

THE ONTOGENY OF HYENA REPRESENTATIONS AMONG THE HARARI PEOPLE OF ETHIOPIA

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INTRODUCTION

In Harar, Ethiopia, spotted hyenas enter the town at night and feed on the detritus that the urban population produces. This paper shows how the city's inhabitants interact with these animals and have conceptualizations about them that evolve with their own development. While at face value my data lend themselves to a structuralist framework, I suggest that an analysis which highlights the experiential quality of hyena representations is more productive: an analysis in consideration of Ingold's (2000: 187) dwelling perspective whereby people's conceptual worlds are not so much constructed and structured within their minds as they are unfolded through relations with Others in spatio-temporal, historically informed, phenomenal worlds. With this in mind, I use the theory of ecologist-philosopher Paul Shepard as a conceptual framework within which to situate my analysis. Shepard was committed to what he called the myth of biological evolution. It connects humans to other animals through a shared prehistory – a shared ancestry – and reveals industrialized and urbanized humans to be disconnected from their animal essences. According to Shepard, this disconnection is a problem. The principle of phylogenetic probity holds that the healthy development of an organ is best assured under the circumstances in which that organ evolved (Shepard 1978: 189). As a consequence, normal development is retarded in modernized humans who are experientially distanced from the Palaeolithic landscape that teemed with wild animal Others (Shepard 1998: 154). As such, '*Homo industrialis*' is trapped in a perpetual adolescence, 'subjected to the myths of the animal/machine, heroes of progress and domination, and the dualisms of ideology' (Shepard 1996: 282). The population of Harar certainly falls within Shepard's categorization of urbanized. The locals participate in a cash economy; they watch Ethiopian and international television via satellite dishes; they commute by taxis or minibuses, use mobile phones, and consume store-bought food. They even make a distinction between culture (*ada*) and nature (*khilqat*) which parallels ideas held by many Westerners. They are by any definition urbanites, but urbanites who encounter hyenas nightly. This paper critically examines Shepard's views and typologies in light of the data from Harar as regards the ontogeny of conceptions of hyenas. In a city of 100,000 inhabitants, how do Shepard's views hold up where the population includes scores of very large, very conspicuous carnivores?

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The city of Harar lies at the eastern edge of a verdant plateau in the Chercher Mountains in Eastern Ethiopia. At 1,850 metres above sea level, the inhabitants enjoy a mild climate throughout the year with sometimes fickle rainy seasons in March and July–August. The rains combine with fertile soils to foster the production of coffee, mangos, avocados, maize, and the now ubiquitous *khat*. The latter is an important cash crop in the region (Gebissa 2004); that which is not exported is sold locally to people who chew the leaves for the effects, which range from mild well-being to focused attention, sleeplessness and, in extreme cases, paranoia. Harar is also a centre of production for roasted coffee beans, beer, crafts, printed matter and bottled water. A coffee-roasting plant in Harar's Old Town produces and exports a distinctive, complex-flavoured coffee based on the locally grown variety; a brewery in Harar's New Town is a major employer in the city and produces beers and non-alcoholic brews that are exported worldwide; there is a print-works producing promotional materials, publications and business stationery; there are also numerous cottage industries producing handicrafts such as baskets and decorations based on traditional Harari baskets. Just a few kilometres out of Harar there is also a bottling plant where sparkling mineral water is bottled for export to other towns in Eastern Ethiopia. By many measures Harar is an industrialized, urbanized city. It is a centre of commerce and government with a telecommunications company, administrative offices for the region, numerous schools and colleges, and a university campus. But it is also the site of nocturnal visits from at least 200 spotted hyenas.

The Harari language was once widespread in the region; however, after Oromo expansion in the sixteenth century, the Harari population and their language became restricted to the confines of their walled city. Surrounded by Oromo chiefdoms, Harar became an autonomous, Semitic island in a Cushitic sea (Leslau 1958: 1–2). A period of isolationism and xenophobia followed (Caulk 1968: 6) until the people of Harar eventually lost their autonomy. In the late nineteenth century, Menelik II and his Shewan army marched on Harar and took the town after a bloody battle at Chelenko (Caulk 1968: 11). However, despite being absorbed into greater Ethiopia and enduring repression during the twentieth century, the Hararis have maintained their language and many of their traditions.¹ The Harari people's subsequent tolerance of colonists and settlers, in combination with the preservation of much of Harar's architecture, earned Harar a City of Peace prize and a World Heritage listing from UNESCO.

To be Harari is to be Muslim, and the importance of Islam in the town is attested to by some eighty-eight mosques and 121 shrines in and around Harar (Mohamud *et al.* 2006). Spotted hyenas are also important with respect to Islamic praxis in Harar as they catch and consume *jinn* (singular: *jinni*). As unseen, potentially harmful spirits, *jinn* are a concern to many townspeople who appreciate the presence of hyenas, which are said to control the numbers of *jinn* in and around the town. In Islamic teachings, there is nothing to indicate that hyenas are unable to access the spirit world to consume *jinn*, and in Harar

¹Technically, the Hararis lost a lot of autonomy when the Oromo occupied the surrounding land, as historical evidence suggests that the Harari emirs were compelled to placate local Oromo chiefs in order to ensure the free movement of trade caravans (Burton 1856).

I never encountered misgivings with regard to Harari conceptualizations of hyenas' supernatural capacities.

