

THE BACHAMA TRICKSTER AS MODEL FOR CLOWNING BEHAVIOR

by Phillips Stevens, Jr.

Ŋburum, a member of the pantheon of major deities in the cosmology of the Bachama of Adamawa, northeastern Nigeria, exists in two quite distinct conceptions. As a major god he is a quick and fair judge, highly respected. As the Trickster of folktales he is the laughable embodiment of the near-totality of negative social values. In this latter role, Ŋburum provides a model for emulation by any would-be clown or joker, and he is regarded as the "founder" of *gboune*, the institution of society-wide joking relationships.

This paper focuses on this latter aspect of Ŋburum's character, and shows how aspects of his behavior as depicted in folktales are evoked by participants in the joking relationships, and by those who play the clown on certain social occasions. Although this discussion deals primarily with the Bachama case, it might suggest potentially fruitful aspects of the study of play and humor that may have been overlooked elsewhere: the possibility of the actors' recognition, invocation, and evocation of folkloric models and sanctions as guides to behavior.

THE BACHAMA TRICKSTER

The Bachama (see Stevens 1973) are a kingdom of farmers, fishers, and hunters occupying approximately twelve hundred square miles of the lowlands along both sides of the Benue River. Their presently recognized territory extends roughly forty-five miles downstream from the confluence of the Gongola River with the Benue, and from three to sixteen miles inland from the river on either side. Their language belongs to the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family. They are an offshoot of a

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remnant of the once-powerful Bata states whose spiritual headquarters was at Dyemsa Pwa, in the Cameroons, and who were sub-divided by the Fulani wars of the nineteenth century. A rough estimate of their present population is 22,000.

The deities in the Bachama pantheon include a remote High God, regarded as the Creator and the source of all spiritual power, but inaccessible directly to man. Directly accessible to the people are the *pule*, spirits. These include the *pule kake*, nature spirits; the *pule bwàre*, ancestors; and the *pule kpankpanye*, the major deities. These latter are deified culture heroes who lived earthly lives in the times of the beginnings (*tufo vurato*, "the travelling of the world"). Many of them played important roles in the migrations and settlements of the people, and were the originators of certain customs and the founders of certain institutions.

Bachama distinguish between two major bodies of oral tradition. The *dyemshi vurato*, "songs of the world," are myths; true accounts of the founding of the society and of the lives and deeds of the founders. These constitute sacred history, and their recitation is strictly controlled. The *gbamiye* (*gbamito*, sing.) are folktales. They, too, deal with the times of the beginnings, and the *pule kpankpanye* often feature in them, but they are public property, and their chief function is entertainment. These are most commonly told by storytellers (*ji-ga-gbamiye*, "persons sing folktales") to assembled audiences after the evening meal. Some of these are "just-so" stories, explaining, for example, why the tortoise has a cracked shell, why the crocodile has a flat nose, why the hyena has a protruding anus, how man acquired the use of fire, why people are mortal. Few contain morals or accounts of creations.

By far the most popular figure in folktales is *ŋburum*, the Trickster. He is the antithesis of positive social values. He is a coward, a cheat, and a thief, a liar and braggart; he is a glutton and a drunkard; he is lecherous, an adulterer, and a committer of incest; he is disloyal to family and friends; he does not stop at murder, even of his closest companions, to achieve his own ends. He is lazy, slovenly, and ugly. And he constantly pokes his nose into other people's affairs, often with disastrous results.

ŋburum is generally conceived of, and represented in the folktales, as a man. This may or may not be significant; it seems, at least, a conception unique among Central and West African societies, among most of whom the trickster is an animal. The name *ŋburum*, however, is quite close to the word for hyena, *nburme*, and some Bachama suggested, but could not explain, this as the derivation of his name. In one *gbamito* *ŋburum* does appear as a hyena, in order to trick two other hyenas, but this is the only case among the more than thirty *ŋburum*

stories I collected in which he appears in other than human form.

