groups			
Human Beings	Animals	Spirits	Objects
<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>	<i>Examples</i>
king	lion	ghost	river
queen	elephant	fairy	plant
man	hyena	ogre	anthill
woman	squirrel	mermaid	tree
boy	tortoise	elf	grain
girl	buffalo	monster	bone
old woman	monkey	spirit-man	rock
enfant terrible	fowl	spirit-woman	moon
native doctor	snake	spirit-child	sun
witch/wizard	fish	spirit-animal	egg

Each set of examples shown above is different from any other set because the character type or group under which it is listed is by definition different from the other groups. For instance, what makes the examples listed under the “Spirits” group unique is that all of them are spirits, unlike the other examples. Even when they assume the form of human beings or the form of animals in order to carry out a good or evil mission, they are still essentially spirits and usually revert to their spirit state after executing their assignment. This is what happens in many folktales where spirit beings transform themselves into material forms.

The character-type grouping used in classifying the 1000 folktales was not based on the traits of a specific character or set of characters but rather on the number of character groups identified in a folktale/set of folktales. Based on this, eight categories of character types/groups emerged and became the structure used in grouping and listing the stories of the second folktales anthology. Based on the characters featured in the selected 1000 folktales, the eight character-type classes used in classifying them were as follows:

Table 4: Character-Type Classification Groups

	Character-Type Classification	List of Character Groups in Featured Folktales
Group 1	Human Tales	human beings
Group 2	Animal Tales	animals
Group 3	Human-Animal Tales	human beings and animals
Group 4	Human-Spirit Tales	human beings and spirits
Group 5	Human-Object Tales	human beings and objects
Group 6	Animal-Spirit Tales	animals and spirits
Group 7	Animal-Object Tales	animals and objects
Group 8	Multiple-Character Tales	human beings, animals, spirits, and objects

Since human beings, animals, spirits, and objects constitute the four-character classes that make up the character-type classification of the 1000 tales featured in TNT 003, the anthology was titled *People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: 1000 Folk Stories of Nigeria*.

This classification is based on grouping of stories featuring similar character types merely for the purpose of presenting the stories in some orderly form to the reader. It does not preclude the reader from analyzing the traits of specific characters, such as old woman, ogre, monkey or tree. The latter and all the other examples listed under objects in Table 3 are only deemed to be characters if or when they speak, act or behave as if they are human beings, which is not uncommon in many folktales.

When the two folktale anthologies were published in 2018, *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings* (TNT 002) was 787 pages while *People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: 1000 Folk Stories of Nigeria* (TNT 003) was 939 pages.

Classifying the “historical tales” group for publication presented some challenges, not the least of which was the preliminary task of deciding which of them was truly “historical” or “non-fictional” in the loose sense of both terms. Two hundred and thirteen (213) tales passed the test and were selected for publication. The next task was to classify and group them based on the type of “historical” or “non-fictional” material each sub-group of tales is identified as. Apart from making their presentation in the anthology orderly, classification of

collected data also enables the reader to choose which portion of the book to read at any given time.

The 213 “historical” tales were deemed to be factual or somewhat true but as I read through them again, many of them sounded stranger than fiction. Yet, as myths, they represent a very important genre in the oral narrative of our people. They may not sound real but as myths they have a stabilizing function in all cultures, including the cultures of the various communities of Nigeria where they were collected from.

To appreciate its relevance and the terms used in classifying the “historical” tales, we need to explain the meaning of myth. According to Herskovits and Herskovits (1958), myth is “a narrative which gives symbolic expression to a system of relationships between man and the universe in which he finds himself”.

Herskovits and Herskovits (1958) elaborate by explaining the nature of myth:

...the myth-making process, in its fundamental derivatives, is psychological and cultural.

