

*Ananse-like Characters in the Ghanaian and Caribbean  
Postcolonial theatre*

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**Abstract:**

This paper presents a comparative analysis of Ananse-like characters in Ghanaian and Caribbean drama. Ananse, the spider trickster in West Africa and the hero of countless folktales, has a strong pervasive influence in the two regions even after years of liberation. This paper analyses the manifestation of some postcolonial aspects and their correlation with the trickster-inspired characters to investigate the extent to which they match the trickster traits in two Ghanaian and Caribbean plays. It also studies how the Ananse-characters reflect the social, economic and political environment in the two regions in the postcolonial era. The paper adopts a comparative approach that promises a fruitful way to articulate the significance of the trickster theme in resisting or adapting to the postcolonial impact. It integrates this comparative approach with the bricoleur methodology that is described by Denzin and Lincoln as a methodology that is better able to address the “value-laden nature of inquiry” and likewise “how social experience is created and given meaning” (8). Both techniques are used to investigate the occurrence of trickster characters in the four different plays. The study shows the significance of the trickster characters in challenging the awareness of the audience who could face illusion in case they did not realize the deception. The paper concludes with pinpointing the impact of the trickster characters in stressing the postcolonial aspects such as exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy, and hybridity as well as highlighting how they benefit of being trick-players in dealing with such postcolonial issues.

**Introduction**

The spider character is known by different names and spellings according to the place it has visited, whether the original homeland in Akan, Ghana in West Africa or through its journey to the New Land in the Caribbean Islands. In this paper, name ‘Ananse’ is used for all manifestations of Ananse-inspired characters whether in African or Caribbean theatre. The figure has completely deviated from the original image as a secular figure which has some heavenly connections. The inherent influence of Ananse whether in Africa or in the Caribbean has deeply affected people since their childhood through their folktales. Christopher Vecsey in his article “*The Exception Who Proves The Rules*” mentions that it appears in the folktales as a human or god, man or animal, creative and destructive. His stories sometimes promote the

concepts of myth and legends and they are sometimes educational in a particular way (106). The trickster highlights a particular theme or a specific social fact by breaking them. When he behaves irresponsibly, he identifies the significance of the concept of responsibility. He crosses the limits of questioning some sacred social values in order to make the people reconsider those values and deepen their faith in them. He apparently threatens the society, yet he deeply educates his people. This strong impact has slowly but firmly established some corrupt values in society and affected different aspects such as family relations, religion and economics as will be discussed in the plays under study. These corrupt values have appeared in the different societies when people embrace the Ananse techniques of trickery and deception to achieve their goals at all events. At an extreme end, after the transformation of Ananse to the Caribbean, Emily Marshall in her article "The Ananse Syndrome" mentions that his influence has pushed some educators like Pauline Bain at a Conference of The Caribbean Union of Teachers to suggest banning Ananse as a folk hero because he promotes "trickery and unscrupulous behaviour amongst children" (127); an influence that is believed to establish corrupt values in the Jamaican youth and accordingly invented the "Anansi Syndrome".

The selected plays in this paper are varied. The first two plays are from the Ghanaian theatre; *The Marriage of Anansewa*, (1975) by the literary icon Efua Sutherland and *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (1987) by the pan African Mohamed Ben Abdallah. *The Marriage for Anansewa* presents some unpalatable features of the Ghanaian society at that time such as poverty, gullibility and materialism. The poverty is exemplified by the poor economic situation of Ananse's family, a situation that drives Ananse the father to draw a mischievous, deceitful plan to cheat others for survival. The gullibility is reflected in how easily most of the characters are deceived by Ananse's fabricated, hoax stories, resulting in superstition and unfavourable behaviour in the Ghanaian society. The materialism, with its reflected social immoralities, is the significant feature and well demonstrated by the motives and actions of many of the characters, whether major and minor. *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* (1987) by the Ghanaian playwright Mohamed Ben-Abdallah deals with the context of political instability in a post-colonial African country where one coup follows another and indicates deep socio-political anxiety. With its exciting narrative, the play demonstrates the semiotics of revolution. The story of coups, conspiracies and political turmoil is subtly presented to the audience through the narration of an Ananse-inspired central character, Mallam Ilya, who exploits people's respect for some sacred religious figures to secure himself in a community that is heating up and full of unrest and strikes.

