



## EXPLORING THE RHETORICAL STRUCTURES OF NIGERIA'S TWO NATIONAL ANTHEMS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This paper provides a comparative rhetorical analysis of Nigeria's two national anthems: "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" and "Arise, O Compatriots." Adopted at different junctures in the nation's post-independence history, these anthems serve as potent symbols of Nigeria's evolving national identity, political ideologies, and socio-cultural values. This study examines the rhetorical structures, persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos), and stylistic devices employed in each anthem to construct and project a vision of the Nigerian nation. Drawing on a framework that integrates rhetorical analysis, postcolonial theory, and symbolic discourse analysis, the paper argues that the shift from "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" to "Arise, O Compatriots," and the recent controversial decision to revert to the former, reflects a deeper national dialogue about Nigeria's colonial past, its present struggles, and its future aspirations. The analysis reveals that while "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" embodies a rhetoric of hopeful idealism and unity in diversity, "Arise, O Compatriots" adopts a more urgent and nationalistic tone, emphasizing sacrifice and a collective call to action. By juxtaposing these two foundational texts, this study illuminates the complex interplay between rhetoric, power, and the construction of national identity in a postcolonial African state. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how national symbols are imbued with meaning and contested in the ongoing process of nation-building.*

**KEYWORDS:** National Anthem, Rhetorical Analysis, Nigeria, Postcolonialism, National Identity, Symbolic Discourse.



## INTRODUCTION

National anthems are more than just official songs; they are powerful rhetorical artifacts that encapsulate the aspirations, values, and collective identity of a nation. As symbolic representations of the state, they are performed in ceremonial contexts to evoke feelings of patriotism, unity, and national pride. The lyrics and music of an anthem work in concert to articulate a particular vision of the nation, its history, and its destiny. In postcolonial nations, the national anthem often plays a crucial role in the process of decolonization and nation-building, serving as a tool for forging a new, independent identity distinct from the colonial past. Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation, presents a unique case study for the rhetorical analysis of national anthems, having had two distinct anthems since its independence in 1960.

The first anthem, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee," was adopted at independence and served the nation until 1978. Its lyrics were penned by a British expatriate, Lillian Jean Williams, and its music composed by another Briton, Frances Benda. This anthem, with its themes of unity, diversity, and divine guidance, reflected the hopeful and idealistic spirit of the newly independent nation. However, in 1978, under a military regime, Nigeria replaced it with "Arise, O Compatriots." The lyrics of this second anthem were a composite of phrases from five winning entries in a national competition, and the music was composed by a Nigerian, Benedict P. Odiase. "Arise, O Compatriots" is characterized by a more urgent and nationalistic tone, emphasizing the themes of service, sacrifice, and the labor of past heroes. In a surprising and controversial move, the Nigerian government in May 2024 announced the re-adoption of "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" as the national anthem, sparking a nationwide debate about the country's identity, its colonial legacy, and the meaning of its national symbols.

This paper undertakes a comparative rhetorical study of these two anthems. It seeks to understand how each anthem functions as a persuasive text, employing specific rhetorical strategies to shape a particular understanding of what it means to be Nigerian. The central research question guiding this study is: How do the rhetorical structures of "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" and "Arise, O Compatriots" differ in their construction of Nigerian national identity? Subsidiary questions include: What are the dominant persuasive appeals (ethos, pathos, and logos) in each anthem? How do the stylistic and linguistic choices in each anthem reflect the historical and political context of its adoption? What does the shift between these two anthems, and the recent reversion to the first, reveal about the contested nature of nation-building in Nigeria?

This study aims to contribute to the scholarly literature on national symbols, political discourse, and postcolonial identity in Africa. It will provide a detailed understanding of how rhetoric is deployed in the service of nation-building and how national anthems, as powerful symbolic texts, can become sites of ideological contestation. The analysis will be grounded in a theoretical framework that combines classical rhetorical theory with insights from postcolonial studies and discourse analysis. The findings of this research will be of interest to scholars in the fields of rhetoric, political science, African studies, and cultural studies, as well as to anyone interested in the complex relationship between language, power, and identity in the modern world.



