

Resolving Conflicts in Igbo Trickster Tales

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Abstract

All pre-cultural societies of the world have trickster tales with which they celebrate the activities of very small animals or gods who defeat their more ferocious and stronger adversaries. These tricksters cheat, lie and do a lot of things that may sometimes, be against culturally accepted social behaviour. What is the effect of such stories in the lives of today's children who are the main recipients of these tales? In using the five conflicts resolution approaches--avoidance, cooperation, competitive, collaboration and accommodation--it has been discovered that competitive or fighting approach dominates over all the other approaches in the conflicts the tricksters are involved. This approach is mainly put into use by somebody who is all out to win the object of his quest without considering other peoples' interests. In order to study this, all the trickster tales in six collections of Igbo folktales were analysed and it was discovered that those which end with competitive approach constitute almost 80% of the 119 tales in those collections. The discovery is that these tricksters were created to teach the socially deprived to survive no matter what it takes. But since the ancestors would not like to disorganize their societies, the

conclusion is that they, in the process of trying to enjoin their offspring to survive all adversities, never envisaged the disunity that can erupt from such encouragement.

Keywords: trickster, conflict, conflict resolution, society, tactics

Introduction

In all successful stories and in real life experiences, there must be situations when the participants or the characters involved are in collision courses. When referring to real life, all humans, animals including insects, reptiles and even plants at certain times of their existence experience this situation which is known as conflict. The reason is that there is always the dearth of needed things which make life bearable. Under this condition, the little that is obtainable must be struggled for since self interest and survival are always at the back of most actions of all living things.

A social analyst has the following as the reasons that generate conflicts. According to him, these causes are: "...struggle over limited resources, inequitable resource distribution or other economic based factors; having contradictory value systems such as beliefs examples of which are religious, moral standard, culture, politics, etc;" "denial or manipulation of people's emotional needs such as love, marriage, care, etc," and "the form of information which people receive" (Enyioma 16).

Sam A. Uchendu in his definition of the concept quoted Joyce Hocker and William Wilmot saying: "Conflict is an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties

who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards and interference from the other party in achieving their goals” (10). Another analyst, Cyril Ositadinma Ozor also cites the definition by Chaplin thus: “Conflict is the simultaneous occurrence of two or more mutually antagonistic impulses or motives” (27). Farther, he has it that. “Forsyth... on his part, notes that conflict occurs when the actions or beliefs of one or more members of a group are unacceptable to and hence are resisted by one or more groups or members” (27).

Of all these definitions, that of Chaplin seems to capture the situation best since there are mainly two terrains where conflicts can occur. These are internal and external terrains. That of internal conflict occurs in the recesses of somebody’s mind as he considers certain situations which may be threatening or disorganizing his life. Situations like this may account for the reasons why some people may be seen soliloquizing or muttering to themselves while walking along the road. The fancies that can overpower mad people and make them to start chasing inexistent monsters can be cited as another example. On the other hand, the conflict between somebody and another person is an example of external conflict. All the other definitions above are harping on this type of conflict.

One may be tempted to ask: If there is a conflict between two persons and one of them does not know that there is a conflict, do we still call it a conflict in view of the above definitions? Yes, it is still a conflict but in its latent form. It is a very dangerous situation since one of the parties is not aware that something is amiss. Therefore, he has no prior information that can make him to protect himself. This is the situation when Duncan invited himself to sleep in Macbeth’s castle at

Inverness (Shakespeare 523). Had he known that his trusted army general would plan a treacherous action, he would not have walked into the mouth of an ambitious and hungry lion.

In Igbo trickster tales, many of the conflicts are of this nature. This is because the trickster is of a very sly nature, trying to have an upper hand wherever he finds himself. It is not only the Igbo trickster that does like this because this is one of the major tactics of all tricksters the world over. One can see it in the behaviour of Coyote, Hare and Raven of North America; Kweku Ananse the spider of the Akan people of Ghana; Zomo the hare of the Hausa people of northern Nigeria; Mbe or Ijapa, the tortoise of Igbo and Yoruba tribes of Nigeria; /Kaggen, the mantis of Malutis and /Xan tribes of South Africa; Brer Rabbit, Brer Anancy (also called Anance, Anansi, 'Nansi), the Spiderman of Jamaica and so on.

