

The Socio-Cultural Role of the Monster Image in Ndorobo Folklore

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Abstract

Folklore directed toward Ndorobo children of Kenya characterize the monster image of *Enkukuu* as a challenge to one's social responsibility to community Other. In the narrative of Calves of My Stomach, the Ndorobo ideal of cooperation between personalities is described in horrific detail. A monster deceives all but one of a group of warriors into drinking poison cactus milk. The one warrior was wise and endeavoured to warn his friends of their peril to no avail. The fooled warriors refused to listen to his counsel and died, afterward being eaten by the monster. The images in the narrative conjure up visions of collective and individual threat and sorrow. Evil is depicted as a constant force swirling around each person and *Enkukuu* represents fear an individual must overcome throughout life. The narrative is spoken to produce trepidation about life outside the community and instil a sense of value for listening to the counsel of community members.

Key Words: Self, personality, social responsibility, community Other, fear.

The purpose of the research is twofold. First, the paper explores how folkloric language through a monster image reflects important cultural and social ideals, understandings, and patterns of thought in Ndorobo world view. A second purpose is to offer ethnographic information to scholars and students' alike necessary for world view studies of eastern Africa specifically focused on the interplay between myths of the monstrous and the social context in which the stories are utilized. The key research question for this analysis is, How does the monster image in Ndorobo folklore conceptualize the life experience? A Ndorobo myth entitled, Calves of My Stomach, is the text chosen for analysis with the monster image, *Enkukuu*, as the antagonist. A second query explores the importance of the monster image in understanding Ndorobo world view categories of Self and Other. The following discussion contributes an ethnographic perspective for categories of Self and Other as well as monster mythology by examining the nature of Ndorobo-ness using the language of the monstrous as a research tool.

1. The Analytical Model for Ndorobo Monster Myth

The theoretical framework chosen to analyze the Ndorobo myth, Calves of My Stomach, is based on the model given by Halliday and Hasan (1989) in their book, Language, Context, and Text: Aspects of Language in a

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Social-Semiotic Perspective. Their premise very simply put is this: to understand a people you must study their language, to understand their language you must study their texts, to understand their texts you must study the context. To analyze a text, the analytic model of this study considers four levels of textual interpretation as suggested by Halliday and Hasan: 1) meta-function of the text, 2) context of situation, 3) context of culture, and 4) intertextual context.

2. **The Ndorobo Text: Calves of My Stomach**

A long time ago a monster lived in the forest. Warriors came through the forest going to raid and the monster said to the warriors, "Calves of my stomach!"

The warriors answered, "Oh!"

"Where are you going?" asked the monster.

They answered, "to raid."

"Come remove this cow that is inside this bamboo," the monster replied.

Again the monster called, "Calves of my stomach, come and remove this cow that is inside this bamboo! Mbuua! (moo)!"

The children of the monster came, that is the warriors came to try and remove the cow, but the cow was not a cow - it was a woman that echoed! It lead the warriors into its house. The warriors went to sit inside and the monster/woman went to pour cactus tree milk.

"Calves of my stomach, come remove this cow," she said as she came into the house and gave cactus tree milk to the warriors to drink.

A warrior got up and said to the others, "The woman is a monster." The others said no it isn't.

This one warrior put his cactus tree milk on top of the house while the rest drank theirs. This warrior left before the others died of the cactus tree milk. When they were dead, he returned to see. Then the warrior went to report about the dead warriors to other warriors. Four new warriors plus the one who escaped returned to fight the monster.

The monster called again, "Calves of my stomach, come remove this thing!"

The monster came [to meet the warriors]. The warriors came also but already knew [the deception of the monster]. The family of the monster broke one leg and plucked out one eye of the warrior who escaped the first time. The monster lit a fire in order to give the warrior cactus tree milk but the other warriors unhurt fought to kill the monster. Before the monster died, it said to crush this finger and remove the warriors who died before.