## LITERATURE REVIEW

This study is situated at the intersection of several fields of inquiry: rhetorical studies, postcolonial theory, and the study of nationalism and national symbols. The analytical framework for this paper is built upon a synthesis of key concepts from these disciplines. This review of the literature will first explore the role of national anthems as rhetorical artifacts, then delve into the theoretical underpinnings of rhetorical analysis, particularly Aristotle's modes of persuasion. Finally, it will examine the concepts of national identity and symbolic discourse within the context of postcolonial nation-building.

### National Anthems as Rhetorical Artifacts

National anthems are a relatively modern invention, emerging in Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries with the rise of the nation-state [1]. They have since become a ubiquitous feature of modern statehood, serving as powerful symbols of national sovereignty and collective identity. Scholarly work on national anthems has often focused on their historical origins, musical composition, and their role in state ceremonies [2]. However, a growing body of research has begun to examine anthems as discursive and rhetorical constructs. These studies argue that national anthems are not merely descriptive of a nation's character but are actively involved in the construction and performance of national identity [3].

From a rhetorical perspective, national anthems are persuasive texts designed to instill a sense of patriotism and unity among a diverse population. They employ a range of rhetorical strategies to achieve this, including appeals to shared history, common values, and a collective destiny. As Machin and van Leeuwen (2009) argue, national anthems are a form of "musical-verbal propaganda" that works to naturalize the nation-state and its ideologies [4]. They are often characterized by a heightened, poetic language and a solemn, majestic musical style that lends them an aura of timelessness and authority. This combination of lyrical and musical elements makes them particularly effective in evoking strong emotional responses and fostering a sense of belonging.

### The Framework of Rhetorical Analysis

The analysis of the rhetorical strategies employed in Nigeria's national anthems will be guided by the foundational principles of classical rhetoric, particularly the work of Aristotle. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle identified three primary modes of persuasion: ethos, pathos, and logos. These three appeals form a powerful framework for understanding how a text persuades its audience.

**Ethos** refers to the credibility or ethical appeal of the speaker or author. It is the means by which a text establishes its authority and trustworthiness. In the context of a national anthem, ethos is constructed through various means, including the perceived legitimacy of its adoption, the reputation of its author and composer, and the moral and ethical values it espouses. An anthem's ability to persuade is heavily dependent on its perceived ethos; if it is seen as inauthentic or imposed, its rhetorical power is diminished.

**Pathos** is the appeal to emotion. It is the way in which a text evokes feelings in the audience to persuade them of a particular viewpoint. National anthems are rich in pathetic appeals, often employing emotionally charged language and imagery to stir feelings of love, pride, loyalty, and even sacrifice. The use of pathos is crucial for creating a sense of affective connection



between the citizen and the nation, transforming an abstract political entity into an object of personal devotion.

**Logos** refers to the appeal to logic and reason. It is the way in which a text uses evidence and logical argumentation to make its case. While national anthems are often more reliant on ethos and pathos, they also employ a form of logos. This can be seen in their attempts to present a coherent and rational vision of the nation, often by referencing historical events, foundational principles, or a shared destiny. The logical structure of an anthem, its progression of ideas, and its articulation of a national narrative all contribute to its persuasive force.

In addition to these three appeals, the analysis will also examine the stylistic and linguistic devices used in the anthems. These include metaphors, similes, personification, alliteration, and other literary techniques that contribute to the overall rhetorical effect of the text. As Leech and Short (2007) demonstrate in their work on stylistic analysis, the specific linguistic choices made by an author can have a profound impact on the meaning and persuasive power of a text [5].

### **National Identity and Symbolic Discourse in Postcolonial Africa**

The study of national anthems is particularly relevant in the context of postcolonial nations, where the construction of a unified national identity is often a central political project. As Benedict Anderson (1983) famously argued, nations are "imagined communities" that are brought into being through shared narratives, symbols, and cultural practices [6]. In postcolonial Africa, the process of imagining the nation has been fraught with challenges, including the legacy of arbitrary colonial borders, ethnic and linguistic diversity, and the ongoing struggle for economic and political independence.

In this context, national symbols such as flags, currencies, and anthems play a vital role in the project of nation-building. They are part of a symbolic discourse through which the nation is defined, contested, and reimagined. As Bornman (2006) argues in her study of national symbols in post-apartheid South Africa, these symbols can be powerful tools for fostering a sense of unity and shared identity, but they can also become sites of conflict and contestation [7]. The choice of a national anthem, for example, can be a highly political act, reflecting the ideological orientation of the ruling regime and its vision of the nation.

