

## The founding myth of the Kapsiki, especially Mogodé

*Rhena te Hwempetla*

The first Kapsiki came from Goudour to Mogodé, through Sirak, settled and grew numerous. Then a man came from Roumsou, to the North, warned by a smith woman, because the newcomers had become many. So the man from Roumsou tricked (*kerwhete*) them. He told them: there is a cavern over there, and when you see something red from the direction of Nzambe [the mountain that forms the border with the village of Sir, to the east] then you have to enter the cave because of the danger'. 'The man is right' the newcomers said. When the next morning they saw something red coming from that direction, they saw the 'fire on Nzwambe' they told each other. 'That is what the man has warned us for' and all entered the cave, filling the cave completely. The man who had tricked them knew the cave well, and came with a lot of straw, stuck in the entrance and put it to the fire, fanning it with great strength.

Inside the cave people gagged and suffocated from the smoke. A certain Ngwedu who was inside with his full sister, same father and same mother, cut open a leather bag, put it around the heads of him and his sister, and tied another skin around their necks. They did sweat a lot but the smoke did not enter. Thus their *shala* has saved them. All the others were dead but they alone, the two in that sac, stayed alive.

After two days in the cave, the fire was gone and they went out. Seated on a large flat stone they looked around: no one in sight. 'Sister, let us climb that mountain, we have no one to go to, we just climb that mountain. So they crossed the *rhwamerhe* ['chief creek'], climbed the shore and went up to the Rhu Ngwedu [the old habitat of the first settlement of Mogodé]. Its top was full of thorns they cleared away with their sickles. They sat on the mountain and looked around. 'Look, there is fire in Gouria, you stay here then I will go and ask for fire', Nwedu said. 'Do not get caught' his sister said. 'If they grab me, you go and look where there are people' he answered, and left for Gouria.

'I have seen your fire and have come to ask for it', he asked the people of the mountain of Gouria. 'You do not want that fire. If I give it to you, you will be in my debt. Why should I give it to you anyway? Where do you live that I would give it to you?' 'I live over there, on that mountain there'. 'OK, I will give you the fire but then you owe me. I will not let you die from cold. Here is your fire, but you are in my debt now for it. Of anything you butcher, any animal be it goat, cow or sheep, the head is mine. But the fire is now with you as a loan.' Ngwedu went to his mountain taking his fire, and lit a fire on top. 'I gave gotten the fire' he told his sister; we stay here and will not go down again, Here we will build our home.' 'Yes, we will stay here' his sister said. They build a provisional house and lived in it. 'Now you are my wife and I will not let you leave,' Ngwedu said. She fell pregnant and bore a son, they called Teri Dingu<sup>1</sup>.

So the man called Ngwedu and his wife were installed on the mountain Rhungwedu. Teri Dingu begat Hwempetla, and he in turn lived on Rhungwedu and begat Zagwayé and Puku. So people call Zagwayé the son of Hwempetla. Hwempetla begat seven children and gave them names: Ngacé among them [the clan ancestor of the story teller, Teri Puwe]. Ngacé begat Jiwedawa, Jirivi and Kwashiléa. Hwempetla also begat Makwajé, who became the father of Rhudava, Pajéli and Rhwaba. The first son of Hwempetla was Tizhé and he became maze, chief. The second son Zeremba, the third son Ngacé, the fourth Makwajé and the fifth Makwiyé. Those are the real people from Mogodé.

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<sup>1</sup> Other informants name Teri Dingu as grandson of Ngwedu.

Now the mother of Hwempetla was not the makwa of Puku, but a *kwaterume* [stolen wife]. All the children of her former marriage had died and so she had left her first husband. She came to Puku who accepted her as his wife, but she was *kwazerema*, the un-loved wife. He spoke with her but not like one speaks with a woman, When he had slept with her it took months before that happened again. At the moment she conceived Hwempetla, it had been more than a year, people say, since he had slept with her.