3. **Analysis of the Socio-Cultural Role of the Monster Image**

To analyze the story begins with the meta-function level comprised of three functions. Interpreting a text accurately involves understanding

Ideational Function (learning, thinking) composed of experiential and logical meaning. It is also important to grasp the Interpersonal Function (relational, mood, modality) composed of interpersonal meaning. A myth will also reveal a Textual Function (theme and cohesion) composed of textual meaning built from focus, themes, and cohesive relations. By understanding these functions and meanings of language, it is possible to identify prominent imagery such as the monstrous, the way in which these characters communicate social values and significant features of Ndorobo Self as a community being, and how evil and tragedy are enacted in the Ndorobo community. This first level addresses four aspects of language meaning to be discussed in the following discourse. Opening comments center on the experiential meaning with the logical, interpersonal, and textual meaning to follow (see Table 1).

A. Meta-Functions of the Text

The experiential meaning in the representation of Ndorobo experience begins by identifying the phenomenal aspect of Ndorobo life expressed in the story. To begin, the monster character in Ndorobo folklore almost always lives in the forest. The forest is viewed as a scary place because it is dark even during the day. Night itself is a symbol of evil. The deep, dark forest is dangerous because when a person cries out, no one in the community will hear and come to one's rescue. Thus, a sense of community is emphasized in the myth.

Table 1: Meta-functions of Ndorobo Myth, Calves of My Stomach.

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Ideational Function (Learning, Thinking)	Experiential Meaning ♦ <i>What is the Experiential Meaning in the text?</i>	Necessity for community relations to ensure survival.
	Logical Meaning ♦ <i>What is the Logical Meaning of the experience in the story?</i>	Listen to the advice of community members in order to avoid trouble.
Interpersonal Function (Relational, Mood, Modality)	Interpersonal Meaning ♦ <i>What Interpersonal Meaning does the story have between those listening and interacting?</i>	Emotional plea and reward are deception.
Textual Function (Theme, Cohesion)	Textual Meaning ♦ <i>What Meaning does the Text express about experience described in the story?</i>	Careful of the Unusual.

The life experience is a process, i.e., a journey marked by good and evil forces. Evil is all around and, if the person is not careful and watchful, it will get them. Ndorobo children are told this kind of story to promote being careful in life. It is paramount to be on guard against the unusual and Ndorobo parents use the Calves of My Stomach myth to scare children into cautious awareness. The monster represents both evil and fear, and only one warrior overcame it because of his diligent wariness.

The logical meaning of the myth outlines the sequence of events (see Table 2). The story begins with a raiding event common in Ndorobo history. Traditionally, raiding cattle and stealing were considered a legitimate means of economic survival. However taking from another community member is taboo and self defeating to community vitality; ergo the custom of stealing from earthly Other became the norm. Pillaging from outsiders to improve one's own situation is thought to be clever even today. Earthly Other are to be exploited while community Other are to be supported.

Young age-mates under fifteen years old tend the herds, young age-mate men traditionally have foraged and raided to provide food for the community, older age-mates offer protection to the community in the absence of younger men and also provide counsel. In order for the individual and the community "to have good fortune," age-mates must support one another.¹ A person must maintain relational harmony to ensure their support of others is reciprocated and these relationships are needed to guarantee survival.

Table 2: Outline of Sequence of Events in Calves of My Stomach.

Sequence	Event
1.	Ndorobo warriors gone to raid.
2.	Cow (monster) calls them.
3.	Warriors find cow is woman (monster).
4.	Woman takes warriors to house and gives milk.
5.	One warrior suspicious, all other warriors die.
6.	One warrior goes for help and returns with warriors.
7.	Cow (monster) tries to deceive again.
8.	Monster injures first warrior.
9.	Monster tries to make cactus tree milk.
10.	Warriors fight monster.
11.	Monster releases dead warriors before it dies.

It is interesting to note that the monster tries the same technique for deception with the returning warrior and his second group of friends. While one group of warriors ignored counsel, the second group acted on the experiential knowledge of the one warrior. Ndorobo thought regards perception as the most trustworthy basis of knowledge. The second group of warriors heeded this cultural belief by listening to the experience of the one warrior and understanding the dangers of the deceiving monster. Ndorobo informants were adamant concerning the valued end point of the narrative. Indeed, one should always listen to the advice of other community members in order to avoid trouble!