Although priests and shrine-keepers assert that no one can know what spirits look like, storytellers and their audiences can formulate images of characters in folktales. From several lay people I was able to draw this composite of ɲburum's physical appearance and accouterments: he is bigger than any man now living, but shorter than the other *pule*, and very fat. His nose is flat and crooked, with wide nostrils. His eyes bulge and are often bloodshot. His forehead is broad and slopes backward, and the back of his neck protrudes. His hair is matted and dirty. He has a very short and thick neck—in the description of one informant, "almost no neck at all; his head appears to bounce upon his shoulders." His arms are thick and strong. He has tremendous, distended buttocks. His legs are short and bowed; his feet are, to quote an informant again, "flat and very wide, like those of a duck." He wears a torn and dirty loincloth, which often breaks because of his bulk. He carries a broken and rusty "piece of spear." His near-constant companion is Bogoro, the uncastrated he-goat. (This last attribute in itself is comical; the adult *bogoro* gives off a strong, musky odor, and is no fit human companion.)

It can easily be suggested that when laughing at ɲburum the people are laughing at themselves, at their own failings, and perhaps at their own secret fascination with the idea of breaking social convention. But in spite of his negative attributes, ɲburum does have some endearing qualities. He is often quite clever, and admirable in his ingenuity; but when he stupidly blunders into misfortune he is pathetic in his helplessness. He loves song and dance, and is an accomplished xylophone player; indeed, it is said that when the culture founders took leave of their earthly lives, each choosing a particular spot wherein he would reside as a spirit, ɲburum chose the village of Byemti, in the center of Bachamaland, so that he could easily attend any social occasion during which his talents as a musician might be desired. And, like Ture of the Azande (Evans-Pritchard 1967:29), "in spite of every failure, misfortune, and humiliation he perseveres."

People say that ɲburum is the founder of *gboune*, the network of institutionalized joking relationships (see Stevens 1978). Every individual in Bachama society participates in a number of categories of "privileged familiarity" (Lowie 1920:99ff.) with some others; the "rules" governing each category of interaction are known, and behavior tolerable within each may be unacceptable out of its specified social context. The concept of *gboune* entails not only the joking relationship itself, but also the behavior associated with it, and so it can easily be imagined how ɲburum's character offers itself for emulation by any would-be clown or trickster. To be successful in most *gboune* situations one must not only

be clever with words, but he must have a bit of the clown in him as well. And even in non-*gboune* situations, anyone who can successfully evoke an image of *ŋburum* is assured of getting laughs.

THE TRICKSTER AS MODEL FOR SOCIAL BEHAVIOR

In the remainder of this paper I shall examine briefly a few instances, both *gboune* and non-*gboune* situations, in which *ŋburum* is evoked as the model for social behavior.

The first illustration concerns the art of storytelling. Storytellers are highly regarded; Bachama place them high on a list of achievers, ranking close behind hunters and warriors, who generally scored highest on my lists of ranked activities. A good storyteller must be a good dramatist as well. He speaks with his whole body, showing the emotions felt by the characters in his narrative. His voice must be capable of a wide range of inflection, and his vocabulary must include a good stock of onomatopoeic words.

ŋburum tales are especially demanding of these abilities for their successful telling, and success in this category of folktales is the hallmark of a good storyteller. Although nearly anyone can remember and recite folktales, proficient *ji-ga-gbamiye* are few, and many a small village may recognize only one, or none at all.

