Child Care in Teke Congo XVIIIth -XXth Century

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Abstract: In Teke Congo, as in many Bantu societies, the child is cared for from the womb, from birth and after birth until puberty and adolescence. From the beginning to the end, he goes through a process of initiation and socialization that will enable him to fully integrate his society and later affirm his status as a man or a woman. This obligatory process, especially in traditional societies, is a sine condition that is devoid of which the individual cannot have access to the education of the clan. This study is devoted to the description, the analysis and the explanation of the process of formation of the child in Teke of the Congo, one of the big ethno linguistic groups which are in Congo.

Keywords: Teke, Initiation, Child, Tradition, Congo

1. Introduction

The care of a child in Teke Congo is one of the oldest rites which still in force, especially in traditional Teke societies. It is done through an initiation process that begins as soon as the woman is conceived through the nine (9) months of pregnancy until the birth of the child. Initiation is a mode of integration into a social group and very often it coincides with the ages of life, especially with the passage from childhood to adulthood. It is a process of socialization of the child through a series of tests that prepares him for adult life.

How do Congo Tekes take care of the child from pregnancy to puberty? What is the impact of this initiation in the Teke society?

This study intends to explain, analyze and describe this process and rituals between the XVII th and the XXth century, based on some work of researchers who have worked in this field and on the oral tradition, based on our field surveys.

1) The child in Teke cosmogony

The Teke cosmic order encompasses everything and refers to ntsié (world, earth). This sacral universe includes the visible world and the invisible one.

In Teke, the child is considered a gift of God. Thus, the children come from the world of ancestors, remain a time in the world of life and at death, they join the world of the ancestors. Most often the Teke imaginary shows that the new born was a truly reincarnated ancestor who come to ward off a danger that threatens the group.

For the growth of the child, there are many intermediate divinities that are the subject of ritual ceremonies to obtain favors (luck, protection, healing, good harvest ...) The lineage, Nzo is the group of individuals linked by the blood ties and following a rule of filiations. Filiations for all things determine both the order of kinship, the hierarchy of members, the mode of succession, and even the distribution of authority.

At the level of filiations, the Teke are patrilineal, the role of the father is fundamental. The children therefore belong to the father's clan. It is therefore the father and not the maternal uncle who is the leader of the group. Maternal uncles have no authority over their sister's children, yet they must show respect[1].

Children are considered in this group as innocent. They are people who have not yet gained the experience of life and are in the custody of their parents. To pass from childhood to adulthood, they have to pass initiatory trials such as circumcision for boys. The Teke society requires the child obedience, submission and respect of elders. In this socialization of the child, the magico-religious universe plays an important role as Henri Maurier underlined here:

In all societies, religion plays a certain role. Whether true or false objectively, it does not matter. In it manifests for example the tensions of social life that find their appeasement or their revenge. Religion, very often, has a conservative role, it guarantees the social status, it is an instrument of social control. This is particularly visible in the African religion of ancestors. The basic personality of each ethnic group influences the representation of his god and vice versa.

The child in particular, take part of his family experience to make "gods" in the image of his parents. All this, psychologically and socially, are processes of facts for which nothing can be done [2].

The child owes a great respect to the elders because he is not yet part of the group before puberty. At this age, a series of rites of passage allow him to take the steps that will make him a full member of the group.

Speaking of the conception of this universe by the Teke, Zephirin Sah affirms:

This group is a representation of the world and the universe where they distinguish the material world, that of visible material action and the world of spirits, mikui which belong to another order of realities. But these mikui before becoming pure spirits had been humans. This explains why even after changing their lives, they stay in touch with men, live with them, accompany them in their activities and appear to them in dreams in the human forms they once had. This same universe in which the mikui move is also that of beings of which we do not know very well whether they are endowed with consciousness as the spirits and if they have a particular form. These very particular beings, but endowed with supernatural powers, are
improperly called geniuses, chtonian spirits. The Küküia call these forces nkira.

The Ngaa or healers regularly invoke them in their research of the causes of the disease and in the therapeutic protocol that they propose [3].

