

Khoisan Healing: Understandings, Ideas and Practices

Chris Low


DPhil thesis, University of Oxford

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University of Oxford
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The thesis explores the relationship of contemporary Namibian Khoisan healing practice and ideas, to a history of Khoisan healing from an indeterminable pre-colonial past to the present. My focus is one principally of ideas and understanding as opposed to practice, because of a perceived need to highlight, and to some extent attempt to redress, a very partial historical and contemporary literature on Khoisan healing.

The study draws upon a long history of traveller, settler, administrative, soldier, missionary and anthropological sources from the initial settlement phase of the Cape in 1652 to the present. Through historical analysis of these sources and insights gained from eight months fieldwork amongst Khoisan, I have sought to identify key factors in the contingent history that have led to contemporary academic understanding of Khoisan healing. Moreover, I have attempted to identify where weaknesses might lie in the 'Western' story of Khoisan healing and to suggest how these weaknesses might be addressed.

The analysis entails using historical sources in a novel recursive relationship with fieldwork. The sources serve a number of purposes. They provide: an historical chronology of Khoisan practice and ideas; evidence of how the West constructed its story of Khoisan healing; and during fieldwork they enabled me to ask well-informed questions and to explore issues of change, continuity and interpretation.

A primary theme of the thesis is an examination of the relationship of Khoisan healing to 'primitive' and aboriginal 'modes of thought' discourse. I additionally explore the history of trance dancing amongst 'Khoi' and San and give an account of specific Khoi healing strategies I encountered and their relationship to history. A further focus is the significance of anthropological claims that Bushmen as shamans are different from other Khoi healers. At the core of the thesis is a search for a Khoi and San way of thinking about and practicing medicine that might inform both historical and contemporary analysis.

Chris Low, Christ Church
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Khoisan Healing: Understandings, Ideas and Practices

To date, histories of pre-colonial and colonial Khoisan healing have been written, but few historians have drawn much from contemporary practice to inform their historical interpretations. At least in Namibia, traditional medicine plays a highly important role in Khoisan health strategies. It remains, however, a thinly researched topic, and particularly so in relation to the Damara. The lack of fieldwork used to inform historical accounts, reflects both the methodology of some historians and, in regard to history of the Khoekhoe, a deeper perception that there is too little left of 'traditional' Khoekhoe medical culture to usefully inform history. In relation to the Damara, the lack of historical research must be seen within a wider context in which traditional Damara culture has received little academic attention.

What information exists concerning the history of Khoisan healing is uneven. Although 'Khoi' and San are known to share linguistic and cultural ties, healing knowledge of the two groups has been researched in very different ways. Historians considering Khoekhoe medicine have turned to ethnographic accounts of Hottentot practice as reliable indicators of pre-colonial and post-colonial 'traditional' Hottentot medicine. Whilst there is value in using early ethnographies as sources of information, the historical picture remains faint or, worst still, misrepresentative, if the ideas behind recorded practices are not examined. Much of Khoekhoe medical history is normative history. Often historians have failed to look for Khoekhoe ideas or, in the few cases where explanations are given by historical observers, historians have accepted these explanations unproblematically, despite their partial nature. This is particularly so when Khoekhoe medical practices seem recognisable in a pre-biomedical or current 'Western' medical sense, such as 'medical incision' being thought of as 'traditional inoculations'. Even historians predisposed to using fieldwork, have not looked significantly at the medical practices of contemporary Khoe speaking communities outside of the Cape, as possible sources of useful information that might inform their interpretations.

In contrast to Khoekhoe research, the understanding of Bushmen healing comes from extensive anthropological fieldwork, combined with a rich combination of ethnographic and archaeological sources. For the last fifty years, Bushmen have received considerable anthropological attention. Over this period there has been significant interest in matters of healing and associated ideas and beliefs. The focus of Bushman researchers has, however, barring some interest in medicinal

plants, been almost exclusively centred upon a detailed analysis of the trance curing dance. Following interest in Bushman 'core features', as indicators of long term cultural adaptation to a harsh marginal southern African environment, the dance has, additionally, been increasingly presented as an ancient shamanic healing ritual, carried out by ecologically adapted Bushmen. This interpretation of Bushman healing dancers as shamans, has led to an increasing emphasis on Bushman difference from Khoe speakers and other Africans.

Khoisan medical history is fractured. Whilst historians have gone some way to providing a history of practices across at least the colonial period, they have done little to address ideas and changing ideas behind Khoekhoe practices. Moreover, they have misrepresented certain historical practices by assuming parity exists between Khoekhoe medical thinking and Western, or 'primitive' Western, medicine. Anthropologists have looked far more at ideas and changing ideas surrounding healing but have done so in a limited context. Through a combination of ethnographic and archaeological evidence concerning healing dances, and theories associated with Bushman ecological adaptation and isolation, they have also offered a history of healing that goes back hundreds, if not thousands, of years. Recent anthropological focus around the notion of Bushman shamans has tended to draw Bushman medicine away from its wider Khoisan context.

Although some historians question the validity of projecting assumptions backwards based on fieldwork findings, there is a long and growing tradition of those that believe it difficult even to attempt to understand past behaviour without the insight of local indigenous perspective, and the local details one can only access through fieldwork. In recognition of the continued presence of Khoisan 'traditional' medicine in Namibia, and the value of fieldwork in history, I attempt to address some of the contingency in the writing of Khoisan medical history, as outlined above, by using fieldwork amongst Namibian Khoisan to inform an historical account of Khoisan medicine.

The thesis sets up a recursive discourse between historical ethnography, anthropology and my fieldwork, through which I explore appropriate ways of thinking about Khoisan medicine and constructing Khoisan medical history. To understand why we think about Khoisan healing as we do, I identify key factors and influential works that have shaped academic understanding. I use my sources to provide a history of Khoisan healing and as a means of reflecting upon the construction of Khoisan medical history. The sources I examine span a long period from the initial colonisation of the Cape in 1652 to the present. They include government and missionary records, accounts from soldiers and travellers and professional anthropologists. Although the literature is extensive many of the sources

repeat the same information and there is an identifiable, relatively small, nucleus of research that has informed current understanding.

My fieldwork was carried out principally in 2001. It involved extensive interviewing of Khoisan in all manner of locations across Namibia. To add depth to my research I spent approximately half of my time in Sesfontein, a predominantly Damara settlement in north west Namibia. The rest of my research time was divided between Nama, Hai//om, Ju/'hoan and Nharo communities. In addition to informal discussion, I recorded 102 interviews, participated in many healing activities, including an 'initiation ceremony', recorded medicinal plant use by camera and filmed Khoisan massaging and trance dancing.

Working with historical and anthropological data to flesh out a historicized past, and projecting contemporary understanding into the past, sets up a number of potential methodological tensions and problems. To help resolve these problems I cite historical methodological precedents and examine Khoisan knowledge in respect of generation, transmission, change, different types and rates of change and continuity.

Thesis Structure

In the thesis introduction, I draw upon different twentieth century perspectives on 'primitive' thought and hunter-gatherer 'modes of thought' in a search for the best way to interpret my findings and to explore relationships between aboriginal people and their environment. A key finding of my fieldwork, that is supported by historical sources, is that Khoisan peoples use notions of 'wind' as a way of talking about healing. Equally important are notions of 'potency' believed to be inherent in phenomena that can be moved between people, animals and plants, between healers and patients and between living people, dead people and supernal entities.

