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## THE MONOLOGUE OF THE DOVE

Reflections on life and death in an oral tradition of the Kwami  
people in northern Nigeria

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"Once, upon a time when people were just growing up, and when they had not yet reached their full size, the dove already existed. The dove had already grown to her full size, but this is such a long time ago that we are not able to talk about it."

With these words a story<sup>1</sup> begins, which in many ways is very unusual and wonderful. It originates from the Kwami<sup>2</sup>, a small Chadic-speaking group<sup>3</sup> in northeastern Nigeria. The theme and the structure of the story are as strange as the introductory sentences.

The tale portrays the unhappy life of a dove. Constantly surrounded by enemies, hunted by human beings and animals, disappointed by friends and separated from her family, the dove despairs of her life. She ponders over her unjust fate in this world and in a monologue she begins to consider, whether it would not be better to end her own life. This tragic theme forms the climax of several episodes, in which the tension between life and death is described. The elaborate development of dramatic acts demonstrates the intertwining of guilt and innocence in human existence.

The first episode already deals with this question. There is a hunter, who pursues the dove. Their encounter is described in a dialogue, through which their differences are accentuated<sup>4</sup>. This part of the story runs thus:

"One day the dove arose and went to look for something to eat. While she is busy searching for something to eat, a hunter appears. And suddenly the

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<sup>1</sup> This story was related to me on 26th January 1983 by Malam Usman Baba in Kwami village, Bauchi State. Malam Usman, who was one of my main sources when collecting the oral tradition of Kwami, was considered as one of the authorities in the traditions and customs of his people. The story was translated in autumn 1985 with the help of Dr. Danladi Musa, (now) Head of Department of Mass Communication at the University of Maiduguri. I feel very much indebted to him as well as to the Sarkin Kwami, Alhadji Abdu Suleiman, and the whole Kwami people for their hospitality and assistance during my field work, which was carried out under the auspices and financial support of the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD).

<sup>2</sup> Other names are Komawa (TEMPLE, 1965:325), Kwam (NEWMAN, 1977:37) and Kwom (WENTE-LUKAS, 1985:244).

<sup>3</sup> HANSFORD et al., 1977:114, 186; HOFFMANN, 1971:3; LEGER, 1994:7-8

<sup>4</sup> BANTEL, 1968:16. "Dialog [ist ein] wesentliches Mittel ... die Gegensätze hervortreten zu lassen .."

hunter is there. The dove looks up and says: 'What do you want?' [And the hunter answers] 'Just as you, Dove, want to fill your belly I came to do the same'. [And the hunter continues] 'I am going to kill and eat you'. [And again the dove asks] 'What do you want?' The hunter opens his mouth and says, that he wants to kill and eat her."

The sudden change from direct to indirect speech is used in this section as a stylistic device to slow down the action<sup>5</sup>, and also to indicate the end of the first episode. The episode finishes with the hunter rushing towards the dove and trying to catch her. However, the dove recognises the danger she is in and flies away.

Without any further introduction the second episode starts. The opponent of the dove is now a snake. It is of interest that both protagonists are members of the animal kingdom. The description of their encounter is quite remarkable, considering the communication aspect. The questions of the dove are rendered in direct speech, whereas the answers of the snake, who is silent at first, are reported later on in indirect speech. He uses direct speech only once to dramatise the dialogue. The narrative is as follows:

"The dove sits on a tree, where she sees a snake. The snake tries to hunt down the dove. He wants to catch the dove. Yes, he wants to hunt her. The dove says: 'Snake, what do you want?' The snake is silent. The snake remains silent. The dove opens her mouth and asks three times more. The snake remains silent with all his body. The snake stays quiet. He refuses to speak."

Only when being asked directly: "*Snake, do you want to eat me?*" does the snake open his mouth and his answer is rendered in indirect speech:

"Later the dove heard the snake speaking. He said after a while that he would give an answer later on. To answer her now would not be possible."

The stony silence following the questions of the dove and the final evasive answer of the snake leads to an uneasy situation. The dove, in order to evade this uncertainty, makes an unexpected offer. Her speech changes, she uses 'we' in saying:

"Well, what can we do since you, Snake, have neither legs to walk, nor wings to fly with?"

Again in direct speech she continues:

"Look, I have met you on a tree and I promise you that I shall go at once to search for food for you."

Now suddenly, the snake is afraid that his prey, the dove, will escape. Maliciously he speaks to the dove and what he says is narrated now for the first time in direct speech. He says:

"But I am very hungry and if you go you will waste time and maybe you will never return, and that I do not like."