However, for the purpose of specificity, this study will particularize on tortoise, the trickster of the Igbo people of southeast Nigeria. Whatever that is the result here, can apply to the trickster of all other nations because all of them are the manifestations of the same character, being generated by the same social conditions, and since these nations at the time of creating these characters were at the same level of social development, what they came up with was the same, apart from the differences in their different languages and cultures.

A study done on many societies and their tricksters reveals that: "It could be stated as a general rule and defended fairly well by ethnographic evidence that the occurrence of trickster tales is directly proportional to the degree of oppressiveness of socio-religious restrictions" (Greenway 90).

It is in the process of overcoming these restrictions or in circumventing these restrictions that trickster tales came into being. It keeps on adapting to changes in society so as to accord well with whatever situation it is facing. The tricksters that existed during the food and fruit gathering era are the same in the industrial, computerized and mechanized civilization of today for they keep on adapting to changes in society.

The expectation is that whenever a conflict erupts, the situation has to be brought to normalcy so that none of the participants will lose that which is his and peace will be given a chance to reign. This situation which is known as conflict resolution has been seriously studied both in real life and in the field of literature. The two have been seen to follow the same structure.

One of those who did an in-depth study of the concept in the field of literature is Gustav Freytag. He discovered a five part structure in any conflict that moves to the stage of resolution. To him, this structure is placed in such a way that it forms a sort of triangular shape which some people today call Freytag's Pyramid. According to him: "These parts of the drama 'a' introduction 'b' rise 'c' climax 'd' return or fall 'e' catastrophe have each what is peculiar in purpose and in construction. Among them stand three important scenic effects through which the parts are separated as well as bound together" (34).

That Freytag mentions drama does not debar other literary works from fitting into this framework. That explains why it is being used here. In short, any well written story starts from an introduction during which the narrator or writer brings

about the preliminary details that can enable one to have background knowledge of the story. In the process, he brings about the protagonist and the antagonist. The interaction of the two brings about a conflict which then generates a rising action. The intensity of this gets to the highest point known as the climax after which the tempo starts diminishing until it gets to the resolution also known as the denouement or resolution. This, in the main, is what Freytag pyramid also known as Freytag triangle is all about.

That this is how all conflicts start and linger to an end can be seen in a similar analysis done by two social analysts in real life situation. According to them:

Conflict tend to be described as cyclical in regard to their intensity levels, i.e. escalating from (relative) stability and peace into crisis and war, thereby de-escalating into relative peace. Most scholars also agree that these cycles are reoccurring... also, most models divide both the escalation and de-escalation of the conflict cycle into phases. It can also be noted that in many cases the conflict model has taken the form of a U or an upside-down U (Swanstrom and Weissmann 10).

What Freytag calls a triangle is what these researchers call an upside-turned U. Therefore, Freytag's triangle can be used to study the conflicts in trickster tales. In the two, the final point of the conflict is the resolution of all that has been deformed or disorganized in the course of the conflict.

The essence of this research is to show that tricksters all over the world were created in order to make the socially and physically disadvantaged not to lose hope. Since he has disabilities, he has to make use of his brain as a survival tool. However, in the process of trying to survive, the trickster sometimes oversteps bounds and so, does that which is culturally abhorred since his only intention is to level the playing field and tower over those who are better endowed. But the trickster's overstepping bounds could not have been the intentions of the originators of the tales.

