The Folktale and Contemporary Theory: Psychoanalytic Reading of Three Borana Oral Narratives

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Abstract

While numerous folktales and oral narratives have been collected and analysed in the lens of classical theories, few have undergone in-depth analytical interpretation using modern theories to unravel their symbolic meanings and psychological underpinnings. This paper employs psychoanalytic theoretical framework of Sigmund Freud to analyse three Borana folktales collected from Sololo in Northern Kenya. Through this interpretive lens, the oral narratives are explored as manifestations of the cultural psyche and collective unconscious, revealing complex themes surrounding incestuous desires, gender dynamics, societal taboos, and the navigation of cultural norms. The story of Chulle and her family delves into the subconscious anxieties and desires surrounding female sexuality, challenging patriarchal authority through symbolic representations of phallic power and femininity. The tale of the girl and the chewing stick explores premarital sex taboos, and the complexities of the children born out of wedlock. The narrative of the girl and the ogre confronts deeply rooted fears of rape, male aggression, and the violation of female bodily autonomy, employing the ogre as a symbolic embodiment of societal and cultural taboos. By decoding these symbolic elements and exploring the psychoanalytic dimensions, the paper unravels the intricate interplay between individual desires, societal expectations, and the metaphorical language used to give voice to often-repressed subjects. The analysis demonstrates the potential richness of applying psychoanalytic approach to interpreting African oral narratives, contributing to a deeper understanding of the profound truths about human nature, cultural values, and collective experiences encoded within these narratives.

Key Words: *Borana, Oral Narratives, Psychoanalysis, Oedipus Complex, Folktale*

INTRODUCTION

Folklorists have debated the need to analyse and interpret folktales and folklore for all the years folklore has existed as an academic discipline. J W Powell's comments made over a century ago are pertinent. He asserts unequivocally that interpreting folklore is an attempt to ascertain the symbolic meaning of the folklore materials (Powell 1895:97). The push and pull and the resultant controversies were between those who would want to engage rigorously in the collection of folklore materials and those who would rather interpret for meaning the collected data through relevant theoretical analysis. Over the intervening years, imminent folklore scholars such as Alan Dundes have decried the dire lack of interpretation of folklore materials and scanty attention paid to the clarion call. In a paper tellingly entitled 'meta-folklore and oral literary criticism', Dundes avers that long lists of proverbs are published in folklore journals accompanied by no explanation of either use or meaning (1966:505). In Dundes's view, the raw data proverbs, folktales and other

such genres afforded by the various societies among whom research is done needed to be subjected to oral literary criticism just like written literature undergo terse literary criticism to elucidate their form, content and their inherent meaning. Ten years later, Dundes displays his own frustrations arising from the unheeded plea for interpretation in another paper entitled 'Projection in Folklore: A Plea for Psychoanalytic Semiotics' (Dundes 1976). As argued by these scholars, the task of interpretation is a noble one that explicates the collected material for thorough understanding precisely because the purpose of scholarship is to disseminate knowledge generated by humanity. Un-interpreted data has only the potential for knowledge since it is unintelligible to most people who are unfamiliar with the contextual social-cultural environment within which it was generated that would have been explained by an appropriate analytical engagement with the text. As the renowned folklorist William Bascom avers, folktales and oral narratives have long served as powerful vehicles for transmitting cultural knowledge, values, and collective experiences within African societies (1965). However, the mere collection and preservation of these tales are not sufficient; meaningful analytical interpretations are crucial to unlock their symbolic meanings and psychological underpinnings, as scholars like Alan Dundes have advocated (Dundes 1966, 1976).

The crucial question is, granted, in addition to subjecting the collected data to thorough analysis, what kind of interpretive theoretical framework can be employed to understand data? Of course the answer can be as varied as the existing theoretical frameworks available to the researcher, the content of data and the inclination of the researcher. The three oral narratives which were collected from Sololo in Northern Kenya could be analysed using the multiple classical theoretical frameworks devised by scholars such as morphological theory, diffusionist, performance, functionalism and so on, and still yield completely different results in the kind of knowledge unearthed. A scholar who chooses to interpret the three stories using performance theory would for example, focus on the performer, the audience and their reactions, the facial expressions, the tone and the dramatic elements therein. Another who chooses to analyse using Propp's Morphological theory could identify some of the 31 functions of initial situations, trickery, deceit, villainy and punishment entailed in the folktales. Such analysis no doubt yields multiple meanings for the folktales and bring out completely different but enriching readings of the stories analysed.