Bushmen healing culture is considered by anthropologists to be distinctive from Khoi because it is essentially shamanic and does not involve witchcraft. Whilst my fieldwork identified differences between Khoi and San healing, the similarities were far stronger. Close examination of the sources upon which conclusions regarding Khoi and San medicine are founded, suggests that these perceived differences are to some extent reflective of the contingent enquiry previously referred to.

From chapter one, my thesis considers, chronologically, influential sources and perspectives on Khoisan healing. I explore the contingent construction of Khoisan history and why we think about

Khoisan healing as we do. Recognising that the sources lying behind the story of understanding also provide a remarkable historical record of Khoisan healing practices, I combine my consideration of ethnographers and their ethnography, with consideration of the longevity of practices and ideas I encountered during my fieldwork. I also use the historical sources to explore wider meanings, or changing meanings, behind practices carried out by my informants. In particular in chapter one, I consider Khoisan massage practices and use of a herbal mixture, buchu. I additionally frame the early information on Khoisan healing within a context of fashions of ethnographic practice and European ideas of 'savage natives'.

During my fieldwork amongst the Damara of Sesfontein, I encountered a trance healing dance, called an *arus*. Although Damara healing dances have been recorded since the early twentieth century, many contemporary academics are unaware of their continued or past existence. As noted, the Bushman trance dance is a key factor thought to distinguish Khoi from San healing. As part of my historical examination I attempt to establish whether or not Khoi people practiced trance healing dances historically, or whether the dance I encountered, the *arus*, is a recently adopted or created phenomenon. I similarly consider the historical longevity of the Bushmen trance dance and question just how different the ideas apparent in the San trance dance are from those found in certain Khoi healing strategies. I use the history of the Khoisan trance dance to consider early European interpretations of Khoisan religion and witchcraft.

Khoisan ethnography from the early nineteenth century to the first decades of the twentieth century, fits within four distinctive phases, differentiated from each other by distinctive themes of interpretation. In the second chapter I consider these four phases in relation to Khoisan healing strategies and, continuing themes presented in chapter one, European ideas concerning Khoisan religion, witchcraft and trance dancing. The first phase revolves around the arrival of missionaries in Namibia at the beginning of the nineteenth century. This phase runs approximately to 1858 when missionary Carl Hahn added new depth to dance observations. Phase two focuses on the 'discovery' of the Bushman trance dance through the work of the philologist, Wilhelm Bleek and the Cape Official, Orpen. This section places dance discovery and new ways of thinking about Khoisan in wider social and intellectual interest in the 'primitive mind'. The third phase examines the consolidation of the discovery in a spate of German field based research in Namibia around 1900. The final phase, spanning the first four decades of the twentieth century, examines the contribution of the first professional anthropologists of the Khoisan to new data and understanding. The chapter seeks to identify different contexts through which different understandings of Khoisan healing, and particularly the Bushman trance dance, emerged. It additionally outlines the broader European social contexts

behind interest in Khoisan and how new information contributed to European understanding of Khoisan people.

After the 1930s very little anthropological work was carried out of significance to Khoi healing. In contrast, from the 1960s onwards, anthropologists of Bushmen devoted considerable attention to the Bushman healing dance. Chapter three examines the interests and theoretical paradigms of research relevant to Bushman healing from the late 1950s to the present. Anthropologists of this recent period have presented a particularly partial understanding of San healing and its relationship to Khoi healing. The trance dance has very much dominated research into Bushman healing. My fieldwork suggests the importance of the dance, as the primary healing strategy, is overstated. Moreover, when the trance dance is considered within the broad context of Khoisan healing, and when particular accounts of Bushman trance dances are given close comparative scrutiny, the proposed notion of distinctive Bushman shamanic healing looks increasingly open to question.

Having previously emphasised the contingent nature of the ethnographic record, from chapter four onwards, I focus more on contemporary Khoisan medical practices and ideas. Many of the phenomena and ideas related in this latter section of the thesis are new to Khoisan anthropology. Chapter four builds on what little information has been recorded regarding Damara trance dancers. I describe a distinctive group of healers I encountered in Sesfontein, in north west Namibia, named 'rainmen' or 'rainwomen'. I outline the role and practices of these healers. This is followed by a similar consideration of Hai//om dancing healers. Although Hai//om healing dances have received some anthropological attention, their wider healing context remains largely unexplored.

The thesis concludes with a consideration of the key healing ideas I encountered amongst my informants. I look for underlying ways of thinking and doing that link apparently diverse Khoisan practices and ideas. I particularly return to the significance of massage to Khoisan people and to the relevance of ideas of 'wind'. In an exceptional article published by the anthropologist Hoernlé, in 1918, she recorded beliefs regarding massage and organ movement that served as an initial stimulus to my research. She also reported the existence of a small range of Nama disease categories. I encountered the same disease categories amongst contemporary Nama and Damara. In the very last section, 'Old Time, New Time', I provide detailed accounts of these diseases and consider Khoisan ideas about old and new diseases in relation to issues of medical pluralism, change and transformation of ideas.

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A Note on Terminology and Language

Schapera's *The Khoisan Peoples* (1930)¹ brought the word 'Khoisan' to a wide academic arena. The word remains popular in southern African vernacular as a folk category. 'Khoisan' is a European constructed compound of old Nama *khoi*, or modern *khoë*, meaning people in most Khoe languages and *Sān* (*Saan*), or more conventionally *San*, being the word Khoekhoe use for Bushmen. Schapera used 'Khoisan' in relation to 'Hottentots' and 'Bushmen'. In Barnard's 1992 update of Schapera's comparative study, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa*, Barnard extends the Khoisan appellation to one that includes the Damara, on the basis of structures held in common across 'economic, cultural, linguistic and 'racial' boundaries'.² The contemporary primary subjects of this thesis are Namibian Nama and Damara 'Khoi', and Hai//om, Ju/'hoan (!Kung or !Xu) and Nharo Bushmen.

As a matter of convenience I have taken the liberty of using the word 'Khoi' as a means of referring to Nama and Damara as opposed to *Khoikhoi*, which is used predominantly for historical Cape pastoralists, and *Khoë* which, as a linguistic category, includes Nama, Damara and the Bushmen groups Hai//om and Nharo. The San people I encountered frequently referred to themselves as Bushmen. This may reflect repossession of a word that in former times held negative connotations amongst the San, or indicate that 'Western' sensitivity over the word Bushmen, has been just that. Regardless, I use San and Bushmen interchangeably, as do the people to whom the label is applied.

My study is concerned with how the Khoisan have been considered in the past as well as how we understand them. To emphasise different ethnographic contexts I retain the spelling of Khoisan words used by different ethnographers. For my fieldwork material I use the orthography of Haacke and Eiseb for Khoe speakers (1999) and Dickens for Ju/'hoan,³ except where I wish to emphasise distance between my findings and those of other researchers, when I retain the spelling presented by my translators.

The variety of different spellings used for specific words in this thesis is indicative of the complexity and difficulty of Khoisan orthography. The earliest Dutch settlers compiled Khoisan wordlists and orthographic interest has persisted ever since. The extent and nature of word variation, and particularly the omission and substitution of clicks, has been a topic of increasing interest and specialisation since

¹ I. Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa* (London, 1930).

² A. Barnard, *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 3.

