

“The Thing of Foul Mouth”: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of the Hyena Lore in the Borana Oral Tradition

Fugich Wako

Department of Literature, Languages and Linguistics, Egerton University, Kenya

Email: fwako@egerton.ac.ke

APA Citation: Wako, F. (2021). “The Thing of Foul Mouth”: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation of the Hyena Lore in the Borana Oral Tradition. *Ngano: The Journal of Eastern African Oral Literature*, 2, 98-111.

Abstract

No wild animal, other than perhaps the jackal, has caught the imagination of traditional and cultural Borana life than the hyena. This is expressed profoundly in a significant number of folktales, proverbs, and superstitions. In nocturnal darkness the hyena induces fear and its name rarely mentioned and tabooed; only indirectly called ‘the thing of foul mouth’. A protagonist or an antagonist in many stories, it has been contrastingly portrayed as foolish, greedy and witty. For those who understand its ‘language’ the hyena ‘speaks’ to people through ‘laughter’ and the howling noise it makes, warning people of impending peril or forecasting good fortunes. Through the oral narratives, the hyena is imbued with human characteristics by man. In this sense the hyena represents man and his follies. This paper explores some of the oral traditional narratives among the Borana in which the hyena is the subject and teases out their psychological significance. By making an interpretative reading of the hyena narrative and what it signifies, the paper concludes that the Borana project their anxieties and wishes and express them through an animal they consider appropriate to bear their unconscious.

Key Words: Borana, Hyena, Oral Tradition, Proverb, Psychoanalysis, Story

Introduction

The stories and proverbs about the hyena were mainly collected during a fieldwork among the Borana of Isiolo in northern Kenya, and to a lesser extent from different sources in Sololo, also in northern Kenya after the initial fieldwork. At the core of this paper is the crucial question of the metaphoric and symbolic attributes ascribed to the hyena, the ambivalence in terms of its social perceptions and what meaning they yield. In the real world of the Borana, the hyena is despised, hated, ridiculed, feared, and avoided and euphemized with such names as *yuyu*, *waani afaan ajaa* (‘the thing of foul mouth’), yet in the fictional world the hyena is witty, foolish, humorous, greedy, and an expression of ambiguity and duality. This paper is inspired by the curiosity and the urge to analyze and explain beyond the apparent and the ordinary the justification for the employment of the hyena as a vehicle and medium for a vast number of oral expressions among the Borana.

There are valuable critical studies that focus on the subject of the hyena in various folkloric contexts amongst many societies. One such interesting piece is the one by

Marcia Gaudet (1992) that explains the place of hyena in Louisiana and African tales. She argues that the sexual ambivalence of the hyena with its unusual genitalia suggests that it is hermaphroditic and this duality of its nature has caught the attention of the storytellers and hence significant in terms of story interpretation. Its nature is that at one moment it is masculine and at another moment, feminine, and hence it is a dirty brute (Gaudet 1992: 67). She concludes, “the hyena as a dupe gives an additional dimension of ambiguity and marginality, and that Bouki the hyena fails to recognize the dangers of entering and remaining where he is forbidden, accepts and trusts the advice of his friend and forgets the real dangers of his situations” (Gaudet 1992: 71).

The theme of hyena’s abnormality has also been reported by Jurgen Frembgen (1998) in his study that focuses on the magical function of the hyena in African and Asian worlds. The hyena is depicted in African folklore as an abnormal and ambivalent animal: considered sly, brutish, necrophagous, dangerous and vilest of beasts, it embodies physical power, excessivity, ugliness, stupidity and sacredness (Frembgen 1998: 333). He opines that because of the hyena’s lack of sexual dimorphism, people think that the same hyena can alternately father as male and give birth as female. This observation has also been expressed in the Borana proverbs discussed below. Interestingly, Frembgen states that the hyena has magical importance of varying degrees to many societies around the world. These ranges from the superstition of guaranteeing good harvest, getting desired woman, protection against harm, and medicinal values such as fighting tumor and treating rheumatism, and treating infertility and sexual dysfunction.

Thomas Beidelman who studied the Kaguru of Tanzania argues that the hyena occupies an essentially negative, sometimes menacing, more often grotesquely comic role (Beidelman 1979:524). For Beidelman, the hyena is closely associated with witchcraft, with deviancy from morality and decency. Citing his informants, he writes, “the hyena is active at night, devours carrion including humans, has a wild almost humanoid laughter, stinks, greedy and indiscriminating in its diet, scheming and calculating yet basically clumsy and stupid and hermaphroditic” (Beidelman 1979:524). The physical characteristic of the hyena is in this citation extrapolated to its internal and behavioral nature to formulate and shape his character. In Beidelman’s work the hyena is almost always associated with a witch who is an old woman. Beidelman concludes that just like the hyena, old women are symbolically ambiguous in terms of Kaguru beliefs about the relation between age, sexuality and authority, and hence stand for the subversion of male authority (Beidelman 1979:523).

