

Stolen Identity Schemes and Drought in the Trickster Narratives of Igbo Extraction

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Abstract

This paper examines the intersections of stolen identity and drought as moral and socio-cultural metaphors in Igbo trickster narratives, revealing how traditional oral wisdom anticipates modern cybercrime dynamics. Drawing on selected Igbo fables from Ogbalu's *Mbediogu: Ako bu Dike* and fictional narratives by contemporary Igbo writers, the study examines how the recurring motif of theft—manifested through self-renunciation, identity cloaking, anonymity shielding, and "mass eating"—reflects both moral collapse and survival strategies during periods of scarcity. Through textual and ethnological analysis, the paper situates the trickster's ingenuity within Igbo cosmology, revealing how unbridled desire, moral laxity, and poor preparedness during "drought" prefigure the rise of stolen identity crimes in modern Nigeria. It argues that these traditional narratives do not merely entertain but critically diagnose greed, deception, and unproductivity as precursors to social and economic decay. By linking the proverb "*nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyo n'udummiri*" ("the firewood gathered in dry season warms one in the rainy season") to the psychology of foresight and moral responsibility, the paper redefines the trickster as both moral warning and prophetic figure. Ultimately,

it demonstrates that Igbo oral literature functions as a pre-digital ethical framework that critiques contemporary cyber-fraud as a drought-born tragedy of moral unpreparedness.

Keywords: Igbo trickster, stolen identity, drought, cybercrime, oral literature, African ethics, cultural philosophy

Introduction

Stolen Identity, the "fastest growing white-collar crime in the world," depicts a situation where "personal information is wrongfully obtained and thereafter used to commit fraud" (Cassim, 2015, p. 69). Koops and Leenes (2006) define the crime as the "intentional, unauthorized use of a person's identifying information for unlawful purposes" (p. 553). They further aver that "[i]dentity criminals do not steal identities: they use identity as a tool to steal money" (p. 553). According to Cross and Layt (2021), stolen identity also involves stealing images of a genuine person to create a fictitious identity. The impact of identity theft is far-reaching, owing to the significant financial and psychological costs it imposes on victims and organizations. (Gies et al., 2020).

Focusing on "the knowledge of the growing crime," Allison et al. (2005, p. 19) decried the crime's fastest growth rate among other offences. Sharp et al. (2005) highlighted the negative health implications of identity crime; they studied victims whose unresolved cases

of impersonation led to increased "depression" and "psychological emotions" (p. 131). DeLiman et al. (2021) examined the impact of identity crime on older adults. Similarly, Stachelka (2019, p. 138) observed that 'convictions for identity crime are still among the rarest outcomes' despite its high prevalence in Bialystok, Poland. In addition, Choi et al. (2021) estimated the 'fear rate of identity theft victimization. Extant literature on identity theft has privileged the rising and damaging nature of the crime and victim protection; little attention has been paid to identity manipulators and the cultural representations associated with their exploitation. Drawing on six Igbo trickster fables from *Mbediogu* (a collection of Tortoise tales) and two 'stolen identity' narratives by Igbo writers, this paper investigates identity theft schemes, highlighting the use of the Igbo motif, *nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyo n'udu mmiri* in the selected prose narratives. Through textual analysis, this article aims to reveal the prophetic role of the Igbo trickster figure in

foreshadowing stolen identity as the ill-fated firewood that ultimately offers false succor to indolent minds in Igbo society.

Stolen identity and cybercrime in Nigeria

Stolen identity or scam is among the crimes described as "419" in Nigeria. 4-1-9 refers to Section 419 of the Nigerian Criminal Code, and it is popularly used to denote crimes of deception Identity fraud escalated in Nigeria as a result of "the technological boost in the ICT sector in the year 2000 and the electronic-banking revolution which started in 2003" (Ebem et al., n.d, p. 1). Cassim (2015, p. 69) notes, however, that identity theft can be committed without technical means via "physical or traditional means or by mail theft." Instances of identity theft in Nigeria include cases of imposter candidates during national examinations, which are quite popular. This situation involves the "deliberate impersonation of applicants" by imposter candidates, commonly referred to as "mercenaries" or "merce," who appear in examination halls to take examinations on behalf of registered candidates who have hired them (Rufai et al., 2012, p. 120). Common identity theft strategies in Nigeria include email-based phishing scams, which Shaikh et al. (2016) describe as the unlawful use of social engineering and technology to obtain sensitive

