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Yoruba Market Dynamics and the Aesthetics of Negotiation in Female Precolonial Narrative Tradition

Ropo Sekoni

The discussion of the depiction of women in Yoruba artistic products and the contributions of women to Yoruba aesthetic thought have enjoyed more attention in the hands of scholars of the spatial arts than from those in the temporal arts, especially the verbal arts. Studies by Rowland Abiodun, Henry Drewal, and Margaret Drewal have all paid close attention to the often overlooked notion of postrepresentational or unitive (nondualistic) imagination in Yoruba art in general and art by Yoruba women in particular. Summatively, these scholars have identified the prevalence of twinning, transvestitism, and the synthesizing of opposites as central and recurrent images in Yoruba spatial arts, especially masks and sculpture.

More specifically, Margaret Drewal's discussion of Yoruba ritual reveals the continuous celebration of the centrality of the human subject as a synthesis of its twin sides—male and female—in various Yoruba rituals (174-90). The ubiquitousness of gender play in Sango worship, Ifa initiation, and Agemo festival, in the form of cross-dressing, or ritualizing rebirth through the juxtaposition of the container (female and bowls) and the contained (male and contents of a bowl) graphically depicts the centrality of

negotiation, compromise, synthesis, and reintegration or fusion of the primordial splitting of the human self into two—Ase and Ato, menstrual fluid and sperm (“Iwori Meji,” see Babayemi and Adekola). The recognition of a “postfeminist” Yoruba cultural space by scholars of spatial and performative arts suggested in the writings of Abiodun, Drewal and Drewal, has enjoyed a history of muted discussion in the writings of scholars of Yoruba verbal arts. Apart from oblique references to the synthetic character of the subject and the androgynous character of spiritual power in Osa Meji (see Abimbola), and the tensional, ambivalent, and self-canceling properties of Yoruba oriki (see Barber), the centrality and recurrence of the hermaphroditic, unitive, two-sided yet unifiable subject or proto-protagonist in Yoruba verbal art has largely been ignored by scholars of precolonial Yoruba literature or orature. This neglect has, unintentionally, prevented the world from understanding (and perhaps learning from) the precolonial Yoruba tradition of “postfeminist” aesthetic discourse and social praxis.

The main objective of this study is to identify, characterize, and interpret the central role of Yoruba market dynamics (a female-dominated culture) in the development of Yoruba aesthetic and epistemological preference for unitive, nondualistic perception and depiction of the human life-world. The primary data for this investigation will be drawn from the female-dominated (though not female-specific) trickster-tale tradition of the Yoruba.

The socioeconomic and symbolic importance of the market in the Yoruba world has been copiously acknowledged by scholars of Yoruba culture. Niara Sudarkasa has, for example, described the Yoruba market as a female-dominated public space. While Yoruba women are peripheral to farming, an essentially rural and relatively private economic activity, they are the principal actors in the essentially urban, public-oriented economic activities of the market in Yorubaland. The location of the market in the center of Yoruba towns and near the palace—the citadel of political power in Yoruba towns constitutes an indirect semiotization of the centrality of the market—trading and exchange—to the social dynamics of life. Bernard Belasco has aptly described the importance of the market as the female-wing of the Yoruba political economy and the metronome of the Yoruba symbolic economy in his observation that the Yoruba market reflects “ideational elements that may be constitutive of social relations and permit us a view of society from within which is not otherwise accessible...” (Belasco 22).

The dynamics of interaction in Yoruba markets can be characterized as dialogic, defined by exchange and interchange of signs as means of constructing reality. Yoruba market dynamics can be described semiotically as a two-way flow of signs between two individuals serving simultaneously as sender and receiver of signs. Bargaining and haggling over the price of a commodity between vendor and buyer depicts metasemiotically that the value or meaning of any social phenomenon is open to negotiation by the human subjects that value and revalue such phenomena. As is obvious in the literature of Yoruba marketing, the price (value) of a good is never fixed.

