Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Hausa Lalle by El Hadj Awal", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/780. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

El Hadj Awal

Hausa Lalle

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions



"Lalle" plant, *Lawsonia inermis*. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons, public domain (accessed: September 30, 2022).

General information	
Title of the work	Hausa Lalle
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Hausa
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	December 27, 2021
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Central Mosque, Tsinga Yaounde
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

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Creators



El Hadj Awal (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 62 (in 2017)

Social status: Imam

Profession: Business man

Language of narration: Hausa (Hau)

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	The Hausa population of Cameroon are mostly found in the Grand North (Adamawa, North, and Far North) between Latitude 80 34' 51.2436" North and Longitude 130 54' 51.8364" East. They are dotted all over the country, because of their migratory nature. They constitute one of the marginalized groups in the country, partly because many are not educated, especially their women. The Hausa people of Cameroon are part of the Sub-Saharan African Hausa community. They speak Hausa (Hau), practice Islam, and belief in festivals like the Cock Festival (the nephew of the successor of a family throws a cock in a fire with the belief that should it fall on the right of the fire, bountiful blessings will be poured on the family, but should it fall on the left side of the fire, bad luck will come upon the family) and the Lam (a ceremony that is performed to show off young girls who are ripe for marriage). Conversely, amongst these people are specialists (Malams, Hausa priests) who perform different rituals and sacrifices, and blend different magical formulas to cure different diseases that plague individuals, families and the community (see here, accessed: January 7, 2018).
Summary	In the beginning whenever a man was about to sleep, his wife was obliged to support his head with her left arm and lure him to sleep. Tradition forbade any form of disobedience towards parents and any act of rebellion towards a spouse. One day, a lady was caught in a dilemma in executing her function as daughter and spouse. Her husband was asleep and she had to attend to her father who was passing by. Her father called on her but she could not respond for fear of waking up her husband. To satisfy both parties, she took a knife, cut off the part of her arm supporting the husband's head, and went out to meet her father. While out, and making all efforts not to draw anybody's attention to her severed arm, the blood pouring out of the cut on her arm betrayed her. Her father asked her why she was bleeding, and she replied that at the moment he called her, she was cuddling her sleeping husband, and so, out of fear of waking him up, she decided to cut off the part of her arm that was supporting her husband's head in order not to disobey any of them. Surprised by her strong faith, her father beseeched God to reserve a better place for her in the abode of the ancestors and grant her speedy recovery. When the girl returned to her husband, she explained to him all that

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had happened. He burst into tears and exclaimed: “If my wife’s hand could return as before!” God immediately answered his prayer. His wife’s hand recovered and the spilt blood turned into a small plant called “lalle” (henna), and a voice from nowhere prophesied: “This tree is blessed and all women must use it for decorating their bodies during marriage and other important occasions. This will make them remain blessed and submissive.” Today Hausa women (both young and old) of northern Cameroon use this reddish substance to paint and beautify their hands and feet.

Analysis

The idea of beautifying the self is deep-rooted in Hausa mythology. As Hausa mythology notes, a price was paid for the coming into existence of this beautifying product – “lalle”. The narrator of the myth draws the audience’s attention to the ordeal that the heroine undergoes to arrive at the cherished beauty plant, though this was not originally her journey motif. This heroine, under patriarchal constraints, becomes a sacrificial lamb, by amputating her arm, first, not to disturb the husband, and second, to rush out, amid the blood oozing out of her hand, to satisfy her father. Her miraculous recovery and the eventual transformation of the spilt blood into an ornament of beauty symbolises virtue rewarded.

Lalle as a beautifying plant dates from time immemorial, and to date, the Hausas continue to use it as a beauty product. Its application in the past involved placing and clasping the leaves of the plant on the body, and later removing it to leave behind the desired imprints on the body. With the advent of modernism, there is a shift from simple imprints to designing, wherein different products have been introduced to improve the design and duration on the body. Among these products are colours and hydrogen peroxide. This art of body decoration is present in many world cultures. The products used might differ, but the objective remains the same – improving beauty. The Hausa of Cameroon and neighbouring Nigeria, like those in other parts of Africa, follow this cultural practice.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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Concepts	
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Femininity Gender expectations/construction Gender, female Oppression Respect Values
Further Reading	Bivins, Mary Wre, *Telling Stories, Making Histories: Women Words and Islam in Nineteen-Century Hausaland and the Sokoto Caliphate*, Portmouth: Heinemann, 2007.
Addenda	Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking Researcher: Divine Che Neba Assistant researcher: Djibril Saibou

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