The special connection between the hyena and the witch has also been posited by Margaret Dunham (2007) in her study of the Valangi of Tanzania. According to her, the hyena is compared with the witch since both eat corpses, commit incest, engage in homosexuality, and reign in their baser impulse (Dunham 2007: 594). We are told of the folk belief among the Valangi that witches ride naked on the hyena sitting facing backward at night to perform some of their witchcraft, and that hyenas live in the witches’ house at the back of the house where it is darkest (Dunham 2007:593). Old women are vilified as witches in Valangi community and are categorized with the hyena, a wild animal that is configured detestable and base. In some of the stories she

analyzed the hyena is portrayed more as a housewife who stays at home and does cooking in contrast to its nature of being a talented hunter.

Sehlu Kidane (1996) has written on the Borana oral narratives in which he analyzed stories where the hyena is deemed greedy and foolish. The hyena plays the dupe in stories where fox is the trickster that outwits and destroys him. In one such story the hyena is led into “eating the Lion’s calf, and in this way fox exploited the hyena’s greed to destroy him and inherit his cattle” (Kidane 1996:39). In yet another story, the hyena triggers a chain reaction that helps solve the problem of hare whose long ears were hooked by a thorn tree from which he could not unhook himself. The hyena agrees to devour the donkey as a way of complying with the request to free the hare when all others were refusing to help rescue the helpless hare, and hence turning himself into a benefactor from the viewpoint of the one in trouble. Yet others perceive him as greedy and vilify him despite his helpful gesture. The greed overrides the help he has rendered to the hare and hence instead of being regarded as a hero, he is deemed a villain. Aneesa Kassam in her work on symbolism among the Gabra, reports that ‘Waata informants told me that they were able to speak the ‘language’ of the hyena, an evil animal in the Gabbra conceptual scheme’ (Kassam 1986: 197). Perhaps this alludes to comprehending the symbolic interpretation of some of the hyena’s actions since in reality there is no hyena language to be spoken by people. It is noteworthy that the Gabra, Borana’s immediate neighbor conceives of the hyena as evil perhaps because it is prone to attack them and their livestock frequently.

In the analysis of the texts that follows, I will adopt Alan Dundes’ (1980) seminal work on symbolic projection in interpreting folklore. Applying the psychoanalytic theory is useful if it helps us to interpret the symbolic elements found in the myths, legends and folktales (Das 2014: 13). The attempt to use psychoanalysis in Borana texts is not farfetched as it may appear. There are stories among the community that directly hint at probing the psychological status of individuals to bring out their fears, desires and wishes. A story is told long ago of a middle aged man, his wife and their first born son of 20 years. One day they traveled on a long journey far from everybody. They had walked for days in scorching sun and they were thirsty and exhausted. They came across a deep well in the middle of nowhere. When they wanted to drink the water they could not do so because it was unreachable. The well was so deep that they had no way of drawing the water. And they could not go away because they were going to die of thirst. As they sat there, the man prayed and god whispered to him that if each one of them will speak the truth and say their wishes without hiding anything, the water level will rise and that they will use their hands to draw and drink. He told his wife and son that all the three of them must with no inhibition say what is in their minds in form of their wishful thinking for their lives to be saved. They agreed to do it and the boy was first. He said he wishes that his father dies while they are wealthy and that he wishes to use that wealth the way he wants, buying good clothes, taking all the women he wanted and being an envy of his peers. The water level in the well rose significantly. The wife said that she wishes that her husband dies, leaving her with all the wealth for her to control. She wishes that her son is a weakling whom she can control to marry the girl of her choice and that she can go with any man she likes without being rebuked. She wishes that she is admired by all men and envied by all women in the area. Again the water level in the well rose very high but still out of their reach. When it came to the

man's turn, he said that he wishes to grow old with his wife and son to a ripe old age of a hundred years with all his wealth. He wishes that his son gets married and that he sees his grandchildren before he dies. He wants to die before his wife and son and being buried by all his family members. The water level rose to the brim, overflowing the well and they quenched their thirst and carried some to last them their journey.