This paper, however, aims to contribute to this endeavour by subjecting three folktales from the Borana people of northern Kenya to psychoanalytic reading, drawing upon psychoanalytical theoretical framework rooted in the works of influential thinker, Sigmund Freud, and later developed by Carl Jung. The decision to adopt this interpretive approach is primarily guided by the complex content and themes addressed in the selected Borana folktales. These tales often grapple with intricate subjects, such as incestuous desires, forbidden knowledge, gender dynamics, and the navigation of societal norms and taboos. In addition, psychoanalytic theory, with its emphasis on the unconscious mind, repressed desires, and symbolic representations, offers a valuable lens through which to examine these narratives (Bettelheim 1991). Moreover, the symbolic analysis aligns with the inherently metaphorical nature of folktales, where characters, objects, and events frequently carry deeper symbolic significance. As Holbek (1998) suggests, fantasy in folktales serves as a primary instrument through which social conditions can be discussed, mediated, and even escaped. By decoding these symbolic elements, new insights can be gained into the cultural psyche, societal anxieties, and collective experiences encoded within the tales.

While the application of psychoanalytic interpretations to African oral literature is not entirely new, it remains a relatively under-explored area of study, particularly in the context of the Borana oral tradition. Similarly, in the wider context of the folktales in the rest of Africa, application of psychoanalytic and symbolic framework for reading such oral narratives have been attempted, although few and far between. This is attested by Mollema who asserts that 'no or little material could be found regarding a literary study in African languages concerning either Freudian applications or any of the post-structuralist psychoanalysts work' (1996:2). This is despite the fact that in her study she found 'in many of the Zulu folktales it is quite easy to demonstrate that a psychoanalytic reading reveals patterns which correspond to certain recurrent and deeply seated fears in collective subconscious' (1996:4). This paucity of relevant psychoanalytic application to African oral narratives has also been observed by Waita (2019). He subjects four Kikuyu folktales to psychoanalytic criticism and concludes that the tales demonstrate that Freudian criticism can explicate feminist and gender dimensions in African folktales, making it a veritable tool for understanding female psycho-sexual development (2019:27). Wako (2021) applied psychoanalytic interpretation to hyena stories among the Borana and opined that the hyena symbolizes people's subconscious fear of the hyena and what it represents. This paper seeks to contribute to this growing field by demonstrating the potential richness of such analysis and their ability to uncover profound truths about human nature, cultural values, and the transformative power of storytelling inherent in these narratives.

ANALYSIS

The Story of Chulle and her Family

The first story I subject to analysis is the story of Chulle and her family. This is a story in which a girl by the name Chulle flees her home after her elder brother proposes to marry her with the consent of her father who had vowed to support him whichever girl the boy wishes to marry. She was asked to take milk to her brother on his bed who had feigned sickness to grab and make love to her. On the run and alone in the wilderness, she takes refuge on a tall tree she requests to be short or tall for her to climb and sleep on. The tree obeys her plea. She is later discovered in her hideout by her younger sister tending goats and the family comes out in their number to beseech her to come down from the tree. She refuses the plea, claiming that they are now no longer her family but her in-laws. Eventually a lion comes along and pleads with her, saying he will marry her, to which she agrees on condition that if he loses a wrestling match with her he foregoes his request for marriage. She wins twice, but the third time falls down under the pretext of defeat. When they go to her home for marriage consent, her family accepts on condition that the lion successfully jumps over nine spears. The lion jumps over eight spears but the brother raises the ninth spear and the lion gets killed. Chulle could not be consoled by the kind gestures of her people to sit with them and instead chooses to sit on the spread skin of her dead lion-husband. The lion skin flies with her into the sky, forming thunder and lightning from where Chulle always smiles from above to the people on earth in intimidation and awe.

The tale of Chulle and her family is a poignant exploration of incestuous desires, gender dynamics, and the contestation of patriarchal authority. Through symbolic representations and psychoanalytic interpretations, the narrative exposes the subconscious anxieties and desires surrounding female sexuality and the challenge to male dominance within the family unit. The central conflict arises from Chulle's brother's incestuous desire to marry her, a desire explicitly supported by their father's vow to consent to whichever girl the son wishes to marry. This dynamic evokes Freudian theories

on the Oedipus complex, where the son harbours unconscious desires for his mother and views the father as a rival (Freud, 1900). However, in this case, the desire is redirected towards the sister, symbolizing a subconscious desire for power and control over female sexuality within the patriarchal family structure.