In this social teke world, children, girls and boys, have their eyes turned to the elders of the village who must put them in the school of life. To be a full member of their society, they must know the laws of tradition and their culture. A little as Lucien Lévy-Bruhl states here:

From an early age, the child is introduced into the mystery of life. The first duty of seniors is to teach young people the deep meaning of living. Life consists in being engaged in a complex network of mystical participation with the other members, living and dead of its social group, with animal and plant groups born from the same soil, with the earth itself, with the occult powers protecting it. Together, and more particular sets to which the individual belongs more especially [4].

All stages of the socialization of the child will take into account this reality of the visible and invisible environment.

2) The care of the mother and the child during pregnancy

In Teke society health care is a constant concern that accompanies the existence of the individual from birth to death. It starts with taking care of the future newborn. Specialists in obstetrics are responsible for monitoring the progress of pregnancy. The pregnant woman is subject to a large number of food and psychological prohibitions. The main prohibited in this register are:

- Food prohibitions: the woman is forbidden the consumption of a certain number of foods judged detrimental to the health of the child she bears: mufemè pork, monkey meat, nkima, squash, ntaà, sorrel, linkulu, peppers, badza, boar meat to prevent the persistence of birth pains, the flesh of the protopenter (Ndzuoon, Ndzoombo) to prevent miscarriage. She must not eat eggs for fear of giving birth to children without hair,
- Or take a cassava-tree food to avoid the delay in delivery, that is, the exit of the placenta [5].
- The prohibitions of a psychological and symbolic nature: prohibition to attend a mourning, a burial, prohibition to participate in a fishing party.
- It is strictly forbidden to the pregnant woman to lie on her stomach, not to wrap a loincloth around her neck so that the umbilical cord of the child does the same. She should not be placed too long in front of the door of the house to avoid that at birth the expulsion of the baby is not slow.
- The pregnant woman is not allowed to watch the chimpanzee (Nzigui, Ibuhi) or hideous or abnormal people (people suffering from a mental illness, insane, physically handicapped) to spare the future newborn the adoption of the same physical traits or abnormal characters. Also, it is not recommended to go behind the pregnant woman with a lamp, a flame or an illuminating torch, to avoid the birth of a child with abnormal eyes.

- Her husband is now banned from fishing and hunting until further notice. Neither should he dig holes, pressing a deadly childbirth. It is also forbidden for him to transport a corpse or perform customary wedding ceremonies during that period of pregnancy.
- To the couple, it is strictly forbidden the nocturnal quarrels (kiptila, ambili) and the sexual vagrancy (Ukali)
- For the newborn, the ngaa makes with a piece of placenta of his mother a protective fetish preserved in a statuette serving as a reliquary.

The child will remain under the protection of this fetish until puberty [6].

The birth of the nkira or ba mбу, the twins, is the occasion of great special festivities to which the whole village is invited. This is the occasion when the village performs rites which are reserved for the birth of twins. All children by their innocence are also considered as nkira that must be cajoled.

The prenatal follow-up of the woman begins from the moment when the woman (Mukai, Unkeï), ceases to see her periods (Atsui, Souengue), (moon). Moon because the moon serves as a means of calculating the duration of pregnancy (yun) which is nine months.

3) The care of the child from birth to the age of puberty

From the first moments of his life on earth, from 0 to 5 years, the child is under the care of his mother who gives him his maternal affection. The parents surround him with all the affection that is necessary for his growth.

After this first stage (early childhood), between the ages of 12, 13, 14 and even 16, the child is ready for initiation where he receives lessons from his teachers on the knowledge of his society and culture. Theoretical teaching is associated with a number of practical educational activities that rank always difficult trials though graduated and all to prepare the body of the child to adulthood. There is for example the test of the great hunt for the most dangerous animals: leopards, buffalo... Covered with leopard skin, armed with arrows and spears, knives with double facets, kibiélè in one hand and the other of the buffalo tail, Musèka mpaka applicants flow into a chase at risk. They will not go hunting once, they will hunt often and it is hunting that reveal the best and most worthy. Naturally to hunt so dangerously, it requires physical training through a race and many jumps: high jump, long jump, spear training, ...

On these initiations, Alphonse P. Van Eetvelde states: In many societies, children are removed from their families and their environment to be gathered by sex, away from homes, in a special enclosure, a sacred grove or a corner of the dense forest, depending on the geographical environment. The initiatory rites and the teachings are organized, either within the framework of a village, or of a clan, of a territorial grouping [7].