The two Ghanaian plays are significant as they address the concerns of twenty-first century Ghanaians after independence. Both belong to the third

stage of Frantz Fanon's taxonomy of artists and intellectuals in terms of the impact of colonialism that he presents in his book *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961). The first stage is 'assimilation' when they try very hard to assimilate and correspond to the Western culture, so they can mingle and be accepted, but they find the White civilization still rejecting them. As a result, they move to the second phase which is "total rejection of the Western culture" and return to the African past. Fanon describes this stage as a form of 'self-enslavement' (158-159). In his interview with James Gibbs and Anastasia Agbenyega in 2000, Ben-Abdallah classifies his plays as falling into Fanon's "third phase" when "the African Artist liberates himself or herself utterly from [...] colonial enslavement" (159) and at the same time frees himself from ignoring or running into the past. The true artist in this approach is one who works for the betterment of his society, its present as well as its future. This is what he aims at in his plays neither to ignore his past nor to please the West, but rather to produce plays that help his community become more stable by addressing all the issues that make the environment full of unrest.

### **Literature Review**

Theatre in Ghana thrived in the years after independence in 1957 through the works of prominent figures such as Efua Sutherland and Joe De Craft, which correlated with political agendas seeking a unified sense of nation. The Ghanaian president at that time, Kwame Nkrumah, supported the flourishing of theatre as a means of defining and communicating his beliefs. His vision was quoted in Sutherland's interview with Maya Angelou as "Kwame has said that Ghana must use its own legends to heal itself" (13). Later she responds to his aspiration and comments on her contribution that "I have written the old tales in new ways to teach the children that their history is rich and noble" (13). Her efforts are best rewarded when he attends the inauguration of Sutherland's Ghana Drama Studio and speaks to the audience. Robert July notes that his speech focuses on "the desire that a network of theatres be established throughout the land, the hope for a renaissance of the arts in Africa [and] most of all, Nkrumah's recurrent dream of pan-African unity, aided in this instance by the universal language of art" (74).

It is noteworthy that the situation in Ghana became very complicated after independence because of the political instability. Synchronizing politics with theatre had a great influence on playwriting as it started vigorously just after independence, fully supported by the government of Kwame Nkrumah. Then, with the unstable political condition of the country, it declined for some years to flourish again in the beginning of the 1980s under the government of J. J. Rawlings in whose tenure Ben-Abdallah established the National Commission of Culture and built the National Theatre of Ghana. He was a member of the revolutionary government of the Provisional National Defence Council in the 1980s and 1990s and was appointed as the minister of Education

and Culture in 1987. This is another reason for choosing Efua Sutherland and Mohamed Ben-Abdallah as they represent the flourishing of theatre in two different eras, and their plays are comparable in the sense that they are both supported by the state, and they critique some postcolonial issues at a time when the country was relatively stable and well-established. Ben-Abdallah's plays, written in the 1970s and 1980s, have displayed the political consequences of Ghana in the post-colonial era. After a series of military coups and short-lived civilian regimes that followed deposing Nkrumah, Ghana again faced the challenge of defining and producing a unified national identity. A situation that made Rawlings say, after he returned to power at the end of 1981 in a radio speech to state; "this is not a coup. I ask for nothing less than a revolution, something that would transform the social and economic order of this country" (Nugent 15). His words were very inspirational to many critics, politics, and playwrights and he was claimed to be a hero and connected in a way or another to Nkrumah. Similar to the way Sutherland was inspired by Nkrumah's speech of unity, Ben Abdallah was ignited by his words and called for reforming the Ghanaian political identity.

Ananse emerged in the Caribbean written literature after it had been neglected for a long time during the colonial era in different folk forms (Juang and Morrisette 102). They also mention many examples of Ananse's popularization in literature some of which are the plays under study; *Smile Orange* by Trevor Rhone (1971), and *Couvade: A Dream-play of Guyana* by Michael Gilkes (1974). *Smile Orange* is introduced through Ananse-inspired central character, Ringo, who exemplifies different themes such as racism, which is exhibited in the economic aspect of life. Most of the black characters in the play occupy inferior jobs, such as Ringo – the waiter at Mocho Beach Hotel, Cyril – the busboy, Miss Brandon – the receptionist, and the Assistant Manager of the hotel who is also coloured, but occupies a position that is higher than the rest of the characters mentioned. Moreover, he is married to a white woman. This suggests that the society in which the play is set is fully charged with racism. More so, the wages of the black staff are so poor that they get involved in illegal and dishonest deals to cope with life. The other play is *Couvade* (1972) by Michael Gilkes adopts a strategy to unite with the past and resolve the question of identity through the literal tale of Lionel, a tormented, black Caribbean art-teacher who seeks to conceal with his mixed Guyanese identity through his paintings. The artwork that is being painted is a complex work blending the mythologies of the numerous ethnic groups that form the current Guyana. The trickster character in the play is Arthur, as described by Deandrea as "very articulate, not limited to only one quality, but also pertinent to the point in question" (9). The conflict in the play between Lionel and Arthur is that Lionel draws and educates people about their identity crisis between their past and future which is illustrated by Gilkes in his introduction to the