The hyenas of Harar spend their days resting in their hiding places in the hills and forests outside the town. As the sun sets they emerge, and after 10 p.m. they enter into Harar's Old and New Towns looking for food scraps. Two hyena clans include Harar's Old Town in their territories, and, while they engage in clan wars outside the ancient walled city, they interact peacefully within (Baynes-Rock 2013). The Hararis maintain that peace is ensured through feeding porridge to hyenas on the eve of Ashura, the tenth day of Muharram (Baynes-Rock 2015; Zekaria 1991). As a reflection of that, hyenas are also fed nightly outside the Old Town. At two separate locations there are men who feed hyenas scraps of meat and derive an income from paying tourists who come to see the spectacle. This encourages audacity in the hyenas and fosters the kind of confidence they require to tolerate close encounters with humans in Harar's narrow lanes during the night. People also need confidence during these encounters; hyenas are imposing carnivores weighing up to 80 kilograms in the case of females, so they do not pass by unnoticed. Unsurprisingly, these conspicuous and oft encountered animals in Harar have engendered rich conceptualizations and feature prominently among Harar idioms, sayings, songs and tales.

The Harari word for hyena is *waraba*. It is Cushitic in origin (Leslau 1963: 161); however, it is not unusual for words in the Harari language to be shared or borrowed from other languages. Harari shares root words with Tigrinya, Amharic and Geez, and borrows words from Arabic, Somali, Oromo and Gurage (Leslau 1959). In Harar, it was suggested to me by locals that the word *waraba* derives from *wehr* and *abba*, meaning 'news' and 'man' respectively. This operates in a 'just so' fashion as the hyenas in Harar are said to carry messages from deceased religious figures, known locally as *awliach* (see Gibb 1996), who oversee the affairs of the town.² However, the 'news-man' etymology also works in Somali and there are Somalis who hold similar conceptions of hyenas to the Hararis.³

THE HARARI INFANT

For Harari children, their first encounters with *warabas* are aural, when they hear the hyenas' haunting whoops in the streets outside their homes during the night. Most infants are kept indoors after dark, so they have no idea what hyenas look like. Instead, their initial conceptions of hyenas are abstract, imaginative, and usually frightening. They are based solely on information from their parents mixed with what they imagine of the creatures who are making the noise. Harari children are told early on that *waraba* is a huge, slaving beast who patrols the lanes looking for children to eat. A Harari lullaby urges the child to remain quiet and sleep, lest the beasts in the lanes find and eat them:

²While *awliach* technically denotes males, the *awliach* also include a number of female figures.

³From discussions with Somalis in Harar and Hararis with Somali ancestry, I found similar ideas to those of the Hararis: that hyenas were capable of passing on messages, that they consumed *jinn* and were socially engaged with humans.

<i>Waraba diyya sum</i>	Hyena is coming be quiet
<i>Gungora diyya sum</i>	Leopard is coming be quiet
<i>Aiy habaroy, hoy 'lebek'</i>	Your mother is the only one you should answer

There is nothing like the threat of a monster to control a child, and Harari parents employ their children's fears of giant hyenas to their advantage. The confines of the compound of a Harari household make it a stark place in which to play. Consequently, children are always eager to get out of the gate and play in the lanes with their friends. This is tolerated by parents during the day but after dark the children are made to return to their homes with warnings about *waraba*:

When I was a child, you know when you are a child you have to usually get out your gate and play. So that the parents will trick you and tell you, 'There is *waraba* outside. *Waraba* is very hard, he will eat you, harm you.' Even then, we didn't know what he looked like, this *Waraba*. Even as a child we didn't know this thing.⁴

I'm from Argobberi [in Harar's Old Town]. When I was a child, my parents told me they [hyenas] will eat you and harm you. In my memory, I have a bad idea of *waraba*.⁵

Waraba is also a children's game that is played in the lanes of the Old Town. It is a variation on hide-and-seek. The child who is the *waraba* faces a wall and waits while the other children run off and find a place to hide. Once ready, the children call to the *waraba*, who comes searching for the hiding children. As the *waraba* searches, she makes spine-chilling whoops, while the other children in their hiding places hold their breath and listen to the imagined beast patrolling outside. Once found, the child who was hiding is 'eaten' by the *waraba* and he in turn becomes the new *waraba* as the game starts over.

Shepard discusses at length emulation of animals in play. He suggests that enactments are transformative as they foster individual children's conceptions of themselves (Shepard 1978: 121; 1999: 21). When a child plays at being *waraba*, he or she does not of course become a hyena. Instead, the child finds a part of herself that is 'hyena-like', based on a simplified representation of what *waraba* is: the dangerous beast that eats children. This, according to Shepard (1996: 87), is why children must form simplified conceptions of animals at the early stages of their development: it serves them better in understanding themselves. It is only later in life that, given the right conditions, they come to understand the complexity of the other animals in their environments (Shepard 1996: 83). Shepard's other assertion is that games such as *waraba* speak in simple terms of the flow of life. The child being eaten by, and in turn becoming, *waraba* is a 'metaphor of assimilation and reconstruction [suggesting] a balance of creation and destruction' (Shepard 1996: 83).

There are two elements which I consider are lacking in Shepard's thesis, although neither negates what he has argued. First is the transgression of relational boundaries that is inherent in games such as *waraba*. When a child becomes *waraba* – when she mimics a being other than herself – she steps outside the everyday restrictions on her person. She enters into a state of relations

⁴Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

⁵Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

with the other children that allows her to stalk them as if they are prey or else to hide from one of them as if that other child is a dangerous beast stalking her. This way of relating is outside the usual constraints of social relations with other children and it opens up possibilities for relations beyond the game (Baynes-Rock 2015: 101). In stalking and catching another child – in the course of the excitement of the game – physical contact and emotional expression with others are heightened and elaborated, and this has echoes in later social interactions between children. After playing *waraba* together, children open up the possibilities for closer friendships.