Such factors as the urgent need of a commodity by its prospective buyer, the remote and immediate contexts of the buyer and the vendor—disease in the family, death in the family, recent loss of job, etc. of both parties—are major factors in the final price of an object agreed to by both vendor and buyer. The transformation of the market into a communicative/diplomatic space in which both sides exchange notes on their interests and constraints as prelude to the determination of the prices of goods and services, mimes, in a metasemiotic sense, the notion that social life depends on exchange and negotiation. More importantly, negotiating the prices of the means of biological and social continuity in the market depicts the importance of the complexity and plurality of perspectives in the construction of culture. The indispensability of negotiating rather than ordering or patterning as a necessary condition for stability in Yoruba marketing is well captured in Belasco's description of action in the Yoruba market:

Market life is laden with risk and uncertainty not amenable to rational control and scientific prediction because it is fundamentally saturated with a divine irrationality; its disorderliness is an aspect of sacred ambivalence. (26)

The Yoruba market is not only a physical site for struggle and negotiation over prices of goods and services between vendors and buyers engaged in the reversible role of namer and renamer; it is also, as Belasco has aptly acknowledged, depicted in sacred and secular discourse as a symbolic or metasemiotic site for the dramatization or ritualization of ambivalence as the ever-present face of things in the human life-world. The Yoruba portrayal of the market as a sign of ambivalence (lack of certainty of character) and disequilibrium (lack of stability of essence) is captured in the characteristics of the gods that are associated with the market: Esu and Aje (Belasco 29).

The ambiguity, ambivalence, and unpredictability of Esu is too well known to deserve further elaboration here (Euba). It is however, important to acknowledge the contrast between the icon of a whole calabash for Orunmila as the god of creation and the broken pots or calabash as icon for Esu as the god of mediation and discourse (see Gates). Similarly, Aje, a female god and one worshipped mostly by women as principal actors in the distributive sector of the Yoruba economy, is a god that also valorizes ambivalence. The ambivalence and her ever-present power of transforming things into their opposites is captured in parts of the oriki of Aje:

Aje, Ogunguniso
 Elebeje Ado
 Aso eni gbon deni go
 Aso eni go deni gbon
 [Aje, the Ogun in the market
 The owner of 1400 Icons of transformation
 The changer of the wise to a fool
 The changer of the fool into a wise man]

Describing Aje as Ogun in the market is a metaphoric transfer of Ogun's fusion and transformation of creative and destructive energies. Loading Aje with 1400 Ado (icons of transformative power) is a metonymic depiction of Aje as a god of infinite possibilities. Finally, the indexical illustration of Aje's ambivalence through the image of reversal: turning good or wisdom into buffoonery and vice versa completes the triadic semiotization of the ambivalence of Aje as the custodian of the market.

The question of the interconnection between the political economy and the symbolic economy is answered in the several Yoruba sayings that create an analogical connection between life ("aye") and the market ("Oja"). Such popular sayings as "Aye Loja, orun nile" (The life-world is a market and heaven is home), "Aye Loja, oja laye" (the world is a market and the market is the world), and "Eda Waye wa naja ni" (humans are in the world to bargain and negotiate) all link the market as a site of perpetual negotiation to the planet as a site for ceaseless bargaining and haggling over actions and ideas. In an indirect way, the analogical transfer between the market and the human life-world is a recognition by the Yoruba of the similarity between the processing of life in general and the processing of life in the market. Thus, the emphasis on ambivalence rather than univalence, fluidity and flexibility rather than rigidity and fixity, alterability rather than stasis, suggests the Yoruba preference for nondualistic and non-dichotomous imagination. The miming of a nondualistic mode of representation in Yoruba spatial arts, especially masks, has been acknowledged by Abiodun and Drewal as the consistent depiction of the human subject in images that evoke twinning or doubleness of the human self as both male and female and as the peak of human action (procreation) only as the synthesis of the twins of life: the male and female sides of the self (Drewal, *Yoruba Ritual* 190). The fluidity of identity is also represented through the ambivalence or two-sidedness of the trickster-god, Esu, or through periodic cross-dressing of male and female priests. Examples of cross-dressing and transvestitism abound in Yoruba rituals. The most illustrative images of the synthesis of opposites are those of Sango women priests shaving their heads like men and of male Agemo priests wearing traditional female hairstyles. In spatial arts, the synthesis of ambivalence can only be depicted through juxtapositions: the layering of a female attribute on a male figure and vice versa. However, Yoruba verbal arts, especially the stories created by women, provide a more subtle imaging of the ambivalence of the subject as well as of the synthesis of the subject through the character of the trickster as a means of presenting both the two-sidedness of the subject and the synthesis of the two sides. The creation of an image that is capable of representing one or all sides of a multi-dimensional character simultaneously is rife in trickster tales—an essentially female-dominated genre. What is remarkable about the Yoruba is the prevalence of the trickster figure in different manifestations of Yoruba religious and secular narratives as well as in all forms of semiotization in Yorubaland. The rest of this paper will demonstrate the prevalence of the

nondualistic, unitive trickster as a proto-typical protagonist in the female-dominated Yoruba Trickster narrative tradition as a narrativization of the “postfeminist” orientation of the precolonial Yoruba cultural space.

