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KOUADIO'S WORLD: BAOULE WORLDVIEW

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INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to present a survey of the worldview of the Baoule people of Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa. This Akan group, originally from what is now a part of Ghana and settling in Côte d'Ivoire in the mid 1700's, is made up of approximately 1.600.000 people (Johnstone 1993, 184).

In the study, we will use the definition for the term "worldview" proposed by Michael Kearny. "The worldview of a people is their way of looking at reality. It consists of basic assumptions and images that provide a more or less coherent, though not necessarily accurate, way of thinking about the world" (Kearny 1984, 41).

It would be impossible to make a complete, detailed presentation of the Baoule worldview in a paper of this genre. Therefore we will give but a survey presentation using as method the description of a Baoule life. We will present Kouadio (a typical Baoule name - the son born on Tuesday)¹, his life's setting and his pilgrimage through the world of physical existence to his ultimate destiny. Our desire, in this process, is to discover worldview markers in each aspect of Kouadio's world that will be studied. We will conclude with a presentation of some thoughts on the influences that are impacting Kouadio's perception of the world and some lessons we may learn, from his life, to help us better communicate the Gospel to the Baoule.

The material that we will present in this document represents the traditional worldview of the Baoule. This is, for the most part, a synchronic study of the worldview under discussion and most of the research on which it is based is old. A deeper and more interesting study would be that of a more

¹ See Appendix 1 for a list of the names that go with each day of the week.

current diachronic nature. This, however, will serve as a good beginning in the understanding of the Baoule mindset and also as a base for a more current diachronic study.

One also needs to be aware of the fact that there is a great deal of difference, across the board, in beliefs held by the various sub-groups of the Baoule people. We are making an effort here to present the bigger concepts that touch the largest possible segment of the society while leaving aside items that might vary to a larger extent between sub-groups.

We are thoroughly convinced that there is tremendous value in learning the worldview of the peoples with whom one tries to communicate the Gospel. Yakubu Otijele makes it clear that a good understanding of the African worldview is important for the communicator of the Gospel because,

It will greatly enhance the apologetic concerns of Christianity by facilitating a dialogical forum between the Christian apologists and their African targets. It will also enhance a more objective understanding of the African thought forms and culture. Consequently, it will become easier to identify and use the best values in African thought in the re-expression of the Christian message (or the contextualization, incarnation, or indigenization of the Christian message in Africa without falling into the dangerous error of syncretic adulteration of the Christian message and at the same time without unduly antagonizing and provoking the potential converts to Christianity in Africa.). Furthermore, it will also enable the Western Christian apologist to identify the real psychological, metaphysical, and spiritual problems of the African and then to address those issues realistically from the point of view of the all-sufficient message of Christianity as presented in the Bible. (Otijele 1991, 13).

The value of this particular presentation is that, in spite of changes in certain perceptions, this way of understanding the world still rules in much of life for the Baoule preparing to enter the twenty-first century. A proper understanding of this material will be greatly beneficial in the communication of the Gospel to the Baoule people.

As we introduce this paper we want to highlight one major thread that will be seen woven into every aspect of Kouadio's worldview. That thread is the thread of unity. This value shows up in almost every aspect of life and will be seen weaving its way through our whole discussion.

KOUADIO'S WORLD

The Main Supernatural Players in His World

Unlike the world of the typical secular Westerner, Kouadio's world consists of many forces that are invisible. These forces, though unseen, play as important a part in his life as the ground upon which he walks. For him life is filled with forces that are not detectable to the naked eye. He sees his agricultural success as dependent upon an alliance with the ground that is ratified by a special ceremony at the inauguration of his village. This alliance will be maintained by respecting a certain animal and observing certain rules of hygiene (Ex. no garbage in the village, no sweeping on a certain day, no drum playing on a certain day, no bananas brought into the village as a whole clump, etc.). He may believe that because a deer saved an ancestor and became his wife he cannot eat that animal. Or perhaps it was a certain fish that gave counsel to an ancestor so he cannot eat that fish. He benefits from wisdom of the ancestors which let him know things like the fact that you don't lean your rifle against a banana tree or a spirit in that tree will pull the rifle toward the trunk and it will be bent. His world, and every part of it, is alive and active around him. These are merely a sprinkling of the ways that the supernatural intersects with the natural in his life. There are 5 main players or groups of players in this system.²

The Great Heaven

If we were to ask Kouadio if he believes in God, he would respond by telling us about the supreme god, the Great Heaven (*Nyanmisen*). For Kouadio, as you look at the sky you don't see the one who is there inside the heavens but he is there. He, *Nyanmisen*, (the actual word for "sky") is more than just blueness above. There above, in his mysterious way, lives the creator god. This god is everywhere. He is the great one (Guerry 1975, 145).

² See Appendix 3 for a list of the names and characteristics of the major spiritual elements of Kouadio's world.

John Mbiti explains that all across Africa, in spite of the worship of multitudinous forces, every African religion knows of one supreme being. A study of 300 groups, which had not been greatly influenced by Christianity or Islam, revealed that all of them, without exception, knew a God, a Supreme Being (Mbiti 1972, 39)³. Many would go as far as to say that the religions of Africa are monotheistic by nature. There needs to be some qualifications made to distinguish them from the classic monotheistic religions but the reality seems to be that all of these groups hold to the existence of one Great God (Otijele 1991, 8).⁴

For the Baoule this god is remote and has little to do with mankind. He is too busy. No one knows anything about his origins. He is the creator. He is probably the greatest of the spirit forces of the Baoule cosmology. He is good and no one would charge him with evil but he is far away. Thus the Baoule say, "They know (or 'one knows') *Nyanmish* but they worship fetishes" (Etienne 1971(?), 11). This can be a very real point of contact for the enterprise of world evangelization, a commonality to be employed in making the Gospel of Jesus Christ more comprehensible to the Baoule people like Kouadio.

The Earth (*Asis*)

If the Supreme God were to have a rival, it would be the Earth. The earth, however, is close to humanity. She gives to humankind all the sustenance that they need. She has always been a great friend of Heaven and they are always seen together (Guerry 1975, 149). They are assumed to be equal and, at most Baoule traditional funerals, the deceased is asked which of them is greater. If those representing the deceased even begin to give an answer, it is assumed that they are not correctly representing him and their interpretation is rejected (Etienne 1971(?), 11). Earth may not be bigger but she is closer. Because she is the source of the food that they need, the Baoule make an alliance with her whenever they form a village.

³ I was not able to find an English copy of Mbiti's book, African Religions and Philosophy so I am translating from the French version that I could find.