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<sup>5</sup> BANTEL, 1968:42. "Indirekte Rede ... ist ein beliebtes stilistisches Mittel, oft auch benutzt, um einen gewissen Abstand zu gewinnen ..."

The simple-minded dove does not yet realise that the conversation is only intended to keep her from escaping, so that she might be caught by the snake. She replies:

"But how can you say that I will not come back?"

Now the answer of the snake is again reported in indirect speech, which runs as follows:

"He [the snake] says, that he was just on his way when the dove arrived and that he is sure, (that) if he had continued on his way he would have already caught something to eat."

Stylistically, indirect speech diminishes the dramatic tension<sup>6</sup>, and serves as a transition to an interlude that again is narrated as a dialogue. The story continues:

"Meanwhile, however, the snake coils himself around the branch and draws nearer to the dove. But the dove flies off to another tree and meets a friend. 'Where are you going?' [she is asked] 'I am going to search for food to give to the snake to eat.'"

But the snake secretly followed her and ...

"God saw to it, that she noticed the snake in time. Undoubtedly God saw to it, that she escaped the deadly fangs."

Here the third episode starts. The dove meets another dove. The dialogue between the two can be seen as a warming-up for the dove's subsequent monologue. This dialogue between the two doves is rendered in uninterrupted direct speech. The introductory formula *tè gó* meaning "*she said*" is not used. The translation of this passage is as follows:

"Well, now you know the wickedness of the world. I know (it)! You left your home?! Yes, I came here but I shall not return to the snake. I promised to bring him food, but I will not do it."

Abruptly the dialogue ends and the story takes a new turn. It goes on:

"She [the dove] leaves her friend and opens her beak to sing a song. She thinks about other things, about what happened to her since she left her home. She says now she will try to sing a song. She opens the mouth to sing the right song. But she sits still. She does not move as she usually does. She is thinking. She ponders about the right song. Suddenly she remembers. She remembers her nest, she remembers her eggs."

At this point the narrator interrupts the narrative, in addressing the audience with the Kwami formula *kè fòndà*, i.e. "you know". By doing this he slows down the action and delays the climax of the story to increase the dramatic tension. Using this device, the narrator is able to bring his own reflections into the story and it allows him to concentrate on the actual climax that follows. The passage runs like this:

"You know [says the narrator], the dove lost everything and you know how it happened. She is here now, and she reflects upon many things, and

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<sup>6</sup> GRIMES, 1984:73: "In indirect discourse, person assignments are taken from some performative more remote than the one that dominates the statement immediately ..."

she ponders many things, and her heart is sad. She cannot go back and she sits here. And she ponders many things over and over again and she is sad. She opens her mouth and she sings: 'tataye, tataye'. But immediately afterwards she is silent again. What should she do? She sings again: 'tataye, tataye, tataye'. And she is silent again. She does not want to attract other doves by her singing. She sits and remains silent. She sits and begins to think."

At this point in the narrative the tragic monologue begins, the monologue that revolves around the theme of suicide. This monologue is the climax and the most moving passage of the entire story.

Now, the narrator continues in the first person (singular), thus changing the perspective from narrator to actor<sup>7</sup> and identifying himself with the problems of the dove. The actual plot comes to a standstill, memories, thoughts and associations are reported instead, hidden feelings and moods come to the surface.

The monologue of the dove as it was recorded in Kwami is given here including a brief analysis of various grammatical forms<sup>8</sup>.

... tè ?éppé fógídò fiái yànyá tè gó kàrmè tè gó /

*She opened (NAR) mouth-her place of doing (PRG) she said (NAR) now she said (NAR) /*

nè àùugó nè kùmgó nér ká äiyàn âà / nè lèèäügó lówó âà /

*I sit (PRF) I felt (PRF) sweetness in sitting (VN) not / I born (PRF) child not /*

?iinò nè ?indínà / kàrmè nè wà mòyáy äèefà nè äúmàn äáani

*egg-my I left (PRF-ALTR) / now I see (PRG) that I am able (PGR) return (VS)*

fiäînkí kán ?iinò âà / tòò wèn nè wà yànyá / nè ?indínà fiäímmí /

*place-this with egg-my not / well thing I do (PRG) / I left (PRF-ALTR) place-that /*

kée nè äáani âà / nè äáani âà /

*(and) then I return (VS) not / I return (VS) not /*

nè wà kúmàn nérinkí âà tún nè fànnà / nè shùmùgó kán mè /

*I feel (PRG) sweetness-this not since I came out (PRF-ALTR) / I beat (PRF) with this /*

nè kòbùdù nè kòbùdù mè / tè äiyà tè ?ímmé wèn

<sup>7</sup> V. RONCADOR, 1988:109. "Nach Dixon (1977) besteht die bevorzugte Erzähltechnik darin, daß der Erzählende die Begebenheiten in der ersten Person vom Standpunkt des Helden der jeweiligen Episode erzählt."

