



ETHNOHISTORIES

Gö Caballero

English

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FOREWORD

To facilitate reading in Ngäbere, we have adapted, with some modifications, the system in the short Ngäbere-Spanish dictionary Kukwe Ngäbere by Melquiades Arosemena and Luciano Javilla, published in 1979 by the Directorate of Historical Heritage of the National Institute of Culture (INAC), now the Ministry of Culture, and the Summer Institute of Linguistics.

VOWELS	CONSONANTS
a - Like in Spanish	/b/ch/d/g/j/l/m/n/ñ/r/s/t/v/y/ Like in Spanish
ä - Deeper than in Spanish	c - Like the soft sound of the /c/ in Spanish
e - Like in Spanish	td - Intermediate sound between /d/ and /t/, like /th/ in English
i - Like in Spanish	k - Like the strong sound of the /c/ in Spanish as in "casa"
í - Guttural sound between vowel and consonant, like the "klick" of some African languages	ng - In Ngäbere it exists in initial position, but in Spanish it does not exist in initial position as in "congo"
ii - An /i/ longer than in Spanish	IMPORTANT: It should be noted that in Ngäbere there is no /f/
o - Like in Spanish	
ö - Deeper than in Spanish	
ó - More accented than /ö/	
u - Like in Spanish	
ü - Deeper than in Spanish	
ú - Like the /w/ in English	

It should also be clarified that this story comes from narrators residing in the village of Potrero de Caña, formerly the Tole district of the Chiriquí province, now the Müna district of the Ngäbe Buglé region, from which the Agronomist Roger Séptimo, the compiler and writer is a native. Consequently, the phonology corresponds to the dialectal or regional variation "Guaymí del Interior" (Pacific slope) which differs from the "Guaymí de la Costa" (Caribbean slope of the province of Bocas del Toro and the now district of Kusapin in the Comarca Ngäbe Buglé) in the *Guaymí Grammar* of Ephraim S. Alphonse Reid, published in 1980 by Fe y Alegría. This variant corresponds to what Arosemena and Javilla call "Chiriquí" and which contrasts with the Caribbean variants of Bocas del Toro and the coast of Bocas.

This ethnohistory was published in 1986 in Kugü Kira Nie Ngäbere / Sucesos Antiguos Dichos en *Guaymí* (Ethnohistory *Guaymí*), by the Panamanian Association of Anthropology, with the PN-079 Agreement of the Inter-American Foundation (FIA) managed by Dr. Mac Chapin, Anthropologist, who encouraged us to follow the example he had set by compiling *Pab-Igala: Histories of the Kuna Tradition*, published in 1970 by the Center for Anthropological Research of the University of Panama, under the direction of Dr. Reina Torres de Araúz.

This book represented the work of the Agricultural Engineer Roger Séptimo, when he was a student in his second year at the Center for Agricultural Teaching and Research in Chiriquí (CEIACHI), Faculty of Agricultural Sciences, University of Panama (FCAUP), not only writing in Ngäbere the stories that he had heard from his family members in his community, but also his effort to translate them into Spanish as a bilingual person that he is, like other indigenous people in Panama, who are striving to receive a formal education.

The ethnohistories were compiled, recorded on cassettes and written by the Agronomist Roger Séptimo in 1983 and 1984.

As Professor-Researcher of Anthropology and Rural Sociology at the CEIACHI of the FCAUP, Luz Graciela Joly Adames, Anthropologist, Ph.D., encouraged Roger, as one of her students, to write the stories, convince him and show him that she would not exploit or abuse his work, but that he would get credit. Consequently, the anthropologist limited herself only to making some corrections of form and style in the Spanish translations without altering their content.

We encourage students from the seven indigenous peoples in the Republic of Panama, and teachers in public and private schools, colleges and universities in Panama, to write in their own languages and translate the ethnohistories and songs they hear in their families and communities into Spanish, as part of their informal education.