⁴ Otijele refers to the writings of Idowu, Imasogie, Mbiti, Benjamin Ray, and G.F. Parrinder in proposing this idea.

They also offer her libations before working their fields and set aside days when they will not bother her (Ibid. 12). She plays a major part in the life of our friend Kouadio.

The Ancestors

For Kouadio, as for the typical member of any tribal group, "The universe itself is alive and is inhabited by high and lesser gods, spirits of many types and animals, all of whom share in the same vital force. But it is the ancestors, the living and the unborn who are center stage" (Hiebert & Meneses 1995, 127). Vincent Guerry, a Benedictine monk who served with the Baoule for many years⁵, would agree with Hiebert on this point as it concerns the Baoule. In spite of the elevated position of Heaven and Earth, the ancestors (*wunmisen*) play a more important role in the everyday life of the average Baoule. He says, "Heaven, the creator and great master, is by definition the first and highest power in the Baoule religion. From personal observation it seems to me, however, that ancestor worship is really the primordial element in this religion" (Guerry 1975, 137). We will be presenting various aspects of the worship of the ancestors below so will content ourselves with this mention, simply pointing out that they are probably the most important target of the worship of Kouadio and his kin.

The Genii of the Earth

After these three come the genii or the spirits of the earth (*asie usu*). These are ugly little spirits who can take on human form and show themselves to human beings. There are kind ones and mean ones. They often decide to help people and end up attaching themselves to people who in turn will worship them. Their worship usually consists, of making a pretty statuette to represent them and making various offerings to it. They must be appeased if they get angry (Kouassi 1985, 65). Some are always angry and stay away

⁵ Guerry lived among the Baoule for seven years before writing his book.

from people except when they wish to hurt or kill someone. These often require major sacrifices which will be offered outside the village (Guerry 1975, 151).

The Power of Sorcery

Probably the most fearsome power with which Kouadio will deal is the power behind all sorcery. This is the impersonal power called *Bae*. Guerry sees this as “the demon” who is multiple and has a personality (Ibid. 154). Gene Olsen, retired Christian & Missionary Alliance missionary, points to a quality of impersonality in this force. She would bring out the fact that *Bae* works through people (*Baefus*) and can be involved in doing good as well as bad. Guerry, would say that they work on their own and their great goal is to devour the spirits⁶ of people, thus killing them. For him, all their work is evil.

It is frequently heard, however, that people “have *bae*” referring to a certain extraordinary power either to do something (talent) or to live long and well. The white man is seen as “having *bae*” because of all the marvelous things he can do. For this reason, I find myself leaning in the direction of my colleague, Mrs. Olsen and would see *bae* more as approaching an equivalence to the vital force of the Melanesian *mana* (Hiebert & Meneses 1995, 115) rather than demons. One thing that seems very certain, this should not be the word that Kouadio would use as the name of the personal devil of the Bible, Satan. Whatever the finer points of its character, Kouadio has to face the possibility of this force touching, probably in a cruel way, his life.

The Fetishes

Kouadio’s fetishes (*amoin*) are forces that can be rendered favorable to him through various forms of worship. The *amoin*s are not friends of their owners. They are fearsome because of the disaster that they can wreak in the lives of people (Guerry 1975, 152). Often they are represented by masks which are called

⁶ The “spirit” here does not carry the same meaning as we would give it. We will introduce the concept of *waws* shortly below which is the part of the human makeup being referred to here.

out of their hiding place in the forest to come into the village to show their power. This usually takes the form of a dance in which someone is assigned to wear the mask. Under the influence of the fetish that the mask represents, this person will dance before the villagers. Other fetishes are carried by their owner and still others have small abodes on the edge of the village where regular gifts are offered to them. Their main purposes are protection and punishment. They are to protect their owner and can be used by him to punish enemies. The problem is that they can also punish their owners for any lack of respect shown or services not rendered. Some fetishes are individually owned while others are communal property or the property of a family (Etienne 1971(?), 8-9). Interestingly, should the owner become dissatisfied with his fetish, he can simply throw it away and get another. Kouadio will encounter these forces or their representations every day and will spend major sums of money on appeasing them and using them for his personal benefit.

The Setting - The Reality that Surrounds Him

Having seen the major players in the unseen activity that surrounds Kouadio, we can now turn to the world in which they live together with him. We must realize first of all that this world has two dimensions. Kouadio lives with a constant awareness of the *natural* permeated and influenced by the *supernatural*.

The Land Over There (*Blo*)

One of his most basic awareness' is that of "the land over there". This is a mysterious world that is a duplicate of his "real" world. It is the world from which life comes and to which it returns after death. It is also the world of truth, the truly real world. All goes well in *blo* (Guerry 1975, 137). No one knows where it is but no one doubts its existence. "*Blo*" speaks of that which is presumed, the idea of supposition. "*Lo*" is the preposition that means "over there". So it is the mysterious existence that no one has seen but of which everyone is certain that it is out there somewhere (Etienne 1971(?), 5-7).

This is also the home of the *blolo bla* or *blolo bian*, spirit wife or spirit husband that various people have. These are the spouses from the other existence. Kouadio, as he becomes a man, will very probably have a dream of a woman one night. She will come to him and claim to be his spirit wife. He must, after that, begin to set aside one day for this spirit wife. He will make a small statuette to represent her and will maintain a conjugal relationship with her including the sexual aspects common to physical marriage. Many women have spirit husbands as well. These are often very capricious and make life difficult. They are often blamed for miscarriages as miscarriages frequently follow a dream in which the women is beaten by her spirit husband for some kind of rebellion that she has committed.

This just shows that the invisible world is very real for Kouadio. He will go to great pains to maintain harmony with this world in spite of the fact that he has never seen it. It provides a backdrop for the existence that he does see and therefore is very important for him.

His Village

Pierre Etienne gives an excellent presentation of the way the land, inhabited by a particular family, is divided up and how its different elements are viewed. First of all we must talk about home. The village is home and plays a vital role in Kouadio's life. There is a Baoule proverb that says, "You don't eat your village with your left hand".⁷ This simply means that the village is important and one must respect and honor it. As Kouadio gets established as a mature father and status holder, a basic part of his prestige will stem from the kind of house that he can build in the village. Anyone with sufficient standing both financially and socially will do all that he/she can to build a nice house in his/her home village. If Kouadio does not work for the bettering of the village, he is seen as a poor

⁷ Touching something with the left hand is a sign of dishonor, disrespect because the left hand is seen as unclean.

citizen. If he has the wherewithal and does not build a house, his family will receive very little help at the time of his burial. This is a major concern for the Baoule as we will see shortly.