In the story of Chulle, the brother would want to have his sister for a wife. This is an incestuous relationship which the girl runs away from. By consenting to the boy's incestuous desires, the father shows himself as a weak and unassertive male. In her flight, the girl comes across a tall erect tree and requests the tree to come down for her to climb and it obliges. The tree is a phallic symbol considering that it is tall and erect, and that it can rise and come down at the command of the girl who climbs on it and gets shelter. The tree is an object that the girl can implore, toy with and manipulate to satisfy her sexual desires by asking it to rise, or shrink and to take refuge on. As Roheim (1992) avers, growing represents erection. The phallic symbolism of the tall erect tree that Chulle requests to climb and take refuge upon can be interpreted as a representation of her own sexual awakening and desire for autonomy. By commanding the tree to rise and shrink, Chulle asserts control over her sexuality, a power typically denied to women in patriarchal societies. The tree serves as a symbolic refuge from the incestuous desires of her brother and the complicity of her father, allowing her to temporarily escape the confines of familial oppression.

When her people discover her whereabouts and beg her to come down, she refuses on the grounds that her relationship to them has changed from that of parents and siblings to that of in-laws and husband. The blood ties have been severed by the incestuous relationship that was initiated by her brother and approved by her father. As Elizabeth Marshall observes, fairy tales stage scenes in which the family appears as a site of violence where rapacious fathers violate their daughters, featuring a wronged daughter in flight from the unwelcome desire of a man who is her own father or otherwise a man in power (2004:405). In the case of Chulle's story, the offending man is her brother rather her father who nevertheless supports his son's incestuous desires against societal norms. The song that is repeated over and over again in answer to all their pleas to come down from the treetop underscores the pain the girl has endured and the consequent loss of filial ties with her natal family. Hence with the incestuous relationship, the father becomes a father in-law, the mother becomes a mother in-law, the sister becomes a sister in-law and the brother, a husband.

Finally, she comes down from the tree top in answer to another suitor, the lion whom she consents to marry. The lion symbolises a physically strong male. From the point of view of the girl, her refusal to marry her brother was not only a refusal to partake in incest but also a way of refusing to marry a weaker male evident in her acceptance of the lion as a husband. By marrying the lion, the girl denies her father the means by which he maintains power and control over her. She marries on her own conditional terms that entails a wrestling match with her suitor. By deliberately falling under the weight of the lion, she becomes a willing victim of his sexual desires to penetrate and feminize her. The win over the lion also feminizes the lion, since defeat implies feminization. But because she loves him, she eventually restores his masculinity through her pretended defeat by the lion. When Chulle ultimately decides to marry the lion, a symbol of masculine strength and virility, she defies the patriarchal authority of her father and brother. However, her symbolic victory is short-lived, as her brother ultimately kills the lion through duplicitous means, representing the reassertion of patriarchal power and the denial of female agency. Chulle's transformation into thunder and lightning, towering over her mortal male kin, can be interpreted as a symbolic reclamation of power and a defiant rejection of the injustice inflicted upon her.

Furthermore, in marrying the lion, she feminises her brother by a symbolic castration. For the girl's brother, it implied emasculation and male rivalry that needed to be answered. The symbolic castration of the brother and the emasculation of the father through defiance and marrying outside his overarching authority cannot go unchallenged from the male members of the family. They get their revenge later in the story when the boy thrusts a spear into the belly of the jumping lion. Among the Borana, a spear is a symbol of manhood. Each male individual worth his salt must carry a spear. On the contrary, male elders who have passed through the *buffata* (head shaving) ceremony and have symbolically become peaceable neither touch a spear nor carry it. Nor are women allowed to carry spear, as doing so makes them symbolically men. By penetrating his lion brother-in-law, Chulle's brother thus feminises the lion and wreaks revenge for himself and his father. He thus kills his lion brother-in law to regain male power and massage his ego lost earlier through his sister's rejection and defiance of their father. In killing his lion brother-in-law, the boy engages in the theme of aggregation and duplicity. The raising of the last spear is a duplicitous trickery which was employed to get rid of the successful suitor. This act of aggression also shows in-law anxieties and subconscious fears of being attacked by their new kindred in their new home of marriage, particularly if the marital site is at the home of the girl.

