Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: An Orphan Girl and Her Stepmother by Joseph Ndipowah Teneng", 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/429. Entry version as of November 05, 2026.

Joseph Ndipowah Teneng

An Orphan Girl and Her Stepmother

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype



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

General information	
Title of the work	An Orphan Girl and Her Stepmother
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Pinyin
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	October 3, 2016
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



Joseph Ndipowah Teneng (Storyteller)

Social status: Commoner

Profession: Farmer

Language of narration: Pinying

Age of Narrator: 68 (in 2017)

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

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: Pinyin constitutes one of the villages in Ngemba. Ngemba lies between Longitude 100 12' and 100 47' East of Greenwich Meridian and latitude 5045' and 6018' North or the Equator. Asobo Pius in *Mother Tongue Influence on English Language in Cameroon: A Case Study of the Pinyin Language** notes that the Pinyin people serve as universal sets of the Ngembas of the North West Region and the Bamboutous of the Western Region. Thus, the Pinyin language, accordingly shares some intelligibility with the Bamboutous Language because of family and trade links. Like most Ngemba people, they believe in God, divinities, spirits, ancestors and the practice of magic and medicine. For them, as is the case with most Ngemba villages, there is no such thing like natural death.

Occasion: Staged

* Asobo, Pius. *Mother Tongue Influence on English Language in Cameroon: A Case Study of the Pinyin Language*, ENS, University of Yaounde 1: DIPES II dissertation, 1999.

Summary

Long time ago

There was a man

Who was so handsome.

He had two wives.

The first was very, very beautiful,

The second was not so beautiful.

The first wife gave birth to a girl child,

The man was happy.

Because that was part of his wealth.

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He had a friend who started

Betrothing this little girl at birth,

He would always bring him firewood,

And roast meat.

The man planted a kola nut tree for the daughter

The daughter had everything that one can imagine.

Dresses, enough food, bracelets, necklaces, and others.

One day the little girl's parents went on a journey.

On their way back,

As they were crossing a stream after a heavy rainfall,

They drowned.

The second wife was very happy.

At their death,

The kola nut tree was like this (he shows the height with his hand).

The honey days for the girl

Became very bitter as bitter vegetables*;

She was obliged to stay

In the care of the step-mother (narrator turns and asks):

Do you know what usually happens with an orphan's game?

(There is silence and he continues)

The game is usually being divided un-skinned**.

As orphans prefer to swim at the banks of the river,

This child was very careful;

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And she was ready to accept and

Do whatever thing the stepmother

Wanted her to do.

The stepmother treated her as a slave.

She had no time to rest;

She was more than a running stream.

When this girl could no more bear the burden,

She left,

Went to her younger uncle,

Reported all what was happening in the house.

All the treatment that she has been receiving.

The uncle had just returned from

Harvesting her child's birth kola nuts,

I mean the kola nut planted by her father when she was born.

The complaints meant nothing to him,

As he was more concerned with the peeling of his kola nut.

He was afraid that if he took sides with this girl,

The small gifts he has been receiving

From the girl's stepmother might be suspended.

He too had thought of taking her

As his second wife.

He paid little or no attention to the girl,

Told her to have a stronger heart.

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The girl left disappointed.

On her way back,

She came across food thrown

By women on the way to their farms.

She collected all the food,

And continued her journey.

She arrived at a small stream with a small bridge.

Near the bridge, was an egg.

The egg shook,

She wiped her face (the narrator unconsciously wipes his own face)

Looked again,

The egg shook again,

She talked to the egg and asked,

“Can you relieve me from this trauma?

Push me into this stream.”

The egg said,

“My dear, I am not the type to add your troubles,

You are too young for this,

A beautiful girl like you

Should not take death as an option,

You know I could not sleep because of you.”

The girl was surprised,

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Gave some of the food to the egg

(A member of the audiencewas surprised and asks)

FATHER, WHAT DO YOU MEAN?

DO EGGS HAVE MOUTHS

TO COMMUNICATE WITH HUMANBEINGS?

OR HOW DID THIS OCCUR?

(Narrator comes back)

My daughter,

In the beginning,

These things were possible,

This story is something that happened long ago,

So only our great grandparents could explain

How eggs were able to communicate with human beings.