³ Recent, no date.

the later nineteenth century. This reflects an increase in academic knowledge of the Khoisan and ever growing academic linguistic sophistication. To date, opinions still vary considerably regarding the extent of variety in word formation. Dorothea Bleek, compiler of an extensive comparative Bushmen dictionary (1956) treated words 'as of one root although they have different clicks'. Bleek recognised that 'clicks seem to vary from one tribe to another, possibly among individuals in the same tribe'. At the same time she acknowledged that some orthographic variations may be due to faulty hearing.⁴

Bleek's orthography has been criticised.⁵ Despite methodological problems with her material many of my findings seemed to support her assertions, suggesting evidence for more extensive omission and substitution of clicks than is perceived by some researchers. In recognition of the complexity of linguistic study and my thoroughly rudimentary knowledge of Khoisan languages and linguistics, I only offer word relationships in this thesis highly tentatively. The possible existence of linguistic ties plays no part in validating links I identify between ideas, although, should they prove valid, the finding would lend support to my material. What does at least seem indicated, is that the Khoisan characteristic of flexibility identified in the arena of thought, and perhaps wider behaviour, may also be a feature of language use. Moreover, semantic relationships may exist between words that seem orthographically related but the relationship between the words may not have been recognised by academics, because the meanings behind the words have not been fully understood. For discussion of orthographic variety see Köhler (1963), Haacke (1986, 1997) and Traill (1986).⁶

⁴ D. F. Bleek, *Comparative Vocabularies of Bushman Languages* (London, 1929), p. 4.

⁵ See for example: A. Traill, *The Complete Guide to the Koon*, ASI Communication No1, University of Witwatersrand (Johannesburg, 1974), p. 10; Barnard, *A Nharo Wordlist, with Notes on Grammar*. University of Natal, Occasional Publications no. 2 (Durban, 1985), pp. 4-6.

⁶ Köhler, O, 'Observations on the Central Khoisan Language Group', *Journal of African Languages*, 2 (1963), 227-234; W.H.G. Haacke, 'Preliminary Observations on a Dialect of the Sesfontein Damara', in R. Vossen and K. Keuthmann (eds.), *Contemporary Studies on Khoisan 1*, Q.K.F. 5.1, (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 375-396; W.H.G. Haacke, E. Eiseb, and L. Namaseb, 'Internal and External Relations of Khoe-Khoe Dialects: a Preliminary Survey', in W.H.G. Haacke and E.E. Elderkin (eds.), *Namibian Languages: Reports and Papers*, (Windhoek, 1997), pp. 125-210; A. Traill, 'Click Replacement in Khoe', in R. Vossen and K. Keuthmann (eds.), *Contemporary Studies on Khoisan 2*, Q.K.F. 5.2 (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 301-320.

Preface

Sesfontein, a settlement of 7,358 people (2001),¹ lies 233kms from the end of the tarmac road at Kamanjab in Northern Namibia. A journey from Kamanjab to Sesfontein that took days by oxcart can now be completed in four hours or less in the dry season. The route passes through hills and plains of rocky amber scrubland. It runs by sporadic impoverished settlements and occasional isolated ramshackle huts of tin and wood, where Damara or Herero stay 'on the farm' with their goats. In Sesfontein there are two shops, a school, police post and a church. A clinic staffed by a nurse opened in 1966.

Between 1864 and approximately 1882 groups of Nama, called Topnaar (*ǃAoni*) and Swartbooi (*//Khaugôa*), migrated from Nama territory in the south of Namibia to the north west Kaokoveld region, including Sesfontein.² When the Damara came to Sesfontein is less clear, some having come with the Nama and some probably having lived in or moved through the region for many generations, possibly even before occupation of the region by Bantu speaking peoples.³ As early as 1897 Sesfontein had its first permanent Rhenish missionary, Nikodemus Kido.⁴ A year prior to his arrival the Namibian colonial military, or Schutztruppe, had established a fort at 'Zesfontein' which remained occupied until 1914. In the last few years the fort has been rebuilt as a tourist lodge from which people can drive into the wild Africa of Himba people, elephants, rhino, giraffe and other game. Occasionally animals visit Sesfontein. A few years ago an old lion came one night and snatched a baby. Elephants trample and strip the meagre dusty gardens on the edge of the settlement.

A few older people of Sesfontein tell of their nomadic upbringing and their homes by the ephemeral rivers. Many hunted when young, gathered foods and moved around the region as food and water dictated. Some I spoke to led this sort of life until about twenty years ago, when they came to Sesfontein because of its permanent water and government food. Now people cannot hunt because of Nature Conservation. They can live in tin huts in the dust of Sesfontein. They can store water in old petrol barrels and eat mealie porridge and the odd bit of goat or donkey. In the right season they collect mopane worms, but they cannot collect just anything they want.

¹ Republic of Namibia 2001 Census, Preliminary (March 2002), www.healthnet.org.na/grnmhss/NamCENO1.htm. Accessed 2/10/03, 14:21 hrs.

² W.H.G. Haacke, E. Eiseb, L. Namaseb, 'Internal and External Relations of Khoe-Khoe Dialects: A preliminary Survey', in W.H.G. Haacke and E.E. Elderkin (eds.), *Namibian Languages: Reports and Papers* (Windhoek, 1997), p.131; K. Schneider, 'The Mission Parish of Sesfontein', trans. by I.R. Ludger Flunkert (Schermbek, n.d.), p.1.

³ Ibid; Haacke *et al*, 'Internal and External Relations', p.150.

⁴ Schneider, 'Mission Parish', p.1.

In the centre of Sesfontein lives a witchdoctor, a *!gai aob*. My Damara friend and translator, Suro, told me he killed her mother. Her mother was a clinic nurse who Suro said had died from cancer. On my second night in Sesfontein a *!nanu aob* or ‘man with the rain spirit, wind thing in him’, came to examine Suro’s sick niece. The ‘rainman’ slaughtered a goat behind Suro’s grandmother’s hut, amidst the broken bottles and bits of old car. He suffocated the goat and watched it fall. It fell to the left, the female side. It was dead people on her mother’s side that were killing the child. After days of massaging and feeding ostrich egg shell to the child, her mother hitched a ride to Opuwa, a frontier town in the Angola direction. The child was treated there in a filthy hospital where they stayed on the floor. They treated her for dehydration and she came back well. Suro thought it was the *!gai aob* who made the child sick. People were jealous of the Ganuses because her mother had been a clinic nurse with money and now the white researchers come to Suro and give her money.

In September 2003 I received a letter from Suro. Three of the *!nanu aob*’s, or rainmen healers, I spoke to have died. People of Sesfontein held a healing ‘trance’ dance, called an *arus*, for each one of them, but there was nothing they could do. The rainman who put the healing things into me had also died, ‘he took someone’s *tokolosi* and there is no one who can help him’.⁵ Bantu speaking peoples talk a lot about *tokolosi*. They are impy little people that disrupt people’s lives. Some people sleep with them.

This thesis tries to make sense of many of the things Suro and others told me. It tries to make sense of Sesfontein and other similar places where Khoisan live. Places where you drink tea sitting on car batteries and go both to the clinic and the rainman. Places where the wind brings news of death; where a church elder treats an agitated mind by applying a still beating goat’s heart to the chest of the afflicted, but where the evening throbs with the sound of a generator; where you can buy Coke.

I try to understand Khoisan in relation to their surroundings in the bush, on farms, in shanty towns and in Windhoek. I look for reasons why Bushmen and Damara wear bits of eland or black cloth to protect themselves from illness and why Nama and Hai//om know, like many Tswana do, that the shadow of a bird can make you ill. It is a story that examines the relationship of ‘development’ and urbanization to Khoisan health strategies, but also a story of how the ‘West’ has chosen to think about the Khoisan and their medical world.