An *nzo-ga-gbamiye* is often the village clown as well. Although he tells his stories at appointed times in the evenings, in many social situations he enjoys a license, the extent of which often depends only on his own ability to "bring it off." He assumes a sort of *gboune* with villagers and strangers alike; he might attempt to "steal" goods from passers-by or market traders, he might follow behind people, mimicking their styles of walking, or echoing the inflections in their speech. If accosted he may run away, uttering cries of mock fear; he may hide behind a tree, or another person, and peer cautiously around—all in the manner of *ŋburum*. If his victims feel annoyance, it is usually short-lived, for laughing by-standers will say something like, "*A-a, ndi nzo-ga-gbamiye*"—meaning, "no-no, he is a storyteller"—or, "*A-a, suno ŋburum!*"—"no-no, he is *ŋburum!*"

The emulation of *ŋburum* occurs in other non-*gboune* situations, particularly in certain of the cyclical festivals. I shall discuss *ŋburum*-like behavior in two of them.

The wrestling festival of *Kwete* is held during the dry season in the headquarters village of Lamurde.¹ As in the several other wrestling festivals held throughout Bachamaland, the emblems of *Kwete* are a

single long staff, the *kufe* (literally, "spear," but in this case, an iron staff surmounted by a brass ornament), and the *vayato*, a bundle of short staves festooned with long strips of bark. After each evening's wrestling bouts are completed, and the spectators and competitors have left the wrestling ground, a titled priest, attended by his elder clansmen, other titled elders, and one or two selected drummers, delivers the sacred history of the coming of the *kufe* and *vayato* to the people. Versions vary, but the central figure in each is Nzo-kuditu-hiḍong, "son of one leg." This one-legged man, who came "from the East," traveled from village to village, accompanied by the original *kufe* and *vayato*, and a ram. At each village he stopped and challenged any young man to a bout of wrestling; the things he brought with him were to be awarded to whoever could defeat him. His challenge was eagerly accepted, but the one-legged man defeated each of the best young men any village could put forward, until he was finally thrown in whichever village the speech is being recited. After his defeat, Nzo-kuditu-hiḍong disappeared, leaving his things behind with instructions for their use and maintenance,² and went to Waduku, a village in the northwestern corner of Bachamaland, where he became Pula-Hase, "The Terrible Pula."

One *gbamito* tells of Ṇburum's encounter with Nzo-kuditu-hiḍong. From Waduku he continued to go about with his ram, offering challenges in various villages. The news of his coming went ahead of him, and when he arrived in Ṇburum's village, Ṇburum had already hatched a plan. The ram, of course, was meat, and as the storytellers say, "everything is meat to Ṇburum." When the one-legged man arrived, Ṇburum gave him food and drink and a place to rest, and persuaded him to leave the ram in his house overnight; they would wrestle for it the following day. Ṇburum killed the ram and he and his family³ dined splendidly that evening. The next day when the one-legged wrestler returned for the match, Ṇburum pushed forward each of his children in turn, and finally his wife, all of whom were thrown. When Ṇburum could delay no longer, he, too, was thrown. On the pretext of returning inside to fetch the man's ram, he and his family escaped through a hole in the fence. Nzo-kuditu-hiḍong shaped his revenge: he changed his form, caused a great storm to blow, and busied himself at his fire (he was a blacksmith, and some of the *dyemshi vurato* say that he brought smithing to the people). Chilled by the storm, and attracted by the warm glow of the fire, Ṇburum and his family were trapped by their erstwhile guest. They finally made their escape, but not before Ṇburum had been suitably embarrassed and shamed before his wife and children.

In subsequent wrestling festivals Ṇburum joined in: not as a contestant, of course, but as the *Kpa-lagbe* ("master of youths"; *Kpe-lagbe*, pl.), the referee-coach who accompanies each village's contingent of

wrestlers.⁴ This allowed him the greatest freedom to show off, to strut his stuff but never to be actually put to the test. And he forms the model for every *Kpa-lagbe* today. Like an *nzo-ga-gbamiye*, the *Kpa-lagbe* must have an extrovert personality. He must be an entertainer; in addition to being a fair and impartial referee of the matches, he is expected to strut and dance and otherwise amuse the spectators. In Lamurde, where *ŋburum* lived for a time, he was the first *Kpa-lagbe* for the *Kwete* festival. And when the *Kpa-lagbe* of Lamurde performs today, people acknowledge his antics with responses of, "A-ha! *ŋburum!*"

ŋburum was a musician; he is reputed to have been the first xylophonist, and he was fond of the *dingame*, a long drum held horizontally from a rope across the shoulders and struck by the palms at both ends. At *Kwete* the xylophonists and players of the *dingamye* are also identified with *ŋburum*. They dance and perform together, playing the tunes reputed to have been *ŋburum*'s favorites.