We also encourage readers of these ethnohistories in Ngäbere, Spanish and English, to draw the scenes that they liked the most, as they did in 2002, students in an Education and Society course, directed by Dr. Joly, at the Faculty of Education, Autonomous University of Chiriquí.

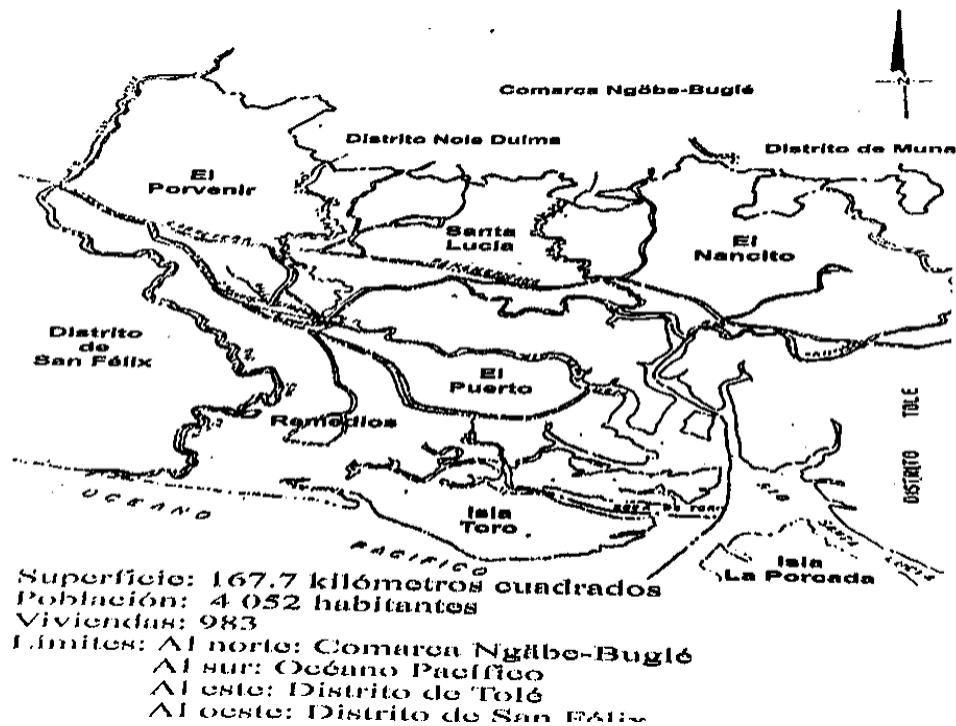
Article 13 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, approved by the General Assembly, in its 107th plenary session on September 13, 2007:

1. Indigenous peoples have the right to revitalize, use, promote and pass on to future generations their histories, languages, oral traditions, philosophies, writing systems and literatures, and to name and maintain their communities, places and people.
2. The States shall adopt effective measures to ensure the protection of this right and also to ensure that indigenous peoples can understand and make themselves understood in political, legal and administrative actions, providing for this, when necessary, interpretation services or other appropriate means.



When Gō threw himself into the Pacific Ocean, according to the indigenous people, specifically and precisely, in the coast between the districts of Remedios and Tolé, in an area close to both districts could be heard tremendous marine sounds that surpassed the normal sounds that the ocean has.