⁵ Suro Ganuses

Description of Project

Throughout urban and rural communities of Namibia, Khoisan ‘traditional’ healing is alive and well. This thesis, at its broadest level, explores the contemporary nature of Khoisan traditional medicine. It additionally examines what present Khoisan health strategies can tell us about those of the past. As indicated in the title, my focus is principally on ideas and not practices, although the two clearly overlap. I have emphasised ‘understanding’ over practice out of a perceived need to highlight, and to some extent attempt to redress, a very partial historical and contemporary literature on Khoisan healing.

The thesis draws upon a long history of traveller, settler, administrative, soldier, missionary and anthropological sources, from the initial settlement phase of the Cape in 1652 to the present. Through historical analysis of these sources and insights gained from eight months fieldwork amongst Khoisan, I have sought to identify key factors in the contingent history that have led us to our present understanding of Khoisan healing. Moreover, I have attempted to identify where weaknesses might lie in the Western understanding of Khoisan healing and to suggest how these weaknesses might be addressed.

The analysis entails using historical sources in a novel recursive relationship with fieldwork. In this relationship the sources have served a number of functions: they provide an historical chronology of Khoisan practice and ideas; they provide evidence of how the ‘West’ constructed its story of Khoisan healing; and during fieldwork they enabled me to ask well informed questions. I used the fieldwork to investigate the relationship of the historical information to contemporary practice and to explore issues of change and continuity. Fieldwork helped me consider the strengths and weaknesses of contemporary understanding and to suggest what appear to be the most appropriate ways of thinking about Khoisan healing.

A number of tensions and potential problems are inherent in my methodology and I consider these in detail in the Introduction. The main tension is between a methodology derived from *Annales* that is thoroughly historicizing and my assumption that one can project backwards on the basis of fieldwork. To resolve this problem I cite not only historical methodological precedents, but examine Khoisan knowledge in respect of generation, transmission, change and different types and rates of change.

The initial impetus for this thesis lay in two primary observations regarding knowledge of Khoisan healing. Brief consideration of these observations serves as a way in to the primary themes of the thesis. The first point came out of a reference made by the anthropologist Winifred Hoernlé in 1918, concerning Hottentot theory of disease. In an article that extensively explored the relationship of ritual to healing amongst the Nama, Hoernlé made a passing reference to a Hottentot belief that illness could be caused by the movement of organs. Treatment of this movement, she reported, involved massaging the organs back to their correct respective positions.⁶ In the context of my previous career as an osteopath, this reference was intriguing because it was suggestive of practices carried out within the osteopathic profession but considered highly unorthodox within conventional biomedicine.

In view of the global universality of massage practices throughout history, and the obvious benefits of massage to a people with health problems but little technology and no biomedical theory, it seemed very reasonable to me to suppose that massage, if not theories of organ movement, must almost certainly have been a feature of historic, pre-historic and probably contemporary Nama life. If there was a theory of organ movement this in turn seemed to demand a knowledge of organs of the body, probably their function and at least an idea of their 'symptomatic function' if they were perceived to be malfunctioning. This consideration led me to the question, might the Nama have a specific theory of disease and perhaps even a medical system?

Remarkably, reference to the literature soon made it apparent that anthropologists of the Nama had done little to update anthropological reports of the early decades of the twentieth century. Nowhere in the post-1918 Khoisan literature was there any elaboration of Hoernlé's observation except for a few meagre details regarding Nama massage recorded by a Namaqualand doctor, Laidler, around the time of Hoernlé's fieldwork. Consideration of this situation suggested a number of options. The most likely answer seemed to follow on from a concern expressed by Hoernlé in 1923, that all the Nama were becoming so increasingly acculturated by the early twentieth century that locating any sort of 'traditional' knowledge was becoming almost impossible.⁷ Anthropologists subsequent to Hoernlé might not, therefore, have considered detailed study of Nama 'tradition' possible. They might consequently have been attracted to study African people thought to be more traditional.

Another possible explanation was that my earlier training as an osteopath had unusually drawn me to a particular sort of observation. My osteopathic eye that recognised organ movement, was looking

⁶ A.W. Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites of Transition and the Conception of !Nau among the Hottentots', *Harvard African Studies*, 2 (1918), 77.

⁷ A. Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 176.

outside the bounds of conventional 'Western' medical thought categories - similar scientific categories to those that have dominated the colonial gaze and extraction of knowledge. Mudimbe identified this idea of partial, contextually specific, observation as, 'the powerful yet invisible epistemological order that seems to make possible, at a given period, a given discourse about Africa'.⁸ Building on Mudimbe, perhaps there was something in the colonial enquiry of the early twentieth century that pointed Hoernlé towards the moving organ phenomenon, as there had later been, in a different context, that drew my attention to it. This reflection pointed to significant contingency in the colonial record.

If Hoernlé's Nama were indeed typical of past or more recent Nama, and an absence of reporting of massage practices was a reflection of lack of anthropological interest in 'traditional' Nama, on the basis of Khoisan similarity, it appeared reasonable to expect that somewhere in the wider Khoe and Bushmen literature there would be at least confirmation of something similar to the moving organ theory, if not a full appraisal of massage theory. Further research, however, revealed an almost complete absence of massage in any Khoe related literature. Despite the quantity of literature related to Bushmen, and entire books written on Bushmen healing, massage never received more than an almost incidental inclusion. Even reports made in the last few years that directly concerned alternative medical practice in Namibia, paid virtually no attention to massage, nor for that matter to Khoisan healing generally, relative to that of the other major ethnic populations of Namibia.⁹

This absence of massage in the literature seemed to point to a very partial nature of the ethnographic gaze over time. The extent and implications of a partial gaze to historical and anthropological understanding of the Khoisan became more apparent the further I considered the question. As evident in the proceeding outline of key sources, Khoi and San medical history has been considered in very different ways. This has encouraged an unevenness in what is presently known of Khoisan medicine. This unevenness is partly dependent upon contrasts in old and new methodological analyses, but also on different historical, anthropological and to some extent linguistic foci.

The most extensive literature concerned with the history of Khoisan medicine, is Schapera's compendium, *The Khoisan Peoples* (1930). Beyond this wide appraisal, general accounts of medicine have almost exclusively concerned only the Khoekhoe. Post-1950s interest in Bushmen medicine,

⁸ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Bloomington and London, 1994), p.xiv.

⁹ See D. Lebeau: 'Seeking Health: The Hierarchy of Resort in Utilisation Patterns of Traditional and Western Medicine in Multi-Cultural Katutura, Namibia', 'Massage is practised by several traditional healers to ease sore muscles and correct problems with internal organs':(PhD Rhodes University Dec 2000), p. 134. cf. T.W. Lumpkin's *Traditional Healers and Community use of Traditional Medicine in Namibia*, Ministry of Health and Social Services and UNICEF (Windhoek, 1994).

which will shortly be considered, has centred around primarily the trance healing dance and to a lesser extent herbal remedies. The most extensive Khoekhoe account is Laidler's 1920s unpublished monograph, 'Manners, Medicine and Magic of the Cape Hottentots', much of which was written up into his 1928 article, 'The Magic Medicine of the Hottentots'. Beyond this, historical summaries of Khoekhoe information can be found in accounts by a medical doctor, Menko (1954) and a short summary by Norwich (1971). More recently the historian Viljoen published an article, 'Medicine, Health and Medical Practice in Precolonial Khoikhoi Society' (1999).

