

WHY THE WASP HAS A TINY WAIST

(As told by Waja Ngnalbu on 21st February 2020 in Chamba, Ghana)

Introduction:

The following story relates how the wasp's self-exile from his community eventually deformed him. It presents the wasp as a loner who refuses to participate in communal activities and thus incurs the wrath of his kith and kin. The story, grounded in the communal spirit of Konkomba funerals (particularly the *kinachun* cultural dance), celebrates teamwork and depicts the centrality of communal living among Konkombas. The storyteller makes this clear at the outset of his narrative when he commences his tale with its moral lesson before relating the tale itself.

[Click here](#) to listen to the Likpakpaln narration.

Story

'Do you know why the wasp has such a tiny waist?' asks Waja.

'We don't know; tell us; why?' audience respond variously.

Waja then continues:

It is important to participate in communal activities with others whenever the occasion arises. Once upon a time, there lived a wasp and his kin. They lived together with other members of the community in peace and unity. The wasp however decided to be a loner, excluding himself from all communal activities. He neither attended any funeral nor participated in any *nkpaawiin*. One day the wasp received news about the demise of his in-law and had to leave for the funeral.

Unfortunately, because he had not been attending other people's funerals, no one wanted to accompany him to his in-law's funeral. Left with no other option, he decided to go alone, carrying with him all the instruments needed to perform the *njeen* and *kinachun*: he picked up the *ligangaln*; he tied *tibaln* around his ankles; he strapped the *kilon* to one shoulder; he slung an axe over the other shoulder; he picked up his *uduun* in his hand; he tied all the other *tinachinchen* around his waist and hit the road running.¹ As he journeyed, he sang this song:

Likpakpaln transcription

Chorus

Nfa nbiin ye

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa. (2x)

Gum gum gum gum

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Tou tilouti

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Chakta chakta

English translation

I've let out a loud cry

[But]the world stands aloof; he stands aloof. (2x)

Gum gum gum gum(beats the ligangaln)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Tou tilouti(blows the liwul)

The world stands aloof

Chakta chakta(dances with the tibaln around his

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

ankles)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Chorus

Nfa nbiin ye

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwaaa.

I've let out a loud cry

[But] the world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

As he drew closer to his in-law's house, he intensified his singing, drumming, and dancing:

Nfa nbiin ye

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa. /2x)

I've let out a loud cry

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.(2x)

Tou tilouti

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Tou tilouti (blows the liwul)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Gum gum gum gum

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Gum gum gum gum (beats the ligangaln)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Chakta chakta

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Chakta chakta (dances with the tibaln)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

Gang galaang ga

Garwa si ee, ki u si ee garwa.

Gang galaang ga (beats the dawul)

The world stands aloof; he stands aloof.

From a distance, his in-laws heard the singing and drumming and speculated that the wasp, and perhaps his kin, were arriving. Some of them remarked sarcastically, in reaction to the wasp's appearance at the funeral grounds-the first of its kind-that: "Bo! Today the wasp is coming; the earth will explode." Out of curiosity they rushed out and fixed their eyes in the direction of the singing and drumming. The wasp soon emerged, staggering under the weight of all the *kinachuŋ* musical instruments he was carrying and playing. On helping him take the musical instruments off his body, the wasp's in-laws discovered that the *tinachinchen* around his waist had compressed his waist into a tiny size. All their efforts to get his waist to return to its normal size proved futile.

That is why till date the wasp's waist is so tiny. *Tiin tiin kolb. Maa tiin gur, ki gur, ki gur, ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yajah agbenja na.*

Note

1. "... and hit the road running" is my translation of the Likpakpaln idiom, "le u fii lir nsan bo (ki cha), which literally but nonsensically translates: "and he fell on the road going. Its closest English equivalent is "to hit the road." But because the English equivalent does not capture the sense of urgency and enthusiasm suggested in the Likpakpaln idiom, I introduced this enthusiasm by adding the word "running" from the English idiom, "to hit the ground running," which suggests an enthusiastic start to an activity but does not mean to set off on a journey. To therefore communicate the idea of the wasp setting off energetically/enthusiastically, I had to amalgamate the above

English idioms into, "... and hit the road running."