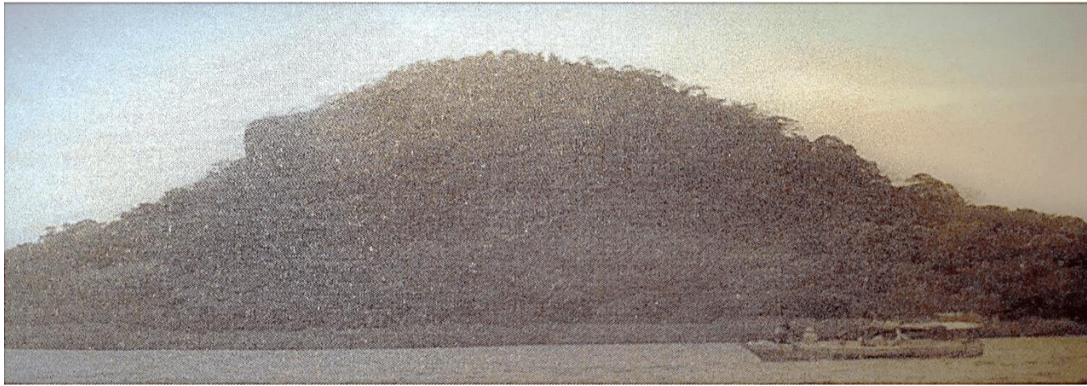
REMEDIES DISTRICT MAP



Sánchez Pinzón, Milagros. Remedios: Legendary Land. Panama: Editorial Culturama Internacional. 2011:40.

It is believed that Gō changed into the form of a giant fish, according to the *suguiás* who lived in that region. Also, according to the indigenous people and the *suguiás*, he attacked the ships coming from

Spain and of other nations that arrived at the Port of Remedios. The indigenous *Guaymíes* (Ngäbe) think, until now, that the colonizers residing in Remedios did not know about these events because they thought that *Gö*, when he launched himself into the ocean, he died drown and that his existence had finished forever. Nevertheless, the indigenous people did know about this case.



Rogatu (toponym in Ngäbere) or *Pan de Azúcar* (toponym in Spanish) hill from which *Gö Caballero* threw himself to the Pacific Ocean | Sánchez Pinzón, Milagros. Remedios: Tierra Legendaria. Panamá: Editorial Culturama Internacional. 2011:77.

On the coast, near the port of Remedios, lived a *suguiá* who was called *Nomon Guaba*, and nowadays there is a part that is known by his name *Guabatu* (*Guabalá*). This *suguiá* and another one saw that the people of Remedios were not being supplied by the necessary merchandise that generally arrived from Spain. This became obvious by the absence of ships in the port of Remedios. In spite of this, the colonizers did not become aware of this, maybe thinking that the ships were going elsewhere or that were very slow in their course.

Under such circumstances, the *suguiás* *Guaba* and others opted to make war against *Gö Caballero* to avoid more severe consequences. The two *suguiás* planned to choose eight men, four for each *suguiá*. The eight men would go in search of *Gö* in the ocean, with all the necessary indications to fight with *Gö*.

The narrative says that, unfortunately, the day that the eight men had to leave, the other *suguiá* failed to send the four men that he had to send. This motivated that, at the last minute, the *Suguiá Nomon Guaba* had to find eight men to begin the feat of combating *Gö*, or else, be victims in that encounter, under strict rules proposed by *Nomon Guaba*.

Only the two *suguiás* knew where *Gö Caballero* was and how to find him. Among the recommended rules were the following; as they were going in a boat, they had to take care at what precise moment they would be attacked by *Gö*, so that the boat would not capsize, because *Gö* was going to create an enormous whirl inside the ocean with strong wind. The supposedly enormous fish would swallow them, boat, and all. When arriving inside the fish, they would find the ships that had been swallowed by *Gö Caballero*. Immediately, they had to begin cutting the fish by a rib, with the saw that the eight were carrying. But, when beginning to cut the rib, they had to have in mind the sound of a storm that could be heard externally. That is to say, they had to be guided by the storm. When they could not hear the storm, then they had to stop sawing the rib; and when they could hear it again, they should renew their task; thus, successively, until they finished perforating the rib and immediately go out through it. This care was due to, according to the *suguiá*, that *Gö* travelled to another ocean and, if they continued cutting the rib, there was the possibility that at the instant that they perforated the rib they could be in another continent and could be lost. According to the *suguiá*, when they could hear the storm was when they were in the Pacific Ocean.

The eight had to pick the gold and the silver that was in the ships inside of *Gö*, but it had to be a certain quantity of coins of silver and gold, as faithful witnesses of their feat and that they had really fought with *Gö*. This request was made by the *Suguiá Nomon Guaba*.