play when he describes a receptionist and thinks of “what combination of ethnic strains had produced the teenage girl of rich-brown complexion with wide cheeks, straight black hair, and a warm, ready smile” (vii). Later, he asks her and knows that she is a descendant of eight nations and five different races. On the one hand, she is culturally rich, on the other, she is poor identity-wise. This shapeless combination commonly known as a Guyanese or Caribbean citizen, and that is the dilemma that Couvade addresses. (vii)

Ananse has a pervasive presence in the postcolonial Caribbean literature, and it is represented as a protagonist, antagonist, major or minor character. The Guyanese writer Wilson Harris in his book *History, Fable and Myth in The Caribbean and Guianas* describes the genesis of the limbo myth which is a well-known feature in the carnival life of the West Indies and originated in Africa. He elaborates: “Limbo was born, it is said, on the slave ships of the Middle Passage. There was so little space that the slaves contorted themselves into human spiders. Limbo, therefore, as Edward Brathwaite, the distinguished Barbadian born poet, has pointed out is related to anancy or spider fables” (378). He assumes that the waves of migration through the Middle Passage from Africa which have settled in the Americas and the West Indies; generation after generation have got the stamp of the spider metamorphosis and have led to the universality of the Caribbean man. In the context of the cruel Caribbean plantations, the transformed Ananse has replaced the West African spider in terms of his godlike features which have been replaced by some earthly qualities, besides, Harris sees the adaptation of Ananse in the Caribbean society as a model of creating a positive product from terrible inputs. Richard Burton (1997) and Emily Marshall (2009) agree that he naturally exploits any existing object for absolute survival using what Marshall called Anancy tactics and completely forgets his role as a half creator or as a mediator between deities and people. His stories usually have a twofold wisdom; one of them looks directly toward the future and offers a way to survive in the world to come, as exemplified in Trevor Rhone’s *Smile Orange* (1975). While the other direction of Ananse’s wisdom in the context of the Middle Passage looks back to the past, back to the African Motherland as seen in Michael Gilkes’ *the Couvade* (1972). The two chosen works are emblematic of Ananse’s tactics in different ways. *Smile Orange* reveals the predicament of Jamaican blacks seeking work opportunities that will hopefully lead to some financial improvement. The “smiling” workers, who seek cash as well as any opportunities to move to the United States, oblige any wish made by American tourists.

The themes of the four plays are related to postcolonial issues of corruption, socioeconomic marginalization, political instability, hybridity, exploitation and racism. However, this paper focuses on the manifestation of four themes that are evident in the four plays and the manner by which the

trickster-character deals with the respective theme. The themes are exploitation, hybridity, corruption and hypocrisy and the major trickster trait is deception and trick-playing as the tool by which the tricksters handled the postcolonial issues.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper is based on a comparative bricoleur approach. The comparative approach investigates the common historical, cultural, political, and social themes and promises a fruitful way to articulate the significance of the trickster theme in resisting or adapting to the postcolonial impact. Robert J. C. Young shows how the development of the postcolonial comparative method connects isolated islands in literature that might not show a common ground between them. Young states: “The radical move has been to compare the uncomparable, literatures considered incomparable, a dimension that has been developed forcefully in minority literatures” (687). He asserts that postcolonial literature must be comparative because it is written from the position of always being compared to other literatures. Moreover, primary information about four contemporary postcolonial plays will be discussed alongside a critical analysis and evaluation of the content, context, style, language, and subject matter of them.

