Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Mara the Autistic Child [Mara. L'enfant autiste] by Richard Fakala [Akira Junior] , Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke, Elizabeth Hale and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1449. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Richard Fakala [Akira Junior] , Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam

Mara the Autistic Child [Mara. L'enfant autiste]

Cameroon (2020)

TAGS: African Storytelling African Traditions



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

General information	
Title of the work	Mara the Autistic Child [Mara. L'enfant autiste]
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	French
First Edition Date	2020
First Edition Details	Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam, *Mara. L'enfant autiste*. Yaoundé: Éditions Akoma Mba, 2020, 31 pp.
ISBN	9789956101566; 9789956101559
Genre	Fiction
Target Audience	Children (6+)
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Creators



Richard Fakala [Akira Junior] (Illustrator)

Akira Junior was born Richard Fakala in Ndoungue, Cameroon. He took interest in drawing and fine arts in his primary school days and since then, he has been engaged in drawing and illustrating for media presentations, banderoles for sensitization campaigns and children's books. For the most part, his illustrations revolve around Cameroonian cultures. He dreams of creating fine art, cinema cartoons and a book illustration industry in Cameroon. According to him, these will help the younger generation know their histories and immortalize their heroes.

Sources:

camerounweb.com (accessed: April 12, 2022).

dw.com (accessed: June 8, 2022).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com



Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam , b. 1988 (Author)

Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam holds a master's degree in marketing from the International Relations Institute of Cameroon. She has a keen interest in development, particularly for vulnerable people and

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populations which has pushed her to volunteer at several non-governmental organizations such as Great Empire, Green Promise Initiative, and World Literacy Foundation. She also has a passion for African culture. She lives in Douala, Cameroon.

Sources:

LinkedIn (accessed: June 8, 2022).

Le point littéraire, 3:25-4:15 (accessed: June 8, 2022).

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé I, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Translation

English: *Mara the Autistic Child*, trans. Nda Lot-Kenneth Ndzingu, Yaoundé: Akoma Mba, 2020.

Summary

There lived a little girl in Boukele village called Mara. She could not walk before two and pronounced her first words at five, while her younger brother could already run around at two. She felt uncomfortable in hot weather and would collapse from time to time. The villagers said she had epileptic fits and so avoided her. Her neighbour Conji was forbidden to play with her. She was an object of mockery and this made her ill at ease. When the chief of the village heard of her, he visited her family and wore a bracelet on Mara's left wrist. At the end of his visit, he advised her parents to take her to the next health campaign. They did and there, they were told that their child was suffering from what the book calls a disease, autism, that affects her walking and talking. They were equally told that the condition had no cure but that they could help their daughter improve with educational games and school. Mara began to feel better with the educational games. She was sent to school the following year but her school-fellows could not play with her and mocked her instead. Conji even told her, "My mum says you are crazy" (15). Mara felt bad but her brother was there to lift her spirits. With the help of a home teacher, Mara made good grades at school and was always among the best four. She took part in a competition in the village and had to use a pen and paper to write down her answers since she could not talk well. Though she knew the answers to the questions, she was always overtaken by the other competitors who could talk faster than her. She was discouraged and started crying but her mother encouraged her by saying "Baby don't worry" (20). In the end, she won. Everyone was surprised. Conji apologized to her and the crowd clapped for her.

Analysis

Before the advent of western medicine in most African societies, some conditions were not known and were therefore attributed to witchcraft or evil. Such was the case with autism and epilepsy. Mara, the little autistic child in the story was avoided, mocked and stigmatized because of this belief. Though the chief advises her parents to seek

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	medical attention, the bracelet that she wears on her left wrist serves as a protective amulet against evil spirits. The story exposes autism as a way of being so that the superstitious beliefs that surround it can be discarded, and so that autistic people can be integrated into society. The story goes further to suggest ways through which autistic children can be helped to be a part of society, for example, educational games and follow-up. More especially, the story stresses that love is a vital component in the raising of children with autism. When Mara gets depressed at not being able to answer the questions quick enough, her mother speaks consoling words to her and she livens up. This encourages a nurturing environment with parents, contrary to the demoralising comment by Conji's mother. The message of the book is that when children with autism are well treated, they will integrate socially.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child, children Girls Love Parents (and children) Rejection Superstition
Further Reading	Eze, A. Ugoji, "Autism in Africa: The Critical Need for Life Saving Awareness", *Journal of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies*, Special Issue on Leadership for Individuals with Special Needs, 34–38 (accessed: June 8, 2022). Le point littéraire avec Jean Jacques Foko & Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam, interview (accessed: June 8, 2022). Manguelle, Emmanuel, « Dédicace – 'Mara l'enfant autiste', Chimène Kouékeu Ngoukam prône une société de tolérance », accessed at :

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http://cameroonnews.live/dedicace-mara-lenfant-autiste-chimene-kouekeu-ngoukam-prone-une-societe-de-tolerance/ (no longer available).

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