On the other hand, if inside the belly of *Gö* there was a person who offered them food to eat, they should not eat it. If they felt cold, they should warm themselves with the fire that was there, only that and nothing else.

Unfortunately, it is not known how many days lasted this mission to finish with *Gö*, for his interminable deeds.

It is known that of the eight, there were only two survivors who came out through the perforated rib of *Gö* Caballero; and that afterwards one died on the way to the port where they had embarked in some place of Remedios. Only one arrived back to *Nomon Guaba*, with all the requests made by him, and narrated all that had happened. But, after a moment, he also died to culminate with those who had the valor and sufficient courage to encounter all the risks that meant combating the insatiable monster.

He said that, definitely, the warning of the *Suguiá Nomon Guaba* was true. He said that, when they were in the high seas, there was a moment when an enormous whirlwind took the boat in a contrary direction of their route and in a moment they found themselves on the border of an enormous whirl that formed in the ocean and that the force of the wind threw them inside it, sinking them with boat and all and immediately falling in another place where such a whirl did not exist, but it was another thing. At their sight appeared considerable numbers of ships that were immobile and with enormous visibility. Inside the ships no one was alive; they could only smell the unbearable putrefaction, that apparently was of the sailors who had died inside the belly of *Gö*.

They seemed to see like enormous rivers, hills, and valleys that seemed to keep the dimension, as it seemed that there were seven of each.

They did not lose time in doing what they had to do: "cut the rib". They started cutting in one place, supposing that it was the side of the rib, in a rotating manner to allow each one to rest. When they started cutting *Gö*, he would moan and they could clearly hear what *Gö* was saying with the voice of a person, that he was feeling a very strong pain in his belly. But they would continue with their task and saw that inside came waters of all colors and different odors. These were poisons that, according to the *suguiá*, were to combat that human worm that was perforating the rib.

There were times when they would go to warm themselves, due to the intense cold, in a fire that would never extinguish and that by its side there always remained an old grey-haired woman who always carried a parrot and who several times offered them food, but none ate due to the previous

warning. They did not know who that old woman and the parrot were, and that, according to them, seemed to form part of the life of *Gö*, as no one could think that she was a victim of a shipwreck, as no one else was alive. Inside the ships there were only skeletons and pestilent odor of the rotting sailors.

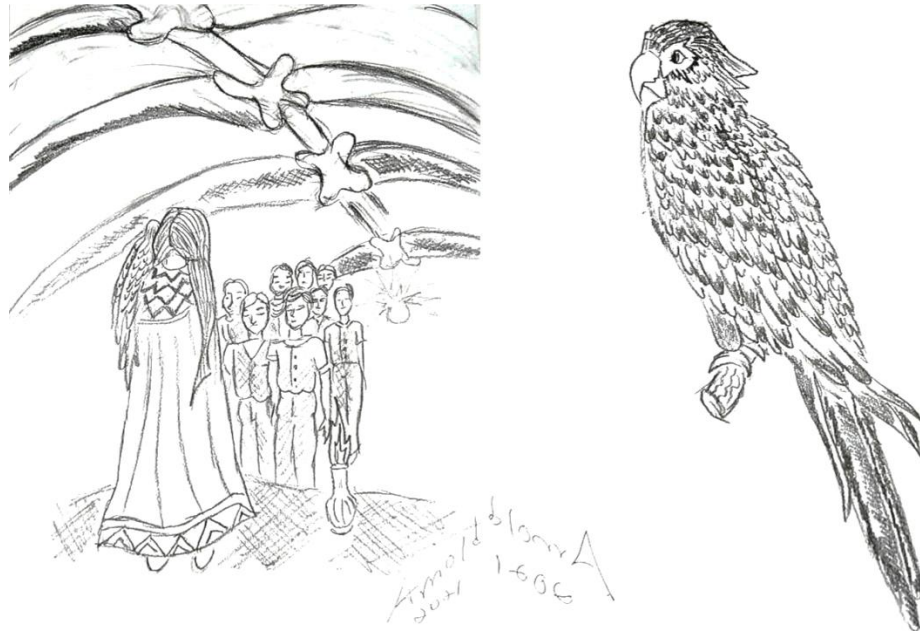
According to the order to gather gold and silver, they made sure to do this, and they went to get the number of coins and then they saw ships of all colors and with diverse cargos, lying one on top of the others. The eight slowly began debilitating little by little, falling sick. Thus died the first one, remaining only seven. Then the rest began to die one after another, due to the effect of the smell of the waters of different colors that were arriving inside of *Gö*.



