Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Origin of Black and White (Red) Races by Joseph Njong", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Katarzyna Marciniak and team members in Warsaw. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/193. Entry version as of November 21, 2026.

Joseph Njong

The Origin of Black and White (Red) Races

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	The Origin of Black and White (Red) Races
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Bafut
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	October 25, 2016
Genre	Myths
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Katarzyna Marciniak and team members in Warsaw, University Warsaw, kamar@al.uw.edu.pl

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



Joseph Njong (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 65 (in 2016)

Social status: Quarter Head (a tribal function)

Profession: Farmer

Language of narration: Bafut

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background of Bafut: Bafut is located in the North-West region of Cameroon with an estimated population of over at 140,000 inhabitants spread over a land surface area of about 340 square kilometres. As Shu Abednego Che and Tanda Isidore Fuh rightly observed, in the *History of Bafu*t, the first Bafut people migrated from Lake Chad down to the Tikari area North West of Fumban which had a dynastic rule. In constant search for fertile land and a more peaceful settlement, they migrated again to Ndobo (present day Ndop) and then down to Bafut where they finally settled. The people are called B+f++. The Fon who is a paramount leader, the head of the legislative wing of leadership in Bafut, is closely assisted. Batangchos (second class Fons), who all pay allegiance to him. Prominent religious festival in Bafut include Pacification of village Gods in all major shrines in Bafut; the wangle (Grass cutting ritual geared at protecting the village form enemies of all types, including neighbouring villages); worship of family Gods in family shrines; protection rituals at individual family and village levels. The people generally believe in the worship of ancestors, spirits, ghost, God, Gods. Most of the shrines of these gods are at the mountain sites, caves, in streams, lakes, valleys etc. The end-of-year religious festivals are crowned with the Fon dance (Abinimfor), which can be compared, for instance, to the Greek Dionysian festival*.

Occasion: Live performance

* See: Nkemleke, Daniel A., Divine Che Neba and Eleanor A. Dasi, *Mythic Fulfillment and Performance in the Bafut Abinimfor and the Greek Dionysian Festivals.*

Summary

The form of the notation reflects the rhythm of the performance. Capital letters indicate when the storyteller’s voice was high; italics indicate when the voice was low.

In the beginning, God was alone.

He had no company.

He liked to see people.

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He liked to see people dance, run, play, and converse and do many things.

[Aside by the storyteller] *If we are living today… it is because God needed our company.* [The storyteller wipes saliva that is dripping at the extreme right side of his mouth. He wipes his face and continues.]

My children,

[There is much smoke in the house and tears are running down the eyes of the storyteller and some members of the audience.]

He had little comfort and needed the company of man.

He needed the company of man. The idea of creating man came to his mind.

And he decided to create man. And live with him.

He [God] thought of moulding a figure.

In this light, he left for a stream nearby,

Dug and collected fine clay*,

You know that clay is of different types,

Sandy, soft, black, red, black,

So, he took the best clay,

He started his job of moulding the various parts of the body.

He moulded the head, body, legs, arms, ears, nose, and all other parts of the body.

His aim was to create a figure that resembled him.

Everything he had on his body,

He gave it to man,

[Audience ask in a chorus:] Was God a man or a woman?

[Storyteller:] HOW CAN GOD BE A WOMAN, HE WAS A MAN.

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[Members of audience nod, while the men present are satisfied, women present are not satisfied as many of them wrinkle their faces. The storyteller continues.]

After God moulded all parts of the body,

He decided to harden the soft clay,

He made a lake of fire,

Fire that could burn this house [I.e. the house in which this story was being told] Within the shortest time.

He made this large fire,

Placed all the moulded parts into it;

As the fire was burning

The parts were hardening.

[The storyteller turns to his audience:] Have you ever seen the blacksmith's fire?

[Audience:] No.

[Storyteller:] WHO AMONG YOU KNOW NTUMENYU AT NIKO**? If you visit him you will know what I mean.

When I talk of the blacksmith's fire, it is extremely hot,

It melts iron.

This fire, as I said, was too hot.

After a short time,

God wanted to see

His product.

He was also anxious removing

The parts before they were completely hardened.

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These parts were red,

They were not very solid,

They were weak,

He carefully removed them,

Joined them together.

They were *smooth* and good *looking*
But too weak.

He breathed air into them

And they started living.

God was happy

To have a companion.

This set was red.

He continued his creation.

Another set was carefully moulded,

Placed on the blazing fire,

The first mistakes were corrected,

God passed his time playing with

The red set.

Upon his return,

The other set on

The blazing fire became very dark and hard.

God carefully joined them,

Breathed air into them.

This set was very strong

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They could work the whole day and night,

With no rest,

And were hardly tired.

He thought of burning the other red race

He had created before,

But said:

“NO, ONE SHOULD BE STRONGER.”

He found two races in front of him:

The first, red but weak,

The second, black and hard.

That is how the two races in this world originated.

[The storyteller reiterates.]

Know that the red men were hurriedly made beings,

And that is why they hurry over things.

Did you not see the group that came here…?

I mean those who were working with the village community project. [Reference to European expatriates who work in the local community.]

They always move fast,

Hurrying greg greg greg greg and

That is how God

Hurriedly made them.

This is the end of my story.

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* The motif of creation of the Man from clay appears in many cultures; see, e.g., the *Bible* and Prometheus' myth in Greek mythology (footnote by the UW part of the team).

** Reference to a local blacksmith.

Analysis	Myths from different cultures have attempted to provide answers to the origin of different races that make up the world, after science has failed to give a satisfactory response. The above myth is one of the African variants, particularly from Bafut, in the Northwest region of Cameroon. The common denominator between this myth and most world myths is man's origin from the soil (clay). Also, the perplexing questions about the different colors and why one race is seemingly physically stronger than the other are clearly answered, as the color and sturdiness are determined by the duration of each of these races in the blacksmith's fire.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Appearances Diversity Humanity Life Masculinity Religious beliefs
Further Reading	Aletum, Michael Tabuwe, *Political conflicts within the traditional and the modern institutions. A case study of Bafut-Cameroon*, Vander Pub., 1973. Engard, Ronald K., "Myth and Political Economy of Bafut (Cameroon). The structural history of an African Kingdom", *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde* 34 (1988): 49–89 (accessed: January 21, 2021).

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Niba, Matthias, *The Bafut Conundrum. Keynote address at BMCA*, USA. Minneapolis, 2006.

Shu Abednego Che and Tanda Isidore Fuh, "The History of Bafut", bafutmanjongcalgary.ca (accessed: November 25, 2016).

Addenda

Researcher: Divine Che Neba (trans.).

Method of data collection: Tape recording.

Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke.

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