The trickster tale is not only an oicotype in relation to other fictive modes within the narratological compass of the Yoruba; it is also, as I have argued elsewhere, the only tale-type that invariably has more female than male narrators (see Sekoni). Trickster tales, or Tortoise tales as the Yoruba refer to this mode, constitute a narrative subgenre that appears to be popular among the masses or non-hegemonic members of different Yoruba subgroups. Unlike myths or legends, performed largely by official spokesmen of the culture’s hegemonic group in a public space and mostly during calendarized rituals and festivals, trickster tales are narrated in the privacy of homes mostly by grandmothers, elderly aunts, and mothers, and occasionally by grandfathers and elderly men. The predominance of women as narrators of trickster tales that are outside the purview of direct or indirect censorship often provides opportunities for women to encode their perception of social life in the codes that best illustrate their aesthetic of social processes. The primary thesis of this study is that Yoruba women, especially Ondo-Yoruba women from whom over 300 trickster tales were collected between 1979 and 1985, produce an aesthetic code that ritualizes and narrativizes a non-dualistic, unitive, or incorporative imagination that is reminiscent of the culture of perpetual negotiation and reversal of roles between addresser and addressee, between the protagonist and antagonist, or the dominator and the dominated in complex trickster tales characterized elsewhere as metatales or trickster tale qua trickster tale (see Sekoni).

Before a full description of the interconnection of the aesthetics of market transaction and the fielding of ambivalent, incorporative, fluid, and flexible protagonists in trickster tales, it is necessary to give brief attention to the simple, often uni-dimensional trickster tales that have been popularized in the writings of Adebayo Babalola and Tunde Ogunpolu. Since Ogunpolu’s structural description of Yoruba trickster tales builds on and perfects Babalola’s application of Alan Dundes’s theory that trickster tales are structured to reflect the tension inherent in the establishment and disestablishment of friendship or the making or breaking of contract, it is necessary to focus on Ogunpolu’s popularization of the dualistic and didactic variants of the trickster tale tradition.

In his description of Yoruba trickster tales, Ogunpolu claims that the average “Yoruba folktales start on a note of equilibrium,” which he has characterized as the motifeme of togetherness. This is followed by a lack or special need by one or some members of the trickster-tale cosmos. To remove the deficiency, a contract is entered into by protagonist and antagonist. When this contract is honored, the motifeme of the contract respect will automatically lead to that of fulfillment and the restoration of the pre-story equilibrium. Refusal by any of the parties involved to honor all or any of the conditions of the contract often leads the story in an opposite direction, thereby producing motifemes of contractual violation and separation and

thus the aggravation or perpetuation of disequilibrium (see Ogunpolu). According to Ogunpolu the trickster tale can be categorized into two structural types: T-L-C-B-S (togetherness—lack—contract—breach—separation) and T-L-C-R-F (togetherness—lack—contract—respect—fulfillment). Ogunpolu's characterization of the structural pattern of Yoruba trickster tales is perhaps the most rigorous and daring to date, especially because it is based on an extensive field of research. His perspective is, however, limited in accounting for the different aesthetic attitudes inherent in different ideological use and re-use of the trickster-tale discourse. The narrative as a symbolic mediation of social behavior presupposes that the structural thrust must possess a specific aesthetic status in both epistemological and political terms for narrators and narratees that share the same social and cognitive space. More specifically, the structuring of the tale must be perceived to include the structuring of the characters' attitude toward the ideological significance of the spatio-temporal context in which they behave. The analysis of tales must include the analysis of contractual obligations of characters in trickster tale as well as the social needs of characters that benefit from contract fulfillment or violation. Although most of these questions are not raised by Ogunpolu, the trickster-tale tradition directly or indirectly asks some of these questions—through subtle revisions or various depictions of the trickster-protagonist within the tale-cycle. An examination of the trickster tale cycle reveals, as has been observed elsewhere, different narrative orientations that range from tales of norm-creation/norm-reinforcement to norm-evaluation/norm-replacement. Babalola's and Ogunpolu's characterization of the trickster tale in T-L-C-B-S (togetherness—lack—contract—respect—fulfillment) appears to have been based on the tale of norm-reinforcement.

