Amshetu Melo Forchu, Brindy Belinga Claude, "Entry on: The Mysterious Lake [Gheuh] by Mama Asanatou", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2021). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1277. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Mama Asanatou

The Mysterious Lake [Gheuh]

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	The Mysterious Lake [Gheuh]
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Baba
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	June 7, 2020
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Yaoundé, Mfoundi, Central Cameroon
Genre	Folk tales, Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



Mama Asanatou (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 77 (in 2020)

Social status: Housewife, matriarch

Profession: Housewife

Languages of narration: Bamun, Baba

Bio prepared by Amshetu Melo Forchu, University of Yaoundé, meloamshetu@gmail.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Background of Ndefang-Pinying: Ndefang-Pinying constitutes one of the villages in Ngemba. Ngemba lies between Longitude 100 12’ and 100 47’ East of Greenwich Meridian and latitude 50 45’ and 60 18’ North or the Equator. Asobo Pius in “Mother Tongue Influence on English Language in Cameroon: A Case Study of the Pinyin Language” notes that the Pinyin people serve as universal sets of the Ngembas of the North west region and the Bamboutous of the Western region. Thus, the Pinyin language, accordingly shares some intelligibility with the Bamboutous Language because of family and trade links. Like most Ngemba people, they believe in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine. For them, as it is the case with most Ngemba villages, there is nothing like natural death.

Summary

In the distant past in the Baba 1 village, a mysterious lake, called Gheuh*, suddenly appeared in broad daylight in the lower section of the village**, to the happiness of the people of the village and their king, who saw in the lake a source of water, fish etc. for their sustenance. They had not had water for a long period and the people had been in great suffering. However, a short period afterward, war broke out between the invisible inhabitants of this lake and their king on the one hand, and the Baba people and their king on the other hand. According to the myth, the cause of this war was simple: when the lake appeared to occupy the lower section of the village, it began to lay claim to the inhabitants of the lower section of the village as part of his kingdom. The king of the Baba people challenged this claim. Both parties quarreled over this and the wives and children of those who sided with the king of the lake abandoned their homes and escaped to the lower section of the village, for safety. Because of this expansionist ambition of the lake and his people, the king of the Baba summoned the lake to come to his palace for a discussion on how to end the strife. The lake refused to honour the summon, under the excuse that it does not travel in the daytime. The Baba king and his *Nkemchis**** decided to use force to get the lake and his people to comply. When news got to the lake and his people that force was to be used to take them to the palace, the lake orchestrated the disappearance of many more Baba people. This last action by the lake infuriated the Baba king, who decided to walk down to the lake with his *Nkemchis*, and accompanied with his own wizards and custodians

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of tradition, they stood guard by the lake for three straight days, during which they made incantations and the lake gradually dried off. From that time the people of Baba were safe from the tyranny of the lake.

* This literary means a mysterious Lake, in the local language of Baba 1.

** According to our narrator, this lake is still present today.

*** Notables in the royal palace of Baba.

Analysis

The origin of many rivers, forests, animals etc. in many tribes in Cameroon cannot really be explained as in many cases they emanate from the spiritual realm. Their appearance either brought happiness to the people they met on the land or it brought chaos. In case of chaos negotiations were made between the people of the land and the appeared natural element. When these negotiations failed, the people, through traditional rituals, sent the natural element away from their land. This is seen with the above myth of Gheuh, due to the conflict in Baba 1 and lack of cooperation with the king, was vanquished by the king of the land. In some cases, the problem emanated from humans, at such times they paid the consequences of their mistakes. This is, for example, the case with the myth of the crossing of the Sanaga by the Beti be Nanga on a snake's back. Due to the people's curiosity to know how they were crossing the river, the torch bearer mistakenly hurt the snake with fire, pushing it to turn and dive into the water thus throwing those on his back into the water and leaving those who had not yet crossed on the other shore.

The spiritual dimension of these elements of nature came from spiritual beings to which they were attached. In the story, the Gheuh river had an invisible king and population who commanded it.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and

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Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Conflict Nature War Water
Further Reading	Shanklin, Eugenia, “Exploding lakes and maleficent water in Grassfields legends and myth”, *Journal of Volcanology and Geothermal Research* 39 (1989): 233–246.
Addenda	Researchers: Amshetu Melo Forchu, Brindy Belinga Claude

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