For Chulle, the loss of her husband means unforgivable injury and pain. She takes flight from her people for a reunion with her husband in death. That she lightens the world with flashes in form of her laughter is a manifestation of her everlasting happiness. The reunion in eternity between Chulle and her lion-husband is evidenced by thunder where she instils fear and awe with unforgiving finality in the people by the drumming of her dead husband's skin. Even in bereavement victory belongs to her.

The story is a contestation of the patriarchal machinations of men told from the point of view of a female victim. The moral is that even though the girl is defeated in the current reality since her lion-husband is killed, the intervention of the supernatural in form of being uplifted to the sky above leads to the restoration of justice for Chulle who becomes happy ever after. It is imperative to note that she now becomes a towering figure overcast above the heads of the mortal men who denied her happiness with her chosen husband. They are, so to speak, under her mercy. By transforming herself and her late husband into thunder and lightning that essentially assumes the scary and subduing nature to mortal man, Chulle asserts her power and authority over her once powerful and intimidating father and her arrogant and self-serving brother. She emasculates them in a final and everlasting way. Having vanquished her male kindred in eternal humiliation, she enjoys an eternal bliss with the one she loves, the lion-husband.

Another symbol that needs mentioning and explanation is that of milk. Chulle's parents had asked her to take milk to her brother who feigns illness in his bedroom. Among the Borana, taking milk to a man is ideally the duty of a wife. In the story, Chulle carries out this duty with caution, having been warned by her younger sister about the plot to marry her off to the brother. When he grabs her as she brings the milk, she drops it on the ground and runs away. As Mollema (1996) observes in the context of Zulu tradition, milk can be seen as a metaphor for sexual relation and a definite symbol of fertility. Similarly, Nyongesa's study contends that cooking and serving are traditionally associated with feminine gender to signify sexual relation with the husband (2017). The Chulle story poses questions of brother-sister relationship in which offering milk plays a major symbolic role. The fact that the gesture finally aborted through the breaking of the gourd and spilling of the milk meant the non-consummation of the incestuous marriage. In Borana, there is a proverb that

goes, *feedhiin obolleti hin nadhoomsitu* (love cannot make a lover out of a sister). Both the father and his amorous son violate the wisdom of this proverb. However much you love your sister, society and natural law would not allow you to convert her to be your lover. The proverb is in the mould of superego in which the basic sexual drives of individuals are socially tampered and influenced with the morality principle.

The Story of the Girl and the Chewing Stick

The second story I analyse is that of the girl and the chewing stick. This is a story of a girl who herds her father's goats alone and comes across a chewing stick from *aade* tree left on the road by a male horse rider. She chews on it and becomes pregnant, giving birth to a baby boy whom she hides in a cave. Every morning when she comes from home and evening before she drives the flock back home, she sings to find out whether her baby is alive or dead and breastfeeds him. This goes on for a long while until one day the hyena discovers her secret and sings the same song to the child and when it innocently opens the cave for the hyena thinking his mother has come, the hyena devours it. The following morning the girl discovers to her utter dismay and sorrow that her child was not answering her song, having been killed and eaten by the hyena. Devastated, she cries her loss without telling anyone the source of her sorrow.

This folktale delves into the realms of female sexuality, societal taboos surrounding premarital sex, and the complexities of the children born out of wedlock. As noted elsewhere, fairy tales have power to transport the hero/heroine out of everyday life into an enchanted space of transformation and tend to solve the problem of how to find a wife, what to do with unwanted child and fear of forbidden knowledge such as incest, abandonment and murder (Bettelheim 1991). The chewing stick itself serves as a phallic symbol, representing male virility and the girl's repressed desire for sexual relations. The man on the horse represents an ideal masculine man. The horse is a symbol of strong sexually virile animal that is well endowed with huge phallus. The combined impression of a male horse rider to a forlorn girl herding her father's goats is so enticing and attractive so that she desires him for a husband. The chewing stick represent oral sex for the girl as chewing on it after the man drops it makes her pregnant. The girl's act of chewing on the stick left behind by the horse rider, a symbol of idealized masculinity, and subsequently becoming pregnant can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of her unconscious desire for sexual intimacy. The pregnancy, a result of her "oral sex" with the phallic chewing stick, represents the fulfilment of this repressed desire, albeit in a socially unacceptable manner (Freud 1900).