In spite of the usefulness of such teachings, the elders could not have envisaged that trickster tales can produce counter results to the rules and regulations they established to guide their offspring. In this way, such tales sometimes, bring about social disorganization in spite of their helping the children (who are the main targets the creators had in mind) to succeed in life. In order to know the insidious effects of trickster tales, the researcher studied tales recorded in six collections of Igbo folktales. These collections are: Ambrose M. Chukwudum's *Tales From the Forest World*, Romanus Egudu's *The Calabash of Wisdom and Other Igbo Stories*, G. C. Obodoechi's *Adventures of the Tortoise and Other Animals*, Philip Bordinat and Peter Thomas' *Revealer of Secrets* and Rems Nna Umeasiegbu's *The Way we Lived: Ibo Customs and Stories* and also his *Words are Sweet: Igbo stories and storytelling*. The total number of tales was 199. Then, the researcher looked at the way the conflicts in them were resolved. Of all the approaches used in conflict resolution the explanation of which will later be seen in the paper, 10.87% of the tales were resolved with avoidance conflict resolution approach; 2.17% with accommodation approach; 6.89% with

collaboration approach; 2.17% with compromise approach and 77.9% with competitive approach.

That the last mentioned has such a larger figure shows that it is a dominant and favoured approach in this type of tales. This cannot be questioned since the essence of this type of tale is to enjoin the socially, economically and physically marginalized to overcome shortcomings and move higher in the social ladder.

Each of such approaches has some characteristics that differentiate it from others. If a dangerous one among them is employed by a determined diehard, one wonders what the result will be like. It is under such a condition that lives are lost as in the case of a young monkey who during a famine saw Tortoise lying as if he were dead but underneath him was a dagger he would use in killing anybody who would fall into his trap (Ogbalu 39). In spite of warnings, he went to have the supposedly free meat. When he got near, Tortoise stabbed him and he died. This situation can also be seen in real life when people are poisoned, assassinated, beaten up or verbally abused.

The Trickster and His Tactics

Who is a trickster? Why is it that smallest of animals, gods, humans are normally chosen as tricksters. As an illustration, Hermes the Greek trickster god is just a messenger, not Zeus the father of the gods or Ares the god of war. Tortoises, Spider, Hare, to mention but a few, are just some of the smallest in the animal kingdom. Why did they not select Elephant, Tiger, Boa constrictor or any of the big animals?

In an online article, S. E Schlossor states that: “A trickster is a mischievous or roguish figure in myth or folklore that typically makes up for physical weakness with cunning and subversive humor. The trickster alternates between cleverness and stupidity, kindness and cruelty, deceiver and deceived, breaker of taboos and creator of culture” (n.p.).

In spite of his deprivations, the trickster must survive, and as it is the desire of everybody, he must have his voice heard in society. How can Tortoise, as small and hampered by his shell as he is, live in the same jungle where Elephant can trample all other animals under feet? Can Tortoise challenge Lion and other feline animals in any contest? Can he be fast in running to any source of food before others get there? One should note the truth in this online article which states that “The tortoise is unique because he among the tricksters is slow and plodding. He is used to encourage the children to use their brain as speed cannot always win the price” (Hempel n.p.). Therefore, since these tricksters are meant for children, the animals highlighted must be small so as to accord well with the age, stature and restriction associated with children who are yet to create conditions for their survival. Since people tend to be more comfortable and imitative of those that are on the same level with them, these children can be comfortable with the stories of the trickster.

In defining the trickster, Trudier Harris writes in an online paper that “By definition, tricksters are animals or characters who, while ostensibly disadvantaged and weak in a contest of wills, power and/or resources succeed in getting the best of their larger more powerful adversaries” (n.p.). For the trickster to turn his disadvantage to advantage, his weakness to

power, he has to make use of his mental ability. It is with this that he can survive in the jungle where the rule is for the weak to be trampled under feet. What is more, there is no rule in the jungle to control the behaviour of the unruly, domineering and selfish attitude of the inhabitants. It is because of this that trickery and the usage of brain power are applied in resolving conflicts in which the trickster is involved. But then what is conflict resolution?

Different Approaches in Conflict Resolution

The expectation when a conflict starts is that it will be resolved with utmost rectitude, or else, the combatants will have no breathing space. If it continues like that, the more powerful and brutal of the combatants will annihilate the life of the other. Also, if it continues for too long, many people or characters in society will be affected thereby destabilizing society. In this way, society will break into pieces resulting in total stagnation of all activities. In all, there are five approaches in resolving conflicts.