In one *gbamito*, *ŋburum* came upon a group of Fulani herd-boys. *ŋburum* was distrustful of all people, preferring rather to consort with animals, but he was especially distrustful of Fulani.⁵ These Fulani, however, had something that attracted him, and his greed overcame his cowardice; but even so he was afraid to approach them directly. He took out his xylophone and began to play as he took two hesitant steps forward, then one back, and so on, singing, "*Kouna, ŋburum na du kouna,*" meaning, "excuse me, *ŋburum* is coming to join you." The rhythm of these words, *Kóuna, ŋbùrùm ná du kóuna*, is played by the musicians at *Kwete* and other wrestling festivals. After the wrestling on the last day of *Kwete*, the *dingamye* players, accompanied by the xylophonists, enter the dance area and gingerly approach the spectators. Assuming expressions of timidity, they come close, then, as if they are about to be captured, they run back. During this display they beat out this tune. This same two-steps-forward-and-one-back motion forms the basis for other social dances as well,⁶ and is everywhere acknowledged as having originated with *ŋburum*.

Although the king attends *Kwete*, this is not a royal festival; he is there as a spectator. He is seated on the *ruto*, a special platform constructed of a long tightly-woven mat staked upright to the ground in a closed circle, then filled with sand to make a dais about two feet in height; over this is a raised dome of woven grass. Certain titled elders of the *Kabe*, the chief-making clans whose most important functions consist in providing for the welfare of the king and his household, sit on the ground before him, with their backs to him. This is the usual position of the king during a festival.

The king is regarded as a semi-divine personage upon whose welfare depends the welfare of the entire society. But at *Kwete* he is as open to

the antic approaches of the *Kpa-lagbe* and the musicians as is any other spectator. The apparently degraded role of the king in this context is all part of the fun,⁷ and it reflects the behavior of *Ŋburum* in another *gbamito*. This *Ŋburum* tale is one of the most popular, and it is recalled by the spectators and participants at *Kwete*. It tells of how *Ŋburum*, through his greediness, degraded both the festival, which he had originated, and the kingship as well. It will serve our discussion to relate a portion of it, as I recorded it from one storyteller.⁸

As historical background it is explained that when the society was first established, but before the kingship was vested in a mortal, the major deities took turns at holding the office. In this story it is *Ŋburum*'s turn to be king. Some explanation of terms is necessary: *vanga* is a long eel-like fish, popular because of its good taste, but quite dear, as it is difficult to catch. It is only through the kingship that *Ŋburum* is able to obtain this delicacy. *Ngwara weto* is a slow, swaying step, danced by the king while accompanied by the royal musicians, at any festival he attends. Its effect is that of the walk of a cripple, or a person with an injured leg, and it signifies humility.⁹ *Gbeto* is a praise-chant, associated with a particular titled office. Its recitation is accompanied by a rhythmic clapping of the hands. The *Kabe* do their *gbeto* on their initial greetings to the king, and thereafter whenever he sneezes, coughs, or clears his throat. Following explication of the historical background, the story goes on:

Ŋburum was given the kingship, and when going to the *ruto* for *Kwete* he took some roasted *vange* and put them into his pocket. He hastily did the *ngwara weto*, ascended the *ruto* and sat down. *Ŋburum* was hungry, and he wondered how he could hide from the *Kabe* so that he could eat his *vange*. But he saw that he could not leave his place to go and eat them, and so he bent his head into his pocket, took up a *vanga* and bit into it, *gur-r-r-rak!* and he began chewing, *chokop-chokop-chokop!*

The *Kabe* heard the king making these sounds, and they began to do their *gbeto*. And each time he took a bite, *gur-r-r-r-ak!* and chewed it, *chokop-chokop-chokop!* the *Kabe* made *gbeto*.

