Eleanor A. Dasi, "Entry on: The Price of Selfishness in Khitoumy by Agnès Ngoh Nzuh", peer-reviewed by Divine Che Neba, Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1552. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Agnès Ngoh Nzuh

The Price of Selfishness in Khitoumy

Cameroon (1997)

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



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General information	
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Creators



Agnès Ngoh Nzuh (Author)

Agnès Ngoh Nzuh is a Cameroonian author of collections of traditional stories. She published *Les poussins têtus: contes de la savane et de la forêt* (1997) and *Tales from the Grassland and the Forest* (1997). Both are aimed at school children, the former is used in primary education in the Francophone system (grade 6), the latter became a textbook included in the syllabus of the Ministry of Secondary Education in Cameroon, in line with the competency based approach.

Source:

"Contes. Les poussins têtus", *Takam Tikou* 7 (1998): 69 at cnljbnf.fr (accessed: September 30, 2022).

Onana, Aristide, "Book Review: *Tales from the Grassland and the Forest*" at journaletudiant.com (accessed: September 30, 2022).

Jong, T.V., "Dramatizing/Transforming the Cameroonian Oral Tale: A Study of Ngoh Agnes Nzuh's The Story of the Stubborn Chicks", *Epasa Moto: A Multidisciplinary Journal of Arts, Letters and the Humanities* 1.2 (2014): 247.

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Additional information

Summary

A long time ago, the people of Khitoumy village lived cheerfully and in abundance as the gods blessed them for upholding good moral values. In moonlit evenings, they would gather around the fireplace to dance and tell stories particularly to children. These stories had the peculiarity of having good moral lessons at the end which was always geared towards kindness to everyone. The elders of the village always told their children this because the gods had the habit of disguising themselves in the forms of old men, beggars, homeless people to come and ask for help; and helping them was an open door to blessings. Because of their kindness, the people of Khitoumy were so blessed to the point where neighbouring villages admired them and some even left their villages for Khitoumy.

One pregnant woman, called Fukah, and her husband decided to move into Khitoumy. When Fukah gave birth, the people welcomed the baby and treated them well. One day, a god of the land disguised into an old man and paid Fukah a visit in the absence of her husband. The god asked for drinkable water from Fukah. Fukah refused under the pretext that the water left at home was for her and her baby. She however gave the god roasted coco yams to eat. After eating, the god still insisted on having water, but she refused to give him water. The god left. A few days after, all the rivers, lakes and water ponds in Khitoumy dried up and coco yams started growing everywhere in the land. Everyone was worried and the elders of the land decided to consult the chief priest. He announced to them that a stranger in their land refused a god water and rather gave him dry coco yams to eat. What they are experiencing is punishment and it would last for six months. After six months, they would have to ask for forgiveness from the gods. The people of Khitoumy patiently suffered during the six months of drought. They went long distances to fetch water and lost many of their animals. After the six months, they asked for forgiveness from the gods and Fukah equally asked for forgiveness from both the gods and the people. Water was restored and they regained their cheerfulness.

Analysis

It is a common belief amongst many cultures across Africa that gods take human form, mostly as old and/or handicapped people and beggars, to visit the people, most often to test their faithfulness and

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moral uprightness. Those who pass the test are rewarded while those who fail are punished as is the case in the story. Here, emphasis is also laid on care-giving to the old and other vulnerable people as part of the moral obligation of members of African societies.

The story also introduces us to the story-telling tradition, as is the custom in most African societies. These story-telling events, held around the fireplace and on moon-lit evenings are not just a medium through which oral history and traditions are transmitted to the younger generation, but are also used as lessons of morality for every member of the society. These events are still prevalent today though in most cases, there is a change in setting; from the fireplace to the sitting room and even radio and television media. In the story, acts of kindness are particularly emphasised, both in stories and real life, for they are the cords that bind the moral fabric of the society.

Lastly, the story brings to light the relationship between the gods and humans as one of powerful and powerless exemplified in the punishment meted out to the humans for being selfish. Therefore, like many other myths of African origin, this story reiterates the necessity of upholding good moral values and being in good standing with the gods.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Morality Punishment Religious beliefs Tradition
Further Reading	Gyekye, Kwame, *African Cultural Values: An Introduction*, Accra: Sanfoka, 1996.

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