It is as if the man has dropped his phallus for her to have oral sex with it. The stick is a phallic symbol that produces semen in form of a saliva which when the girl swallows, results in her pregnancy. Borana oral tradition is replete with the place of chewing stick *(riiga)* as an instrument of sexual connotation. In one instance, a man refuses to share his long chewing stick with some excuses of the roles *riiga* (chewing stick) plays in his daily dealings. In the anecdote, he asserts that 'this part, I will chew on, this part, I hold as a handle, this part, is for flies to patch on, this part, I admire women with, and last portion is directions guide for myself on a long travel'. Here, it is interesting to note that among the functions chewing stick serves is oral hygiene and a flirtatious object for wooing women. The close connection between white teeth and female admiration is not difficult to establish given some of the songs of women in praise of men using their white teeth.

Because society does not approve of pregnancy out of a wedlock, the girl conceals her pregnancy from her people. When she gives birth, again she hides her child in a cave to protect it from danger

and social gossip. The cave represents female genital and the womb (Khan 2018). Hiding the child in a cave symbolises shielding him from society. She names the baby the chewing stick baby, thus acknowledging its illegitimate paternity. She is haunted by the fear of wild animals attacking her baby and always sings as a cue for its response, 'are you alive or dead'. This refrain in the song is central to the story that underpins her psychological discomfort that pervades the story. Through the repetition of the song, the story centralises the unwanted child, its mother and their secret communication from the hideout. By hiding the child in a secret cave, she thought she was safe until the hyena comes along. The hyena represents evil forces that literally devours not only her child but with it her secret and temporal bliss. The hyena's cruel action confirms her fears all along of her baby's precarious existence evident in her song 'are you dead or alive' refrain. The girl's decision to hide her pregnancy and her child in a secret cave reflects the societal stigma and shame associated with premarital sex and unwanted pregnancies. The repetitive refrain in her song, "Are you alive or dead?" encapsulates the psychological turmoil and anxiety she experiences, as she fears the consequences of her transgression being discovered.

The child is conceived from the saliva of a chewing stick collected from the road left behind by a prolific male horse rider. The relationship between saliva and semen as bodily secretion among the Borana is very close. The saliva is used as a spittle for blessings of people on many occasions. The semen germinates into a living being from which human and animal life, as the proverb, 'A male semen that drops in the right place is a living being,' implies. The chewing stick is from the *aade* tree, a common herb which the Borana people use for their oral hygiene, but is mostly preferred by men as an effective instrument for brushing their teeth. It is only rivalled by the chewing stick from *hagagaro* herb for which songs and oral poetry have been composed. For example, *rigaan hagagaro, si farse malla Garo,* (Your chewing stick is from *hagagaro* herb, I praise you my dear Garo) is a common line from some songs by young men in praise of women.

The propensity with which the girl chewed on the stick undergirds her desire to have oral sex with the horse rider who is the epitome of masculinity. The virility and fecundity of the two are evident in the speed with which the girl gets impregnated. Because there is a dire lack of a father figure, the girl plays the nurturing and protective role for her child by breastfeeding him and also hiding him in the cave. Breastfeeding is a phallic symbol as it signifies oral sex, and in the story this implies Oedipal desire of the child for the mother.

As a fantasy, the story depicts the uninhibited desires of the girl for sex with virile men and her morbid fear and anxiety of the consequences of such sexual indulgences. The fear of social ridicule owing to the cultural prohibition of sex before marriage and attendant pregnancy makes her hide the baby away. The futility of her action of hiding the reality of her situation from society is made bear when the ravenous hyena exposes her by eating her dear child. The symbolic act of breastfeeding her child can be interpreted as a manifestation of the Oedipal complex, where the child's desire for the mother is expressed through the oral fixation of breastfeeding (Freud 1900). The intrusion of the hyena, a symbol of malevolent forces, and its devouring of the child can be seen as a symbolic representation of the societal repercussions and ultimate destruction of the girl's forbidden desires.

From the point of view of the society, the moral lesson appears to be that young girls must wait to be married before indulging in sex that results in unwanted pregnancies and the resultant shame of bearing unwanted children. The folktale depicts psychosexual development of a young girl and her desire for sexuality and fear of it (Vidrsperkova 2024). The tribulation the girl undergoes in

hiding her pregnancy, the child, and the pain of losing the very child to the cruelty of unforgiving wild animals far outweighs the pleasures of sexual indulgence disapproved by society. Her sexual rendezvous clashes with societal strict adherence to cultural norms of preserving virginity before marriage demanded of the Borana girls. Through this folktale, the Borana society seems to impart a cautionary tale about the perils of premarital sexual indulgence and the importance of preserving societal norms and cultural values surrounding female sexuality and reproduction.