information from internet users. Phishing entails fraudulent attempts to acquire usernames, passwords, and credit card details by masquerading as a trustworthy entity in an electronic communication (Ashiru, 2021). The term 'phishing' derives from an alteration of the word 'fishing,' where the perpetrator acts as the fisherman, the email serves as the bait, and the targeted victim is the fish. Basically, identity theft in Nigeria is mostly perpetrated through friendly fraud, stolen phone, and SIM swap. While "friendly fraud" refers to a situation where someone known to the victim is responsible for their impersonation, stolen phone identity fraud occurs when misplaced or stolen phones are not promptly reported to the bank, allowing fraudsters to make payments to merchants, purchase airtime, and settle bills. On the other hand, SIM swap fraud involves gaining unauthorized access to a victim's bank account by taking over their SIM card. In many cases, victimization affects both the sender of the money and the individuals whose identities are stolen. Although identity crime and its consequences have received considerable scholarly attention, relatively little research has examined the cultural factors underlying stolen identity crime.

The Igbo, stolen identity, and trickster studies

The Igbo, whose language is also known as Igbo, are among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. They comprise the five Southeastern states of Nigeria, listed in alphabetical order as Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu, and Imo. Significantly, the proximity of the Niger River to the region has contributed to the major occupations of the Igbos, which include trading, fishing, and farming. The Igbo's inclination towards trading existed long before the European colonization of Africa (Northrop, 1972; Egboh, 2022). Northrop (1972, p. 1) explains that "the archaeological sites at Igbo-Ukwu and other evidence reveal long-distance trade in metal and beads, as well as regional trade in salt, cloth, and beads at an early date." Remarkably, the Igbo, being closely associated with trade, are pursuing businesses worldwide. While the special *Mangala* dried fish variety, eaten throughout Nigeria, is supplied by the Niger River, virtually every home in Igboland engages in subsistence farming. As a tribe renowned for its outstanding ingenuity in trading and business, the Igbo storytelling culture has made a significant contribution to their mercantile prowess, particularly in consumer persuasion. Such trade-boosting verbal skills are born from the

strong precedence of folktale and other oral artistry in the tribe. Geographically and climatically, the Igbos inhabit the tropical rainforest zone of Nigeria, where thick forests of timber and firewood abound. Significantly, this climatic condition explains the presence of firewood as a symbolic object of power in the Igbo thought.

Although the Igbos have diverse traditional stories of their origin, they share the same cultural beliefs and philosophies about life. Among such beliefs are those that border on morality, which are perceived as contributing to social harmony and existence. Folktale, apart from its entertainment purpose, is the art of fleshing out the Igbo traditional philosophies and beliefs for proper appreciation by the people. Obiechina (1993, p. 39) explains that folktales are "told for amusement, entertainment, and education. They may deal with the experiences of individual human beings or animals. They often contain some moral or clinching exemplum, even though they are told essentially to provide entertainment, a strong didactic purpose is implicit in them." Nwachukwu-Agbada (1991, p. 19) proposes that "the Igbo culture enjoys popularity of the folktale" for many reasons: "it has an entertainment value, it

serves a didactic mode for child-rearing and it is a memorable artistic genre"; he further claims that "[a]lthough the audience of an Igbo folktale session is usually made up of children, the tellers could be adults or children; aesthetic verdicts could be delivered by anyone who is sufficiently confident of his or her knowledge." Likewise, (Nwaozuzu, 2006, p. 29) sees folktales as "a traditional prose narrative which evokes several images in the minds of the audience". In line with the opinions of Namulundah and Maree (2016, p. 1) that "folktales serve both descriptive and prescriptive roles by consistently depicting societal and cultural norms", it can be argued that folktales act as a medium for social criticism. Emphasising folktale's social functions, Ogbalu-Ekwenti (2019, p. 69) discloses that "in these folktales, the people's ideas, their culture, their world view and those important things that make for the unity of the people are artistically woven into these stories." Notably, folktales draw on everyday life experiences, and through the figure of the Tortoise, these lessons are transmitted to children at an early age, shaping their orientation toward both productive and counterproductive actions. Stolen identity in the Igbo language can be rendered with the words "identity" and "theft," which are

