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Tortoise's Deception: the Use of Threat at the Market Place

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Abstract

Ventures are attempts of people with efforts to improve their situations. These ventures are made with the hope of achieving successes. But some time not everyone can make efforts. Some people are lazy and so cannot achieve their goals by the dint of handwork. Such people resort to violence. This does not only obtain in the human society, in the Igbo man's culture, which are the land of human beings; land of animals in the folktales, tortoise is the trickster. He is the protagonist of folktales. He is very little in comparison to elephant, lion, tiger, dog and other animals. He does not work for his living. He hopes to cheat. During a certain famine, he resorted to threats of violence that scared animals away from the market place. This made animals to leave their wares for him. He then carted everything into his house and so solved his problem of hunger and starvation. When it was about to leak, he cunningly dealt with the being that wanted to report him. This story uses tortoise to symbolise human beings that use threats of different sorts to snatch people's possessions from them. Such people abound in Igboland.

Introduction

Human beings relate to one another in different societies. They have different communities, clubs, associations, organisations provinces, states, regions etc

by which they manage their affairs to help them lead their lives. In those divisions, management of the earth needs the provisions of various amenities in order to live very well. Human beings need good living and this is why people leave one place for another in order to enjoy better living conditions.

Bad places from where people migrate away are made bad by nature or man. Some towns could be uncomfortable because of lack of potable water as a result of God's creation. Deserts for example lack water to drink because God did not make water available there. In some riverame, people dread living there for fear of the rivers that overflow and wash away the faces of the earth and drown those living there.

Man makes some places uncomfortable to live due to some behaviour of his. In so many instances, man may be so criminally minded that he makes his environment uncomfortable. The criminal behaviours that make places uncomfortable to live in include armed robbery, rough driving occasioning harm, assaults, waylaying, blackmailing, fraud, corruptions, rape, forgery, arson etc.

For the environment to be peaceful enough for good habitation, man has to be of good behaviour. Good behaviour can only be exhibited by well nurtured people that have cultivated good character. The character can be negative or positive of course but the positive character is the type needed for the goodness of society. The positive character is the type that possesses a combination of qualities that make someone a rational being in order to inherently have morally– built standards that portray moral principles.

Positive character is the type we need so that society would be peaceful. When there is peace there will be no molestation of any sort. People will be able to go about their business without fear or favour. The peaceful situation would enable smooth life as people would work both day and night. This would enable maximisation of gross national productivity by which every nationale would benefit from his country. Peace is acceptable here in the sense of Francis (2001:17) who sees it as “absence of war, fear, conflict anxiety, suffering and violence and about peaceful co-existence as well as Ibeanu (2001:10). That defines it as activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within, specific societies in the wider interest community.

It is the peaceful situation that could make room for orderliness. Where there is order in everything people do, then there would successes in human

endeavour. This is because everybody would work hard in his career Aluko (2006:9) notes the necessity of orderliness:

Orderliness from all indications appears to be the first reasons why man needs to organise the society in which he lives. Roles are then identified and defined so that each individual knows his functions and what is expected from him as a member of a group or society. The ordering of the roles and the regulation of the position constitute the key concern of social organization this fulfils an enormous variety of personal and societal needs and shapes, the lives of the people. It ensures efficiency in that it demands that things be done in an efficient manner.

But when the character is negative, society is then identified with all sorts of vices including violence. Violence does nobody any good. It is not a good means of settling disputes as it destroys what disputes left over. It is the weapon of frustrated people. No reasonable person uses violence as a matter of first resort. It is only when people cannot honorably save themselves from problems that they resort to violence to see whether they can fight their way through.

Violence is a physically used force of negativity aimed at damaging things by hurting or injuring a being, meaning or killing him. It starts from the angry or wicked mind of the planner to destroy a non-living thing or kill a living thing. Violence is a negatively induced outburst of people which are occasioned by aggression cruelty retaliation or sheer wickedness. It should be abhorred because it results to the use of knives, clubs axes, guns or poisons in destructions of lives and property.

In the land of, animals Tortoise is a well known personality in the folklore of Igbo people, he is noted for lack of the capability to work hard and earn his living. He earns his living by cheating other characters in folktales. His laziness made him lack money with which to buy the goods of his choice from the market. His greed pushed him into planning to cheat other animals. He used threats to scare animals from the market place and took away their wares. He fed himself from the wares. He safeguarded himself so well that he made sure Monkey that would report him to other animals was killed.

Threat, which is an aspect of violence, is yet to be matched with an assault. Although threat is expected to be followed by a physical attack which may not come by it if it is an empty threat, nobody belittles it because it cannot be quantified because of the unknown magnitude of the follow-up of the threats.

Tortoise and Other Animals

Once upon a time, tortoise went to the market place. There he saw the wares on display. He had no money on him to buy his needs. He thought up a plan of taking away, the wares without paying a dime. His plan was to dig a tunnel from his house to the market place so that he would threaten the market when it is in full session.