On another note, Norman Denzin and Yvonna Lincoln prove that the bricoleur methodology is significant for: “stress[ing] the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry” (8). Moreover, they argue that bricolage as a methodology is better able to address the “value-laden nature of inquiry” and likewise “how social experience is created and given meaning” (8). So, a bricoleur methodology is best defined as one in which the inherent evaluations of a research project are made clear and persistently returned to throughout the period of a study. Furthermore, Troy Richardson refers to this mode or strategy as defined by the structural anthropologist Levi-Strauss, that it implies a kind of ingenuity and skill, of making good use of a range of tools (780). Then he cites the works of Denzin and Lincoln as they illustrate the main terms and characteristics of the bricoleur researcher. This strategy comes into perspective in the process of understanding topics like the relationship between text and reader, language and consciousness, culture and aesthetic, and subjectivity and narrative. Such ways of getting knowledge, as in indigenous contexts, will eventually raise questions that transcend the scope of reading and reflecting on the text. To sum up, both techniques, the comparative and bricoleur, are the best to study and compare the occurrences of the trickster characters in the two regions to give better illustration of their background, behavior, and evolution.

**Exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy, and hybridity flourished by deception**

The first theme that is clearly manifest in the plays is exploitation. As a starting point of similarity, the two trickster characters, George Ananse and Mallam Ilya, have been observed throughout the incidents of the two plays as self-centred and trying to find themselves excuses for their exploitative purposes. In *The Marriage of Anansewa*, Ananse the father is derived from the Akan folktale of a poor father who strives and makes stories to overcome some serious financial troubles that prevent him from paying his daughter's school fees and other commitments. Sutherland modifies this folktale and imbeds the cunning stream of Ananse into the incidents, creating *The Marriage of Anansewa*. It spins around Ananse, the Machiavellian character who advertises the photograph of his daughter in the hope that she will marry the chief who will pay him a great deal of money that he needs to improve his social status. The play begins with Ananse speaking to his daughter asking her to use her typing skills and reminding her that he spent a lot of money when he sent her to the E.P. Secretarial School. He exploits her to do something she does not like and pushes her to help her father who is getting old and needs to live in a comfortable environment. Ananse tries to convince his daughter Anansewa to type the letters that he plans to send to four chiefs:

My daughter, it isn't well with the home, therefore sit down, open up the machine I bought for your training, and let the tips of your fingers give some service from the training for which I'm paying. I have very urgent letters to write... And when you return, will your fees for E.P.'s Secretarial School be paid? ... will the last instalment on that typewriter which you need for your training be paid? (2-3)

Ananse makes Anansewa type the letters without her understanding that they are about her. She is called "the object of your interest" in the letters (6) and Ananse sends them to the four chiefs after persuading her to mislead them to compete unwittingly as suitors seeking her hand. So, each chief chooses a date to complete the customary marriage, which Sutherland calls the "head-drink ceremony" (18).

By the same token, John K. Djisenu singles out *The Trial of Mallam Ilya* for presenting the main character, Mallam Ilya, in the image of Ananse, who is seen as selfish and gluttonous, one who has benefitted a lot from all the post-independence regimes, "employing his brain to fill his belly" (43). The same meaning is revealed in the play by Kouyate the High Priest of Angah, when he describes Ilya, as an opportunist, one who has always kept a seat for himself in their courts throughout the years, with the constant change of the ruling heads, whether they are successful. He openly shows his personal needs with complete denial of the real people's interests.

## KOUYATE<sup>1</sup>

... Ilya: ever since the warrior Patapa led the rebellion of warrior that toppled Kumrahn out of his seat of power and plunged us deeper into chaos, we have seen several more revolts... successful and abortive... And you, Ilya you and men like you have sat in everyone of their councils. What, I ask you, holy one, what have you done in the interest of those for whose sake you became the hero of the oppressed? (141)

The two trickster-like characters, Ringo and Arthur share self-centered qualities that are known about themselves. Ringo in *Smile Orange* teaches his young apprentice Cyril, what Deandrea describes as ‘the trickster trade’: “If you is a blackman and you can’t play a part, you going to starve to death.” He announces his maxim is: “exploit the exploiter!” who is in this context, the American tourist. That motto defines one of Anancy’s techniques to use all his efforts and power to outwit his masters (in this case, the hotel guests) by cheating them (107). Similarly, Arthur in *Couvade* is described by Pat, Lionel’s wife, as selfish and devious who forgets his mottos for a drink. When Lionel asks Pat if she likes Arthur or not, she answers clearly “I don’t. Well, he is so puffed-up with himself! Always patting people on the back and when he’s had a few drinks always ready to shout about ‘power for the people’ and ‘black brotherhood’ while all the time he’s only thinking about himself.” (7). She describes how superficially he believes in his ideas as long as they gain him some personal benefits, otherwise, he can easily abandon them.