She bore Hwempetla when the other women were threshing the sorghum, and people sent her into the field to help, and she gave birth in the bush. All women were busy taking the harvest to the threshing place and nobody helped her carry the sorghum after her delivery. So she sat down to give the baby some water and had to carry the infant in her arms, as Puku had given her no sling to carry the child in, like other women. So she tied the baby with an old sac. After the threshing she sat down and cried: 'Why does *shala* not heed me. The sorghum is too heavy to carry.' She did not know yet she had given birth to a prodigy. Hwempetla then spoke up and said: 'Put it on top of your head and do not complain. I shall help you. The woman put the *kwaciga* (basket) on her head and it was very light, so she could hold her child with her hands.

A little further she saw an antelope, and asked: 'Who can skin it for me without touching the meat?' [to serve as a sling]. Her son said: 'Look at it from the corner of your eyes, then the animal will die and you can take it.' She look at it from aside and it fell down.' 'Go get it' he said. The woman took the antelope: 'How will I carry it?' she asked. 'Put it on your head and you will see how I will help you', he told her. So she did and found that the grains and the antelope together were very light. She went home and said Puku, her husband: 'Puku, look at this here.'

The man came over: 'Who did this for you?'

'I found it dead' the woman told. She did not tell that her son had done so, for her son had forbidden her to speak about it.

'Here you have it, but I want the skin; will you give it to me?' she asked Puku.

Puku skinned the animal, gave her the skin but distributed all the meat under his other women, and she did not get anything at all, not even a little morsel. She still had no grains for food, and had to make her food from the dregs of the beer. Puku gave all the antelope meat to the other women, but refused her all meat. Hwempetla told his mother: 'Please mother, do not cry'. When the husband handed over the skin, the other women said: 'no one is going to help you with prepare the skin.' The child helped her to rub the skin to make it soft, but some hairs remained on it. Yet she used it as a sling while the child was small.

Years later, when Hwempetla was a boy, he was old enough to tend the animals. He told his mother: 'If I go on a journey, do not leave your hut. People will not ask you to do anything anyway, and if they ask, you should pretend to be ill. In no circumstance leave your hut. I know my father will not come for you either. I tell you this, because the people will come and ask for me. 'And Hwempetla left for the field, very early in the morning till arriving at Roufta. He wandered around over there for about three days. One morning, when the cattle were gathering in the cold to go into the fields, he stood between them. A few men on a hill saw that the cows assembled quickly on one point that morning, quite early. The told their children: 'Make sure that the cattle do not leave for the field too soon.' When the children approached the animals, all sank into the ground. The children ran over to the spot, and called the men. Together they tried to stop the cows but in vain.

Hwempetla went home with the cows. It was night when he arrived at the home mountain and he climbed it with the animals, and left the cattle just outside the forecourt, in the *seme* [place where the maize is sown, just near the compound wall]. He had taken many cattle. One can still see on the mountainside the place where he had left the cattle, the prints of their hoofs are

still there. [Indeed, on the flank of the mountain hoof-like impressions in the volcanic rock are visible]. He did leave the cows inside the earth however, with just their horns sticking out. He called his mother: 'I am back mother, do not go outside yet, just wait till I tell you'.

A co-wife came out to fetch water. She stumbled over the horns, fell and broke her jar.

Another came out and the same happened. A third one and the same again. The Hwempetla called his mother: 'Now you come out to fetch water.' She came out, fetched water and came back with a full jar. When she came home with the water, Hwempetla said: 'Now go to my father and tell him to come out to see what happens at his compound'. His mother: 'He will not be mad, I hope?' 'No, go now it is I who sent you'.

The woman went to her husband: 'Puku, Puku, come and have a look here'. He answered: 'Why do you call me?' 'Come and listen to what I have to tell, it will not take you long' she said, 'come and look outside what happens at your compound'.

