Divine Che Neba, Aïcha Saïd Larissa, "Entry on: The Enormous Monster [Burma-Te-Dge] by Brey Houzibe", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke, Katarzyna Marciniak and Karolina Anna Kulpa. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2020). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/1014. Entry version as of October 31, 2026.

Brey Houzibe

The Enormous Monster [Burma-Te-Dge]

Chad

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Slavery in Africa





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

General information	
Title of the work	The Enormous Monster [Burma-Te-Dge]
Country of the First Edition	Chad
Country/countries of popularity	Chad
Original Language	Ngambays
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Chad
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	December 30, 2019
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Abeche, Nord of N'djamena
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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Creators



Brey Houzibe (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 53 (in 2019)

Social status: Notable

Profession: Teaching

Language of narration: Ngambays

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Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Burma-Te-Dge: Literary meaning “an enormous monster” in the language of the Ngamays people.

Background*: Abéché, the capital of Ouaddaï Region, is located in south-eastern Chad and is surrounded by Sao and Chao. It is reported to have been the settlement of Ouaddai Muslim sultanate, before the 1912 French colonisation. Tombs of former sultans can still be visible in the region. Abéché remains a pastoral economy where farming is the chief activity. Men dominate most sectors of the society and women handle family responsibilities like housework and childcare. In addition, they maintain nuclear families that practise polygamy and respect community elders. The patrilineal system of inheritance is significant among them. Oracular practices and divination, ancestor veneration, belief in spirits and ideas of fertility are invaluable to the Abéché.

Sources:

Fuchs, Peter, "Nomadic Society, Civil War, and the State in Chad", *Nomadic Peoples* 38 (1996): 151–162.

Chad, everyculture.com (accessed: May 4, 2020).

Summary

In the beginning, among the Ngambays people of Mundu in the South of Chad, there lived a young pregnant woman, who constantly went out to fetch wood in a nearby forest. While in the forest, she wanted to lift a big log of wood, and suddenly her baby came out of her womb together with the placenta. In this village, the placenta was considered as a second baby. She took the placenta home and abandoned the real baby in the forest. After a long time, an old woman who had also been fetching wood in the same forest found the baby and took it home. As the baby was growing up, she was treated as a slave. One day, this slave-girl mistakenly hit the biological daughter of the old woman with a pounding stick as both of them were jointly pounding millet in a wooden container. The biological daughter of the old woman responded angrily saying: “How you dare hit me? You who

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was gotten as a foundling by my mother in the forest?" The slave girl replied by singing a melancholic song as follows:

"Verily I am the child of the first wife, she who fabricates beautiful calabashes.

I am the child of Dila, he who fabricates knives, jets and spears in the forge."

Upon hearing this melody, the old woman apologized to the girl for all the mistreatment. To make amends, the old woman offered her calabashes and clay pots and sent her back to where she came from. She was accompanied by a crow to her destination, where her legitimate father immediately recognized her and welcomed her. After a great reception offered by her father, he threw away the "placenta-baby", to keep her real daughter (i.e. the "slave girl" now returns to real parents), but her mother secretly took the placenta-baby to the forest, kept it under a big tree and gave it sesame as food, and then ran away. From then, placenta-baby swore to avenge her abandonment. As she lamented her situation aloud, a hyena appeared to share her food, and they became friends. One day, hyena was trying to hunt a goat without the permission of the owner of the goat and placenta-daughter reported to the owner. Hyena was unhappy and decided to get rid of Placenta by throwing her into a big fire, which had been lit by some other person to use the ashes to make salts. Placenta became more furious for obvious reasons: not only has hyena failed to help her avenge her abandonment as he promised; he has now thrown her into the fire. Placenta remained determined to take her revenge, even if she becomes ash. She planned that when she is burnt and her ash is put into a calabash and taken to the village, she would metamorphose into an enormous monster (Burma-Te-Dge), and would swallow all the inhabitants of the village, including animals. When indeed she was burnt and her ashes taken to the village, she turned into a big monster, swallowed everything in the village, and the only person who managed to escape was her sibling, the "Slave girl", now pregnant. She gave birth to twins: Mbairo and Dila, who grew up and started asking questions about who their father was. Their mother then narrated the story of how their father had been swallowed by Burma-Te-Dge, together with all living things in the village. The three of them decided to take arms against Burma-Te-Dge. Hidden behind a tree, they called the name of the monster aloud: "Burma-Te-Dge!" "Burma-Te-Dge!" "Burma-Te-Dge!" As the monster appeared to swallow them, the twins (Mbairo and Dila) succeeded in killing it.

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When it was killed, they operated it and all the villagers and animals he had swallowed were liberated from his stomach. The twins: Mbairo and Dila became joined-rulers the clan.

Analysis

Orphanhood is a cause for concern in many communities from antiquity to present. This is rooted in the challenges therein and the overt discrimination meted out on orphans by the society*. The same society that discriminates against them has not totally given a deaf ear to their plight. Communities, to an extent, and some individuals, have found ways and means to ameliorate the condition of these victims of circumstances. Despite the crippling efforts to better their condition, they continue to be mistreated and humiliated. The Bafut people of Cameroon, whose treatment of orphans is not different from that of the Ngambays in Mundu (South of Chad), affirm in one of their proverbs that “the game of the orphan needs not be skinned before being shared”. After all, it is a game without an owner. The state of the game (not being skinned) clearly indicates that orphans are defenseless being. In a related proverb, they add: “an orphan swims only near the banks of a river”. Two things are evident in these proverbs: first, victimization and second, carefulness. The victimized must understand his status and be careful in the society because there is nobody at their side to defend them in case there is a problem. Exposed by war, migration, population displacement, death and other calamities, and entrusted in the hands of foster parents or uncaring societies, orphans are bound to undergo all sorts of ordeals in life. The abandoned child in the myth above ends up in the hands of an old woman, who raised her as a slave. Like other slaves, she is mistreated and given all difficult tasks to accomplish. Her adventure leads her into discovering her father and that notwithstanding, she ends up as a savior to her society, through her twin children Mbairo and Dila. Mbairo and Dila, as the myth records, are able to kill the enormous monster that has been a threat to the people, operate its stomach and liberate the whole village trapped in it.

* Orphans are viewed here more or less as fatherless children.

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Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	Africa
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Adventure Family Orphans Parents (and children) Supernatural creatures (non-classical) Survival Transformation Twins
Further Reading	Fitzgerald, J. T., "Orphans in Mediterranean Antiquity and Early Christianity", *Acta Theologica* (2016): 29–48 (accessed: May 4, 2020). Hubner, S. R. and D. M. Ratyzan, "Fatherless Antiquity? Perspective on 'fatherless' in Ancient Mediterranian" in S. R. Hubner, and D.M. Ratyzan, eds., *Growing up Fatherless in Antiquity*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, 3–28 (accessed: May 4, 2020). Goepp, J. C., "Rites, mythe et cohésion sociale dans une société du Sud-Ouest du Tchad: les Ngambays", *Journal des Africanistes* 50.2 (1980): 59–71 (accessed: May 4, 2020).
Addenda	Researchers: Divine Che Neba and Aïcha Saïd Larissa Assistant researcher: Seïd Houzibe (trans.) Editor: Daniel A. Nkemleke

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