

Animal Names We (Dis)Praise By

An Exploration and a Mini-dictionary of Animal Epithets in Egyptian Arabic

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Abstract

Animals have always been a parallel world on which humans draw for service, food, entertainment, comfort, experimentation and insight. Animals have been a source of dread, humiliation and disgust as well. Humans have always used animals to shed light on their own conditions, e.g., in fables and parables and other allegories. They have used their names, behaviors and qualities to talk about their own species, and to positively or negatively evaluate and label one another. This article is an exploration into (Egyptian) Arabic zoosemies - animal names used for labeling and insulting and, less frequently, praising - with occasional references to and comparisons with English. Based on the exploration, a mini-dictionary of Egyptian Arabic animal epithets explained, illustrated and translated into English is compiled.

Keywords: zoosemy, zoosemes, animal names, (Egyptian) Arabic

ملخص:

عالم الحيوان - كل ما يمشي ويزحف ويطير ويسبح - عالم مواز لعالم البشر. ولم يقف البشر في استعمالهم ما يسمح لهم من هذا العالم عند المنفعة، بل يستعملون أسماء الحيوانات وصفاتها وسلوكياتها في التعبير عن معان بشرية. من ذلك استعمال أسماء الحيوانات في الذم والمدح. تتناول هذه الدراسة استخدام أسماء الحيوانات في الذم والمدح إجمالاً - من وجهة نظر دلالية وتداولية واستعارية - وفي لغة أهل مصر اليوم على وجه الخصوص، مع إشارات إلى اللغة العربية الفصحى وإلى اللغة الإنجليزية لاكتشاف بعض ما في استعمال تلك الأسماء من عموميات بشرية ومن خصوصية ثقافية. تلحق الدراسة بهذه الخلفية الموجزة قاموساً مُصغراً لتلك الأسماء ودلالاتها واستعمالاتها في لغة أهل مصر.

الكلمات المفتاحية: استعارة أسماء الحيوانات وصفاتها، أسماء الحيوانات، لغة أهل مصر.

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1. Introduction

Then why are they turning away from God's reminders, as if they were alerted donkeys, fleeing from a lion? (The Holy Quran 74:49-50)

Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves (Matthew 7:15).

One verbal-visual text on Facebook depicts a lion and a monkey with the logo of an Egyptian football team on each of them. The caption reads *ʕindama yamraDu l ʔasad yaZunnu l qird ʔannahu maliku l ghaabah* – "When the lion gets sick, a monkey will think it is the King of the Jungle." The parable of a donkey acting out as if it were a horse, only to be shortly uncovered when it starts braying is quite popular on Arab Facebook pages, too. In both cases, humans are represented as animals and are called "animal names." One more, visual-verbal text on Facebook has a duck embracing a dog and the caption reads *taʕlam ʔannahu kalb lakinnaha tuḥibbuh* - "She knows (that) he is a dog, but she still loves him, notwithstanding."

Animals are drawn upon in everyday language and the ways humans name them and use them encode their perceptions of those animals, some of which are quite mistaken or questionable, and most of which are based on literature, art and media, rather than direct contact (Cf. Schmauks, 2014).

"... animals ... also face vicious verbal attacks. Day by day, innocent animals' names are being misused in lewd, objectionable, and obscene ways...." (P. Jorgensen "7 Dirtiest Animal Names." Huffpost, July 10, 2012. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/dirty-names-animals_b_1651855)

The animal kingdom is a parallel world. Humans have used animals for so many purposes, including drawing parallels between animal and human life and using animals to reflect upon human life in fables, parables and allegories. Whether the purposes are didactic or malicious, animals may very often be taken for granted by humans. They are what we think they are, though some them we have never seen in reality, e.g., a phoenix.

This memorable passage from the Bible describes a Utopian state

of affairs where humans and animals live in harmony and peace: "The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; the young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox" (Isaiah, 11.6-7). It would be heaven if humans could live that way, and it would be even more heavenly if they could live in peace with other creatures. This is not the case, however. Animals as well as humans engage in all forms of aggression and oppression, a great deal of which is verbal.

Verbal aggression includes "swearing (using rude, vulgar, or taboo language); cursing (entreating supernatural powers to inflict misfortune, illness, or death on the adversary); threatening (vowing bodily injuries, death, legal actions, or other punishment); aggressive requesting (e.g., 'Get lost!' or 'Drop dead!'); insulting (stating negative or embarrassing traits of the addressee)" (Schmauks, 2014: 96). Some verbal aggression – joshing or banter, or being friendly and nice in a rude and crude manner – is harmless.

An exploration of how animal names are used for praise and dispraise in a community reveals a lot about the language and culture of the community, specifically about how this community collectively perceives animals, their traits and their behavior, and how this perception varies, remains the same, from one community to another. The exploration can also help uncover misconceptions about animal ethology – that is, animal traits and behaviors.

This article is an exploration of animal names used for praise or dispraise in Egyptian Arabic. It also provides a mini-dictionary of animal epithets in this variety of Arabic. The mini-dictionary is based on a brief theoretical framework on the nature and functions of animal epithets, or zoosemes, from the points of view of semiotics, pragmatics and cognitive metaphor theory. Perception of animal names by those who use them or receive them is not given any attention.

There are casual treatments and partial lists of Arabic animal epithets in blogs, forums and Facebook pages, but this article provides a more comprehensive mini-dictionary, with explanations, translations and

illustrations of animal names used in insulting, and less frequently in praising, in Egyptian Arabic. References to Classical and Modern Standard Arabic (CA and MSA) are inevitable because Egyptian Arabic is, among other things, one development of these two stages of Arabic. Some correspondences between (Egyptian) Arabic and English in this regard are also provided.

2. Theory: Zoosemy

Animals have always been a resource for name-calling in human culture. Animal epithets attached to humans by their fellow humans seem to be a language universal, based, in the case of insulting, on the belief that humans are superior to animals, but some of them in certain situations deserve to be called animal names. Some animals, or some behaviors thereof, are well appreciated; so, they are used for endearment, flirtation or praise. Using an animal name for labeling a human is zoosemy; the animal epithet itself is a zooseme.

2.1. What is Zoosemy?

A zoosemy is an animal epithet or animal metaphor, simile or metonymy used to refer to human behaviors, traits or dispositions (e.g., Kieltyka and Kleparski, 2005). A zooseme is usually based on presumed ethological knowledge of how animals behave and what they inherently are. In this verse from the Quran "Or do you think that most of them hear or reason? They are just like livestock. Rather, they are [even] more astray in [their] way" (25:44, trans. Yusuf Ali, slightly adapted), the signified of the word *ḥanṣaam* extends from referring to livestock to referring to humans who are unable to hear the message from God.

2.2. Three Ways of Analyzing Zoosemy?

A zooseme may be analyzed in terms of cognitive metaphorical mapping as well as in terms of traditional metaphor. One quality or behavior, e.g., being wild in "She is a wild cat," is borrowed from a source domain (vehicle: animal) unto a target domain (tenor: human). There is a common ground, which is uncontrollable, potentially damaging, behavior. The mapping is also based on the assumption of parallelism between the world of humans and that of animals.

Metaphorical mapping can be realized with or with or without a linking word, e.g., "like", "as", "similar to", "resemble", etc. A simile is realized in Arabic using such linking particles as *zayy*, *mi@l*, *ka* ("like" "as") and *shabah/ yishbih* ("looks like", "is like"). In metonymical mapping, one part of an animal, e.g., *deel il kalb* – "a dog's tail" - is used to refer to a human, or a human quality, which is crooked behavior in this case.