When there were only two survivors, then the rib of *Gö* burst and they immediately put the boat through there and went out to the surface of the ocean, in an unknown place. They navigated as they could, until they could visualize the coast. Then they identified the place from where they had departed until they got to *Nomon Guaba*. But, on the way to go to the house, one died, remaining only one survivor. He got to the *suguiá*, narrated what had happened to them, and when he finished, he lay down on a seat to never wake up. The *suguiá* received the gold and silver coins, that after provoked a conflict with the irresponsible *suguiá* who did not fulfill his compromise with *Nomon Guaba*, because apparently, he wanted a part of the coins.

Then, after this event, *Gö* stopped doing harm, as the problem was finished. No other ship got lost from that moment onwards and again ships began to arrive at the port of Remedios, supplying the stores with merchandise. Also, the extraordinary noise that had formed with the fall of *Gö* into the ocean stopped. Since then, no such events have been known. However, it has been thought that the famous *Gö Caballero* is not dead but is still alive without doing the evil he used to make. Neither can it be stated where he could be in the immense Pacific Ocean or in the Atlantic. But, the truth is that the danger ended and no more ships were lost.

With this narration, once more it is well established the conviction that the *Guaymí* (Ngäbe) *suguiás* fought among themselves, as they would rebel for personal matters against a certain social or community order and would fight arduously to overcome it, without caring if it was *Guaymí* (Ngäbe) or not. The determination was always that the bad ones had to be exterminated in some way, no matter from where they came.



Note by Agricultural Engineer Roger Séptimo Jiménez

This character in the narrative is not important as *suguiá* but becomes important because strange elements invade this land and colonize it without taking into account that there were human beings living in the region, as for them these inhabitants were savages who, the same as the animals, also would be displaced throughout the mountains due to their presence. But it was not that way, they found resistance from the inhabitants and were also victims of the existing nature and of a series of phenomena that were inexplicable for them; not being able to find the real origin of these facts, blamed the indigenous people. Therefore, they began hunting the *suguiás* who were the spiritual leaders of the indigenous population.

In one of those campaigns to eliminate the *suguiás*, who according to the colonizers were witches who were fighting against them, they found *Gö Caballero*. Becoming aware of him as a *suguiá*, immediately they put him in jail in the town of Remedios, according to the narrative, and where they wanted to kill him. But, for the bad luck of the colonizers, in their own faces he burned their houses, without them being able to stop him. Thus, the persecution against the *suguiás* and especially in this case against *Gö*, was never easy and much less possible.

Moreover, this *Gö* caused them even greater defeats. When he fell into the ocean, he became an enormous fish, according to the narrative, that from then on dedicated himself not to let any ship in the high seas go to the port of Remedios. Not even the colonizers became aware of this and the inhabitants of that time died without knowing it. Even nowadays it is unknown in the region.

This event obliged another *suguiá*, who lived nearby in the same region, to combat on his own the then phenomenal *Gö Caballero* who never returned to live in his town. This *suguiá* finished with the danger that *Gö Caballero* was causing to the traffic of ships, without owing any favor to the colonizers. He simply did it to normalize the marine traffic; so that at no time the ocean could be a considerable danger for the inhabitants of the region in case of using it in some days; so that the commerce, which was then unavoidable, would suffer danger at any moment; and because it was his duty and responsibility to take care of his people.

JOLLY

Luz Graciela

PUBLIC DOMAIN CONTENT