The other element that Shepard overlooks is the aspect of children's play that is concerned with matters that are less existential and more to do with continued existence (Bjorklund and Blasi 2005: 835). A game such as *waraba* is also good practice. For little human children, physiologically and emotionally adapted to developmental vulnerability on an open savannah teeming with predators, it pays to learn the most effective means to avoid being eaten. Indeed, in the eyes of Harari children, they were playing at something that they imagined could happen at any time in the lanes in which they played.⁶

For Harari children, the singular character of *waraba* also lent itself to formations of simplified representations of another ethnic group. One of the five main gates in the wall around the Old Town is named Argobberi for the Argobba people who live in the hills surrounding Harar and traditionally come to the town to trade at the markets. There is a chant among Harari children that speaks of a capacity among these people to transform into hyenas:

Argobba: Maaltu maaltu usu
Mishet mishet waraba

The Argobba: by day they are people
By night they are hyenas

In light of Ethiopia's nationwide policy of ethnic federalism and the local tradition of tolerance, it is not surprising that some adult Hararis are embarrassed by that little chant. While it bespeaks the kind of xenophobia that characterized Harar in the nineteenth century, and the ethnocentricity that fostered the exploitation and exclusion of the Oromo in the early twentieth century (Caulk 1968: 6; Waldron 1974: 267), it is the children of Harar who perpetuate it. As such, it remains with Hararis like a pair of very old and uncomfortable shoes that they haven't yet thrown away. Waldron described how, during the 1960s, the Argobba were regarded with suspicion by Hararis and that they were 'jokingly' accused of being were-hyenas (Waldron 1974: 281). In fact, he based that on the children's chant quoted above (Waldron 1984: 53). In the course of my fieldwork I found that some Hararis were quick to dismiss it, telling me it was nothing but a children's story which meant nothing. They insisted that the Argobba did not actually turn into hyenas at night. One suggested explanation for the origin of the chant was that the Argobba congregated outside the town after sunset and went back to their farms in the night. In that way, they could be considered as being like hyenas. Another Harari with no pretensions to political correctness told me that

⁶Bushmen children played a similar game in which the child playing hyena invaded the camp, whereupon the others had to band together and chase the hyena away. That, too, was based on events that could really occur in camp.

it was a straightforward warning that the Argobba could not be trusted, based on a characterization of hyenas as untrustworthy.

According to Shepard (1996: 99), where a child carries a simplistic conception of an animal, it can be employed to give them a ready representation of other humans. Whether the children represent the Argobba as untrustworthy or dangerous is in turn dependent on how they conceive of *waraba*. However, they readily adopt the chant because they are able to represent *waraba* as singular in character. In turn, the singular character of *waraba* is reinforced because it shows itself applicable to an entire ethnic group. It is like a feedback mechanism. However, this fails with Harari adults for reasons beyond those of embarrassment. One reason is that, as a Harari person matures and becomes more familiar with Argobba people as individuals, these people become more and more difficult to singularize.⁷ The other is that adult Hararis are more engaged with hyenas than the children are. They encounter them frequently in the lanes and recognize the complexity and irreducibility of hyenas. The complexity of representations comes only with maturity and socialization of the individual Harari.

As Harari children mature, they expand their boundaries. They venture further and further from their homes and even go out at night in the company of adults. They might be taken to visit relatives in another part of town or go in the company of an adult to one of the night markets. In the evenings, the lanes are busy with people, but with the lateness of the hour comes the increased opportunity for a child's first face-to-face encounter with a hyena:

We went to market at night, after Magrib, after twelve [six] o'clock, and when we came, this hyena came to our home and he was in front of us. And people said, 'Waraba, waraba' and I remember for me it was a dog. And then with everybody saying 'waraba' it was a revelation to me that this thing that I thought was a dog was a *waraba*. I ran to my house and told my grandfather that a *waraba* was eating my mum and he said, 'Bring this dog, it won't harm you. This *waraba*, that's it, from now on you know this *waraba* so don't be so fearful.' I was seven or eight years old.⁸

This is a metamorphosis for the Harari child whereupon the once terrifying beast of the imagination is transformed into a familiar, peaceful, albeit intimidating, pedestrian in the lanes. It is still a singular conception but one that stands in contrast to the one they held previously. After that first encounter, the conception of the *waraba* as peaceful becomes cemented with each new occasion on which the Harari and *waraba* pass each other peacefully in the lanes.

The *warabas* know that the Harari people won't attack them; they will feed them, they will [do] everything, their intentions are good. So their father and their ancestors are in a good relation with the humans so that when you grow up you see your mother and father how the connection with the people, so that when they grow up they have good intentions.⁹

⁷Some Hararis have Argobba ancestry; some have one Argobba parent. However, in each case they still claim to be Harari.