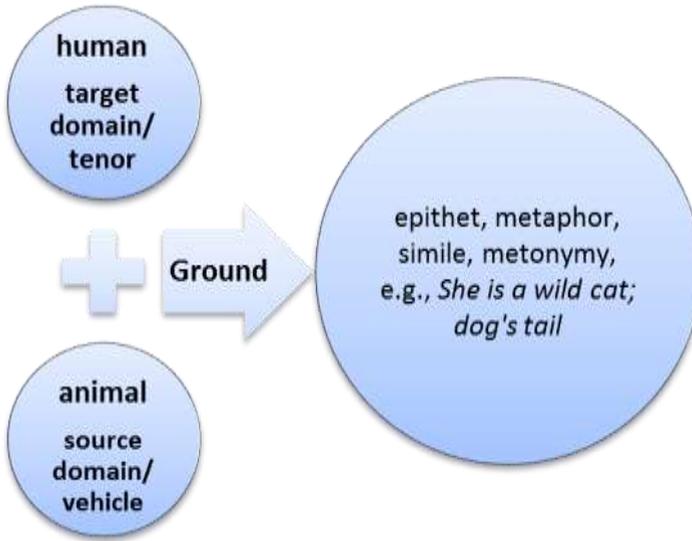


Fig.1: Zoosemy as Metaphor

A zooseme, an animal epithet, can also be analyzed in terms of semantic change. Zoosemy is thus "one of the mechanisms of semantic change whereby animal names are employed to designate human characteristics" (Kieltyka, 2010: 167). A word originally denoting an animal, e.g., "fox", undergoes a process of expansion, amelioration or degradation, and comes to refer to some human qualities of behaviors, e.g. being clever, or being tricky, crafty and cunning.

From the point of the Politeness Principle (Leech, 1983), zoosemes can be polite or impolite, ironic or joshing. Depending on the situation and the participants' perception of the animal involved, a zooseme can signal praise (approbation) or dispraise (impolite). Calling someone animal names belongs, in the jargon of pragmatics, to "positive

impoliteness": "Use taboo words - swear, or use abusive or profane language," and "Call the other names - use derogatory nominations" (Culpeper, 1996: 358).

Yet, an animal insult can be a kind of joshing or banter, "mock impoliteness," e.g., in a movie starring Adel Imam, a mother seeing her son off crying with *maʿa s-salaamah yaa ʔibn il kalb* – Lit. "Good bye, son of a dog" - and a praise based on an animal name can be ironic, e.g., *ʔasad* – "lion" - to someone who is obviously weak and timid, and *ghazaalah* – "gazelle" - to a chubby, fatty woman.

2.3. Where Do Zoosemes Come from?

Animal epithets attached to humans are based on how and what animals eat (feeding), how they fight, how they flee and how they mate, and how far humans resemble them along these fundamental aspects, which translate into traits, behaviors and dispositions. These traits, behaviors and dispositions determine how and where humans live, work and socialize.

To elaborate, a bird-like person will prefer freedom to stability; a sheep-, or bear-like person will prefer to be guided and controlled by a shepherd, while dogs, wolves and foxes can work in groups. Domestic animals live close to humans, whereas wild animals live in jungles, and cattle on the farm. Reptiles hide in furrows and burrows, while birds spend a great deal of their lives high in the air. These environments do have an impact on animal behaviors.

What animals feed on and how they eat it largely shape human perceptions of those animals and consequently how those animals' names and behaviors are used to label humans. This is where human descriptions of some animals as "animals of prey," carnivorous, herbivorous, and so on come from. "Animals of burden" - e.g., camels, donkeys, horses, and mules - are usually fed by their owners or users. Other animals eat dirt, waste and smaller animals.

There is a long list of verbs, both in English and Arabic to describe ways of eating: "feed on," "feed" (with the extra meaning of "look for food") – *yaTʕam*; "hunt" (where there predators and preys) – *yaSTaad*; "root" (push their noses) – *yashtamm*; "graze" (feed on grass) – *yarʕa*,

yartaḥ; "prey on" – *yaftaris*; "ruminant" (bring food back from their stomachs into their mouths and chew it again) – *yajtarr*; "browse" (on plants, especially their leaves) – *yaqTif*; "bite" (using teeth) – *yaqDim/yiqTum*; "bolt," "munch" and "gobble" (noisily) – *yuqrum*; "champ," "force down" and "chomp" (unwillingly) – *yatajarraḥ*, *yabtaliḥ/yazdarid*; "crunch," "devour" and "demolish" – *yaltahim*; "hamstring" – *yaḥqir*; "pick at" and "peck at" – *yanqur*, *yinaqniq*; "lick" – *yilḥas*, *yilaḥwis*. Wild animals will fight for their food and safety, whereas domestic animals are passive and quite in searching for food.

Animals are also classified according to their fleeing and escaping styles – sheep live in herds, wolves in close groups and rats prefer to live in burrows and avoid contact. Animals walk differently, and their walking styles are clues to some of their traits and behaviors: tigers bounce, *taḥib/taqfiz*, birds fly, *taTiiir*, beetles crawl, *tazhaf*, apes swing, *tataḥarjah*, bees, owls and parrots flit, *turafrif*, dogs run, *taḥdu*, donkeys trot and jog, *tuharwil*, deer and hounds bound, *taḥib/taqfiz*, crows flap, *takhfiq*, bears lumber, *tadubb/atabaaTa?*, butterflies and doves flutter, *turafrif*, cats steal, *tansall/atasallal*, cocks and turkeys strut, *takhTur/atabakhtar*, wolves lope, *taTfur/taqfiz*, toads and rabbits leap, *taqfiz/taḥib/tanuTT*, sheep frisk, *taTfur*, snakes glide and slither, *tansaab*, monkeys climb, *atasallaq*, mice scamper, *tahrub*, lions and hyenas prowl, *tajuus*, *taSTaad.*, larks soar, *tuhalliḥ*, hens strut, *tardruj*, fish swim, *taḥuum/tasbaḥ*, horses gallop, *tarkuḌ*, *takhibb*, eagles swoop, *tanqaḌ*, camels and ostriches quaver and tremble, *tahdiḥ*, ducks waddle, *tatahaada/atabamaayal*, elephants amble, *tarhu*, and cows wander, *tasuum/tahiim*, scorpions creep, *tadubb*, and cows and bulls charge, *tahiim/tadukk*.

One last source of information about animals is their mating – how they mate and copulate. "From the brutal strength display of the wild elk to the seductive display of peacocks, all creatures strive to exert control over their reproductive choices. ... Some animal species are monogamous while others have a variety of mates. Some personalities like the beaver mate for life, while tiger personalities are solitary and rarely monogamous" (<https://animalinyou.com/>).

These pieces of information about animals support using their

names, their body parts and their traits and behavior in referring to humans. Kieltyka (2010) identifies seven conceptual dimensions or spheres where this happens: profession/ social function, behavior/ character, origin/ social status, physical characteristics/ appearance, morality, sexuality, contempt/ opprobrium.

3. A Mini-dictionary: Data, Scope and Method

One main objective of this article is to compile a mini-dictionary of zoosemies, or animal epithets in contemporary Egyptian Arabic. "Animal" is taken here to include animals and birds, and "dictionary" is used in a very loose sense. Data for the mini-dictionary come from a very large variety of sources, from classical Arabic literature to contemporary Facebook pages, bumper stickers, pop songs, movies and TV dramas. Many instances of animal epithets can be found in modern and contemporary Egyptian, mainstream as well as folk and colloquial literature.