A glossary of Likpakpaln words and phrases

Bo!:

'Bo' is an interjection used by Konkombas to express surprise

chakta chakta:

the Konkomba onomatopoeic words for the sound made by ankle bangles when one stomps the ground when dancing.

gang galaang ga:

Konkomba onomatopoeic words for the sound of the dawul—a two-pieced hollow metal musical instrument used to produce music by alternately hitting both hollow metal parts with either a stick or the horn of an animal.

gum gum gum gum:

are onomatopoeic words Konkombas use to describe the sound of the drum.

kiloŋ:

an hourglass-shaped musical instrument with round skin coverings at both ends. Known variously as dondo, tama, dundun, kalungu, or lunna across West Africa, it is usually placed under the armpit and struck with a stick to produce music. One can change the pitch or tone of the sound by compressing and releasing the strings connecting the two skin coverings at both ends. This makes kiloŋ suitable for use as a talking drum in some West African cultures.

kinachuj:

the cultural dance of the Konkomba people. It is a communal dance that requires the effective participation of a large group rather than an individual. Though mostly associated with funerals, it can also be performed outside funeral occasions such as in church, at social and political gatherings among others.

ligangaln:

a cylindrical drum with skin coverings at both ends. It comes in different sizes that determine the sound it produces. The big drum (ligangaln-sakpeln) produces bass or a lowpitched sound while the small drum (kiganganbik) usually produces a high-pitched sound.

Likpakpaln:

is the language spoken by the Konkomba people of Ghana.

liwul:

a local flute made of wood.

Maa tiin gur, ki gur, ki gur ki m muun, ki muun ke n-yajah agbenja na:

transliterated as "May my story diminish and diminish and diminish whilst I grow and grow as tall as my grandfather's male Kapok tree." This is one of the numerous ways in which a Konkomba storyteller can end his/her story. This particular type of ending suggests that Konkombas believe that storytelling (or entertainment in the broader sense) has health benefits, especially healthy physical growth. The association of storytelling with physical growth is so entrenched in Konkomba belief system that it is even believed that when a child engages in storytelling at daytime—for Konkomba storytelling sessions are held normally in the evenings after supper/dinner—he or she will have stunted growth. Also, the reference to the grandfather's male Kapok tree in this type of ending points to the patriarchal nature of traditional Konkomba society.

nkpaawiin:

communal activity. Among Konkombas when one is swamped with work, he or she can ask for the help of others, who would usually respond generously in their numbers provided the

"help-seeker" has been participating in ikpaawiin (plural form of nkpaawiin). Ikpaawiin are mostly called when one has a lot of farm work, is building, flooring or roofing a house, shelling maize/corn, cracking groundnuts, or thrashing guinea corn among other physical activities. Such occasions are not just for working but also for communal interaction and bonding.

njeen:

procession. Normally kinachuŋ commences with a procession, even though this is not a hard and fast rule.

tibaln:

ankle bangles used to dance kinachuŋ. They consist of small pieces of metals sewn unto animal skin; and are usually worn around the ankle by dancers or performers.

tinachinchen:

is a collective noun that refers to all the musical instruments—such as drums, rattle, gong, flute, bangles, etc.-used in the performance of the kinachuŋ.

Tiin tiin kolb:

the end of my story. This is the commonest and easiest way to end one's story in Konkomba storytelling. However, a storyteller can also choose to use this as a prelude to the end of the story and then finish with another statement such as the one used in the story above or a statement nominating the next storyteller.

tou tilouti:

the onomatopoeic words used by Konkombas for the sound of the flute.

uduun:

a round-shaped hollow metal used to produce music by incessantly brushing over its surface a small nut-like metal fixed on one's thumb. It is shaped like the gong but consists of only one hollow metal piece.