In tales of norm-reinforcement, there is an overt didactic pressure on the narratee through vertical characterization that is based on a dualistic perception of characters as good or bad. The trickster is invariably depicted in such tales as a bad character whose actions run counter to those of good and orderly characters. Most often, the other characters are projected as representatives of cosmos while the trickster is depicted as the agent of chaos. This dualistic, dichotomous thinking is manifested in variants of the tales characterized by Ogunpolu; however, most of the tales told by women narrators in the writer's ten-year field experience fall more into the category of norm-criticism than norm-reinforcement. As norm-critical tales, they either problematize the dominant values in the contextual Yoruba community or subvert such values. Such tales have been characterized elsewhere as metatales or tales of negation in contradistinction to the tales of affirmation often popularized in the writings of Babalola and Ogunpolu (see Sekoni). Tales of negation, as will be illustrated, evince a unitive, nondualistic, incorporative depiction of the trickster in contrast to the emphasis on dualistic thinking and the imposition of social meaning that characterize tales of norm reinforcement. Characterized by emphasis on the negotiation rather

than the imposition of social meanings, tales of negation portray the trickster as ambivalent, two-sided, and simultaneously capable of stabilizing or destabilizing the social ethos evoked in the narratives. Tales of criticism discourage the unidimensional perception and depiction of the trickster that tales of reinforcement often valorize.

One example of the unidimensional and unidirectional portrayal of the trickster in tales of norm-reinforcement is the tale of "Tortoise and Snail":

Tortoise and Snail were good friends. They were so fond of each other that Snail decided to give her sister to Tortoise as a wife. Tortoise according to the storyteller was very lazy and envious of Snail's thriving farm. While appearing to be fond of Snail, he was planning on how to get Snail into trouble and inherit the latter's successful farm. One day, Tortoise killed the king's messenger and deposited the corpse on Snail's farm. After this, he went to inform the king that his messenger's corpse was on Snail's farm. Snail was accordingly arrested and condemned to death in spite of his passionate plea for mercy on account of his innocence. Snail then asked for the last period of liminal license before his death. He appealed to the king to allow him to put on a beautiful dress and dance through the town on the king's horse. The king agreed to this. As soon as Tortoise saw his convicted brother-in-law on the king's horse dancing to music from trumpets, he quickly believed that the king must have been happy at the killing of his messenger (an ugly hunchback). Tortoise rushed to the palace to confess to the killing, giving so detailed an account of the murder that his claim to killing the messenger became incontrovertible. After this unsolicited confession, Tortoise was condemned to death while Snail was released.

It is possible to see this story in terms of a structural movement from equilibrium to disequilibrium, or the making of friendship to the breaking of friendship. For example, Tortoise broke an unarticulated code of conducting friendship by attempting to incriminate Snail. It can thus be argued, in the manner of Ogunpolu and Babalola, that Tortoise's violation of the conventions of friendship caused disequilibrium. One crucial point to note is the predetermination of the protagonist's behavior by the storyteller. The trickster-protagonist is projected as being immoral, lazy, envious of his friend's success, and interested in taking possession of his friend's farm. The conflict in this story is one in which lack is self-induced by a character with moral deficiency. Tortoise is presented as being a bad citizen while Snail is depicted as a good citizen. The fact of moral weakness as a source of social disorder or disequilibrium is thus subtly suggested to the audience by the storyteller. Even without waiting for the moral tag that "people should not attempt to take over people's property," the didactic pressure applied subtly through the projection of the trickster as callous and demonic betrays the story's ideological intention. The underlying motive of socializing the audience into accepting the normative values of the community: honesty, sanctity of private property, and hard work receive illustration in the storyteller's

projection of the trickster-protagonist. More importantly, the uncompromising sense of poetic justice, the vindication of the good character (Snail) and the vilification of the bad one (Tortoise) suggest the fact of such a story as an instance of vertical integration propaganda or what Jack Zipes calls, in reference to similar strategies in the fairy tale tradition, the reinforcement of an authoritarian socialization process.