The theoretical framework of postcolonialism provides a critical lens for understanding the dynamics of national identity and symbolic discourse in a country like Nigeria. Postcolonial theory, as articulated by scholars such as Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, and Homi Bhabha, examines the enduring cultural, political, and psychological legacies of colonialism. It highlights the ways in which colonial ideologies continue to shape the identities and self-perceptions of formerly colonized peoples. In the context of this study, postcolonial theory helps to illuminate the significance of the fact that Nigeria's first national anthem was written by a British expatriate, and the recent decision to revert to this anthem has been interpreted by some as a neocolonial move. The role of language is particularly critical in this context. Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1986), in his influential work *Decolonising the Mind*, argues that language is a carrier of culture and that the dominance of colonial languages in post-independence African nations perpetuates a form of mental colonialism [9]. The choice of English as the language of both of Nigeria's national anthems is, therefore, a significant rhetorical and political statement. It reflects the complex linguistic reality of Nigeria, a nation with over 500 indigenous



languages, where English has served as a lingua franca and the language of government and education. However, it also raises questions about the marginalization of indigenous languages and the ongoing struggle for linguistic and cultural decolonization.

This study will, therefore, analyze Nigeria's two national anthems not only as rhetorical artifacts but also as products of their specific historical and political contexts. It will explore how each anthem engages with the complex legacy of colonialism and contributes to the ongoing project of defining what it means to be Nigerian in a postcolonial world. The analysis will draw on key concepts from postcolonial theory, such as mimicry, hybridity, and the role of language in shaping colonial and postcolonial identities. The concept of mimicry, as articulated by Homi Bhabha, is particularly relevant to the analysis of "Nigeria, We Hail Thee," which can be seen as a form of colonial mimicry, a text that adopts the language and cultural forms of the colonizer. The recent re-adoption of this anthem raises complex questions about the nature of neocolonialism and the ongoing struggle for cultural and intellectual independence in Nigeria. By bringing together insights from rhetorical analysis, postcolonial theory, and the study of nationalism, this paper aims to provide a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the rhetorical work that national anthems perform in the life of a nation.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of "Nigeria, We Hail Thee"**

"Nigeria, We Hail Thee," the nation's first national anthem, is a product of the historical moment of its birth: the dawn of Nigeria's independence on October 1, 1960. This context is crucial for understanding its rhetorical posture. The anthem is imbued with a sense of hope, optimism, and a desire for unity in a newly independent nation grappling with the complexities of its colonial inheritance. Its rhetoric is one of aspiration, projecting a vision of a harmonious and prosperous future for Nigeria.

### **Ethos: The Credibility of a Hopeful Vision**

The ethos of "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is constructed on a foundation of moral and idealistic authority. The anthem seeks to establish its credibility not through an appeal to a specific political ideology or militant nationalism, but through its articulation of a universal vision of peace and unity. The opening line, "Nigeria, we hail thee," immediately establishes a tone of reverence and respect for the nation. The use of the verb "hail" suggests a voluntary and heartfelt expression of allegiance, rather than a coerced declaration of loyalty.

The authorship of the anthem, while a point of controversy in contemporary Nigeria, is also central to its ethos. The fact that the lyrics were written by Lillian Jean Williams, a British expatriate, and the music composed by Frances Benda, another Briton, can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, it can be seen as a symbol of the continued cultural influence of the former colonial power, a remnant of a colonial mindset. On the other hand, it can be viewed as a gesture of goodwill and a testament to the inclusive and multicultural vision of the early post-independence era. The anthem's proponents argue that its foreign authorship does not detract from its patriotic message, but rather enhances its ethos by demonstrating a universal love for the new nation. This perspective, however, has been challenged by scholars who argue that the reliance on a British author for such a significant national symbol is a clear example of the 'colonial mentality' that persisted in many post-independence African nations [8]. This mentality, a legacy of colonial education and cultural assimilation, often led to a preference for European cultural forms and a corresponding devaluation of indigenous traditions. The choice



of a British-authored anthem, from this perspective, can be seen as a missed opportunity to assert a distinct and authentic Nigerian cultural identity from the very beginning of its existence as a sovereign state.