⁸Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

⁹Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

According to Shepard, it is during middle childhood that the concerns of the individual are directed less towards the self and more towards wider society. Beyond the projection of the self onto other animals, middle childhood brings with it the projection of the attributes of other humans onto animals: anthropomorphism. In what Shepard calls the 'iconic' stage of development, anthropomorphism serves to maintain contiguity with animals: to 'create an excess of common ground, stored for late adolescence when disjunction almost swamps the ego' (Shepard 1996: 88; Shepard 1998: 42). At the same time, it serves to initiate the child into wider society and its games of cooperation, connivance, misfortune and gain (Shepard 1996: 94). In anthropomorphic folktales, the animals serve as caricatures of human types: the stranger, the bully, the salesman, the brother-in-law. They teach the child about predictable kinds of animals from which he or she can make predictions about the behaviours of those animals' human counterparts. The following Harari folktale exemplifies this kind of conceptualization.

The Three Brothers

Three boys were walking together in the forest when they met with Hyena. They were very frightened and Hyena asked them, 'Whose protection are you under?'

The first boy answered, 'I am under the protection of God.'

The second boy answered, 'I am under the protection of the Earth.'

And the third boy answered, 'I am under your protection.'

Hyena looked at the boys and said, 'If I eat you who is protected by God, wherever I go I may not escape Him. So you I shall not kill. If I eat you who is protected by the Earth, then where on Earth will I find a place to hide? So I shall not eat you. And you who has put yourself under my protection. If I eat you, you will be protected inside my belly. Come!' And she killed and ate the third boy. (Cerulli 1936, translation by Illaria Sartori)

For a Harari child, the message is clear: there are some intimidating folks out there in the world beyond the wall whom you might think you can outsmart. But you are new to this game, so be careful with your trickery; it might just come back and bite you in the face. The story is also effective because it speaks to children at different stages of development. The conception of the hyena as dangerous is upheld by the characterization of *waraba*. However, it is not incompatible with the revelation that Harari hyenas are peaceful. The story is cleverly set in the forest where there is a different set of rules to those in the Old Town. The forest represents the wilderness: the mountains and the untamed lands occupied by non-Hararis, unseen spirits, and unfamiliar hyenas. Here is where the folktale reveals an added dimension that is lacking in Shepard's thesis. For the older children, the story is not just a warning about the human strangers they might encounter in the world 'out there'; it is a warning about putting yourself under the protection of the wrong kind of hyena. While those in the streets are considered peaceful by the locals, the hyena of the forest is an entirely different kind of animal.

[There is] a good relationship between them [hyenas and people in Harar]. But in Awaday and some other place there is a bad condition [attacks]. Something bad happens like in

Kombolcha last year. When she [a woman] tries to go home, the *waraba* between the way, catch her and eat. This is a bad consequence. But in Harar, the *waraba* will not harm the people.¹⁰

THE MATURE HARARI AND THE MOUNTAIN HYENA

Beyond the animal imaginings of childhood, anthropomorphism and theriomorphism, Shepard argues that it should be a normal part of human development for people to incorporate animals into their conceptions of the cosmos. Careful observation of the Others leads to an understanding of the unity of life and its games of chance; the otherwise baffling order of the universe is made understandable through animal myths relating to the beings out there in the world (Shepard 1996: 98). This is where Shepard contends that people of industrialized societies are stuck in the ‘juvenile absolutes of folklore animal images’. The animals are marginalized by otherworldly religions and reductionist scientific principles so that all that remains are animal ‘burlesques’ (Shepard 1998: 93). In our drive to make sense of the cosmos, we ironically shove the animals aside and seek truths elsewhere. We reduce them to pets, playthings, objects and tradeable goods. Hararis are industrialized urban dwellers yet, in contrast to what Shepard would predict, their representations of hyenas extend far beyond the anthropomorphic, the burlesque and the objectified. This complexity speaks of a people closely engaged with hyenas in a mutuality which attests to familiarity. And these roots lie in the distinction formed in childhood between the Harar hyenas and the hyenas from another place. The latter are known as the *sari warabas*.

When Hararis talk about the hyenas from somewhere else, they make the distinction clear by prefixing *waraba* with *sari* (mountain), *sari be* (from the mountain) or *sari be zal* (he is from the mountain). This is an altogether different kind of hyena. The ‘mountain’ from where these *sari warabas* come is not a specific place: it is simply a counterpoint to the place of Harar. Interchangeable with the forest, the ‘mountain’ is a wild, untamed place, without people, without *khat*, and swarming with dangerous *warabas*. It is unaffected by the protective spiritual power of Harar’s *awliach* and therefore inherently threatening. It is the antithesis of the peaceful, civilized place in which Hararis dwell – the world behind the defensive wall through which peaceful *warabas* pass each night. While the Harari *warabas* are held to be benevolent, the *sari warabas* are unreasonable, malevolent and a danger to Hararis. There is a haunting Harari song that is performed at weddings and which appeals to the son or daughter of Harar to return to or stay in the city, while suggesting that the hyena remain in the mountain:

Gey waldow gey giba
Tey saribey waraba yagba'ba

Child of Harar, return to Harar
Let the hyena live in the black mountain.

(Gibb 2002: 62)

In the above version, Gibb is quoting a North American Harari who employs the words of the song in a web forum to assert the imperative for the Harari to return

¹⁰Interview with Harari man, February 2011.

to Harar. The hyena, Gibb argues, is juxtaposed with the Harari, and the ‘black mountain’ signifies a distant or foreign place that is not a Harari’s true home. While Gibb’s interpretation is pertinent, I was always confused by the reference to the hyena in the song – ‘Let the hyena live in the black mountain’ – as my informants indicated that it was preferable for Harar’s hyenas *not* to live in the black mountain; rather, they should live in the farmland just outside the town and protect Hararis. At least, this was obvious to Hararis living in Harar. What I discovered was that it is not a Harari hyena that is being referred to in the song but a mountain hyena, and the song is entreating the mountain hyena to stay in the black mountain. This is borne out by an earlier version of the song that was recorded and translated by Leslau (1965: 78):

<i>Gē wāldō gēxa gibāī-wā</i>	O child of Harar, come back to your city
<i>Sāri-be wārāba yāghābā-wā.</i>	Let the hyena live in the (desolate) mountain.

