

The Pedagogic Structure of Igbo Folktale: Lejja Tortoise Tales a Case Study

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ABSTRACT

Lejja is a town in Nsukka Local Government of Enugu State (south-eastern part of Nigeria). It is often categorized among the northern Igbo tribes of Nigeria. Although its dialect differs from the general Igbo, its cultural beliefs are almost the same as those of other Igbo speaking tribes of Nigeria. An analysis of Lejja tales reveals that Tortoise, the symbolic trickster character, represents wisdom in two ways; firstly, as a character who excels as a result of his innate wits, then secondly, as a character who falls victim to his own ploys. Structurally, the weaving of the latter stories is done in such a way that the excesses of Tortoise in the former category are checked, in other words his feeling of invincibility among the other characters are controlled. This paper vividly portrays the nature of the checks technically woven into the tales and tries to elucidate further the lessons of the trickster stories: extreme wisdom is needed by man to solve the society's intricate problems, but its use against one's neighbor or for selfish reasons is an unacceptable societal value.

1. INTRODUCTION

In African traditional societies, folktale as well as other forms of oral literature performs the dual function of entertainment and instruction. While it serves as a means of relaxation after the day's work, it also functions as the repository of a society's identity, indigenous belief systems and traditions. Accordingly, Isidore Okpewho has that:

such information is contained in the various forms of oral literature practiced in the society—songs, narratives, proverbs, riddles, and so on—which are delivered either privately (e.g. mother to child, artist to apprentice) or publicly (e.g. in moonlight entertainment or in open performances by skilled artists). Through the media the younger members of the society absorb the ideas that will guide them through life and older ones are constantly reminded of the rules and ideals that must be kept for the benefit of those coming behind them (1992: 115).

Furthermore, tales play didactic functions in society because they emphasize the strong qualities which members of a society should emulate and ridicule

weaknesses which one is encouraged to repudiate (Garunji Chesaina 1994:85). Such narratives are, in most cases, a structural triumph of the good over evil. The trickster tales, for example, are intended to propagate good behavioural patterns as ingenuity, courage and wisdom as well as ridicule negative values like laxity, sluggishness and laziness.

This study develops further the educational quality of Tortoise tales among the Lejja people which have also emphasized the weave of triumph of good over evil. Adopting a structuralist approach to narratives, this paper elicits meaning through juxtaposed oppositions and their eventual relation to a larger, overarching system or structure.’ The ‘good’ and the evil’ are therefore studied in line with their didactic preoccupations to the larger society in which they have been created.

2. LEJJA PEOPLE

Lejja is a village community located south-west of Nsukka town in Enugu state of Eastern Nigeria. It is bounded in the north and south by Obimo in Nsukka Local Government Area and Ozalla in Igbo-Etiti respectively. It shares common boundary in the east with Ede-Oballa and Opi both in Nsukka Local Government Area and in the west with Aku in Igbo-Etiti and Nkpologu in Uzo Uwani.

According to the 1963 census, Lejja had a population of 13,582 people but in the 2006 census, which is the most recent, the figure has increased to approximately 67,000 people. Adada River, which flows into the Anambra River, derives its source from Ugwu Esha in Lejja. Adada River is the only significant body of water within Nsukka Local Government Area and there has been a belief that the river shifted its former source at Elə Ohe, the foot of a hill at Obukpa village in Lejja, to where it is located presently.

The seasons, just like any other place in Nigeria, are divided into rainy and dry seasons and the rainfall is just enough to support savannah grasses with scattered pack of lands of shrubs. The general coolness of weather in Lejja might have been as a result of its location in a valley that is trisected by hills.

The traditional occupation of the people is agriculture, trade and crafts. However, many people at the moment have gained employment in the civil and public service. Lejja is well known for farming-farmers keep short-horned cows, sheep and goats in large numbers together with their subsistence farm work. The presence of hills makes the weather suitable for such animals as the farmers sustain themselves adequately from the proceeds as their cows were exchanged for the local beads (ákà) and elephant tusk (òpə) during their early pre-colonial trade with the people of Nkanu and Ozalla in Nkanu Local Government Area.

Today, palm produce, black beans and Nsukka yellow pepper form the people’s cash crops. Black beans used to be their major specialization but recently most farmers have shifted towards the Nsukka yellow pepper due to the

huge profit made from it. Crops as yams, cassava, and three-leaved-yam are however still grown. The men, in most cases, cultivate the land while women help in weeding, processing palm fruit, weaving and so on. Farm implements are still rudimentary, most prominently hoes and machetes.

In the pre-colonial era, crafts such as weaving, smithing, wood carving and basket making were practiced on a very low scale. Archeological research finds undoubted evidence of a viable smithing industry in the relics of slag blocks at Dunoka village and at the foot of Ugwu Nkwo, very close to the Nkwo Lejja market.

Lejja people speak a dialect generally classified under the generic Nsukka language, a language variant slightly different from the standard Igbo widely used for communication and academic purposes. A great talent in language understanding competence is usually required to those who come from other Igbo-speaking parts of Nigeria to understand the Nsukka variant. Moreover, slight differences in the different Nsukka dialects tell the particular community an individual hails from. Lejja, therefore, apart from being classified under Nsukka, has its own variant that immediately identifies the speaker's origin. For example, such words as *nonwe/nohwu* (here/there), [*A nọ m nonwe* (I am here)], [*A nọ m nohwu*. (I am there)] are *ebe a/ebe ahụ* respectively in the standard Igbo variant. These words could be realized as *nwa/hwubehwu*, *mbena/mbéèná* and *mbenye/mbenfe* respectively in other Nsukka dialect variants from the main settlers of Nsukka (collectively known as *Ideke* and comprises Nguru, Isiakpu, Nru, Echara), Obollo and Enugu-Ezike.