But others began to laugh, and said to each other, "What kind of king is this, with the *Kabe* sitting at the foot of *ruto*, and he is eating something in their presence!"

And the people told *Ŋburum* that what he was doing is not good, that the king of Bachama does not eat things in the presence of people. And so *Ŋburum* rose up, took his *vanga* and put it back into his pocket, and stalked off, saying to the people, "You can have your kingship!" And he went away to play shells¹⁰ with *Bogoro*.

At the closing of *Kwete*, as with many other festivals, a so-called "erasing dance" (*kuda wure*) is done, performed with brooms; the ground is swept clean of the traces of visitors. During this dance the

musicians have their last opportunity to mimic the antics of *ɲburum*. Their behavior was explained to me¹¹ as follows:

The musicians follow the dancers throughout the festival ground, then about the town. They are *ɲburum*. When they meet people they say, "We, *ɲburum*, will play music for you" [*ɲburum na lyebouno*]. When they play that they move backward, then forward, and like that, until they are in the midst of the people. If a boy happens to be among them with something that belongs to him, or a girl with a head-tie, the musicians may snatch those things from them. Even a stranger may lose something to them, and it is lost. It is lost for good, because it was *ɲburum* who was doing this stealing, because he was *Nzo-womshe* [literally, "son of greed"].

And so, too, the "snatching" behavior that accompanies much *gboune* activity is founded in *ɲburum*.

The story of "*ɲburum* and *Vanga*" continues::

When the kingship was out of his possession, all *ɲburum* could do was dance and make music, and this he did, all around the world. He is the one with *Wuro Ka-duwe*.¹² Wherever there is something happening, he will go there with his dance. . . .

He ate *Nzo-kuditu-hiɔng*'s ram. *Nzo-kuditu-hiɔng* is from *Waduku*. Because of what happened to his ram, he wants to catch *ɲburum*.

And so *ɲburum* goes, dancing, but when he reached a place where *Waduku* people are, he will jump, *bur-r-rup!* and run away, *katap-katap-katap!* When he is safe, he will stop and stand, *katau!* Then he will start to dance again, and he will go on dancing, *kwatau-kwatau-kwatau!* But if he ever reaches a place where *Waduku* people are, he will run away again, because of *Nzo-kuditu-hiɔng*'s ram which he ate.

And thus *ɲburum* would dance from town to town, where people would give him food and drink for his entertainment. *ɲburum* is thus the originator of the customs of social dancing called *Ngura-dore* ("carrying *dore*," the particular dance¹³), *Wuro-Ka-duwe*, *Dawe*, and others. And his manner is evoked by the dancers today. Along the way, within villages and between them, the participants assume a light *gboune* among themselves and with those they meet, and they can demand and expect to receive refreshment.

Another public occasion during which *ɲburum* forms a model for behavior is the big *Pato* festival, jointly hosted by the riverine villages of *Numan* and *Imburu*. This festival takes place about mid-October, at the end of the rainy season, and is the occasion for the great annual hippopotamus hunt, joined by hunters from the neighboring societies of *Mbula*, *Bwaza*, and *Jen*. The festival occupies six days, each named for the particular activity or historical commemoration that is being observed. The days on which *ɲburum*-like behavior is condoned are *Fulkpang* (literally, "break

the calábash") and *Farato* ("rock"), the fifth and sixth days.