Without the word for ‘black’, the song can be translated as ‘Mountain hyena, let him stay where he is’. The place being referred to is indeed the mountain; it is simply the case that the mountain need not be referred to twice as the prefixing of *waraba* with *sāri-be* indicates that he is in the mountain. The words of the song implore the Harari to return to and stay in Harar and let the outsider, the non-Harari, remain in the outside world. In this interpretation, the hyena is not juxtaposed with the Harari but rather is a representation of an outsider. The song not only implores the Hararis to stay in Harar, it also reminds them that the ‘mountain’, the outside world, is a dangerous place because, as everyone knows, the *warabas* there are not peaceful. Hence, the traditional Harari supplication made to hyenas prior to coffee ceremonies or mealtimes acquires a deeper meaning according to the kind of *waraba* to which it is addressed:

<i>Sari be zal waraba</i>	[The] mountain hyena,
<i>Afet qum zo be,</i>	may he find health,
<i>at zo, rīzq zo, yafach’ma.</i>	bones, and all his needs
<i>Gub zo be, ya gibba.</i>	and then return to his cave.

If it is a Harar hyena that is being referred to, then wishing him health, bones and a smooth road home is an act of beneficence. However, the supplication addressed to the mountain hyena is a wish that he might find health, bones and a smooth road home so that he does not become hungry or delayed, and linger in Harar where he will attack livestock or people. There is also a saying, ‘*Sari be zal waraba uzo rahaba*’, which translates as ‘May the mountain hyena not be hungry’. This carries the same sentiment as the supplication: that the *sari waraba* should find food so that he will not venture into the town.

In Harar, the concept of the *sari waraba* is that of an antagonist. This is exemplified in the saying ‘*Sari be zal waraba, uzo i geta*’, which translates as ‘May this trial not even happen to the mountain hyena’. The saying is uttered by a person who is having a run of bad luck or experiencing a lot of pain or a severe illness, and it underlines the severity of the problem. In English, an appropriate equivalent is ‘I would not wish this on my worst enemy’. The *sari waraba* represents the worst enemy of the Harari: the one from elsewhere. He is like the historical, marauding Oromo who conquered the land surrounding the town, or Menelik’s Christian

'highlanders' with imperial ambitions. The *sari waraba* is also the antithesis of the Harari. He is aggressive and unreasonable; he hides in the mountains from where he launches attacks on people and livestock. Yet the hyena from elsewhere is not simply a metaphor for dangerous outsiders. The *sari waraba* is a living entity, out there in the dangerous world beyond the defensive wall. Ironically, it falls upon the local, peaceful hyenas to defend the town against him.

ALL THIS TALK ABOUT HYENAS

As Hararis mature, their vocabularies blossom. They acquire a rich variety of idioms, songs, proverbs and sayings that relate to the world of humans while at the same time speaking about the worlds of hyenas with which they become increasingly familiar. A lot of these pertain to hyenas' ravenous appetites. There is a saying in Harar that is structured as a question and answer: '*Waraba min be yiburdal? Hammad be.*' Its meaning translates as 'With what is the hyena satisfied? With ash.' Among various interpretations of this saying, the most pertinent is one that connects it with a saying about human beings: 'With what is a man satisfied? With earth.' That saying alludes to human nature: a man is never satisfied with his lot and always strives for more, but he finds satisfaction only after death, when the earth of the grave finally satisfies him. In the case of hyenas, they are always hungry and eat anything and everything until there is nothing remaining but ash, at which point they are ultimately satisfied.¹¹

The capacity of hyenas to eat large quantities of food lends itself to a great many sayings in Harar. If a person makes a mess of something, then someone can say '*waraba hirrat asha*', or 'he made a hyena's dinner'. This reflects the ways in which hyenas make a mess of the carcasses they consume. If someone is overweight, it can be said of them, '*waraba kulen ay ushuba*'. This is based on the belief that hyenas gather on nights of the full moon and make *kulen* (supplication), which brings them food from the sky. The saying suggests that the overweight person would be food for hyenas when they gather and make supplication for food. Indeed, there are several sayings implying that someone will end up as food for ravenous hyenas. Where someone is careless and thinks only of the present, it is said, '*Hoji le zaliyow usu, waraba yabla'a*' ('The man who thinks only for today, let him be eaten by the hyenas'). In that saying, there is no indication that he will be killed by hyenas; it is simply that he will soon die and be found in the street by them. Whenever two Hararis meet in the street, they embark upon a succession of greetings that includes enquiries about each other's health, family and recent whereabouts. It is customary to say to the person 'you disappeared!' – which is a way of saying that the person has been missed. An alternative to that is '*zo le ekhu waraba*' ('we did not hear the hyena'). That greeting implies: 'I knew

¹¹For me, the question was a reliable way of determining whether a Harari was born and raised in Harar. The word *yiburdal* translates literally as 'is made cool', so that the question to a non-local Harari is understood as 'With what is the hyena made cool?' It is simply puzzling. Meanwhile, Hararis raised in the Old Town immediately understand the meaning implicit in the question and produce the answer '*Hammad be*' almost as a reflex action; Harari elders especially enjoy the word play.

you were not dead because I did not hear the hyena calling to his friends to come and eat your corpse. So where were you? You were missed.’ It not only tells the person that he or she was missed, it also reflects the way in which hyenas whoop and make a noise around large quantities of food, and it is a commentary on the capacity of hyenas to eat anything they find. It is a greeting that demonstrates a complex set of ideas about hyenas based on familiarity.

