Divine Che Neba, "Entry on: An Orphan Child and Her Uncle's Wife by Peter Numfor Ambe", 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/412. Entry version as of November 06, 2026.

Peter Numfor Ambe

An Orphan Child and Her Uncle's Wife

Cameroon

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Nymphs



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

General information	
Title of the work	An Orphan Child and Her Uncle's Wife
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	February 4, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Bafut
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover
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

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Creators



Peter Numfor Ambe (Storyteller)

Age of narrator: 65 (in 2016)

Social status: Quarter head

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

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 explain, the Bafut people migrated from Lake Chad down to Tikari area Northwest of Foumban, which was under 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

* See: bafutmanjongcalgary.cat (accessed: April 10, 2018).

Summary

AN ORPHAN CHILD AND HER UNCLE'S WIFE:

Long long time ago

There lived a man

Who got married and had

Just one child.

The gift that was given him during

His wedding was his late sister's daughter -

A child who had been moving

From one family member to another.

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The wife detested the gift but

Later on accepted it.

She accepted it because

Their only daughter

Was feeling very lonely.

She was still very young,

And so needed company.

The acceptance of this child

Into the new home took place after a lot of controversy.

Anyway the child found herself in the new home

And was very hard working - an ant is not as busy.

She did everything in the house

So as to please her new parents, but she was always being beaten.

Her cousin was very lazy.

Always moving at snail pace

But she was the favourite at home.

She was honoured like a queen.

Her needs were always met.

All she demanded, she had.

But her orphaned cousin

Was never appreciated despite her efforts;

She could dig places like a pig and nobody was ready

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To appreciate her efforts.

All faults committed by their child

Were transferred to the adopted child.

At certain moments,

She was obliged to carry out

Many tasks at the same time.

While all this was going on,

The proper child was constantly honoured.

The washing of dishes was done by this orphan child.

Their dishes were being washed at Takwe.*

(Narrator explains)

In the ancient times, these small

Streams that you find today were very scarce.

You could only find the takwes.

This child was often sent to wash dishes there.

One day,

As this child was sent to the stream,

To go and carry out her regular chore; washing of dishes,

One of the dishes disappeared.

She started crying but had no option

Than to returnto the house.

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(by the time the narrator

Pronounces the tragedy of this child,

Many members of the audience are

Already saying

“weh!Weh!”**

(Majority of the audience were already

Supporting their jaws with theirhands)

Sorrowfully, the child reported herself,

“father, as ..as, ..as...as I was washing the

Dishes…

(interruption from the father) WHAT?

(child shedding tears,continues)…as I

Was,

Washing,

The dishes, that your,

That your dish…

(says faster) got missing.”

They immediately fell,

On the child like rain,

Bim, bim, bim

Tuktuk, pap, bim***

At last

The child could no more walk.

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She was only crying.

(the narrator wrinkles his face

And wipes his mouth)

The aunt's husband said:

"STAND UP,

GO AND BRING THAT DISH"

I do not mean a duplicate,

WHAT I NEED IS THE DISH

MY DISH AND NOTHING ELSE"

(He shouted).

The wife of this child's uncle has been looking for means of

Sending away this child or killing her.

She once more insisted,

"GO AND BRING MY DISH".

The child left.

The woman knew that,

As this child would go down,

To look for the dish,

She would obviously drown

Since the Takwe was too big.

This would bring her some joy.

The child started searching along

The banks of the river.

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As she was searching and searching

And searching, eee (a long breathe)

She arrived at a certain place where

She saw an old woman,

This woman was completely covered with scabies.

Narrator: have you seen how

Grains of corn are packed on the stalk?

The scabies on the crone could only

Be compared to the

Grains of corn on the stalk.

As the crone saw the child coming

Down she asked,

“Where are you heading to?”

She replied, “I am looking for

My father’s dish,

I do not know whether you have seen

It as you are sitting here”

The old woman told her:

“Come near, come nearer my child,

Come and scrape-off my scabies.”

