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Emmanuel Matateyou

Myth of Ntiteuh (the Most Beautiful Woman on Earth) Who Married the Sky King

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





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Creators



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Emmanuel Matateyou , b. 1952
(Author, Storyteller)

Emanuel Matateyou is a writer and a professor at the Ecole Normale Supérieure, University of Yaoundé 1. He is a former Fulbright scholar and has published widely on oral literature and Cameroonian culture and languages. Some of his publications include: *An Anthology of myths, legends and folktales from Cameroon* (1997), *Les Merveilleux récits de Tita Ki* (2001), *Parlons Bamoun* (2001), *Problématique d'une conciliation du réel et l'irréel* (1999), *Les sociétés secrètes dans la littérature camerounaise le cas des Bamoun*. 2. vol. (1990).

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Narrator: Emmanuel Matateyou Cultural Background*: Bamoun (Foumban) The Bamoun Kingdom is situated in the Western region of Cameroon. It is surrounded by Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions in the North, Mifi Division in the West, Bafia and Bangante towns in the South and Banyo town in the East. Its origin dates back to 1390 with its founder Nchare, a prince from Rifum (the present day Bankim), in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon (see here, accessed: July 9, 2019). The Foumban traditional society is well structured with "Mfon" (King) at the head, closely assisted by the "Momamfon" the queen. Other custodians of culture include the notables. The Mfon is noted for his numerous wives and uncountable children. Other secret societies which assist in the administration of the Kingdom, both in the physical and spiritual realms, include the secret societies. Among them are: Nguri and Muitngu secret societies. Owing to the people attachments to the Gods, spirits and ancestors, the Foumban people pay particular attention the popular Nguon Festival (of fertility and protection), which has become a crowd pulling event in Cameroon for the past years. Gods and ancestors are worshiped during the festival and the spirit of sharing encouraged among the people by the king. The Foumban kingdom is one of the oldest Kingdom in Africa and noted for the invention of their own form of writing, which was later pushed to the periphery. * Sources: Mamadou, Ntiecheles, *Les conflicts Socio-politique dans le Royaume Bamoun de 1863–1889*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 2000. Fewoh, Paul Mouliom, *Collectives Décentralisée et Developpement Local: le Cas de la Commune Ubaine de Foumban*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2006.
Summary	There was a great family who lived among the Bamoumn people of

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Foumban. This family had nine children, all girls. The first was called Ntiteuh literally meaning Green, and she was the most beautiful. The second was known as Nkieng, literally meaning Black. Because of the popularity of this family and the extraordinary beauty of the girls they decided to live by themselves in the forest for fear of tempting anyone. As they grew up to maturity, many suitors came to ask their hands in marriage. The last seven of the girls got married except the first two who were the most beautiful.

When Ntiteuh walked by, there was a sound from her legs which mesmerized men. One day, a notable in the court of the King of Bamoum was sent to ask her why she has refused every suitor that had come to ask her hand in marriage. Ntiteuh replied “she didn’t want someone who will maltreat her, or beat her up like other people do in the whole kingdom”. At long last she decided to marry not to a human being but to a Sky King. The marriage was celebrated for seven days according to the tradition of famous marriages in the kingdom.

After the fanfare was over, Ntiteuh and her husband, the Sky King, decided to go up to the sky. The village tradition demanded that a newly married woman took along with her a maid, preferably from her own family. The function of this maid would be to help in house chores and run errands while the newly-married woman rested. And so Ntiteuh, the most beautiful woman in the land, took along with her, Nkieng, her immediate successor and the second most beautiful woman in the land. The marriage adventure with the Sky King was initially very good. After a few years, a baby boy was born to them. The surprising thing about this new born was that he was growing much more than other children of his age, and this was not considered normal by people of the kingdom. Some of her former suitors gossiped and said “perhaps her pride has led her to catastrophe, how could she get married to the Sky King and have an abnormal child”, they wondered?

A messenger was sent from the sky to come down to earth and announce the good/bad news. Good news because a boy had been born to Ntiteuh and Sky King, but bad news in that the child was growing more than his age. The parents of Ntiteuh were worried. However, they were also consoled by the fact that the Sky King was husband to their daughter, and that he would do everything to correct the abnormality. Time passed and the baby boy was growing. He became very popular with everybody down on earth. To most people,

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he was a miracle child who has perhaps come to solve some of the long-standing puzzles in the kingdom. As his popularity increased and attention was focused on him, the Sky King became jealous and killed the child.