Psychoanalysis observes that the creative faculty draws on drives and fantasies buried in the unconscious and that they provide the clue to understanding the imaginative mind (Mollema 1996:2). The story draws out the wishful thinking of the individuals through the death/life crisis. Their life depended on each one of them speaking the truth which is hidden in their inner selves. By asking them to bring it out to save their lives, the storyteller is probing what was in their psychological unconscious. For both the son and the wife, it is their inaccessibility to use the family wealth the way they desired that forms their fears and anxieties. For the man, it is the possibility of dying early in life without knowing the future of his family that causes him anxiety. And so, each of their subconscious is meant to address the fears and anxieties they have. The wishful thinking is a way of addressing the object that hinders the achievement of their desires. Both the son and his mother see the man as a hindrance to their attaining their desired goals of being wealthy and using their wealth to gratify their sexual and material desires. The man also fears his wife or son will get rid of him to access family wealth which he controls singlehandedly. Traditionally, father-son relationships were, and still often remain today, tense and oedipal (Silverman 2016: 178). From the point of view of the son, he wants to replace his father as a de facto family head by taking the role of controlling family wealth, and hence he suffers from that anxiety. The same is true of the woman suffering from penis envy by wishing to replace her husband as woman man and controlling the family and loading it on her weakling son and becoming a husband for her daughter in-law. The man on the other hand has different problems. He suffers from separation anxiety. He does not want early separation from his family through death and instead, desiring the longevity of life.

The above story is essentially relevant to the explication of why narrators use an animal character, in this case the hyena, to articulate their human issues. The Borana oral texts confront one with proverbs ostensibly uttered by the hyena or stories told about him. The hyena could be lamenting about what he deems as unfair treatment from god at creation because of his own apparent peculiarities. But since we know that the hyena is just but an animal that lacks capacity to talk, let alone philosophize over his unique condition, it is indeed the people using the hyena as their own mouthpiece to air certain views. For Dundes, it arises through inversion where it is pretended that animals would like to be like humans (1980: 56). Dundes further argues that all artistic creativity is projective (Dundes 1980: 59) and therefore symbolic. Symbolic projection is defined as tendency to attribute to another person or environment impulse or feelings, which is painful, unacceptable or taboo that is actually within one self (Dundes 1980: 37). The lamentation that the hyena makes, for instance, about the unfairness of god if uttered by man, is unacceptable, painful and in the main a taboo. But the use of animal character lessens the effect of disrespect to god, while putting across the general human feeling about the anomaly of godly creations. Hence narrators project their own anxieties, thoughts and wishes upon an animal in oral stories and proverbs as if it were those animals who have spoken those words. Cleverly and through artistic projection, they

evade the wrath their own unacceptable utterances would have brought on them. As Dundes teaches, it is precisely for this reason that in jokes, folktales, folksongs, proverbs and children's games that anxieties can be vented (Dundes 1980: 36) and this is done as psychological defense mechanisms which provides an unconscious screen for the display of the causes of anxiety (Dundes 1980: 37). Regarding the relationship between humans and animals and how they appear to interchange their roles, Dundes informs us that although men want to yield to animal desires and perform the animal acts, this is not a guilt-free wish (Dundes 1980:56). For instance, animals engage in incest or homosexuality without feeling shame, yet man feels shame arising from his sense of morality and therefore cannot engage in these acts directly without being discrete. In order to escape the guilt of his action if he must, he first convert the animal into human form by giving him human characteristics such as speech, marriage and general human comportment and then still keep the animality of the animal intact for them to perform the other shame-inducing roles. For Dundes, the more human the behavior performed by the animal, the complete the projective inversion (Dundes 1980: 56). The contrast between what animals do and what man does is on another level the contrast between nature and culture. Cultural inhibitions would not allow man to engage in all the natural things animals do because of their animal nature. Similarly, man cannot do all the things animals do because of his human nature which is culture bound. The framing of these genres in the fictional way provides a socially sanctioned outlet for the expression of what cannot be articulated in the more usual direct way (Dundes 1980:36).

Beliefs, Superstitions, Proverbs and Witty Sayings about the Hyena

Certain social beliefs are associated with the hyena among the Borana. One such belief contends that the hyena is a seer who can forecast the future. People have used the howling noise it makes as meaningful signs that can be read. One informant told me that four signs can be attached to the hyena's noise and interpreted by those who understand its 'language'. A grunt by the hyena means someone important will die from the immediate neighborhood. A long howl means there is peace. The lost animals will be found if the hyena makes short, disjointed noise, and a long howl followed by a grunt means the rains are about to pour. In the 1990s in Sololo District, I knew one Guyo Dida, a Gabra man married to a Borana woman who was the interpreter of the 'language' of the hyena. On the most part, he was a lone ranger, hunting and gathering honey by following honey birds in the bush. He was an expert in interpreting the hyena language largely reading the signs of what the hyena does and relating it to what happens later. My informant told me that recently near a certain village the hyenas were fighting, chasing, falling and biting one another in groups. The following day two opposing forces and dissident groups fought at the same spot with several resultant deaths. The repeated actions of the hyena can overtime be turned into his language with meaning for those who have followed his actions and what they signify.

