Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: Extinction of the Life Giving Grass / Extinction of the Herb of Immortality by Mofor Nchinda", peer-reviewed by 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/145. Entry version as of November 02, 2026.

Mofor Nchinda

Extinction of the Life Giving Grass / Extinction of the Herb of Immortality

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	Extinction of the Life Giving Grass / Extinction of the Herb of Immortality
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Ngemba
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Cameroon
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	August 22, 2017
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Place of performance: Awing
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	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



Mofor Nchinda (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 60/65 (in 2017)

Social status: Notable

Profession: Farming

Language of narration: Ngemba/Awing

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Cultural Background*: Awing

The Awing people of the North West region of Cameroon originated from the North East of Congo, moved to Widikum and then to their present settlement today among the Upper Ngemba tribes. A legend re-enforces that they originated from the Bantu roots of East Africa. They belong to the upper Ngemba tribe of Bamenda central. Awing has spectacular scenery, including a hilly landscape and Lake Awing, and is a popular tourist site. Lake Awing is the major shrine where most sacrifices in the village take place. It provides an ultimate touristic splendor to the inhabitants of Santa sub-division in the North West Region and beyond, and supports a thriving agriculture industry. In many legendary myths, Lake Awing is the abode of the village numerous gods, which requires annual appeasement to guarantee fertility, peace and love in the land.

Occasion: Staged performance

*Sources:

Tangwing pius monji, *The Awing Fondom of the North West Region of Cameroon*, all-about-cameroon.com (accessed: July 8, 2019).

Summary

Long time ago,

There lived a woman.

This woman had many children.

Fifteen.

(Audience retorts) FIFTEEN?

(Narrator continues)

You think the olden days

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Were like today.

A man's riches

Were measured by the number

Of children and wives he had.

(Narrator turns to the audience):

Can I continue?

(Audience answers in chorus)

Yes.

(He clears his voice without thunderous cough)

One day,

This woman,

Took all her children to the farm.

They worked, worked and worked

Until,

Everybody was tired and thirsty.

They retired to a shed

In the farm,

Sat there,

And were eating.

They ate to everybody's satisfaction.

A wine-tapper came

Begged for some food.

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The woman refused,

He left.

They were thirsty,

Another wine-taper was passing,

They begged for some wine.

The wine-tapper said,

The wine was just enough

For his family.

Their throats started cracking,

It was burning in their throats,

The mother decided to send one

Of the daughters to fetch them some

Water.

The girl left.

Below their farm was a big stream.

In the stream,

There was a water animal,

Always causing turbulence in the

Stream.

As the girl descended to fetch

The water,

The water animal was disturbing,

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The girl waited for long

The water could not settle

The girl was angry

Shouted at the animal

“STOP THAT,

Are you the owner of this stream?”

The water animal did not reply.

It continued its activity.

The girl was very angry,

Got a stone,

Threw it at the water animal

It roared moooh, moooh.

The water animal in turn

Took the same stone,

Shot it at the girl.

She fell down and died.

Her mother waited for her

They waited,

Waited and waited

Until the sun was about setting,

Another daughter was sent

To go and look for her.

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As she arrived near the stream,

She saw,

She saw,

Her sister.

Lying dead.

The water was very dirty.

As she wanted to check

What had happened,

She saw the wild animal,

Staring at her,

With red eyes.

The anger in her,

Made her to approach the animal.

“WHAT IS WRONG WITH MY

SISTER?

WHO HAS KILLED HER?”

The animal replied:

“As your sister came here

She wanted to kill me;

She ordered me to leave this stream

MY HOME” (the narrator opens his eyes and places his hand on his chest).

I refused,

She wanted to kill me,

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But l killed her because she failed.

That is why she is lying there.

Before the wild animal finished its

Speech,

The girl's sister

Picked up a stone,

Threw it at the water animal,

And the wild animal,

In turn,

Picked up the same stone,

Threw at the girl,

She fell down,

And died.