The limited evidence for Khoekhoe medicine remains to date cast predominantly in 'normative' style history. Although this reflects research and methodology up to the mid twentieth century, the few relatively recent historians who have specifically studied Khoekhoe medicine have not fully taken on board the implications of Social History. Moreover, earlier ethnographers, particularly Schapera and the missionary Vedder, continue to be cited by historians and anthropologists alike without due consideration of Khoisan meaning, as opposed to 'Western' meaning, inherent in their medical practices. Viljoen's recent study has sought to resolve weaknesses he perceived in earlier studies of Khoekhoe medicine and 'to give pre-colonial medicine an anthropological-historical dimension', but his account fails adequately to address the validity of certain assumptions implicit in the earlier material.

Colonial ethnographers recorded Khoisan medical practices that appeared familiar. Thinking in terms of their own medical practice they recorded, for example, phlebotomy, cupping and primitive inoculation. Cultural phenomena they observed which did not appear 'medical' were recorded within other categories of behaviour, including religion and superstition, or ignored as un-noteworthy. Pulling together information from these early ethnographers can provide a valuable history of forms of practice and this is what Schapera, Viljoen, Menko and others have done. This information does not, however, provide a history of Khoisan medical ideas associated with those practices.

In Kolb's early record of Cape Hottentots (1727) he included a picture which Viljoen has reproduced with the caption 'Khoikhoi methods of cupping and bloodletting'.¹⁰ Viljoen concludes that, the 'Khoikhoi version of blood-letting and cupping were thus on par with Western medicine'.¹¹ To which Western medicine though does Viljoen refer, that of Kolb's or that nearly three hundred years later?

¹⁰ R. Viljoen, 'Medicine, Health and Medical Practice in Precolonial Khoikhoi Society: An Anthropological-Historical Perspective', *History and Anthropology*, 2:4 (1999), 529.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 530.

In 1938 Lucien Febvre, co-founder of the *Annales* journal, drew attention to the unthinking fallacy of assuming that the mental framework of historical players was the same as our own.¹² Normative accounts of African medicine implicitly accepted that the terms ‘medicine’, ‘disease’, ‘doctor’ and ‘patient’ were interchangeable between societies. The implication of Viljoen’s conclusion seems to be that elements of Khoikhoi medicine were similar to Kolb’s ideas. Taken to its logical conclusion this suggests that the Khoikhoi must have been practicing bleeding following the same theory of European humoral medicine that lay behind Kolb’s medical knowledge. This would not only be a remarkable state of affairs, but it conceptually inserts the Khoikhoi into a Western primitive scientific past. I have used Viljoen’s article as an example because it is a recent product of sound history sympathetic to the Khoi. But such historical slippage carries the danger of obscuring the Khoi ideas behind practices.

Norwich commits a similar historical error. Norwich, also commenting from Kolb’s record, observes that the Khoikhoi bled one another using a tourniquet and a clenched fist, ‘presumably to obtain the maximum amount of venous engorgement’. He makes this assumption on the basis that Hottentots were carrying out ‘blood letting’, as it has been known and practiced by European medical practitioners. He directly continues by collapsing ‘blood letting’ and a different phenomenon, ‘scarification’, together: ‘to this day scarification is still popular [...] amongst Bantu’.¹³ Scarification is in fact highly popular amongst contemporary Khoisan but it comes in many forms, none of which compare readily to Western bleeding practices of the colonial past or the present.

Similarly again, Schapera, like many ethnographers, uses a vocabulary of ‘inoculation’, ‘immunity’ and ‘immunization’¹⁴ in a straightforward manner when he describes Khoikhoi procedures undertaken to protect a man from snakebite. Whilst the procedures may involve the ingredients of inoculation and even apparently bring the same results, the question must be asked whether it has been worked out and undertaken within Western biomedical scientific paradigms. Clearly it has not. What lies behind such practices is an entire nexus of ideas which up until now has only been touched upon in different, as yet vaguely related, Khoisan contexts of ‘potency’.

The information contained in colonial ethnography can provide a history of practice but it tells us little of the ideas and changing ideas inherent in those practices. Equally it is highly selective. Recovering historical ideas from non-literate cultures is difficult although some ethnographic evidence does exist. I have set out to extend the boundaries of what is known of past and present Khoisan medical practice

¹² L. Febvre, ‘History and Psychology’, 1938, reprinted in Peter Burke (ed.), *A New Kind of History* (London, 1973).

¹³ I. Norwich, ‘A Chapter of Early Medical Africana’, *South African Medical Journal*, (8 May, 1971), 503.

¹⁴ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 399.

by assimilating details not just from colonial records of medical behaviour but from other observations as well, principally regarding religion and superstition. I furthermore seek to reconsider conceptions of Khoisan medicine in the present and past in the light of my fieldwork enquiry, anthropological research and historical sources. I emphasise the contingent nature of past and present understanding, including my own, in an attempt to highlight where weaknesses in our understanding might lie.

Sources

The secondary and historical works previously cited all draw the bulk of their material from a number of key sources. I turned to the same material to look for both detail of practices and ideas and indications of how the story of Khoisan healing emerged. Primary amongst the sources were the seventeenth and early eighteenth century travel accounts of Dapper, Ten Rhyne, Grevenbroek and Kolb, followed by those of a number of scientific adventurers in the later eighteenth century, Thunberg, Gordon, Sparrman and le Vaillant. During the nineteenth century, texts had a more varied provenance including British officials, scientists, more travellers, such as Barrow, Baines and Galton and missionaries such as Carl Hahn and Cook. Towards the end of the nineteenth century records exist from a small number of German anthropologists or soldier ethnographers, especially Schinz, Lübbert and Gentz. Two philologists, Theophilus Hahn and Wilhelm Bleek, also made a highly significant contribution in the second half of the nineteenth century.

Hahn, curator of the Grey collection in Cape Town, wrote a distinctive analysis of Khoikhoi mythology, *Tsuni-//Goam* which is of particular relevance owing to his attention to Khoikhoi ideas. Bleek provided the first substantial details regarding Bushmen. Prior to Bleek the distinction between Bushmen and Hottentots was seldom clearly made. Some ethnographers even used the term Bushman in relation to vagrants of any ethnic group surviving on the edge of society.¹⁵ Elphick cites Lichtenstien (1812) and other 'scholarly minded travelers' of the early nineteenth century as the first to differentiate between Khoikhoi pastoralists and Bushman hunters.¹⁶ Partly because of this lack of distinction and partly because earlier ethnographers had more contact with Khoikhoi, there is little that can clearly identified as Bushman medicine before Bleek's research.

Bleek's linguistic interest in Bushmen was very much concerned with recording the primitive world and the primitive Bushman mind before it was lost for good and with it some of the last survivors from

¹⁵ See for example, le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior Parts of Africa...*(2 vols., Perth, 1791), i, 159.

civilized man's past. Bleek's interests were adopted in the last few years of his life by his sister in law Lucy Lloyd and continued after his death by his daughter, Dorothea. A remarkable and extensive corpus of material survives from this legacy concerning language, folklore, religion, hunting and medicine men. The material provides exceptional insight into Bushmen thoughts and beliefs but little on day-to-day healing practices.