The focus of the mini-dictionary is on Egyptian Arabic, but references to MSA and CA are inevitable. Because these two varieties or levels of Arabic are shared by almost all Arabs, the animal epithets identified in the mini-dictionary will be more or less the same in most Arab countries; at least, they will be comprehensible for almost all native speakers of Arabic. There will of course be a lot of variation at the level of colloquial Arabic in each Arab country. For example, the phrase *qaTw mfaSSib heel* may sound quite incomprehensible to an Egyptian unfamiliar with Saudi Arabic. The Egyptian version is *quTT/ ?utt faSabi jiddan/ giddan* or *khaaliS*, and the meaning in both cases is "a very enraged tomcat."

The expressions in the mini-dictionary may have nothing to do with the essential nature of each animal, but they definitely have to do with people's perceptions of these animals. Urban and rural variants are noted whenever they are different, and so are standard (MSA) and colloquial ones. The letter (f) signals a feminine form and (plur.) indicates a plural form.

The mini-dictionary contains a self-evidently partial list, no matter how long. The focus is on names of animals rather than on their

behaviors and actions, which is another fertile area for research. Parts of animal bodies, e.g., tails, pecks, mouths and jaws, receive minimal, if any, attention in the mini-dictionary, though they are extensively used in describing human traits and behaviors.

Arab countries other than Egypt may have other labels for the animals listed and other connotations associated with them. Furthermore, derivations from animal names – e.g., *wahshiyah* from *wahsh* ("brutality" from "brute") and *furuusiyah* from *faras* ("chivalry" from "cheval") - are not given adequate attention. The mini-dictionary does not touch upon animal names used for forming verbs, either, e.g., *yastaʔsid* ("act like a lion"), *yatanammār* (Lit. "to act like a tiger"; "to bully" or "to act like a bull"; *yibaTbaT* ("to quack", to "duck"), or verbs associated with animals, e.g., *yazʔar* ("to roar"), *yaʕwi* ("to howl", "to bark"), *yanhaq/ yinahhaq* ("to bray"), *yurfuS* ("to kick"), *yaldagh* ("to sting"), *yibiiD/ yibiid* ("to lay eggs"), *yifqis/ yifʔis* (to hatch") and *yikaaki* ("to squawk", "to cluck", "to chirp"), to give a very partial list. An interesting Facebook user's advice is *ma tkhafshi min illi byrfuS aw yinTah khaaf min illi byfuD min gheer kalaam* – "Do not fear someone who kicks or butts; fear someone who stings/ bites silently, stealthily."

There is some repetition and a lot of cross-referencing in the mini-dictionary, which is quite predictable given that some traits and attributes are shared by more than one animal or bird. In fact, many animals live together in creating allegories, comics, metaphors, proverbials and idioms. One example is "When the cat is away, mice will play" – *ghaab il quTT ilʕab ya faar*. It will be seen very often in the mini-dictionary that many animal names make sense in the company of, or in opposition to, other animal names, e.g., wolf and sheep.

Still another limitation, the mini-dictionary is not arranged alphabetically, and there is only a minimum of thematic, or biological, organization. It all grew from a simple paragraph and kept expanding up and down. And, after all, it is a mini-dictionary which means, among other obvious things, that not all animal names used for labeling in Egyptian Arabic are listed.

Most of the religious references and quotations in the article come from the Qur'an, though the Arabic version of the Bible contains many

references to animals and parables which infiltrate the everyday language of Egyptians and could have enriched the mini-dictionary.

Animal names and derivatives thereof and examples of their usage are translated literally (Lit.), followed by an equivalent in English whenever relevant. Domínguez and Zawislawska (2006) warn of direct translations of animal-based insults from one language to another. A "camel" in English is not the same as a "camello" in Spanish. The first is the animal itself; the second refers to a drug pusher. "Camelo" is "henpecked" in Portuguese, "chameau" is "whore" in French, "Kamel" is stupid and silly in German (139-140).

*An animal idiom in one language may not have an exact equivalent in another language. One idiomatic expression may be rendered using a non-idiomatic expression and one animal idiom may be rendered without using the animal name. One example is the English "Let sleeping dogs lie" which is rendered into Arabic as *ʔal fitna naaʔimah laʕna allaahu man yuuqiZuha* – Lit. "Schism/ sedition is sleeping; may God curse the one who wakes it up."*

Conclusion

In this article, a brief theoretical background on the nature, functions and sources of zoosemy has been given. Three ways of looking at a zooseme, an instance of zoosemy, have been outlined: zoosemy as metaphor, zoosemy as an instance of semantic change and zoosemy as a means of being polite or impolite. The pervasiveness of animal epithets in labeling humans, their attributes and behavior in the Arabic of Egypt is underscored.

This background is necessary for the lexicological objective of the article, which is a mini-dictionary of animal epithets in Egyptian Arabic. The instances of animal epithets in already discussed suggest some universals as well as a lot of variation in using animal names for praise or dispraise. They also suggest that a literal translation of an animal epithet is, more often than not, inadequate. Further evidence for these two conclusions, which merit a lot of research attention, can be found in the mini-dictionary itself.

Transcription Conventions

Consonants: ʔ ء voiceless glottal stop; θ ث interdental voiceless fricative; j ج voiced palatal fricative; ħ ح voiceless pharyngeal fricative; **kh** خ voiceless uvular fricative; ð ذ interdental voiced fricative; **sh** ش voiceless palatal fricative; S ص voiceless pharyngealized fricative; **D** ض voiced pharyngealized plosive; **T** ط voiceless pharyngealized plosive; Z ظ voiced pharyngealized fricative; ʕ ع voiced pharyngeal fricative; **gh** غ voiced uvular fricative; **q** ق voiceless uvular plosive;; **w** و voiced bilabial semi-vowel; **y** ي voiced palatal semi-vowel. **Vowels:** /a/ front, low, unrounded; /i/ front, high, unrounded; /u/ back, high, rounded and pushed. The diphthong sounds in, e.g., *beet* ("house") and *toor* ("bull") are the colloquial versions of *bait* and *θaur*. Long vowels and emphatic/geminate consonants are shown by doubling the relevant symbol.

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Appendix

A Mini-dictionary of Animal Epithets in Egyptian Arabic

Animal (generic)

- *ḥayawaan* / *ḥayawaanah* (f), *ḥayawaanaat* and *ḥayawaaniin* (plur.) in childish talk – "animal", *bahiim* / *bahiimah* (f) *bahaayim* (plur.) – "beast"; something that is animal-like, lacking in reason or control is "bestial".
- In English, serious criminals, killers and rapists, can also be referred to as "bloodsuckers," "brutes" and "flesh-eaters." The generic word "cattle" can be used by slaveholders referring to their slaves.
- The insult *bahiim* is an informal variant of *hayawaan*; the latter is common in educated circles and in TV dramas. A comic text on Facebook, July 22, 2019, has a screenshot from Twitter where a tweet reads *ʔil bint illi ma tiʔrafshi tuTbukh/ tutbukh mashkuuk fi ʔunuuḥitha* – "a girl who is not a good cook is not really feminine/ not a real femme." A silencing repartee to the tweet is *ʔakbar Tumuuh il bahaayim ʕalafha* – Lit. "The greatest ambition of beasts is their foliage"; that is, the most that a beast-like human seeks is his food."
- "Nothing comes out of the sack except that which was in it." The generic animal name *wuḥuush* is used to express this meaning in the Egyptian Arabic proverbial *ʔijri ya bn ʔaadam jary il wuḥuush gheer rizqak lam tiḥuush* – Lit. "Run, son of Adam, the running of a monster; you will not get anything other than your fortune."
- *daabbah* is the Arabic word for any animal that walks; the plural is *dawaab* – including the *dibiib* – "snake" – which creeps. In the Qur'an (8:22, 55), the worst *dawaab* or living creatures on the earth are those who do not believe in God. But *daabbah* and *dawaab* are not used pejoratively in everyday Egyptian Arabic.
- *Tufayliyyaat/ kaaʔnaat Tufayliyyah* – "parasites," "parasitical creatures" – predictably refers to persons who live on or in a host and get their living, fame, status, etc., from or at the expense of their hosts. On derivation from the word is *taTTaful* – "imposition" and "acting parasitically."
- *hamaj/ hamag* – "undisciplined," "unmannered" - and derivations

from it, e.g., *hamajjiyyah* – "lack of discipline and manners - and *hamaji* – "someone lacking in these" – come from the same word *hamaj* which originally means little flies and similar insects. The collective word now means mobs or masses of people who lack discipline and manners.

