Jacqueline Atemkeng Fonge, Amshetu Melo Forchu, "Entry on: Ngwarem by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1274. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

Ngwarem

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Ngwarem
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bamun
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	May 5, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Folk tales, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Jacqueline Atemkeng Fonge, University of Yaoundé 1, fonjackie88@gmail.com Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

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Creators



Mama Asanatou (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 77 (in 2020)

Social status: Housewife, matriarch

Profession: Housewife

Languages of narration: Bamun, Baba

Bio prepared by Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	The Bamoun people are a large Bantu ethnic group in Foumban in the western region of Cameroon. They are predominantly a Muslim community, although they are also Christians and members of other minority religions. It is not uncommon to also find people who do not believe in any traditional or established religion. The people of Bamoun worship their ancestors and believe that both the living and the dead can be in close communion during certain traditional ceremonies.

Summary

“Kesasahooo”! “Kesasahooo”! [Should I tell you this story! Should I tell you this story!]*

“Wooo”! “Wooo”! [Yes! Yes!]

A long time ago, there lived a man called Ngwarem** who was married to eight women, and they lived in separate houses in a large compound. These women got pregnant at the same time and when Ngwarem went to a faraway land in search for food, all the eight women had their babies. When he returned, he was very happy and decided to move from one house to another to see his newborn babies. When he got to the house of Ndohnjieu***, the woman in house no. 8, he noticed that the baby was unlike the others — very tiny. Consequently, Ngwarem immediately rejected the baby on the grounds that he was not the father. He grabbed the baby from Ndohnjieu; rushed to a road junction and dumped her on a heap of ants while Ndohnjieu pleaded in vain to have her baby back.

The sky king immediately took this baby to the sky and handed over to one of his wives who had just had her own baby. This woman breastfed the baby alongside her own. However, the curious thing about this baby picked from earth was that, not only was she growing faster than the other one; but she was also very beautiful. Because of her extraordinary beauty right from childhood, she became known as the “princess of the sky”. It was habitual for the children of the sky king to descend to the earth for fishing, and during one of these fishing expeditions, the princess of the sky secured the permission of the sky king to accompany her “siblings” to the earth.

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The fishing activity consisted of pulling water from a muddy pond until the fish would remain exposed, and then the fish would be carried out in a basket. That was the usual ritual; it was only after all the fish would be gathered together that sharing could take place. As the siblings finished removing the fish, and just when they began to share, a strange man appeared and begged for fish. This strange man happened to be Ngwarem, and behold, he was immediately attracted to the beauty of "the princess of the sky". Hereafter, he immediately asked her whether she would like to marry him and that he was willing to take her home. The "princess of the sky" accepted, but told Ngwarem that she had to go back to the sky since they had come to earth for fishing on a special permission. However, she promised to go back to the sky with her siblings, and to come back in three days. At this moment, the "princess of the sky" already knew that Ngwarem was her father who had dumped her on an anthill.

Later on, with great exhilaration, Ngwarem returned to his village and declared that he had seen another beautiful woman to add to his many wives: little did he know she was indeed the daughter he had abandoned! On the third day, the "princess of the sky" arrived and was accompanied by one of her younger sisters from the sky. They also had with them a guitar called "lûm", and a magic calabash containing a small quantity of water. The sky king had instructed that for anything she is offered to drink or eat, a drop of that water must be put on it. Ngwarem had informed the whole village of the coming of his new wife, and many had gathered to welcome the "princess of the sky".

At the peak of the joyous event, "princess of the sky" was spotted at a corner with the "lûm",

Singing a song that can roughly be rendered as:

"Ngwarem, do you know me!"

"Ngwarem you threw me away!"

"And today you want to date me!"

"Ngwarem, do you know me!"

Ndohnjieu immediately recognized her as her daughter when she heard the song. In astonishment, Ndohnjieu rushed to inform

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Ngwarem and instead he accused her of being jealous of his new wife. The tone of the song increased and many people who were present at the event approached the singer. When Ngwarem heard the song himself, he believed his wife had told him the truth: “princess of the sky” was indeed the daughter he abandoned. In absolute humiliation and guilt, Ngwarem pleaded for forgiveness from “the princess of the sky” but she rebuffed him. Three times he asked for forgiveness and three times he was rebuffed! At the end, the “princess of the sky” returned to the sky to her adopted father, the sky king. Thus, Ngwarem lived to regret his action, yet there was nobody to comfort him.

* Local Bamun language.

** This literary means a man of a large family in the local language of Bamun.

*** This literary means “I shall see” in the local Bamun language.

Analysis

In some parts of traditional Africa, a man’s prowess is, in most cases, measured by the number of wives and children he has. It was equally believed that any child who did not look physically healthy or who was sick immediately after birth had to be branded a witch or wizard and was disposed of. These transversal African beliefs are highlighted in the myth above through Ngwarem, who is an epitome of an African man, looking at his eight wives who give birth at the same time. Some of these beliefs were of divine origin, and as such dominated human reasoning in a way that people acted without applying wisdom. This explains why Ngwarem, to show his authority, belief and patriarchal stance, committed the abominable and cruel act of throwing his own flesh and blood (daughter), who was still full of life on a heap of ants after refusing to acknowledge his paternity. This myth also underscores the vulnerability and defenseless position of the African woman vis-à-vis the male counterpart, which is the reason why Ndohnjieu (the child’s mother) was unable to protect her child from the ill fate reserved for her by the patriarchal tradition.

Even though Ngwarem’s cruel and inhumane attitude towards his child is condemnable, it is also very important to note that he only

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	acted under the influence of traditional beliefs that characterized the Bamoun society at the time. For the very fact that he regretted his actions at the end shows that he finally came to terms with the reality and gravity of his actions. Ngwarem's position at the end of the story could be read as the sky god's way of discarding such baseless beliefs. That is probably why Ngwarem's punishment is not commensurate to his action of throwing away his child. The myth can also be a lesson to individuals not to repay evil with evil. Ngwarem treated his daughter cruelly but she in return does not punish him with equal measure.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Abandonment Child, children Family Siblings
Further Reading	*Breaking With Brutal Tradition: Young Tribesman Fights for Babies' Lives* (accessed: July 29, 2021). Matateyou, Emmanuel, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1997.
Addenda	Researcher: Amshetu Melo Forchu

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