The anthem's ethos is further strengthened by its appeal to a higher authority. The final stanza's plea, "O God of all creation, grant this our one request, help us to build a nation where no man is oppressed," frames the project of nation-building as a sacred and divinely sanctioned endeavor. This appeal to God lends a transcendent authority to the anthem's message, elevating it above the realm of partisan politics and presenting it as a timeless and universal prayer for the nation.

### **Pathos: The Emotional Appeal to Unity and Diversity**

"Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is rich in pathetic appeals, employing emotionally resonant language and imagery to foster a sense of national belonging. The anthem's central emotional appeal is to a sense of unity in diversity. The second stanza, "Our flag shall be a symbol that truth and justice reign, in peace or battle honoured, and this we count as gain, to hand on to our children a banner without stain," evokes a sense of collective pride in the national flag, a potent symbol of the nation's sovereignty. The phrase "a banner without stain" is particularly powerful, suggesting a commitment to a pure and unblemished national character.

The anthem also appeals to the emotions of love and brotherhood. The line, "Though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand," directly addresses the challenge of ethnic and linguistic diversity in Nigeria. By acknowledging these differences and then transcending them with the unifying concept of "brotherhood," the anthem seeks to create a powerful emotional bond among Nigerians of all backgrounds. This is a rhetoric of inclusion, designed to foster a sense of shared identity and a common destiny.

The anthem's music, with its majestic and solemn melody, plays a crucial role in enhancing its emotional impact. The slow, stately tempo and the soaring melodic lines create a sense of grandeur and occasion, inspiring feelings of reverence and awe. The music works in synergy with the lyrics to create a powerful emotional experience, one that is designed to lift the spirits and instill a deep sense of patriotic devotion.

### **Logos: The Logic of a Unified Nation**

While "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is primarily driven by ethos and pathos, it also contains a logical argument for national unity. The anthem's logo is based on a simple yet powerful premise: that Nigeria's strength and prosperity depend on its ability to overcome its internal divisions and work together as a unified nation. The anthem presents a rational case for unity, arguing that it is the only path to a just and prosperous future.

The logical structure of the anthem is clear and progressive. It begins with a declaration of allegiance to the nation, then moves to a celebration of the national flag as a symbol of truth and justice. It then confronts the issue of diversity, arguing that it can be overcome through brotherhood. Finally, it concludes with a prayer for divine guidance in the task of nation-building. This logical progression creates a compelling narrative of national aspiration, one that is both emotionally resonant and rationally persuasive.



The anthem's logos is also evident in its emphasis on the future. The line, "to hand on to our children a banner without stain," presents nation-building as a long-term project, a legacy to be passed down to future generations. This forward-looking perspective provides a rational justification for the sacrifices and compromises required to build a unified nation. It is a logic of investment, arguing that the hard work of today will yield a better future for all Nigerians.

### **Stylistic and Rhetorical Devices**

"Nigeria, We Hail Thee" employs a range of stylistic and rhetorical devices to enhance its persuasive power. The use of an **apostrophe**, a direct address to an absent or inanimate object, is evident in the opening line, "Nigeria, we hail thee." This device personifies the nation, making it a tangible entity that can be addressed and revered.

**Anaphora**, the repetition of a word or phrase at the beginning of successive clauses, is used to create a sense of rhythm and emphasis. The repetition of "our" in the second stanza ("Our flag shall be a symbol... Our own dear native land") reinforces the sense of collective ownership and shared identity.

**Metaphor** is used to create powerful and memorable images. The national flag is described as "a banner without stain," a metaphor for a nation with a pure and unblemished character. The nation itself is implicitly compared to a building in the line, "help us to build a nation," a metaphor that emphasizes the constructive and collaborative nature of nation-building.

**Alliteration**, the repetition of consonant sounds, is used to create a musical and memorable effect. The line, "Though tribe and tongue may differ," is a notable example, with the repetition of the "t" and "d" sounds creating a pleasing phonetic rhythm.

In summary, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is a masterful piece of rhetoric, a text that skillfully blends ethos, pathos, and logos to create a powerful and persuasive vision of the Nigerian nation. Its rhetoric is one of hope, unity, and aspiration, a reflection of the historical moment in which it was born. The anthem's enduring appeal and the recent controversy surrounding its re-adoption are a testament to its rhetorical power and its central place in the ongoing dialogue about Nigerian national identity.