translated as "*njirimara mmadu*" and "*izu ohi*". The translation is, however, understood when the words are reversed as "*izu ohi njirimara mmadu*". Although the term "stolen identity" may appear recent in relation to cybercrime among the Igbo, comparable strategies have long existed in Igbo society and are reflected in trickster tales that highlight shortcuts to wealth and the consequences of idleness. Stolen identity is widely known among the Igbo traders as "*awarawa*" (sub-standard), "*akpuruka*" (adulterated), or "*adigboraja*" (counterfeit), which variously refer to different disguised and manipulated products. By branding locally made products as foreign, Igbo traders sell their goods at undue profits, presenting trickery as a pathway to success due to the exorbitant gains achieved. Trickster, a ubiquitous archetype in trickster tales, is often associated with cultural heroism (Weis, 2005; Samuels et al., 1986, p. 152; Pelton, 1989; Amissah-Arthur, 2019, p. 55). By identifying the trickster with the divinity of the gods, scholars depict the figure as a participant in the creation myth of a people. For this set of scholars, the trickster figure is a creator, knowledge inventor, saviour, and life changer. Tricksters are also associated with the invention of knowledge, for example, the Greek Prometheus and

Hermes, as well as the alchemical figures of Mercurius, as cited by Samuels et al.

While Amissah-Arthur (2019, p. 152) links Akan-Ghanaian *Ananse* to the gift of speech to mankind, *Eshu Elegba* of the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria is associated with trade invention (Wescott, 1962, p. 336)

Other trickster studies emphasize the mythical figure as symbolic of "trappedness", "imprisonment", "constraint" and "limitations", whose "breaking free" is "the principal goal" (Bassil-Morozow, 2014, p. 26). The trickster assumes the role of a slave and a servant, creatively surviving and exceeding the oppressive master. As a social leveler, the trickster excels despite his social constraints. Bassil-Morozow classifies Goldoni's Arlecchino, Beaumarchais's Figaro (M'baye, 2011), along with the Tar Baby and Brer Rabbit, within the category of trickster discourse. Also, portraying the "trapped" figure are studies on feminist emancipation (Jurich, 1998) in which women as trickster heroines save themselves from oppressive patriarchy through intelligence, and creatively chart new ways for others. Bassil-Morozow's (2014) portrayal of the trickster as "change" and "challenge" to the "existing order of things" shows how the trickster represents the psycho-anthropological concept of change, an

impulse that challenges the existing order of things.

Drawing on Jung's theory of the collective unconscious and human universality, some scholars identify the trickster figure as proof of the common origin of man despite racial and cultural diversities. William (2012), as well as Hynes and Dory (1998), using scientific knowledge of biology, reveal the trickster as an embodiment of general human traits, such as being good, musical, and silver-tongued. Pelton (1989) also explores the way the trickster links "animality and ritual transformation; culture, sex, and laughter; cosmic process and personal history; divination and social change". Furthermore, (Yeku 2015, p. 1) reconceptualizes the "subversive and anti-establishment behaviour of the traditional trickster of oral narratives" in "Akpor", a cyberpop hero.

In the Igbo context, trickster discourse reflects the universality of humanity, presenting the trickster as an ambivalent metaphor of social conduct that embodies both virtuous values and the futility of crime. He is both an absolute oppressor and a victim. Nwachukwu-Agbada (1991, p. 30) explains that:

Tortoise plays on the intelligence of both humans and animals in

the majority of trickster stories. In some tales, he may be caught and exposed, yet he somehow manages to survive and, in the end, makes fun of the person or animal that attempts to expose him. A tortoise is often regarded as a wise and old creature. As the Igbo say, '*O nwere mgbe Mbe bu okoro?*' ('Is there ever any time that Tortoise is a youth?')

Ogbalu (2019, p. 111) further describes the Tortoise as embodying a breach of the norm of reciprocity, expressed in the proverb, *aka nri kwọọ aka ekpe, aka ekpe akwọọ aka nri* (one good turn deserves another). Okodo (2011, p. 381) avers that the Igbo Tortoise symbolizes laziness, failure to achieve goals by handiwork, and "a resort to violence" to cope with life. For Okodo, the Tortoise serves as an instructive warning against the dire consequences of being unprepared for life's challenges. Obika (2018) discusses the trickster as a metaphorical representation of conflict resolution, which is based on competition and individual survival, with no regard for the interests of others.