<sup>8</sup> The following abbreviations indicate: ALTR = altrilocal; NAR = narrative (aoriste); PRF = perfect; PRG = progressive; SUB = subjunctive; VN = verbal-noun; VS = verbal-substantiv.

*I would pass (SUB) I would pass (SUB) this / she sat (NAR) she thought (NAR) thing*

ká féllàmè káf / wèn nér kán wèn ?àmmám / nè mòygó / äén nè ?áy  
*in world-this all / thing sweetness and thing badness / I saw (PRF) / just I made (NAR)*

äíyà mên tíäà fáä ìnò tèkkùgó äòomè tèkkùgó /  
*sitting (VN) if lying (VN) night-my finished (PRF) word finished (PRF)/*

mên tíäà fáä ìnò äà fíccé nè ?&y ?ímmò /  
*if lying (VN) night-my not there I must do (SUB) thinking (VN) /*

tè ?éppè fógídò tè gó / nè kán wèn nè wà yánáy nè yánà  
*she opened (NAR) mouth-her she said (NAR) / I with thing I do (PRG) I do (PRG)*

äáani kíinò bàrà máalá / kwáalá ?áarò kán fùndò tè tùurànìn äà /  
*return (VS) body-my hunt bush / bird searching (PRG) with leg she flight not/*

nè wà mòyáy mên nè fètté ?ímmò äà / nè wà yánáy äén nè ?àlí nè  
*I see (PRG) if I go out (NAR-ALTR) thinking (VN) not / I do (PRG) just I may go (SUB)*

?àlí nè tùgí kúunò nè mòndé kán ?ímmìn-?ímíyà mèn  
*may go (SUB) I may beat (SUB) head-my I may forget (SUB) with thoughts-thoughts these*

tómínòmè / nè ?àlí nè tùgí kúunò.  
*front-my-this / I may go (SUB) I may beat (SUB) head-my.*

Here is a literal translation of the monologue:

"The dove opens her mouth there, where she sits saying: Now I have reached this point and I have never experienced the sweetness of life. I have not given birth to children yet, and I have even abandoned my eggs. I realise that I can not return home to my family. What evil did I do? I left my family and never again can I return. For me there is no way of returning. I have not enjoyed life since I went away. I experienced all this even though I only wanted to be left in peace [alone], and did not want to be involved in it [life's problems]. She sat and reflected further. There is good and evil in the world. I had to experience it all. Now I am sitting here and if my time is up I must die, but if my time is not yet up, I still have to think of all those horrible events. And again she begins to lament: Whatever I will do from now on, I will always be reminded of the hunter and of that bird which had no legs and could not fly. I realise, I cannot escape my thoughts. What can I do about it? Maybe it would be better, if I went to end my life, to forget these never-ending thoughts [in future]. Yes, it would be better, if I went to end my life."

In the same way in which the monologue was introduced by a prelude where the tension was built up, there is an afterpiece following, in which the dramatic climax and the tension subside. The narrator changes the perspective back to the third person. The story continues as follows:

"She flies down to the ground and lands on the ground to look once more for something to eat. She searches for food in the bush. She sees something and eats it up. She flies up again back onto the tree and sits down."

This episode finally finishes with an utterance of the dove which - now to mark the distance - is rendered in indirect speech.

"She says, that neither is it better to walk on her feet [meaning to be on the ground] nor is it better that she fly [meaning to be in the air]."

Here the third episode ends and the fourth commences. This time the counterpart of the dove is a falcon, the natural and sole enemy of a dove in the air. The story continues as follows:

"She flies back to the ground and is looking for something to eat. Suddenly a falcon appears. He swoops down on the dove. She makes herself small. He does not catch her. Then the dove follows the falcon and addresses him. She says: 'What do you want?'"

The answer of the falcon is narrated in indirect speech.

"He [the falcon] says that he wants to catch her. He saw her on the ground and he thought she was ill. She replied: "I just flew down from the tree. I did so because I was pondering the things of the world [ways of life]. I flew down because I saw nothing [meaning no enemy]. I sat on the tree and thought of myself and said to myself: the night [really death] will come, no matter if I am sitting on a tree or on the ground."

