Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Nifo'o by Peter Tancho", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Eleanor A. Dasi and Elizabeth Hale. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/441. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Peter Tancho

Nifo'o

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Underworld





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

General information	
Title of the work	Nifo'o
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	March 6, 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 Elizabeth Hale, University of New England, ehale@une.edu.au

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 Tancho (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 75 (in 2018)

Social status: Notable

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

Nifo'o: The principal shrine in Bafut. It is believed that all the missing (dead) chiefs in Bafut reside there.

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. The Mbebili 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

* Shu Abenego Che and Tanda Insidore in *The History of Bafut* (accessed: April 20, 2018).

Summary

Once upon a time,

At *nkwih tinso'o**

There lived an old man,

Who owned a raffia bush.

His name was Asa'ankieh,

This man was an excellent tapper

Nobody in the village could tap

The type of wine he was producing,

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He could tap more than,

The present chief's tapper.

THE RAFFIA BUSH HE HAD

COULD COVER MORE THAN

FIVE MOUNTAINS.

Since the raffia bush was too large,

And he had numerous palms to tap a day,

He was forced to construct a small hut

Near the Nifo'o,

Where he could stay,

And carry out his tapping regularly.

People who had raffia bushes nearby

Started a small settlement around the Nifo'o.

The people who settled there could hear

Strange voices coming out of the Nifo'o.

They could hear

Babies crying in the Nifo'o.

They could also hear

People hewing wood in the Nifo'o.

The whole place was always busy.

But when the people approached the Nifo'o,

Only the pool of water was seen there.

They attempted to throw stones in it

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But no stone could enter it.

(Narrator turns to the audience)

Today if you throw a stone into the Nifo'o.

It will not enter there;

Even the leaves from the trees

That surround the Nifo'o,

Cannot fall into the Nifo'o.

My dear brother,

(says the narrator)

Nobody knew exactly

Where the noise was coming from

Nor those who produced it.

The noise was haunting.

(Narrator raises his hand and throws it on his labs)

(Audience interrupts)

"You know that goose pimples are appearing on my body"

"Are you a woman?"

(Narrator continues)

Each day when the tapper

Came to tap his wine,

Most of the calabashes

Were empty,

He let it go.

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But the collection of wine

By this unknown person, persisted.

Many things came in to his mind:

Maybe the calabashes were porous.

He bought new calabashes,

But discovered that

It was not the problem.

He continued his investigation.

One day, he decided to hide

And trap down this thief.

As he laid on the ground to wait,

A raid of driver-ants and a stormy downpour

Chased him away.

The next day,

He thought all was over.

As he realized that the ants were no longer there.

He laid down once more

To track the person

Who had been stealing his wine.

He was again driven by,

The same raid of driver-ants

And a stormy downpour.

He attempted the third, fourth, fifth

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Sixth, seventh, eighth, ninth and

Tenth time.

The same thing happened.

He knew something was wrong.

He told his neighbours and many

Advised him to see a diviner.

Only a diviner would tell him what

Was going wrong.

He went out for one.

He met one,

He threw his *nikwabi*** on the ground,

“Jac jac jac"***

He shook the cowries in his palms

“Tsaki “tsaki “tsakin”tsaki”****

He threw them on the ground and revealed that

Nifo’o was a sacred ground,

Occupied by spirits,

He also revealed that

Missing chiefs in Bafut*****,

Have chosen Nifo’o as their place of habitation.

The diviner asked the man whether

He planted those raffia palms

He said, “NO.”

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He advised him that,

Each time he taps his wine,

He should fill a clean calabash with some wine and

Keep it for the owner of the palm bush.

He showed a spot under a particular tree in the bush

Where this wine would be kept.

He returned,

But violated what the diviner said.

The next morning,

The wine was still emptied.

But this time,

The driver ants were not there.

He stood wondering.

Many questions were coming up,

Why did I not listen to the diviner?

But who is collecting this wine?

WHY? WHY?

As he was asking these questions,

There was a strange noise behind him.

He stood up,

Saw a very large snake,

I mean, a very large snake.

(Narrator insinuates) Such snakes

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Do not appear today again.

The snake was moving towards Asa'ankieh.

He was petrified,

There was a strange noise behind him;

He wanted to run,

But stopped again

As the snake was at close range.

He discovered that there was a cowry on its head.

It opened a big lit that was hiding its face,

The face was that of a human being,

Asa'ankieh. almost escaped,

The snake cautioned him:

"Listen,

*I am the late fon******,*

I have been visiting this

Palm bush several times.

I like your wine,

Each day that you tap this wine,

Take that calabash

(He pointed behind Asa'ankieh)

Behind you

Fill it with fresh wine

And place it behind this raffia tree,

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Upon your return the next morning,

Check the same spot and collect your reward.

My children,

Nkwih tinso'o is a small hill that leads down to Nifo'o.

This place is in Bukari*******

So this incident caused many problems at Bukari.

(audience) How?

(narrator continues) A dog that hurries

Much is always late.

Are you in a hurry?

Or do you want to go to bed?

(all) No.

(narrator continues)

Asa'ankieh almost became the greatest hunter in the village,

Everyday he collected a deer behind

His raffia palm in return for the wine.