Among the Igbo, the Tortoise symbolizes *Aghugho*, which encapsulates such character traits as cunning, wisdom, and fast thinking. Hence, it is said in an Igbo

prayer that: *Ofo m na-agoro gi bu ke ezi na ụlo gi buru ndi nwere uche ka mbe*, meaning, "my wish upon your household is that they shall be as wise as Tortoise" (Madu, 2016, p. 201). Tortoise, therefore, replicates wisdom, oratorical prowess, and the ability to command respect from all the members of the community. In another sense, *Mbekwu* connotes *onye iru abuo* and *onye kpuru ekpu na-ari ari*, meaning, "one with a double face" and "one who crouches and crawls simultaneously" by literal translation. This description applies to the masking of identity in order to obtain unmerited favor. Remarkably, Tortoise represents the Igbo philosophy of survival as depicted in the saying, *Onye ruo, o rie* (if one who works, he will eat). This thought drives the Igbo ambitious and competitive entrepreneurship identity. As entrepreneurs, most Igbos are wealth creators and migrants in search of survival.

Drought in Igbo Ethnology

Firmly embedded in the trickster narratives is the challenge of drought/famine, as well as societal vulnerabilities to such encounters. Drought goes beyond its denotative description of "shortness of rainfall" to encompass resource scarcity. Passioura (2007, p. 113) posits that drought

connotes "severe financial hardship among farmers in rich countries, malnutrition among farmers in poor countries, which if prolonged can lead to migration and desertification". Illustrating the universality of drought, Dirks(1993, p. 23) contends that "the extent to which societies experience drought depends on cultural definitions of property and exchange rights". In other words, the physical and chronic manifestation of hunger in any society clearly portrays its entanglement with drought. The United Nations (2011) declaration of famine as "food insecurity", succinctly described as "inability to find food", affirms Dirks's submission above. Pesler (2001, p. 53) also defines drought as "declining per capita water supplies with the demands of rapidly growing populations."

Among the Igbo, drought management is embedded in the proverb, *nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na anyo n'udummiri*, which can be translated literally as "the firewood one gathers in dry season warms one's body during the rainy season". Firewood represents power, comfort, hope, and inspiration among the Igbo. Beyond the role of cooking food and providing nourishment, firewood sales offer financial empowerment. As a source of warmth during freezing weather, its

availability is soul-soothing and physically comforting. Additionally, dry firewood signifies preparedness for future use. Gathering and drying firewood during the dry season (from November to March) ensures sustenance during the wet season (April to October), a period of planting and cold weather. The dry season facilitates the stocking and drying of firewood, its dryness symbolizing accomplishment and success, while the inefficient burning of wet wood conveys frustration, gloom, and despair.

Methodology

The data for this study were sourced from three primary texts: Ogbalu' (1975) *Mbediogu: Ako bu Dike*, (a collection of Igbo Tortoise tales), from which four stories were selected; and two fictive internet crime narratives of Igbo authors - Nwaubani's (2009) *I do not come to you by chance* and Okafor's (2018) *All our lives* (a short story). The primary texts were purposively selected based on the theme of stolen identity explored in them. Although *Mbediogu: Ako bu Dike* is written in the Igbo language, quoted portions are transliterated into English to maintain the indigenous flavour of the stories. The folktales drawn from the text are also numbered one to four for easy reference. The analysis of the structural connections among the trickster figures

in the narratives was based on Igbo ethnological philosophy.

Igbo Trickster Narratives and Stolen Identity Strategies

In a bid to distort their identities and manipulate the victims' sensibilities, the tricksters assume a new and completely different identity. Common to both tricksters of different eras are the ironic and deceptive strategies of self-renunciation, new identity cloaking, anonymity shielding, and mass consumption. Let us examine each of these strategies.

Self-renunciation and Identity Cloaking

Self-renunciation is the suppression of one's natural and inherent identity to create self-discrepancy. New identity cloaking, on the other hand, is the art of substituting true identity with new features. This act of successfully concealing one's true identity and substituting it with a strange one contributes greatly to the favorable manipulation of people's sensibilities. In line with Hu et al.'s (2017, p. 19) description of the concept of true identity as "the actual attributes that an individual presents in daily life" and Higgin's (1987, p. 319) definition of identity as "actual self", or "the current state of an individual" as against the

ideal self (an individual's wishes) to avoid sanctions and disapprovals from others, people are more likely to hide negative aspects of their true self. Aspects, such as physical attributes, racial identity, and beliefs, which are considered negative and capable of revealing the true identity of a swindler, can be adjusted at the moment of manipulation.

