Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Why the Dead Are Respected in Maka Land by Mvongo Biya", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/629. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

Mvongo Biya

Why the Dead Are Respected in Maka Land

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 the Dead Are Respected in Maka Land
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Ewondo
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	December 21, 2017
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Azomekout
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (young adults + adults)
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Creators



Mvongo Biya (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 62 (in 2017)

Social status: Clan member

Profession: Retired Grade I Teacher

Language of narration: Ewondo

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background*: The Maka people occupy part of the Upper Nyong Division of the East Region of Cameroon. They entered the county from the Congo Basin and settled at the borders of the East and Adamaoua Regions but were, however, forced to move deeper into the rain forest by Beti-Pahuin invaders, who were fleeing Fulani warriors. They mostly practice subsistence farming and hunting. Though they increasingly adhere to western religious practices (especially Christianity), animism, which is native to them, is still wide-spread especially concerning traditional folk medicine. They are also very superstitious and believe in witchcraft.

Occasion: staged

*Source: *Makaa people*, en.wikipedia.org (accessed: January 17, 2019).

Summary

A long time ago in the Maka Land, there lived four women full of ambition and passion for wealth. One of them farmed for profit while the three others were engaged in fishing. They were very satisfied with what they made out of their activities and did not waste any opportunity that could earn them more. They devoted all their time to their activities and ignored happenings that concerned the entire community.

One day, one of the old men in the village died. Usually in such situations, the chief of the village gathered the inhabitants of the village together and asked them to suspend their activities until the dead is buried. These four women ignored the chief's call. The one who was a farmer went to the farm and worked all day. As night approached, she heard some noise in a nearby bush and a black bird kept hovering around her, but she remained unperturbed. Suddenly she was seized by an invisible force that took her to the moon. This is the reason why it is believed in the Maka Land that the image seen in the moon is that of this woman.

Meanwhile, the three others who were fisherwomen took their

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material with them and headed straight to the river. At the river, they found that everything around them was strange. Woods and grasses appeared strange, and the water from the river suddenly became red like blood. The three women, nonetheless, decided to disregard the strange occurrences and carried on with their activity. They dipped their baskets into the water several times, but caught no fish. Out of a sudden, they heard a voice whistling around them and they became afraid. The voice said: “you will find me here. Respect the dead”.

By nightfall the women realized that there was not going to be any catch and so they decided to return. By some unknown force, they could not trace their way back but just kept turning around on the same spot. It was only at dawn that they found their way back and got to the village shivering with cold. As they walked back to the village, a wild bird kept singing and saying: “you are finished my daughters”. All of them became very seriously sick. In spite of the efforts of traditional healers and priests, they all died and are still chased from the land of the dead by the ancestors of the Maka people. It is because of the woman who was believed to have been taken to the moon, and the three fisherwomen, that it is strictly forbidden for someone to go to the farm or to the bush when a departed one is being mourned in Maka Land.

Analysis

Generally, in most African and world cultures, ancient wisdom requires that the dead, especially aged people, should not be disregarded because they are believed to be mediators between the living and the Gods. Death is therefore not a termination of life but a descent into another realm where the soul continues to live. The living are expected to accompany the spirits of the dead, in a cyclical process, with song and dance, as they journey to the land of the spirits.

Apart from the idea of venerating the dead, this myth presents the woman as the primary defaulter of customs and traditions with such character flaws as being overzealous, greedy and contemptuous.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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Concepts

Further Reading

Abel, Ernest L., *Death Gods: An Encyclopedia of the Rulers, Evil Spirits, and Geographies of the Dead*, London: Greenwood Press, 2009.

Addenda

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Method of data collection: Tape recording

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