The absolutization of the values being taught in this tale has its correlate in the absolutization of the characters: the well “adjusted” character has all the acceptable qualities while the maladjusted one is a complete contrast. Returning to our earlier concept of a spectrum of expectable audience interactional pattern with the trickster-protagonist, the tale of Tortoise and Snail is one that is capable of eliciting in the audience the emotion of absolute rejection of the protagonist. The narratee is being prepared by the story to hate normative deviation which is being symbolized by anti-human and anti-social predisposition such as Tortoise is being made to represent in this tale. Thus, the image of the trickster as metamorph or transformer of the social order, capable of providing models of social resistance for the audience, is brought into question and doubt through the projection of the same trickster-figure as an impulsive cheat and murderer in this story.

The theme of absolute values made possible by dualistic or binary thinking evident in the tale of Tortoise and Snail is not characteristic of the discussion of values in women-related artistic genres and in the socio-economic behavior of Yoruba women. The depiction of Tortoise, an ambivalent, complex, and incorporative character, as an impulsive, immoral character and an extreme social deviant in tales of norm reinforcement appears to have been influenced by the demonization of Esu in the Yoruba translation of the Bible and the Christian reinterpretation of Esu within the framework of a dualistic rather than a unitive worldview. The depiction of the Esu metaphysical metamorph as Satan in the Yoruba Bible, must have served as a motivation for the demonization of Tortoise. The dualistic imagination behind the Bible, especially the polarization of the ideal (God) and its counter (Satan) evinces an agonistic worldview that is unmistakably different from what exists in both sacred and secular Yoruba discourse and praxis. To return to a major theme in this study—the dynamics of behavior in the female-dominated marketplace—the absolutization of values through images of binary propensities evident in tales of norm reinforcement does not reflect the centrality of the negotiation of value or, by implication, meaning in Yoruba market dynamics. The fluidity and reversibility of roles between vendor and buyer, addresser and addressee, subject and object that characterize bargaining in Yoruba markets are clearly absent in the absolutization of values and fixity of roles or identity that characterize the tales of norm reinforcement popularized by Babalola and Ogunpolu.

The tales that were preferred or requested by narratees and were narrated by female narrators during my field work in Yorubaland in general and among the Ondo-Yoruba in particular, reflect more of the emphasis on the negotiation of meaning in market social interaction through the fluidity of

disposition and reversal of roles than the fixity of role and rigidity of disposition that are reflected in tales of norm reinforcement.

One example of such tales, characterized elsewhere as metatales or self-reflexive and metamorphic tales, is the story of “Tortoise, King, and Elephant”:

In Ajalu town, there was an epidemic that made every citizen nervous. So serious was this epidemic that the town was thrown into a chaotic situation. After sacrificing many animals and slaves to no avail, the King of the town consulted the oracle and was advised to sacrifice a live elephant to the town’s spirit. None of the town’s celebrated hunters could capture a live elephant. Tortoise volunteered to bring a live elephant to the palace. Everybody including the king jeered at him. The king entered into an agreement with Tortoise, promising to kill Tortoise if he failed and, to yield the throne to him if he succeeded. Tortoise decided to exploit elephant’s palate for sweet things as well as his insatiable ambition for political power. He ordered the king’s wife to provide him with bean buns soaked in honey. Tortoise sent to the elephant that he had good news for him. On getting to the elephant, Tortoise told him of the decision by the people of Ajalu to elect elephant their king as a replacement for an ineffective king. Before the elephant responds, Tortoise gave him some of the bean buns as a gift from Ajalu. Noticing how the elephant savored the buns, Tortoise quickly added that the buns, as sweet as they appeared, were the least delicious of the food prepared for Ajalu Kings. The elephant thus agreed to follow Tortoise to Ajalu town in spite of his wife’s serious reservations about the authenticity of the easy offer of Ajalu throne to a foreigner. The praise-singers hired by Tortoise were at hand to hail the elephant as King-elect during the journey to Ajalu. At regular intervals during the journey, Tortoise offered the elephant some bean buns. Finally the elephant was led to a throne that was constructed by Tortoise. The throne was suspended by concealed ropes over a large ditch in which the elephant was to be sacrificed. The elephant was sacrificed, and health, peace and order returned to Ajalu. The King became hesitant on his contractual obligation to Tortoise. He informed Tortoise of the need to consult Ifa. The oracle averred that if Tortoise were allowed to rule, his regime would be characterized by three years of prosperity followed by three years of austerity and that Tortoise should be allowed to rule only for the first three years, after which the original king should come back to his throne. Tortoise told the assembly of Ajalu town that he would only take half of the king’s property without entering into a rotation of power between the king and himself, adding that he would be around to tell the oracle what to say when the next epidemic struck.