In a folktale, the Tortoise accesses food by pretending to be someone who can be greatly trusted. By paying close attention to Squirrel, he memorizes the codes to open the door. Such self-renunciation and cloaking skills are portrayed in the following stories from *Mbediogu*: *Mbe na ndi Mmuo kpuru isi* (Tortoise, The Blind Ghosts and Leopard) (55-60), *Mbe na Osa* (Tortoise and Squirrel) (MABD, 70-74), *Mbe na Akpa ji* (Tortoise and the Bag of Yam) (78-79), and *Mbe na Ewi* (Tortoise and Cane Rat) (80-84).

In story one, titled, *Mbekwu, Ndi Mmoo kpuru isi na Agu* (Tortoise, The Blind Ghosts and Leopard) (MABD, 55-60), there was famine in the land of the animals, and Tortoise, in his search for food with his son, meets Ghost, who is blind. Ghost is carrying a basket full of food, and that makes Tortoise's mouth watery. Tortoise follows Ghost, who stops at a spot and says, "Uzo meghee!" ("Door open!") to command the earth to open;

and once inside the earth, says, "Uzo mechie!" ("Door close!") (56). Tortoise, having observed Ghost's instructions closely, imitates Ghost's voice and repeats his words to let himself into the land of the Spirits to join in the feast. By properly mentioning the codes of entry into the land of the Spirits, Tortoise succeeds in opening the door, which is magically programmed to recognize voices only. So Tortoise is let into the Ghost land. Consequently, Tortoise has the opportunity to satisfy his hunger and that of his son.

Similarly, in story two, *Mbe na Osa* (Tortoise and Squirrel) (Ogbalu, *Mbediogu: Ako bu Dike* (MABD, 70-74), there was a period of drought and hunger, and Tortoise persuades all the animals to kill their mothers during the famine. Tortoise's persuasive skill is so influential that his envy against the animals whose mothers are still alive was unnoticed. Since his own mother is dead, Tortoise appeals to the animals' sentiments by 'educating' them on how beneficial the killing of their mothers would be at that time. Tortoise's argument that this would not only save the younger and more active generation from extinction but would also reduce the number of people to be fed was

convincing. All the animals except *Osa* (the Squirrel) agreed to the idea.

Osa, having presented a slave to be killed as his mother, hides his mother in the sky, where he intermittently goes to be fed and tended. Tortoise, moved by *Osa*'s healthy appearance, persistently drives *Osa* to disclose the secret of his hidden mother. In response to Tortoise's constant pleading to be given such a treat, *Osa* takes Tortoise to meet his mother after they had agreed to keep the outing secret. During the visit, while *Osa* sings a special song for the mother to throw down a rope from the sky for them to climb with, Tortoise pays attention to the coded song.

One day, during *Osa*'s forage for palm nuts in the forest, Tortoise, in a gathering of the animals, not only divulges *Osa*'s secret of good health but also pledges to lead them to the sky. When they got to the spot, Tortoise started singing like *Osa*: "*Mbe wee malite abu di ka Osa; nne Osa wee chee na o bu nwa ya, wee tupuru ha udo.*" *Osa*'s mother thought that it was her son and threw down the rope (72). Upon learning the animal's conspiracy through the Telling Bird (Nnunu Ogbama), *Osa* rushes back to the spot and sings another song, instructing the mother to cut the rope. All the animals fell and

broke into pieces when *Osa*'s mother cut the rope. Tortoise seeks a cure from Deer, whose medication makes him look like a recuperating patient.

In story three, *Mbe na Akpa ji* (Tortoise and the Bag of Yam, *MABD*, 78-79), *Mbe*'s strong desire for yams is portrayed. He goes in search of it till he comes across a stolen bag of yams left by robbers. Unable to carry the bag alone, Tortoise decides to transport it one tuber at a time. One day, Tortoise, having heard that the villagers have scheduled a hunting expedition in the forest where he has hidden the bag of yams, makes a plan. As the hunters approach the forest, Tortoise commands them in a threatening, loud voice:

*Laghachinu azu, o bu ogwu dibia
mere ka m tinyere n'akpa nke a.
Ndu m na ndu ezi na ulo m di
n'ime ya. Ndi na-agba anu agaghi
eru ya aru n'ihi na o na-aso nsi
egbe. Nkita adighi emetu ya onu.*
(Go back! It is my medication from the traditional healer that I put in this bag. Hunters don't go near it because it abhors gunpowder. Dogs are prohibited from it, too.)