Here the last episode abruptly ends, but the story is not over yet. The story finally ends with an epilogue that is as strange as the beginning.

"Now the dove does not venture to do anything anymore. She only roams through all the villages. She flies to all the villages and visits them. If she comes upon another dove she makes friends with her. She stays 7 days and 7 nights in each village. She has already visited all villages near and afar. I feel [the narrator ends] she has done it already for many years and she has been doing so for 77 years up to the present day. Nobody knows, when she will be finished with it."

We will now look at the tale from the perspective of communication; firstly the constellation of the participants, i.e. who communicates with whom, and secondly the manner of their interaction.

Participants of the first episode are the dove and the hunter, i.e. an animal and a human being. They meet on the ground. The dove poses a question and opens the dialogue, after which the answer of the hunter is given in direct speech. Using indirect speech, the hunter concludes the discourse.

In the second episode the participants in the communication are exclusively animals. At the beginning, these are the dove and the snake; later another dove comes onto the scene. This time the conversation takes place on a tree. The

dialogue is again opened by the main actor, the dove, with a question. First no conversation arises, because the snake keeps quiet. Only when the snake is asked three times, does he let it be known that he does not want to talk. To force a conversation, the dove changes to the 'we-form' ("Well, what can we do ..."). After this sentence the snake's reply is given in direct speech. In answering the dove, the snake responds in indirect speech. This form concludes the first part of the conversation. The communication again commences, now together with the befriended dove. The latter starts the dialogue, which is concluded by the main actor in direct speech.

Similar to the epilogue of the second episode, a dialogue starts in the first part of the third episode. The participants are again the dove and her friend, i.e. an animal of the same species. The befriended dove begins the dialogue. Before the monologue starts, the narrator breaks off, while he addresses the audience. Through his words *kè fòndà* [meaning] "you know", a communication takes place, although on another level<sup>9</sup>. Participants of this rather rhetorical statement are the listeners, who should be put into the proper mood for the following monologue. The monologue, the most immediate communication with oneself, is given in direct speech.

The fourth and last episode has the dove and the falcon as protagonists. Both these animals belong to the family of birds, but they are natural enemies. The communication takes place in the air. The narrative says: "Afterwards the dove followed the falcon ...". Again it comes to a dialogue that the dove commences in direct speech. The indirect speech of the falcon concludes the conversation.

The various situations and forms of the communication can be seen in the following chart<sup>10</sup>.

I.	DOVE d1	HUNTER d - i	GROUND
II.	DOVE d1	SNAKE i - d - i	TREE
		DOVE d2	DOVE d1
III.	DOVE d2	DOVE d1	TREE
	Narrator	Audience	
	DOVE d1	- m	TREE
IV.	DOVE d1	FALCON i	AIR

<sup>9</sup> Cf. HÖHLIG, 1978:23-24, where techniques for telling stories are given. Here, the "witnessed form" is explicitly described, which "occurs when the speaker wants to give his comment on the story, for instance to confirm the truth of the statement."

<sup>10</sup> The following abbreviations indicate: d = direct speech; i = indirect speech; m = monologue; the number gives the succession of speech.

From this participant and communication chart, the following observations can be made:

In all episodes, the dove is a participant in communication. She always uses direct speech.

The dove always opens the communications, except in situations where she meets another dove, i.e. in the afterpiece of the second and prelude of the third episode.

All episodes end in the indirect speech of the dove's counterpart. Exceptions are, when she meets another dove and of course in the monologue. This means: Always when the dove acts with a member of another species, then the communication ends in indirect speech, which is always initiated by the counterpart.

Every situation of communication is related to its proper place; the hunter to the ground, the snake to the tree and the falcon to the air.

From the perspective of communication the following conclusion can be drawn:

The dove always initiates the dialogue, when she meets an interlocutor. The counterpart always finishes the dialogue. On the other hand the dove always concludes the dialogue, whenever she meets a partner of her own kind.

At the end of this paper I should like to mention some unusual aspects of this tale. First of all the theme of suicide: So far as I know the theme of suicide hardly ever appears in African stories.