Ntiteuh grieved at the death of her son and decided to abandon her husband, the Sky King, and went back to the forest where she was living before. Nkieng, the junior sister, was left behind. But, every time the Sky King went to the farm, Ntiteuh would come back and help the junior sister do house chores and prepare food. Before coming each time, she would put on a dress like a leopard skin, which helped her to disappear and to appear as she wanted. As she went about helping her sister with house chores, her magical powers were manifested. For example, when she wanted to prepare *fufu-corn**, she would just touch the corn flour and it would turn to corn paste. When she wanted to clean dishes, she would touch the first one and the rest would be clean immediately. In fact, everything that she touched changed into the form she wanted that thing to be. When the Sky King returned and ate the fufu-corn, he realized that it had a different taste from what Nkieng was used to preparing. Many times, the Sky King kept asking himself "why is this fufu-corn very different in taste than what Nkieng has been preparing?" This did not only apply to fufu-corn, but to other food that he (the Sky King) ate during that period when Ntiteuh was away. Apart from the food that tasted more delicious than normal, even the arrangements in the house looked different. The Sky King did not believe that it was the work of Nkieng. He then decided to ask Nkieng what was happening. At first, Nkieng refused to say why. But with pressure from the Sky King, Nkieng told the Sky King what had been happening: She said "whenever you went out to the farm, Ntiteuh would appear and prepare food and do house chores, and then after that would disappear again". "How can she be caught?" asked the sky God? Nkieng said she did not know.

The Sky King called for some of the most reputed magicians in the kingdom and asked them to find a way to arrest Ntiteuh and make her not to disappear again. After a very long series of magical trials, they decided on a strategy that worked. They saw through their magical powers that the mystical strengths of Ntiteuh lay in the leopard skin clothes that she wore each time she appeared, and that if that dress was taken away when she removed it, she would not disappear again. But the difficult thing was that Ntiteuh only appeared when Nkieng alone was in the house. A strategy had to be found. After another series of magical consultations, the magicians told Nkieng that when

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Ntiteuh appears again, she should take her leopard skin dress and put in a pot full of ants. One day, when Ntiteuh appeared and had removed her leopard skin dress and put it aside and started doing house chores, Nkieng did as the magicians had told her. When the time to go arrived, she put on the dress but she could no longer disappear because ants were biting her.

Unable to disappear, Ntiteuh hid herself inside logs of wood that were packed in one corner of the house to be used to build fire. When the Sky King returned from the farm, he was told that Ntiteuh was hiding inside the logs of wood. The Sky King decided to approach that dark corner with a kerosene lamp. Each time he went closer, Ntiteuh would blow the light out. This was repeated several times, and several times the light went off. The magicians were unable to find a solution, until Nkieng told them that she had the answer. “What is this answer”, they asked? She replied “the only way to get Ntiteuh out of the dark corner is by the cry of a baby”. So they looked for a baby and brought, and when the baby started crying, Ntiteuh came out of the dark corner to rescue the baby.

Not long after, she said she wanted to go back to the forest. The Sky King refused. She set another date and time that she must be allowed to go. When the date and time came for her to go, the Sky King refused to let her go. She gathered her belongings and went and sat in the middle of the compound and started singing a song that when translated says:

I got married to the King of the Sky because

I feared bad treatment from ordinary men

I had a baby with him

Out of jealousy he killed the baby

I must now leave him, and

Go back to the forest where I came from

After this song, she said if she was not allowed to go, a series of calamities would befall the people. First, she commanded the rain to fall, and she said “the rains are people who have come to look for her” (i.e. Ntiteuh). After the rain had fallen seriously and flooded places as a first sign, the Sky King did not heed to her request to let her leave.

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Next, she commanded the storm that came and blew up everything around. Her request was still ignored. After the storm, the lightning came and burned everybody that was living in the kingdom except the Sky King and the two sisters (Ntiteuh and Nkieng). At this critical point, still, the Sky King did not give in. The last thing that happened was thunder that came and killed the Sky King, and carried the two sisters back to the forest where they came from. This is the end of my story.

* This is popular food item among the Bamoun people. It is derived from mixing corn powder in hot water to obtain a paste-like form.

Analysis

The above myth chronicles the vulnerable position of the woman in many world societies. Ntiteuh's fears of getting married to a human reinforces this susceptible position since her worries are with respect to the fact that women in her society are treated with disgust and disdain; being beaten frequently. This is typical of African societies where a wife is considered her husband's property, thus, he may do with her what he likes. The mistreatment of women is almost always the result of jealousy, either of the woman or of her child(ren) particularly when attention shifts from the man to the child(ren), or when the child(ren) threaten the man's social position as is the case of the myth of Ntiteuh.

The myth also highlights the contrast of the maternal love and the lack of paternal love displayed by the father, who treats his son as a rival, and cautions how ferocious a woman can be if her motherly behaviour is suppressed or denied. Because she grieves her son's death, and the prohibition to get consolation from her forest dwelling, Ntiteuh brings calamity upon the society. Her vengeful approach recalls the characters of these women who prove that motherly love for her children can never really be suppressed, which makes the woman strong and positive. In spite of the fact that women are often presented as victims, their powerful, dominant need to protect their children can make them behave as villainous avengers.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Child, children Family Magic powers Murder Parents (and children) Relationships Religious beliefs Revenge Siblings Tradition Violence
Further Reading	Matateyou, Emmanuel, *An Anthology of Myths, Legends and Folktales from Cameroon*, New York: The Edwin Mellen Press Ltd, 1997.

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