Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Ndongbiko by Peter Ambe", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Lisa Maurice. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/437. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Peter Ambe

Ndongbiko

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





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

General information	
Title of the work	Ndongbiko
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	February 4, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Bafut
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults and adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaounde 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaounde 1, wandasi5@yahoo.com Lisa Maurice, Bar-Ilan University, lisa.maurice@biu.ac.il

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



Peter Ambe (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 52 (in 2018)

Social status: Commoner

Profession: Farming

Language of narration: Bafut

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating	Background: Bafut is located in the North West Region of Cameroon, with an estimated population of about 140.000 inhabitants, spread over a surface area of 340 square kilometers. As Shu Abenego Che and Tanda Insidore in “The History of Bafut” rightly put, the first Bafut people migrated from Lake Chad down to Tikari area Northwest of Foumban, which was 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. They negotiated leadership with the aborigines, who were the Mbebili people, under the leadership of Niba Chi. TheMbebili people later accepted to be subservient to those who came in from Ndobo for peace to reign. Mbebili today is one of the villages that make up the Bafut Kingdom. Occasion: Staged
Summary	A long time ago in this village, There lived a man. His name, I do not know. Even my parents did not know his name. This man grew up as a hard working farmer and hunter. He was one of the best hunters in the village. He grew up, And like any prosperous man, He was admired by many, especially women. He turned down many love advances from his female peers. However, he ended up in the arms of a woman Who was more or less an ogre.

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Their union produced a handsome boy.

His name was Ndongbiko.

Ndongbiko's childhood was not the best,

Because his busy father was hardly with him.

His farms were far from their residence,

And sometimes after farming, he would go out on a hunting expedition

In neighbouring forests.

The mother, who was always with him, was strange.

I MEAN STRANGE.

(The narrator wipes his mouth)

She was a strange figure.

Each time she prepared food,

She would eat alone,

And Ndongbiko will only survive on crumbs.

This woman kept on starving Ndongbiko each time

The husband went for farming or hunting.

This persisted

And the neighbours were observing

As Ndongbiko grew pale with time.

The neighbours kept on watching

This ogre of a mother.

One day,

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When the father of Ndongbiko went to the farm,

The mother did the same thing.

She prepared food,

Ate the food while Ndongbiko starved.

A neighbour saw it;

This neighbour was…

This neighbour was…

(The audience comes in and assists the narrator)

Audience: "… the friend to Ndongbiko's father?"

Narrator: "No"

Audience: "Was the age group of Ndongbiko's father?"

Narrator: "Yes."

(Narrator continues)

The neighbour was Ndongbiko's father's age group.

This neighbour told Ndongbiko's father that

If this child is crying,

It is because his mother had been eating all the food alone.

He repeated that only the left overs are given to Ndongbiko.

Ndongbiko's father was angry,

He got his wife well beaten.

She was sent back to their compound.

Her mother-in-law brought her back.

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Upon their return, Ndongbiko and his father had gone out.

They waited, and waited and waited in the house

But Ndongbiko and his father were not forth coming.

Ndongbiko's grandmother started contemplating:

"Are my son and grandson missing?"

This pre-occupied her for a long time.

One day,

As she was sleeping,

She had a nightmare,

A terrible nightmare.

In her dream;

She was on a long journey,

Passing mountains upon mountains,

She saw two people on her path,

One was young and looking pale,

The other was old and looking VERY FRESH,

He was carrying a new wooden box.

She passed them and continued her journey.

It was dark in the dream,

She could not see well.

However, the tiredness ended as she saw some water to drink.

She woke up the following morning,

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And started wondering what the dream meant.

She decided to go out for a search.

She started looking, looking and

Looking for the children.

As she looked for his son and grandson,

She came across a man harvesting palm nuts.

As she saw the palm nut harvester,

She sang to him:

“MY FATHER

As you are harvesting your nuts,

Have you seen the father of Ndongbiko

With a child in his mouth?”

The man listened carefully to the song;

Asked the grandmother to repeat the song.

She sang again:

“MY FATHER

As you are harvesting your nuts,

Have you seen the father of Ndongbiko

With a child in his mouth passing?”

The man said he had not seen anybody.

She continued her journey

Traversing the land of the spirits.