The most influential Khoi and San research in the early decades of the twentieth century was carried out by the missionary Vedder and the Austrian ethnographer Lebzelter. Laidler and Hoernlé, whom we have already encountered, focussed on the Khoikhoi. Fourie, medical officer to the South West Africa administration, provides details of Hai//om Bushmen. Between the late 1930s and the 1950s there was an effective hiatus of significant research.

The legacy of research up to the 1930s has a distinctive character that is evident both in Schapera's 1930 compendium and in Viljoen's much later article. Both Schapera's and Viljoen's accounts seldom stray beyond description of pragmatic healing practices, such as using herbal remedies or poultices and setting broken bones. Although Schapera includes extensive details regarding religion and superstition, he does not significantly collapse these imposed categories to look for a wider Khoisan understanding of health strategies. Bushmen literature through the early years of the twentieth century tended to follow interest in what seemed special about the Bushmen, namely their ancient primitive hunting existence in a hostile environment. While some attention was paid to special Bushman knowledge of poisons, antidotes and herbal remedies, very little attention was given to their wider healing world.

From the 1950s onwards, Bushmen, unlike the Khoekhoe, received enormous anthropological attention. In 1992 Barnard estimated that well over six hundred articles and books had been written concerned with Bushmen,¹⁷ the vast majority of which are from this post-1950s period. Moreover, in recent years the interest has certainly not abated.¹⁸

Surprisingly, as identified, very little of this vast body of Bushmen research has specifically concerned healing, and what has, has focused on the healing dance and to a lesser extent herbal remedies. The most influential accounts of healing are undoubtedly Katz's *Boiling Energy: Community Healing*

¹⁶ R. Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa* (Johannesburg, 1985), p. 4.

¹⁷ Barnard cited by J. Suzman, *Things from the Bush: A Contemporary History of the Omaheke Bushmen* (Switzerland, 2000), p.7; see also R. Hitchcock, 'Ethnographic Research and Socioeconomic Development', *The Past and Future of !Kung Ethnography*, QKF 4 (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 388-403.

¹⁸ Between 1992 and 2000 at least six Bushmen related doctoral theses have been published to say nothing of wider and subsequent material: R. Gordon, 'The Stat(u)s of Namibian Anthropology: A Review', *Cimbebasia* 16 (2000), 23.

among the Kalahari Kung, 1982, and his 1997 co-authored sequel *Healing makes our Heart's Happy*. Katz's work, which began with his fieldwork in the late 1960s amongst the Ju/'hoan, is a sociological and psychological analysis of the trance dance, framed by Lee's focus on Bushman adaptation to their ecosystem.

During the 1970s a number of other anthropologists began research that would lead them to consider healing, but to date no specific broad based study has emerged. In particular, Barnard (1979) began to place the Nharo dance in a wider healing ideational and practical perspective and Guenther (1986;1999) examined dancing in relation to belief, symbolism and acculturation. Biesele (1993, 1997) has examined the trance dance within her wider consideration of Bushmen beliefs and symbolism.

Since Budack's work on Khoikhoi tribal history in the 1960s, Khoikhoi research has tended to be more historical than anthropological. Only Viljoen has sought to explore Khoisan medicine extensively in an historical or anthropological context. Those who have briefly considered medical phenomena are: Schmidt, Wagner-Robertz, and most recently Wallace and Sullivan. Because the focus of these researchers lies elsewhere, they do not provide extensive insight into Khoisan conceptions of health, illness and treatment in a wide context. Lumpkin and Lebeau's recent research on Namibian traditional medicine is also too broad in outlook to provide useful Khoisan details.

Sullivan's research (1998; 1999; 2000) is primarily concerned with Damara use of environmental resources. In this context she includes some details regarding use of plant and animal remedies. Schmidt's and Wallace's main contribution to this thesis lies in their consideration of the Damara trance dance. In 1986 Schmidt published an exceptional report entitled 'Present Day Trance Dances of the Dama in SWA', which was to some extent a sequel to her earlier paper 'Alte Heilverfahren Im Heutigen Sudwestafrika' (1981). Schmidt's main interest is in folklore and religion. Her work on Damara trance dancing is useful but suffers from the inaccurate conclusion that the Damara trance dancer does not work as a healer and treat people during a trance dance.¹⁹ Although Damara trance healers exist Schmidt was apparently not aware of their existence and she wrote about them as an historical phenomenon. Similarly, Wallace (1997) interviewed urban informants who knew of the Damara trance dance but had no first hand experience of it. She also considered the dance historical.²⁰

¹⁹ S. Schmidt, 'Present Day Trance Dances of the Dama in SWA / Namiba, *African Languages of Southern Africa (ALASA) Khoisan SIG: Newsletter*, 4 (1986), pp. 4, 5, 9, 10.

²⁰ M. Wallace, 'Health and Society in Windhoek, Namibia 1915-45' (Institute of Commonwealth Studies, Univ. of London Ph.D. thesis 1997).

In the 1970s Dagmar Wagner-Robertz, a German anthropologist, worked on issues of religion and healing amongst the Damara and Hai//om and observed a Damara trance healing dance. Unfortunately Wagner-Robertz died before much of her material appeared in publication. An account of just her findings on dance has, however, recently been published, interestingly, with the proviso written by experienced anthropologists of Namibian peoples that the work stands as an historical document for a practice now discontinued.²¹ Wagner-Robertz's fieldwork notes serve as perhaps the most useful background to this study. Her key informants were all born around 1900. What they described corresponds strongly with my material and thereby provides greater historical depth to my approach and argument.

In summary, these Khoi sources present primarily a history of medical practice. And there has been little recent research on Khoi healing. Although some limited discussion of Khoi ideas has featured in ethnography, this has either followed pre-1930s fields of interest or has not been related to healing in its broadest dimensions.

Bushman sources, by way of contrast, contain very little historical detail of medical practices, although information concerned with ideas has featured since the Bleek accounts. Over the last half century interest in Bushman ideas has persisted despite it generally having taken second place to ecosystems analysis. From recent contexts there is again little record of medical practice. Focus has primarily been on use of herbal medicines. Bushman healing ideas have, however, received considerable attention in relation to the trance dance.

The Practicalities: fieldwork and interviews

From September 2000 to September 2001, I spent ten months in Namibia, eight of which were mainly devoted to interviews. I spent four of these eight months in Sesfontein and four, divided roughly equally, between Nama, Hai//om, and Ju/'hoan groups, with ten days amongst Nharo. The longer stay in Sesfontein was undertaken in attempt to add depth to my comparative study. In order further to maximise the usefulness of a relatively brief encounter, I stayed where possible with the people I was working with, either camping next to them or living in their accommodation.

²¹ D. Wagner-Robertz, 'Ein Heilungsritual der Dama Südwestafrika / Namibia', in Michael Bollig and Wilhelm J.G. Möhlig (eds.) *History, Cultural Traditions and Innovations in Southern Africa*, 12 (Köln, 2000), p.9.

During my fieldwork I travelled 24,000 Kms. in a good 4x4, which undoubtedly gave me a tremendous advantage in accessing 'remote' communities and exploring sometimes tenuous leads. In addition to participating in everyday healing events and extensive informal discussion, I recorded 102 interviews, underwent a healing 'initiation' ritual, made a photographic record of medicinal plants and a video record of trance dances and massage practices. Some of my recorded interviews involved larger groups although the majority were with individuals. Interviews were predominantly with healers and informed family members who practiced some form of treatment. My policy was to ask for specialists and then, when this avenue was exhausted, simply to walk through communities asking random individuals if they practiced any healing, and, if so, whether they minded being interviewed. Often 'randomly' selected individuals, or partners of interviewees, knew just as much as the professed specialists. I made a point of following opportunities as they arose.

