Didymus Tsangue Douanla, "Entry on: A New Earth. African Ritual Theatre [Une Nouvelle Terre. Théâtre-Rituel] by Werewere Liking", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, 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/1346. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Werewere Liking

A New Earth. African Ritual Theatre [Une Nouvelle Terre. Théâtre-Rituel]

Ivory Coast (1980)

TAGS: African Traditions Gods



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

General information	
Title of the work	A New Earth. African Ritual Theatre [Une Nouvelle Terre. Théâtre-Rituel]
Country of the First Edition	Ivory Coast
Country/countries of popularity	Ivory Coast, Cameroon, Francophone Africa, USA
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	1980
First Edition Details	Wèrèwèrè Liking, *Une Nouvelle terre; suivi de Du sommeil d'injuste: Théâtre-rituel*. Abidjan: Les Nouvelles Éditions Africaines, 1980, 92 pp.
ISBN	2723602346, 9782723602341
Genre	Play*
Target Audience	Young adults
Author of the Entry	Didymus Tsangue Douanla, University of Koblenz-Landau, douanlatsangue@gmail.com

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Creators



Werewere Liking , b. 1950
(Author)

Eddy Ngo Njock, known as a writer under her pen-name Werewere Liking was born in 1950 in a village called Bondé, eighty kilometers from Yaoundé, Cameroon. She was born to parents who were traditional artists. She got married at the age of sixteen but separated from her husband in 1978, after twelve years of marriage. Before her separation, her mother-in-law schooled her thoroughly in traditional education. She was initiated into several women's secret cults as part of her tradition. She started painting at the age of eighteen and later composed songs which were published as poems in her book *On ne raisonne pas le Vénin*. In 1977, she met French woman Marie-Josée Hourantier, with whom she travelled to Senegal. Together, they founded the Atelier de recherche en esthétiques théâtrales négro-africaines, which trained impoverished young artists. They also founded their own theatre group, the Mystique Atelier Théâtre, where they staged Liking's plays with her playing the lead role. She received the Prince Claus Award in 2000 for her contribution to culture and society, and her book *The Amputated Memory* also won the Noma Award in 2005.

As a researcher, Liking has worked in traditional pedagogy at Abidjan University (LENA) between 1979–1985. She has also been a researcher in Malian puppetry and colonial-style paintings that represent Europeans in colonial attires. In addition, she continues to carry out research that aims at explaining the roles of figures in the staging of productions. She also founded the Ki-Yi Mbock group, which she described as a movement for the birth of a contemporary Panafrican culture and unity, and the recognition of the cultures of the black world.

Source:

World Encyclopedia of Puppetry Arts (accessed: August 2, 2021).

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Additional information

Translation	English: *African Ritual Theatre. The Power of Um* and *A New Earth*, trans. Siga Asanga, Jeanne N. Dingome, Innocent Futcha and Nalova P. Lyonga, San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1996.
Sequels, Prequels and Spin-offs	Liking, Werewere, *La Puissance de Um*, Abidjan: CEDA, 1979, 63 pp.

Summary

The entry is based on the English translation of the play by Siga Asanga, Jeanne N. Dingome, Innocent Futcha and Nalova P. Lyonga under the title: *African Ritual Theatre. The Power of Um* and *A New Earth*, San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1996, 61–89.

This play is a sequel to the 1979 version of the same title, reviewed in this database.

It is a play written in three movements. The first movement opens in an imaginary village with a man, Nguimbus, arguing with his wife, Soo, at the end of a road. They are arguing about what to do about the deplorable state of affairs in the village. While Nguimbus thinks they should leave things as they are and suffer in silence, Soo thinks they should stand up and protest against their brothers dying in exile, the women losing their dignity and the children being uprooted from their land, which is being partitioned and sold off.