3. LEJJA PEOPLE AND TORTOISE MYTHOLOGY

Tortoise, which belongs to a class of reptiles called *Chelonia* or the turtle, is known as *mbekwu* or *mbe* among Lejja people and it is highly sacred, symbolic and metaphoric. Tortoise is accorded a great respect because it is the first and most important thing that the land accepts for appeasement whenever it is desecrated. This desecration is better known as *nsọ alā* and it is a particular crime that the Earth deity prohibits the traditionalists from doing in order to enjoy fruitful relationship with the land. 'Earth' here represents a man's household and it is defiled by adultery. For any pronounced case of infidelity in marriage, the impending punishment from the deity could be a poor yield of crops which is intended to enhance hunger, infertility in the family lineage, madness and series of deaths in the household. For such crimes, people say that *alā na-awa madu mbe* (Earth demands tortoise from a person). On the question why Earth requires a tortoise as a sacrificial gift, Fidelis Nwotobo, a seventy-five-year-old traditionalist, suggested that it could be a result of the fact that Tortoise, just like the dung-beetle (*ádà*), cannot just be found anywhere. Both have a special habitat known as *egbam* and as such, they have *Egbam ádà*, (the

dung-beetle land) *Egbam idāde* (the earthworm land) and *Egbam mbekwu* (the tortoise land). Therefore, they are said to be scarcely seen.

Any perpetrator of adultery must admit guilt for any pacification and reconciliation process to start. The ritual is necessary to liberate the family and its entire generation from the wrath of the Earth deity and, most importantly, to reabsorb the erstwhile excommunicated sinner into the community. The pacification and reconciliation ritual demands a cow (which represents the man); a she-goat and a hen (to represent the woman), and the tortoise which denotes the Earth deity. The goat and cow are killed at the *onu alā* (Earth's mouth), which is located somewhere in the man's compound, allowing their blood to drip into a hole dug at the spot. The tortoise is buried alive in that same hole while the cow's and goat's meat are eaten as a communal ritual meal which terminates any malice between the offender and the people. After the meal, everyone goes home happy.

Because of the fact that the tortoise is used for the above-mentioned sacrifice, its meat is regarded as one of the *anākəriṃpəmas* (sacred meat) of Lejja. There is no punishment attached to whoever eats it; the meat is rather avoided as a mark of respect for the supreme deity because the people do not find it reasonable enough sharing *Alā's* favourite meat. They equally make it clear that the tortoise is not worshipped in any way. Furthermore, Tortoise among the Lejja people represents an evil omen in the sense that it is believed to serve as a messenger of the *dibias* (medicine men). It conveys the charms made by medicine men to the individuals whom they are meant for. The *dibias* tie the *əkpari/əkpa ogwu* (charms) to the tortoise's body and send it off on an errand to an enemy. The charms, in most cases, comprise some personal belongings of the deemed enemy like strands of the person's hair, torn pieces of the person's clothes, earrings etc. A piece of cloth is used to tie the charms together and to attach it to the tortoise's body that conveys it to the enemy.

When a tortoise like this is sighted in the compound, it is covered with a basket and clamped down with a heavy object to ensure that it does not slip away. *Dibias* who specialize in this type of case are sought to neutralize the effect of the charm. This ritual is known as *iru ogwu* and it is meant to make the charm impotent. Nobody touches the basket except the *dibia*, who has fortified himself with superior charms. Should anyone touch it, the person takes up the effect of the charms whether it was or not meant for the person. The *dibia* on arrival takes the tortoise to *onu arushi* (the deity's mouth) and the evil effects are ritually compelled to go back to whoever sent them.

Tortoise shell is equally invaluable to the *dibias* as it serves as a box for their incantation equipment. It is believed that whoever uses the shell box is truthful, wise and reliable as the shell represents genuineness, but a recent case countered that opinion. A story is shared in Umuakpo, one of the villages in Lejja about a woman - *Mama Chinyere* - who lent her neighbour - *Mama Ugo* - a wrapper for a village dance. One day, *Mama Chinyere* came around to collect something from *Mama Ugo* and saw nobody around. While leaving, she saw her wrapper

washed and spread outside. She took it thinking that she had saved her friend the stress of returning it to her. When Mama Ugo came home and found the wrapper missing, she did not know how to tell Mama Chinyere about it, instead she sought the help of a *dibia* to help her detect the thief. The *dibia*, after incantations, told her that the thief was someone in their family. That proclamation generated a serious upheaval among the family members to the extent that Mama Chinyere heard it. She, in utter surprise, ran to Mama Ugo and told her how she had collected her wrapper a long time ago but had forgotten to inform her about it. Fidelis Nwotobo, the narrator of this story, made it clear that that particular *dibia* usually used the tortoise shell to carry his incantation tools to capitalize on the people's belief.

In Lejja tales and proverbs, Tortoise is the trickster symbol which is always associated with the term *awuwọ*. *Awuwọ* encapsulates such character traits as cunning, wisdom, and fast thinking as one Lejja aphorism says: '*Ọfọ m na-agorə gə bə ke ezə nẹ ụlọ gə bərə ndə nwerə uche kẹ mbe*. This expression translates as "My libations upon your household are that they shall be as wise as Tortoise". In other words, a very intelligent, articulate, fast thinking and clever person is always described as 'Tortoise.' This man/woman is sought after in times of conflicts as s(he) seeks peace through his/her unique wisdom, oratorical and fast thinking attributes. This individual earns a lot of respect as well from the entire members of the community.

In another sense, *mbekwu* connotes *Onye ihwu nabọ* (someone who has two faces), in other words, an unreliable person. When a mother warns her daughter: '*Ụmụ nwoke bə mbekwu*' (Men are Tortoise), she wants her daughter to be on her guard and watch her steps with men in order not to be taken advantage of because some of them are not reliable when it comes to relationship matters. Ironically, in some cases, this same act of 'deception,' is not looked down upon for it is regarded as a mark of smartness and a survival mechanism in difficult situations and the blame rather goes to the deceived. As a result, Tortoise's deceptive actions are often applauded and its stories are eagerly listened to by the old and the young.