The paper moves to another postcolonial related theme which is corruption and hypocrisy which are enacted in the plays. In the Marriage, they are seen in Ananse’s ultimate concern to live a prestigious life even if it were at the cost of his daughter. His concern is not about serious life issues as it is about showy and flamboyant matters. He says: “Will I be able to go to memorial services, this week in a fine cloth, next week in a suit or a different cloth? Will I be able if I go, to thrust my hand confidently into my pocket in public and take out a five-guinea donation?” (4). In the same context, Ilya in Ben-Abdallah’s play does the same thing when he declares it frankly, “Every man wants to be important and honourable, at least, for sometime...” (143). Unconsciously, he gives the key that all over the years he has deceived different rulers and proved his loyalty to their plans to secure himself a seat in their courts and to achieve and maintain his self-esteem and ego. Ringo’s trickster-like ambivalence successfully hides the truth and shows his slipperiness as he rejects to be seen from one angle. He has used the occasion of the man’s death to his own benefit. Neither he nor his friends show any grief

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<sup>1</sup> Names of characters in Euba’s play are written in the middle of the line to copy the style he uses in the original play.

or sympathy at that incident. It is significant to note that although Ringo is the master of dishonesty and deception, he cannot succeed without the help of his friends, Joe and Cyrill. Although they first refuse to buy his idea of heroism, eventually they join him when they notice that they will profit from his lying that he risks his life to “save the people dem”. He turns a situation of carelessness and irresponsibility into one of heroism and victory. Another hidden meaning is well expressed in this scene with the speech Ringo gives to Joe and Cyrill when they first refuse his story of false heroism about the importance of support and assistance black people should give to each other in case of troubles. He uses eloquent and persuasive words to make them agree to his deception, although their real reason to help him is their own personal benefit. They both become scared of losing their jobs, worried that if the hotel gets a poor reputation for the bad service they provide, nobody will come again. ‘Hear me now, dis thing going to have serious repercussion, you know’, Joe declared. When they realise their own loss and listen to his words about solidarity, they change their minds and follow his words as if to stand by him.

Ringo: Why all di fuss? Dat’s why black people will never get anywhere. We don’t stick together. We will try and make a little get out, but as soon as something goes wrong, a little slip-up, we start nyam up each other. (150)

Consequently, the drowning scene reveals the real mutual corrupt interest nature of their friendship. There is support and assistance as long as they serve everyone’s own interest even if this support involves an unethical issue. Additionally, it shows how the Ananse tactic is implemented by Ringo on a practical level that makes him convince his friends to use it to their advantage. In *Couvade*, Arthur is caught in different situations changing his opinions and words about social issues like marriage. When Lionel and his brother in law, Eddie, try to convince him to get married, He says:

Arthur: marriage is too damaging boy. It involves not one, but two deaths. Eddie: Pat and Lionel don’t look dead to me.

Arthur: Pat and Lionel are exceptions to the rule. (17)

He is always slippery and hypocrite as long as his opinions contradict with the current stream of opinions, he does not mind changing them to please the people around him. Another example is while the four main characters are arguing about the roots of the Guyanese people, Arthur after supporting a fanatic idea of how humiliating the past of their ancestors is, he changes his viewpoint again for the same simple reason, which accidents happen:

Lionel: As a matter of fact, Arthur, there were cases of Caribs and Africans living together and sharing a common culture...

Arthur: Jesus, you're not going to tell us again about your African great-grandfather and your Carib great-grandmother? Accidents happen, you know. (23)

The term hybridity has been recently related to the work of Homi Bhabha, who analyses the relation between the colonizer and colonized and concludes that they both depend on each other and work mutually and cooperatively to build their unique entity. He asserts that all cultural systems are built in a space that he calls 'Third Space of enunciation' (37). For Bhabha, cultural identity exists in this contradictory and mixed place and the recognition of this mix will help us overcome cultural diversity issues in favor of empowering hybridity within which cultural difference will function.

