Jacqueline Atemkeng Fonge, Amshetu Melo Forchu, "Entry on: Ngãhndami 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/1275. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

Ngãhndami

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	Ngãhndami
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bamoun
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	May 17, 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

Cultural Background*: Bamoun (Foumban)

The Bamoun Kingdom is situated in the Western region of Cameroon. It is surrounded by Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions in the North, Mifi Division in the West, Bafia and Bangante towns in the South and Banyo town in the East. Its origin dates back to 1390 with its founder Nchare, a prince from Rifum (the present day Bankim), in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon (see here, accessed: July 9, 2019). The Foumban traditional society is well structured with "Mfon" (King) at the head, closely assisted by the "Momamfon" the queen. Other custodians of culture include the notables. The Mfon is noted for his numerous wives and uncountable children. Other secret societies which assist in the administration of the Kingdom, both in the physical and spiritual realms, include the secret societies. Among them are: Nguri and Muitngu secret societies. Owing to the people attachments to the Gods, spirits and ancestors, the Foumban people pay particular attention the popular Nguon Festival (of fertility and protection), which has become a crowd pulling event in Cameroon for the past years. Gods and ancestors are worshiped during the festival and the spirit of sharing encouraged among the people by the king. The Foumban kingdom is one of the oldest Kingdom in Africa and noted for the invention of their own form of writing, which was later pushed to the periphery.

* Sources:

Mamadou, Ntiecheles, *Les conflicts Socio-politique dans le Royaume Bamoun de 1863–1889*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 2000.

Fewoh, Paul Mouliom, *Collectives Décentralisée et Developpement Local: le Cas de la Commune Ubaine de Foumban*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2006.

Summary

There was once a woman called Ngãhndami*. She was known to be talkative and nosy. She asked questions about any unusual thing she

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saw. In her village, it was forbidden to tell a story that was untrue, and if one was found guilty of telling a lie, the punishment was severe and sometimes deadly. One day, Ngãhndami went into a dense forest very far from the community to fetch food. While there, she saw a human skull sitting in a corner. When she was done looking for food, she asked the skull, “What are you doing here?” The skull did not respond. Then Ngãhndami started kicking it while repeating the same question until the skull finally responded; “I am here because of my inquisitiveness. I used to talk a lot. I used to ask so many questions, and that is why I found myself here”.

After the response from the skull, Ngãhndami ran back to the community to report to Kmpeumenyang, the king, whose name meant ‘the biggest animal on earth’. Kmpeumenyang immediately ordered some of his very senior servants to go to the forest with Ngãhndami and bring the skull. These servants were also members of a secret disciplinary group charged with the responsibility of punishing anyone who told a lie to the king. When the skull was brought, Kmpeumenyang announced the strange news to the entire land and summoned everyone to a gathering in which Ngãhndami would recount her forest experience with the skull. When all the people were gathered, Kmpeumenyang asked Ngãhndami to get the skull to talk as she had reported. Ngãhndami asked the skull:

“mengorongtu mii” [the skull of a human being]

“shikekuna” [speak now as you did speak in the forest]

Unfortunately, the Skull did not speak. She continued to harass the skull, kicking it up and down and asking the same question, but the skull did not respond. She tried again the second and third time but had no response from the skull. At this juncture, everybody concluded that she had told a lie to Kmpeumenyang. Accordingly, the king ordered that she should be punished by death. When his senior servants carried out the order, the skull began to talk. Hence, it said, “I told you that it was my mouth (i.e. my inquisitiveness) that brought me here. Now you have come to join me”. Hereafter, King Kmpeumenyang regretted why they had killed Ngãhndami. The whole village mourned her for a long time but the wisdom behind her death remains that it is unwise to be talkative, nosy or inquisitive. This remains a popular adage among the Bamoun community in the western region of Cameroon till today.

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* In the Bamun language this name literally means a person who gossips, who is nosy and inquisitive.

Analysis

The respect for traditional norms and values has always been the order of the day in African societies. Even though these norms are defined in diverse ways in different societies, they were expected to be absolutely respected. Some of these values were intended to maintain social and moral cohesion. For example, in many African cultures, it is often said that it is not everything that one sees that one must know about. Ngahndami, in the above myth does not respect this wise saying and thus brings calamity upon herself by wanting to know what a skull, which represents an ancestor in the Bamoun land, is doing in the forest. The skull's response was a warning from the gods for her to check her nosiness.

The myth equally reflects on Ngahndami's despicable act towards the skull as disrespect for the gods and ancestors of the land, whose role in society cannot be overemphasized.

Though death may have been too hard and cruel punishment for Ngahndami, it nonetheless was meant to serve as an eye opener to the younger generation, on the need to be honest, talk less and listen more and above all, be very cautious when in contact with the supernatural.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture

Character traits Death Names Punishment Tradition

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Further Reading

Matateyou, Emmanuel, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1997.

Shorter, Alyward, “Concepts of Social Justice in Traditional African Religion”, *Pro Dialogo Bulletin* 12 (1977): 32–51.

Addenda

Researcher: Amshetu Melo Forchu

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