Also, Tortoise can designate a cheat who always looks out for any possible means of getting more chunk/share of what he has in common with others. Likewise an individual who falls victim of his/her own ploy is referred to as a Tortoise as indicated in the widely used wellerism in Lejja: '*O laa kẹ mbe*' (S(he) has gone like Tortoise). This wellerism is made manifest in a plot where a stepmother sends her stepdaughter to fetch water at midday knowing full well that the spirits prowl the land at such an hour. She wants the daughter to be killed by the spirits. But when the daughter goes out, accosts the spirit (in the form of elderly woman carrying a bundle of firewood) and helps her to carry the heavy load, she is rewarded with every good thing on earth. When the stepdaughter comes home with all the goodies, the stepmother is both annoyed and envious. The next day, she impatiently waits for midday to come and pushes her own daughter out to fetch water amidst her grudges. Like in the first case,

the elderly woman appears again with her load of firewood. The girl becomes unruly to her and calls her ‘dirty, smelly, ugly, old woman.’ The old woman gives her an egg and advises her to break it only when she is in the presence of her mother. The girl happily goes home with eagerness to find out what her goodies are. So, immediately she comes home, she calls her mother out to the compound and breaks the egg. Two big canes appear and flog both of them to death. At the end of this story, the narrator would usually say: ‘*nya bæ ne Ọ laa ke mbe* (That means that she has gone just like Tortoise).

In some other cases, Tortoise suggests ‘ingratitude.’ This is exemplified in an anecdote where Tortoise was thrown in a cesspool where he stayed for eight days and on the ninth day, when someone came to pick him out, he said: “Take me out! The stench suffocates me.” Again, there is a proverb that says, ‘when you invite Tortoise to a meal, it is no use giving him water to wash his paws, because he will not appreciate it, for the more you give him, the more he will expect. Metaphorically, Damian Opata, an erudite scholar of Lejja culture and literature summarizes the appropriation of the Tortoise stereotype in expressions among Lejja people such as ‘*Ika ẹńyá*, (intelligence/wisdom) *Nkam ẹńyá*, (selfishness/egocentrism) and *Onye kayarə ẹńyá Okagbue Onwoẹńyẹ*’ (self-destruction as a result of excessive display of wisdom and intelligence). Just as *mbe* (Tortoise) represents all of the above in Lejja thought, so does it in the four Lejja Tortoise Tales we shall examine below.

4. STRUCTURE AND THE FOLKTALE

The structural approach of analyzing tales and narratives began in 1950s and 60s and had its roots in the linguistic approaches of Ferdinand Saussure. Structuralism, as discourse analysis, has traditionally been championed by scholars such as Vladimir Propp (who first applied it to tales), Roland Barthes, Claude Levi-Strauss, Algirdas Julien Greimas among others. Their major preoccupations focused on the questions simplified by Akporobaro, as follows: how do we tell stories? What constitutes the ontology of narratives, folktales, myths and novels? And how do we arrive at a determinable meaning?

The basic idea that cuts across all structuralist approaches is that the minimal unit of a narrative consists not in the characters that feature in the story, but in the characters’ actions. I choose to examine the Lejja Tortoise tales with Levi-Strauss’s theory which proposes that binary oppositions be identified in narratives, then subsequently, correlated. The choice is motivated by the fact that it is the only theory that enjoys a complete application to all the story types that are to be analyzed under this study because their meanings are not straightforward but suggestive. For that reason, therefore, it is impossible for them to smoothly fit into the structural narratemes and actantial units propounded by Propp and Greimas respectively.

For Claude Lévi-Strauss, binary opposition is a very important and appropriate structural principle to be applied not just to the folktale, but also to poems and every other type of text in order to unravel meaning. This principle upholds that the meaning of a word can be achieved by understanding the difference between that particular word and its opposite. Since nobody is born with meaning, words merely act as symbols for a society's ideas and those symbols are fixed by convention because there is no direct relationship between an object and the name it bears. According to Lévi-Strauss's principles, therefore, the understanding of a word like 'coward' depends on its opposing idea, 'hero' likewise, 'good and bad,' 'light and darkness,' 'boy and girl' and so on. Lévi-Strauss and Barthes also emphasize the fact that one side of the pair always appears to be more valuable to a society than the other, for example, 'good and bad.' One analyzes a text, therefore, by being able to identify the appropriation of these binaries as well as their correlates in a text.

Lévi-Strauss's approach, according to Isidore Okpewho, took its root from the sociologists Emile Durkheim and Marcel Mauss who opposed Malinowski's "idea of viewing various units of a society as continually working toward harmony and stability." They, conversely, proposed their own view which was that "society is being constituted of variety of elements and interests constantly in conflict with another and held in some kind of delicate balance of certain institutions." (178). It was this knowledge of conflict between elements in society that influenced Lévi-Strauss into applying the principle of conflict between conceived symbols and their constituent elements to tales and other cultural phenomena. Just like his fellow Structuralists, he reaches "conclusions that are bound to be out of ordinary and certainly differ from the rather superficial meaning that a story teller tries to ascribe to a tale" (180). Unfortunately, Lévi-Strauss's model has not enjoyed an overwhelming acclamation from oral literature scholars like Ruth Finnegan and Okpewho. Finnegan criticizes the conclusions the approach draws on tales as far-fetched which make them "turn out to be less illuminating in the face of the facts than a less ambitious analysis of the obvious meaning and context" (518). Okpewho, on the other hand, emphasizes the complex nature of the approach and the cumbersomeness, according to him, rests on the fact that the approach uses tools derived from mathematics and other disciplines like music to analyse a cultural phenomenon, and many other things like:

the social background from which a product (e.g a tale) comes [...], an anatomy of the tale to work out the abstract structure of relationships between the various units of its composition (especially the symbols) [...], and most important of all, an effort to demonstrate the psychological problem within the culture which the tale is trying to resolve by way of confrontation between these constituents. (178)

Apart from being complex, structuralism as a whole has been accused of "playing fanciful games with language" (180) operating at the level of the

inconscius as well as relegating the narrator's conclusion of tales to the background (181). However, in spite of the criticisms directed to structuralism, its principles are still applied in many research works and this study adopts it as well. Not devoid of criticism, theories are yet applied vibrantly in literary criticisms.