The festival is principally for a female deity, *Mata-Nefarong* ("the woman of Nefarong," slightly rising ground about two miles to the west of Numan). Since some of the favorite haunts of the hippo are on her land, Mata-Nefarong's permission and blessing on the hunt must be secured. As *ɲburum* is a brother to Mata-Nefarong, and he has a shrine very near to hers, he features prominently in the festival.

In the afternoon of *Fulkpang* people gather at the "bush house" (*hođyi-kake*) of the spirit at Nefarong. *ɲburum*'s shrine is a few hundred yards away, at a place called *Gbindang* (from *gbinda*, a big man, an important man). The women sit together outside the sacred grove; the men enter and sit together by clans. Beer is served around to all. Some of these clans may have historically-based joking relationships with one another, but on this occasion, all assume *gboune*, and while drinking their beer they hurl insults at each other and laugh uproariously at particularly clever (generally obscene) remarks. But this type of *gboune* is limited to words only; no horseplay is tolerated, and personal property is inviolate. Mata-Nefarong is particularly intolerant of thievery; in this respect, and thus in some folktales, she acts as a foil to her trickster brother.

Whereas interfering with others' personal property is forbidden at Nefarong, in the evening of *Fulkpang* great license is tolerated. One enlightened informant told me that this is "Bachama National Stealing Day." Thievery is largely carried out by children. Resembling in many ways the "trick or treat" activity of Halloween in the U.S.A., children go about the town taking for themselves anything that they fancy. Certain "rules" obtain; in particular, the privacy of compounds must be observed. Outside the compounds, anything that is not obviously claimed, any untethered animal or fowl, any item that has been carelessly (or, perhaps, intentionally, for the children) left around, is public property. It is said that *ɲburum* was the originator of this custom, to give sanction to his often-frustrated greed.

ɲburum continues as the model for behavior the following day, at *Farato*. People from Numan, Imburu, and several other villages gather at the sacred rocks that mark the place on the river bank below Numan where the Bachama effected their separation, following a kingship dispute between twin heirs to the throne, from their parent Bata. On this occasion, as in most festivals, social activities take place during the day, and the serious ritual and recitations of the *dyemshi vurato* are performed at night.

This day is devoted entirely to joking and merriment. A principal attraction is the antics of the *Nzo-đingawo*, the player of the *đingawo*, an iron gong struck by a short rod. The prototype of this instrument was made by *ɲburum* from a broken hoe blade. The title of *Nzo-đingawo* is earned, not inherited, by its bearer; he, like an *nzo-ga-gbamiye* or *kpa-lagbe*, must be a naturally funny man. He must be at once witty and tactful, so that he

can bring off his stunts without causing lasting offense. I shall relate relevant events of *Farato* as I witnessed them in 1969.

Men, women, and children from several villages have gathered at the river bank by early afternoon. They remain together in village groups, and in clan groups within these. They stand; their musicians, drummers and players of cow- and elephant-tusk horns, sit on the ground in front. Forming a large semi-circle, with the river completing the enclosure, the spectators number perhaps two thousand. Within the circle, at one end, is a shelter made of poles and mats. Inside this shelter sit the elders and priests of Numan and Imburu, who will perform the religious ceremony in the evening. In the middle are about ten large calabashes of beer, provided by the women of the original clans of Numan and Imburu.

And throughout this gathering, running from group to group with complete brashness and impunity, is the *Nzo-Dingawo*. He is naked from the waist, proudly displaying his fat belly. His head has been shaven clean. As he moves from group to group he bangs his *dingauto* loudly in the ears of any likely mark, and continues until he receives a "dash" of anything from a few pence to several shillings (he effectively spoiled a portion of my tape-recording of the event by striking the instrument next to the microphone). The *dingauto*, in fitting remembrance of its introduction by ŋburum, is considered a "lonely thing." It can accompany other instruments in marking time, but its harsh notes cannot be varied, and it is not usually welcome in other musical performances. Although it is considered under the category of musical instruments, it is not stored together with them. Some towns may have several *dingautye*, but Imburu, *Nzo-Dingawo's* village, has only one, thus it is considered doubly lonely. If someone is alone, without a spouse, helper, or friend, people may say of him, "*s̄hne dingong botugo dingautu Imburu*"—"he is alone like the *dingauto* of Imburu." It is a fitting accompaniment to one who models his behavior after ŋburum.