With regard to greedy *people*, they are not said to be *like* hyenas as much as they are said to *be* hyenas. When I was introduced to a museum worker in Harar who offered to help me with my research, my Harari companion whispered to me, ‘Be careful, he’s a *waraba* with money.’ The message was that the man would put money first in any relationship. In fact, it is sufficient to simply say of someone ‘*waraba*’ to suggest that they are greedy; it does not even require a sentence to frame the word, just a context. If someone is asking an exorbitant price for an item, the buyer can simply say under his or her breath, ‘*waraba*’; if someone tries to gain some financial advantage through an obvious deception, again it is sufficient to say ‘*waraba*’. In the latter case, the referent also implies not only that the person is greedy but that he is not to be trusted. Similarly, people say of someone who is untrustworthy, ‘*waraba waraba inta*’ (‘hyena is hyena’). It suggests that, no matter how much a person demonstrates that they have changed their ways, an untrustworthy person will not change. They will bite your hand and take your money.¹²

However, it is not simply hyenas’ greed and capacity to steal that Hararis employ to comment on the human condition. Hararis’ familiarity with hyenas means that all kinds of hyena characteristics are referenced to reflect human attributes. If someone appears confused or flustered, then that person might be referred to as ‘*zizanya be waraba*’ or ‘hyena in the morning’. The metaphor is based on the behaviour of hyenas who linger too long in the town or the farmlands after sunrise and find themselves running back and forth, trying to avoid crowds of people while seeking their way home to safety. *Mu zaylee waraba* is the ‘hyena who does not say whoop’. This applies to someone who is sinister. Alternatively, if someone is overtly frightening, he is spoken of as a *sari waraba*, reflecting the fear that people have of the mountain hyenas. If someone is trying to cover up his ignorance, he can be called *Wali Waraba* (Hyena Sufi); this is derived from the idiom *Wali Mohammed*, which describes a man who goes to a foreign land and pretends to be a religious mystic. In the same way, *Wali Waraba* covers up his rude behaviour and pretends to be something he is not.

If a person who has success or luck on one occasion tries to revisit that success by recreating the circumstances, then it is said of them: ‘*Waraba ahad ayam zolabayu attay be sati ayam hartu yahadral*’ (‘The hyena who once finds food will return to that place every day for a week in the hope of finding more food’). An example is a tour guide who is employed by a tourist for one day and then goes to that person’s hotel every day after that for a week in the hope of getting more work. If a person is in the habit of chewing a lot of *khat*, he is said to

¹²It is not always the case that calling someone a *waraba* is derogatory. One could say to a young child, ‘*Waraba amir, kut iliy dus yazalam daho*’ or ‘Hyena king, let it rain for you pure wild honey’. *Waraba amir* is also an idiom that refers to a young man who is outstanding among his peers and exhibits leadership qualities.

have *waraba daam* or the blood of the hyena. The reason for this is that the effects of *khat* cause the person to stay awake all night like a hyena and not go to sleep until sunrise. On the other hand, a person can have *waraba nasib* (hyena's luck), which suggests that the person in question often finds fortune without seeking it, in a similar way to hyenas that wander the streets and occasionally come across large, concentrated quantities of food.

Use of the word *waraba*, when appended to the names of plants and fungi, also reveals something about how Hararis conceive of hyenas as beings like humans. The field mushroom is known as the *waraba shemshir* or 'hyena umbrella'. Obviously, the field mushrooms are too small to serve as umbrellas for hyenas; however, it is significant that they are named after something for humans which, in this case, is for hyenas. The *waraba derbisi* is 'hyenas' wild fruit'. This is a yellow fruit that grows wild in the fields and superficially resembles another wild fruit, known as *derbisi*, which people eat to relieve gastrointestinal problems. The *waraba derbisi* grows on prickly stalks and is too tart to be eaten. Hence, it is a food like that for humans, but for hyenas. So, too, the *waraba tuhma* or 'hyena garlic' is not edible for humans but resembles cultivated garlic. The names of these wild plants and fungi reflect conceptions of hyenas in Harar to which Gibb alluded: the hyena as 'half brother, half wild, half civilised, roaming the hills around the city yet familiar with the tangled streets of the town' (Gibb 1996: 191). The hyenas are beings 'like humans' who occupy the waste places and streams around Harar, occasionally venturing into the world of people. They eat what people discard or disregard, and in this way they are complementary to and juxtaposed with the human population. Moreover, as Hararis mature, they come to understand that hyenas also think like humans.