The child without hesitating,

Went and helped the woman.

The crone once more told her that

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"As you are scraping these scabies,

Eat those that make the sound

Num, num

And give me those that

Sound jeri, jeri"****

Without hesitating,

The child was scraping her scabies,

Eating the wet ones,

Which produced the num, num sound

And giving the dry ones

That were making jeri, jeri to the crone.

After working with her for a while,

The old crone thanked her.

She told her that

"I will reward your kindness;

I will tell you where you can

Get your father's dish.

Continue to move down,

You will see a house on your left,

Enter there and ask,

They will give you,

Your father's dish."

The child continued to break through the evil forest.

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She followed the river course,

And despite the meandering and

The danger of slipping into the river,

She continued.

She arrived at a place where there was a house,

As she reached there,

Towards the evening period,

Though very tired,

She was still ready,

To continue her journey.

She pitifully entered the house.

The owner of the house was a water Nymph.

She did not know.

The Nymph asked this child,

“Where are you going so late in the night?”

The child replied, “I am looking for my father’s dish.”

The water Nymph said,

“My daughter, it is too late for you to continue this search.

Come, come and sleep with me,

And tomorrow,

I will direct you to where your father’s dish is.

But there are mosquitoes in this place.

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These mosquitoes are my children.

Do well not to kill any in the night.

(Aside from performer and members of audience)

“Can one sleep with mosquitoes in the same house and not kill them”

“ Of course, one can. Have you ever paid a visit to Douala?

You will see a lake of mosquitoes.”

“You want to tell us that you have been to the coast”

“I hope the bridge going there is not broken”

(Narrator comes back) THAT IS NOT

WHY WE ARE HERE

IF YOU ALREADY KNOW THE STORY,

WALK OUT CAREFULLY.

(He continues his story)

I ended where?

(Audience) “where the water Nymph is

Declaring her love for mosquitoes”

Aha!! So, this child went to sleep,

The whole night, the mosquitoes were

Singing nyeee nyeee

Despite the noise produced,

The child was very calm.

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Very early in the morning

Her body was like the back of a toad.

She was looking extremely ugly,

With layers of rashes on her body.

The water Nymph ask:

“CAN YOU SEE THAT MOUNTAIN?”

(The narrator is pointing also)

“Go there,

At the summit of that mountain,

Are two eggs,

One will be running towards you, welcoming you,

And saying, “TAKE ME,

TAKE ME, TAKE ME!!”.

Do not attempt to touch that one.”

(Authoritatively)

“TAKE THE DUMB EGG.

DO YOU HEAR WHAT I AM SAYING?”

(The narrator holds his ears)

“Break it and you will find your

Father’s dish.”

The child answered, “YES MOTHER”

Though very tired,

She was ready to continue her search,

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Even to the point of death.

She carefully moved out of the valley,

Started climbing the mountain.

It took her some days before she could reach the summit,

Almost stooping, one of the eggs started welcoming her,

“MOTHER, MOTHER, TAKE ME

MOTHER, MOTHER, TAKE ME”

The child pushed that one aside

Proceeded toward the quiet egg,

Collected it.

Broke it.

To her greatest delight, many nice things came out,

Lorries, money, new dishes,

Her father’s dish,

Bags of rice, everything that men desire were there.

She settled near the mountain.

A new house emerged there for her.

She went home happy.

Though poorly received by the aunt and her husband,

The news went round the village

Like wild fire.

With much envy,

Her aunt and the husband,

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Asked their own daughter

To go and wash dishes.

They told her that

If she goes there,

She should throw one of the dishes into river.

She did so.

Upon her return,

The mother asked her to go and look

For the dish.

She also went out for the search.

At this time both the father,

And mother were praying

That their daughter should not drown as she was looking for the dish.

She moved down

The banks of Takwe,

Reached a certain area where

The same old woman sat

Scraping her scabies.