Tortoise and his family took the bag of yams home after the hunters left it there.

In story four, *Mbe na Ewi* (Tortoise and Cane Rat) (*MABD*, 80-84), Tortoise refuses to join the rest of the animals on a hunting expedition. Out of laziness, he excuses himself, pretending to be ill. While the animals return from the hunt, Tortoise hides inside an anthill by the roadside, and disguises his voice to sound like *IGWEKAALA*, the Supreme Deity of the animal world. With a loud and commanding voice, he compels each animal to drop two of the animals it killed during the hunting expedition. The following conversation takes place between Tortoise and the first victim, *Ufu* (Hare):

Mbe: Taa! I bu onye?

Ufu: A bu m Ufu.

Mbe: Olee ebe I si?

Ufu: E si m ichu nta.

Mbe: Dobe anu abua n'ebe ahu!

Ufu: I bukwamu onye?

Mbe: A bu m igwe ka ala.

(Mbediogu, 81)

Tortoise: *Taa!* Who are you?

Hare: I am Hare.

Tortoise: Where are you from?

Hare: I went hunting.

Tortoise: Drop two animals there!

Hare: Who are you, please?

Tortoise: I am *Igwe ka Ala*,
Heaven-bigger-than-Earth.

Onye nwe mmadu na anumanu, the owner of humans and animals. (MABD, 81)

In stories one to four, *Mbe*, the protagonist, successfully attains his goal through a perfect scheme of voice renunciation and voice cloaking. By suppressing his true voice and perfectly substituting it with that of his target's, he is able to deceive his victims and achieve his desires. In stories one and two, the inability of the Spirit's door and *Osa*'s mother to decipher the falseness of the voice is due to Tortoise's flawlessness in the scheme of voice renunciation and cloaking. In essence, Tortoise's stealing of Ghost's voice deceives the "Door" into granting him entrance into the land of the Spirits. He further joins in the ceremonial meal with the Spirits and satisfies his hunger at the moment. Also, stories two and four clearly depict the Tortoise's ability to instill fear in other animals and hunters as a result of the impeccable denunciation of his seemingly soft, tiny voice, which belies a threatening identity. By assuming the identity of the supreme Deity (*IGWEKAALA*, Heaven-bigger-than-earth), Tortoise manipulates the animals' emotions and instills fear in them. The animals think they are communicating

with the grand Deity, and that makes them part of their hunted game at once.

The above manipulations depict phishing activity of scammers who closely observe Automated Teller Machine (ATM) users, and then cleverly memorize their passwords or PINs to access their accounts later. Depicting self-renunciation and cloaking in Okafor's (2018) "All our lives", the personas suppress their true identities as local Nigerians, substituting them with foreign identities. In search of greener pastures, the personas migrate from the village to the city, where they change their true indigenous names, for instance, from "Chikamneleanya, Ogheneakporobo, Abdulrasheed, Olarenwaju, Alamieyeseigha, Tamunodiepriye, Onuekwuchema, Toritsemugbone, or Oritshetimeyin" (Okafor 2018, p. 14) to "Matt, Jason, Alex, Garth, Arthur" (Okafor 2018, p. 17). In their disguised identities and extensive simile figuration, the personas say:

...We act like we own stretches and stretches of land, stately homes, estates, penthouses. We say we are cousins to the President of the United States, grandsons of the Queen of England, and close friends with the Prime Minister of France. We carry ourselves like people who don't shit.

In their new identities, the personas present themselves as fluid online mystery lovers, appearing as enchanting men, attractive women, gays, or the impoverished. Through these crafted identities, they successfully swindle money from their online lovers.

Portraying a stolen female identity for online dating is the character, Wizard, in Nwabuani's (2019) *I Do Not Come to You by Chance*. Wizard, a male member of "Cash Daddy's" (Boniface's) scam conglomerate in Umuahia, Nigeria, disguises himself as "Suzie" to elicit a marriage proposal from a man. On an appointed visit to the man, "she" excuses herself with a sudden business trip to Nigeria. With her passport stolen at the airport, Suzie swindles the man out of \$4,000 (163).