Nevertheless, this theme must have fascinated man throughout his existence, as seen in the ancient Egyptian story of 'The man who was tired of life'<sup>11</sup>. To this fragmentary story of the 12th dynasty (about 1990 BC) the 'Monologue of the Dove' shows many striking parallels. It reports a desperate situation in the life of a man, who, left alone, requests his Ba (i.e. his soul) for a way out of his pain and grief. The Ba advises him to put an end to his life. At first the man refuses to do it, but later on he agrees. When he asks his Ba to perform the funeral rites, the Ba suddenly changes his mind. He urges the man not to think about death, but to forget his troubles; to enjoy life, not to despair; to be confident and not to have any regrets.

I do not want to say, that the story of 'The man who was tired of life' is directly comparable with the Kwami tale. But indirectly there are certain common characteristics. A striking one is, that - just as the unhappy dove - the unhappy man speaks in a monologue to his Ba. His partner, the Ba, is depicted as a bird in ancient Egyptian mythology<sup>12</sup>. This bird is the concrete representation of the 'psyche' or the soul of a human being, which continues in this world after a man's death.

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<sup>11</sup> ERMAN, 1896; BARTA, 1969; FAULKNER, 1956.

<sup>12</sup> BONNET, 1971:74-77.



As we know from different African stories the dove is a symbol of the soul<sup>13</sup>, so it is not unlikely, that in the Kwami tale the dove represents it also. In support of this interpretation there are the introductory sentences. "Once, upon a time, when people were in the process of growing up ... the dove already existed. The dove had already grown to her full size, but this is such a long time ago that we are not able to talk about it."

Further peculiarities in the tale are the numbers 7 and 77. These - being a combination of 3 and 4 - are often found in African stories, but in ancient Egyptian rituals and myths as well<sup>14</sup>. The number 7 has not only a specific meaning for the 7 facial openings (2 eyes, 2 ears, 2 nostrils and mouth), but also the Sun-god Re has 7 Bas or the Maat, i.e. the natural order of things as well as the state of morality and ethics is based on the number 7. Whereas the number 7 has a special significance in many cultures (for example the 7 good and the 7 bad years in the Bible, the 7 days of the week, etc.), the regular properties of 7 are shared by its multiples<sup>15</sup>. Obviously one may extend this logic to an indefinite multiple which in the end implies infinity<sup>16</sup>.

So the dove is - as it stands at the end of the tale - in the process of flying around 77 years and nobody knows when these (years) will come to an end.

And who else could better understand and define infinity than the dove as the embodiment (or representation) of the immortal soul?

## Résumé

"Le Monologue de la Tourterelle" est le titre d'une histoire, curieuse à bien des égards, des Kwami, petite ethnie du nord-est du Nigéria.

C'est le récit de la vie malheureuse d'une tourterelle. Constamment entourée d'ennemis, chassée par les hommes et les animaux, déçue par ses amis et séparée de sa famille, elle commence à désespérer de la vie. Elle réfléchit à son destin injuste sur cette terre, et son monologue est une méditation dans laquelle elle se demande si elle ne ferait pas mieux de se suicider. Ce thème tragique constitue le point culminant de plusieurs épisodes qui décrivent les tensions entre la vie et la mort. Dans un développement très élaboré d'événements dramatiques, réapparaît sans cesse la parabole de la contradiction entre culpabilité et innocence de l'existence humaine.

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<sup>13</sup> KARUTZ, 1938:313.

<sup>14</sup> DAWSON, 1927:97 f.; SETHE, 1916:36.

<sup>15</sup> DAWSON, 1927:105 f.; GOYON, 1985:185 f.

<sup>16</sup> GOYON, 1985:191 f.; MOFTAH, 1964:55-56.

## Zusammenfassung

Mit dem Titel "Der Monolog der Taube" ist eine in vielerlei Hinsicht ungewöhnliche Geschichte der Kwami, einer kleinen in Nordostnigeria beheimateten Ethnie, bezeichnet.

Die Erzählung schildert das unglückliche Leben einer Taube. Ständig umgeben von Feinden, gejagt von Menschen und Tieren, enttäuscht von Freunden und getrennt von ihrer Familie beginnt sie am Leben zu verzweifeln. Sie denkt über ihr unverschuldetes Schicksal auf dieser Welt nach und beginnt in einem Monolog darüber zu meditieren, ob es nicht besser sei, Selbstmord zu begehen. Dieses tragische Thema bildet den Höhepunkt mehrerer Episoden, die das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Leben und Tod beschreiben. In einer kunstvollen Steigerung von dramatischen Begebenheiten wird immer wieder die Parabel von der Widersprüchlichkeit der schuldig-unschuldigen Verstrickung menschlichen Daseins nachgezeichnet.

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