The hyena is regarded in daily Borana discourse as dirty, gluttonous, and cannot be counted as a trophy game even when one kills him despite being an acknowledged dangerous animal. In his greed he eats animals that are still alive, and he is the only animal that does this along with the wild dogs. The hyena's name is rarely directly mentioned. He is instead euphemized as 'yuyu', or 'the thing of foul mouth'. It is

believed that he has a poisonous mouth as a result of eating deadly poisonous snakes like puff adder. All the Borana ritual leaders such as *Qaallu* and *Abba Gadaa* cannot eat the meat of livestock killed by the hyena. Animals regarded as the big five such as the lion, the elephant, the rhino, the giraffe and the buffalo have a praise song that praises them and those who hunt and kill them. Not so the hyena. It is believed that the hyena is a nocturnal animal that sleeps during the day and hunts at night. People who stay late in the night without sleeping and wake up late during the day are said to behave like the hyena. People believe that the hyena lives in her own hyena hole (*boola warabesa*) where she slips in during the day and hence cannot be found easily in the daylight. It is in this hole that the hyena feeds and nurtures her cubs. There is also a belief that the hyena owns a water container in form of a tuber plant (*buute warabesa*) that grows in the wild. No one knows how the plant came to be associated with the hyena but everyone believes that the plant is for the hyena to draw water with. A saying is sometimes uttered that the hyena's water container does not serve the hyena any good even though it is said to be hers. This is uttered where one feels some object or person that belongs to her is but a name without performing the function it was meant for. Although the object is said to belong to the individual, in terms of its functionality to help serve the owner, it is seen wholly as having no use.

A nursery rhyme that appears to be anchored on people's hatred for the hyena goes: here the sun is shining, there the rain is raining, and here the hyena is giving birth, there god is withholding back the baby's legs. As Cassar-Pullion and Galley (1990:99) observe, the poetic vision conforms to the value of the social group to which the poet belongs, even though he is an inventor in the same tradition. The poem is about contrast in the weather where rain and sun are jostling for attention. It is also during this time when the hyena is giving birth. Unexpectedly, instead of facilitating this natural process god is said to have hindered it by blocking the baby from coming out. This blockage will lead to the mother hyena and her baby's death. While the rain is supplanted by the sun in the case of the weather, birth is also supplanted by death in the case of the hyena. The binary opposites of life/death are implied by the pairing of rain/sun and birth/death. The poem is a wishful thinking of the composer that the hyena should die in this miserable way. In terms of literalization of metaphor, death for the hyena is life for people and vice versa.

The proverbial statement *warabes dogamsu dhaqee rimaan deebie*, the hyena that seeks to impregnate returns with pregnancy is loaded with meaning. Proverbs normally are part of ordinary conversation or play the role in argument of one kind or other (De Caro 1986: 185). This proverbial citation is uttered mostly in instances where one has gone out of one's way to stir conflict that is unprovoked but comes back bruised, beaten and defeated. In the case of the hyena, the Borana believe the animal is a hermaphrodite, that it is a male as well as a female. The notion of the hyena as hermaphroditic has also been observed elsewhere. Gaudet (1992: 67) says the unusual genitalia of the female hyena cause it to look and act like a male, and because of this some of the tales suggest the hermaphroditic connections. Often the same male/female animal will seek for a mating partner first as a male. In this instance the hyena was going on top, to mount, to lay and to penetrate its partner as a male would a female, to impregnate. But an unexpected reversal of event, the male is feminized and mounted and impregnated. Being beaten, defeated, bruised is symbolized as feminized, penetrated and impregnated

against one's will and consent. In terms of literalization of metaphor, the saying illustrates the fear of homosexuality among men and of being feminized through sexual penetration. At another level, the saying may also be an unconscious allusion to men who take other men's wives as mistresses while ironically theirs are also being taken. Since men cannot be pregnant in the natural sense, the saying attributes the pregnancies of their wives from the illegitimate liaisons with other men to them as the feminization of the husbands.