Additionally, Cash Daddy in Nwabuani's (2009) novel adopts the identity of influential individuals who have inherited fortunes stashed in foreign banks. With an agreement to receive a certain percentage of the money upon retrieval, the scammers seek a potential victim (*mugu*) for manipulation. Such is portrayed by Boniface, aka "Cash Daddy" who cloaked himself with the identity of "Professor Ignatius Soyinka, the astronautics project manager of National Space Research and Development Agency

(NASRDA)", (Nwabuani, 2009, p. 108) whose colleague is "trapped" in space and abandoned in space because of his racial background after the dissolution of the Soviet Union and its withdrawal of the sponsorship. Ojukwu's position in the spacecraft was taken up by the Russian cargo. Obviously, by characterizing "Professor Soyinka and his colleague, AVM Ojukwu", and the late General Abacha's wife respectively, Boniface (Cash Daddy) and Kingsley replicate the Tortoise's stealing of *Osa* (Squirrel), *ndi mmuo kpuru isi* (the blind Spirits), and *IGWEKAALA*'s identities. The exploiters mislead their victims into believing that they are interacting with a genuine person. Also noteworthy is the tricksters' use of real-life occurrences to lend credibility to their lies. Tortoise mentions *Igwekaala*, who is popular and revered in the animal kingdom, while Cash Daddy incorporates a genuine and historical event of space flight.

Anonymity shielding

In the stolen identity narratives of "Professor Soyinka and his colleague" and *IGWEKAALA* (in story one), the victims are deceived using masked identities. The true identities of both trickster characters studied are shielded by a medium, which limits the information available to their victims. Tortoise's identity is shielded

from the animals by the anthill and the make-believe grass he puts on himself, while the internet, which offers minimal face-to-face contact and a large space between the two parties, fuels the identity deception by online scammers. Also noteworthy is the tricksters' deployment of real-life situations to lend credibility to their lies. Tortoise mentions Igwekaala, who is popular and revered in the animal kingdom, while multiple personas, such as Cash Daddy, Kingsley Ibe, and Wizard, incorporate genuine and historical events, including the dissolution of the USSR and the death of Gen. Abacha.

Mass eating

Being eaten or chopped is a popular slang expressions in Nigeria, which imply being duped. Among the Igbo, "*Nwoke ahu riri m ofuma*" ("That man really ate me.") and "*D man chop me well*" (in pidgin) connote an action of immense duping. Mass eating, therefore, describes a situation of massive duping in terms of the number of victims targeted by the fraudster. The tricksters' ingenuity for "mass eating" is observed in the narratives as they employ repetitive schemes on a large number of people. While Tortoise repeats the same trick on different animals, the modern fraudsters also replicate the same schemes on victims in different vicinities.

Implications of Stolen Identity and Drought.

With a keen awareness of the enduring impact of drought, the crucial focus of the trickster narratives under study is the consequences of inadequate mitigation to "drought challenges". The narratives also focus on determining the future through present lessons as entailed by the Igbo proverb, which says that "*nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyo n'udummiri*" ("the firewood that one gathers during the dry season/drought keeps one warm during the rainy season"). Stolen identity is therefore viewed as the consequence of unpreparedness towards future realities. The inability to control a person's innate desires makes them vulnerable to crime in times of drought. In the Tortoise tales, story one, *Mbekwu, Ndi Mmoo kpuru isi na Agu* (Tortoise, The Blind Ghosts and Leopard) (*Mbediogu*, 55-60), Tortoise's insatiability breeds the negative attitudes of covetousness and greed in him. In the story, while searching for food as a result of famine, the sight of a food basket awakens his appetite, despite the scary nature of the carrier. He describes the Ghost food carrier as follows:

... *dimkpa toro ogologo, aji*
gbachiri n'iru, O tekwara uhie
n'aru ya dum, gbokwasikwa
nkirika akwa n'ukwu, burukwa

nkata nri juputara nisi, osisi nile dichiri uzo ka nwoke a sojisiri. (A tall, huge man with hair all over his face applied red dye on his body, had a ragged cloth tied around his waist, carrying a basket filled with varieties of food, broke all the dry wood along his path with his leg).

The story foreshadows the risks involved in taking what does not belong to one. While the story presents a daring portrayal of bravery, it also warns of the vicious cycle of consequences that follows such actions. A serious desire to loot public funds during times of drought in a country like Nigeria often accompanies a reckless conscience that undermines the nation, as well as the manipulation of accounts and audits. Likewise, in *Mbe na Akpaji* (Tortoise and the Bag of Yam, *MABD* 78-79), *Mbe's* strong desire for yams pushes him to covet a looted bag of yams dumped by robbers for personal use. Although this episode may appear as treasure during drought, it is significant to note that further schemes to protect the bag of yams from hunters plunge him deeper into the crime and risks of identity masking. He wades through the forest in the night to scare the hunters away with his disguised voice. He also fabricates lies

about the contents of the bag as being used for the treatment of illness. Hence, it is worth noting that modern identity criminals fabricate falsehoods to sustain their stolen identities.