Several images of the negation of domination are present in this story. First, the trickster debunks the hegemonist’s stereotype of the inconsequentiality of the powerless by achieving what a combination of military (the hunters) and political (the king) power could not accomplish. Second, Tortoise’s interest in getting rid of the elephant is motivated by the overbearing,

hegemonic ambition of the elephant, the desire for undeserved political power on the part of the elephant. Third, the trickster's refusal to be king suggests that his interest in Ajalu is not for the acquisition of political power for himself but for the salvation of the community from a culture of perpetual sacrifice of the less endowed members of Ajalu town that existed before the intervention of Tortoise.

The metacritical dimension of this story is provided by the unexpected resolution of the conflict of the unarticulated struggle for hegemonic power. Tortoise's matter-of-fact rejection of the offer of rotative monarchy contrasts starkly with the nervousness of the king. More importantly, Tortoise's refusal of cooptation into the hegemonic group illustrates his symbolic role of the lord of the margins and champion of the dominated. His satiric comment "I will be here to tell Ifa what to say the next time the epidemic comes" poeticizes his role as the symbol of resistance.

Let us examine some of such tales of resistance and negotiation. In the story of "Tortoise and No-Argument-Town," Tortoise sojourned in a town where nobody was allowed to argue or disagree with whatever position that was taken by the rulers and elders. Small children were not even allowed to argue among themselves. Tortoise, like other sojourners in this town was warned by the community elders and district chiefs not to endanger his life by entering into argument with anybody in this town. During an annual harvest ritual, while all the political and cultural leaders of the town were gathered to ritualize the beginning of harvest and authorize the eating of the new yam, Tortoise openly challenged the arrangement of the ritual artifacts. He accused the ritual priest, who was also the second in command to the king, of scrambling the ritual logic by breaking the pod of alligator peppers before kolanut and by asking for ancestral blessings for the elders in preference to the children. The king and his cabinet of chiefs there and then sentenced Tortoise to death. He was to be slaughtered in the town's grove across the river that ran through the town. Tortoise was tied with a strong rope and carried by the state executioner accompanied by some senior chiefs and other state warriors. While the executioners were crossing the river, Tortoise screamed, complaining that a shark was biting him on his toes. The state executioner on whose head Tortoise was securely placed, shouted back at Tortoise, arguing that such a thing was impossible given the buffer created by his six-foot-tall body between Tortoise and the surface of the river. Tortoise immediately drew the attention of the man and the other people around to the fact that the man had broken the town's taboo by arguing. The chiefs in the group ordered that Tortoise be returned to the palace for retrial. As soon as they got to the palace, Tortoise shouted that the shark that bit him in the river was sitting behind the king. The king shouted back at Tortoise for causing trouble. Tortoise accused the king of arguing. The king and his cabinet, after listening to Tortoise's allegation that the executioners tortured him by allowing a fish to bite him and the former's rebuttal of the allegation in an argumentative manner, acquitted Tortoise, sent him out of town and henceforth allowed the citizens to argue on good grounds.

This story mimes the negation of domination characterized by a legal structure of unquestioning conformism and blind faith in the cognitive position of the elders and the powerful, regardless of the rightness or wrongness of what this favored group parades as knowledge. Images are aligned in this story to semiotize the tension between power and privilege, and denial and deprivation. The initial situation evoked in the story about the fictive world suggests the notion of repression as a mechanism for protecting the interests of power and the empowered over those outside the cult of power. Subsequent images focus on the differentiation between power and powerlessness, by juxtaposing Tortoise's cultural marginality (being a foreigner) with cultural centrality—represented by the spokesman of the town's hegemonic group who explained the culture of compulsive silence and uncritical response to existing cultural relations to Tortoise. The trickster's metamorphic potential is accorded a cultural heroic status with Tortoise's willingness to confront an unjust social order by deliberately breaking the law that for ages has protected the town's hegemonic politics of deception. This image of heroic energy of the trickster is further illustrated by Tortoise's standing of the social order on its head as he forces the state executioner to openly break an oppressive law by lying against him. By pressurizing the king to break a law hitherto taken to be sacrosanct, the trickster ensnares as well as endangers the social order if the king should fail to address his state executioner's as well as his own uncoverable infringement of the law. Although the compromise in the final image of the story literally sacrifices Tortoise in the form of deportation, the enactment by the king of a new and more liberal law thematizes the metamorphic role of the trickster as a symbol of the negation of domination. Furthermore, Tortoise's deportation underscores the perpetual fear of the politically conscious subject by the political ruler and also draws attention to the ever-present need of a trickster-figure as a dialectical or agonistic image of development.