In another proverb, the hyena said he would want to accuse god for three things but he will forgive him for three reasons too. Said the hyena, 'God created all other species male and female, but for us we are all female and male' (hermaphrodite). But in spite of this, I forgive God because we can give birth and fill the world. Secondly I wish to accuse God because in all other species, only a few are lame. But for us we are all created lame. Again I forgive God because despite the lameness we can catch whatever prey we chase or be able to outrun whatever is chasing us. Lastly I wish to accuse God that in all other species only a few are greedy but for us, the whole hyena species is regarded as greedy. I forgive God because despite the greed, we still call one another if we realize there is some food to be shared. Proverbs used in speech situation attract the imagination of the listeners by poetic effectiveness of their expression and to lend authority and weight to argument because they are generally recognized as eternal truths (Okpewho 1992: 231). In this proverb the hyena enumerates some weaknesses and shortcomings of the entire hyena species that make it distinct from others. These are their hermaphroditic nature, lameness and greed. Even though their apparent anomalies stereotype them, they nevertheless have overcome their adverse effects and can procreate and advance their species, can functionally run or chase adversaries and do share whatever needs to be shared in form of food finds. The hyena can see the peculiarities of his own existence vis-a-vis other creatures and knows that his misfortune emerged out of the errors of creation by the supreme creator of heaven and earth. He laments this unique characteristic but acknowledges that he has been enabled in another way. When despised or insulted or slighted he could hold his own and comes across as a defender of his own limitation or position. This is an allusion to typical human situation of people who offend others but deserve forgiveness because of previous kind gestures they may have rendered to those they have offended. Here the hyena is seen as a seeker of justice, fair play and equality. The characteristics cited are unique to him. He is aware of his own limitation and intelligently analytical of them. He points to the uniqueness of his own existence. The text provides an intellectualized rationale why people should forgive one another, no matter the magnitude of the offense. Symbolically the proverb is a veil attempt to address the deity about the inadequacies of human conditions that are always found wanting arising from the inexplicable will of god. The reality of binary opposition of rich/poor, handsome/ugly, able/disable, clever/foolish is alluded to with its attendant fair/unfair implications. Implied in the proverb is the knowledge that social interaction among people brings in many frictions among them, some of which needs to be foregone in view of other considerations. In a society where all depend on one another for communal living, psychologically people need to forgive misdemeanors of friends and foes alike for the larger common good. The binary opposition of nature and culture is at play here. While

it is natural for the way people look, it is cultural how they perceive the way they look and work and outgrow some of those natural shortcomings.

It is fairly common to hear a proverb like *Warabes maruman ufi nyatu*, the hyena that eats its own intestines. This proverb is normally uttered in reaction to those who molest one of their own. In a society where kinship is cherished and nurtured, endangering one's own is frowned upon and symbolically spoken of as the hyena that eats its own entrails. It is said that the hyena when speared and the entrails come out will consume it and in that act, contribute to his own quick and sure demise. Those who attack their own kind are metaphorically referred to as hyena, who essentially contributes to the death of family, clan or tribe. Consumption of own guts is an oral theme. The hyena suffers from oral frustration, unable to satisfy his greed to the extent that he feeds on himself. It is a reversal of social norms as society expects its members to protect it from external attack. The proverb cautions against destroying own society as an enemy from within. Literally speaking intestine is used to show brotherhood as in sharing the same intestine (womb) of the same mother. The fear of patricide, fratricide and internecine clan wars is perhaps the reason for this proverb and the way to avert it.

Oral Narratives about the Hyena

In one story, the hyena finds an old woman and her granddaughter abandoned in a homestead from which people have moved. She had no donkey to carry her load. The hyena comes around and asks her why she was not moving with others. The woman says she has no one to carry her load. The hyena offers to carry the luggage at a fee of a string of meat to which he will be constantly fed. The old woman agrees but the girl objects on the ground of his untrustworthiness. The hyena then quips, "If the owner of the luggage accepts to load and the one being loaded accepts to carry, what is making the young girl have a verbal diarrhea?" The deal thus agreed they set to move. Shortly, the hyena increases his pace, putting a distance between him, the woman and her granddaughter. The woman knows he limps, but because he is outpacing them, the limp is construed as a lie. She calls out "*sob okol sob okol*" (limping liar, limping liar). The hyena replies, "*jarti qoofu baag okol*" (the hollow old woman, so what if I limp?) and runs off with all her belongings. The story's comic element resides in violating norm where the hyena is made to replace a donkey as a beast of burden and the way he outwits the woman and easily leaps to the wild with the luggage of the unsuspecting hag. The task of such compositions and their performances is to impart information through an entertaining and compelling plot acted out by the storyteller (Rosenberg 2011:265). The physical abandonment of the old woman is symbolic sexual abandonment since old women are past the ages of flirtation for sexual ends. The lack of care and support by the villagers is evident when she cannot acquire a donkey as the normally used beast of burden to carry her belongings. The hyena's gesture of offering to carry her luggage appears to be a noble one that will solve the woman's immediate problem. She has found a new friend on whom to pour her burden. But the suspicion of the girl almost aborts the venture. He asks for fees in form of long, dried and preserved meat which he will be eating all the way to their destination. At one level, this act of oral ingestion is also symbolic of oral sex which he gets from the old woman. The girl's objection is basically to this idea of the friendship, the courtship and entering into cordial relationship for which the hyena (man) is made to carry the load and the woman

pays him in an unending meat supply albeit dry and old, like the old woman's sexual organs. In terms of wishful thinking by the people, there is the wish that the old woman is deprived of her belonging by the fictitious animal and not themselves in order to escape the immorality of the act. At a risk of the deal being mangled, the hyena underscores the mutual benefits and agreement between two consenting adults and questions the girl's unwarranted verbosity in opposing the deal. When the woman realizes that the hyena had actually duped her, she calls him a limping liar, that the limp itself is a pretense. His reply is more pointed and carries his disregard for her, although he has eaten her meat and therefore indebted to her. Calling the woman 'hollow' implies that the hyena has already satiated his desire for her through his oral ingestions of the meat which is symbolic of his sexual exploit of her. He thus brags and dares her to chase him.