Dog

- *kalb*, *kalbah* (f) - "dog", "hound". ("*kalbah*" does not mean the same as the English "bitch"); *ibn* / *bint il kalb* - "son/ daughter of a dog/ bitch". A common Egyptian insult is *bani ʔaadam braas kalb* ("a human with the head of a dog."). A *kalb* is dirty, greedy, low, despicable, especially when it is *ʔajrab* – "mangy."
- A "whelp" in English is a *jirw* in Arabic; a "cur" and a "mongrel" are *kilaab* – "dogs" - in the senses of low and ill-bred – which are *waaTi*, *khasiis*, *saafil* and *duun*, all meaning "low." A "puppy" can refer to someone who is worthless and trivial and can be used in lieu of *kalb* for endearment in a classy environment.
- The phrase *ibn kalbah* does not mean the same as "son of a bitch," as in the Shakespearean insult "the son and heir of a mongrel bitch" (*King Lear*, 2:ii), which corresponds to the Egyptian *ibn labwah* – see below. A very vulgar and uncommon equivalent of a bitch is *kalbah mʕassifah* – "a vulnerable, promiscuous bitch." Rapists, on the other hand, are likened to *ʔiʔaab* – wolves (see below) - in MSA, often modified with *bashariyyah* – "human" - and to *kilaab* – "dogs" - in colloquial Egyptian Arabic.
- The expression *deel il kalb* – "a dog's tail" – refers to someone who is crooked and cannot change it. Another animal – a leopard - is used to render the idiom *deel il kalb ʕumru maa yitʕidil* into English – "A leopard cannot change its spots."
- People sometimes need to compromise and deal with a dog with respect: *ʔin kaan lak ʕand il kalb ʕaajah qullu ya siidi* – Lit. "When you need a dog, call him Sir" – the same way they have to do with a monkey in authority: *ʔurqus ʔurʔus li l qird/ ʔird fi dawlituh* – Lit. "Dance for a monkey when you are in its country/ under its control". Both are ways of "currying favor with authority."
- The story in one Prophetic Tradition of a man who was sent to

Paradise because he provided water to a thirsty dog and of a woman who was sent to Hell because of ill-treating a cat is quite known amongst Muslims. Not every dog should be treated kindly, though. Thus, the Arabic idiom goes: *jawwiŕ kalbak yatbaŕk* – Lit. "Starve your dog and it will keep following you."

- Both "a dog's life" and *ŕiishit il kilaab* mean more less the same kind of low life of misery, but a cute puppy living with a classy family is not like a street dog, or like a worthless, unfriendly "cur."
- For some, dogs are quite disgusting and repugnant: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (*Proverbs*. 26.11, 2). The dogs' habits of shameless, "indiscriminating" mating associate them with prostitution (Ferber, 2007: 59-60).
- An enraged dog – *kalb masŕuur/ saŕraan* – is another way of referring to a mad dog, and can refer to an enraged person, getting out of reason and control. *ŕal kilaab DDaalah* – "street dogs" – also known as free-ranging urban dogs, which are usually unconfined dogs that live in urban areas, can be also very dangerous. The expression can also refer to homeless, street children.
- Dogs' sniffing ability has given them some work with the police and a reputation of *ŕhamŕamah* – sniffing – sticking their noses everywhere. Dogs are also good at chasing – chasing a bone, or *ŕaDmah*, as well chasing a thief. A person who will be happy with any little benefit is just as worthless as a dog happy with a bone. However, "a dog with a bone" in English has a different meaning. It refers to someone who will never stop till s/he is done with the task or problem at hand. Dogs can chase thieves. The sense of some persons chasing someone on behalf of a third party is quite common in Egyptian Arabic – *kilaab il baasha*, the Pasha' dogs, is a case in point. This is the sense also found in the title of a novel by Naguib Mahfouz – *ŕalliŕ wa l kilaab*, "a thief chased by dogs," or "Dogs and the Thief."
- The word "cynic" – a philosophical attitude and a way of life - derives from a Greek word meaning "dog-like", maybe because of a certain place where this philosophy originated – Cynosarges - or because of the cynics' rejection of conventional manners and preference to lead a life of dogs on streets. It does not mean the same as *klaabi* – "dog-like" - in Egyptian Arabic.

- Yet, the word *kalb* has given the Arabic language the verb *yatakaalab* – "to fight/ compete fiercely for" – which denotes struggling after a piece of meat or a bitch.
- The Egyptian idioms *kalb wa la yiswa* – Lit. "a dog and is worth nothing" - and *janaaza ħaarrah wi l mayyit kalb* – Lit. "a heated funeral and the dead is a mere dog", or "Much ado about nothing" – are further indications of how worthless many think dogs are.

Ass, Donkey

- *ħumaar/ jaħsh/ gaħsh* (MSA: *ħimaar*) – "donkey", "jackass", "ass"; *ibn / bint il ħumaar* - "son/ daughter of a donkey". The insult is mostly used to mean "stupid," "obstinate" and "blunt"; "deaf to music" and to anything intellectual. The donkey is a beast of burden, so the word can mean "hard working" or "workaholic" in *ħumaar shughl* (Lit. "donkey of work"/ "work donkey").
- *jazara w qaTamha jaħsh/ gaħsh* – Lit. "a carrot and a little donkey bit/ gnawed it" - further attests to the assumed stupidity of donkeys, especially when they are not mature enough. They will end a serious relationship for a trivial reason.
- In the Arabic novel *ħimaar il ħakim - Al-Hakeem's Donkey* - (1940) by Tawfik Al-Hakeem, the animal is treated more kindly. In fact, the incipit of the novel treats a donkey as wiser than an ignorant human, because the latter is never aware of his/ her ignorance.
- A donkey is found in the Egyptian *skitnaalu dakhil biħmaaru* – Lit. "We said nothing so he got in with his donkey"; that is, "Give someone an inch and he will take a mile/ yard" - and *saab il ħumaar witshaTTar a bardaṣah* – Lit. "He let go of the donkey and showed his power against the straddle"; that is, "He punished the weak for the mistakes of the strong".
- Though it is capable of kicking, a donkey is powerless and has no say; hence, the Egyptian idiom *ṛirbuT l ħumaar maTraħ ma yqullak/ yṛullak Saahbuh* – Lit. "Tie a donkey wherever its owner tells you"; that is, do what you are asked to do.
- A *ħumaar/ ħimaar* is a *rakuubah* – "something to ride". When it gets tired, this is quite a big deal. This is where the idiomatic response – *ghulub ħumaari* ("I give up") - to a tough question comes from.