5. STRUCTURAL OPPOSITIONS IN LEJJA TORTOISE TALES

Four stories are examined in this study: 'How Tortoise Got a Wife', (ii) 'Tortoise and Cricket' (iii), 'Tortoise and *Nkwube* Woman', and (IV) 'Tortoise, Sheep and Bat' (see the Appendix).

For the structural analysis, I have the following structural divisions for the tales:

In the first two tales (Appendix 1 and 2):

- (i) Tortoise needs something that he does not have/ he deceives people/ he gets it/ he is innocent and acquitted.

In the last two stories (Appendix 3 and 4):

- (ii) (i) Tortoise needs something he does not have/ he deceives people/ he gets it/ he is found guilty and punished.

In all the analyzed tales, the meaning implicitly lies at the end of the stories and that is why in the two pairs of story structures above, (i) and (ii) there is a suggestive representation of the oppositions between 'wisdom' and 'folly' in line with the Lejja cultural tradition.

In the first story, the fact that Tortoise gets away with his crimes of cheating his victims suggests 'wisdom in smartness' and 'determination' which are survival traits needed by an individual to succeed in a world of poverty and competition. Tortoise in 'How Tortoise Got a Wife'

... Wanted to get married but he did not have any money. He thought out a plan and set out on a journey with three grains of corn. When it was getting dark, he entered a man's house and said to him, 'Oga please, could you allow me to pass the night in your house? I still have a very long way to go and it is still dark.' The man accepted him and showed him where to sleep. At night he left the corn to be eaten by rats and the following morning he asked for a replacement of the seeds. He got a replacement-a chicken and took it to another house. At night, he strangled the chicken and asked for a replacement the following morning. He got a goat, which he also strangled. He was given a child whom he laid among the princesses in the king's house. He again killed the child and claimed that they lay on him. Lastly, he was compensated with a princess. (Full story, Appendix 1)

In Lejja town, this attitude of independent and ingenious decision demonstrated by Tortoise is known as *Ika enya* which depicts intelligence on one hand and, on the other hand, an exploitative kind of wisdom which has a selfish end. It is often portrayed when someone uses intelligence to outsmart another person of a larger share of what they have in common or what actually belongs to that person. It also signifies the possibility of someone making a living at the expense of a weaker person's folly. In this story, Tortoise displays both *Ika enya*, and a determination to attain any successful height despite the obvious impeding obstacles by using his intelligence to dispossess people of their belongings and converted them to his. Tortoise needs to have a wife but does not have the money to go through the rigorous and huge expenses of marriage so, 'he thinks out a plan and sets out on a journey with three grains of corn.' He does not sit down and beg or even go to borrow because he knows that he may not be able to pay back. Better still, he does not see poverty as an excuse for not getting married; he goes on with his plans - armed with just one thing - his wisdom.

Likewise, in the second story, 'Tortoise and Cricket,' Tortoise wants to attend a burial where he will be required to render a dirge on the deceased and he does not have a good voice. He does not see this as an impediment to achieving his goal of attending the burial. He starts off by doing something; he sends for the animals to come and do a crying competition for him. Among all of them, he selects the best (Cricket) and asks him to accompany him to the burial ceremony as seen in the excerpt below:

Once upon a time Tortoise wanted to attend a burial ceremony and assembled all the animals together. He said to Goat, 'If your father died, how would you cry? Goat cried, '*Kpee! ----Kpee!* Tortoise said to him, 'Will you *Kpee* yourself out of this place.' Then he went to Sheep and asked him, 'If your father died, how would you cry?' Sheep cried, '*Mee! ---Mee!* Again Tortoise said to him, 'Will you *Mee* yourself out of this place.' Tortoise went to Cow and said to him, 'If your father died, how would you cry?' Cow cried *Muuu!---Muuu!* Tortoise laughed and said to him, 'Will you *Muu Muu* yourself out of this place.' When Tortoise came to Cricket and asked him the same thing, he cried.

These two stories highlight that the entrepreneurial ideology which is being campaigned vigorously in our contemporary societies started a long time ago in Lejja's Tortoise tales. Recently, graduates and youths are instructed to start up something and not sit down to wait for an already-made government jobs to come and fall on their laps. The stories teach that just like 'three grains of corn' finally metamorphose into a wife, and in the second story, Tortoise not only attends the burial but also is crowned a king because nobody had ever sang as beautifully as he did; something could actually come out from nothing. The excerpt below tells how Tortoise got his sweet voice after he had told Cricket to cry for him.

Tortoise was overjoyed with the song and asked him to sing it again. After that he invited Cricket to attend the burial with him. When the appointed day came, he set off to the burial with Cricket well hidden in his bag. When they approached the arena, he told Cricket to start crying. As Cricket cried, Tortoise rubbed some saliva on his eyes, opened and closed his mouth in the same rhythm with Cricket's cries.

Furthermore, among the Lejja people, wisdom as egocentrism and deception are represented by the two expressions '*A yadām onwo m ekāri onye?*' and '*E terā ugba e terā azu*' respectively. The closest translations are: 'whom do I leave myself to admire/watch?' and 'whether it is castor oil that is cooked or fish.' These two expressions are portrayed in the tales (Appendix 1 and 2) and they depict a disregard for innocence. The first emphasizes the placement of one's interest high above others in certain situations in life; and anything short of it is being regarded as utter stupidity. The second means 'by hook or crook.' Tortoise displays the first concept when he places his interest first and does not consider other people's feelings before he leases out his malicious actions on them. For example, in the first story, he says to the men, '*Oga* please, could you allow me to pass the night in your house? I still have a very long way to go and it is still dark.' All the men were taken in by Tortoise's innocent countenance and they kindly grant him his wishes without even asking after his background or thinking twice about his character. As far as Lejja people are concerned, the men paid the appropriate prices for their dumbness and stupidity while Tortoise is hailed for his schemes.