On the other hand by burdening the hyena with her load, the woman feminizes the hyena. Literally speaking she is riding on the hyena and loading it on him. Elsewhere, Dunham (2007: 593) reports among the Valangi of Tanzania that the hyena can be ridden by humans, 'learning to ride the hyena is one of a witch's most difficult tasks'. In loading the hyena and entrusting it with her belongings, the woman domesticates and tames the wild animal. By accepting to be a beast of burden albeit at a fee, the hyena plays a willing victim of being feminized. The woman's desire to tame the hyena for herself, for her own exclusive use as a beast of burden and also a sexual plaything available to her irrespective of the social norms and people's opinion is underscored. The granddaughter represents the old woman's conscience and a moderator of her desires and a social prick to regulate her immodesty and inappropriateness. In the story both the hyena and the woman were being led by their id, the desire to satisfy themselves whether sexual or oral ingestion without delay. But the girl plays the role of the ego and super ego. She applies the reality principle and societal ideal as it is not socially right to engage the hyena, a wild animal, for domestic work. As Finnegan (1970:351) teaches us, what is often involved in the animal stories is a comment, even a satire on human society and behavior.

In another story, the hyena and the jackal went to look for cows together. The hyena gets a fat bull and the jackal gets a scrawny cow. The jackal puts a fatty, shiny fruit tuber (*singo*) in her cow's anus. She then asks the hyena to bring her bull to run on a hill with her cow to gauge which one is fatter. The hyena consents and when she sees the droplets of "fats" from the jackal's cow, the hyena begs to be given the cow. The jackal grudgingly agrees, insulting her, the foolish one of big cheeks; disappear with it into the hole. They then go in search of a house. The hyena gets a well built, well sheltered house with only one door. The jackal gets a hovel, with many entrances, and see-through without a thatch. The jackal says, if an enemy comes I will run through this door, my children will run through this other door, for you if an enemy comes through the main door where will you run through? The hyena begs to be given the shanty and the jackal finally agrees, insulting her, the foolish one of big cheeks, disappear with it into the hole. They again go in search of a knife. The jackal collects the feathers of vulture together. The hyena gets a sharp strong knife. The jackal says if this my knife breaks, I will slaughter with this, if this one breaks, I will slaughter with this, you if this one of yours breaks what will you use? The hyena begs to be given the feathers and the jackal agrees after what seems like a long plea by the hyena, insulting her, the foolish

one of big cheeks, disappear with it into the hole. They then slaughter the cows. The hyena's knife in form of feathers cannot do the work. She asks the jackal for advice; the jackal places the sharp knife between the feathers and slaughters the cow. Then they settle in their houses to feed and fatten their children. The children of the jackal becomes fat because they feed on the meat of the fat bull, stay in a sheltered house while those of the hyena become thin and weak because they feed on the meat of a thin cow and are sleeping in a cold windy unsheltered house. The hyena asks why his children cannot grow fat and what the jackal does to fatten her own children. The jackal answers, put them in a large water container, boil the water and pour into the container, cover and open after one week. The hyena did what she was told. When she opened the container, obviously the children had all died. Realizing what the jackal had done to her, the hyena now too furious goes to her house. The jackal had earlier fled, leaving behind a tree stump covered with clothes like someone sleeping. The hyena started beating the tree stump before realizing that the jackal has outwitted her. She waited for her at a water point and disguising herself using grass, the jackal comes along to ask to be allowed to drink water. The unsuspecting hyena allows her to drink the water. Next she comes again disguising herself using ash. When the ash gets washed off she is exposed and the hyena recognizes her and gives chase. She is caught but she pleads the grip is too tight and when the hyena loosens the grip, she leaves her with her feces and runs off never to be caught.