He went out and there Hwempetla had brought forth all the cattle from the earth by miracle. Puku came and saw his compound surrounded by cattle. He was flabbergasted and went into the woman's hut. 'Who has done this thing, wife of mine?' he asked. 'The child that is with me has done this'. 'What child?' 'Hwempetla did it, for when I stayed inside he was not here. He had told me not to leave the hut, so I stayed in' she said.

From that moment Puku started to love his wife.

'Whose cattle are these?' Puku asked Hwempetla. He answered: 'Ours! Shala has given these to us'. 'Great!' Puku said. He stayed in that hut, gave his wife sorghum and meat again and slept with her but not with his other wives.

After receiving these cattle from Hwempetla, Puku went over to Gouria to tell what had happened. 'Very good' the people of Gouria said, 'be sure to give us the heads when you kill them'. So every time a cow died, Puku brought the head and a leg to Gouria. Hwempetla did not like that and grew angry, and he saw that he and his brothers were already large.

Hwempetla told his brothers: 'If a cow now dies, we will not give the head.' Soon a large bull died. Puku told his children: 'Bring the head and a front leg to the people of Gouria.' 'OK' the children said. They left to give the meat to Gouria, but then Hwempetla said to his brothers: 'Let us not give the meat to the people of Gouria. Let us roast the meat and we will see how the war turns out. If we are with too few, we will give them the meat again'. They sat down, made a fire, cut the meat in long strips, roasted it and ate it to the last morsel. Then they went home.

'Did you give the meat to the people of Gouria' their father asked them. 'Yes' they said.

The people of Gouria did not see the head of the bull. 'Where is the bull' they asked the children. 'At home in the stable', the children lied to them. The others came to Puku: 'Where is the bull? People told us it was ill in the stable'.

'Another bull? Did my children not bring you the head and the front leg I sent them with?'

'You have told them that you are strong enough to make war to us, surely. If not, they would not have eaten it on the road' the people from Gouria said, and left angry. When the children came back from the bush and had put the cattle into the pen, his father called them over and asked where they had left the meat. 'If you did not bring it to Gouria, where did you leave it?' their father asked them.

'We have roasted it over there in the field. Their father told them: 'The people from Gouria have come for the war. How can we suffer a war? You are still small, what can we do against Gouria, sons?'

Hwempetla said: 'We will battle as well, we are big enough'.

'You, big enough?'

'Yes, big enough!'

Then wait a moment' his father said. He took a calabash and put it on *Kelungudehwete* [a rock between Mogodé and Gouria, some 2 km. on the road]. 'Let me see!' he told his sons and

gave each of them five arrows. 'If each of you can shoot all five arrows into the calabash then and only then I know that you can battle'. They all shot and all arrows went into the calabash. Again they shot and again all arrows into the calabash. Puku went over and saw that all arrows were inside and not one was on the ground.

The next day the people from Gouria came for the war, and the fight began. They shot at the people of Gouria, but did not kill them. They shot, and hit but did not kill them, yet no arrows fell on the ground. Thus Hwempetla and his brother shot their arrows at the people from Gouria but no one was killed. Then Gwenji came, a stranger. He had heard of the war with Gouria and came to help Hwempetla and his companions with a huge buffalo horn full of poison (*rhwé*), mixed with thorns. They sowed the battlefield with it. The people from Gouria stepped on it and started to die. From that day people called the newcomer Gwenji Rhwé. And so Gouria was decimated and Mogodé free.

[Long] after the battle Gwenji came to the house of Hwempetla, he send his sons [sic!] to meet the newcomer in the forecourt. Maze, the oldest son was too busy with his calabash, the second had urgent business with his quiver, only the third took the time to meet the stranger. Since then Gwenji is part of the makwante clan.

On a certain day the children of Hwempetla crossed the river at Teki, and found on the shore someone under a sewe [Acacia sp.]. Nobody knew him and they asked who he was. He answered: '*Mava kwasewe*' [slave of the Acacia], and that is how his clan came to be named *mava*, (slave) as nobody knew where he came from.