It persisted for a long time.

The whole Bukari was against him

Because he was not from that village.

Some hunters were very angry.

Worst of all,

These animals were not taken to the palace.

The whole population was angry.

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A message was sent to the Chief,

The Chief ordered the people to tie him up.

Who is he to be eating the Chief's meat?

(Aside) *you know that there are certain animals that*

Individuals are not supposed to consume.

One morning,

The whole village entered Asa'ankieh compound.

He was caught and tied up.

He stayed in the house for some days,

The missing chief visited the raffia palm bush several times,

He discovered that his tapper was no more coming.

He visited the area several, times and saw nobody.

(the narrator arranges the firewood

That was burning and asks

Those who were sitting in the opposite

Direction to do same)

After sometime,

Asa'ankieh. was released.

Immediately he was released,

He went back to his raffia bush.

On his arrival,

The snake was there again

It opened its human face and asked

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"Where have you been all this while?"

Asa'ankieh. replied,

"The Bukari people almost killed me

For eating the chief's animals.

I was caught and tired up,

Look at my swollen legs."

The snake said,

"I WILL PUNISH THEM

Go back to your house,

The village gong will be played

In the night by the town crier (herald)

He will be calling all Bukari people for a village hunt.

He will announce that monkeys

Will finish the corn at nkwih tinso'o.

This news will go round the village,

Everybody will be out,

Even the present chief,

Everybody will be out for this village hunt.

BUT DO NOT COME OUT

STAY IN YOUR HOUSE"

Asa'ankieh nodded.

He went back to his house

He did not tell the story to anybody.

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At midnight,

Immediately after the crowing of the cocks,

The town crier came out

With his gong

(the narrator stands up)

BUKARI PEOPLE ARE YOU ALIVE EE

BUKARI PEOPLE ARE YOU ALIVE EE

EVERYBODY SHOULD COME OUT OOO

EVERYBODY SHOULD COME OUT OOO

FOR MONKEYS WILL FINISH OUR CORN AT NKWIH TINSO'O OOO

EVERYBODY SHOULD COME OUT OOO

FOR MONKEYS WILL FINISH OUR CORN AT NKWIH TINSO'O.

The news went round and

Everybody came out with his light.

Everybody, even the Chief

Came out with his light

But Asa'ankieh did not come out.

All roads were leading down to *nkwih tinso'o*.

Nkwih tinso'o is the last hill that you descend

Before entering Nifo'o

Everybody was only struggling with his light

To see the footpath

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Thus everybody was looking on the ground.

Everybody was only descending.

As they were descending,

As they were descending eee,

They started entering the Nifo'o,

One after other, one after the other.

By the time they arrived,

The entrance had opened its mouth

And the water was no more producing any noise.

There was a big inlet and, without knowing

Everybody went in.

The Chief of Bukari was still behind

He was following gently with his own light,

When he wanted to look up,

He saw a waterfall above and cried.

OH! HO! MY PEOPLE ARE ALL GONE!

Immediately the waterfall started

Falling and blocked the way into the Nifo'o.

Before this the whole village

Was already in the abyss of the Nifo'o.

Only the Chief and the three attendants

Who were behind him

Remained.

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That is why the population

Of Bukari people in Bafut is too small.

Part of the Bukari people are living inside the Nifo'o.

Narrator: Eh… eh my children…

Every year, sacrifices are being offered,

To the gods and ancestors of the Nifo'o

It has remained like that up to this day.

People do not throw stones into it;

People do not shout around this area;

Anybody who violates the laws,

Moderating all visitors to Nifo'o

Is never spared by its inhabitants.

Punishment to defaulters,

Ranges from mystical

And instantaneous dumbness,

Deafness, madness, blindness,

Or death.

Living examples are found in Bafut.

Apart from the extra –ordinary tranquility

That reigns around the waterfall,

The fall has much in stock.

As the water falls,

The ox-bow lake that it creates,

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Remains clean.

* This is the last hill near the Nifo'o.

** Cowries mixed with stones and colanut peelings used by diviners to foretell events.

*** Noise produced as the diviner shakes his cowries to perform his ritual.

**** Ibid.

***** The Bafut people and other chiefdoms in the North West region of Cameroon believe that their chiefs do not die but get missing.

****** The word "fon" is the adulterated form of "mfor" (Chief or King) in most ngemba languages in the North West region of Cameroon.

******* A village in Bafut.

Analysis	The Nifoo is presented as the home of the living dead, gods and spirits of the land. These beings can serve as a blessing or curse to the living. The Bukari people were only translated from the world of the living to that of the living dead. Till date the place is seen as the home of missing chiefs.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Underworld
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Punishment Religious beliefs Respect Society Talking animals

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Further Reading

Geldard, Richard, *The Traveler's Key to Ancient Greece: A Guide to Sacred Places*, Wheaton: Quest Books/Theosophical Pub. House, 2000.

Gray, Martin, *Sacred Earth: Places of Peace and Power*, New York: Sterling, 2007.

Addenda

Researcher: Divine Che Neba.

Method of data collection: Note-taking.

Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke and Eleanor A. Dasi.

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