As well as respecting the village, he will have to respect the founder of the village. The founder is the one who inaugurated the initial alliance established between the earth and Kouadio's extended family. The deceased founder will be invoked and honored with an offering of the firstfruits of the early yams as well as sacrifices at the beginning of new forest clearing projects (Etienne 1971(?), 19). Very probably the village will carry the name of the founder.

Actions that displease the earth damage the alliance that was originally established by the founder of the village. For that reason a renewing of the alliance must take place from time to time. Currently, a shaman⁸ is moving from village to village, in the area of Yamoussoukro, renewing this kind of alliance. Mr. Adje Loukou is staying in villages that ask him to come for the alliance renewal. According to a friend of mine, the ground has been hurt or ruined by the sin of the inhabitants. These sins include putting curses on people to kill them. He makes everyone bring in all of their bad fetishes. They are stocked at the sight where a new stone has been placed to represent the alliance that the people of the village have renewed with the earth. If anyone hides their evil fetishes, Mr. Loukou can find them by his mystical powers and they are brought out and put with the others. Once the renewal has been enacted, the village will be protected by the earth and will have no more major problems.

This points out again the importance of the Earth and harmony between the Earth and the society.

⁸ The "shaman" has several jobs to do. He consults the spirits to find out the causes of the disease of his client which are presumed, for the most part, to be of a spiritual nature. Once the diagnosis has been made, the spirits also give the remedy for the illness. These can be of a strictly spiritual nature (offended ancestors or other spirits) or of a physical nature. He is usually knowledgeable in the use of herbal medicine and so many of the treatments are of that kind. He is also capable of making "poison" for those who want to use spiritual means to kill an enemy. In renewing the alliance with the Earth, he is treating the illness of the whole village.

Outside of the village is the path that leads to the field, to other encampments, to the water source and the other locations to which the people must go. The path is part of what Etienne calls “humanized nature” in contrast to “savage nature”. Kouadio will probably not like leaving the path to step into the bush because the bush is part of savage nature and is replete with dangers that he wants to avoid. The field is another element of humanized nature. Because of the alliance made with the ground and the sacrifices made whenever new ground will be cleared, the field is made safe. Sacrifices are made both back at the village on the rock that represents the alliance and on the site of the new field so as to insure a good crop and sufficient food to provide for the family and any visitors that might pass. The Baoule always hopes to be able to have sufficient food and drink to share with visiting relatives, friends or even, at least in the past, with strangers (Etienne 1971(?), 22-23).

Etienne brings out many more interesting dynamics of the humanized/savage nature dichotomy. We will leave the discussion there, content with pointing out that there is a conception of protected areas and non-protected areas. The protected areas are made safe through a proper relation with the Earth. Therein, we see once again the importance of harmony in relationship between Kouadio and both the visible and invisible realities that surround him.

It is interesting to note that, in spite of the importance of the village, there is a freedom to move on to other areas. Family ties usually provide the link to other regions where some, especially the youth, will move to help in plantations, which are far from home, or will seek other work. A family can be spread all over the country.

Besides the search for employment opportunities, family members are often displaced to continue their schooling. This is not seen as too great a hardship even though the major movement starts when the children are entering their seventh year in school and are not old enough to take care of themselves. There is also quite a bit of movement among youth for whom the village does not hold

enough fascination. Some will want to get out from under parental supervision and desert the village. (Lassailly-Jacob 1983, 80). Is something falling apart in Kouadio's world?

His Time

Something in Kouadio's worldview that differs greatly from that of the average Westerner relates to time and how he perceives it. Kouadio breaks up his time into segments much the same as ours but with a different understanding of the relationship between those divisions. The following table shows the computation and denominations of time for the Baoule.

Baoule Word	English Meaning	Significance
<i>Afus</i>	Year	Begins at the time of the harvest of the late yams
<i>Anglo</i>	Month - Moon	The cycle of the moon as well as the moon itself
<i>Le mocus</i>	Week - 8 days	A week counts both ends of a seven day cycle as is the case in French. The days of the week are named Kisic, Dyole, Mlan, We, Ya, Fuc, Monnen - Monday through Sunday
<i>Gua</i>	Public square - Week	Stands for a week because, since the time of colonialism, the market, which situates itself in the public square, comes to many centers once a week
<i>Csn / Le</i>	Day	The smallest recognized unit of time. The day starts at sunrise even though the night belongs to the next day
<i>Do</i>	Hour	This is a part of French influence as church bells often rang on the hour and the onomatopoeic "dong" was deformed to <i>Do</i> . A more natural expression for our friend Kouadio might be a deformation of the French word for hour, "heure". He would for example say, "twazsi" for "trois heures" or three o'clock (Etienne 1968, 18-19). ⁹

What is particularly fascinating about this computation of time divisions is that the different parts did not, in the past, have any necessary interconnection. Pierre Etienne explains this well saying,

Everything takes place as though there were several systems for referring to the time, the day, the week, the month and the year but without any rigorous relationship of congruence between them.

⁹ See Appendix 4 for more tables showing various aspects of how seasons are divided and the phenomena upon which these divisions are based.

Excellent
synoptic
analysis

They don't think of any special number of months in the year or weeks in the month. The week in contrast is defined by the number of days of which it is made up (Ibid. 18).

Time went on and no one was concerned with how many weeks fit into a month. The year was a cycle of agricultural events that were measured loosely. The day, being the smallest measure of time started with the sun's coming up and ended with its setting. The slots that made it up were simply based on what one did at any given point in the day (Ibid.).

As for the seasons, based on the two major weather shifts, the dry and the wet, they fluctuated and did not always come at the same time each year. The computation of the seasons was based on the agricultural program of the seeding and harvesting at first of the various yam crops. If Kouadio is a truly traditional Baoule, he will see yams as the only real food. The yam crop, at its various stages, gave the names of the seasons because of its importance for the people. With the coming of the Westerner and interest in cash crops, the coffee schedule also played a role in the dividing and titling of seasons. Not only did these crops determine the seasonal divisions of the year and their names, they also began to override other important events. Even funeral celebrations could be postponed, and still are, because of the importance of the yam and coffee crop cycles (Ibid. 20).

Other markers of the seasons were weather phenomena. Seasons were named after certain rains or dry times in the year. Of a total of 28 expressions used to designate periods of the year, 14 refer to weather phenomena and 14 to agricultural phenomena. Some of these overlap leaving a couple to be named after constellations and other phenomena that were seen as regular yearly certainties (Ibid. 21-22).