### **Rhetorical Analysis of "Arise, O Compatriots"**

"Arise, O Compatriots," adopted in 1978, represents a significant rhetorical shift from its predecessor. Created during a period of military rule, this anthem reflects a different set of national priorities and a distinct vision of Nigerian identity. Its rhetoric is more urgent, more nationalistic, and more focused on the duties and sacrifices required of the citizenry. Where "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" was a hopeful prayer for unity, "Arise, O Compatriots" is a militant call to action.

### **Ethos: The Credibility of a Collective Mandate**

The ethos of "Arise, O Compatriots" is grounded in the idea of a collective, popular mandate. Unlike the first anthem, which was written by a single foreign individual, the lyrics of "Arise, O Compatriots" were cobbled together from the best entries in a nationwide competition. This process of collective authorship is central to the anthem's credibility. It presents itself not as the vision of a single person, but as the voice of the Nigerian people themselves. The five



creators—P. O. Aderibigbe, John A. Ilechukwu, Dr. Sota Omoigui, Eme Etim Akpan, and B.A. Ogunnaike—represent a cross-section of the nation, and their combined effort lends a democratic and authentic ethos to the anthem, despite its adoption by a military regime.

The anthem's opening line, "Arise, O compatriots, Nigeria's call obey," immediately establishes a different kind of authority from "Nigeria, We Hail Thee." The use of the imperative "Arise" is a direct command, a call to action that demands an immediate response. The term "compatriots" frames the relationship between citizens as one of shared struggle and a common cause. This is the language of nationalism, of a people united in a collective project. The anthem's ethos is thus not one of gentle persuasion, but of moral and civic duty.

The authority of the anthem is further reinforced by its appeal to the sacrifices of the nation's heroes. The line, "The labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain," creates a powerful sense of historical obligation. It suggests that the present generation has a sacred duty to honor the struggles of those who came before them. This appeal to ancestral sacrifice is a common feature of nationalist rhetoric, and it serves to create a powerful sense of continuity and shared destiny. The anthem's credibility is thus rooted in a sense of historical responsibility and a commitment to the nation's founding ideals. The military government of General Olusegun Obasanjo, which oversaw the anthem's adoption, sought to instill a new sense of national discipline and purpose after a period of civil war and political instability. The anthem's rhetoric, with its emphasis on duty and service, was a key part of this nation-building project. It was a deliberate attempt to move away from the perceived sentimentality of the first anthem and to forge a more robust and self-reliant national identity.

### **Pathos: The Emotional Appeal to Sacrifice and Service**

The emotional landscape of "Arise, O Compatriots" is one of duty, sacrifice, and solemn resolve. The anthem's pathetic appeals are designed to inspire a sense of patriotic fervor and a willingness to serve the nation, even at great personal cost. The language is stark and uncompromising, a reflection of the military era in which it was born. The call to "serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith" is a powerful emotional appeal, one that frames national service as an act of devotion.

The anthem's emotional core is found in its emphasis on sacrifice. The reference to "the labour of our heroes past" is a powerful reminder of the struggles that have shaped the nation. It evokes a sense of gratitude for those who have fought and died for Nigeria, and it creates a powerful emotional imperative to continue their work. This is a rhetoric of remembrance, one that uses the past to inspire a sense of duty in the present.

The anthem also appeals to a sense of hope and a vision of a glorious future. The final stanza, "O God of creation, direct our noble cause, guide our leaders right, help our youth the truth to know, in love and honesty to grow, and living just and true, great lofty heights attain, to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign," is a prayer for divine guidance in the task of nation-building. However, unlike the prayer in "Nigeria, We Hail Thee," which is a humble request for help, this prayer is a more assertive plea for direction in a "noble cause." The anthem's emotional trajectory is one of struggle and sacrifice leading to a triumphant future, a future where Nigeria will "great lofty heights attain."



## Logos: The Logic of a Disciplined Nation

The logos of “Arise, O Compatriots” is based on a logic of discipline, duty, and collective action. The anthem presents a clear and rational argument for why Nigerians should be willing to sacrifice for their nation. The premise of this argument is that the nation’s survival and prosperity depend on the unwavering commitment of its citizens. The anthem’s logic is one of cause and effect: if Nigerians serve their nation with love, strength, and faith, then the labor of their heroes will not be in vain, and the nation will achieve greatness.