Physical tests are doubled with psychological ones. The most difficult is silence. Silence for the purposes of a meditation training that will facilitate contact with the spirits.
of the ancestors. Silence that will facilitate the awareness of the Teke identity and their obligations, their duties alongside the prerogatives as men, *ba ngobalika* (real men) for boys and real women for girls[8].

Another very hard test is the separation of the child from his parents once back from initiation. But probably not for 16-17 year olds who are happy to leave their parents’ home and start living the demands of their need for freedom.

The circumcision test for young boys between the ages of 11 and 13 marks an important stage in the young boy's initiation into adult life. The foreskin section is a time of excruciating pain and the 11-13 year old initiate young should not scream or writhe with pain. Apparently we are far from health care; in fact all physical activities at least are oriented to the maintenance of the body in good health. The initiation rites of adolescents have been maintained for long time.

In the Küküa of west-central Congo, the *nkira*, on the other hand, is a rite of female initiation in which women worship a spirit of the waters, also called *nkira*. This spirit possesses them. Then it arouses in them a rise of fever, headaches and trances; in this case we say *am bali itswa or anvi u nkira*, that is, the person is possessed by the *nkira*. What Raoul Léhuard calls a crisis of possession by the *nkira*:

During the crisis, he says, the woman is lying down and held on a bat-flank in a special hut. He draws red and white lines on his forehead, and on the rest of the face he is marked with dots of the same color.

The appeasement returned, the woman remains a moment sitting on the bat-flank, in front of the spirit of the *nkira* which can be materialized either by a statuette whose face carries the paintings of the person possessed and whose reliquary encloses the spirit, either by a pottery that contains the same elements as those that are gathered in the statuette [9].

For the well-being and the health, the teenagers receive, but in a specific way, an initiation formation. They are initiated to the *nkira*, spirit of the waters from which they learn the essential principles for the construction of their future life of adult woman. The purpose of this initiation is to harden the body, the body against natural and external aggression.

In order to maintain the healthy Teke man or woman, a fundamental ritual with a mystical dimension takes place. One end of the child's umbilical cord is taken from birth, dried in a cup of calabash or placed in a statuette. This operation symbolizes the connection of the human being with the space of the world, the space of the village and the protective space of the ancestors. The whole thing signifies the connection of all the universes in relationship with of imbrications, with the universe where the human being lives.

Theophile Obenga writes about this reality when he says: the village guard of the umbilical cord, also becomes at the same time, the essential stay of the human being. To bury the man near his village, the guardian of his umbilical cord, is to bring him back not only to the ancestors, but also to lead him to what is his universal strength.[10].

This great importance attached to the health and survival of the individual through rituals indicates the close connection between the man, the parental group, the ancestors, the village social group, its environment, the world and the supernatural forces of which God (*Dzami*) and the spirits of the ancestors (*Mikui*).

**Education and rites of passage**

Initiation is a mode of integration into a social group and most of the time it coincides with the ages of life, especially with the passage from childhood to adulthood. It is a process of socialization of the young people who, gathered in age class spend more or less long time outside the village [11]. This long process of socialization of the young boy and girl in this society is marked by trials and rites that prepare candidates for life as men and women. On the importance of rituals in the lives of young initiates, J. F Yekoka (sld) states:

Important rites go through the daily life of the Bantu cultural components ... These rites confer to marriage the essential elements of symbolism, without which it can not embody the virtues of social life. In other words, rituals give to marriage all its sociological significance, all its complexity. It is by them, no doubt, that marriage covers all its sacredness [12].

To understand the meaning of these rites, we used the rite of circumcision for young boys and the management first of the moon (*Atsui*), first menstruation for girls. At this stage of initiation, the candidate learns to be an adult that is to say, to transform himself or herself into a mature and productive element of his group. And in the third stage, more advanced initiations allow the disciple to reach the higher levels of wisdom and the mystical dimension.

On the test of circumcision, Bernard Bakana Kolelas states:

The operation is a major event expected by the entire community, but the waiting also causes some apprehension. This is the stage where the ceremonial *Beka* reaches the culmination marked by a dramatic solemnity. There is no doubt: circumcision is fraught with meaning for the life of the community. Its consecrates the sexual majority of the males of this community; it confers the capacity of reproduction, to which the community brings its gratitude by celebrating the apotheosis of the circumcised. Thus, the virile and social maturity of a male is socially recognized. The meaning of life and the necessity of the perpetuation of the group undoubtedly explain the strong involvement of the whole community in the great ordeal [13].