- "As the horse could represent the willful or irrational part of the soul, so the ass, in a humbler way, could stand for the merely physical or bodily side of life" (Ferber, 2007: 16).
- Latin to English insults related to donkeys from Terence to Shakespeare include (loc.cit.): "stulto," "caudex," "stipes," "asinus," "plumbeus" - "fool," "blockhead," "stump wit," "ass," "leadbrain" - "asses," "fools," "dolts"; "What a thrice-double ass / Was I," says Caliban, after his foolish rebellion against Prospero (*Tempest* 5:1).
- *baghl* - "mule" - "stupid," "reckless" and "senseless," with the extra, positive sense of sexually potent and strong. A *baghl* is a hybrid from a horse and a donkey, neither as noble as a horse, nor as "base" as a donkey.

Monkeys, Apes and Pigs

- *qird/ ʔird* - "monkey," "ape" and "chimpanzee"; *khanziir/ khinziir* - "pig," "shoat," "hog" which all mean "dirty," "idle" and worthless", and in the case of *qird*, "restless" and "troublesome"; hence, "monkeying around." Eating pork is a religious taboo amongst Muslims.
- An ape in English is also a silly, foolish person. Closely related is *nisnaas* ("guenon"). Apes and pigs are amongst the lowest, ugliest creatures, partly because of Quranic references to unbelievers who were transformed into these two types of animals. Another reason is the religious taboo on eating pork. A *khanziir* is then a dirty, ugly, low person.
- However, "A *qird* is in the eyes of its mother a gazelle," thus goes the common Egyptian saying, which is another version of "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." (The word *ghazaalah* - "gazelle" - refers to a slender, pretty woman.) And a *khanziirah*, having undergone a process of amelioration, in the language of Egyptians is a classy, expensive kind of Mercedes cars. A "hog" and a "swine" are sensual and gluttonous besides being filthy, but the sexual overtones are not there in the Arabic *khanziirah*.
- A *qird* or *nisnaas* in Arabic does not connote foolishness or stupidity, unlike a monkey or an ape in German and English.

Fox and Wolf

- *ʔaʕlab* (MSA: *ʕaʕlab*) - "fox," "clever," "cunning," "dubious" and "crafty." A fox is a symbol of trickery and subtlety. Horace describes someone as a "crafty [*astuta*] fox masquerading as a noble lion" (*Satires* 2.3.186) (Ferber, 2007: 81).
- The Egyptian counterpart of "sour grapes" is that of a rat failing to reach honey with its short tail, where the idiomatic *da ʔuʕr deel yaa ʔazʕar / zʕar* – Lit. "That is because your tail is too short, you tale-cut rat" – comes from.
- A person who cannot be trusted and cannot be relied on is described as *ʔaʕlab/ ʕaʕlab* – e.g., in the classical Arabic line of poetry *yuʕTiika min ʔarfi illisaani ʕalaawatan wa yaruughu minka kama yaruughu ʕʕaʕlabu* – Lit. "He gives you sweetness from the tip of his tongue, but evades (when needed) as he were a fox"; "He speaks to you very nicely, but once you need him, he evades you like a fox"; "Sweet talk, but no good deeds."
- "A wolf in sheep's clothing" is a familiar reference to a cheating, deceitful, camouflaged person. Stories of *ʔaʕʕaʕlab il makkaar* – "cunning, sly fox" - are part of every Arab child's education.
- *diib* (MSA: *ḍiʔb*) – "wolf," very clever at bewitching females and catching them. The expression *ḍiʔb bashari* means a wolf-like man, especially "a rapist".
- A *diib* is very cruel, too. Someone who makes a great achievement is said to have "caught a wolf by its tail" – *yijiib iddiib min deuluh*.
- "If you are a lamb, you will be devoured by wolves" is a common piece of advice in Arab culture. The hostility between sheep and wolves is both eternal and universal, very similar to that of cats and mice, though more fearful and less comic. One character in *Romeo and Juliet* is described as a "wolvish ravening lamb."
- The Arab adage *ʔinnama yaʔkulu ḍ-ḍiʔbu mina l ghanam ishshaaridah* – "a wolf will eat a sheep only when it is on its own" – calls for unity in the face of evil.
- *ḍiʔbah* – "a female wolf" - in Arabic is a false friend of "vixen" in English. The latter used to mean ill-tempered and impatient, and has come to also mean unpleasant and mean.

- *qaTiiŝ* / *quTŝaan* – "herd", "herds" . Herds of sheep and goats mean nothing for a wild animal; neither do flocks or herds of common people. *ŝaqliyyat il qaTiiŝ* - Lit. "herd mentality" – is the plain folks' mentality and the disposition to do what everyone else is doing. *manaaŝat il qaTiiŝ* - "herd immunity" - has become very popular with the outbreak of Covid-19.

Lion, Lioness and Other Wild Animals

- *ʔasad* / *labwah* (f) (MSA: *labuʔah*). The former is ameliorative, while the latter is pejorative. An *ʔasad* is cruel and ruthless and powerful. It is also greedy – hence the idiom "the lion's share." A *labwah*, on the other hand, is a lecherous, promiscuous woman, quite similar to a "bitch" in English and a "lagarta" in Spanish.
- *nimr* (MSA: *namir/ namirah*) – "tiger," "tigress" – refers to a cruel, fierce wild person, but *namirah* does not refer to a woman wild in bed. Moreover, the word "cougar" in the sense of a mature woman attracted to younger men does not translate directly into Arabic. Yet, the word *namirah* is used in translating the title of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* to mean a wild, uncontrollable woman - *ŝharisah*.
- *nimr*, *fahd* – "cheetah," "panther," "leopard" - and *ʔasad* are common Arabic male names, referring to qualities of speed, cleverness and strength. Less common names are *diib* and *taŝlab*.
- A lion is often contrasted to a dog. Both are treated as carnivorous, but a lion is nobler than a dog. Thus, a Facebooker's piece of advice reads *la taʔkulu ʔusuudakam li kay la tanhashakum kilaab ʔaŝdaaikum* – Lit. "Do not eat your lions lest you should be fiercely eaten by the dogs of your enemies."
- Meaning winner and loser respectively, *sabŝ* and *Dabŝ* occur together, e.g., in *sabŝ walla Dabŝ* to mean a wild animal, most likely a lion, which eats preys and another, a hyena, which eats what is left behind. A hyena does not connote the same in English; it rather connotes cruelty and ruthlessness.
- The phrase *sabŝ il burumbah* refers, often satirically, to a coxcomb, a swank.