In the second story, Tortoise tells Cricket that he will accompany him to a burial but on the condition that he will be inside his bag just to perfect his fake performance. Instead of showing gratitude to Cricket for reaping from his art, the story has it that 'They later set food and wine before him. But while Tortoise ate and enjoyed himself, he threw in bones to Cricket in the bag.' Cricket, on his own part does not ask why he, who does the singing, should be kept in a bag. So, just like the men in the first story, he deserves no pity.

In the two stories, the two opposing traits - wisdom and folly - are suitably represented by the characters meant for each. For instance, Tortoise represents wisdom in both stories, while all the men who replaced Tortoise's lost items and Cricket represent folly because they easily succumbed to Tortoise's whims and caprices. In contemporary society, the men and Cricket represent those who do not look beyond the present when making their plans/choices in life (the men in the first story did not look beyond Tortoise's physical qualities before allowing him into their houses) and those who are mentally weak as well as blind to opportunities to the extent that they do not know when their rights are trampled upon and their opportunities of success outsmarted off them by brighter and smarter individuals. Tortoise is smart enough to take over Cricket's talent of good voice from him for free since he does not even realize the potential he has and the opportunity of excelling with it. In the same vein, this attitude can be

used to interpret the European's incursion into Africa where the Africans did not know the value of the raw materials they had or even how to positively transform them into wealth. They traded their ivories and manpower (slaves) for cheap objects like mirrors, hard drinks etc. Therefore, the Europeans who were smarter and represented by Tortoise in this case took over Africa (Cricket) through those 'cunning and mischievous' goods. Just as Cricket foolishly transfers his wealth (voice) to Tortoise because of the mischievous offer of attending a burial with him, so did Africans foolishly transfer their ivories, oil and even manpower (slaves) to the white man.

The '*E terā ugba e terā azu*' ('whether it is castor oil that is cooked or fish' by 'hook or crook') is another ideology among the Lejja people that justifies Tortoise's inhumane actions. '*E terā ugba e terā azu*' roughly equates with the English 'the end justifies the means.' The full meaning of the statement is 'whether you cook only castor oil or fish only, all we need is soup.' In other words whatever thing comes about does not matter; all we know is that we have that 'thing' (soup). The expression is portrayed in the fact that robbers in the pre-colonial era of Lejja people were admired and feared. They were seen as heroes because of the power a robber wielded in the community. Looting someone and getting away with the act was a status symbol as it marked the power the looter had over the looted. The looted was made caricature of for being stupid and foolish. That attitude was in recognition of the fact that it required a great skill and cunning for one to rob and get away smoothly with the items in intact. Such men's wealth was respected and the source was not looked down on either. In the interpretation of this author, the tradition frowns at such an action only when it become excessive – revealed by the expression '*iwe nke onye nwen ji ama*' (taking to the extent that the owner knows) – while craftiness, deception and shrewdness were tolerated in the pre-colonial Lejja society to some extent, as it is exemplified in Tortoise's gimmicks in the first two stories.

Generally speaking, there are glaring evidences of structural manipulation that compel a story to end in a certain way in order to represent all these cultural views. In the first story, the first man pays for Tortoise's 'three gains' of corn eaten by the rat in his house with 'a chicken,' the second man pays for the chicken which Tortoise strangled with 'a goat, then the third, with 'a child.' Tortoise again strangles the child and cries that the child died because the princess lay on him. He then gets one of the king's daughters in return. The exchanged items here - 'the chicken,' 'the goat,' and 'the child' all 'facilitate the transformation' of the 'three grain of corns' into 'a princess.' They also state explicitly that the items used to pay for the lost/dead ones are much higher in value than the lost ones and that gives Tortoise the leverage to succeed in his escapades. Also, the fact that the men, without any grudge, parted with their property, is another structural element infused into the story to ensure that victory tilts towards Tortoise's side.

Again, in the Cricket's story, the inability of the people to detect Tortoise's fake performance - that the voice they heard did not emanate from Tortoise but

inside the bag - serves as the structural facilitator that equally gives Tortoise the victorious edge over Cricket. The people insisted on crowning Tortoise king after hearing Cricket's side of the case just as this excerpt reveals:

They got there and saw Cricket who narrated to them what Tortoise did to him and how he was responsible for Tortoise's plight. They felt sorry after they had heard what happened and begged him to release their king for them and he did so. When they came back and confronted Tortoise with the allegations, he lied and swore that he had never seen Cricket in his life. The people immediately rounded Cricket up and killed him for daring to lie against their king.

Consequently, these two stories, implicitly and ironically, portray the conquer of wisdom over folly which is in essence used to impart the crude lesson of life that survival is really for the smart, the intelligent, the go getters and the fittest. The extreme price one has to pay for choosing to be foolish, ignorant and dormant about the things that go on around one is gullibility which paves the way for susceptibility to the manipulations of the wise.

In the last two stories, (Appendix 3 and 4), following Levi-Strauss's theory, we are able to decipher the opposition again between wisdom and folly; but in this case, the apparent 'wise one' is beaten. Accordingly, Hans-Jorg Uther (2006) opines that:

Defeat usually appears as an act of revenge by the cheated animal in the concluding episode of tales consisting of several parts. Such a theme is of interest because it characterizes the fox as a stupid animal. In this capacity, the fox is repeatedly cheated, a feature that on the other hand is demonstrated by tales about liberation from captivity (148).

For Uther, therefore, the themes of the stories of this type emphasize liberation from captivity as well as an act of revenge for wrong done to one. Obviously, the victims grow out of their innocence as a result of the bitter experience they have been put through by the wise one. Uther uses the popular 'Fox and Crane Invite Each Other' story to illustrate these 'revenge and liberation from captivity themes' where out of revenge the bird offers Fox food in a bottle in her house. This was meant as a payback for an earlier invitation by Fox, where she was offered, in a plate, food dissolved in a liquid. Uther (147) also argues that the deceived trickster theme could emphasize 'an appropriate compensation' for an evil plan or thought.