On the surface, the story is about friendship built on trust on the one hand and mischief and deceit on the other. The hyena is trusting and over-relies on the advice of her friend. Ruth Finnegan tells us that the hyena is a type of brute force and stupidity, constantly duped by little quick animals (Finnegan 1970:345). The jackal is cunning, manipulative and a beneficiary of the latter's naivety and overdependence. The hyena symbolizes good trusting people who depend on the advice of friends, people who refuse to use their own common sense even when they know something is right to seek the opinion of their friends. The jackal creates situations for the hyena to doubt and dislike what luck has bestowed upon her. Here the hyena is good, trusting and unsuspecting while jackal is opportunistic, malicious, envious and desirous of her friend's properties. But more than this, the story is about feminine rivalry over domestic matters. It is about whose house is better, whose cow is fatter, and whose children are better fed. What plays out is the trickery that borders on treachery of an unprecedented level that ends tragically. There are salient competitions among women over their beauty, their possessions and their children. Women have a lot of anxiety about what their female friends have in form of property and their looks. The story is about possession envy, where envy over what people other than ourselves own and how those possessions are inversely made our own. Through these tales both the creator of the tales, tale-teller and whoever listens to these tales enjoy by fulfilling, though symbolically, their desire to surpass the law of the father and to possess the forbidden (Nair 2014:53). There are references to anal theme where the scrawny cow's anus is inserted with some tubers to demonstrate that it is fat. Ultimately when the jackal was caught, she left the hyena with its own feces that also implies oral frustration. The story is possibly a result of communal anxiety about false friendship, rivalry amongst the age-mates and peer competition.

The subordination of the hyena and the supremacy of the lion in their own wild world are illustrated by the story in which the hyena was basically a herdsman for the lion, even though he also had some of his own among the herd. On one occasion the jackal being clever and cunning plotted the death of the hyena by coopting him into a demonic plan of killing and eating the lion's new born calf. They then caught a dik dik and pretended that the cow gave birth to it, and since the dik dik is bound to run away, asked the lion to tie it with a tight rope. When the dik dik ran away as it would, the lion was suspicious and the jackal threw the hyena under the bus by spilling the beans. Unknown to the hyena, the jackal had not eaten much of the meat and even the little she ate she vomited by putting her fingers in her mouth, leaving the hyena to eat greedily the head, the hooves, and all with intent to adducing evidence when push came to shove. The jackal asked the lion to hit each one of them on the back to induce vomit, and when this was done, all the crushed bones, hooves and chunks of meat were found in the hyena's vomit. Overwhelmed by the evidence, the lion had to kill the hyena for devouring his calf. The cunning jackal asks Big Uncle lion for some of the hyena's herd and her wish was granted. In this story, the hyena comes across as a dupe and a gullible character easily misled into crime and unable to escape punishment. He is a tragic figure who is overcome with greed and does not think twice about the consequences of his action. He falls for the schemes of the manipulating jackal without the ability to disentangle himself from his problems. The jackal becomes a trickster par excellence. She plans and hatches an idea that will forever eliminate the hyena and inherit his property. The trick is accomplished by a number of manoeuvres. Capitalizing on his greed, she co-opts the hyena into devouring the lion's newborn calf and eats little herself, foreseeing the serious consequences of such a daring act. She thinks quickly and comes up with the idea of using a dik dik that in appearance could be substituted for a new born calf. But since she is aware of their crime, she cautions the owner to use a tight rope to tie it. When they were eventually cornered, she devises vomiting as a foolproof way of identifying the culprit. After eliminating the hyena, she cries as a plea to the lion to let her inherit the hyena's livestock. Folktales reflect family tensions, unconscious wishes, and interpersonal dynamics that often stand in direct contrast to observed behavior (Ben-Amos 1992: 115). Among the Borana cattle ownership has always been a point of contention among siblings and parents. The jackal's wish to eliminate the hyena reflects sibling rivalry over property leading to premeditated homicide. It is also symbolic of a family member's unconscious wish for the death of a relative whose property may end up in the hands of the member. The inheritance of property if death occurs follows the path of seniority although by the time a father dies he has already distributed his property in form of *andhurraa* (livestock given at birth). But the death of a sibling will naturally call for a redistribution of the property formally belonging to the deceased, including even inheriting his wife. Quarrels and fighting over livestock is frequent especially when some of the sons feel their livestock are far much less than those of their siblings. Although sibling elimination is uncommon because generally Borana do not kill other Borana, the psychological desire for it cannot be ruled out specially knowing that it is beneficial to some siblings who stand to gain in case of such an eventuality.