The goal of the tale of negation—whether as metatext or tale of social subversion—is, as we have implied in our analysis of the tales discussed in this paper is, to demonstrate the alterability of existing social relations of domination. This goal is accomplished through the evocation in each tale of the negation of a cosmos in which the underdog (the trickster) struggles many times at the risk of his life against oppression and marginalization by entering into a battle of wits or cunning with representatives of the hegemonic group and more often than not succeeds in forcing the hegemonic structure to be rearranged. The audience of this mode of trickster tales is consequently encouraged, by the force of analogic reasoning to view their social reality as dynamic and alterable, given the willingness of the deprived members of the society to take the risk of confronting and struggling against social assumptions that are often presented as ontological and natural. The emphasis of the tale of negation on the possibility of emancipation for the beleaguered is correlated with a narrative strategy and perspective that promotes critical reception of the tale on the part of the audience.

The most important strategy for presenting a dialogic non-didactic narrative form here pertains to characterization. Whether as protagonist or antagonist, the trickster is depicted in a manner that encourages free interpretation of his actions by the audience. There is an absence of negative pre-coding of the trickster whereby the audience's perception of the trickster is predetermined by narratorial commentary on his motivation or predisposition. Such evaluative descriptions as greedy, wicked, dishonest, or mischievous are not used by the narrator in the depiction of Tortoise in tales of negation. When the trickster is given such negative epithets, it is usually by other characters in the tale and is thus presented as another image to be interpreted by the audience in relation to other images in the narrative.

The emphasis on alterability in these tales is in consonance with the emphasis on fluidity and flexibility in the Yoruba market space. The switch by the trickster-protagonist from the role of norm destroyer to norm creator in "No Argument Town," illustrates the reversibility of roles and fluidity of identity that define the dialogic, reciprocal and negotiatory culture of interaction in the Yoruba market space. Just as women engage in communication in the market by negotiating not only the value of their wares but also their roles as vendor and buyer, so does the trickster-tale genre that they dominate reflect the two-sidedness and yet incorporative or unitive character of the trickster-protagonist. The juxtaposition of tales of norm reinforcement (with emphasis on dualistic imagination and didactic pressure) and tales of norm criticism (with emphasis on unitive, or nondualistic, free interpretation) is capable of "invaginating" the genre by showing the different ways of perceiving the trickster-narrative tradition by proponents of idealist criticism (such as Babalola and Ogunpolu) and practitioners of sociosemiotic criticism (such as has been attempted in this study). Such invagination (Culler 205) involves the metanarrative focus of women storytellers on the hidden dimensions of the trickster as an ambivalent, incorporative subject and the consequent repoliticization and reconfiguration of the one-dimensional trickster in the tales of norm reinforcement popularized by idealist criticism.

One significant invagination made possible by the juxtaposition of tales of norm criticism and norm reinforcement is the tension between non-dualistic and critical perception of life on the one hand and the dualistic, didactic depiction of reality on the other. When related to other cultural discursive forms such as masks and rituals, the trickster metatale reflects the preference by Yoruba women for a "postfeminist," postrepresentational, imaging of natural and social life. While, for example, the fluidity and incorporativeness of identity is depicted through twin figures or double heads in Gelede masks (see Babatunde), the same notion is projected in the ambivalent and fluid character of the trickster in tales of norm criticism. The trickster tale of norm criticism or evaluation, like the Gelede masks or other rituals that emphasize cross-dressing and role reversal, hints at the unitive, incorporative, nondualistic, character of precolonial Yoruba cultural discourse.

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