Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Myth of the Origin of the Tupiri Clan by Diguimbele Bagamla", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/615. Entry version as of November 15, 2026.

Diguimbele Bagamla

Myth of the Origin of the Tupiri Clan

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	Myth of the Origin of the Tupiri Clan
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Tupuri
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	December 22, 2017
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Baga, Far North, Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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Creators



Diguimbele Bagamla (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 68 (in 2017)

Social status: Member of Council of Elders

Profession: Farmer

Language of narration: Tupuri

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background*: Tupuri refers to the people and language. The Tupuri population is concentrated - between the geographical coordinates Latitude 10° 30’ 39.6972” North and Longitude15° 2’ 26.8872” East of Kaelein the Kaeledivision of the Mayo-Danay Division in the Far North of Cameroon. The Tupiri practice communal living - evident in their “gourna” (circle dancing with sticks during death celebration) as a sign of unity. They are also noted for their “Feokague” (the Cock festival) where the whole village gathers to invoke the spirit of their ancestral spirits. They are known to invoke sprits of their ancestors in times of hardship and in times of joy. Apart from their ancestors, they perform rites in honour of the python and worship the gods of water and trees.

Occasion: staged

* Sources:

Feckoua, Laurent, *Les Hommes et Leurs Activités en Pays Toupouri du Tchad*, Thèse de 3ème Cycle en Géographie, Université Paris VIII, 1977, p. 407.

sorosoro.org (accessed: January 11, 2019).

Summary

In the beginning, there lived a man who was married to two wives. One was fertile and the other was barren. One day, the two went into the forest to fetch wood. While in the forest, the fertile woman, who was heavily pregnant started to have labor pains. Her co-spouse came to her aid and caused her to lie on a fallen tree trunk where she could give birth in the best conditions. After - being tormented by the pains of labor, she passed out. Her co-spouse then stole the child, hid it, and claimed that she had given birth to a gudubuli (a shapeless mass of flesh). She wrapped the placenta in a sycamore leaf, and presented it to the other woman as the shapeless mass of flesh she has given birth to, when she regained consciousness. Since this woman was in severe pains and had so much trust in her co-wife, she believed what she told her. After this, both wives returned home and told their husband what

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had happened.

As the action was unfolding in the forest, a guenon (monkey) was stealthily observing everything that the barren woman was doing and later snatched the child away while both women were discussing. The guenon started catering for the child in a cave and breastfeeding it. After some time, the guenon's breast milk became insufficient to meet the child's demand. As a last resort, the monkey moved around in the village every night in search of food for the human child. It sometimes stole the best food reserved for the chief to feed the child. As a result, the child was growing up very strong and healthy. Each time that the monkey went out in search of food, it left behind the child with three of its friends, with whom it had developed a longstanding friendship. These friends were the lion, the panther and the python.

After sometime, the chief was notified about a thieving guenon, which had constantly been hovering around when everyone was asleep in order to steal food. A few brave people in the village testified about the presence of animal in the vicinity, and decided to trace its itinerary at night. After observing it for some days, they reported its movements to the chief. The chief organized a village hunt to track down the guenon. Upon their arrival in the forest, they found the guenon sitting together with three animals and a child. The other three animals were a lion, a panther and a python. The guenon was busy feeding a child. Filled with fear, the men stopped and were about to turn back when they saw the lion, the panther and the python leaving. The men were surprised when the guenon came towards them and placed a child into the arms of the father. It then explained to them exactly all what happened in the forest between his two wives. Surprised and elated, the man took the child from the animal, accepted it and named it "Gore", which means, great nobility, for he said "I found this child among the most formidable animals of the forest." He took the child home and initiated him into the royal family and this was announced to everyone with a great feast.

This child grew up and was endowed with supernatural powers. When he came of age, he got married and become the next of kin to his father. He begot four sons. Each time he had a new son, the guenon (which saved him) would come in the night and say what name was to be given to the new-born child. So he called the first child, Muguri, the second, Guju, the third, Soway and the fourth, Kera. The four children constitute the four patriarchs of the Tupuri.

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One day the eldest, Muguri, told the other brothers that he wanted to get married. They accepted and he got married. Later they a conflict arose among them because the other brothers also wanted to get married but could not, since their eldest brother had not had a child since he got married. They then took upon themselves to get a second wife for him. The other three later got married and they separated from each other, since they could no longer live in one small house with their wives.

One day, the king, Gore, called his children and gave them a command which they had to obey all through their lives. He told them: "The following animals: the lion, the panther, the python, and the guenon are your grandfathers, you would never eat their meat; your wives should equally, never burn the wood from the sycamore tree, for it is these animals that raised me, and it is with the leaves of the sycamore that my placenta was tied, saying that my mother had given birth to a "gudubuli." That is why the Tupuri have so much respect for these animals and do not eat their flesh.

The first son, Muguri, and his descendants have the lion as their totem, the second, Guju, and his descendants have the panther as their totem, the third, Soway, and his descendants has the python as their totem, and the fourth, Kera, and his descendants have the guenon as their totem. Each lineage only marries from the other three clans.

Analysis

The child is the nucleus of marriages in Africa. The durability and degree of love in most African marriages anchor on the productive nature of the woman. In this light, women who are barren are either considered as men or persona non grata in the society. This sexist attitude, compounded with the fact that within marriages in typical traditional set-ups in Africa, men are never considered infertile, only increases the already existing alienations that African women are entrapped in within the patriarchal society. As the above myth indicates, a barren wife is obliged to use the necessary means at her disposal to obtain a baby to fully integrate herself in the society as a human being. This quest is confronted with obstacles, and the end result is ridiculous, as the baby ends up in the hands of a voyeur (the monkey). The child is fed with the breast milk of a monkey. Only when penury sets in, the monkey resorts to stealing human food to feed the child. Besides other ideological constructs pointed out in the myth, it

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	also brings into limelight the theme of humankind's will to survive. It also introduces the fact that in Africa, it is an honor to give birth or have children.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Further Reading	Feckoua, Laurent, *Les Hommes et Leurs Activités en Pays Toupouri du Tchad*, Thèse de 3ème Cycle en Géographie, Université Paris VIII, 1977.
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba Assistant researcher: Happy Haiwe Appolinaire Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking

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