Interviews were carried out with the aid of translators. Nearly all interviews were recorded and transcribed at a later date. I used four translators in all, two men and two women. A Sesfontein woman, Suro Ganuses, was my primary point of contact and to her I owe much of my information concerning the Damara. Suro and her extended family provided a way into the Nama and Damara communities. I selected Suro following advice from the anthropologist Sian Sullivan, who had worked intensively with her on projects concerning Damara use of environmental resources. Suro's exceptional knowledge of 'traditional' practices and stories allied with her extensive social network added considerably to my research. Although using someone already familiar with another researcher's ideas might be considered detrimental, as might my following particular social contacts already approached in different research projects, I felt, and continue to feel, that the benefits of her experience far outweighed the disadvantages. Amongst the Hai//om I worked with both Suro and a Hai//om resident of Tsintsabis, Frederick //Awaseb. I asked Frederick to assist us primarily because of his helpful demeanour and knowledge of matters I was concerned with. Amongst the Ju/'hoan I worked with /Ui Oma and amongst the Nharo with Marieta 'Ellery' Naoadoës. Both /Ui and Marieta were local community members who had worked as translators to previous research projects.

In the choice of my assistants I felt it was valuable to use both men and women to help balance informant response to my and my translators approaches. The balance of a white man with a local Damara or San woman often proved a source of ready humour to perspective informants and set the tone for a successful interview. Owing to the heavily researched nature of Bushmen anthropology there is considerable control by various NGO's regarding access to Bushmen. This control leads to repetitious use of translators by successive researchers. This in turn unavoidably leads to the same

interviewees providing information to different researchers. The resultant research funnel undoubtedly moulds academic impressions of what ‘the Bushmen’ believe. I was not entirely able to avoid this funnel but tried to diminish its influence on my work, as I did with my work amongst the Nama, Damara and Hai//om, by following as broad a range of leads as possible.²²

Theoretical Considerations

When I began my fieldwork I was, in some sense, looking for continuity. I was exploring whether old massage practices, and whatever understandings might have gone with them, were a feature of contemporary Khoisan life. At the same time, however, I was more expectant of finding massage absent because of heavy acculturation. When I first fished around the academic community with my thesis proposal the warnings came thick and fast – a good idea, very little work has been done on Khoisan healing, but there might not be much to study; the literature is large but there is little in it, and, the Bushmen are certainly not what you imagine. One researcher was particularly keen to tell me about day-to-day drinking, fighting, stabbing and high tuberculosis rates amongst the Bushmen.

In retrospect the warnings were absolutely right about the literature. It is big – and particularly so in the context of Bushmen studies from the 1950s onwards. Accounts of healing are also thinly spread. Despite this, though, the task is manageable because there are relatively few key sources which have been recycled and which accumulatively provide the basis of academic understanding. As indicated, my primary focus is on historical understanding, rather than providing simply a chronological history of practice. My archival research has also therefore been limited to identifying key influential sources that have shaped how we think about Khoisan medicine. When my fieldwork is considered alongside the key sources and background archival material there is enough to flesh out ideas of healing.

Schapera’s and Barnard’s comparative studies provide a way into the large range of published sources, as does Van Warmelo’s massive index of published articles.²³ A search for the wider context of understanding has also been made easier by the publication of some key traveller and missionary diaries, particularly the papers of Robert Gordon and the missionary Carl Hahn. In terms of dealing with the German colonial administrative archive, there is a scarcity of sources which, as the historians

²² I have explored the idea of the ‘research funnel’ in a paper presented at ‘Researching Africa Day’, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford, June 2002. Lyn Shumaker’s *Africanizing Anthropology* (Durham N.C., 2001) sheds considerable light on the complexity of issues concerning the relationship between the anthropological product and research assistants.

²³ N.J. Van Warmelo, *Anthropology of Southern Africa in Periodicals to 1950: An Analysis and Index* (Johannesburg, 1977).

Bruchhausen and Roelcke have noted in an East African German colonial context, indicates a lack of colonial interest and material incentive for systematic research. Bruchhausen and Roelcke identified that German attitudes towards indigenous medicine over the 1884-1914 colonial period moved between assertions of cruelty, stupidity and recognition of primitive treatments. Their assessment of the archives of German East Africa tells very much the same story as that of the virtually coterminous German occupation of South West Africa.²⁴ In both regions, administrative interest in traditional medicine lay primarily in knowledge of poisons, poison remedies and medicinal plants.²⁵ The medical focus of the German South West Africa administration primarily concerned the health of the territory with particular interest in tropical diseases and the spread of venereal disease amongst both Africans and colonists.²⁶

In relation to what I might find to study in Namibia and what bearing this might have historically, warnings of acculturation were not overstated. But from the first forays into fieldwork there were strong indications that indigenous medicine was alive and well. After about a month of fieldwork it became plain that the position was more interesting still – all in the healing realm was not as it seemed.

Gradually evidence accumulated of pluralism marked by continuity. To a large degree my findings fit in well with similar studies undertaken by historians and anthropologists working in different African contexts since the 1960s. Unlike other studies, however, my conclusions come from a comparative analysis, not just a study of one group of people. My analysis pulls together evidence from two groups, which despite sitting under one umbrella, Khoisan, have been recorded and considered in very different ways.

Finding common ideas between Khoi and San, and continuity with Khoisan of the past, demands a consistent way of analysing continuity and change across two types of people, each of whom are thought to have undergone very different colonial experiences. Researchers have emphasised the distinctive factors in Khoi and Bushmen colonial experience. But I will argue that this emphasis has fractured academic understanding of persistent underlying Khoisan similarities in ways of thinking and practicing medicine. In part the perception of difference between Khoi and Bushman medicine is a product of the ethnographic process. In part it is also an overestimation of the destructive colonial

²⁴ W. Bruchhausen and V. Roelcke, 'Categorising 'African Medicine': The German Discourse on East African Healing Practices, 1885-1918, in Ernst Waltraud (ed.), *Plural Medicine, Transition and Modernity, 1800-2000* (London, 2002), pp. 77- 94.

²⁵ NAW: ZBU 912, Medical Research; ZBU 913, Tropical Diseases; ZBU 915, Arrows and other Poisons; ZBU 916, Local Medicinal Plants; ZBU 917, Snake Venom, Snakebite and Cures against it.

impact on Khoisan medical ideas and practice. Despite development in Namibia, the influence of the environment that underlies Khoisan health ideas and practices remains significant.

Understanding how historians and anthropologists have come together to write and think about African medicine is important to a study that seeks to comment on contemporary understanding of the Khoisan. It is a story that revolves around the nature of the African mind, the relevance of 'natives' to European history and issues of whether or not Africans and other indigenous people really do operate with different ideas about the world.

To place ethnographic interest within its wider intellectual context of the last century, I will proceed with a résumé of significant trends in thinking. The review seeks to bring together the strands of intellectual thought that shaped research interests on the Khoisan and the broader ways historians have adopted to think about African medicine. I follow this review with an outline of my theoretical alignment. This draws attention to the unevenness of the historical record and how I have attempted to redress aspects of the problems this unevenness poses.

To understand Khoisan healing it is necessary to consider the nature of Khoisan knowledge and how it is transmitted. To set up my subsequent argument, a preamble regarding how I have chosen to interpret my findings relative to academic precedents around aboriginal ways of thinking seems essential. Therefore, at risk of presenting the prize before the competition, I have included a reasonably extensive consideration of knowledge as an introduction.