It is significant that the productive capacities of this Third Space have a colonial or postcolonial provenance. For a willingness to descend into that alien territory . . . may open the way to conceptualizing an international culture, based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of culture's hybridity. (38)

It is the 'in-between' space that carries the burden and meaning of culture, and this is what makes the idea of hybridity significant. Hybridity has frequently been used in post-colonial discourse to mean simply cross-cultural 'exchange', and this use of the term is evident in the four plays which depict the postcolonial society. This is exactly what Sutherland implements in *The Marriage* when she makes Ananse the protagonist with a new hybrid identity as a modern, anglicized, Christian Ghanaian man whose first name is George. Another aspect that Barber et al. note is that by the 1960s–70s, the plays closely revolved around the everyday life of contemporary Ghana "with reference to cocoa, farms, banks, schools and the Ghana National Lottery" (15). *The Marriage* typically portrays the themes, characters and the syncretic adaptation of the colonized society by presenting the contemporary problems of normal people who make up the audience. Ananse is deeply concerned with the prestigious donation to make in the Sunday prayer, the soft, bouncy mattress, "When you come back, will there be a better, leak-proof roof over our heads? Let alone some comfortable chairs to sit in? A fridge in the kitchen? A car in the garage? My name in invitation lists for state functions? Embassies' parties?" (4) All these modern intruded concerns act like his main aims that he sees no offense to use his daughter in his trick as a means to achieve them in order to live in the contemporary world. With respect to *The Trial*, Ben-Abdallah addresses the contemporary postcolonial hybrid society in Ghana. The play expresses a multicultural pot with a mixture of religions and religious figures such as Mallam Ilya and Imam Abbas, representing Islam, as well as Kouyate, the High Priest of Angah, who represents Christianity. At the same

time, the play has another lengthy scene describing the masquerade in which Henry the Navigator, Queen Victoria, Cecil Rhodes and David Livingstone perform ‘wildly grotesque’ (118) portrayals of the history of European expansionism in Africa. Kouyate, the leader of the masquerade, clarifies this point stating that ‘we live in a crucible where the horrors of the past are smelted with the violence of today to be forged in the monster of tomorrow’ (141).

In *Smile Orange*, the whole situation is built on hybridity. Jamaica’s economy depends on tourism and the plot reflects the need of Jamaica to attract more white American tourists and they have to satisfy all their entertainment needs. Although it is an island country, they just wait for tourists coming from America to make the tourism industry flourish. Interactions between workers and tourists in the hotel reveal the crisis of black Jamaicans who are seeking economic improvement despite the attempts in the tourist economy provided by the government of a formerly colonized country. Jamaican workers create different activities to please the American tourists whether ethical or unethical. Many of them, like the Front desk clerk, hopes to have a relation with an American tourist to travel with him to the States. Ringo himself, the main character, puts a lot of effort on that aim. The Assistant Manager of the Hotel is already married to a White woman who mistreats and betrays him with another Black man. Rhone exposes this potential comparison in his representation of the Mocho Beach Hotel. Like the plantation, the hotel has a network system of social and labour connections that is characterized by racial division yet showing some hybridity manifestations. On the one hand, he presents the tourists as all white and assumingly wealthy, at least enough to afford leisure time and a holiday abroad, although there is an opposite point of view that if they were rich, they would probably be staying at a far better hotel. On the other hand, he portrays the distressing images of poverty and deprivation in the same country presented by the hotel staff. It is this economic gap between the two categories that recalls the plantation memory, mirrored in the labour of the black residents who benefit economically from tourism by providing pleasure and service to the tourists, who are mostly white.

Similarly, Gilkes’ *Couvade* is a symbolic play that promotes the concept of hybridity. Gilkes seeks to see Guiana as a mixed society with all the different roots mingled and intertwined. In the play we see Lionel holds a great debate on his painting with Arthur -the trickster character - that Lionel has drawn many faces to express his vision about the diversity of the Guyanese society, the mixture of African, Amerindian, Indian, and Chinese, and how they should unite and shape a unique Guyanese culture. Arthur, on the other hand, disagrees with the idea suggesting that it is only Mother Africa that should be counted as the root of the Guyanese because the greatest number of people in the country are found in dark skin. Arthur keeps fighting for this idea

until he finds a better chance and joins the PNP that claims unifying the cultural legacy into a syncretic Guyanese character.