Hwempetla became chief of the village. He wanted a woman, so he tried the daughter of Rain. He tries to steal her, but every time he comes near her, Rain starts to groan, and ultimately Rain gets tired of the game. 'Why do you want to steal my daughter? Maybe you succeed, but then on your little piece of land rain will fall continuously and drought will reign elsewhere. Your fields will be washed away with rain. Is that what you want? You have to go down to the earth, and I stay up here to go from village to village, till the end of the world.

'So you do not give me your child'?

'No, I do not give her'.

Then Rain and Hwempetla make a wager. Rain will grant Hwempetla a favor if he can hide himself for eight days. Hwempetla leaves and hides in a beer jar between the couch which is kept there, in the very house of Rain himself. Then Rain starts his search: he comes down with enormous winds, tears trees down, destroys houses and termite hills. Everywhere he searches, mouse holes, under stones, everywhere. Exhausted he returns after eight days home and there finds Hwempetla who tells him that he was in the couch, inside the beer jar.

'You are right', Rain says, 'I have ransacked the whole earth and did not find you as you were in my own house. I am for everyone, not for someone special. If you and your small mountain are thirsty, then you have to tell me so. You tell me; 'I am thirsty, and the I come and pour myself out at your mountain. Do not buy rain at someone else, but come and ask me for it' Rain told him.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Hwempetla is at the end of his days. He tells his people: 'I liberated you from our enemies, I shall try to liberate you from Death as well. If I do my utmost, that has to succeed.'

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<sup>2</sup> This particular story is told, more widely distributed, with the ground squirrel (*meke*) in the role of Hwempetla; the squirrel is the standard protagonist in the Kapsiki traditional stories, *rhena heca*. In the squirrel version the end is different: the squirrel does marry the daughter of Rain and gives an elephant as bride price. The father-in-law he east the elephant from the inside, helped by the leopard, and then arranges that the angry Rain catches the leopard *in flagrante delicto*.

So when his time came, he thought: 'With my powers I should succeed, I will be too quick for Death. He took the skin of his bull and flew through the air. Death chased him, faster and faster and threatened to overtake him. Hwempetla tried to shed Death flying straight through a mountain, but Death still followed him<sup>3</sup>. Then he tried to hide for Death but to no avail. He hid in the thorn bush but Death found him. He hid inside the straw for the roof, but Death found him. He hid inside a termite hill, but his hairs stuck out and gave him away. He hid inside a hollow baobab, but Death saw him. He then dug himself into the stem of the couch, and made himself very small, very small he made himself. Four days and nights Death searched everything, in the straw, in the pool, in a well, but no Hwempetla. Then at last Death saw a toe sticking out of the couch, because the stem was too small. So, finally Hwempetla had to admit defeat. 'If the couch had been larger, I could have beaten Death' he said. 'You people, there is no use trying to hide from death, but prepare yourself for a dignified end, and do like I will do shortly. Wrap me inside the skin of my bull; during the dance the smith has to carry me on his shoulders, and my wife should hold its tail. When you hear a whoosh noise, I will be gone. Then come to a spot in the bush with a lot of fleas, above two holes in the ground. Make my tomb there, and my wife's.' And so it happened. During the dance Hwempetla flew from the shoulders of the smith pulling his wife behind him with the tail. People started searching the bush and finally found two holes in the ground, covered with fleas. They made two tombs and covered them with leaves.<sup>4</sup>

From that moment onwards, people do not escape Death, but are mounted on the shoulders of the smith, and danced with, finally 'flying' towards the grave.

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<sup>3</sup> The particular mountain has caverns, one of which is used for the girls' initiation at their first marriage (makwa).

<sup>4</sup> During the annual rain hunt these tombs are repaired and covered with leaves to ask Hwempetla for rain, which he will purvey to Rain.