Snake and Scorpion and Other Creepers

- *tifbaan* (MSA: *tuṣbaan*) – "snake"; *ḥayyah/ ḥayyih* (f); *ṛafṣa* – "snake"; *dibiib* which means "creeping" is a very rural variant; *ṣaqrabah* – "scorpion."
- The *tifbaan* has a long history of deceit and cheating in the memories of humans beginning with the story of Eve. It looks nice and feels smooth, though it is killing.
- An evil woman who causes hate and fighting between people, while looking kind and nice, is described as an *ṣaqrabah/ ṣaṛrabah* – very much like a *ḥirbaayah* – "chameleon" - and both have the ability to deceive.
- A scorpion is not the same as a centipede – *ṛumm ṛarbaṣah wa arbaṣiin*, lit. "with forty-four legs." The latter is less poisonous but more influential. Both refer to an evil woman.
- Less dangerous reptiles include *siḥliyyah*, *waral*, or *Dabb* – "lizard" - and *burṢ* – "tarentola." Both are disgusting for many people, at least in our culture. They also refer to worthless persons.
- Chameleon: *ḥirbaayih/ ḥirbaayah* (MSA: *ḥirbaaṛah/ ḥirbaaṛ*) - "color-changer," "hypocritical" and, with women, it means "evil," someone who causes people to fight with one another. The word is typically associated with women.
- Worms symbolize immortality and humbleness. They are interchangeable with caterpillars. They can destroy roses, in which case they are "canker worms." There is no escape from dirt and dust, from worms, at least metaphorically. *kul id-duud qabl/ ṛabl maa yaaklak* – Lit. "Eat worms before they eat you" – is an Egyptian way of saying "You've got to eat a peck of dirt or dust before you die."
- Shakespeare's "Thy tongue outvenoms all the worms of the Nile" (*Cymbeline*, 3:4) would make no sense if translated into Arabic, even though the Nile is in Egypt.
- Similar creatures include *khunfisah* – "(dung) beetle." Its name can mean repugnant and wretched, but it has other meanings in various contexts, e.g., "hard working."
- One Egyptian equivalent of "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder" is: *khunfisah shaafit ṣiyaalha mashyiin ṣa l ḥeeṬ qaalit da ṣuqd luuli*

malDuum fi kheeT – Lit. "A beetle saw its kids walking on a wall; the mother beetle said 'This is a necklace of pearls, well-threaded'."

- One generation ago or so, *khunfis* and *khanaafis* – "beetles" - used to refer pejoratively to long-haired, Westernized, not-quite-manly, young men in Egypt.
- In some rural areas in Egypt, a *khunfisah* – "a female beetle" - is seen as a herald of a scorpion; thus, a follower, someone who is a mere "tail" of someone else. This is not quite common in Egypt, though.

Crow and Owl and Dove

- *ghraab/ ghuraab* – "raven," "crow" as in *ghuraab il been* ("carrier of bad news," "herald of war and death"); *buumah* – "owl," more or less the same.
- In a classic Egyptian song, a raven is opposed, and unluckily married to, a dove, or *yamaamah*, signifying beauty and peace.
- *yamaamah* is another name for *hamaamah*, and both symbolize peace, love and speed, and occasionally, a meek, timid attitude. *ʔil wad da hamaamah* – Lit. "This boy is a dove/ pigeon"; that is, very fast. *furreerah* is the closest synonym of *hamaamah* in this sense. It is incidentally derived from a verb – *yafirr* - that means fly or flee.

Cows and the Like

- *baqarah* – "cow" – *toor* (MSA: *ṭawr*) - "bull" - *tees* – "ibex" (All of these mean "stupid," "reckless" and "senseless/")
- *jaamuusih/ jaamuusah* – "buffalo" - and *ʕiglah/ ʕijlah* – "calf," "bullock" - refer to a fat, stupid woman, very much like the Shakespearean "fustilarian." A *fiil* – "elephant" – can also mean big, fat and blunt.
- *jaay/ jah min wara jaamuusah* – "coming/ has come right from behind a buffalo"; "as common as muck" – is a very culture-specific expression referring to an uncivilized, uncultured, ill-mannered and unrefined person.
- In English, a "heifer" can refer pejoratively to a girl or a woman, an "ox" may be a fool, and a "calf" can refer to a meek, weak, stupid person. Interestingly, the word "kid" belongs to this family of cattle, and the word has come to mean a "child," or any person who is not

mature enough.

- None of these has anything to do with the obscene "You bull's pizzle" (*Henry IV, I, 2:iv*). Yet the word *fahl* is sexually-loaded. A *fahl* is male animal, a bull, a mule, a camel, a buffalo, a sheep, a stud, especially when it has stamina and strength. Thus, a man is described as *fahl* when he has the same. The word *fuhuulah* refers to a male's virile stamina and potency. Not surprisingly, the closest equivalent in English to a virile man is "a stud," "a stallion."
- Bulls and cows, though regarded as sacred in some places, are as often abused as donkeys, moving water wheels around blindly – hence the idiom *humaar/ toor marbuuT fi saaqyah* ("a donkey/ bull tied to a water-wheel/ a noria"), indicating servitude and humiliation, and extending to humans who have to work all the time to keep a humble living.
- The same way a cow, a buffalo or a donkey is, a bull is a domestic/ farm animal, usually owned by a farmer; hence the expression *juha awla b lahm tooruh* – Lit. "Goha has more claim on the meat of his bull"; "A person has first claim on his own property."
- The word *ghurillah* ("gorilla") refers to a big, fat, ugly woman, and *khartiit* ("rhinoceros") to a big, senseless man.
- Another word for a blunt, stupid, but kind and friendly, woman is *dibbah* – "bear" – and the story of the she-bear – "the sow" - that killed its owner is quite popular. A teddy bear is a soft toy favored by many kids.
- The idioms *jismu il bighaal wa ?ahlaamu l SaSaafiir* – Lit. "the bodies of bulls and the brains of sparrows" - and *Tuulu Tuul in-nakhlah w Saqlu Saql is-sakhlah* – Lit. "He is as tall as a palm tree and his brain is as small as a little goat's" - both mean "all brawn and no brain", as further borne out by the story of the idiom *?ukiltu yawma ?ukila ?awru l ?abyaD* – Lit. "I was eaten the day I allowed the white bull to be eaten."
- The idiom *toor allaah fi barsiimuh*– Lit. "Allah's bull in His/ its clover"; that is "stupid," "careless" and "senseless" – has caused some controversy. Some would rather say *toor laahi fi barsiimuh* - Lit. "a bull careless in its clover"; "a happy camper" – so that the word for God is not attached.

- It is very unlikely for a bull to fall down; once it does, many will hurry up to slaughter it. This is the meaning of the Egyptian *ʔil ʕijl waqaʕ/ wiqiʕ haatuu is-sikkiin* – Lit. "A bull has fallen down. (Hurry up and) bring a knife."
- A *toor* or *ʕigl / ʕijl* will give milk if a rooster can lay eggs. So "milking a bull" is equivalent to the Egyptian *niquul/ niʔuul toor/ ʕigl / ʕijl yiquulu/ yiʔuulu iħlibuuh* – Lit. "We say a bull and they say milk it" - and both indicate that an activity or question is impossible, futile or fruitless, a mere waste of time.

Giraffe

- *zaraafah*. It is the tallest living terrestrial animal, and quite predictably its name can refer to a person who is exceptionally tall and somehow foolish.

Horse and Camel

- *ħuṢaan* (MSA: *ħiṢaan*) – "horse," "stallion," "stud" - often has very positive connotations of strength and status. Horses are cherished in traditional Arab culture and literature. They still have their prestige in Gulf countries.
- A horse is like a *baghl* (see *ħimaar*) in indicating sexual stamina and horsepower is still a measure of engines.
- When a horse is dead, there is no use flagging it because *ʔiDDarb fi l mayyit ħaraam* – Lit. "It is *ħaraam*/ forbidden to beat a dead person."
- The challenge "do your damnedest worst" is equivalent to the Egyptian *ʔaʕla ma fi kheelak ʔirkabuh* – Lit. "Ride your highest/ strongest horse"; "Do your worst."
- Getting something "straight from a horse's mouth" is getting it in Arabic *min ħanak ʔissabʕ/ il ʔasad* – "right from a lion's/ wild animal's mouth."
- The feminine counterpart "mare" - *faraṢah* and *muhrah* - refers to a slender woman. The latter is a common female name in many Arab countries, and so is *faaris* – "horse-rider" or "knight." Less common, though, is *ħayyaal*, which means the same.
- Camels, "the desert ships" for so long, are also held in high esteem in many Arab countries. A camel is known for its patience and forbearance; hence the rural bewailing cry by a woman upon the death