The actions of the second group of warriors should not be interpreted as killing for revenge. Rather, the monster and its family are eliminated because they consume many warriors and reduce their number dangerously low to provide for the community. It is quite logical to conclude the chain of events with the monster giving back those warriors killed earlier, because the life of the monster was over and it had no more use for them. The dead warriors came back to life and were restored to their community.

The most significant interpersonal speech in the myth are the plea, "calves of my stomach," and the ensuing reward of cactus tree milk. The plea as well as the reward is a deception. Unfortunately the attitude of the warriors is careless, and the ruse succeeds. There are several rhetorical features that have symbolic meaning. The phrase, "one time long ago," is a beginning formula for Ndorobo folktales in general and references historical tradition. This phrase also validates the storyline and main point by providing authoritative clout. The monster calls them "calves of my stomach" because it is in the voice of an old woman. This means 'beloved one' or 'my children'

and is spoken by older women to those they love. The voice of evil will use emotional values to trick a person. Bamboo forests can be very dense with good grazing and occasionally livestock become entangled. The question is what a woman would be doing in this context. Men and young boys have the responsibility to accompany grazing cattle, sheep, and goats. The first clue of danger in this twisted scenario was the woman's voice instead of a male voice seeking help for her animals.

The news value expressed in the textual meaning of the experience is to admonish children to be careful and mistrustful of all one does not know. The topicality of the thematic structure revolves around maintaining a fearful scepticism of that which is unusual and/or outside one's community. Cleverness and courage are needed for personal and community survival.

B. Context of Situation

Every text, indeed all language, has a context. Context of Situation is the second level of analysis and "serves to interpret the social context of a text, the environment in which meanings are being exchanged" (Halliday & Hasan, 1989:12). It is the immediate environment in which the text is functioning. Three features which compose the conceptual framework of Context of Situation for analytic purposes are: 1) Field of Discourse (what is happening), 2) Tenor of Discourse (who is participating), and 3) Mode of Discourse (what is the role of language).

The kind of activity happening in the narrative is typical for young warriors referred to as *murrans*. The first group of warriors are sent out to raid from other tribes. Stealing is taboo within the in-group but quite a legitimate practice to take from out-groups to provide food for one's own community (see Table 3). It is a journey only age-mates would make together. Age-mates face dangers such as the forest together and would not dream of raiding alone without group support. In the myth, it is the foolhardy behaviour to respond to the woman's voice because it takes the warriors away from their intended goal of acquiring cattle. Becoming side tracked when the community is depending on them is a social sin.

There are several groups of actors in the myth that are noteworthy. First is the woman monster who can be characterized as a trickster. Use of the older woman's voice by the monster and the verbal form used gives it a very high status. The warriors who became victims of the trickster were a group of unmarried young men of the same age set. Age-mates are bonded for life and are responsible for one another's welfare. The wise warrior who did not drink the cactus tree milk probably was the group elder. The warriors form one social group who are in opposition to the monster family group. The story climaxes around one ethnic group (Ndorobo warrior community) challenging another ethnic group (monster family community).

Table 3: Context of Situation of Ndorobo Myth, Calves of My Stomach.

Field of Discourse ♦ <i>What is happening?</i>	Legitimate practice of raiding to provide food for one's own community.
Tenor of Discourse ♦ <i>Who is participating?</i>	Ndorobo warrior in-group vs. monster family out-group.
Mode of Discourse ♦ <i>What is the role of language?</i>	Oral literature using magic motifs.

This myth is oral literature with a number of magic motifs in the text utilized to creatively reinforce the unpredictable dangers common in the life experience and the need to be ever vigilant against them. The monster has the supernatural ability to pose as a human. Cactus tree milk is magically prepared as a poisonous concoction the warriors seem unable to resist. Sorcerous power allows the monster to contain all the dead warriors in its finger as well as the dead warriors to come back to life.

C. Context of Culture

The text and its context operate within the broader scope of a culture which is the third level of analysis termed the Context of Culture. Any Context of Situation setting the stage for a text to function is not an arbitrary fabrication of random features but a representation of the world view. By understanding the Context of Culture, it is possible to gain insight on the cultural ideology that gives value to the text and provides boundaries for interpretation. Furthermore, Context of Culture describes the cultural assumptions made in context and in what way these determine how a text is interpreted in its Context of Situation.