The girl came down,

Asked the old woman, (rudely)

“AS YOU ARE SITTING HERE

HAVE YOU SEEN,

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MY FATHER'S DISH PASS BY?"

The crone replied,

"COME AND SCRAPE MY SCABIES

BEFORE I WILL ANSWER YOU"

The girl said,

"I CANNOT TOUCH A DIRTY SKIN

LIKE THAT ONE

I AM NOT USED TO SUCH

THINGS IN OUR HOUSE"

(The narrator twists his face as he pronounces the words of the rude child)

"Anyway, continue your journey."

(Angrily)

"As you are moving down,

You will see a house on your left,

Enter there and ask for your father's dish."

The stubborn child continued her journey.

As she reached down,

She saw the house there on the left.

She entered.

Without greeting the occupant

Of the house she rudely asked:

(The narrator changes his voice,

And is virtually talking through his nostrils)

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"HAVE YOU SEEN MY FATHER'S DISH PASS BY?"

The water Nymph said it is late to answer her;

The only thing to do is to sleep and

Very early in the morning

She will show her where to

Get her father's dish.

The water Nymph also told

The stubborn child that

There are many mosquitoes in the house,

And that she loves them very much.

That she should not kill any in the night

The stubborn child replied,

"Aheeaheeeaheee,

How can mosquitoes be biting me

And I sleep like a log?"

The water Nymph did not reply.

She slept and in the night,

The mosquitoes started singing.

She was killing them one after the other.

The whole night was pap, pap, pap

(audience interrupts) "Why was she

Refusing that people should not kill the mosquitoes?"

Narrator answered:

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"You will have thinning hairs like me."

(The audience laughs)

(narrator continues)

Anyway, the mosquitoes

Were the children of the water Nymph.

Early in the morning, the water Nymph

Was too angry

She asked the girl to move up to the mountain,

"You will see two eggs at the summit.

One will be welcoming you

The other will be lying quietly

DO NOT TOUCH

THAT WHICH IS WELCOMING YOU

ARE YOU GETTING WHAT I AM SAYING?"

She answered:

"Ayeeayeeayee

How can an egg be welcoming me,

And I choose just a dumb egg?"

She carefully climbed up the mountain

Reached the summit,

As she arrived the summit,

One of the eggs came shouting,

"MOTHER, MOTHER, TAKE ME,

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TAKE ME, TAKE ME!

She bent down and collected it,

Went home,

She was warmly received by her parents.

It was announced all over the village

That she was back.

The whole village was invited

For the “egg breaking” ceremony,

The day came and she broke the egg.

All wild animals - snakes, lions,

Tigers came out and killed everybody

Who was present, even the girl.

That is the end of my story.

(everybody was satisfied)

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* Takwe refers to a big river.

** “Weh” denotes sympathy.

*** Sound produced from an indiscriminate beating, kicking and slapping.

**** The *numnum* scabies are watery while the *jeri jeri* types are dry.

Analysis

This myth highlights the trials and tribulations of an orphan heroine who is severely mistreated by her foster parents. However, by sheer dint of obedience, hard work and perseverance, she is later on rewarded with wealth and prosperity. This myth could help to give

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	hope to orphans as well as teach children and young adolescents the values of obedience and perseverance. It also sensitises foster parents to the need to treat orphans well. This implies that those who treat orphans will be rewarded while those who ill-treat them will be punished. The myth shares some motifs with the myth entitled *How Jealousy Originated in Polygamous Homes*, such as the motif of an old woman with scabies or the motif of two eggs – one with wealth as a prize, the other with snakes bringing death as a punishment.
Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions Nymphs
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Animals Disobedience Family Justice Obedience Oppression Orphans Society Violence Witch
Further Reading	Myth *How Jealousy Originated in Polygamous Homes* (accessed: January 21, 2021).
Addenda	Researcher: Divine Che Neba. Method of data collection: Note-taking. Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke and Eleanor A. Dasi.

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