On another level, we may define myth as those narrative forms that embody a system of symbolized values which in each separate society phrase the philosophy underlying its concepts, ideals and ends, and mark off its culture from all others as a way of life. Myth, in these terms, implies a social acceptance of approved symbols that, by transcending the generations, are at once the instrument of identification with the past and with the continuities of present and future. That is to say, like all manifestations of culture, myths draw their deepest sanctions from the fact that for the individual of a given society they existed before he was born, and that he carries the conviction they will continue after he is dead. Herein lie both the social and psychological importance of mythic symbols.

So, the 213 tales, whether “historical” or “non-fictional”, are generally mythic tales. They were classified based on terms appropriate to their mythic nature but also in accordance with what the tale-bearing communities considered them to be. Initially, I identified the following 10 classes of tales: sky and earth tales, communal myths, origin tales, communal chronicles, oracular tales, chronicles of the gods, heroes and heroines, cosmic tales, tales of taboos, and miscellaneous accounts. Then I decided that some of these classes made better sense when merged with another class. Doing that brought the number of classes from 10 to five. The tales placed under the miscellaneous accounts class, having been distributed and accommodated in one or the other of the five new classes, had no tale under its umbrella and was, therefore, removed. So, at the end of the

classification exercise, the 213 “historical” or “non-fictional” tales were distributed under the following headings:

- I. Creation and Cosmic Myths
- II. Group Origin Myths and Chronicles
- III. Oracular Myths and Chronicles
- IV. Legendary Heroes and Heroines
- V. Various Communal Chronicles

While diverse individuals and elements, real or imagined, constitute the dramatis personae in all the 213 tales, many of the tales directly or indirectly made reference to or are influenced by the actions or inactions of oracles (gods) or legendary forebears (ancestors). They were not stories whose facts could be checked; they were myths. Hence, the title of the fourth book in the Treasury of Nigerian Tales series became *Gods and Ancestors: Mythic Tales of Nigeria* (TNT 004). Like Books 2 and 3 of the series, this anthology was published in 2018 and it numbered 221 pages.

This brings us to the all-tales compilation, *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales* (TNT 001), the collection that contained all the approximately 4000 tales collected during the nationwide tale-collection project. Such a huge number of tales obviously could not be published in one book. So, its combination of folktales and “historical” narratives were split into two books: *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales* (Volume 1) and *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales* (Volume 2). Classification issues did not arise here as the tales in these volumes were grouped under the states of the country where they were collected. Okanlawon (2019), who wrote the foreword, described *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales* (TNT 001) as:

fresh fieldwork report on raw Nigerian narratives with little embellishments in the transcriptions and translations. So, they can be retold and refined... It is not all fairytales in the manual, but real, realistic solutions to real social problems, as well as the origin of customs and traditions. It is full of comedies and tragedies, narrated by custodians...with no education.... Being so versatile and prolific, this is, perhaps, Dr. Bukar Usman’s magnum opus/major work, and with a pertinent orientation for national unity. The corpus presents not only folktales as oral literature, but also clan/community accounts as oral history, and existentialist expositions of human survival, some at narrative lengths, and others as summaries. They are building blocks of unity, with folk or ethnic concepts/philosophies on cooperation, advice and destiny.... Nigerians constitute some 40% of the African population. Anyone who wants to know them can derive their psyche, manners and values from these narratives.

A Treasury of Nigerian Tales (Volume 1) and *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales* (Volume 2) are estimated at over 1,600 pages each when eventually published.

In conclusion, let me note that some of the folktales collected from different parts of the country have been translated and published in Nigeria's three major languages: Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. *Taskar Tatsuniyoyi*, Hausa-language translation of my collected folktales, was published by Gidan Dabino in 2012; the Yoruba anthology, *Ôgörùn-ún Ìtàn láti Ilê Yorùbá* (One Hundred Folktales from Yorubaland), translated by Ben Tomoloju, was published by Klamidas in 2016. And in 2020, Klamidas published *Nchikọta Akụkọ-ifo Ndị-Igbo*, the Igbo collection translated by George Amadi.

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