He employed Rabbit to dig the tunnel. One day he went to the market place through the tunnel as he played a drum and threatened to kill whoever waited to meet him. The threat sent fear through the spines of all the animals at the market place. They all ran away leaving their wares. Tortoise went out of the tunnel and carted all the wares to his house through the tunnel. He went home and ate as much as he wanted while other animals lamented of their losses.

This matter continued until other animals got so much worried. They suspected Tortoise. They held a meeting without inviting Tortoise. At the meeting, they employed Monkey to hide on top of a tree while others would run away so that he would catch the offender.

On another day, Tortoise repeated his crime. When other animals had run away, he came out to cart away the wares. Monkey jumped down the tree and caught him. Monkey threatened to raise an alarm when Tortoise asked him not to do so that both of them would own the wares. Monkey accepted the condition. Not long after, Tortoise asked Monkey to allow him take the wares home so that he would know that they have really agreed to be friends. Monkey permitted him on the pretext that he would get a share from the wares they would collect when next Tortoise would strike at the market place.

Later on, the animals scheduled a meeting and Tortoise sensed that Monkey would give the account of his observation of the scare at the market place. He decided to make a plan of how to deal with Monkey. He took a drum to King Leopard's house and played sweet music for him. The music attracted some animals. When king leopard was about to go to the venue of the meeting, Tortoise asked that he accompanied him with music because of his leadership

position. Tortoise and the animals that gathered formed the entourage of Leopard.

At the venue, Tortoise played his sweet music so well that King Leopard and all the animals there danced for so long a time that they forgot the meting. Unfortunately King Leopard stepped upon the drum and the membrane tore into pieces.

Tortoise cried bitterly for the destroyed drum. This attracted King Leopard's sympathy for Tortoise. He asked Tortoise what it would cost to repair the drum. Tortoise told King Leopard that he needed strings to repair it. King Leopard asked Tortoise where he could buy strings and he told the king that it was from the sinews of Monkey's hips and legs. King Leopard jumped upon Monkey and tore the sinews in his body out. As a result Monkey was no longer alive to tell animals that it was Tortoise that caused the scare at the market place and carted away their wares for his satisfaction. So, Tortoise went unpunished (Ogbalu, 1873).

Comment: Tortoise's colleagues work in the farm, trade in the market and do all other sorts of things in order to earn their living. They use the money to buy their needs from the market.

But the case is not the same with Tortoise. He wastes the time he badly needs for working and earning his living in searching for the opportunities of exploitations against his colleagues. This is why he had no money to buy his needs from the market like other animals. When he goes round the market to see wares on sale without money on him, his greed and avarice always push him into crimes against other entities to make his life better.

He awarded a contract for digging a tunnel from his house to the market. He goes to the market through the tunnel as he threatens the buyers and sellers who could not fathom from where his fearful sound was coming. The threat that he would kill whoever waits to meet him scares everyone at the market place so they left their wares for him to cart away into the tunnel down to his house.

Other members of his community lost a lot to him and so decided to find out what caused them to lose their wares. They employed Monkey to hide in the tree to see whoever committed that offence. This is because Monkey can easily climb onto the tree. When next Tortoise struck, Monkey did his work well and caught Tortoise. But he ended up betraying the trust other members of the community had in him instead of rushing to the rest of the members of

the community and report Tortoise he joined Tortoise to see what he would selfishly get from the wares.

From there Tortoise deceived him into accepting that he (Monkey) would share from the wares of another market day but that he (Tortoise) would cart away the wares of that day. So he allowed Tortoise to go away with that day's loot.

Tortoise planned the elimination of Monkey to ensure he did not let the cat out of the bag. He knew that once monkey tells other members of his community of his crime, they would kill him. So he took a drum to the house of their king and joined his entourage when he was going to the venue of the meeting. As he planned it, the king stepped upon the drum and destroyed it. His demand of the parts of Monkey as the materials for repairing the drum brought about the death of Monkey. By this Tortoise ensured his safety as Monkey was no more alive to report him for his crimes.

Lessons from the Folktale

Folktales are seen as fictitious stories that are so cock and bull that they must not have taken place. But there are some elements of truthful events in every culture over which the stories were created and recreated over years from generation to generation. Okoh (2008:111) accepts this by stating that there are different facts in oral literature stories because the creativity, transmission and propagation of the literature depend on performance.

In relating the story of Tortoise's threat at the market place to society, we can see that Tortoise is a symbol. Tortoise symbolises human beings who defraud their fellow human beings from time to time since man came into being. So as we study the above story we should bear in mind that it is about deceitful human beings.

Some human beings can become angry because their fellow human beings annoyed them. The annoyance may take place over periods of time in which the wronged ones might have shown their anger and warned their offenders to retrace their steps. In some cases the offenders changed from their evil ways to became gentle to those they had been offending. They may tender apologies to those they offended. This makes the people offended to forgive and forget.