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As she was going, she saw a woman harvesting her crops.

She sang to her:

“MY MOTHER,

As you are harvesting your crops,

Have you seen the father of Ndongbiko

With a child in his mouth passing?”

The woman was very quick

At understanding what she was saying.

She answered that she had not seen them.

The grandmother continued her journey.

As she started moving down the valley of the dead,

She met a palm wine tapper,

Beckoned himand asked whether he had seen a man passing there

With a child in his mouth?

The palm wine tapper told her that:

“Listen, follow my instructions carefully.

As you finish descending this hill,

You will see a woman pounding some bitter herbs,

If she asks you to do anything, do it without questioning.

DO YOU HEAR? (Narrator holds his ear)

She will help you.”

She continued her journey.

As she was going, she met the woman

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Pounding bitter herbs and sweating,

She sang:

“MY MOTHER,

As you are pounding these bitter herbs,

Did you see Ndongbiko’s father

With a child in his mouth passing?”

The old woman told her that she should help her before

She could direct her to where she would find Ndongbiko and his father.

She took the woman’s pestle,

Started pounding the bitter herbs.

She pounded, pounded and pounded,

The old woman took the grandmother of Ndongbiko,

Went and showed her where her son was buried,

And told her that after the burial of her son,

Ndongbiko left and was wandering.

The old woman told her that,

As Ndongbiko was wandering for

A long time, some gods came and took him away.

The grandmother cried, cried and asked,

“WHAT WILL I DO NOW?”

The old woman said she does not know.

(The narrator simultaneously waved his hands, some members of the

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audience placed their hands on the jaws, othersopened their mouths wide)

The grandmother continued her journey.

Along the way, she met a man fetching wood,

She stopped and sang:

“My father,

As you are fetching your wood,

Have you seen Ndongbiko passing?”

The man said he has not seen anybody.

She continued her journey.

She saw a woman on the way preparing mba’a*

The old woman asked her to help her.

She agreed and both of them continued preparing it

Until they were tired.

After preparing it, the old woman went to a Nkumshie**

The woman told the Nkumshie that this woman,

Is looking for her grandson called Ndongbiko

Who has been missing for sometime.

The Nkumshie asked the woman

Whether she is ready to do what he wants.

The woman said,“Yes”.

The Nkumshie gave the woman some herbs to pound.

She took a week to pound the herbs.

After one week, the Nkumshie went into his house,

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Took two calabashes,

One with a mouth***

The other without a mouth.

He gave the woman,

Showed the woman a room

In which to place the calabashes.

He told the woman that the house belongs to the gods of the land.

The woman, though afraid, gathered some courage,

Went into the house,

(narrator insists)

A house which was dark as charcoal, with no window.

She placed the calabashes in the dark chamber.

The Nkumshie asked the woman to stay in the dark chamber

He further instructed:

“The moment that one of the calabashes explodes,

Carefully stand up,

Move seven steps behind,

Stretch your armand touch it well,

Then you will take the hand of Ndongbiko”

The grandmother stayed in the dark chamber for long

Before a calabashes exploded.

She took seven steps behind,

Stretched her hand,

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It met another hand

But she felt the hand was that of a grown up.

Immediately, places became white**** in the house.

She discovered that it was Ndongbiko.

She took him out,

Thanked the Nkumshie

Thanked, thanked and thanked him for her grandson.

This is the end of my story.

(Everybody in the audience showed signs of satisfaction by laughing or smiling)

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* A black paste produced from cooked cocoyam leaves. Usually used in preparing what is popularly known as “black soup” in Ngemba.

** A prophet.

*** The mouth here refers to an opening.

**** The house became bright.

Analysis

Child neglect is central in this myth. The fact that the child in this myth is exposed first to hunger by his mother and later, his father’s death makes him a victim of circumstances. Other issues like fortune telling, interaction between the world of the living and that of spirits and the living dead are raised in this myth.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts

African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions

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Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Child, children Family Journeys Parents (and children) Prediction/prophecy Religious beliefs Supernatural creatures (non-classical)
Further Reading	Scheub, Harold, *A Dictionary of African Mythology: The Mythmaker as Storyteller*, Oxford University Press, 2000.
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba. Method of data collection: Note-taking. Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke and Eleanor A. Dasi.

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