Calves of My Stomach is situated in the larger framework of Ndorobo culture. It is one strand woven into the overall fabric of Ndorobo world view. Understanding the background for the Ndorobo value of listening to community Other and suspicion of earthly Other can be enhanced by historical knowledge of the ethnic group.

The name, Ndorobo, describes an ethnic category of hunting-gathering groups residing on the fringes of various east African pastoral and agricultural peoples. Historically, the name 'Ndorobo' carried a derogatory tone of condescension which has not diminished even today (see Table 4). The encapsulating groups did not merely assert their political dominance over the hunter-gatherers, they also treated Ndorobo as inferiors, as people apart, by stigmatizing and discriminating against the group (Blackburn, 1974). The stereotypes held by encapsulating groups are politically potent and color the whole range of interactions between these tribes and Ndorobo hunter-gatherers (Little, 1998).

The one glaring belief in Ndorobo world view that gives immense value to the myth is the Ndorobo concept of personality (*olkuak*). Ndorobo believe a person is born into a particular social group by the will of Creator God, *Enkai*, and are destined to be a product of social forces within that culture. The primary sociocentric element of the person is called, *olkuak*. *Olkuak* is often translated ‘personality’ but bears little resemblance to the English translation. It is conceived in a radically different mode of thought. Ndorobo view the person as an extension of the community, one pebble in a bucket of sand. One grain is meaningless and easily overlooked; a handful takes form, fills space, and therefore has meaning and use. The personality of the person, their *olkuak*, submerges Self within the community thereby providing Self with purpose, value, strength and most importantly, a means of expression.²

Self is made continuous with community by *olkuak*. The initial capacity for personality is given to a newborn by Creator *Enkai* and content is generated from the social environment. Shaping *olkuak* into an acceptable personality is insistence by parents and community elders on obedience from those younger members of society. Personality is to be submissive to the will of the collective Other and by doing so *olkuak* becomes what community makes a person. Developing a good personality is synonymous with valuing and acting out Ndorobo ideology, otherwise the person will suffer the consequences of being ruled by evil.

Table 4: Context of Culture of Ndorobo Myth, Calves of My Stomach.

<p style="text-align: center;">Broader Background</p> <p>♦ <i>What broader cultural background gives meaning to the story?</i></p>	<p>Low status of Ndorobo with peripheral national identity.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">Specific Background</p> <p>♦ <i>What specific information further enlightens the meaning of the story?</i></p>	<p>Ndorobo notions of personality reflect Ndorobo values, desires, morality, and behavioral norms.</p>

A warrior has a strong need to belong, work, and live cooperatively with his age-mates and others in the community. This sociocentric Self and the cultural provisions that sustain it are found in personality. *Olkuak* is a culturally encoded dogma transmitted from generation to generation as pragmatic, authoritative principles. It is considered a moral link, giving the person the necessary rudder to steer into acceptable, culturally moral waters.

The threat of personal death serves to warn against the very real dangers of forsaking Ndorobo culture, a way of life only community

members can pursue. Calves of My Stomach is a description of the harsh consequences of deviating from the moral oughts of personality. The myth uses the monster image, *Enkukuu*, to promote fear among children in two ways. First is fear of the monster itself which stands for outsiders. A Ndorobo must always approach strangers to the community with a certain amount of mistrust. One must be on guard so that no one in the community is taken advantage of by earthly Other. Secondly, the monster image represents a bizarre, out of the ordinary person. It is a matter of morality when faced with an unusual anomaly, Ndorobo are taught to flee without hesitation. The Ndorobo community is small, and no one can take the chance that a phenomenal experience will not hurt community Other. If something or someone is uncustomary, then it is to be shunned.

Individual weakness in personality is the cause of the collective bane of the first warrior group. As noted earlier, the monster itself, *Enkukuu*, represents fear. The socio-cultural role of the monster image in Ndorobo folklore is to assert there is no fear that cannot be overcome by a person with a united community. However, a community in harmony is predicated on each community member guided by a proper personality.