The *Nzo-Dingawo* indulged in many pranks that afternoon. He took one woman's head-tie and relinquished it only when she had paid him 3d.; he left the crowd, declaring loudly that he was thirsty, and went to a near-by beer house and pestered the beer-seller until she gave him 6d.-worth of beer; coming again he met a man wearing a Fulani-style straw hat which he seized and held until the man paid him 4d.; he saw a Mumuye boy selling water (Mumuye, from the hills south of Numan Division, have established a monopoly on the water-selling trade in Numan; they are regarded as *gboune* partners by the people of Numan and Imburu) and followed him, banging on his *dingauto* and making fearsome noises. The boy did not understand. People told him that if he did not pay the man something, he would surely die. The boy, obviously consternated, gave him 1d. And so he carried on until it was time for the choosing of the beer.

Whenever *ɲburum* had performed for the people, he was given the first choice of the beer that was available; and so here the *Nzo-Dingawo* has the first choice. He is to signify his choice by touching whichever calabash he wants. He dances around the calabashes, singing that it is about time that the women have offered the beer, why have they waited so long? "*Huun ba bul ha ka myato da won?*"—"Will you kill us with the hunger of death?" But then he stops and begins abusing those women; the beer has been allowed to ferment too long, and can make people drunk. "*A hin mye da vwe, a hin mye da won?*"—"We are the people of beer, we are the people of death"; beer, like death, is indiscriminating. And so, implying that he does not want to see people become drunk, he quickly circles the group of calabashes, touching all of them. The crowd roars. But the joke is on him, for the division of the beer had been made earlier by its providers, who come and take their calabashes from under his nose, and dole out their contents to their fellow clanspeople. The *Nzo-Dingawo* is left alone with his one calabash. But even in this apparently pathetic rejection, he is playing *ɲburum* to the hilt, and it is only when the elders in the shelter prepare for the recitation of the *dyemshi vurato* that he observes more normal social decorum. And hereafter, until the following year's *Farato*, he will be able to take similar liberties only with those who share *gboune* with him.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The occasions I have described above have been only few among the very many instances in which *ɲburum*, the Trickster, forms the model for social behavior. In any *gboune* interaction a recognizable image of *ɲburum* may be effected by the participants. In certain formalized situations, such as funerals, clans that have *gboune* with the clan of the deceased perform to alleviate grief, and their model is *ɲburum*. For their performance, and for their practical assistance with the burial, they are given first choice in the division of the cow that the family has provided as food for the guests. They, as did *ɲburum*, take the choicest parts of the animal.

Referring to such behavioral aspects of *gboune*, one informant said,

ɲburum was the founder of *gboune*. When they play *gboune*, usually the people think of *ɲburum* and feel like him, because he was the one who started it, and they are copying him. Just as *ɲburum*, because he was afraid of people, called everyone "Nduwan" ["my age-mate"; it is among age-mates that the closest bonds of friendship are to be found—see Stevens 1978], the people who play *gboune* feel united and happy. And that is the meaning of *gboune*, it is a unity. And it is because of *ɲburum*.