All of this has changed greatly in the last few years. People constantly complain that one can no longer read the weather as in the past. They are constantly predicting a rain that doesn't come or a dry time that ends up being washed out by torrential downpours.

Another difference in the perception of time has to do with its very character. "For the Baoule, time is not a possession, not something that one has, but rather something that adheres to us,

something that we live. And in that sense, the Baoule never lacks time, since time is a part of him; he needs only to live fully in every moment of the present” (Guerry 1975, 168). This creates major problems when the Westerner meets the Baoule in the arena of the work place. For the Westerner, time is something that one possesses. It can be bought and sold. It is not something to be passed but must rather be spent carefully (Kearney 1984, 103). If an employer pays someone, it is for his time. If he pays for that time, he believes he has the right to see it used for his greatest profit. For Kouadio however, this creates genuine misunderstanding.

A struggle came about in my home when a houseboy who worked part-time for 2 families thought he would get 2 full salaries. Everything had been explained to him but he could not fathom being paid for time. To him, he was doing 2 jobs and should get paid for both.

At our Bible Institute, in Yamoussoukro, Côte d’Ivoire, the Baoule director has established the practice of operating on BBC time. Students are to be on time, with an inflexible schedule. If they are late 3 times they get an unexcused absence. An unexcused absence is penalized by a one point decrease in the students final grade for the class in which he/she was late. It is incredible how often they are on time since we initiated this practice. I am not sure that it is a bad thing in that it helps them to adapt to a modern world in which they will be required more and more to be “on time”. It is also good for them in that the Bible holds us to obligations. Being late is a case of letting one’s “yes” be “no” (Jas. 5.12) as he decides not to keep the commitment or recognize the “yes” that he declared when he registered at the school.

The big problem is that, very often, Kouadio has to make time for people. Others have a hard time realizing that something could be so important that he could not have time to sit and chat with them. They are together and must be ready to pass time together without worrying about other activities. This lack of concern for activities, in relation to a concern for being with people, makes life a lot less tense for the Baoule. He can relax and enjoy the people around him, knowing that he will

have the opportunity to take care of his other responsibilities later, if they are really that important (Guerry 1975, 168).

“In Baoule country”, Guerry would have us believe that “the only important tense is the present tense. The past as a quantity has no importance, only untimely events make a mark on memory” (Ibid. 169). An example of this is the fact that you must know the day of the week on which you were born. That is how you got your name¹⁰. Your birth date however does not matter at all.

Kouadio’s full Baoule name is Kouassi Kouadio François. His father was born on a Monday so his family name is Kouassi. He was born on a Tuesday, so his name is Kouadio. Since his world has been affected by the French, he has a “French” name as well which is François.

In this setup, the father’s name comes first to show relationship. People know who you are attached to and can have an idea of what you are like because of their knowledge of your father. The Baoule say, “The sheep does not give birth to a goat”. They can know you somewhat by knowing your father. Your carrying his name makes that connection for them. That name will be dropped for Kouadio’s children because they will carry his name. His children will be known as the children of Kouadio and not of Kouassi.

We see two points of significance here. The first is event orientation. One day, a long while ago, your mother gave birth to you. An event took place. She had a baby, You! It was a big event.

The second point is relationship. Your name shows that you are the son of your father whose name is the first in your whole name. People can know you through him.

Guerry puts forth the idea that the future does not exist for the Baoule (Ibid. 169). To speak of an action in the future the Baoule use the immediate future most of the time. This gives the impression that they are not looking very far ahead. If they are going to use the future tense, they will

¹⁰ See Appendix 1 for a list of the names that go with each day of the week.

not say “When I do...” but “If I do ..”. It is as if they are uncertain about it. They are so into the present that their future is more of an “if” situation than a “when” situation for them.

This lack of future orientation shows up in certain specific activities. They do not seem to think ahead very much. At funerals they don’t bring a rope to let the casket down. They will often tear up one of the lovely clothes that is being buried with the deceased and use that. They miscalculate and have to do a lot of extra work but it doesn’t bother them at all. The Westerner calculates and saves some time but is constantly fretting and tense about how much more time he should save (Ibid. 170).

Much time passes in the talking out of family or village disputes. The protocol of correct greetings, funeral arrangements, discussions of every kind take up enormous amounts of time. As we sit in on these sessions, we, the Westerners, feel that time is being poorly used. For them it is seen simply as maintaining relationship. In a way, it is a kind of recreation for them and something enjoyable as they fulfill social obligations. Thus it is not necessarily a bad thing (Etienne 1967, 30).

With all this in mind, when we get to our discussion on the family, we will see that the Baoule father is, in fact, constantly thinking about the future of his dynasty. He makes every effort to enlarge his group of dependents to guarantee a better situation in his future (Etienne 1967, 32-33). Another indicator that points to an interest in the future is the percentage of songs sung by Baoule believers about the return of the Lord Jesus. Baoule believers are interested in that although it is a fair distance off in the future.

His Life (or The Making of an Ancestor)

His Entry Into the Physical World

We turn our attention now to the life that Kouadio will lead as he comes from the spirit world, passes through his physical existence and returns to the spirit world. First of all he must make his

entry into the physical world. Kouakou Kouassi explains that there are three possible origins of babies. The three possibilities are:

1. They might be strangers (*aofus*) from the l'au delà (the hereafter). This child is a stranger come from the spirit world (*blolo*) without any prior involvement in the family.
2. They might be the reincarnation of an ancestor (*wunmisen*). The child will be examined at birth to see if he/she resembles any of the ancestors. If resemblances are found, he/she will be named after the ancestor which he/she resembles.
3. They might be a gift from invisible forces - either the great God, heaven (*Nyanmisen*) or from the *genii* of the forest (*asis wusu*). These children are given either because of the request of the parents or simply by the kindness of certain spirits. After the birth, the spirits must be consulted to discover their identity so that the child might be named after them and proper thanks might be given (Kouassi 1985, 61).

As we look at these possibilities we should not be surprised to see that every possibility ties into the ongoing relationships that are being maintained with the supernatural world. Each has obligations tied to it and builds on old relationships or provides the occasion to begin new ones.

When one figures out the source of the child, diagnosis of various sicknesses can be made and other problems can be solved. We can see how this works by looking at the case of a woman being treated for post-partum mental difficulties. In the case that Kouassi relates for us, these troubles end up being attributed, by the shaman, to 2 different sources. First of all, the ailing mother had disregarded the prohibition against the eating of papaya. Among the Baoule, this fruit is seen as causing restriction of the female sexual organs and thus rendering the birthing process difficult. In the birth experience, the women must exert so much pressure in forcing the child through the restricted passage that blood is forced into her head creating a kind of mental illness that results in agitation and hallucinations.