D. Intertextual Context

Part of the textual environment includes other texts which have been drawn from and incorporated into the text or support the text assumptions in their own storyline. As the fourth level of analysis, Intertextual Context is an unconscious awareness by participants of the continuity between texts and their shared understanding. It is possible to identify significant cultural themes, values, and relationships as well as cultural continuity and discontinuity by understanding Intertextual Context. The Ndorobo narrative, Calves of My Stomach, is socially situated among other Ndorobo literature that provide both support for the notional intent and give additional meaning.

We now turn to other pertinent proverbial wisdom and narratives enhancing the meaning of the myth (see Table 5). As previously stated, personality should reflect the Ndorobo value of heeding advice from community members. A Ndorobo proverb announces, "He who has an ear, let him listen." Without the ability or willingness to hear (identify appropriate response and obey), a person is lost in ignorance and a slave to his foolishness.³ Understanding is predicated on the act of hearing which is required for obedient behavior.⁴ The first group of warriors did not listen to the wise warrior consequently, "Carelessness killed the owner." In addition, the proverb, "Man is always beaten by his own trick," warns obedience to elders and developing a good personality cannot be bypassed. The word for 'trick' is *olosek* and is also translated 'short-cut.'⁵ Chosen action which disregards the social norm will undoubtedly result in failure.

Table 5: Intertextual Context of Ndorobo Myth, Calves of My Stomach.

Other Textual Support	Self Narrative Too Keep a Secret.
	Proverbs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◆ He who has an ear, let him listen. ◆ Carelessness killed the owner. ◆ Man is always beaten by his own trick.

One trait the Ndorobo personality is expected to possess is trustworthiness in reference to both individual safety and community security. Untrustworthiness is a social sin and is evidence of a corrupted *olkuak*. A Ndorobo elder related the story, “Too Keep a Secret,” of hunting with two age-mates in his youth as an example of a trustworthy personality.⁶ The three friends raided a sheep from another tribe, butchered it on the trail, and ate the beast. All evidence of the deed was destroyed. He warned his friends to “wipe their mouths” implying the need for secrecy, but one man chose to boast about the raid. His personality betrayed the men in uncharacteristic Ndorobo fashion because he was not cautious and endangered his age-mates. The elder concluded that one’s behaviour reflects their personality, and it is imperative their personality reflect cultural values.

4. Concluding Remarks

To disregard a Ndorobo precept such as listening to the advice of an age-mate is foolish and a venture one will live to regret. The myth, Calves of My Stomach, teaches that the very meaning of life, indeed life itself, vanishes at the moment an individual denies their Ndorobo personality. It happens in the sense a person becomes lost in a meaningless existence outside their community. The first group of warriors became lost in a meaningless existence within the finger *Enkukuu*. The personality element is a compass to steer Ndorobo away from that which would harm Self and others and toward all that would make life fulfilling in the context of community.

The intense interactiveness of a person with community provides a framework of support based on obligation. The value of mutual helpfulness, participation, and harmony associate self expression with obligatory conduct based on need - need of community and need of the individual. It is the duty of every Ndorobo warrior to exemplify cultural precedence in behaviour through personality. Duty is a code of conduct that insists individual behavioural habits and decisions are in compliance with proper duties expected of all warriors in the culture. Duty is used in two ways here. It is the duty of a young man to behave according to community wishes and secondly, fulfil warrior duties and responsibilities. Young men find self expression in expanding responsibilities as warriors within the community and value the

sense of duty that brings honour and fulfilment to them individually and as a group. To fulfil their duty as warriors, young men must be able to control and/or overcome fear. Raiding as well as protecting community boundaries is not a responsibility for the faint of heart. Young men are expected to overcome fright and panic associated with *Enkukuu* fears and be dependable warriors both wise and obedient.

Notes

- ¹ Ole Nkaru, personal communication, March 19, 1998.
- ² Ndorobo understanding of the term *olkuak* with personality seems to differ from the Maasai people from which their language is borrowed. Thus, the variance in definition and usage is more than just lexical variation and implies the conceptual framework is specific to their world view.
- ³ Putiai Krondo, personal communication, December 4, 1997.
- ⁴ Joseph Ngayami, personal communication, June 17, 1998.
- ⁵ Julius Ngayami, personal communication, June 15, 1998.
- ⁶ Impaayo Ngayami, personal communication, September 24, 1997.

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