One of them is known as avoidance or withdrawing approach. In this approach, if one of the parties perceives his utter defeat if he continues, he can withdraw thereby distancing himself or even denying knowledge of the issue at stake. Some people like Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* can go as far as committing suicide (165). A lot of tactics can be applied. It may be that one of the parties sees his inability to win and so, he opts to distance himself from the conflict temporarily, waiting for a time when he can compete favorably. But, such a time may not come in time. Before it comes, his

opponent may have usurped the objects for which they are struggling or, he may no longer be within his reach.

As an illustration, consider the story in “Strength and Reason” (Chukwudum 78). In this story, a gorilla catches a woman in a forest and wants to wrestle with her. She accepts but says that she has to plait his hair first. They move to the shade of a tree. There, she ties his hair to the branch of a tree and tiptoes away. She later comes back with her husband who has bows and arrows with which to fight the gorilla. He shoots and hides but the gorilla discovers his hideout and wants to wrestle with him as well. But the man suggests:

Let us exercise our limbs very well before this wrestling. This exercise will be of great help to both of us. Start continuous somersaulting for seven plus seven times towards that side while I do the same towards this side. Go quickly and return to this spot where we shall wrestle... (Chukwudum 83).

It is in this way that both the husband and his wife escape from wrestling with the formidable ape thereby making this story a good one for illustrating how avoidance conflict resolution approach can appear in Igbo trickster tales.

Another approach in resolving conflict is accommodation conflict resolution approach. In this approach, one of the combatants has a very high concern for others and in this way neglecting his needs. Such people may be among those who are so spiritual and kind that their expectation is for the gain and bliss that will come in the next life, or among those who are much concerned with the maintenance of stable social

relationships. However, Sylvester Enyioma Ohajanwa points out that: “In most cases, people use this style as escape routes when they find themselves at cross roads over capable solutions to conflict” (22).

To illustrate this approach, take the tale in Egudu’s collection titled “A Debtor and his Creditor” (67). In this story, a man borrows some money for his marriage. When the friend demands for his money, he keeps on giving him one excuse after the other. This situation continues until one day, the creditor goes to his house. On seeing him, the debtor runs into his house and hides under his bed. Unfortunately for him, he is unable to hide his legs properly.

When the creditor asks the man’s wife where he is, she tells him that he has gone out to get some money from his debtor. The creditor who is at the time looking at the fugitive’s legs simply tells her: “That’s fine and fair. But please, tell him that any time he is hiding under his bed trying to escape from his creditors, he should learn to put both his feet completely under the bed. Good bye” (69).

Such a reaction in the face of such a provocation can only come from somebody who is all out to maintain his relationship with such an unreliable friend. This sort of resolving conflicts known as accommodation approach can only come from the antagonist of the trickster. The trickster can hardly exhibit such behaviour. Or look at the diehard trickster friend who has no way of escape. His only solace is that he has a bed underneath which he can hide and evade paying his debt.

Another way of resolving conflict is collaborating or cooperative problem solving. In this approach, the combatants come together in order to see how they can resolve their conflict so that none will lose out totally. Rather, each will gain partially and at the same time, lose partially. As seen by Ochinya Ojiji:

... the parties do not avoid the conflict. They work with each other to find a solution that is satisfactory to both of them. It is about dialogue in which the parties listen actively and gain understanding of the other party as well as their own. That understanding enables them to develop a solution that satisfies the concerns of both parties. It is a situation where both parties win (122).

An illustration can be given using a tale in G. C. Obodoechi's collection titled "The Tortoise Ambition" (29). It happened that Tortoise collected all the wisdom of the world and put them in a calabash. While tying the calabash with a rope which was hanging round his neck, he was unable to climb a tree where he wanted to hide the entire wisdom. "On his failing to climb the tree with the gourd in front, an animal hunter laughed at him and instructed him to hang the gourd at his back" (30).