THE YOUNG MAN OF RELIGION IS A HYENA

The term that reveals most about Hararis' engagement with hyenas is *Derma Sheikh*, which applies to both young men and hyenas. The word *sheikh* in Harari carries a similar meaning as in other parts of the Muslim world: a *sheikh* is a respected man, learned in the Qur'an, and a follower of the right path. In Harari, a *sheikh* is also versed in local knowledge pertaining to the *awliach*, the hyenas, and the means by which *jinn* should be exorcised. A *sheikh* can also become one of the *awliach*: Aw Abadir (Abadir the father), who taught Islam in Harar and established many social institutions, was occasionally referred to as Sheikh Abadir; another, Sheikh Hashim, was one of the most influential of the *awliach*. *Waraba Sheikh* is the patron saint of hyenas and progenitor of a family who were responsible for feeding porridge to hyenas each year during the festival of Ashura. As for the word *Derma*, it is both an adjective and a noun. It translates as 'young [man]', so that, when it is attached to *sheikh*, it denotes a young man who is learning his religion.¹³ According to Gibb (1996: 191), *Derma Sheikh* is the hyena king: the leader of the hyenas. Gibb refers to him as a 'source of great fascination [who is] learned in religion and inhabits a world somewhere between the spiritual worlds of the *Ge usu*' [Hararis] and the

¹³The word for young woman is *kummer*.

Awliach [saints]'. Zekaria's (1991: 87) account differs in that *Derma Sheikh* refers to a messenger boy who runs errands for the teachers who are schooling them in Islam. It is in this sense that the term applies equally to the hyenas of Harar, as they act in the same fashion as errand boys for teachers of Islam: hyaenid *Derma Sheikhs* run errands for the *awliach*. This is the same interpretation as the one given in the film *Dermesheh* and also one that I encountered in the field:

There is this shrine called Aw Siraj Arewach. The *Derma Sheikhs* serve the *Wali* [saint] by bringing *khat* to the people at the shrine when there is *mawlud* [religious celebration].¹⁴

However, there are more than two interpretations of the name. Indeed, the number tends to increase in proportion to the number of people with whom I discussed the term. One account holds that *Derma Sheikh* is a name given to the man who first fed hyenas outside the wall. Another is that it was the term used by the first hyena man to address his hyenas while he was feeding them. One says it implies that the hyena is a young member of the *awliach*. Another interpretation references the potential that hyenas share with young men – the potential to be rude, unruly, and even dangerous. Despite this potential, the Harar hyenas are well-behaved; they are akin to respectable young Harari boys who hurry through the streets in their *galabayas*, running errands for *sheikhs*. Both hyenas and boys show self-confidence and respect for others; they follow the right path. Yet another interpretation is derived from the capacity that hyenas have for clearing *jinn* from the city in the same way that *sheikhs* can exorcise *jinn* from people.

Hyena is a bridge between visible and invisible things. If he comes here, they know that if there is a hyena around. He says, 'Whoop'; I say, 'Oh, the whole area will be free of *jinn*.' That's why we call him *Derma Sheikh*.¹⁵

Significantly, the term is also widely accepted as a means of addressing hyenas directly:

When people are coming home from shrines there is a group of hyenas who will see them home safely. A person just needs to say, '*Derma Sheikh*, please accompany me home.' If there is a hyena you feel safer. You know he is walking you home.¹⁶

We always see these hyenas and always they don't touch us and we stay still so they will just pass. '*Derma Sheikh, aman be gibba* [go and return in peace].' So we didn't have any harm to each other.¹⁷

Derma Sheikh is his name. If he wants to attack a person, when you say *Derma Sheikh* he has to go away, he will go . . . This nickname, he knows.¹⁸

¹⁴Interview with Harari man, January 2010.

¹⁵Interview with Harari man, December 2009.

¹⁶Interview with Harari man, February 2011.

¹⁷Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

¹⁸Interview with Harari woman, February 2011.

For Shepard, talking to animals is symptomatic of a modern psychosis brought about by our separation from Others, a separation where pets are less a salve than a symptom (Shepard 1996: 144–5). We babble to our lap dogs, chatter to our parrots, design experiments to try to teach chimps and dolphins to talk. In Shepard's view, it is not communication; it is the feeble attempt of a species that sits alone and disconnected from its place in the animal kingdom. We talk to animals because we want their approval, their recognition, their blessing (Shepard 1996: 141); we want them to hear us and affirm that we belong so we 'cheer each time an ape signals "I want a banana"' (Shepard 1996: 145). But what of those humans whose connection to the world of animals is not as frayed? Do they remain silent in the presence of the Others and gaze wordlessly into the eyes of beasts? No, but it is a different kind of communication. In this respect, Elizabeth Marshall-Thomas (2003) provides revealing insights into the world of interspecies communication with her account of Bushmen and lions in the Nyae Nyae area of the Kalahari in the 1950s. According to Marshall-Thomas, the Bushmen frequently spoke to lions. When lions approached Bushmen camps at night, the human inhabitants shook burning branches and spoke in low, commanding voices, telling the lions to leave (Marshall-Thomas 2003: 73–4). When lions and Bushmen converged on an injured wildebeest, the Bushmen tossed clumps of dirt not at the lions but in front of them, while speaking respectfully: 'Old Ones, this meat is ours.' It was standard practice for Bushmen to address lions respectfully as 'Old Ones' (*ibid.*: 78).