The Girl and the Ogre

The third and last story I analyse is that of the girl and the ogre. This is a story of a girl who brings food prepared by her mother to her father who works in the field. One day she is confronted by an ogre without hands and legs who compels her to share the food with him under the strict condition that she does not tell her people. She obliges only for a short while before her father starts complaining of the little portion of food he receives. The girl violates the ogre's interdiction and reveals her predicament at the hands of the ogre, after assurances from her parents of her security from the ogre's threats. The ogre comes for her at night, singing and gloating of his omnipresence and devours her, leaving only a small finger that drops into her mother's fumigating hole. One day as the mother is fumigating herself by sitting on the hole, the finger enters her and the story ends.

This oral narrative delves into the psychological realm of fear, particularly the fear of rape and male aggression towards women. The ogre is described by the girl as having no hands and legs, essentially symbolizing detestable ugliness. Being an epitome of ugliness, he is an embodiment of object of sexual repulsion by the girl. The food getting eaten is fear of the girl to be raped on her way to take the food to her father. When she finally confesses that it is the ogre that has eaten her father’s food, the ogre comes at night to devour her as it had warned her. The ogre comes at night, singing to her and reminding her all the descriptions she had given about it to her parents. It boasts to her of its ability to know all the utterances she had made in confidence about it. It could reach her even though she thought it could not walk because of its lack of legs. For the girl, the ogre represents an aggressive male forcing himself on her. His eating of the food meant for her father brings a kind of sexual competition between two males for whatever food, real or symbolic, she could offer. He devours her and ingests her whole body save for her small finger.

The ogre's demand for the girl to share her food, a symbolic representation of sexual relations, can be interpreted as a metaphor for the coercive and aggressive nature of male desire (Bettelheim 1991). The girl's initial compliance, followed by her eventual violation of the ogre's interdiction, reflects the internal struggle between societal expectations and personal agency.

The ogre's omnipresence and ability to reach the girl, despite its apparent physical limitations, symbolizes the pervasive nature of the threat of male violence and the vulnerability of women in patriarchal societies. The parents' intervention, while well-intentioned, ultimately leads to the girl's tragic demise, highlighting the limitations of parental protection and the persistent power imbalances inherent in gender dynamics. The finger dropped into *bool qayyaa*, (the hole in which women fumigate themselves for sweet scent in preparation for sex) requires further elucidation. In this woman-made hole, women stuff herbal and wood fragrant and incense that are eventually burnt and the emitted smoke is captured with a baggy clothe in which the woman is wrapped. In the story, the small finger of the devoured girl enters her mother as she is sitting on the hole fumigating herself. In this instance, one can surmise that the girl copulates with her mother in rivalry to her father with exclusive conjugal right over his wife's body. The finger entering the

mother is the case of a female penis envy in which the girl envies her father's role of sexual access to the mother and performing the same using her finger which symbolises penis.

That the finger is a phallic symbol among the Borana is not in doubt. The following anecdote illustrates. It happened that a young man insulted a young girl in a moment of quarrel that he will insert his finger into her. The girl cried over this despicable insult and reported the matter to her people, who in turn referred the matter to the elders. The boy's utterance was deemed to have violated the girl's virginity and honour, and was equated to sodomising a man through sexual intercourse using his finger since the unmarried girl is considered as a boy not to be penetrated in sex. He was found guilty and sentenced to paying a fine of thirty head of cattle being a fine for sodomy as the Borana society deem young virgin girls as 'boys' on account of impenetrability. The young man appealed for the matter to be heard in presence of a wise old man and his request was granted. After hearing of the case alone with the young man, the renown wise old man advised him to change the finger insertion to hand insertion. He advised him, '*quba sii kaa hinjene, harka sii kaa jedhe*' (I did not say I insert a finger into you, but I said I will insert a hand into you). When the matter came before the elders again, the boy confessed to his new version which some people thought was even worse for the insertion of the hand appeared to be graver and weightier than the finger. The wise old man asked whether the girl in question has undergone female circumcision. He was told she did. The old man retorted, 'a girl who has been entered and penetrated by the hands of her people in the process of female circumcision, how can the hands of the alien other fail to do so?' The boy was absolved of any wrong doing since the 'entire hand' is not considered a phallus whereas 'the finger' is.