- of her husband *yaa jamali* – Lit. "O, my camel!"
- In *kheebit ʔil ʔamal raakbah jamal / gamal* – "a failure so clear for the world to see" – camels are not to blame, and in *kaddaab kidb il ʔibil* – "as deceitful as a camel" – there is a reference to camels' habit of faking thirst.
 - Camels used to be major luggage carriers amongst Arabs. This is where the expression *ʔij-jamal bi ma ḥamal* - "the whole caboodle" - comes from to refer to the whole luggage of money, work or responsibilities.
 - *jawaad ʔaSiil/ farasah ʔaSiilah* (f) and *ḥiṢaan/ jawaad jaamiḥ* refer to a well-bred person and someone who has gone wild and uncontrollable, respectively.
 - Because a horse can get wild, it is borrowed to speak of a human tongue in *lisaanak ḥuṢaanak/ ḥiṢaanak* – "Your tongue is your horse," which is very close to "A still tongue makes a wise head."
 - *faaris bi la jawaad* – Lit. "A Rider without a Horse" - is an Egyptian TV drama first shown in 2002, telling the adventures of Hafiz, nicknamed *ʔaḫ-ḫaṣalab* – "the fox" – cunningly inflicting serious damages on British occupation forces in Egypt.

Sheep and Goat

- *naṣjah/ naṣgah; kḥaruuf* – both meaning "sheep" (*kḥaruuf* is "ram" and *naṣgah* is "ewe"), with the former referring to a female who is clueless and dumb and the latter referring to a similar male, with the additional meaning of senseless and ready to be cuckolded. Both refer to persons who are timid, meek and low-spirited.
- A bell-wether is a castrated ram. The word *makhSi* – "castrated," "eunuch" – refers to a person who is sexually impotent.
- Sheep and goats are used as ritual sacrifices by most Muslims who cannot afford a bigger animal. This is where *kharuuf il fiid* – Lit. "a sheep for the feast/ bairam" - comes from.
- Babies are innocent lambs, but "the black sheep" in a family is the least lucky and the most ill-treated. The equivalent in Arabic is *ʔibn il baTTa s-soodah* – "offspring of a black duck."
- Both variants *miṣzah/ miṣzih* mean "nanny-goat" and refer to a skinny, small woman, but have nothing to do with Shakespeare's "Thou

damned and luxurious mountain goat" (*Henry V*, 4: iv).

- The equivalent in Arabic of "a scapegoat" is *kabsh fidaaʔ*, shifting the burden from a goat to a sheep.
- One more aspect of goats that is not very common in Arabic is their "goatish," "lecherous" disposition. For Shakespeare's Iago goats, monkeys and wolves are exemplars of lust (Ferber, 2007: 86).
- A "cabron" - "he-goat" - in Spanish means "cuckold" and "bastard". The Egyptian word *jady/ gady* - "ram," "he-goat" - may indicate this disposition, but not very often.
- *ghanam* and *miʕiiz* - "sheep and goats" - collectively refer to mobs or masses of unthinking and irrational people who can be controlled, moved and mobilized by demagogues and the media.

Insects, and Other Little Things

- *SurSaar* - "cockroach"; *jundub* - "grasshopper"; *baʕuuDah* - "mosquito," "gall-nipper"; *hasharah* - "insect"; *dibbaanah* (MSA: *ḍubaabah*) - "fly," all referring to trivial, insignificant people, who can be crushed or smashed. A *faraashah* - "butterfly" - is a pretty, "light" woman.
- *namlah* - "an ant" - and *nahlah* - "a bee". The former often refers to a worthless person; the latter to someone who is hard working.
- In the Book of Proverbs: "Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise" (6.6); "The ants are a people not strong, yet they prepare their meat in the summer" (30.25). Though ants and bees receive special attention in the Holy Quran, their positive attributes, e.g., industriousness, husbandry and hard work, are often overlooked, more so in the case of ants which can be easily crushed.
- The expression *zayy in-naml* - "as many as ants" - means too many, referring to a very crowded, overpopulated place. In popular Egyptian wisdom, ants also symbolize envy.

Bug, Flea and Bat

- Bugs - *baqq/ baʔʔ* - and lice - *qaml* - are scarcely used to refer to people, but they remain indications of dirt and ugliness.
- *barghuut*, *barghuutah* (f) *baraghiit* (plur.), MSA: *barghuuθ*, *barghuuθah*, *baraaghiiθ* - "flea." Like mosquitoes, bees and ants,

fleas are never noticed until one is bitten or otherwise disturbed by them. They are as insignificant and they refer to people of very little value or importance.

- The idiom *kull barghuut ʕala ʔadd dammuh* – "Every flea will act in accordance with the amount of blood it has": "Horses for courses" – indicates that every person should be suited to his/ her ability and capacity and should live according to what s/he is, can or has.
- *hamuush* – "midges," a generic name describing many species of small fleas, thus referring to worthless, though potentially disturbing, persons. An exceptionally informal headline on an Egyptian news website reads: *maṢr w ḥarb il hamuush maṢr bitʕiish taḥadiyaat ktiirah* – Lit, "Egypt and the war with midges. Egypt lives many challenges" (Feb. 15, 2018. <https://sadamisr.com>).
- *khafafiish* – "bats". The blood-sucking aspect of bats is not highlighted in Arabic. Rather, the word refers to nocturnal people who prefer to stay in the dark.

Turtles

- *zuhlifa/ zihlifa* (MSA: *sulahfaah*) – "turtle," meaning very slow and lazy, referring to males as well as females. The fable of the hare – or "rabbit" - and the tortoise from Aesop is very common in Arab culture.

Rabbits and Rats

- *ʔarnab* – "male rabbit," "buck"; cowardly and evasive - *ʔarnabah* – "female rabbit," "doe"; very productive of children.
- *faar* (MSA: *faʔr*); *jurḏ* - "rat," "mouse," means cowardly and fearful; also "a little spy." A weasel - *ʕirsah* - belongs to the same semantic space, more or less, and is as cowardly, disgusting and despicable. A mouse is associated with destruction, ugliness and the unjustifiable fear of something very trivial.
- *fiʔraan tajaarib* – Lit. "experimental rats" - is the Arabic equivalent of Guinea pigs. Both go beyond their literal meaning to indicate insignificance and abuse. Poor people can be abused by entrepreneurs, scientists and politicians.
- *qunfud/ qunfid* (MSA: *qunfuḏ*) – "hedgehog" – a person wrapped in clothes, good at hiding and cheating; tricky and wise.

Cats, Ducks and Fish, etc.