Despite centuries of urbanization, Hararis' modes of communication with hyenas are more akin to those of the Bushmen than those of disconnected urbanites as described by Shepard. A Harari man who says *Derma Sheikh* to a hyena in a dark lane is appealing directly to the hyena to remain peaceful and let him pass. He is speaking at an inter-subjective level to a rational being who is expected to decide on her behaviour based on the man's use of phrase, his tone of voice and the amount of respect he shows. He is reminding her of the terms of an historical truce, the mention of which assures the hyena that he means no harm. And, in turn, he can expect that the hyena, once reminded, will honour the truce and let him pass in peace. It highlights what I have demonstrated elsewhere about human-hyena society in Harar: the humans are engaged with the hyenas at a social, inter-subjective level so that communication between the species is a given (Baynes-Rock 2012). It is through interactions and close observations that Hararis are able to see hyenas as animals 'like us', as distinct from 'human-like' animals (Milton 2005: 263). Just as hyenas are seen to communicate with Hararis when they bring messages from the saints, Hararis can communicate directly with hyenas by using the term *Derma Sheikh* and following this with an appeal for peace. Every hyena is seen as a hyena-person who acts independently and rationally; they can each be appealed to by addressing them correctly and reminding them of their own social conventions.

Certainly, there are individuals in Harar who subscribe to other views of hyenas. For example, a Harari businessman raised and educated in Addis Ababa considered hyenas no different to the white-tailed mongooses that emerge at night and roam the streets looking for food. To him, hyenas are simply driven by instinct in search of food and mating opportunities and are neither rational nor socially engaged with the people in any way. However, the majority of conceptions of hyenas that I encountered in Harar are in line with

what I have described above. Where life experience engenders encounter after encounter with spotted hyenas in the lanes of Harar, Hararis understand and regard them in increasingly complex terms. These extend to an appreciation of hyenas as complex, sentient, social beings that are mindful of the human population and that can act according to more-than-human measures of rationality and morality.

CONCLUSION

Representations of animals are always more than just social constructions (Servais 2005: 211); they reflect relationships between the animals who are represented and the people who represent them. The variety of representations of hyenas in Hararis' vocabularies reveals an engagement with animals that is atypical of urbanized people. This demands qualification of Shepard's typology, demonstrating that it is not only urbanization that distinguishes urbanites from hunter-gatherers in Shepard's terms of normal development, it is physical and/or conceptual separation from Others. The fearful representations of *waraba* that are imposed on the imaginations of Harari children are more than a continuation of a parenting tradition. While *waraba* for children is an abstract, frightening monster, the conception given to children is based on audible whoops and real-life encounters that the children's parents have with hyenas in the streets: encounters in which hyenas loom large and are intimidating enough for parents to view them as potentially dangerous in the first place. When Harari children mature, they develop a distinction between Harar hyenas and mountain hyenas. This is based on their first face-to-face encounters with hyenas, which necessitate a differentiation between local hyenas, which are peaceful, and other hyenas, which are dangerous. These ideas, in turn, are expanded on with representations of hyenas as ravenous, greedy or thieving, reflecting Hararis' observations of hyenas eating carcasses and running off with bones and skins. Other representations of hyenas as being confused in the morning or misguided in returning to a place looking for food also have a basis in close engagement with the animals. Yet the most telling of all is the representation of a hyena as *Derma Sheikh*. When this is used as a term of address, it reveals Hararis' recognition of hyenas as intentional, autonomous creatures with which they engage on a social level. Indeed, the industrialized urbanites of Harar show an unusual degree of understanding and engagement with hyenas, one that Paul Shepard (1996: 35) would normally have ascribed to 'primal peoples'.

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ABSTRACT

Employing a theoretical framework developed by ecologist Paul Shepard, I explore here the ways in which Harari people's representations of spotted hyenas develop in tandem with their ontogenesis. The Harari word for hyena, *waraba*, takes on different meanings depending on the socialization of Harari individuals and the particular life stages of these persons. In early childhood, *waraba* is a terrifying beast of the imagination. As children mature, their initial conceptions are overturned as they learn that local hyenas are in fact peaceful; it is the hyenas from beyond Harar's borders whom they learn to fear. Throughout and beyond middle childhood, representations of hyenas are employed in folktales, songs, chants and idioms to represent other humans while at the same time reflecting an engagement with the local hyenas. The representations culminate in the conception of *Derma Sheikh*: the reliable, protective, religious hyena who shares the same interest in peace and security as the Hararis. In Harar, representations of hyenas reflect an attention to what hyenas do 'out there' in the streets and in the surrounding farmland. They speak of a level of engagement with hyenas as persons: one that is atypical of an 'urbanized, industrialized' society.

RÉSUMÉ

S'appuyant sur un cadre théorique développé par l'écologiste Paul Shepard, l'auteur explore le parallélisme des modes de développement des représentations de la hyène tachetée chez les Harari et leur ontogénèse. Le mot harari pour hyène, *waraba*, prend des sens différents selon la socialisation des individus harari et le stade de vie de ces personnes. Dans la petite enfance, *waraba* est une bête terrifiante sortie de l'imagination. Lorsque les enfants grandissent, ils reviennent sur leur conception initiale en apprenant que les hyènes locales sont en fait paisibles ; ils apprennent alors à craindre les hyènes qui se trouvent à l'extérieur d'Harar. Tout au long de la moyenne enfance et au-delà, des représentations de la hyène servent dans les contes populaires, les chansons, les chants et les idiomes à représenter d'autres humains tout en reflétant une interaction avec les hyènes locales. Ces représentations sont à leur paroxysme dans la conception de *Derma Sheikh* : la hyène religieuse protectrice et fiable qui partage le même intérêt pour la paix et la sécurité que les Harari. À Harar, les représentations de la hyène reflètent un intérêt pour ce que font les hyènes « là-dehors » dans les rues et sur les terres cultivées environnantes. Elles parlent d'un niveau d'interaction avec les hyènes en tant que personnes, un niveau atypique d'une société « urbanisée et industrialisée ».