In the story, the mother is fingered by her daughter in a gesture of homosexual performance. As Jack Zipes tells us in another context, the mother is devalued, her power and desire are transferred to the idealized father, and her nurturance is inaccessible (1994:36). From the point of view of the mother, she desires to be fingered by her husband for whom she was preparing for sexual intercourse. But from the point of view of the daughter, she wishes to finger her mother as a rival to her father who has unhindered sexual access to her, being his legitimate partner. The symbolic act of the ogre devouring the girl, leaving only a small finger to enter her mother's fumigating hole, can be interpreted as a representation of both the ultimate violation of female bodily autonomy and the unconscious desire for a symbolic union with the mother (Freud 1900). This act can also be seen as a manifestation of the girl's unconscious envy of her father's sexual access to her mother, as represented by the phallic symbolism of the finger entering the mother's intimate space.

The father appears representing a weak male and a lousy protector who cannot assure his daughter from being literally and figuratively eaten by the ogre. His own wife is also penetrated by a finger which is essentially a phallic symbol in his own house without his protestation and prevention. As a central male figure in the story, he is torn between the female rivalry of his wife and daughter for his attention and the duty to protect them from male aggression from without symbolised by the ogre. The father's act of eating the food brought by the girl has sexual connotation since the sexual act can sometimes be referred to as eating. This implies that the father is in an incestuous relationship with his daughter. She relies on him as a defender from the threats of the ogre that also eats her food (has sex with her). As Jorgensen (2013) states, the cycle of father-daughter incest tales is not actually about real life incest, but rather the daughter's desire for her father.

In a sense, this is a story of repressed conflict involving rape. Forbidden and repressed conflicts involving incest, cannibalism, envy, sibling rivalry and sexuality are taken up and worked through

resolution and psychic growth (Bettelheim 1991). On the part of the girl, being exposed to travelling to the farm alone, she has to contend with the transgressive fear of being raped by monstrous men who meet her on the way. Because her lonely walk on that road to the farm is rather routine and predictable, there are possible male aggressors who take advantage of her in those circumstances. From the point of view of the girl, she is confronted by the fear of rape in form of an ugly monster that is omnipresent and more powerful than the protection her people can avail. In the song, she expresses her concern that truth telling will eventually lead to her demise. She finds that unfortunately the ogre is more powerful than her overprotective parents. Had she been allowed to negotiate on her own terms of sharing food between the father and her tormentor (ogre) and being silent about it, she would have been alive. The story hence, on one level speaks to the weakness of parental power and authority purporting to protect their daughter from external aggressors without reference to the same daughter on how it should be done. Prior to the parents' intervention, the ogre was only eating half the food, hence mutual sharing of sex with two males. But after the parents put this to a stop, the ogre devours the girl which is more detrimental and tragic to all parties. This, from the point of view of the girl, points to a secret sexual affair symbolised by sharing food with an ogre and a total refusal that leads to a brutal attack and death.

In this sense, the story is a fantasy of cultural and psychological mirror that tends to capture some of the tribulations girls in the Borana society undergo in the hands of torturous male aggressors, thus confirming some social realities. As Holbek (1998) observes, fantasy is the primary instrument through which social conditions can be discussed, mediated and escaped. Through this folktale, the Borana society seems to confront the deeply rooted fears surrounding female sexuality, the ever-present threat of male aggression, and the complexities of family dynamics and power structures within patriarchal societies.

CONCLUSION

The psychoanalytic interpretations of these three Borana folktales have revealed a rich tapestry of cultural meanings, societal anxieties, and deeply rooted human desires and fears. By employing modern theoretical framework like psychoanalysis, these oral narratives have been unveiled as powerful vehicles for exploring complex themes such as incestuous desires, gender dynamics, societal taboos, and the navigation of cultural norms surrounding female sexuality and bodily autonomy. The symbolic representations and psychoanalytic underpinnings present in these folktales offer profound insights into the cultural psyche and collective unconscious of the Borana people. They shed light on the intricate interplay between individual desires, societal expectations, and the symbolic language used to give voice to these often-repressed or taboo subjects. The three folktales analysed in this paper tend to treat some of these themes of incest, inappropriate desires of relatives, rape, forced marriage, premarital sex, and unwanted pregnancies that are perennial problems to society.

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