When Tortoise who felt that he was in possession of the entire world's wisdom heard this reasonable advice, he knew that there was still remaining a modicum which he failed to collect. He then broke the gourd into a thousand pieces. "Today wisdom is scattered in small pieces throughout the world and anyone can still acquire a little of it if he makes a thorough search" (30).

If not because of the hunter, the little wisdom left uncollected would never suffice for the entire humanity. In this case, the laughter of the hunter moved Tortoise to scatter the wisdom with which he filled his calabash for all and sundry to be benefitting from. But if the hunter has rebuked him or challenged him, he could not have been easily made to change his mind. According to Ozor in his analysis of this approach; “I win, you win. You cooperate with the other party to find a resolution with a mutually satisfying outcome” (195).

The fourth of the approaches is compromise approach. In describing this, Ozor writes that “You resolve the conflict quickly and efficiently by seeking a fair and equitable split between your respective positions” (195). Those involved are the sort of people who value fairness in their dealings with others. Their expectation is that their antagonists will also be like them and so grant to them an equitable share of what is being contested for. As asserted by Ojiji:

Compromising involves finding an expedient mutually accepted solution which partially satisfies both parties. In other words, parties split their differences and make concessions in order to resolve the conflict. Compromise becomes necessary in situations where the positions of the parties are so incompatible that the two cannot be reconciled without one of them losing something in the process.... This is winning some, losing some situation (123).

For an illustration of this approach as used in folktales, one can look at Rems Nna Umeasiegbu’s “Tortoise and Lion” which is in his *Words are Sweet* (37). In this tale, King Lion

hired all the other animals except Tortoise to work in his farm. When Tortoise got the news, he went and hired the services of Rabbit who would dig a tunnel from his house to Lion's farm. Through this tunnel, he went to the farm when the work was going on. Being a competent musician, he started entertaining the workers with his guitar, telling them to drop their tools and dance.

Then, "All the workers threw away their hoes and began to dance. At noon, food was brought to them. They all ate and continued to dance. At night, everyone went home, tired but happy" (37). When this was repeated the following day, somebody went to the King and enquired if Tortoise was among the workers. When he received a negative answer, he told the King that Tortoise could be behind what was happening. It was only then that Tortoise was consulted and the disturbance stopped.

In this tale, the conflict that originated from the neglect Tortoise received had to stop when the King of the whole animal kingdom had to swallow his pride and detestation of the trickster. Before then, he had lost two working days and the money and food wasted in those two days. He did not demand for a refund or even an apology. That he was far stronger socially and physically than Tortoise was not taken into consideration. He had to swallow his pride for peace to reign.

On the other hand, Tortoise who was infuriated by the slight and negligence meted out to him did not bother again. Even his payment to Rabbit was also neglected. Just like Lion, he had to bear his loss as soon as he was apologized to. For Ozor, the result was "We both win; we both lose" (195). After

that incidence, Lion had an additional worker thereby gaining; Tortoise had to earn more money, more social respect and food on daily basis, thereby gaining. The fact that he then started associating with others is an additional gain for all the animals would start having a better opinion of him. From being an ostracized citizen, he has now obtained his freedom of association. All their loses have to be swept under the carpet. That the King has seen the result of his action is a sort of warning. He will never try such a thing again.

Finally in this consideration of conflict resolution is the confrontation or fighting or competitive approach. In this approach, the parties may use any available means to get their desire. Some can go as far as attacking or even killing their antagonists. This is because they view failure as an extreme form of loss and humiliation and so, they employ whatever they can lay hands on in order to win as seen by Ohajanwa: “Confrontational or competing dispositions are observed in the following attitudes; (i) Assault (ii) Murder. Others even feel that a permanent solution is to eliminate the life of an opponent. Unfortunately, this will escalate the conflict by creating other severe and complicated conflicts” (21).

This approach which is used in nearly 80% of all the trickster tales surveyed in this work most often end in catastrophe. That it dominates other approaches shows its being preferred by the composers of the tales. That also shows the influence it has on society and on the children for whom the tales are composed. For an illustration of this type of approach, one can look into Umeasiegbu’s *The Way We Lived* for the tale “The Story-telling that took Seven Years” (136).