In the second movement, a village poet-musician called Ndinga plays the tambourine and sings a 'rhythm of despair' about the village's plight. He also finds a gun and a whip in the rubble and examines them. Then a character known as People arrives and talks about the oppressive use of the gun and whip. Chief*, their leader, also appears, accompanied by Cop, a policeman. Chief is desperately searching for his throne in the rubble. Cop leads him (Chief) to a chair with a missing leg. Chief tries to sit on it but falls to the ground. He gets up, leaning on Cop, who hands him a gun. Chief reinstates himself on the shaky throne using the gun to maintain balance. Then the two argue briefly about the futility of their lives, each maintaining that his plight

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is worse than the other. Chief is somewhat offended by this and points the gun at Cop. Nguimbus suddenly arrives at the scene entreating the Chief to fire at Cop. People also comes in, pleading on Cop's behalf that the latter is just another voice of his and should be forgiven. The wrangling heats up even more when Soo arrives at the scene, also entreating the Chief to fire at Cop, referring to him and his kind as 'thieves' and 'swindlers'. Cop swiftly seizes the gun from Chief and points it at Soo. Chief is impressed by Cop's swift intervention and appoints him the General of his army. The people rise against Cop, and Chief gives him the mandate to shoot at will. Soo says something to herself about pregnant women who eat snails and give birth to slugs. Chief interprets it as an insult and orders Cop to detain her. At this moment, someone plays a tune that ushers in Wiseman, accompanied by a child. The other characters all freeze on stage as Wiseman enters. He searches through the rubble and picks up a mask called Ngue. This mask represents the central deity of Bassa cosmology as it appeared to a woman named Soo in Bassa mythology. He addresses it thus: “You reflect Man his image twice enlarged / And Man is ashamed…” (p.72). He also claims that this image is of a Man who kills his gods. This accusation is enough to cause the other frozen characters to wake up and point accusations at each other as traitors, accomplices and swindlers. Ndinga comes down from his perch and resumes playing his tambourine and singing to the mask. He asks who deserves to stay in the village, and the rest of the characters argue about this. Ndinga attributes the state of affairs to the death of Ngue and the failure of the people to replace him. He calls on them to stop fighting and instead build a new community. They place the mask on the child's head, and he speaks in the name of Ngue, enjoining the people to unite. All the characters agree to perform rites of passage. All the characters perform the first rites of passage before leaving the old village by crossing their arms on their shoulders, the right under the left.

In the third movement, they settle in a new village and re-enact the rites of passage, though slightly differently; "in a newfound spirit of harmony / This time, the right hand above the left…." (p.87). Ndinga plays a new sound on his tambourine, and a new symbol of unity is enacted with a people more prepared and ready to start anew. By doing so, they lay the foundations of a new village and traced its boundaries, with "the radiant symbol of realization at the cosmic level, the infinite and the finite" (p. 87). Then the people gather and sing a song of unity and praise for they, the sons of Koba and Kwan**, have

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created a new earth which is also a new heaven.

* Chief, Cop, People, Wiseman, and Soo (which means 'exaggeration' in the Bassa language), are symbolic characters, or character types (i.e. fictional characters who, according to Baldick (2001:261) stand as a "representative of some identifiable class or group of people").

** Bassa people link their origins to two mythic heroes, Koba and Kwan, whose names, either separately or together, have come to signify cosmogonic or mythological time. These heroes are believed to have led the Bassa people from their original settlement in Babimbi to their present settlement, which stretches over a vast area of 34 000 square kilometres of land in present-day Cameroon. According to several myths and legends, Koba and Kwan became heroes when they helped the people escape the Hollow Rock or Ngog Lituba – a boulder or megalith which fell from the sky and almost wiped out the entire population, causing the people to flee. Also, when they got to the bank of the great River Sanaga in Cameroon, which they called Lom Mpubi (literally the white river), they could not cross it. So the two heroes helped them build a canoe with the elephant grass that grew on the river banks, with which they sailed across to the other side and settled.