Conclusion

In this paper we set out to explore some of the oral traditional genres and beliefs that the Borana associate with the hyena and how they could be understood psychoanalytically. The hyena comes across as ambiguous animal sometimes depicted as foolish and other times as witty and humorous. In most of the oral expressions where the hyena speaks, his utterances are by all means witty. They portray a character that is thoughtful, wise and is able to articulate issues that confronts him in life. As Osaaji (2009) says animals are metaphorical representations of humans and their behavior. The more philosophical genres like proverb or proverbial story essentially depict the hyena as positive, thoughtful, provocative and sagacious. In the genres where he is depicted as voicing his own issues, more positive qualities are espoused. This is evident in the proverb where the hyena accuses god of deliberate discrimination at the time of creation with unique deficiencies unlike others. The less philosophical a genre, the more the hyena is portrayed as foolish, naïve, stupid and greedy. In these genres the hyena is represented by other voices, his life is narrated. The hyena could be considered the animal counterpart to witches, and as such represents the darker side of humanity (Dunham 2007:594). Where the hyena is objectified by others, he is negated. Although interpreting symbolism is a matter of conjecture, the attribution of some taboo subject to the hyena is a conscious and/or unconscious projection by the narrators to speak in fictional and fantastic terms that rid them of any responsibility of either offending fellow men or higher natural powers. In the Borana cultural lore, age is highly respected and no one should offend people old enough to be one's mother, father and grandmother. By using the hyena to do what they would have wished to do to the older persons, the narrators are engaged in wishful thinking without the consequent guilt. The cruelty that people intended to visit on such persons is attributed to the hyena and then the hyena is marked out as cruel, unjust, greedy and all sorts of abhorrent characterization which they conferred on him. In this scenario we end up with a character that is half human and half animal. Hence for example within the stories we see the animals looking for houses, acquiring knives, slaughtering cattle, owning wives and children, speaking wisely about issues, complaining on unfair matters all of which are human attributes. At the same time, the narrator's intention to keep their animal nature such as howling, roaring, scavenging, crushing bones with their powerful jaws, limping away into the wild and so on, ensured that they will be construed as still remaining within the animal world. In that state the hyena serves as a psychological ploy for man to draw on as he wishes in masking his own desires unconsciously.

References

- Ben-Amos, D. 1992. "Folktale". In Bauman, R. (ed.) *Folklore, Cultural Performances and Popular Entertainments*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, pp. 101-118.
- Beidelman, T. 1979. "Kaguru Oral Literature". *Anthropos*, 74 (3/4): 497-529.
- Cassar-Pullino, J and Galley, M. 1990. "Oral Poetry in Maltese Islands: Image Relating to Love". *International Folklore Review*, vol. 7:97-101.
- Das, R. 2014. "Psychoanalytical Study of Folktale". *Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, vol. 19 (10): 13-18.

- De Caro, F. A. 1986. "Riddles and Proverbs". In Oring, E. (ed.) *Folk Groups and Folklore Genres: An Introduction*. Logan Utah. Utah State University, pp.175-198.
- Dundes, A. 1980. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington. Indiana University Press.
- Dunham, M. 2007. "The Hyena: Witch's Auxiliary or Nature's Fool? Witchcraft and Animal Lore among the Valangi of Tanzania". In Dounias, E. et al. (eds.) *Animal Symbolism: Animals, Keystone in Relationship between Man and Nature?* Paris. IRD Editions, pp.589-604.
- Finnegan, R. 1970. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi. Oxford University Press.
- Frembgen, J. 1998. "The Magicality of the Hyena: Beliefs and Practices in West and South Asia". *Asian Folklore Studies*, vol. 57 (2): 331-344.
- Gaudet, M. 1992. "Bouke, the Hyena in Louisiana and African Tales". *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 105 (415): 66-72.
- Kassam, A. 1986. "The Gabbra Pastoralist/Waata Hunter-gatherer Symbiosis: A Symbolic Interpretation". *Sugia* 7 (11): 189-204.
- Kidane, S. 1996. Borana Oromo Prose Narratives. A Contextual Study. M A Thesis. Addis Ababa University.
- Mollema, N. 1996. "Psychoanalysis and Folktales: A Zulu Interpretation". *South African Journal of Folklore Studies*, vol. 7: 1-12.
- Nair, V. R. 2014. "The Defiance of Religious Discourse: A Lacanian Interpretation of Folktales". *Literary Endeavour*, vol. 5 (1): 47-54.
- Okpewho, I. 1992. *African Oral Literature: Backgrounds, Character and Continuity*. Bloomington & Indianapolis. Indiana University Press.
- Osaaji, M. G. 2009. "Subversion of Patriarchal Ideology: A Case Study of Magdalene, A Woman Oral Narrative Performer from the Samburu of Kenya". *Research in African Literatures*, vol. 4(1): 19-26.
- Rosenberg, A. 2011. *Eastern African Popular Songs: Verbal Art in States of Transformation*. Trenton. Africa World Press.
- Silverman, E. K. 2016. "The Waters of Mendangumeli: A Masculine Psychoanalytic Interpretation of a New Guinea Flood Myth- and Women's Laughter". *The Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 129 (512): 171-202.