Uther's 'liberation from captivity' conclusion on the tales is credible as far as it is applicable to a story that falls within the purview of his illustrations (148). For example, 'Tortoise and the Nkwube Woman' (Appendix 3), where the woman learns from her past experience of Tortoise's mischief. Tortoise deceives her with a lie and finishes the food she was taking to her parents and she plans a revenge by cooking the same food again and keeping it beside a sticky-foo-foo-moulded image of a man whom Tortoise gets stuck to after he

had hit it for scolding him when he wanted to have a taste of the food). However, if I try to apply Uther's views to my No 4 story and my first pair of tales (How Tortoise Got a Wife and Tortoise and Cricket) whose meanings are indirect, I may not be successful. This is because in the former, 'Tortoise, Bat and Sheep' the avenger in the extended episode is a different character altogether (Bat) who later wins over Tortoise in the wit game after Sheep (the victim in the first episode) has died of hunger for falling prey to Tortoise's mischief (of going for the plates and cups when food and wine are served respectively). Even in the first two stories, it is obvious that the victims never grew out of their bitter experience with the trickster. Tortoise gets positive rewards all through. He gets not just a wife but a princess in the first story and is made a king in Cricket's story despite his malicious plans/thoughts and the pains he inflicts on his victims. Even Cricket who seems to have liberated himself from the bondage of ignorance of Tortoise's mischief is still suppressed in the tale despite his personal efforts to revenge the wrong done to him. For instance, when he discovers how Tortoise cheated him out of the food served to them and the bones he throws into him while in the bag, he becomes annoyed and:

He went to a medicine man and told him what Tortoise did to him and sought to know how he would revenge the wrong done to him. The medicine man punished Tortoise by gluing him to the ground after he had finished his food. When Tortoise finished his food and wanted to leave, he found out that he could not move. He cried and begged the people to go to the medicine man and find out what was wrong with him. They got there and saw Cricket who narrated to them what Tortoise did to him and how he was responsible for Tortoise's plight. They felt sorry after they had heard what happened and begged him to release their king for them and he did so. When they came back and confronted Tortoise with the allegations, he lied and swore that he had never seen Cricket in his life. The people immediately rounded Cricket up and killed him for daring to lie against their king.

Cricket's plans of getting even with his offender prove abortive which again suggests that sometimes actions of characters in a story are either predetermined or limited or even manipulated. Some of the trickster tales, like Uther's example, would just have ended at the point where Tortoise is glued to the ground to even out scores between the two characters but what is seen in this tale is that Cricket is still killed despite his innocence and his effort to prove himself so. In essence, the story fails to be classified under Uther's approach, from experience and liberation from captivity, and that adds to its uniqueness as a result of cultural manipulations.

In the last two tales, Appendix 3 and 4, again, there is a conflict between wisdom and folly but this time the roles of the characters are interchanged in the different episodes. Tortoise, the supposedly witty, later becomes the outwitted while the supposedly foolish ones turn out to be the wise; thereby portraying

fully the cultural belief of *iwe nke onye nwen ji ama* (taking to the extent that the owner knows). In the stories, the structures are in such ways that an episode repeats itself while the victors and the victims are swapped as seen in the plot of story No 3:

An Nkwube woman prepared a very delicious meal of *echicha* that she wanted to take to her parents. Tortoise came to fetch some charcoal for fire making and saw food kept outside. He quickly makes up deceptive actions to enable him to get at the food. He deceives the woman, finishes the food and left free. The woman later learns of her deceit and prepares another meal and sets it as a trap for Tortoise. Tortoise comes back for another food but falls into the trap and was caught.

The first episode ensures that Tortoise is given the room to get what he wants-food. He deceives the woman by telling her that her house is on fire and the woman falls into the trap by leaving her food behind while she runs home to check her house out. Tortoise finishes the food, the little he left was just meant to perfect his decoy that there was still food in the pot. He filled the pot with his faeces and spread the remaining food on top of it. The fact that the woman could not decipher the difference between the horrible stench of the faeces and her food is another structural facilitator meant to achieve victory for Tortoise. But once Tortoise starts to feel invincible and proud at cheating others, the second episode comes which is a repeat of the previous actions. While he succeeds in the first escapade, he is beaten in the second.

The woman recalls the Lejja technique of catching a culprit with what he/she likes; '*iye onye na-eri bā e ji e gbu e* (what one eats is what is used to kill one). She, therefore, goes home, prepares another *echicha* and deliberately leaves it outside. Tortoise, again, comes for another turn which suggests that he thinks himself a super star in the game. He, the master of all wits could not think fast that it could be a trap. When he moves to take some of the food, he is confronted by a voice from the moulded foo-foo image of a man. In a smart bid to cover up for his theft, he fights the image and gets stuck. The woman comes out and gives him the deepest flog in his life. The strokes of the cane gave him the lines on his shell.

The fact that Tortoise, the master of wits, could not differentiate between a moulded image and a human being beats the imagination. Again, he does not stop hitting the object when his right hand got stuck; instead he hits it with the left hand, kicks it with the right leg and at last, his left leg, up until he pasts his whole body firmly in the image. This also suggests a character's predetermined limitations by the story structure. Though these actions seem funny, they simply represent the saying that, 'every day is for the thief, one day is for the owner' and by allowing Tortoise to be caught, the story turns around to check Tortoise's excesses; otherwise it would have ended with the first episode where he cheats the woman out of her food. In that way, the moral of the story is portrayed, and

that is; '*Onye kayaarā enya Ọ kagbue onwoęnye*' (One destroys oneself as a result of excessive display of wisdom and intelligence) as Damian Opata put it.

Similarly, in the second story, the same pattern plays out. Tortoise succeeds in finishing the food set for him and Sheep at an occasion and goes for more of the adventures. In going for more, he falls woefully into the trap of his victim as seen in the plot of the story.