The other source of this sickness relates to the origin of this woman's child. By consulting the spirits, the shaman discovers that this child was a gift from the *genii* of the forest who had given this lady's mother, children at the mother's request, and now were continuing their kindness to her daughter. They should have been consulted before the birth but were not. These spirits therefore created problems for the

new beneficiary of their kindness, after the birth, so that they would get recognition for the gift that they had given. A shaman had to consult with these spirits and find out how to appease them (Ibid. 64-65).

We see in this the origin of the child but not how he/she comes together in the womb of the mother and comes to birth. Guerry gives rich insight into this next stage. "As beside the material world there subsists the world of spirits, *genii*, invisible forces of nature that duplicate it (*biolo*); so also, in the human world, there is the world of ancestors that give it life and strength" (Guerry 1975, 137).

Beside what we see in the physical realm is the spiritual reality a "mysterious invisible power hidden" within it. We can take the example of rice. We see the plant but must realize that within it, there is a power "that must make it grow, but that is also able to act upon the human world, to help or hinder man." (Ibid.) This ties people into a relationship even with rice and its spiritual dynamic.

So much for the origins of the person and the effects of his entry into the world of physical existence. Now we need to look at the make-up of the person himself/herself. Guerry explains how the person comes together to be a whole human being.

The Baoule believe that the fetus in the mother's womb is joined, by the second or third month, by a companion called *waws*; together, they are a whole person *sram*. But this *waws* can and does detach itself from the fetus, and takes trips into the landscape. It can thus happen that the *waws* is away when the baby is born: the baby does not move or cry. To call him back, the mortar is banged loudly with the pestle, or the baby is rubbed with the pulp of yam and the *waws* is invoked: "Spirit of the baby, if you are in the field or at the brook, come back quickly." The baby sneezes; his "double" has returned (Ibid. 138-139).

The word *waws* signifies also one's shadow or his/her image reflected in water. Etienne qualifies it as a sort of immaterial double of the visible being or person (Etienne 1971(?), 6). Once this spiritual part has joined the physical, the person is on the way.

The whole process of having children though, is a dangerous experience. In procreation, the couple enters into a relationship with the invisible world. The woman becomes a door by which forces of that world penetrate into the real/visible world. She is confronted by supernatural dangers and given special obligations because in a way she is made sacred by this encounter. She must fulfill any obligations that the

spirit forces involved in the situation might require and she is in a very hazardous position. The place of the man in the process is that of being the canal through which the vital force of the spirit realm passes. The life creating power flows directly from the spiritual provider (ancestor or other) to the soon to be father. It is then passed by him to the mother (Kouassi 1985, 64). This is how it comes about that the child's spirit is seen as coming from the father while the body is seen as coming from the mother (Hiebert & Meneses 1995, 95).

His Sojourn in the Physical World

His Childhood

When Kouadio came into this world he came into a bigger network than just the threesome made up of himself, his mother and his father. He came to a very complicated system of blood relationships. His blood relatives are counted in all the collateral lines on both the father's side and the mother's side as far as relationships can be remembered. All of those relatives however do not hold the same position of rights as others. He usually has a closer tie with his maternal parents (Marie 1967, 365).

It is important to notice that both Kouadio's father and his mother's brother want to count him in as one of their dependents. Where Kouadio will live may create tensions as both will hope to add him to their list of dependents, living with them and insuring their future (Etienne 1967, 32).

This matrilineal connection was instituted by Queen Pokou who sacrificed her son, the nephew of her brother, the king, to save her people at the crossing of the Comoë (Guerry 1975, 125)¹¹. Following this very complicated system, inheritance goes first of all to brothers and sisters and if they are all gone it goes to

¹¹ See Appendix 2, Baoule Cosmology - Epic - Abra Pokou, for more detail.

the oldest son of the youngest sister. In many groups the conditions to be met by a brother who wishes to inherit before a nephew is that he be older than the nephew.¹²

This way of passing on inheritance has been made illegal in the Ivorian constitution but it is still practiced to varying degrees. A young friend named Langui Simplicie, was the rightful heir to his uncle's fortune. He told me however that he would not fight for the inheritance because his cousins, the sons of his uncle, would kill him if he tried to take what tradition said was his. The system is breaking down.

The world in which Kouadio will grow up is a crowded place in which almost every possession is a shared possession. He will learn, as a baby, to sleep with all manner of noise around him. He will maintain that capacity right up through adulthood and will rarely be perturbed by noises that are taking place as he sleeps (Guerry 1975, 73).

In all this shared reality, he will have basically no private time. Everywhere he goes, he will find people. Every conversation he has may be interrupted, no matter how personal it might be, and others will get in on what might have been a treasured secret for a Westerner. He will rarely if ever have the desire to be alone. After all, among the Baoule, those who want to be alone are obviously sorcerers who have something to hide and want to be alone so that they can work out the evil plans they have for others. However, while he shares everything, there will always be his very inner self that will remain a mystery to everyone. Guerry says that, "The Baoule has a deep inner life that he confides to no one According to a proverb, 'our inner life is like a forest; nobody knows what goes on inside'" (Ibid. 74).

He will be trained in many things as he follows his father to the field. He will be taught how to be a good Baoule and one part of that is learning to correctly greet people. The greetings he will learn are for greeting in the morning, afternoon, evening, upon returning from a trip (a trip as small as to the market), rejoining someone at a different location after being together for a while and arriving

¹² This is the position that has been explained to me by my Baoule colleagues Koffi Celestin, director of our Bible Institute and Dr. Kouakou Kouadio André, President of the Alliance Church in Côte d'Ivoire.

separately at the second location, after a long separation, birth, death, sickness, work, etc.. As he masters these greetings he will become known as a good young man. He will be able to maintain harmony with those around him.

One thing that he will have ground into him is that he as an individual entity is not as important as the group of which he is a part. As this is a typical African belief we can benefit from the way in which it is explained by Yakubu Otijele who says;

The human person is a being-in-relation. This means that he is inherently a gregarious social being whose personhood can only be completely realized in community as he relates appropriately to other human persons and even to supra-human beings and God. No person is an island unto himself. The human person is complete (i.e., fully realized) only in proper relation to other human and supra-human beings and to God. As Mbiti beautifully puts it in his African Religions and Philosophy, "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore, I am." This clearly means that for the traditional African, the reality of the divine-human community overrides that of the individual human persons. The "I" is inferior to the "we" (Otijele 1991, 10).

