Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: The Origin of Eternal Death by Lawrence Teneng", 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/449. Entry version as of November 07, 2026.

Lawrence Teneng

The Origin of Eternal Death

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Origin of Eternal Death
Country of the First Edition	Cameroon
Country/countries of popularity	Cameroon
Original Language	Pinyin
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	Pinyin
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults and adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Eleanor A. Dasi, University of Yaoundé 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



Lawrence Teneng (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 65 (in 2018)

Social status: Commoner

Profession: Mason

Language of narration: Pinyin

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaounde 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 10º 12' and 10º 47' East of Greenwich Meridian and latitude 5º 45' and 6º 18' 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 it is the case with most Ngemba villages, there is nothing like natural death.

Occasion: Staged

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

Summary

Long, long time ago,

People used to die and come back to life.

Life by then was eternal.

There was resurrection after death,

Old people died and came back young.

(The audience interrupts),

"What do you mean by dying and coming back young?"

(Narrator continues), "Have you ever seen a snake, and what happens to it? At old age, it sheds the old layer and becomes young." The period of death, was the period for the old to shed off their old coats and become young again. (Audience nods)

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There came a time when the population was fast growing.

The old were giving no room for the young to express their own ideas,

Many people showed superiority

By talking about the various generations they have gone through.

One day, a quarrel broke out among all the animals and men on the issue of resurrection.

The problem now was:

Should man die an everlasting death or should he die and come back?

A group of people and animals were

In favour of resurrection after death,

While another group was against resurrection after death.

It was difficult to strike a balance.

The opposing camps started abusing each other.

God wanted to resolve this problem,

And so summoned both camps.

He asked them to take a unanimous decision.

The people started shouting at each other,

God stopped them and asked them

To send an emissary on what they had decided,

Whether to die and resurrect,

Or to die forever.

It took them some thousand years to take the decision.

By that time,

The major tool for communication was the talking drum.

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The people finally came to a consensus.

Two animals were selected to represent each party –

The toad and the chameleon.

The toad stood for dying and coming back,

While the chameleon was for dying forever.

(Audience comes in), “So it is the chameleon that made us to be what we are today.”

(Rest of the audience and narrator), “of course, yes.”

(Audience continues): “I will never spare any chameleon I see.”

Narrator: “Is it the chameleon that will spare you?”

(Everybody laughs and immediately there is silence and the narrator continues).

These two animals were dispatched

To sound the talking drum,

To the hearing of God.

The message of the toad was that,

RESURRECTION OO, AFTER DEATH OOO;

RESURRECTION OO, AFTER DEATH OOO;

RESURRECTION OO, AFTER DEATH OOO.

That of the chameleon was,

IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

IF YOU DIE, GO FOR EVER.

Each of the animals mastered what it would say.

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They were finally dispatched for the journey.

The people who were for resurrection after death

Knew that man had conquered death,

Since the toad would arrive first.

Everybody stayed behind and was waiting;

But do you people know what happened?

(The narrator opens his eyes wide and wrinkles his face)

(Audience in chorus) NO!

(Narrator continues), *the toad, on his way, saw a swamp of termites flying.*

The chameleon was still far behind.

The toad thought it wise to stop and eat some of the termites.

As it was eating *eee*

The chameleon came quietly,

Saw him,

Passed his way,

And was dancing and moving, to the direction of the *talking drum*.

The toad spent some time eating the termites.

When he thought of continuing his journey,

He heard a sound.

He could not believe what was happening.

He listened, he listeeened.

The drums were sounding high,

IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

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IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

IF YOU DIE, DO NOT COME BACK OO;

IF YOU DIE, GO FOREVER.

The message went directly to God.

The toad took many leaps

But arrived at the time

When the chameleon had already sounded his message.

He passed and wanted to cancel the message of the chameleon

But the talking drum could not talk.

The toad came back,

To the greatest dismay of his camp.

That is why today, people die and go forever.

The chameleon had our fate in his hands.

Analysis

Life and death are phenomena that science and philosophy have found difficult to convincingly explain. These puzzling questions can only be answered by myths though these myths have different explanations based on the cultures from which they emanate. However, most of these myths revolve around stories of vengeful, disobedient and/or trickster characters, human or animal, who provoked the creator's anger and he withdrew immortality from man as punishment. This myth is particularly similar to the myth of the origin of death in cultures across Africa especially the Bantus, Kenya, Tanzania and Mozambique.

The universality and mystery of death as a feature in human existence has occasioned peoples of different cultures to look for explanations to this phenomenon. It has therefore become a common theme in myths

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	across world cultures and cosmologies. The myth shares the motif of an animal race in order to deliver the message to god with the myth entitled *Why People Die and Do Not Come Back*.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Gods
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Communication Death Humanity Life Religious beliefs Success and failure
Further Reading	Abrahamsson, Hans, *The Origin of Death*, New York: Arno Press, 1977. Boas, Franz, "The origin of death", *The Journal of American Folklore* 30.118, (1917). Beier, Ulli, *The Origin of Life and Death,* London: Heinemann, 1966.
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba. Assistant researcher: Nadege Manka'a. Method of data collection: Note-taking. Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke and Eleanor A. Dasi.

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