

## *Bororo Song*

### a. THE BIRD-NESTER'S ARIA

The following is one of many myths told by the Bororo Indians of central Brazil, whose territory used to extend from the upper reaches of the Paraguay River to beyond the valley of the Araguaya:

*M1 (key myth). Bororo: O xibae e iari. "The macaws and their nest"*

In olden times the women used to go into the forest to gather the palms used in the making of *ba*. These were penis sheaths which were presented to adolescents at their initiation ceremony. One youth secretly followed his mother, caught her unawares, and raped her.

When the woman returned from the forest, her husband noticed feathers caught in her bark-cloth belt, which were similar to those worn by youths as an adornment. Suspecting that something untoward had occurred, he decreed that a dance should take place in order to find out which youth was wearing a similar adornment. But to his amazement he discovered that his son was the only one. The man ordered another dance, with the same result.

Convinced now of his misfortune and anxious to avenge himself, he sent his son to the "nest" of souls, with instructions to bring back the great dance rattle (*bapo*), which he coveted. The young man consulted his grandmother who revealed to him the mortal danger that such an undertaking involved; she advised him to obtain the help of the hummingbird.

When the hero, accompanied by the hummingbird, reached the aquatic region of souls, he waited on the shore, while the hummingbird deftly stole the rattle by cutting the short cord from which it was hanging. The instrument fell into the water, making a loud noise – *jo*. Alerted by this noise, the souls fired arrows from their bows. But the hummingbird flew so fast that he reached the shore safe and sound with the stolen rattle.

The father then ordered his son to fetch the small rattle belonging to the souls; and the same episode was repeated, with the same details, only this time the helpful animal was the quick flying juriti (*Leptoptila* species, a kind of dove). During a third expedition, the young man stole some buttere; these are jingling bells made from the hoofs of the caititu (*Dicotyles torquatus*, a type of wild pig), which are strung on a piece of rope and worn as anklets. He was helped by the large grasshopper (*Acridium cristatum*, EB, Vol. I, p.

780), which flew more slowly than the birds so that the arrows pierced it several times but did not kill it.

Furious at the foiling of his plans, the father invited his son to come with him to capture the macaws, which were nesting in the face of a cliff. The grandmother did not know how to ward off this fresh danger, but gave her grandson a magic wand to which he could cling if he happened to fall.

The two men arrived at the foot of the rock; the father erected a long pole and ordered his son to climb it. The latter had hardly reached the nests when the father knocked the pole down; the boy only just had time to thrust the wand into a crevice. He remained suspended in the void, crying for help, while the father went off.

Our hero noticed a creeper within reach of his hand; he grasped hold of it and with difficulty dragged himself to the top of the rock. After a rest he set out to look for food, made a bow and arrows out of branches, and hunted the lizards which abounded on the plateau. He killed a lot of them and hooked the surplus ones to his belt and to the strips of cotton wound round his legs and ankles. But the dead lizards went bad and gave off such a vile smell that the hero fainted. The vultures (*Cathartes urubu*, *Coragyps atratus foetens*) fell upon him, devoured first of all the lizards, and then attacked the body of the unfortunate youth, beginning with his buttocks. Pain restored him to consciousness, and the hero drove off his attackers which, however, had completely gnawed away his hindquarters. Having eaten their fill, the birds were prepared to save his life; taking hold of his belt and the strips of cotton round his arms and legs with their beaks, they lifted him into the air and deposited him gently at the foot of the mountain.

The hero regained consciousness “as if he were awaking from a dream.” He was hungry and ate wild fruits but noticed that since he had no rectum, he was unable to retain the food, which passed through his body without even being digested. The youth was at first nonplussed and then remembered a tale told him by his grandmother, in which the hero solved the same problem by molding for himself an artificial behind out of dough made from pounded tubers.

After making his body whole again by this means and eating his fill, he returned to his village, only to find that it had been abandoned. He wandered around for a long time looking for his family. One day he spotted foot and stick marks, which he recognized as being those of his grandmother. He followed the tracks but, being anxious not to reveal his presence, he took on the appearance of a lizard, whose antics fascinated the old woman and her other grandson, the hero’s younger brother. Finally, after a long interval, he decided to reveal himself to them. (In order to re-establish contact with his grandmother, the hero went through a series of transformations, turning himself into four birds and a butterfly, all unidentified; Colb. 2, pp. 235-6.)

On that particular night there was a violent wind accompanied by a thunder storm which put out all the fires in the village except the grandmother’s. Next morning everybody came and asked her for hot embers, in particular the second wife of the father who had tried to kill his son. She recognized her stepson, who was supposed to be dead, and ran to warn her husband. As if there were nothing wrong, the latter picked up his ceremonial rattle and welcomed his son with the songs of greeting for returned travelers.

However, the hero was full of thoughts of revenge. One day while he was walking in the forest with his little brother, he broke off a branch of the api tree, which was shaped like a deer's antler. The child, acting on his elder brother's instructions, then managed to make the father promise to order a collective hunt; in the guise of a mea, a small rodent, he secretly kept watch to discover where their father was lying in wait for the game. The hero then donned the false antlers, changed into a deer, and rushed at his father with such ferocity that he impaled him on the horns. Without stopping, he galloped toward a lake, into which he dropped his victim, who was immediately devoured by the Buiogoe spirits who are carnivorous fish. All that remained after the gruesome feast were the bare bones which lay on the bottom of the lake, and the lunss which floated on the surface in the form of aquatic plants, whose leaves, it is said, resemble lungs.

When he returned to the village, the hero took his revenge on his father's wives (one of whom was his own mother).

This myth provides the theme of a song, called *xobogeu*, belonging to the Paiwe clan of which the hero was a member (Colb. 3, pp. 224-9, 343-7).

An older version ends as follows. The hero declared: "I no longer want to live with the Orarimugu who have ill-treated me, and in order to have my revenge on them and my father, I shall send them wind, cold, and rain." Then he took his grandmother into a beautiful and distant land, and returned to punish the Indians as he said he would (Colb. 2, p. 236).