His Adulthood - Marriage

Marriage is not begun by a simple ceremony but by a process that takes from 3 to 5 years to be finalized. A trial period begins when the suitor give certain gifts to the parents of the woman he hopes to have as his wife. He will also work in their field or plantation. The gifts he gives and the work he performs, do not represent major expenses as is the case in some cultures. They serve as a little bit of remuneration for what the parents have spent on the girl in her childhood and youth. During this trial period, the girl will provide him with meals and company through the night. After 3 to 5 years, if all goes well and the relationship has produced offspring, a new set of gifts will be given and the marriage will be finalized.

This whole process has had to adapt to the urban shift and education demands. A girl will put off her marriage until she has finished school if she has the good fortune to go very far in the system. A boy will have a fiancée at home but will often be unfaithful to her while he is in the city. He will often choose a more cultured woman from the city and leave his original choice to pine in the village. Those girls who are

in the village, hoping to be chosen by some brilliant student who will have a great future, end up often being left to take a village boy and live their life out in deep disappointment (Carteron 1975, 244-247).

As for divorce, although it has always been an option for the Baoule, reconciliation has always been the desired outcome of marital conflict (Ibid. 248). Harmony in relationships is the major desire for the people of this group.

Another aspect of the marriage relationship among the Baoule is the phenomenon of polygamy. Although it is declared illegal in the Ivorian constitution, it still remains a viable option for Kouadio and his brothers. Its incidence has decreased among the Baoule in recent years but it still remains a choice for the Baoule man. Because of his lack of experience with this phenomenon, the average Westerner cannot understand why a person would want to have plural wives. Carteron lists the 6 main reasons why polygamy has been so prominent in Baoule society. The Baoule man may wish to have more than one wife so that he can have:

1. Lots of children - especially considering the high infant mortality rate - certainly of the past,
2. Lots of help in the field - the importance of the cultivation of yams, for food and coffee, for money in hand, to purchase all of the products which now require this form of exchange,
3. A guaranteed security plan - the children bring support and status to their parents in old age,
4. Sexual satisfaction - especially in light of the prohibition against sexual intercourse during the time of breast feeding,
5. A remedy for sterility - if one wife is unable to have children, another can fill in and provide the children who are a much desired commodity,
6. Prestige - this is probably the all englobing reason that is the common denominator behind all the others. Sometimes a wife will push her husband to take another wife insulting him because he doesn't have the wherewithal to have more than one. She benefits from his prestige as well and so may well be happy to share the home with another woman (Ibid. 247).

Its occurrence is decreasing among the Baoule because of changing social conditions. It is very costly to send a large number of children off to school. Women are often more exigent when money is available and want more gifts than they did when the currency consisted of yams and chickens or goats. In the city, wives can no longer help in the work of the husband. They, along with their children, were a marvelous blessing in the field but in the office or at the factory they have no place and can be of no

assistance at all. These factors combine to make it more and more difficult to maintain a polygamous household. The prestige factor, however, still drives many to put up with the pain involved.

The effects of polygamy in the society are multiple. Polygamy appears to be raising the incidence of fatherless homes because often the wives are not all with the husband in the same courtyard. For various reasons, these ladies separate from the central home of the family and live elsewhere with their children. In the town of Brobo, a survey showed that this was a major factor in the high incidence of married women playing the role of head of the household (Vimard 1987, 13).

A woman in our church found herself in this situation. She was the only legitimate wife of her husband but had been abandoned by him. While she worked as a nurse in the city, he taught school in a nearby village. He had 4 or 5 other women living with him at the time that we lived in her city. Not only was she forced to maintain a house in the city, but he kept all the family allowance moneys that came for her children and wanted to have their children living with him in the village most of the time. On one occasion, one of the "wives" tried to poison the other wives so that she could have the husband to herself. Madeleine's children would have eaten the sauce that was the vehicle for the poison but somehow the plot was discovered before it came to that. Needless to say, at that point, she took her children out of their father's hands.

This is just one example of the difficulty of maintaining a multi-wife household. There are also the problems of unequal support for the children of the different wives, inordinate sums of money spent on the health needs of one of the wives, problems with the extended families of all of the wives, and the list goes on. It is becoming less and less interesting for the Baoule man to have more than one wife. It is becoming more and more a door by which disharmony enters into the lives of many Baoules.

In the African church, polygamy has always presented a problem. Michel Carteron, a Catholic priest among the Baoule for many years, explains that in the past a polygamist had to send away his extra wives. Because neither the man nor his extra wives could be baptized, even if they came to the church years

after having established their polygamous relationship, they had no choice but to " stay at the threshold of the church until the day that death would permit them to correct their situation" (Carteron 1975, 249).

Twenty years after Carteron's article, the situation has changed little in the Catholic church according to the Abbey André Allou, curate of St. Augustin's Cathedral in Yamoussoukro. Many seem to be leaning toward a change but the law still stands. The polygamist, whether desiring to come into the church long after having established a polygamous home, or having recently flouted the law of the church and taken a second wife, cannot receive baptism. Only the first wife in such a family is permitted to be baptized because she is seen as being the only legitimate wife and therefore has not violated the law of the Church. One possibility is held out for the polygamous family. No longer is the man required to send away his extra wives. If he is willing, he can legally marry the first one and then consider the other(s) as sister(s). He can no longer maintain sexual relations with these ladies but must care for them as though they were sisters in his charge. If he follows this prescription he along with the "sister(s)" may be baptized (Conversation, Yamoussoukro, April 25, 1997).

In many evangelical churches, if the Gospel found him in the polygamous state, the polygamist can receive baptism. However, if after making the decision to follow the Lord and identifying with the church, a believer chooses to take another wife he will not be allowed either baptism, involvement in the Lord's supper or any official position of leadership.

Death

There are many other facets of life from which we could pull the demonstration of other aspects of the Baoule worldview but we will now turn to their view of death and the worldview indicators that we can see in this study.

Death is the time when his companion *wawε* leaves the body and Kouadio returns to *blɔlɔ* (the spirit world from whence he came). It is interesting to note that when this companion/double

leaves, he does not just disappear right away. Guerry says that the *wawɛ* waits around until his companion the *wunɛn* (corpse) is under the earth (buried) and then it disappears as does the body which disintegrates in its resting place. After the burial, the person makes his way to *blɔɔ*. At this time the person becomes a *wunɛn* (ancestral spirit) and will be invoked along with all the other ancestors for any major decision that the family must make (Guerry 1975, 139-140).