The candidate must show courage and composure in these different stages of the trial of circumcision (*Lesinda, kizilikila*) which will take place in seven stages as follows:

First step: *kilaa, Ulaa* (demand)
In this first step, the candidate formulates his request for circumcision, for that he must pass a test of hunting by which he must show that he is fit. He has the obligation to bring from his game hunting game that he will present to the elders as proof of his bravery. This rite is called Akuru Akuru, that is, to beg the elders.

Second step: Mbii (hunting)
After acceptance of the candidate's application, the second step is hunting (mbii). The candidate will stay in the forest for seven days to hunt to bring back game that will be used for the grand ceremony.

Third step: Sossi, Ikouri (the package)
Here, all the initiates of the neighboring villages are invited to a large meal during which the candidate receives in front of his parents the Sossi which is a package containing a fetish. The initiated specialists benefit from this gathering to set the day of circumcision [14].

Fourth stage: Adziki, Ankoula (Chimpanzees)
The candidate is in front of an opponent for a traditional wrestling fight called uhani mpani[15]. This wrestling event is coupled with that of the candidate meeting with a group of chimpanzees in the middle of the forest to always test his bravery. In this event, the candidate will manage to discover himself the group of chimpanzees he fixes without showing any fear. This test continues later in another form, this time the child is placed under a shed in a container containing spicy water. Once again, he must show courage by bearing the ordeal that lasts half an hour. The child comes out of these trials if he showed his bravery under the ovations of the elders who congratulate him for his bravery and his coolness. He is taken to the backwater by the elders responsible for watching him for a bath.

Fifth stage: Oliemi (Veille)
The vigil takes place two days after the pepper test. Here the child must watch because it is during this wake that he undertakes other complementary tests related to the transmission of powers. This vigil is mainly reserved for initiated. After having received all the attributes of the ancestral powers and the instructions of his group, the child must sing and praise the virtues of his ancestors and his clan through a well-chosen repertoire of songs.

Sixth step: Kizilika, Ilîëm e (the circumcision)
Circumcision comes early in the morning under the eyes of the initiates who accompany the candidate who defends the honor of the clan. The event takes place in the middle of the village away from the female world. It is a solemn moment of dances, tastings and rituals. In the meantime before the operation, a healer (Ngaa) examined the child and made him a necklace made of a mixture of ingredients from the plant, animal and mineral world to give the candidate more courage and help him to handle the pain. He will wear it around his neck. The candidate will also take a kind of drink called kuirâ. It is almost in a hallucinatory state that the candidate is led in the clamor of the crowd to a discreet place prepared for the occasion. This place is a rectangular enclosure far from any prying eyes. This is how the operation comes into play, a fateful moment full of risks as well, since severe and fatal hemorrhages are recorded.

During the operation (circumcision), the child stands up against the specialist (Mubirî), who is shirtless and has painted the colors of cheetah, red, black and white (Ankèlè a n Ngoo). It is him who will give the signal that will turn the child into a new and adult man. The candidate will thus comply with the instructions given to him during the vigil. Here in the circle of elders, he will fix a tree without flapping his eyelids, it is at this moment that the specialist of the circumcission cuts the foreskin of his penis under the cheers and shouts of joy of the old. This is the proof that the child has just passed the Letsinda test and is now admitted to the circle of initiates, he becomes a real man (Ngobalika) [16].

Step Seven: Ukili (Retirement)
After this operation, the child is interned for three months in a specially constructed hut behind his father's house (Ibolo). Here, under the good care of his counselor, usually a grandfather, he will receive treatment to heal his wound.

Eighth stage : Kipala, Upala (the exit)
The end of seclusion marks the exit of the candidate from the initiatory enclosure. This eighth stage gives rise to great festive ceremonies. These are preceded by a large part of net hunting to have game necessary for the party. On the day of departure, at dawn, the child's counselor leads him to a stream and plunges him into the water for purification. From that moment, he is forbidden to wash in the same stream throughout his life, because a part of him will remain there all his life[17].

