Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Man with Three Braids by Emmanuel Njoya", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Hanna Paulouskaya. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2022). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1543. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Emmanuel Njoya

The Man with Three Braids

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	The Man with Three Braids
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Fumban
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	November 11, 2021
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Foumban/Fumban, West Region, Cameroon
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (young adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
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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



Emmanuel Njoya (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 52 (in 2021)

Social status: King maker

Profession: Teaching

Language of narration: Shumom

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

The Bamoun Kingdom is situated in the Western region of Cameroon. It is surrounded by Donga Mantung and Bui Divisions in the North, Mifi Division in the West, Bafia and Bangante towns in the South and Banyo town in the East. Its origin dates back to 1390 with its founder Nchare, a prince from Rifum (the present day Bankim), in the Adamawa Region of Cameroon (see here, accessed: July 9, 2019). The Foumban traditional society is well structured with "Mfon" (King) at the head, closely assisted by the "Momamfon" the queen. Other custodians of culture include the notables. The Mfon is noted for his numerous wives and uncountable children. Other secret societies which assist in the administration of the Kingdom, both in the physical and spiritual realms, include the secret societies. Among them are: Nguri and Muitngu secret societies. Owing to the people attachments to the Gods, spirits and ancestors, the Foumban people pay particular attention the popular Nguon Festival (of fertility and protection), which has become a crowd pulling event in Cameroon for the past years. Gods and ancestors are worshiped during the festival and the spirit of sharing encouraged among the people by the king. The Foumban kingdom is one of the oldest Kingdom in Africa and noted for the invention of their own form of writing, which was later pushed to the periphery.

Sources:

Mamadou, Ntiecheles, *Les conflicts Socio-politique dans le Royaume Bamoun de 1863–1889*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé 1, 2000.

Fewoh, Paul Mouliom, *Collectives Décentralisée et Developpement Local: le Cas de la Commune Ubaine de Foumban*, DIPESS II Dissertation, University of Yaoundé, 2006.

Summary

A long time ago in the Bamoun community of Western Cameroon, there lived an old man with his wife. The man had three braids. Whenever he was asked what his three braids meant, he answered "these are the three braids of problems." This news reached the royal

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palace and the king called him over to the palace for questioning. When he arrived, the king asked him: “What do the three braids signify?” He replied, “these are the three braids of problems,” (without ever saying what that meant). Then the King asked that he be locked up in the palace prison (“mâ ndâ mbü”). A few days later, the King liberated him for a new questioning session. The King asked him once more, “what do the three braids on your head signify?” The man with the trotting braids answered: “these are the braids of the problems, I say” (“ma tita tèt pon tü”). At last, the King had him released, but called the man’s wife and made an offer to her that if she manages to bring back the secrets that her husband is hiding in his braids, he will give her gifts, and above all, she will be awarded the title of Nji (i.e. a great notable of the palace). The woman returned home and at nightfall, she went to bed. While in bed with her husband, she asked: “is it true that I am the meaning of your braids?” Her husband replied: “These are the braids of problems you can’t understand.” She once more emphasized, “If you don’t tell me the meaning of your braids, I’ll divorce you and go back to my parent’s house.” This is how the man gave in and confided in her: “I will tell you the meaning of my braids but you must promise me that you will not tell these secrets to anyone.” The woman replied: “I promise that I would not tell anyone.” Then the man said: “The first braid means: the beloved woman who ends up killing her husband; the second: the water always comes from the bottom of the bed to flood the bed, and finally, the third: our shoe often pierces our toe.” When her husband fell asleep, she retreated to the King’s palace to pass on the precious information, that is, the secret of the braids on her husband’s head. After doing it, she went home and only realized that the braids on her husband’s head were talking about her. That is exactly why it is often said in Bamoun language that the person who robs you is never far from you and that your thief is a person who knows you better. What kills a man is what he loves the most, and the witch has never given up her potion.

Analysis

Patriarchy has often denigrated the female folk by presenting them as the other. They are often seen as wicked bringers of ill omen and thus, not worthy to be trusted. This misogynistic presentation of women makes one to see them as unwanted beings, as they help frustrate humanity’s ambitions. Women, as certain myths depict, do all in their capacity to exploit the vulnerable spot of men to their advantage. The

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	release of the secret by the heroine in the myth introduces us not only to the theme of betrayal and women's ambitions. The heroine in this myth prefers to favour the King (nation) to the detriment of her husband. This issue of not being able to keep a secret has helped in structuring the Bamoun society as it is today. Women are given secondary roles, and in most, if not all community's secrets are kept away from them, because men do not trust them.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Gaining understanding Gender Masculinity Oppression Punishment
Further Reading	Zeleza, P. T., ''Gender Bias in African Historiography'' in O. Oyewumi, ed., *African Gender Studies: A Reader*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, 207–232.
Addenda	Occasion: staged Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking Researcher: Divine Che Neba Assistant researcher: Jean Kouotou

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