In a discussion of the role of the clown in various societies, Edward Norbeck (1961:204-212) noted that, especially in Africa, interpretations of the clowns' contributions to the maintenance of order through the symbolic overturning of that order have so occupied most writers, since the time of Gluckman's explication of "rituals of rebellion" (1954), that the comic role of clowns, the pure entertainment function, has received little serious study. Even today, his observations are generally valid. Prompted in large part by his observations, I have sought in this paper 1) further to document the purely humorous aspects of African "clowning" behavior, in both ritual and strictly social contexts, and 2) to show, for one society at least, that such behavior has widely recognized folkloric bases. In Bachama society the recognition, by the audience,¹⁴ of the clown's evocation of the Trickster as the model for his behavior can allow him a liberality of license that otherwise most certainly would not be tolerated. I hope the foregoing discussion has suggested potentially fruitful aspects of the study of humor that may have been overlooked, or understressed, elsewhere.

NOTES

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1. The traditional name of this village is *Bachámá*, from which the popular name of the society is derived. The people call themselves *ɓwààre*. *Lamurde* is a Fulani appellation, meaning, roughly, "the place of the *lamido*," or ruler.

2. The *kufe* and *vayato* ensure protection against a variety of ills; of fundamental importance is their association with the agricultural cycle. In most of the several villages where they are maintained, they are entrusted to the care of two titled elders, the *Nzo-kufe* ("son of the *kufe*") and the *Nzo-njiya* ("son of the soil"). An annual festival, *Vayato*, is held in their honor; the sacred emblems are "brought out" and youths wrestle "for them."

3. *ɓburum* lives with his guilelessly loyal wife, *Marka*, and their seven children.

4. C. K. Meek, Government Anthropologist in Nigeria during the 1920s and 1930s, attended a Bachama wrestling festival; he likened the *kpe-lagbe* to "showmen at a circus" (1931:37).

5. Bachama can easily identify with this sentiment; a general distrust of the pastoral Fulani (*Bororo*) is felt by all. Such feelings are generated, in part, by the proud manner of the *Bororo* and their shamelessly direct gaze, and by their disconcerting modern habit of wearing dark glasses.

6. It might be mentioned that this step forms the basis for the popular *Wuro Ka-duwe* ("dance of the horse's grass," traditionally performed for the welfare of the king's horse). The *Wuro Ka-duwe* dancers won an award in the Pan African Arts Festival in

Dakar in 1968, took First Prize in the traditional dance category in a cultural festival in Nigeria in 1970, and participated in the Second Pan African Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) held in Nigeria in January and February 1977.

7. And suggests elements of a "ritual of rebellion" such as is found elsewhere (see Gluckman 1954), in which clowns and buffoons make mockery of the royal personage, or a representation of him.

8. Dore, of Numan. His name is that of a popular social dance.

9. The origin of *ngwara weto* is contained in a myth of the chieftaincy of Dong, a Bachama chiefdom. The culture-founder, Kuludu, having decided it was his time to depart, called each of his sons to show him "the way a chief walks." Each walked proudly and arrogantly, and was struck down in disgust by his father. He sent for his last son who, warned by a diviner, smeared medicine on his leg, making him appear lame. He walked humbly before Kuludu, who was delighted and conferred the chieftaincy on him.

10. A game similar to marbles; shells of the land-snail are spun into a hollow in the ground, and the owner keeps whatever shells are knocked out. *Ŋburum* was the originator of this game; he played it with Bogoro, whom he constantly cheated. In one *gbamito* Bogoro, incensed at being cheated, made an insulting reference to *Ŋburum*'s sexual inadequacy. *Ŋburum* cut off his head and put it into a bag, restoring it to its body only after Bogoro apologized. Players of the game today adopt the names of *Ŋburum* and Bogoro. The one who is Bogoro spins his shell and calls out, "Sar-r-r-r-r! (sound of the shell spinning) He is incapable of courting women!" "*Ŋburum*" responds, "Sar-r-r-r-r! I have Bogoro's head in my bag!"

11. By Ezekiel, *Kpa-lagbe* of Lamurde.

12. See n. 6.

13. See n. 8.

14. Indeed, the perception of, and participation in, a performance *by the audience* has only recently been recognized as a neglected area of folklore research (see Burke 1969, Ottenberg 1973, and Bauman 1975).

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