The anthem’s structure is a logical progression of ideas. It begins with a call to action, then provides a justification for that action by referencing the sacrifices of the past. It then outlines the core values that should guide the nation—love, strength, and faith—and concludes with a prayer for divine guidance in achieving its goals. This logical structure creates a powerful and persuasive argument for a particular kind of citizenship, one that is based on duty, discipline, and a willingness to serve.

The anthem’s logos is also evident in its emphasis on the role of leadership and the education of the youth. The plea to “guide our leaders right” and “help our youth the truth to know” reflects a rational understanding of the importance of good governance and education in the process of nation-building. This is a logic of social engineering, one that recognizes that a strong nation requires not only patriotic citizens but also wise leaders and an enlightened younger generation.

## Stylistic and Rhetorical Devices

“Arise, O Compatriots” employs a number of stylistic and rhetorical devices to enhance its persuasive impact. The most prominent of these is the use of the **imperative mood**. The anthem is replete with commands: “Arise,” “obey,” “serve.” This creates a sense of urgency and immediacy, a feeling that the nation’s needs are pressing and require an immediate response.

**Alliteration** is used to create a memorable and rhythmic effect. The line, “To serve our fatherland with love and strength and faith,” is a notable example, with the repetition of the “s” and “f” sounds creating a sense of flow and emphasis.

**Parallelism**, the use of similar grammatical structures to express related ideas, is also a key feature of the anthem. The final stanza, with its series of parallel clauses (“guide our leaders right, help our youth the truth to know”), creates a sense of balance and order, reinforcing the anthem’s message of a well-regulated and disciplined society.

**Personification** is used to give human qualities to the nation. The line, “Nigeria’s call obey,” personifies the nation as a figure of authority that can issue commands and expect obedience. This device helps to create a sense of personal connection between the citizen and the state.

In conclusion, “Arise, O Compatriots” is a powerful and persuasive text that reflects the historical and political context of its creation. Its rhetoric is one of duty, sacrifice, and nationalistic fervor, a stark contrast to the hopeful idealism of its predecessor. The anthem’s use of imperative language, its appeals to historical sacrifice, and its logical argument for a disciplined and unified citizenry all contribute to its rhetorical power. The shift from “Nigeria, We Hail Thee” to “Arise, O Compatriots” is a clear indication of a changing national



consciousness, a move from a post-independence rhetoric of hope to a more militant and nationalistic discourse.

### Comparative Analysis and Discussion

The two national anthems of Nigeria, when placed side-by-side, offer a compelling narrative of the nation's evolving self-perception. The transition from "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" to "Arise, O Compatriots" is not merely a change of song, but a fundamental shift in the rhetorical construction of Nigerian national identity. This section provides a comparative analysis of the two anthems, examining their key differences in terms of ethos, pathos, logos, and overall rhetorical strategy. The recent re-adoption of the first anthem adds another layer of complexity to this analysis, suggesting a nation in dialogue with its past and uncertain about its future.

Feature	"Nigeria, We Hail Thee" (1960)	"Arise, O Compatriots" (1978)
<b>Dominant Tone</b>	Hopeful, idealistic, reverent	Urgent, militant, demanding
<b>Authorship Ethos</b>	Foreign (British), individual, expatriate goodwill	Indigenous, collective, national competition
<b>Core Pathos</b>	Unity in diversity, brotherhood, divine hope	Sacrifice, duty, historical obligation
<b>Guiding Logos</b>	Aspirational logic of a harmonious future	Utilitarian logic of disciplined action for survival
<b>Key Verb Mood</b>	Declarative and subjunctive ("we hail," "shall be")	Imperative ("Arise," "obey," "serve")
<b>View of Citizen</b>	A diverse people united in brotherhood	Compatriots in a national struggle
<b>View of Nation</b>	A "dear native land" to be cherished	A "fatherland" to be served
<b>Central Metaphor</b>	Building a nation	Answering a call to battle

### The Rhetoric of Origin and Authority

The most striking difference between the two anthems lies in their ethos, particularly as it relates to their authorship. "Nigeria, We Hail Thee," penned by a British expatriate, carries the rhetorical weight of its colonial origins. While this was likely seen as a gesture of continuity and partnership in 1960, it has become a point of contention in the 21st century. The anthem's authority is that of a benevolent, almost paternalistic, well-wisher, a voice from outside celebrating the birth of a new nation. In contrast, "Arise, O Compatriots" establishes a more grassroots, indigenous ethos. Its lyrics, drawn from a national competition, and its music,



composed by a Nigerian police officer, ground its authority in the collective will of the people. It speaks not *to* Nigeria, but *as* Nigeria.