Analysis

Rituals:

This play enacts the importance of rituals (or bissat in the Bassa language) in the Bassa imagination. Among other things, rituals are believed to possess the potential to transform individuals and the community at large. This play further shows how rituals could be reinvented in the neo-colonial present to purge the African society of its many ills. As Willey (2003) writes, “Liking has long been read as an advocate for the ‘ritual healing’ of Africa” (545). Asanga et al concur by stating that rituals are a form of indigenous psychodrama that help the Bassa villagers purge their negative feelings towards one another to live in peace and harmony afterwards. The play opens with profound discord between People and Chief, between People and their chief deity, Ngue, between Nguimbus and his wife, and even among the people themselves. With the arrival of Wiseman, they soon realize

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where and how they went wrong and the need to build a new village, where they can "live again, act anew … and be reborn…" (76). They search through the ruins (symbolic of their traumatic past), where they retrieve cultural objects, such as percale, a calabash and a key with which they enact the rites of passage for a new earth, amid song and dance.

Cultural artefacts:

Cultural artefacts also play an important role in Bassa rituals. When it is time to enact the rites of passage, the villagers rummage in the rubble and bring out a mask, a calabash and a piece of white percale, which are needed for the rituals. However, it is the Mask, known as Ngue, that is the most important. In the Bassa culture, the mask is used to immortalize the central deity of the Bassa people, Ngue. Someone can only wear the mask if they don't have scars, and since all the characters seem to have scars (both physical and psychological), they wonder who qualifies to do so. Then Wiseman appears with a child, laughing and wielding a white percale in his hands which he miraculously found in the rubble. The child's laughter amid the tensions and the white cloth symbolizes innocence and purity which are missing among the adult characters. During the ritual, the child wears the mask and speaks to the people in the name of Ngue. It is believed that he speaks in the name of Ngue because the words are clearly not his own, being only a child. Also, in the Second movement, Wiseman refers to the mask as "the Golden Calf" and "the fish of David" (75). The endnotes state that this as an "[a]llusion to the Taurus and Pisces constellations, a mythical period in which the origin of Ngue is situated (89). This follows an earlier biblical allusion to "the eye of Cain" (72), which Wiseman claims is still missing in the rubble and needs to be found to reveal some soul-searching truths. This passage clearly shows Liking's belief in the intersectionality of mythical pasts, but more importantly, it denotes an African cosmopolitan vision that seeks "to protect the society against SOME forms of contamination (emphasis mine 74). This implies that other forms of contamination which can bring wholeness, unity and progress, are welcome. It also explains why, in the new earth, which is also called a new heaven, women and child are not only included but are given a voice and prominence.

Female agency:

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It is believed that Ngue first appeared to a woman named Soo (just as the Soo in the play), and through her, reached the rest of the community even though women folk were not included in Ngue's secret cult. According to Asanga (1996), when the men encountered Ngue, they pushed women aside and appropriated the knowledge and power of Ngue for themselves making the Ngue cult an all-male one. This play tries to reinstate the prominent role of women in Bassa mythology. If Ngue, the deity, appeared first to Soo, then it follows that his departure, inaction or incapacitation might have been the result of their undermining of women and, by extension, children in the structure of society. In the new earth, created by all the characters, female agency is highlighted as we see Soo placing herself on the tip of the second triangle, which forms the star with six branches. This shows that she has inscribed herself within the cult of Ngue which had silenced and ignored her for a long time.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Traditions Gods

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

Child, children Future Hope* Names Religious beliefs Society Tradition

Further Reading

Asanga, Siga, Jeanne N. Dingome, Innocent Futcha, and Nalova P. Lyonga, "Introduction" in *African Ritual Theatre: "The power of Um" and "A New Earth" by Werewere Liking*, San Francisco: International Scholars Publication, 1996.

Conteh-Morgan, John and Irène Assibad'Almeida, eds., *"The Original Explosion That Created Worlds". Essays on Werewere Liking's Art and Writings* (Francopolyphonies 8), Amsterdam / New York: Rodopi, 2010.

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Mielly, Michelle, "Werewere Liking and the Aesthetics of Necessity: Re-Considering Culture and Development in Post-Colonial Africa" (accessed: June 11, 2013).

Willey, Ann Elizabeth, "Ritual and Roles for Women in Werewere Liking's 'L'Amour-Cent-Vies'", *The French Review* 76.3 (2003): 545–561 (accessed: September 1, 2021).

Addenda

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