- *quTTah/ ʔuttah* (MSA: *qiTTah*) – "cat" - *baTTah/ battah* – "duck, hen" - and *wizzah* – "goose" - are flirtations for a pretty, often busty, female. The word *wizzah* does not mean the same as in the Shakespearean insult "Where got'st thou that goose look?" (*Macbeth*, 5: iii).
- The idiom *ʔaaklik mineen ya baTTah/ battah* – Lit. "Where do I eat you from, duck?", "I do not know where to start" – can be a flirtation as well as a threat, depending on the situation. When the word *quTTah/ ʔuttah* and its plural *quTaT/ ʔutat* are followed by *taakul w tinkir* – "to eat and deny it" - they refer to an ungrateful person.
- The idiom *ʔidda l quTT/ ʔutt miftaah il karaar* – Lit. "He gave the tomcat the keys of the store" - is a reminder that *quTT* is as untrustworthy as a fox guarding sheep or chickens in its English equivalent.
- When it is willing to comply and be humiliated, when it is submissive to whatever or whoever tortures it, *ʔil quTT/ ʔuTT yhibb khannaaquh/ khannaaʔuh* – Lit. "A cat will love the one who stifles it." The expression "A cat will blink when struck with a hammer" can be slightly modified to mean the same.
- *qaTquTah/ ʔatʔutah* in Arabic is "kitten" in English; both are used for endearment with children. A "duckling" is a *baTTuuTah/ battuutah*, or simply *baTTah/ battah*, used for endearment, too. Both endearments can be attached to a personal pronoun to mean "my ..." - *quTTiti/ ʔuttiti* and *baTTiti/ battiti*.
- A cat may be *mghammaDah* – Lit. "close-eyed" and can be blind, *quTaT/ ʔutat ʕamyah* (MSA: *qitat ʕamyaaʔ*), naïve and clueless, or *mutasharriidah* - "homeless," "alley cats" - and so can some girls and women, in which case they are likely to fall prey to sadists and rapists, or human wolves, so to speak.
- A cat will respond whenever summoned. This is perhaps where the idiom *jibna fi siirit il quTT/ ʔutt jah yinuTT/ yinutt* – Lit. "We have just mentioned the cat and it came jumping around right away"; "speak of the devil."
- "Fat cats" - *ʔal qiTaT simaan*, the title of a classic Egyptian movie (1975) - very much like "whales" – *ħiitaan* - "tycoons" – *muluuk il*

maal - Lit. "kings of money" - "emperors" – *ʔabaaTirah*, and perhaps "dinosaurs" – *dinaaSooraat*. These refer to big businesspersons and entrepreneurs. A very influential and well-connected person is described as *ʔukhTabuuT* (MSA: *ʔukhTabuuT*) – "octopus."

- Someone who survives so many chances of death or defeat, is referred to by the idiom *zayy il quTaT/ ʔutat bi sabaʕ ti r waah* – "Like a cat; s/he has nine lives."
- *samakah* – "fish" – slippery; also a playful endearment of many female names which have the letters "s" and "m," e.g., Asmaa, Samia and Samira. Big fish eating little ones is a common expression of a dog-eat-dog world. A common Facebook wisdom is that if fish keep their mouths shut up, they will not take the bait and will not be "fished."
- *dolphiina* – a dolphin cow; a special kind of marine mammals that is also slippery, but exceptionally friendly and kind, which is why the word is used as an endearment for a female.
- "As loathsome as a toad" is a classic English insult. The Arabic name of the amphibian animal *DufDaʕ / Dufdaʕ* - "frog"/ "toad" – refers to a despicable, loathsome, and disturbing, person. The venomous part of the English word – "like the toad, ugly and venomous" (Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, 2:1) - is not very common in Arabic.
- *timsaah* – "crocodile" - is not frequently used for insulting in Egyptian Arabic; it rather refers to a very powerful and influential person, but the expression *dumuuʕ itamaasiih* – "crocodile tears" - means false tears indicating a lying, cheating person. In classical Arabic, *rajulun timsaah* (*rajul* = "man") is a lying person.

Some Birds

- Generic: *ma Taar Tayrun wa r tafaʕ ʔilla kama Taar waqaʕ* - Lit. "Every bird that flies high will fall down"; that is, "What goes up must come down"; *ʔaT-Tyuuru ʕala ʔashkaaliha taqaʕ* - Lit. "Birds will fall upon their kinds"; that is, "Birds of a feather flock together." *ʔiTTeer il misaafir* and *ʔiTTeer il muhaajir* (plur. *ʔiTTYuur il muhaajira*) – "a traveling bird," "a bird abroad" and "a migrating bird" – refer to someone who has left his homeland. To pluck or deplume – *yantif, yaqaqSaS/ yaʔsʔs* - a bird's feathers is to disable a person. *Teer fi s-*

sama is a free bird, while *Taaʔir ḥabiis* is a bird in a cage. The nest – *ʕishsh* - of a bird, and of a person, is his home, as well as his homeland

- *katkuutah* (f) / *ʕaSfuurah* (f) / *zarzuur* / *katkuut* – "chick" and "sparrow," respectively. Both are used for endearment or belittlement depending on the situation. They can indicate helplessness and powerlessness. On the other hand, the *ʕaSfuurah* is the little birdie, the canary that breaks up news and secrets, and the person who spies on his work-mates. The *ʕaSafiir* are the distractions used to take people's attention away from something happening or about to happen around them. *ʔil katkuut il faSiitḥ yiTlaʕ m il beeDa ySiitḥ* - Lit. "an outspoken chick would crow as soon as it gets out of its egg." – is used to refer to someone whose genius shows up very early.
- *karawaan* – "lark," "curlew" - and *bulbul* – "nightingale" – quite predictably refer to persons with sweet voices, seriously or ironically.
- *baghbaghaan* (MSA: *babghaaʔ*) – "parrot"; admired for its ability to imitate sounds, but more frequently disapproved for blindly imitating without thinking.
- *naʕaamah* – "ostrich." The word is used to refer to persons who have a tendency to ignore obvious problems and pretend they do not exist.
- *nisr* ("vulture"), *Saqr* ("falcon", "hawk"), *ʕuqaab* ("eagle"), and *baaz* ("accipiter"). These birds of prey appear not only in the banners of many Arab countries, but also as names of males. Not everyone knows their power and status. This is where the Gulf proverbial *ʔilli ma yʕrif ʔiSSaq yishwiitḥ* - "Someone who does not know what a falcon is may very well cook it" - comes from.
- *nisr ʔiSSaʕiid* ("Vulture of Upper Egypt") is a contemporary Egyptian TV drama and *ʕyuun ʔiSSaqr* ("Eyes of a Falcon") is a classic Egyptian movie. The protagonist in the former is a police officer and in the latter, an army soldier.
- *baTriiq* – "penguin"; most often an endearment of a fatty, lazy child. Depending on its context, it can pejoratively refer to a chubby, fat woman.
- *ʔabu qirdaan/ ʔabu ʔirdaan* – "ibis" - and *ʔabu faSaadah* – "wagtail" – are quite popular in rural areas of Egypt and they refer to skinny, thin-legged persons.

- *dabbuur* - "wasp" - in *dabbuur zann fala kharaab fishshuh* – "a wasp that keeps buzzing only to destroy its own nest" – is said of someone who asks for trouble. However, a *dabbuur* is a person who is very clever at stinging and seizing opportunities; also a man who is very good at catching women.

Cock and Hen

- *farkhah/ diik* – "hen," meaning cowardly and "cock," meaning arrogant. Together, *farkhah* and *diik* can have sexual undertones, hence the obscenity of *?addiika fi l fishshah* – Lit. "I give you in a coop".
- *farkhah* and more frequently its Standard Arabic synonym frequently *dajaajah* refer to someone who goes to bed too early – "too early" by the standards of Egyptian culture.
- The word "cock" in this sense is generally avoided today in favor of "rooster," for the same reason "ass" is replaced with "donkey."
- In the *Book of Animals (Al-Hayawaan)* by Al-Jahiz, a cock is described as foolish and ungrateful; it would copulate with an unknown hen indiscriminately and would never know it later. A cock never cares for having chicks or for sitting on eggs.

- A single male in the company of a number of females is called *diik il baraabir*. The word *baraabir* seems to be some Egyptian rural women's way of referring to little chickens.
- *Taawuus* - "peacock," arrogant and self-conceited. A turkey – *diik ruumi* - can symbolize the same in English, but not in Arabic.