In the second story, "*Mbe na Osa*" (*Tortoise and Squirrel*) (*MABD*, 70-74), *Tortoise's* unchecked envy drives him to betray his friend's secret, disregarding the long-term benefits of continued good meals had he kept silent. Beneath his pretense of inclusiveness lies a deeper envy of his friend's success.. Leaking a fellow worker's private achievement to the employer as proof of embezzlement of the company's funds without considering the employee's features replicates Tortoise's scenario in modern times.

In story four, *Mbe na Ewi* (Tortoise and Cane Rat, *MABD*, 80-84), Tortoise refuses to join the rest of the animals on a hunting expedition. Out of laziness, he excuses himself as sick and saves himself the stress of the hunt. The fact that he has no sustenance during hunger makes him susceptible to the stolen identity scheme, where he robs other animals of their game from the hunt. Similar to the case of Tortoise in this story is the "*school na scam*" trend among contemporary Nigerian university students. Due to laziness, some

individuals hide under the ill wind of unemployment after graduation, becoming school dropouts who will eventually turn to fraudsters, using stolen identities.

The extreme desire to change one's situation for the better drives mankind to the ills of stolen identity, as shown in this excerpt from "All Our Lives":

We live in wooden shacks alongside lagoons that smell of decaying fish and shit. We live in rented apartments with flush toilets and airy bedrooms. We live under bridges, with torn tarpaulins to cover us, feet pounding, and vehicles speeding above our heads. The air in this city is rancid with sweat, gas flares, and sun-warmed garbage. Some of us live in face-me-I-face-yous. We are tired of the daily bickering with our neighbours. Of the lack of privacy. Of infections contracted from pit latrines. We wish we had our own homes. Homes full of servants and pets, with pretty gardens, and fences to shield us from the foulness of this city (MABD 14).

Also depicting the overwhelming desire to change things and actualize dreams in

I did not come to you by Chance, is Kingsley's immature decision to join his Uncle Boniface in the fraudulent acts perpetrated by his syndicate, known as 4-1-9. Kingsley's impatience in balancing the figments of his imagination with reality is his major flaw. He dreams of a wife who would see him as a "deliverer" and "children who would have more than enough to attract the envy of their peers" from frequent trips abroad (MABD 47). The emotional trauma of helplessly watching the flame of his family's poverty gather momentum becomes unbearable to him. Also facing him squarely is the cultural burden of "marrying an Igbo girl," where "the list of items presented to the groom as prerequisite for the traditional marriage ceremony was enough to make a grown man shudder" (33). Fraud, therefore, seems the escape route for Kingsley.

Conclusion

The study has demonstrated that the Igbo trickster narratives—particularly those centered on the Tortoise—offer far more than entertainment; they constitute profound philosophical reflections on morality, foresight, and human vulnerability. By decoding the symbolic nexus between *stolen identity* and *drought*, this paper situates trickster practices within the larger Igbo

cosmology of survival and ethical responsibility. The recurring schemes of self-renunciation, identity cloaking, anonymity shielding, and mass eating reveal how deception thrives in contexts of scarcity, moral laxity, and social dislocation.

The Tortoise's ingenuity, while celebrated as creativity and resilience, simultaneously exposes the dangers of unbridled desire and shortsighted opportunism. His actions reflect the psychological and moral conditions that give rise to modern manifestations of stolen identity and cyber fraud in Nigeria. Just as the proverb "*nku onye kpara n'okochi ka o na-anyo n'udummiri*" warns that preparation in times of plenty

safeguards the future, the narratives caution that indolence, greed, and moral compromise inevitably produce drought—both material and ethical.

Ultimately, the paper reveals that Igbo oral literature serves as a pre-digital moral compass, critiquing the social and economic consequences of moral failure. The trickster, in his duplicity, embodies both human ingenuity and the harbinger of decay when knowledge and cunning are misused. Thus, these narratives serve as prophetic commentaries on contemporary Nigeria, urging renewed cultural consciousness, ethical reawakening, and disciplined foresight as antidotes to the enduring crisis of identity and moral drought.

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