But whereby offenders do not change, the offended people become more aggrieved as time goes on. When the people offended cannot bear any more, they may resort to counter-attacks. In those cases, those offended have

decided to make it tit for tat. The offended persons may retaliate by any means they deem fit. Retaliations are generally known to be greater than the offences that occasioned them.

Retaliations can be instant. Some aggrieved persons may retaliate without any prior information to those that offended them, that is who would fall victims of their retaliations. Instant retaliations shock offenders to their bone marrows. This is because they always come out worse. They always do not have the tongue to talk. In many cases people who had appealed to the offenders to stop fermenting troubles have no mercy for the offenders when they are retaliating. They normally tell the offenders that the retaliatin served them right.

Some aggrieved persons complain a lot and when those that offended them do not stop their actions and apologise with remorse they are attempted to issue threats to their offenders. Their threats might have been aimed at frightening their offenders. In some cases the offenders might stop their bad behaviours to prevent threats issued with ultimatum.

Threats may be backed up with actions from those that issued them. Somebody may issue a threat and would not fail to carry it out because of the shame attendant to such failures. Such failures make someone unserious and portray falsehood on the one hand or the picture of a weakling that cannot fight back on the other hand.

When a threat is not backed with an action, it is an empty threat. An empty threat is issued by someone that would not retaliate. When the persons under the threat ignore the threat, the empty threat becomes clear. The person that issued an empty threat is made a laughing stock. It becomes better not to say anything than to boast without doing anything.

Threats are risky for both the person issuing it and the person it is issued to the reason is that a threat can attract the attention of an enemy who may exploit it. An enemy to someone that issued a threat may carry out the threat so that people would hold the person that issued the threat responsible. This is a usual occurrence which Igbo people warn against in their fable which states: "Tortoise threatened that when a panic arose in the market place, he would trample the pregnant woman to death. Eventually there was some confusion as a result of which people ran helter-skelter and somebody else trampled the pregnant woman to death, and Tortoise was held responsible because of his threat".

Another side of it is that the enemy of the person threatened who might have been searching for an opportunity to deal with him might seize the opportunity of the threat to attack his enemy because he would hide away as attention would be focused on the person that issued the threat. When such a thing happens, people would hold the issuer of the threat responsible. The fall of Tortoise trampling a pregnant woman is relevant here too in the sense that it is the issuer of the threat that did not commit the offence that would be held responsible.

Tortoise's threat at the market place was an empty one. He dug a hole from his house to the market place and used it to go to the market place to frighten the traders when the market was in full session. He disguised his voice as a dangerous being and the traders ran away for safety. He carted away the wares of the traders. This was painful to them so they set Monkey to catch the tractor. Monkey succeeded in finding out that it was Tortoise. Because Tortoise's threat was an empty one he could not kill monkey as he boasted that whoever waited to meet him would lose his life.

Rather than kill Monkey, he resorted to tricks for which he is known. Various authorities have indicated that Tortoise is trickish. They include Mbah and Mbah (2007:178) that describe him as the "Igbo trickster hero", birds in Achebe (1958:87) allowed him join them in attending a feast at the end described him as one that is "full of cunning" and "ungrateful", and Okodo (2011:60) states that Tortoise "learnt of all the feast during a famine and pretended honesty and they fell prey to his pranks by allowing him to join them".

By his trick he used sweet music to confuse animals in such a manner that they forgot to hold the meeting for which they had gathered. They were dancing to Tortoise's music until Leopard stepped upon Tortoise's drum and destroyed it. When Leopard felt sorry and demanded how to repair it, Tortoise told him that he needed snews in Monkey's limbs so Leopard killed Monkey to get the snews. The death of Monkey has eliminated the chance of exposing Tortoise because that threatened traders at the market place and carted away their wares when they ran away.

Conclusion

The folktale of Tortoise using trick to destabilise the market session and cart away the wares abandoned by the traders running for their dear lives is a fictitious way of reporting the crimes of various people against their fellow human beings. There is a likely story of some robbers who release canons

near a business area and people ran away for safety before they went in to cart away boxes of money from a bank. This is normal as armed rubbers normally release shots to scare people away from their business centres before they rob them. In some cases they enter when people are still in their offices including banks and ask them to lie down as they loot. So the folktale is not far from what obtain in society.

Like Tortoise has dealt with Monkey, people also commit different offences in order to cover the traces of their crimes. There are stories of those who embezzle the money in the coffers of both governmental and non-governmental organisations and cover the traces with arson. The criminals often burn the finance departments and any other unit in which the incriminating documents are kept. Apart from destroying documents, the criminals also take lives of whoever endangers their positions. That some people that would be witnesses in some cases were killed is not a surprise.

So the lives of cheats in our society started from time immemorial. The evidence is that the folktale that chronicled this started to exist a long time ago. Therefore, the folktale is a mirror of the cheats that steal by the use of threats.

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