Back in the village, all the old and initiated and the whole group are at the meet for a big party. Each initiate congratulates the newcomer in the much closed circle of the initiates and transmits to him the element of power of which he is holder. A kind of blessing by the elders. All that with the child, leaving the hut where he has stayed for three months, under the gaze of the members of the group and the whole village. At the exit of the box, the initiate skips the big fire three times without getting burnt. During the third jump, he should not have to look behind. The women, girls and children escort her throughout the village with songs and shouts of joy. After this triumphal tour in the village, he goes to sit under his father's shed where he receives the gifts and congratulations of the members of his group. This ceremony thus prepares the child for more responsibilities in his group and to reach the stage of maturity, even affective. The initiative of the girl is also a school of values among Teke of Congo, as we have seen, in young boys.

This well-designed initiation is made of three staggered steps that are:

- The first childhood;
- The beginning of socialization;
- The entrance into adult life.

The different stages contain tests that the candidate must brave to attain adult status and to find a place in society. Indeed, in the education system of the old African world, knowledge was acquired in a progressive way, through a path to several levels. The thought was revealed according to an ascending initiatory process. The integration
of the adept in various initiatory orders was intended to make it accessible to the knowledge that these orders, these institutions had mission to transmit. Each institution undertook to dispense knowledge in a given dimension of reality.

In the Küküa, a teke subgroup, for example, the initiation of the young is ensured by his mother and all the women of her age. What confirms Dieudonné Ngatsé:

In relation to its somatic and psychic growth, the women introduced him to country or culinary work (how to prepare dishes, knead cassava, wash plates), agricultural (crops of plant species). She was taught rules such as submission to man, activism and endurance, because men like working women. Their games must be compatible with their gender. At the age of puberty, she is made aware of the behavior of a woman in front of her husband [18].

For the preparation of young fiancé e s at marriage, the girl must prepare sufficiently to meet the conjugal obligations. Preparations start when she is 14 years old. That is to say as soon as the hormonal system triggers puberty.

In this school of values, society trains, shapes, and adjusts to the equations of life that are set aside for to take over from succeeding generations; it teaches them to grasp the fullness of life with their hands. It gives them the means to preserve, under the best conditions, the cultural and spiritual heritage that has served as an instrument for their own formation and their journey in life.

The virginity of the girl is essential in her role for producing other human lives. For example, for low basongonga of the Congo (DRC), sex before the kikambi make the girl dirty or unclean[19].

In Küküa, the rites of initiation through which the girl passes from childhood to adult society: “This passage is a mystery in which we are already engaged since conception but we have to relive ritually during of confinement and that we will continue to live after initiation. These rites prepare the girl to take their place in adult society and open their eyes to the realities of life. Traditional education, underlines Erny [20], attains its highest degree of awareness at the moment of initiation. The initiation rites of social puberty occupy a part of Küküa society because they have a double dimension, individual and collective. This operation also takes the form of purification: baths, destruction of old clothes, change of name. At the end, the child will be reborn.

At the moment of the initiation which tears her from the family education and to the group to make it accessible to that of the adults, the life of the girl is made of many tests. It is more accurate to speak of transition " to the age of thinking " it is preceded by the time of retirement and learning away from the village and other villagers of varying duration depending on the ethnic group ( from weeks to years at Küküa). The teaching focuses on the rules of life, religion, tradition, certain rites of the clan (as Tam-tam Language) to provide a period of initiation of youth social owners group. This shift in Kükua society is accompanied by an initiation of girls, «candidate e s »initiation is part of a same age group, from 10 or 14 years. The training ends with an initiatory ceremony that can be big. Those who have received such training are a few times and naturally called " insider “ actually they learned what they need to know including in the area of traditions, to be considered as a real or a good woman ( Ngo Mukayi ).

Jean-Jules Motsara [21] to focus on this sociological reality, which allowed us to better understand this long process of socialization of the girl in this society. This initiation is marked by trials and rites that prepare candidates for the life of wife and wife.

