**Creation: West African**

In the beginning the world was a watery, formless Chaos that was neither sea nor land, but a marshy waste. Above it, in the sky lived the Supreme Being, Olorun, attended by other gods, including Orisha Nla, called the Great God. Olorun called Orisha Nla into his presence and ordered him to make a world. It was time to make solid land and Orisha Nla was given a snail shell full of magic earth, a pigeon, and five-toed hen to accomplish this assignment. Orisha Nla came down to the Chaos and set to work organizing it. He threw the magic earth into a small patch. The pigeon and the hen began to scratch in the magic earth, and they scratched until land and sea were entirely separated.

When Orisha Nla returned to the Supreme Being to report on his work, a chameleon was sent with him to inspect the job. The chameleon reported good things and Olorun, satisfied with the good report, dispatched Orisha Nla to finish. The first place on earth was known as *Ife’* which means “wide” in the Yoruba language. Later, the word *Ile’*, meaning “house,” was added. Today the city of Ife’-Ile’ is the most sacred to the Yoruba people.

The making of earth took four days. On the fifth, Orisha Nla rested from his work. The Yoruba traditionally have a four-day work week and rest on the fifth in memory of the creation.

Orisha Nla was sent back to earth to plant trees, including the first oil palm. Olorun made rain fall from heaven to water the seeds, which grew into a great forest.

In heaven, Olorun began to make the first people. They were fashioned from earth by Orisha Nla, but only Olorun, the Supreme Being, could give them life. Orisha Nla, hid in Olorun’s workshop to watch.

However Olorun knew that Orisha Nla was hiding there and put him into a deep sleep., and so only Olorun knows the secret of how to bring a body to life. To this day Orisha Nla, through the agency of parents, makes the body, but only the Supreme Being can give it life.

*Story taken from:*

Bierlein, J. F. *Parallel Myths*. New York: Ballantine, 1994.