Entrance back into the spirit world is not guaranteed for everyone. The returning person must show the other ancestors that he is worthy of being accepted. He does this by showing that the people in the physical world treated him well. The funeral given to him shows their respect and so it must be a grand and glorious celebration. Truly evil people are refused entry and will wonder about as homeless spirits (Ibid. 141). Taking into consideration the importance of the group for Kouadio, we can see how living away from any true home would in the strictest sense of the term be equivalent to the worst hell that he could ever face.

It is interesting to note that there is a built in protective device related to the expensive funeral celebrations of the Baoule (Etienne 1967, 29). The first three children, of any couple, to die¹³ are not given a big funeral. They have a special name (*fewa*) and must be buried as quickly as possible and without any ado. The bereaved are not even permitted to publicly cry over them. While Etienne sees the *fewa* phenomenon as a protective device by which the Baoule are spared great expense, Guerry explains the metaphysical reason behind it. He says that it is a demonstration of submission to the ancestors who, in their wisdom have decided to call back the defunct. If there is a celebration, it points to a rebellious attitude on the part of the bereaved and their defiance will certainly be punished (Guerry 1975, 128-130). It is an interesting response both to the needs of the physical world and to those of the spiritual world.

The funerals of kings could take up months of valuable time for villages in the past. The death of the first president of Côte d'Ivoire, a Baoule, Félix Houphouët Boigny, was celebrated over a period of 3

¹³ Etienne says that the three first born to a couple are *fewa* (Etienne 1967, 29) while Guerry says it is the first three to die (Guerry 1975, 128). This second position is the one which is upheld by our Baoule friends.

months. Although most of life went on as normal, many activities were canceled. Many other activities were planned as part of the funeral celebration. Because the funeral celebrations went over the Christmas season (from December 7, 1993 to February 7, 1994), our Bible Institute postponed its Christmas banquet so as not to appear to be rejoicing over the death of the president.

Whenever a canton chief dies, every person, who can prove that he/she originates from that canton, has the right to a full week off work. This creates a major slowdown that spreads over the whole country at the times of funeral celebrations.

Kouadio has finally arrived at his destiny¹⁴. He has done the round trip. Coming from *blolo*, he has entered the visible natural reality, gone through it striving to maintain harmony both with what he could see and with what he could not see. Now he has arrived back to the place of truth. His lot now is to continue to do his job keeping involved with his family. He will be there to help them. They will recognize his presence with various sacrifices. He will be considered in their invocation as all the ancestors are called to receive the offerings that they are due (Guerry 1975, 142).

His existence, prior to, during and after his sojourn in the natural world, has very little in common with that lived out in the conception of a typical Christian boy from Edmonton, Canada. That's why, if a Christian boy from Edmonton wants to help him understand Jesus, that boy has some learning to do. As he tries to communicate from his secular background, he has to recognize and appreciate, first of all, Kouadio's firm belief in the spirits that surround. He will have to think about bridges that he might use to bring Kouadio to an understanding of what the true God says about reality and those spirits with whom Kouadio is truly dealing.

Secondly, he most certainly has got to recognize Kouadio's desire for harmony and get a feel for the its value in Kouadio's life. Every Christian is to be marked by love. Every body of believers

¹⁴ Perhaps it would be more accurate to say "returned" to his destiny.

which is trying to prove that they are disciples of the Son of God, is called to demonstrate unity.

Surely this provides a connection with Kouadio.

Before we go further in meditating on the value of better understanding Kouadio's basic view of reality, we need to look shortly at the influences that are at work trying to reshape it.



INFLUENCES ON HIS WORLD

Myriad are the influences that are impacting Kouadio's worldview day by day. He faces the secularization thrust on his country by a former colonial master (France), which has been, for ages, one of the most humanistic forces in the world. He has to deal with urbanization that is seeing an endless number of his clan, and of others, show up every day in the big cities of Côte d'Ivoire.¹⁵ These people are leaving the security of their small village and the protection that has been established for them there. This is resulting in major deterioration in the social condition of the group. He faces the impact of a changing class structure which has uprooted the old system of age based leadership and replaced it with an academic based system or a military based system, depending on the country (Mazrui 1980, 63). Pressures are coming from every which way.

Three other forces are battling for ascendancy among the influences working to affect his view of the world. These are religious in nature and strive for the allegiance of his heart. First of all we will consider the impact of a renaissance in interest in the traditional religion of the Baoule. The example we mentioned above of Mr. Adje Loukou, shows us that interest is rising in the animist practices. Carteron's mention of this renaissance shows us that it has been present and growing in influence for over 20 years (Carteron 1975, 243). The advances that animism is making are often placed under the flag of a return to the cultural roots of the people. In this way, the spiritual implications of the movement are downplayed but, none the less, spiritual advances are being made toward the darkness empowering these practices.

Secondly we look at the impact of Islam on Kouadio and his Baoule family. Because of the tremendous influx of immigrants coming to his country in hope of a more prosperous future, he faces

¹⁵ Population: 1970 - 4.4 millions; 1984 - 9.2 million; 1993 - 15,315,000.
Urbanization - 1973 - 20%; 1980 32%; 1993 - 47%.
(1993 figures - Johnstone 1993, 184 - the others come from an unpublished paper from the Côte d'Ivoire C&MA Mission, which gives no references.)

a burgeoning wave of Islamization.¹⁶ Islam seems to be galloping across Africa striving, with all its might to win converts. Muslims are doing all they can to win over especially those who have not yet been won to Christianity. Up until the present, there has been no massive wave of Baoules converting to Islam. There are, however, some and it is interesting to see what led these people to their conversion. I have collected 3 stories, of Baoule conversions to Islam, which are helpful as we try to see how Muslims have worked at winning Baoules. As we examine these stories, we will see an interesting interaction between two worldviews.

The first story took place around 1912. A group of Baoules who had formerly had very good relationships with the colonial administration had fallen out of favor. This resulted in frustrations with the French who, of course, were Catholics. At the same time 2 brothers, one the village chief, grew a friendship with a local marabout, a Muslim holy man. When the older brother was put in prison, the younger took the problem to the marabout. The marabout prayed and the prisoner was set free. At that point, the brothers converted to Islam along with some of their family members. The prayers of the Muslim marabout had, in the minds of these people, delivered the older brother, who was the village chief, a strong and noble man, from an impossible situation (Triaud 1974, 324-326). The elements that show up in this scenario are *friendship* (harmony) and *power* coming together in a *situation of distress*.