This difference in ethos is reflected in the anthems' opening lines. "Nigeria, we hail thee" is a declaration of praise, an act of admiration. "Arise, O compatriots" is a command, a summons to duty. The former positions the citizen as a spectator, a well-wisher at a national pageant. The latter casts the citizen as a participant, a soldier in a national cause.

### **The Emotional Appeal: From Hope to Obligation**

The pathetic appeals of the two anthems are also markedly different. "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is an anthem of hope. It speaks of a future where "no man is oppressed" and where "truth and justice reign." Its emotional core is the ideal of a harmonious and unified nation, a place where "tribe and tongue may differ" but all stand together in brotherhood. The anthem's emotional appeal is gentle, inclusive, and aspirational.

"Arise, O Compatriots," on the other hand, is an anthem of obligation. Its emotional power is derived from a sense of duty and sacrifice. The reference to "the labour of our heroes past" is a powerful emotional lever, designed to instill a sense of historical responsibility. The anthem does not shy away from the language of struggle and service. It is a call to subordinate individual desires to the needs of the nation. The emotional tone is more somber, more militant, and more demanding.

### **The Logic of Nationhood: Aspiration vs. Action**

The logical arguments of the two anthems also diverge. "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" presents a logic of aspiration. It argues that Nigeria can become a great nation if its people live in brotherhood and if God grants them guidance. The logic is conditional, dependent on the moral character of the people and the grace of a higher power. It is a vision of what Nigeria *could be*.

"Arise, O Compatriots" presents a logic of action. It argues that Nigeria will become a great nation *if* its citizens obey the nation's call and serve it with all their might. The logic is instrumental, a formula for achieving national greatness through disciplined and collective effort. It is a blueprint for what Nigeria *must do*.

### **The Controversy of Re-adoption and the Future of Nigerian National Identity**

The decision by the Nigerian government in May 2024 to abandon "Arise, O Compatriots" and revert to "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" has ignited a fierce national debate. This move is far more than a simple change in ceremonial music; it is a deeply symbolic act that raises profound questions about Nigeria's identity, its relationship with its colonial past, and its vision for the future.

Proponents of the re-adoption argue that "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" is a more inclusive and poetic anthem, one that better reflects the nation's diversity and its aspirations for peace and unity. They contend that its message of brotherhood is a much-needed antidote to the ethnic and religious divisions that have plagued the country. Some have even argued that the anthem's foreign authorship is a strength, a symbol of a more cosmopolitan and less insular national identity.



Opponents of the change, however, view the re-adoption of the old anthem as a neocolonial act, a symbolic return to a subservient relationship with the former colonial power. They argue that it is a betrayal of the nationalist ideals that inspired the creation of "Arise, O Compatriots." For many, the first anthem is a relic of a bygone era, a reminder of a time when Nigeria had not yet fully claimed its own voice. The fact that the decision was made by the government without a broad public consultation has only fueled the controversy, with many seeing it as an undemocratic imposition.

This debate over the national anthem is, in essence, a debate over the soul of Nigeria. It is a struggle between two competing visions of the nation: one that is cosmopolitan, idealistic, and perhaps nostalgic for the perceived innocence of the early independence era; and another that is nationalistic, pragmatic, and rooted in a sense of struggle and self-reliance. The controversy reveals a nation that is still grappling with the fundamental questions of its identity. Is Nigeria a product of its colonial past, or has it forged a new identity in the crucible of its post-independence struggles? Is its strength in its diversity, or in its ability to forge a single, unified national will? The debate also highlights the generational divide in Nigeria. For many older Nigerians who came of age in the early independence era, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" evokes a sense of nostalgia for a time of perceived hope and national unity. For many younger Nigerians, however, the anthem is a symbol of a colonial past that they have no connection to. They see "Arise, O Compatriots" as the anthem of their generation, a song that, for all its flaws, is at least a product of Nigerian creativity. This generational gap in perception is a significant factor in the ongoing debate and reflects the different ways in which Nigerians of different ages have experienced and imagined the nation.