Tortoise challenges all the animals to a wit game and Sheep accepts to compete with him. He invites Sheep to accompany him to a ceremony and when the food came, he thought out a plan to finish the food alone. Sheep dies of hunger as he fell woefully into Tortoise's trap. Tortoise is happy with his victory and calls for another rival. Bat takes up the challenge, redresses Sheep's mistakes and wins over Tortoise.

Just like story No 3, there is a repetition of episodes. Tortoise he is pulled down when he begins to think himself powerful and invincible in the game of smartness and tricks. He wins over Sheep when he tells he him to go back for the plates and cups just the moment the food and wine are served. Sheep keeps going back for one item or the other up until the food finishes. Sheep is later stressed out and dies of hunger as a result of his foolishness; but the story does not end there. Instead, there is a repeat of the same actions with Bat and Tortoise loses this time. The choice of Bat (obviously a much faster animal) as a match for Tortoise and the fact that Tortoise, the master of wits, repeats the same type of game with Bath are structural techniques that gear towards achieving a defeat for Tortoise thereby portraying the lesson of the tale which is the same as tale No 3-self-destruction as a result of excessive display of wisdom and intelligence.

In the last pair of tales, repetition of actions in the form of episodes is the implicit structural tool used to achieve a limitation to the obviously domineering power of Tortoise in the stories.

6. CONCLUSION

In the stories examined, Tortoise as protagonist is represented in two ways: on the one hand, his wisdom is worthy of emulation (Appendix 1 and 2) and on the other hand he meets his self-destruction as a result of being unfair to others (Appendix 3 and 4). The last pair of tales therefore check the excesses of the first pair and this parallel structuring of the tales to counter each other goes a long way to support the introductory premise that story structures (apart from the theme) could equally emphasize and impart moral lessons. Although, extreme wisdom is needed by man to solve the society's intricate problems, its use against one's neighbour or for selfish reasons is an unacceptable social value.

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APPENDIX 1

How Tortoise Got a Wife

Once Upon a time, Tortoise wanted to get married but he did not have any money. He thought out a plan and set out on a journey with three grains of corn. When it was getting dark, he entered a man's house and said to him, '*Oga* please, could you allow me to pass the night in your house? I still have a very long way to go and it is still dark.' The man accepted him and showed him where to sleep. At night, he threw the grains of the corn on the floor and the rat ate them up. He began to cry and told the man to pay for his corn. The man begged him to forgive him but he remained adamant. He said to the man, 'If you do not have corn in the house, you have to give me something else in place of it.' The man saw that he was not getting anywhere with his pleas and gave him a chicken. Tortoise thanked him, took his chicken and continued with his journey. Again when the night came, he went into another man's house and told him, '*Oga* please, could you allow me to pass the night in your house? I still have a long way to go and it is already dark.' The man accepted him and showed him where to sleep. At night, he strangled the chicken and waited for the day to break. When the man woke up, he went to him and started crying; 'I am an orphan and the only thing I have in this world has died in your house and I am now left with nothing.' The man begged to be forgiven but it fell on deaf ears. Tortoise kept demanding something in place of his chicken. The man gave him a goat. Tortoise thanked the man, took his goat and continued with his journey. Darkness came again and he came to another man's house with his goat. Again he was offered a place to sleep. At night, again, he strangled the goat and waited for the day to break. Immediately the man came out of his hut, Tortoise started crying that his only belonging had died in the man's house and kept asking for a replacement. The man, after begging Tortoise for a long time, did not know what else to do. He gave Tortoise a child. Tortoise cleaned his face, thanked him, took 'his child' and continued with his journey. Then he came to the king's palace to 'seek shelter for the night.' The king offered him one but at night, he strangled the child and laid it among the king's daughters. When morning came and the daughters raised alarm about the dead child. Tortoise screamed, 'Oh! My child, my only belonging! Your daughters lay on my child and they have killed him. You have to pay me with one of them.' The king looked upwards to the sky and down. He did not know what to do since he had begged Tortoise to no avail. He simply gave out one of his daughters to Tortoise. He happily took his wife home, laughing at how he had fooled all of them.

APPENDIX 2

Tortoise and Cricket

Once upon a time Tortoise wanted to attend a burial ceremony and assembled all the animals together. He said to Goat, ‘If your father died, how would you cry?’ Goat cried, ‘*Kpee! ----Kpee!*’ Tortoise said to him, ‘Will you *Kpee* yourself out of this place.’ Then he went to Sheep and asked him, ‘If your father died, how would you cry?’ Sheep cried, ‘*Mee!----Mee!*’ Again Tortoise said to him, ‘Will you *Mee* yourself out of this place.’ Tortoise went to Cow and said to him, ‘If your father died, how would you cry?’ Cow cried *Muuu!---Muuu!* Tortoise laughed and said to him, ‘Will you *Muu Muu* yourself out of this place.’ When Tortoise came to Cricket and asked him the same thing, he cried:

Chee—Chee-chee—chee (twice) - - - - *Ndebeleke*
Ne nya jeko onwu - - - - - *Ndebeleke*
Otu nya n’ukwu tu nya n’ukwu - - - - - *Ndebeleke*
Otunya n’ukwu n’oruigde - - - - - *Ndebeleke*

This may be roughly transliterated as:

I am going for a burial- - - - - *Ndebeleke*
It may hit my leg or my waist - - - - - *Ndebeleke*
If it hits my waist it will begin to vibrate - - *Ndebeleke*

Tortoise was over joyed with the song and asked him to sing it again. After that he invited Cricket to attend the burial with him. When the appointed day came, he set off to the burial with Cricket well hidden in his bag. When they approached the arena, he told cricket to start crying. As Cricket cried, Tortoise rubbed some saliva on his eyes, opened and closed his mouth in the same rhythm with Cricket’s cries. The people were so touched by Tortoise’s cry that they crowned him king. They later set food and wine before him. But while Tortoise ate and enjoyed himself, he threw in bones to Cricket in the bag. That annoyed Cricket and he crept out of the bag. He went to a medicine man and told him what Tortoise did to him and sought to know how he would revenge the wrong done to him. The medicine man punished Tortoise by gluing him to the ground after he had finished his food. When Tortoise finished his food and wanted to leave, he found out that he could not move. He cried and begged the people to go to the medicine man and find out what was wrong with him. They got there and saw Cricket who narrated to them what Tortoise did to him and how he was responsible for Tortoise’s plight. They felt sorry after they had heard what happened and begged him to release their king for them and he did so. When they came back and confronted Tortoise with the allegations, he lied and swore that he had never seen Cricket in his life. The people immediately rounded Cricket up and killed him for daring to lie against their king.