In this tale, King Ahucho wanted to hear a story that would last for three years. Any person who succeeded in telling such a story would be rewarded with all the King's possessions – including the queen. But if the teller failed in narrating such a tale, he would be killed. That is how a man known as Ikeaka lost his life.

The next person who came up after many people have been killed was a schoolboy who told the story of: "...a king named Ego who had a big store where all the maize he cultivated for the last twenty years was packed. It so happened that there was a little opening at the window and through this opening a weaver-bird used to come in to carry off a grain of maize" (137).

At this point, he tells the members of the audience to be reciting the nonce-word "Furukpo wai". He started singing how the bird flew in and left with just a grain of maize and the audience recited "Furukpo wai" for him. Even when he was asked what happened next, he only repeated how the bird flew in only to fly away with just a grain of maize. At a time, he started demonstrating with his hands the bird's action. This continued till night and he was told to go and sleep. In this way, this story lasted for seven years--far above the three years required by the King. That is how the schoolboy became a King and married the queen.

In none of the tales so far seen are there records of deaths of characters apart from this one. That shows how dangerous competitive approach can be. If this competition is in games, there can be referees and a set of rules. But in this one, the competition is an unregulated one between two parties

who are hell-bent on winning the objects of their desire. That accounts for Ikeaka who first lost his life and all the others that followed. That also accounts for the winner who never took the boredom and repetitions in his tale into consideration. This method further supports the point that the survival of the trickster is as a result of his outthinking his adversaries. Also, since he is in a disadvantaged position, he makes use of anything that he finds handy.

The questions now are: Does it mean that this heedless and unregulated competitiveness is what trickster tales hoist on society? Is it not the opposite most especially, after a consideration of Catharsis theory? Is it not Aristotle who states that such insidious conditions will be purged "... by means of pity and fear..." (139).

Competitive Resolution Approach and Social Learning

Among the Igbo people, there are many tricksters that feature in their tales. Some of the regular ones are: Nwaebunuko, the ram who is the son of a foolish mother, Sheep; Mbenwa-aniga, the tortoise and Nza the sunbird. But apart from the three, there are occasional ones which can come in the form of humans, animals and even plants. In all, only Tortoise has been elevated to the status of a hero. The two others were created to be curtailing his excesses and those of other animals. But in spite of their hindering activities, Tortoise is so popular that his name has gone even into proverbs because of his popularity. According to one of such proverbs: "*Efobe ifo ma akpobeghi mbe, i mara n'ifo ebidobeghi* -- Having a folktale session without mentioning Tortoise means that the folktale narration is yet to start". In view of this and in view of the tales which

are used to narrate his exploits, how are Igbo children affected? Do children emulate him or do they go against him and his activities? These questions can be asked because of the fact that stories do a lot of transformations in people's lives even when the people are unaware of such transformations. As Judy Iseke-Barnes puts it:

The worlds created in the stories [and imbibed by] those who heard the stories, impacted upon their understandings of the world in which they lived. Copeway suggests that stories have an important impact on the children in her nation. The stories are endeared to them and become located in their understanding of the world and life. They also aid in forming and strengthening the social habit of children (25).

Therefore, there is no iota of doubt that the stories one hears affect one either positively or negatively. If the trickster tales affect negatively, it all means that Igbo children may like to behave like the major tricksters whose exploits are celebrated in uncountable number of tales. If it is positively, the result is that the children would like to distance themselves from them in spite of the fact that these tricksters who survive in the midst of the jungle were created to appeal to them. These tales are meant for them, and during moonlight plays, in the school, at home, during television and radio programs, they are bombarded with the activities of these rascals

Among those who are of the opinion that children when bombarded with such tales turn against the activities of

the trickster is Alvin B. Kernan. This researcher quotes a research conducted by somebody. According to him:

For a six-week period, Feshback and Singer controlled the television viewing of two groups of boys from a number of schools. One group watched only programs with high aggressive content, while the other watched only programs with low aggressive content. An attempt was then made to measure the aggressive behavior of the two groups and it was found that the boys who had watched the programs with high aggressive content were significantly less aggressive in their behavior (69).