Two very major aspects of the Baoule worldview come into play and result in a major change. Only half of that village converted to Islam. Catholics stayed Catholic. There have been some conflicts between the two groups in the village but they continue living together today. The two communities are separated with their sections of the village marked by a road that is a little bit wider

¹⁶ Johnstone qualifies (1993) almost 25% of the population of the country as "Foreign Africans". A 1988 Government census (AD2000 - random photocopies without references) puts the percentage of Muslims among this group at 75%. If this percentage still holds, it would mean that of the 38.7% of the population which are Muslim, almost half are non-Ivorian (18%) Johnstone 1993, 184).

than the other roads in the village. They are, however, living together in the same village (Ibid. 331).
Once again we see unity overruling among in the Baoule world.

The second story comes from the background of the director of our Bible Institute, Rév. Célestin Koffi. His grandfather was a great shaman. His renown was widely acclaimed and he had great success. He was however known for being a lady's man and this brought about his demise. Once, when he went after a woman who was loved by another man, the betrayed lover decided to get revenge. He had this powerful and famous shaman magically poisoned. His evil action bore the desired fruit and Celestin's grandfather died. When his children saw the father, whom they thought to be immortal, swept away by the magic, over which he was supposed to have control, they gave up the family worship of fetishes. At that time, there was quite a bit of Muslim influence in the east central part of the country where they lived. So it was that, in their moment of frustration, the message of the Koran was given to them and they converted. Few of the family followed them in this decision but they held to it even though they were persecuted. For a while, they moved to a village that had been started by Muslims trying to avoid persecution. Once again we will see, however, the Baoule thirst for unity winning out. After a bit of separation, some of the animist members of the family moved to a new region and invited the Muslim family members to come along. They did come and they have been living peacefully together for years now.

The main ingredient in this conversion experience is the *frustration with the impotence of their former gods*. Mr. Koffi did not tell me of any miracles done by the Muslims who won the favor of his uncles and aunts but we can know that they were disillusioned with the powerless gods that their father had served. Even as they rejected the Baoule religion, they show a typical Baoule worldview concern, that of correct relationships guaranteeing correct results.

The last story comes from one of our students, Gossé Jules. His 29 year old nephew recently converted to Islam. He had been working with Muslim Baoules in the southern region of Côte

d'Ivoire. He was impressed by these people and was won over by them for two reasons. First of all came the fact that the Muslim, in our part of the world, can acquire and wear powerful amulets that are believed to protect and bring blessing to the wearer.

The other influence that played a role in his decision was the kind reception given to him and the generous help offered to him by Jula¹⁷ merchants. They want to keep Baoule converts from reverting back to Animism and so they receive them well and are willing to generously help them get started in business.

Once again *power* comes into the conversion equation. The other winning element in this case was once again the *kindness factor or friendship*. This story however develops in a bit of a different way than the others. Mr. Gossé has noticed that this nephew will no longer spend the night with him. He senses that the new convert feels threatened by his Christian uncle and wants to avoid any chance of being witnessed to. There is still a bit of family unity as witnessed to by periodic visits but this unity has been diluted by the fear created by the new allegiance that has entered the family situation.

Mr. Gossé was happy to explain to me one reason for which conversions to Islam are very minimal among the Baoule. At some time in the past, a man from his clan named Kondo Yoboué, converted to Islam. He became a great student of the Koran and impressed everybody with his new religion. It all turned sour, however, when the Mr. Kondo went insane. Now, pretty well the whole group believes that the Koran renders people insane. They believe that Muslims can do all manner of evil with the Koran. This is an interesting insight into the Baoule mind. Of course, there may be some truth to this idea but as soon as someone studies the Koran and does not go crazy, it could very well open wide the door for many conversions. This insight emphasized for us once again the importance placed upon the *interplay between invisible forces and the natural world*.

¹⁷ This word originally meant merchant but has come to signify, for the Baoule, almost any Muslim because almost all of the Jula are Muslim.

Most Muslim converts are drawn from the Animist world (Tokun 1997). The Baoule, who are almost 50% animist, are a prime target for Islam. It is important that we continue to bring the Gospel, the third major religious force impacting the Baoule, to them in a sensitive and powerful way. It is essential that we take heed to the way they see reality and that we get close so that we might stop a massive movement to Islam among this group.

Appendix 1 - The names of children for each day of the week.

Day of the Week	Baoule Name for the Day	Girl	Boy
Monday	Kisie	Akisi	Kouassi
Tuesday	Dyole	Adyoua	Kouadio
Wednesday	Mlan	Amlan	Konan
Thursday	Wε	Ahoue	Kouakou
Friday	Ya	Yao	Aya
Saturday	Fue	Afue	Koffi
Sunday	Monnen	Amoin	Kouame

Appendix 2 - Baoulé Cosmology - Epic - Abra Pokou

According to Baoulé traditions a major migration took place following the death of Osei Tutu (the great king who had united the Asante and who had conquered much of Ghana). A succession crisis broke out in Kumase (the capital of the kingdom) between two claimants to the Asante throne, Opoku Ware, who eventually became king, and Dako, who lost both his bid for power and his life. Dako's sister, Abra Pokou, fearing reprisals from the victorious faction, gathered her brother's partisans together and fled westward from Kumase towards the Comoé River.

Baoulé legends recount that Queen Pokou and her followers were indeed pursued right to the banks of the Comoé, which they were unable to cross due to its turbulence. The sorcerers of the group solemnly proclaimed that the gods of the water would be appeased only when the group's most cherished possession was sacrificed to them. The women immediately threw all of their golden adornments - rings, bracelets, and earrings - into the surging waters, but to no avail. Finally it became apparent that the ultimate offering had to be human, but no member of the group appeared willing to give up the life of his child. It was then that the queen, who was also a mother, lifted her baby, her only son, high above her head and threw him into the raging river. Miraculously a bridge of hippos appeared, and upon their backs the people were able to cross to safety. Once on the far bank they prostrated themselves in gratitude before Abra Pokou, their queen. But the queen, being also a mother, could only enunciate one word through her tears; "Bawuli!" "The child is dead!"

From this experience, claim the Baoulé, they derived not only their name and consciousness as a distinct group, but also the importance of matrilineal descent ... While the migration legend may have telescoped certain historic events, giving the impression of a large number of people moving at once rather than the gradual introduction of new cultural elements, it served a political function as well. The Queen Pokou story became a myth which provided a sense of unity and identity during the process of assimilation and integration.

(A redemptive analogy - an only son dying for his father's {aunt's} people?)

Richard Horowitz from the Introduction to Life with the Baoulé, Vincent Guerry. Washington: Three Continents Press, 1975, pp. 12-13.