The woman waited and waited,

Her children did not return.

She sent the third, fourth,

Fifth, sixth, seventh, eighth,

Ninth, tenth, eleventh, twelfth,

Till the last child.

The same thing happened.

The animal killed all the children.

It was getting dark.

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The woman went home and

Narrated the story to her husband.

The husband told her that

This animal had killed

Many people in the village.

He said,

It has touched the wrong person.

He left his house with blood in his

eyes,

His gun, spears, cutlasses

He filed the spears and cutlasses

Until they were as shining as the

Sun.

He left for the stream.

When he arrived at the stream,

The animal was still disturbing

The water.

He jumped into the stream,

With his gun, spears and cutlasses.

Fought with the animal,

For seven days

Until the animal

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Had to surrender.

He dragged the animal out of the

Stream,

Ordered him

To bring back his children.

The animal cut a tree -leaf,

Folded it

In a funnel-like-manner,

Put water in it,

Released the droplets of the water

Into the nostrils of the man’s children, who were all lying dead.

All the fifteen children

Came back to life.

The man was very happy.

Took back his children.

That was not all for the water animal.

The man promised that the animal

Must be killed.

He told the chief of the village that

He has seen the animal

That has been disturbing

And killing people in the village.

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The village chief was happy and

Ordered him to kill it.

With the powers from the chief,

The husband of the woman decreed that

The Life -Giving grass should be off-rooted and burnt

In all parts of the village

Without which

It will be difficult to kill the

Water animal forever.

Within seven days,

The Life-Giving grass was uprooted and burnt.

Not a trace of it could be found

After seven days.

Then, the man dug a hole

At the courtyard of the chief's palace,

Covered it with a mat

And palm fronds,

Then threw some soil on the mat and palm fronds.

Nobody could see the trace of the mat or palm fronds,

He suspended a chair,

Well decorated;

The chair could only

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Be compared to the chief s throne.

The children who had been brought back to life

Had to organize a ceremony

At the courtyard,

Since their father was an important

Person in the village.

They hid their father

Not very far from the courtyard.

The quarter heads of other parts of the village

Were invited.

The water animal, owner of ALL the

Streams, was invited.

The day came.

There was general dancing,

All the invited guests were coming

All honoured guests were taken to their

Seats and the water animal was escorted

To his seat and invited to sit down.

As the animal released its weight on the seat,

It fell into a deep hole beneath "buum"

The people hurriedly filled the hole,

And that is how misery started in this village.

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This is the end of my story.

Analysis	The worries and riddles of life have pressurized Africans, including the Awing people of the North West Region of Cameroon, to seek means of deliverance, succor and/or have a good mastery of their immediate surroundings. These urges made them to be observant, experimental and inquisitive about the survival means of even the animals and birds around them. The end-result of these inquiries, to an extent, has been the virility of plants to human health, not as a means of making them immortal, as was the case in the past, but as means of survival, awaiting death. Like the Awing people of Cameroon, most mythological traditions associate plants with birth or rebirth. Most plants in the Awing are medicinal, and the indigenes resort to them when they are sick. The myth above shares the motif of a miraculous plant with the ancient Mesopotamian myth, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, wherein Gilgamesh loses the herb of immortality. Gilgamesh's plant provides an example of how plants are used as symbols of rejuvenation and life as a whole. Many Indo-European and Chinese myths also elaborate on the theme of the herb of immortality.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Death Emotions Family Life Magic Parents (and children) Survival
Further Reading	*The Epic of Gilgamesh*. Teeter, Donald E., *Amanita Muscaria: The Herb of Immortality*, ambrosiasociety.org (accessed: April 24, 2019).

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Miller, Allen Richard, *The Magical and Ritual Use of Herbs*, Vermont: Destiny Books, 1993.

Addenda

Method of data collection: Tape recording and note taking.

Researcher: Divine Che Neba.

Research Assistant: Mbangwana Nghem.

Editor: Eleanor A. Dasi.

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