One wonders what sort of machine these scientists invented to help them to measure the aggressiveness of teenage children. It would have been more believable if it is written that some of the boys were scared of aggression because of what they saw; some were so excited that they started retelling and demonstrating the episodes they watched; yet, a third group would just be silent, saying nothing. To tell us that all those that watched the programme “with high aggressive content were significantly less aggressive” is quite unbelievable and is in contradistinction to available scientific research results.

This observation came out because of what Jennifer L. Luke and Catherine M. Myers recorded:

Today’s children are exposed to more violence than ever, be it on the news and in their neighborhood and they are bombarded with violent television [programmes] and toys. Many educators and others

concerned with children's well-being believe that this abundance of violent entertainment reflects a culture that promotes aggression as a way to solve conflicts (1).

The present researcher is of the view that this last citation captures the result of such programmes with high aggressive content, for in actual fact, children imitate what is available to them. Since Tortoise is a hero, every child likes to be a hero like him. That can explain why some children have been nicknamed *Nna-mbe* which means the father of tortoise. The actual meaning of the name is that such children have become a compendium of trickery. Others are called *Kirigho*, meaning bundles of wisdom and trickery.

This researcher used to go to the village stream where he was competing with his friends to see who would stay the longest inside the water without coming to the surface to take in some air. While some would dip their heads into the water and come to the surface immediately, watching for who would come up first for them to dive in again, others would simply dive in and come to the surface when they run out of breath.

The tricky children did so because they were playing the script enacted by Sunbird as it is recorded in the tale "The Witty Sunbird" (Bordinat and Thomas 49). Sunbird agreed to go on a hunger competition with his friend Cuckoo. The trickster Sunbird was no match to Cuckoo and so at nights, he would stealthily creep out and eat whatever he found. Whenever he returned, he would shout to Cuckoo to come out of his nest and show himself. After a time, Cuckoo starved himself to death and his competitor took one of his bones which

he turned into a flute. In real life, whatever children are exposed to is what they grow up with.

Concerning the above experiment, one can see that no experiment of that nature ever took place. What they reported was the classical 1963 experiment of Albert Bandura which they twisted out of shape in order to make it to tally with their preconceived notion. But no matter the import of their trickster application, it is on record that:

Albert Bandura, Dorathea Ross and Sheil Ross (1963) studied that role of imitation for learning aggressive behavior. They asked two groups of children to watch films in which an adult or a cartoon character violently attacked an inflated “Bobo” doll. Another group watched a different film. They then left the children in a room with a “Bobo” doll. Only the children who had watched films with attacks on the doll attacked the doll themselves using many of the same movements they had just seen. The clear implication is that children copy the aggressive behavior they have seen in others (Kalet 236).

This aggression can be equated with the competitive approach. What is more, whether the child watches the aggression or hears about it, the result is the same since the two actions end up at the same place--the child’s brain and memory. That can explain Fernald and Fernald’s assertion after they reported a similar experiment. According to them, “In one instance, some children watched a symbolic model, meaning a person who is not actually present but appears only on television, the radio, or in a story” (26). That of television is

visual. That of radio and story is aural. The two led to violence at the end.

That this is the intention of the Igbo creators of the tales can be seen in one local proverb: “*O di njo irichaa nri mmanu, nyuo nsi ojii* -- It is bad for one to defecate black feces after eating red oily food”. Like must beget like and never the opposite. Therefore, the expectation of all parents of Igbo origin is that their children must behave wisely and escape when forced to a suffocating corner.

Violence whether from television or from stories affects the children to become used to violence or aggression as the case may be. When they become used to it, they can show aggression without seeing it as something very dangerous. It then becomes part of their lives. This is also the opinion of Camille B. Wortman, Elizabeth F. Lotus and Charles Weaver in their joint publication. According to these researchers, “What is perhaps most disturbing is that television violence has a desensitizing effect. The more people see it, the more they become inured to it. The result is that people, become more accepting of aggressive behavior and less likely to be upset by it” (621). When something “becomes more accepting” to somebody, does the person embrace that thing or distance himself from it? The sure guess is that the person consciously or unconsciously will imbibe it as a way of life.