### **Deception and trick-playing**

According to Hynes: “the trickster is a consummate and continuous trick-player and deceiver” (35). He uses this major trait to deal with any difficulty that may conflict his personal gain. This is obvious in the four plays under study. For example, Ananse in Sutherland’s play uses only tricks to deceive everyone around him starting from his daughter making her type letters to the potential grooms without her knowledge; she is named in the letters “the object of your interest.” The four chiefs choose the same date to complete the customary marriage, which Sutherland calls the “head-drink ceremony” (18). Moreover, he deceives his assistants, the family members, and the neighbours to make them believe that his daughter died as a means to unknot the problem of having the four chiefs altogether on the same day. He deceives them all once more to convince them that he brought her back to life with his sincere supplications and his connection with some heavenly spirits. It is all built in deception and trickery. Another incident in Ananse’s case in which he is deceiving even himself before others is when he is pleading humbly to god Kweku to support and help him perform his tricks carefully. He shows how stressed he is under his fear of being revealed and justifies his untruthful actions that this is the only way to bring fortune to his daughter.

I know that not all my ways can be considered straight. But, before God, I’m not motivated by bad thoughts at this moment. I have a deep fatherly concern for this only child of mine. If the world were not what it is, I would not gamble with such a priceless possession. So what I plead is this: may grace be granted so that from among the four chiefs who desire to marry my child, the one will reveal himself who will love her and take good care of her when I give her to him. (67)

He demonstrates himself as a weak and exhausted father who really worries about his only daughter and how to choose a suitor who will love and care about her, not to mention his selfishness or his own needs. Sutherland describes him as ‘indeed weary’ (67). He performs his role so cleverly that his helpers not only believe his good intentions and sympathize with him but also help him put his tricks into action to deceive the messengers. The storyteller comments on Ananse’s tricks and the manner in which he convinces himself first before others of his plan to make people believe him. “Storyteller: I can’t laugh enough. Listen, Ananse is lying, he is really, and so relaxed. As for some people! They do not pause to enquire how true a thing is before they believe it, and so it’s easy to deceive them” (60). Moving to Mallam Ilya, he does the same thing when he goes under pressure, he inverts the situation for his own sake and causing confusion by deceiving everybody around him. Although all

his endeavours are for his benefit to always belong to the velvet class regardless, they are dictators or reformers, to live like a hero and to keep his prestige, he gives a perfect pretext for that. Immediately, he remembers the rights of the oppressors and the cause of justice. This is clearly noticed in his talk with Imam Abbas on the occasion of the latter's attempt to make him confess his participation in Kumrahn's assassination:

ILYA

Since when, Holy One, did our personal safety stand between us and the cause of justice?... It is common knowledge that I spoke out from the top of the minaret against "palm-greasing" and corruption in high places. Against forced labour without compensation; against arbitrary arrests and imprisonment without fair trial. I was accused of conspiring with others to commit murder. Everybody knows it is not true. Above all, you know it is not true. You are an elder in the Inner Council and you should know why the Black One is anxious to get rid of me. Why, my father, tell me, why? (109)

He uses well-spoken words and a common figure of rhetoric to deceive everyone, even the audience, to gain their sympathy and to make them get confused about his reality. His aim is fulfilled and can be easily recognized when for instance Malwal's warriors disagree about the innocence of Ilya at the beginning of the play. Not only the warriors, but also the pillars of the Inner Court have the same kind of confusion whether Ilya is guilty or not guilty. While Samburu and Kouyate think he is guilty and deserves to be sentenced to death, Abdul Karim and El-Fasi have a different opinion that he is not that dangerous, "Abdul Karim: He is less dangerous than you and I. What we know he will never know" (94).

In the Caribbean theatre, Mervyn Morris states that Ringo is created from the tradition of Anancy, the trickster figure of African origin features prominently in Jamaican folklore and "through humour Rhone makes the audience observe the trickster's uncanny ability to turn adversity to his advantage" (ix). As a trickster, Ananse represents ambiguity, and through deviousness, he displays the possibility of double meanings and deception. In *Smile Orange*, Ringo is very ambiguous hoaxer, who uses a variety of techniques, including trickery, deception and slippery text as a means of justifying his needs as a labourer contesting the cruel systems in the society. One good example of Ringo's trickery and cheating is the way he manages such foolish tourist-like activities as crab racing run in the hotel. Ringo's own words "Exploit the exploiter, God laugh," define one of Anancy's techniques to outwit his masters (in this case, the hotel guests) by cheating them (107). He cheats them as a means of profaning their superiority by depriving them of their money and thus securing material gain for himself. This is clear in his