APPENDIX 3

Tortoise and *Nkwube* Woman

Once upon a time, an *Nkwube* woman wanted to take food to her parents. She prepared a very delicious meal of *echicha* and the aroma was all over her home. She went into her hut to get more salt to add to her food and Tortoise, who came to fetch some charcoal for fire making, smelt it and thought, ‘Waow! What a nice food this woman has prepared.’ He took a little and the food was too much for him to resist. He quickly rushed home to drop the embers and come back for more. When he came, the woman had left but he met some passersby and sang to them:

Ka unu a hugworum nwanyi Nkwube ka o jeko Amankwo? - Kwurube Nkwube
K’ Opa echicha - - - - - Kwurube Nkwube
Unu di ya - - - - - Kwurube Nkwube
Ose di ya - - - - - Kwurube Nkwube
O di uso - - - - - Kwurube Nkwube

Please did you see one *Nkwube* woman on her way to Amankwo - *Kwurube Nkwube*
Carrying *echicha* - - - - - *Kwurube Nkwube*
With the right proportion of salt - - - - - *Kwurube Nkwube*
With the right proportion of pepper- - - - - *Kwurube Nkwube*
It is very delicious - - - - - *Kwurube Nkwube*

They told him that they saw her, that she was a little ahead of him and if he was fast enough, he could catch up with her. Tortoise ran faster but she was nowhere to be found. He again saw men farming and asked sang the same song to them. They said to him, ‘She just passed here; if you walk faster he could catch up with her.’ Then Tortoise ran and caught up with her. He screamed, ‘Woman! Your house is on fire o, everything there has burnt up!’ The woman, on hearing that, set down the food from her head and ran back to her house. Then Tortoise began to help himself with the food as fast as he could. He left just a little and went into the bush, filled the bowl of food with his excreta and covered it with the little food left. When the woman got home and saw no fire, she was very annoyed at herself for falling for Tortoise’s mischief. She hurriedly ran back, took her food and left for her parent’s house. The woman got there and everyone was happy to meet her. When it was time to eat, the food was shared out and everyone who tasted it was very disappointed with the taste. They found out that they were eating excreta and wanted to kill the woman. She cried and pleaded to be forgiven. The woman quickly remembered that that could be part of Tortoise’s mischief. She simply went home to prepare another one. She made a child-like figure with foo-foo and kept it in front her kitchen. When she finished cooking, she deliberately left the *echicha* outside. Tortoise came again and saw

the food. He was happy and immediately jumped at the food. The image shouted at him, 'Don't touch it!' Tortoise was annoyed and felt insulted by 'the child.' Tortoise shouted back at it, 'Who are you to tell me not to touch the food, don't you respect your elders?' The child did not talk back to him and the silence infuriated Tortoise. He walked up to the image and gave it a hot slap '*Kpaa!*' And his hand got stuck to it. He kicked at it to let himself go but his legs stuck too. So did his stomach and he was unable to move. The woman came, saw Tortoise stuck there and shouted; 'So it was you all along eeh!' She brought a cane and flogged Tortoise up until it made deep marks on his back. That is why Tortoise's shell appears the way it is.

APPENDIX 4

Tortoise, Bat and Sheep

Once upon a time, Tortoise assembled all the animals and told them that none of them could out-do him in the game of cunning. He also said to them that whoever deemed himself fit for the challenge should come and accompany him to a feast. Sheep came out and Tortoise told him to get plate and cup for the trip. When the day came, both of them set out for the trip. They came to a particular spot and Tortoise told Sheep to drop the plate there. They came to another spot and he again said to Sheep, 'Drop the plate here.' As they got there and were served with food, he said to Sheep, 'Do you remember that place we dropped the plate? Go and get it please so that we can use it to share the food.' Sheep ran back to pick up the plate but when he came back, Tortoise had finished the whole food. Again, they were served wine, Tortoise said to Sheep again, 'Do you remember that place we dropped the cup? Please go and get it so that we can use it and share the wine. Sheep ran back to collect the cup. When he came back, Tortoise had finished the whole wine. Sheep later became hungry and Tortoise fed him with water up until his stomach bulged out. Tortoise used palm kernel and plugged Sheep's anus to prevent the water from gushing out. When Sheep got home, his children saw his protruding stomach and were happy that their father fed well at the feast. As Sheep turned to enter his hut, one of the children called him and said, 'Father, there's something stuck on bottom, let me remove it.' He removed it and water gushed out. Sheep fell down and died. Tortoise reported his victory to the other animals and challenged them to come and try him. Another day came, and he assembled all the animals and told them that he was going for a feast and anyone who deemed himself fit for the wit challenge should come and accompany him to a trip. Bat came forth and said, 'I'll go with you.' They again set out for the feast and Tortoise told him to drop the plates and cups at certain spots. They got there and were served food, Tortoise said to Bat, 'Do you remember that place we dropped the plates? Please go and get it so that we can use it and share the food.' Before he could sit down, Bat was back. He said to Bat, 'Do you want the food that much? You can as well go on and finish it.' Bat sat and finished the food while Tortoise looked on. When wine came, the same thing happened. Tortoise did not eat anything and was very hungry. Bat fed him with water and plugged his anus with palm kernel to prevent the water from gushing out. When they got home, Tortoise's children were happy that their father fed well. As he turns to enter his hut, one of the children said, 'Father, come let's remove what is stuck on your bottom.' He removed it and Tortoise fell down and died. Bat assembled the animals together and declared himself winner.