That this competitive approach of the trickster has been permeating into the psyche of many generations of Igbo children and indeed all African children, can be seen in the activities of Negro slaves both in the Caribbean islands and

America. They went to those places to put trickster strategies into action. In one of the records, M. Clay Hooper reports that:

Nat Turner... at a young age was forced to shed his “kind and docile” manner and adopt the tactics of masking and misdirection that were often the slave’s only defense against the arbitrary brutality of the slave system as well as his only means of personal gratifications In short, he adopts the trickster’s craft of translating weakness into power within a particular set of situational constraints (38).

In all sincerity, it was not only Nat Turner who applied trickster techniques as a survival strategy as he was taught by the tricksters. A lot of records exist of such behaviour. In one of such records, Trudier Harris in an online article writes:

The records left by nineteenth-century observers of slavery and by the masters themselves indicate that a significant number of slaves lied, cheated, stole, feigned illness loafed, pretended to misunderstand the orders they were given, put rocks in the bottom of their cotton baskets in order to meet their quota, broke their tools, burned their masters’ property, mutilated themselves in order to escape work ... (n.p.).

The list of their trickster techniques has more in it. If these slaves were purged of such techniques, the above behaviour would not have originated. Rather, these slaves would have endured the hardship of slavery without applying all these trickster techniques. But like tricksters all over the

world, they had to show passive resistance and at the same time, doing untold damages to their masters.

That these slaves must have copied well what the folktales taught them can be seen in the observations of Europeans when they came to the African continent. They heard these trickster tales being narrated, and understood it that the trickster character was created because of them. They, the whites, were with superior ammunition and were surrounded with colonial might. But the blacks must survive. Therefore, they understood it that these blacks were equating them to the bigger animals that were eventually defeated by the smaller ones in spite of their might.

After one of such considerations, A. W. Cardinal writes that:

The Negro ... would have to devise some form of consolation, some means of somehow defeating his superior [the white man]. He [the white man] could only manage [being the boss] for a short while; he could not remain forever master (146).

This is also the view of M. M. Green when she got in contact with the Igbo people and listened to their trickster tales. She observes that:

Whereas direct *ago*... leopard possesses the qualities socially standardized in Igbo culture, there is a strong tendency towards over valuation of the opposite in *Mbe* [Tortoise], the indirect cunning one, so reminiscent one cannot help seeing of the white man as seen through Igbo eye (844).

Conclusion

In summary, these trickster tales replicate in society what they contain: lying, cheating, dissembling, survival no matter what it takes, to mention but a few. It is highly erroneous to assume that they breed the opposite of what they contain. But on a closer look at the Igbo society with all its rules and abominations as stipulated by a female deity known as Ala or Ani or Ana (depending on the dialect), it is crystal clear that the Igbo ancestors never envisaged that in the course of enjoining their offspring to survive that their offspring would go all that far. But that is what is obtainable in the real life of today.

Concerning those who wrongly apply Catharsis theory and come up with a wrong result of the impact of trickster tales in society, one can take a brief look at “social learning” which is a topic in psychology and which can be seen in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* CD-ROM. The editors of this encyclopedia also look at this issue under discussion and come up with a result similar to the one stated here. According to them:

Two opposing theories have been propagated; one claims that the viewing of violence will allow such drives to be sublimated (experienced vicariously thereby lessening the drive) while the other claims that such viewing merely increases the drive. Evidence appears to favour the latter theory (n.p).

Finally it is on record that trickster tales affect children who at that age have not understood why they should not start behaving like the trickster. If they grow with such inclination,

they can never leave that type of behaviour. Therefore, even at adult age, they still put into use everything at their disposal in order to survive. But by judging from the rules of society, it can be surmised that the originators of the nation could not have wished their offspring to achieve success using such head techniques.

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