invitation to Joe, his fellow waiter, to invest his money in the crab race, when he gives him the secret for winning, telling him that he handicapped all the participating crabs except special ones. “You can’t lose on di orange and di red because everything else under handicap” (141). *In Couvade*, Lionel Suffers from terrible nightmares while he draws the painting ‘the robe of ancestors’ as it isolates him from his reality and future. He wants to finish the drawing as fast as he can to reach an identification of his past that satisfies his ancestors before the future – which is symbolized in his unborn yet child. So, he works day and night to get his “vision take a shape and become a while” (48). He seeks an ideal character of Guyana as a distinctive ethnic and cultural combination. SO, it is a critical situation that cause him to get sick, but his friend, Arthur, pretends to be obsessed by the roots of each ethnic group and has a strong faith that Africa is the mother of all Guyanese races. He believes that:

Whether you like it or not, you’re black... You go to any one of the big, progressive white countries. ‘Nigger go home’. That’s the message, friend. Black people in the West Indies will ALWAYS be ashamed of their skin until they learn to accept Africa as a spiritual home. Only then will they have any real sense of power; power to stop the colonial brain-washing that STILL goes on, even in the minds of children. (Gilkes 26)

Arthur embraces this belief and keeps fighting for it on every occasion until he finds an opportunity with the People’s National Party that calls for repossessing the country’s land and developing the interior resources depending on abandoning the roots favoritism and the fight for promoting over another. Lionel once describes Arthur’s political activities as “Game of the trickster” (59) that is based on the dangerous, yet politically profitable ‘divide and rule strategy’. It is significant that the only trickster story that is told in the play by one of the PNP leaders in a public speech inviting the people to go to the election and vote for them is about the spider who, in order to get rid of his debts, makes sure that all his debtors (Toucan, Wildcat, Puma, and Tiger) kill or eat one another. The leader says: “Remember: The spider spins his web by day to catch industrious flies. The trickster promises to pay and swears the truth with lies” (29). All his claims and beliefs turn out to be mere deception. He adopts and fights for them until he finds a better opportunity that helps him improve his current situation.

### **Conclusion**

The paper draws the conclusion that trickster characters are the best to handle different postcolonial related issues in different societies. The paper uses a bricoleur comparative approach to prove that, in the four plays being analysed, they use their abilities of deception and trick-playing to deal with themes like exploitation, corruption, hypocrisy, as well as hybridity. the

comparative approach allows for a slight generalization that trickster-inspired characters, as they still suffer in their respective societies from colonization aftermath, use different Ananse techniques to help them overcome their lives' ordeals.

Efua Sutherland pinpoints the significance of trickster characters when she notes in her introduction to *The Marriage* that "Ananse Appears to represent a kind of everyman, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium of self-examination. He has a penetrating awareness of the nature and psychology of human beings and animals" (V). In his deeds, he mirrors the ambitions, obsessions as well as the eccentricity and stupidity of humans in contemporary situations. She sees Ananse as a means for the society to criticize itself and she expressed that in her words "Exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined" (v).

Sutherland's last words lead us to the second reflection on the trickster's impact in the society. Trickster has that positive impact that could improve the faults of any society if the role of the trickster is not misunderstood. If the role is misunderstood, the impact will be negative as previously shown in Bain's claim to ban Ananse. The Trickster characters challenge the awareness and perception of the receivers whether audience in the theatre or readers of a play who could face illusion in case they did not realize the deception. The characters in the four plays under study are negatively influenced by Ananse's techniques. Ananse the father, Mallam Ilya, Ringo, and Arthur embrace the Machiavellian approach which aims at focusing on their own interests that they will manipulate, deceive, and exploit others to achieve their goals without any concern for the image they represent. As trickster like figures, they break the sacred clichés of fatherhood, religious people, middle working social class, as well as identity fanatic political men. Breaking the rules could reflect a kind of venting out strong emotions and actions that ordinary people cannot indulge. It all depends on the perception of the readers / audience who could choose the temporary outcome of the tricks and follow the Ananse techniques to get the fleeting benefits, or the intellectually sophisticated influence that could lead to refine any suffering society by strengthening the power of discernment.

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