(Narrator continues)Where did I end?

Audience: where the girl gave food to the egg.

(Narrator comes back)

The egg collected the food.

Ate everything, and was very satisfied.

Then it told the beautiful orphan:

“As you progress,

If you encounter a woman on your way,

In her farm,

Using her buttocks to hold her hoe,

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Do not laugh at her,

Only greet her and pass."

As the girl was moving ahead,

She came to the place where

A woman was on her farm,

She saw the hoe on her buttocks.

Greeted her,

Gave her some of the food she had,

The woman was very happy,

Thanked her,

And told her,

"At the junction after this farm,

There are two main roads,

Follow the bushy road on the right

Until you arrive at the compound

Where people are feasting.

Many people will want your hand,

Do not accept the man who is well dressed

And shining as the queen of the stars,

The man who is tattered,

Should be your best choice,

YOU HEAR ME?"

Yes mother:

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As honest as she was,

She followed the instructions of the old woman.

At last, she got married to the shabby-looking man.

They lived together happily

Had many children,

Many farms,

She transported some of the food

To her wicked stepmother.

The stepmother saw what was happening.

She could not believe how this girl had her luck.

All her children had no husbands,

She intentionally drove the first daughter,

To her uncle,

She went and complained to the uncle,

The uncle welcomed her,

Gave her food, and told her that God will

Bless her anywhere she goes.

She left and was going,

She saw food that was thrown along her way.

She was stepping on the food.

Suddenly, she arrived near a small stream,

Just near the bridge, lay an egg.

She asked in commanding voice,

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WHO IS THAT ALONG MY WAY?

The egg wanted to talk,

She hurriedly smashed it,

And it burst-peeeap.

(Laughter from the audience)

She continued her journey,

She reached where

The woman, with the hoe on her buttocks,

Was working on her farm,

She fell down and laughed,

Until her ribs almost cracked.

She stood up and said,

“Why did God punish you like that?”

The woman did not answer,

But however told her,

“As you are going,

There is a junction after this farm,

Take the bushy road on your right until you reach where

The people will want your hand,

Do not accept the man who is well dressed,

Take the tattered man as your husband.”

(She grumbled)

Odd things like odd ones.

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How can a beautiful girl like me

Choose to take a bushy path

And a tattered man,

Well I do not have anything

To do with ugly things.

She left, took the clean road on her left.

As she approached where people were drumming,

The drums were moving further,

She followed and

Followed,

Until she arrived in a country

Where the people were cannibals.

They caught her, killed her,

And that was the end of her life.

My story ends here.

(Everybody in the audience took a long breath after the narration of the story).

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* A kind of vegetable that is very bitter.

** An African proverb which means orphans are always maltreated because there is no one to back them up.

Analysis

An Orphan Girl and her Stepmother falls into the category of myths about the suffering of orphans at the hands of their stepmothers and how through obedience, hard work and perseverance, the orphans

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finally obtain wealth, fame and/or power. A good case in point is the story of Cinderella with which children all over the world are familiar. However this particular myth is reminiscent of the famous Shakespeare's expression in *The Merchant of Venice*: "all that glitters is not gold"*, as well as the biblical counsel that the road to heaven is narrow and tread by few**. It also brings to light the universal literary theme of appearance versus reality.

The egg that speaks to the orphan child can be linked to the universal mythological egg symbolism. This can be explained by the fact that eggs are present in various cultures all over the world and symbolise growth, life and fertility.

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* This proverb dates back to 12th century French theologian Alain de Lille who wrote: "Do not hold everything gold that shines like gold." Geoffrey Chaucer also expressed the same idea in his poem *The House of Fame* (1380) when he wrote: "Hit is not all gold, that glareth.", after: www.phrases.org.uk (accessed: August 22, 2018).

** Matthew 7.14.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Archetype
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Family Justice Oppression Orphans Relationships Society Step-parents Supernatural creatures (non-classical)
Further Reading	Luminet, Jean-Pierre, *Creation, Chaos, and Time. From Myth to Modern Cosmology*, arxiv.org (accessed: August 22, 2018).

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Addenda

Researcher: Divine Che Neba.

Assistant researcher: Nadege Manka’a.

Method of data collection: Tape-recording.

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

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