The future of Nigerian national identity will be shaped by how the nation navigates these questions. The national anthem is a powerful symbol, but it is only one element in the complex and ongoing process of nation-building. The real work of creating a just and prosperous nation, as both anthems suggest in their own ways, lies in the hands of the Nigerian people themselves. As Chinua Achebe (1983) argued in his seminal work, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, the nation's failure to achieve its potential is not due to a lack of resources or talent, but to a failure of leadership and a lack of national discipline [8]. The two anthems, in their own distinct ways, can be read as responses to this central challenge. "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" offers a vision of a nation united by a shared moral purpose, while "Arise, O Compatriots" calls for a more disciplined and self-reliant approach to nation-building. The ongoing debate over which anthem best represents the nation is, in many ways, a continuation of the debate that Achebe initiated over four decades ago: a debate about the character of the Nigerian nation and the path to its redemption.

## CONCLUSION

This comparative rhetorical analysis of Nigeria's two national anthems, "Nigeria, We Hail Thee" and "Arise, O Compatriots," has illuminated the profound ways in which these foundational texts have shaped and reflected the nation's evolving identity. The study has demonstrated that the shift from the idealistic, reverent rhetoric of the first anthem to the urgent, militant discourse of the second represents a significant transformation in Nigeria's national self-perception. This transformation is not merely a matter of lyrical or musical style, but a fundamental change in the nation's understanding of its past, its present, and its future.



“Nigeria, We Hail Thee,” with its ethos of expatriate goodwill, its pathos of hopeful unity, and its logos of aspirational harmony, is a product of the optimism and idealism of the independence era. It is a text that imagines a nation united in brotherhood, a nation that can overcome its internal divisions through a shared commitment to peace and justice. In contrast, “Arise, O Compatriots,” with its ethos of collective indigenous authorship, its pathos of sacrifice and historical obligation, and its logos of disciplined action, is a product of a more turbulent and nationalistic period. It is a text that imagines a nation forged in struggle, a nation that demands service and sacrifice from its citizens in the name of a greater cause.

The recent and controversial decision to revert to “Nigeria, We Hail Thee” has added a new and complex chapter to this story. It suggests a nation that is not only in dialogue with its colonial past but is also deeply divided about its own identity. The debate over the two anthems is a microcosm of a larger national conversation about the meaning of patriotism, the nature of Nigerian identity, and the path to a more just and prosperous future. This study has argued that this debate is not merely about a song, but about the very soul of the nation.

This research contributes to the broader scholarly understanding of national symbols as powerful rhetorical artifacts. It demonstrates how a close rhetorical analysis of these symbols can reveal the underlying ideologies, values, and power dynamics of a nation. The comparative framework employed in this study, which integrates classical rhetorical theory with insights from postcolonial studies and discourse analysis, provides a robust model for the analysis of similar symbolic texts in other national contexts.

Further research could extend this analysis in several directions. A more in-depth study of the musical composition of the two anthems, for example, could provide further insights into their rhetorical and emotional impact. A reception study, examining how ordinary Nigerians have interpreted and responded to the two anthems over time, could offer a more grassroots perspective on their meaning and significance. Finally, a comparative study of Nigeria’s anthems with those of other postcolonial African nations could provide a broader regional context for understanding the role of these symbolic texts in the project of nation-building.

In conclusion, the story of Nigeria’s two national anthems is a story of a nation in search of itself. It is a story of hope and struggle, of unity and division, of a colonial past that continues to haunt the present, and of a future that is yet to be written. The rhetorical journey from the hopeful idealism of “Nigeria, We Hail Thee” to the militant nationalism of “Arise, O Compatriots,” and back again, is a testament to the enduring power of symbols in the life of a nation. This journey reflects the deep-seated tensions and contradictions that have characterized Nigeria’s post-independence history: the tension between tradition and modernity, between unity and diversity, between a desire for a unique African identity and the enduring legacy of its colonial past. The national anthem, as this study has shown, is not a static or monolithic symbol, but a dynamic and contested site where these tensions are played out. By listening closely to the rhetoric of these two powerful songs, we can gain a deeper understanding of the complex and ongoing project of imagining Nigeria.



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