The girl occupied and still occupies an important place in teke society [22]. Besides her role as future wife, the young daughter was at the center of educational activities, socio-economic and farm work, household at Kukua the learning is based on the child's active participation in different activities of the group. This is pedagogy of experience where adults serve as examples and frame of reference for youth action. Emphasis is placed on experience and the theory is grounded in practice (pragmatic principles of experience and example). The lessons received are related to the physical environment, the socio-economic realities and directly related to the production tasks. In this way, the girl is given an example of utilitarian knowledge that enables her to face a lot of frustration with the difficulties of life (principle of functionality). The main educational techniques used in Teke are: tales, riddles, legends, proverbs, rites of initiation...

- The tales (Ankun)
They are taught to children in the evening, around the fire and this because the day is reserved for various works. Their very rich and varied content, touches at the same time several disciplines: the language, the song, the zoology, the psychology, the moral etc. tales in küküa society thus play a role that is at once instructive, environmental, physical social and moralistic (often show the child how evil is punished and the good rewarded).

Example of a story: Mbiene and Nguekil, were the two animals that were disputing a tails. Mbiéné, rat of full door with the tasks of panther on its pretty skin. Nguekela, a legendary animal, has several tails. The day of the fight arrived. The whole animal family formed a circle around the two protagonists. Arbitration is provided by a lion, the king of animals ... The duel lasted about fifteen minutes. Then Mbiéné, with a brutal gesture, killed Nguekila, to the applause of the audience. Then all the tails scattered on the ground. The animals rushed and everyone took his tail. It is from this date that each animal carries a tail [23].

- The riddles (Ississon)
They are both a game and an exercise of mind. They assume a very broad knowledge of the environment: names of the characters illustrated the parts of the body and their characteristics. Map your, natural phenomena ... girls rely on memory, imagination, spirit of observation and are based on the following educational principles:

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• The pedagogy of language: here, it is for the child to be considered as a principal agent of the teaching because it is him who must seek to find the right answer to all that the elders will say.
• Emulation: here the child is forced to surpass himself to find the right answer.

In fact, among these people, teaching riddles, like tales and legends are key for disciplines such as history, geography, anatomy, zoology, botany, etc.

- Legends (Ampion)
Through the legends, the girl will also have a very rich and varied training. She acquires the various knowledge as it was transmitted to her by the tales, but in addition she learns the history of the family, the clan, the spatial location of that one, the followed itineraries during the migrations, the lessons of crossed water or lakes, the origin of the world, etc. The child at the same time learns genealogy, history and the geography, cosmogony [24].

- The games (Kition)
In küküa society this exercise is aimed at the training and physical endurance of the child [25], but also effective means to promote fundamental learning, to develop intelligence, perceptions, the tendency to experiment the power of invention, etc. It is by playing that the child manages to assimilate certain intellectual realities that should have remained external to the child's intelligence. Games of chance, counting or mathematical combination develop children's reasoning and imagination: it is through games of initiation that, in Teke society, children are introduced to the practice of productive activities and finally, the observance of the social rules that shape its character [26].

- The fear (bouago, buoo)
It is the means that traditional education uses here to enforce the rules, laws, and vital precedents that govern all social life.[27]. The child is afraid of the natural or supernatural consequences that could happen to him if he transgresses the laws, the interdicts, the taboos, etc. There corporal punishment is usually mild.

In this society, all knowledge transmitted to young people is fixed in the memory of the ancients. What they are trying to pass on to younger generations.

Conclusion
In Congo Teke, the individual is cared for from the mother's breast to adulthood. In this way, nothing is neglected in the process of caring for the child. All the elements that contribute to the formation of the child are united as the links of the same chain. At the end of the first childhood, the initiation welcomes the child. This completes the first education given by the group, by the lineage and village community during early childhood. It is the integration of the child into the group, through initiation and coercion, which provides the Teke child with the values that will give meaning to his life (yamii, laon). It is in this adherence to the ideal system of representation and evaluation situated in a quasi-absolute that the life of the child assumes a meaning, even if today, with the influence of the modernity and development of the big urban centers, initiation is now between tradition and modernity.

Sources and references

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Footnotes


[6] E. O. n ° 1


[8] Z. Sah, op. cit ., p. 82.


[14]EO n ° 2

[15]EO No. 3

[16]EO No. 4

[17]EO No. 5


[22]EO n ° 6


[24]EO No. 7

[25]EO No. 8

[26]EO n ° 9

[27]EO n ° 10