Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: Why Birds Chirp in the Morning and at Dusk by Godwin Doh Nuvaga", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Divine Che Neba and Susan Deacy. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/451. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Godwin Doh Nuvaga

Why Birds Chirp in the Morning and at Dusk

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	Why Birds Chirp in the Morning and at Dusk
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Mungaka
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	March 6, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Nkefat, Bali Nyonga, North West Region, Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults and adults)
Author of the Entry	Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com
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Creators



Godwin Doh Nuvaga (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 58 (in 2018)

Social status: Commoner

Profession: Businessman

Language of narration: Mungaka

Bio prepared by Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background*: Bali Nyonga is a part of the larger Bali Chamba group found in Cameroon and Nigeria. The account that the Bali Nyongas give of themselves is that they came from the Niger on horseback, attacking and defeating other tribes along their path until they finally settled in their present site. This is probably why they are known by their neighbours as a warlike and aggressive group (particularly Mankon, Pinyin, Meta, Bafut, Moghamo, who have been victims of their aggression). Their language, Mungaka, gained prestige during the colonial days as it was used by missionaries for communication and education. Like any other cultural group in the North West Region of Cameroon, the Bali people pray to God through the ancestors. They have a rich cultural heritage which they manifest each year through the Lela Festival.

Occasion: Staged

* Source: Bob Ata, *The Bali Nyonga of Cameroon, a story of African Migration*, mediablackberry.com (accessed: August 20, 2018).

Summary

So many years ago, God sent messages to the world through a strange red bird, called Nkub. Every year, Nkub brought annual messages from the great forests to the people. This special bird was only seen once every year and each time it flew from the forest into the land, it repeatedly sang a phrase in Mungaka, “chulog manikob” which is directly translated as “a message from God”. Whenever it flew into the land, it never landed until it got to the palace, where it delivered God’s messages to the Fon and flew back into the forests. The people then moved to the Fon’s palace where the Fon transmitted the messages to them.

The messages were often predictions of the fortunes and misfortunes that would befall their land. The good fortunes were mostly based on the fertility of their farmlands, while the misfortunes were more on possible intertribal wars for which they ought to be prepared.

The custom of getting annual messages from God through Nkub was

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engrained in the minds of every indigene, including children who could often be heard chanting “chulog manikob” around the time they expected that Nkub could come.

One day, after the messenger had flown back into the great forests, the chief told the community that Nkub had announced his death and that his next visit would be the last. He also added that Nkub would like to be buried in their land so that they could remain in close contact with Nikob (God). The only condition Nkub had given was that everyone would stop their work at dusk in honour and appreciation of Nikob’s sacrifices for the clan. If they failed to respect the agreement, they would become very poor and their land would be barren. The villagers unanimously accepted.

One year later, Nkub came along with twenty other similar birds, in one collective and focused flight. From the flight, it was easier to identify Nkub. He was not only conspicuously in command, but the other birds looked smaller than him. The villagers felt it could be part of the agreement Nkub had with their Fon, but they didn’t know why Nkub was accompanied by twenty others. So they walked to the palace to find out more about the messengers. As usual, the villagers remained outside while the Fon discussed with the birds

At dusk, the twenty other birds flew out in a circle. The fon then came out and announced Nkub’s passing on. The villagers began mourning. The Fon told them to stop mourning because Nkub was not only among them, he had also given them his last gift before dying. His last gift to them was his family, the twenty birds flying around. They were to make sure that the villagers always had enough time to work and enough time to honour the memory of Nikob at dusk as well. Since Nikob was highly respected in the birds’ kingdom, other birds decided to help the descendants of Nkub in their mission to regularly remind the villagers to respect their commitment. That is why until now, birds chirp early in the morning to encourage people to go to the farms so that by dusk, they can return and honour the memorable sacrifice of Nikob in their land.

Analysis

This myth indicates the belief of the Bali Nyonga people of the Northwest Region of Cameroon in a supreme being, Nikob. It subverts the 19th-century Eurocentric stereotype of Africa as a land of savagery, polytheism and superstition. Before the advent of the Judeo-

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Christian and Islamic traditions, Africans had well-established religious systems that varied across communities. The belief in Nikob in the myth, who transmits messages through a bird-mediator shows the relation between the supreme deity, divinities, spirits, ancestors and man. These divinities play different roles depending on their mission designed by Nikob. Each has its role in the cosmic order. Similarly, most ancient and classical mythologies had a structural pattern for their religion, with each pantheon defined according to the people's culture. In some pantheons, divinities and some spirits are represented by animals and birds, while in others, some individuals are given powers to represent some deities. The list of birds that feature in mythologies as messengers of gods, oracles and mediators is endless.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Communication Religious beliefs

Further Reading

Buckland, A. W., "Mythological Birds Ethnologically Considered", *The Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 4 (1875): 277–292.

Ingersoll, Ernest, *Birds in Legend, Fables and Folklore*, New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1923 (accessed: August 21, 2018).

Addenda

Researcher: Eleanor A. Dasi.

Assistant researcher: Julius Angwah.

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Method of data collection: Tape-recording.

Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke and Divine Che Neba.

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