²⁶ For references see Nils Oermann D.Phil. thesis. 'Mission, Church and State Relations in South West Africa under German Rule (1884-1915)', Oxford University D.Phil. thesis 1998.

Introduction

Patterns of Thought

In the late nineteenth century there was considerable interest in primitive people across European academic communities. The interest was born from diverse roots, including: eighteenth and nineteenth century travel, missionary and colonial expansion; eighteenth century Scottish Enlightenment thinking on matters of economy and society; nineteenth century German interest in folklore, national characteristics and philology; and nineteenth century evolutionary theory. By 1900, in England, the anthropologist Tylor and the ethnographic collator, Frazer, both concluded primitive thought was illogical. In the next few decades Sigmund Freud believed, like Malinowski, that native primitive thought was not illogical but operated as a mechanism for relieving tension.²⁷

W.H.I. Rivers, neurologist, psychologist and anthropologist, restructured the problem in his posthumously published, *Medicine, Magic and Religion* (1924). Rivers suggested native thought was not illogical but made sense within its own bounded setting. This sort of perspective had been notably mooted by the missionary Livingstone some half century earlier.²⁸ It was a position elaborated on by Evans-Pritchard in 1937 in his now famous study, *Witchcraft, and Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande*. With the advent of fieldwork, Rivers and Evans-Pritchard explored such primitive peoples as Tylor and Frazer had only read about. They placed the primitive subjects of their studies in settings replete with their own rules, although the settings, they were well aware, were undergoing transformations through the expansion of colonialism.²⁹ Rivers and Evans-Pritchard emphasised the understanding that 'native' thought must be taken on its own terms in a contextually specific situation. It was internally consistent, not contradictory, existing in its own web of relations.

In France in 1910 Lévy-Bruhl, a sociologist and student of Durkheim, published his influential and controversial book *How Natives Think*.³⁰ In this work Lévy-Bruhl built on Durkheim's German rooted ideas of 'collective representations',³¹ alongside his own ideas of 'prelogical thought' and 'mystical participation'. Unlike the English conception that native thought was a primitive precursor of Western thought, 'wrong', or made sense only in context, Lévy-Bruhl emphasised, with an eye to

²⁷ E. Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion* (Oxford, 1965), p. 94.

²⁸ D. Livingstone, 'Conversations on Rain-making', in *Missionary Travels and Researches in South Africa* (London, 1858), pp.22-27.

²⁹ W.H.I. Rivers, *Medicine, Magic and Religion* (London, 2001), pp.49-50.

³⁰ Originally: *Les Fonctions Mentales dans les Sociétés Inférieures*.

³¹ Collective representations are shared ideas and images of natural and social reality; L.Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (New Jersey, 1985), pp.xii; 36-39.

the universal, that primitive thought was not alogical or antilogical, or even an earlier version of Western thought; it was different.³² How it was different lay in ‘mystical participation’, by which Lévy-Bruhl simply meant that primitive people saw connections between phenomena, things, events and organisms, that are imperceptible to the senses.

Over the years Lévy-Bruhl’s work has caused considerable consternation. At various times it has been criticised for promoting a distinction between indigenous and Western people. The foundations of his conclusions were also attacked because he had not undertaken fieldwork and because his language of ‘prelogical’ and ‘mystical’ seemed to point to redundant evolutionary theory. Evans-Pritchard criticised Lévy-Bruhl for exaggerating the mystical which was, after all, a term that could equally be applied to similar phenomena of belief and superstition found in Western cultures.³³ Despite his criticism, however, Evans-Pritchard was ultimately an advocate of Lévy-Bruhl’s interpretations.

At the beginning of the twentieth century British historiography was dominated by the study of ideas and politics. Typical of other academic disciplines of this period, history sought a distinctive disciplinary identity. In France, however, by the late 1920s the emergent Annales group were calling for interdisciplinary history that looked towards geography, psychology, sociology and other disciplines in an attempt to capture the thought worlds of historical players.³⁴ In Braudel’s highly influential *La Méditerranée et le monde Méditerranéen* (1949) he examined history in relation to the influence of the environment and time-scales. He emphasised a conception of history being composed of different phenomena, which moved at different rates of change. Braudel’s slowest changing factor was the environment, which he famously referred to as the *longue durée*. To this he added the ‘conjunctures’ and the shortest factor, the ‘events’. Later Annales studies by Le Roy Ladurie, Le Goff and others went on to examine the parameters of *mentalité*, why people at certain times think certain things. In effect they brought individual agency to the long historical backdrop.

Although Annales historians did not pursue an extensive sophisticated understanding of environmental influence, in their combination of interdisciplinary history, environmental

³² L. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (New Jersey, 1985), p. 78.

³³ Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, p. 87.

³⁴ See especially: M. Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on its Basic Characteristics* (London, 1966) [1931]); L. Febvre, *The Problem of Unbelief in the Sixteenth Century: The Religion of Rabelais* (Cambridge, Mass., London, 1982 [1942]).

consideration, dealing with different rates of historical change and searching for mentalité, they set methodological precedents I draw upon in this thesis.

In America in the first half of the twentieth century, the cultural relativist school of Boas moved away from older European styled considerations of the primitive mind. Out of this distinctive American analysis, two linguists, Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, the former a distinguished professional academic, the latter, a maverick amateur of influence, developed a further distinctive take on the primitive mind. Central to Sapir and Whorf's interests was the relationship of language to different ways of constructing and interpreting reality.³⁵ Whorf in particular pushed the idea, based principally on his analysis of Native American linguistics, that some native peoples actually display more scientific reasoning than Western people. Whilst I would not wish to defend this point, Whorf had some interesting things to say regarding how people interpret the world around them. In particular Whorf observed that 'the Hopi have a preference for verbs, as contrasted to our own liking for nouns'. This, he continues, 'perpetually turns our propositions about things into propositions about events'.³⁶ As I examine later, the relationship between nouns and verbs is important in the Khoisan context in terms of how Khoisan think about healing 'energy' and the nature of sickness, spirits and spirit helpers or spirit defenders. A further idea of Whorf's that I do not explicitly draw upon but nonetheless contributes to my analysis, is that concerning the power of thought and particularly prayer to bring phenomena into manifestation.³⁷ As will be seen, Khoisan talk to phenomena such as rain or animals as a means of encouraging a particular outcome. Consideration of the Hopi context provides useful insight into aboriginal ways of relating to environmental and organic phenomena.

Towards the mid twentieth century, the Annales interdisciplinary message was appearing amongst historians beyond France. In the 1940s, Ackerknecht called for an exploration of 'primitive medicine' through a coming together of historians and anthropologists.³⁸ Examples of such fusion and of historians starting to engage in anthropological styled fieldwork, came with the gathering of African oral histories by Kenneth Pike in 1948 and Jan Vansina in 1953. By the mid 1960s fieldwork

³⁵ See introduction: B. Whorf, *Language, Thought and Reality*, J. Carroll (ed.) (Cambridge, Mass., 1956).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-2.

³⁸ E. Ackerknecht, 'Contradictions in Primitive Surgery', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, 20:2 (1946), 184.

had become standard practice for most doctoral students of Africa in most north American universities.³⁹ British training followed more reluctantly although it became central at SOAS.

By the 1980s historical interest in collecting oral histories had moved on from predominantly political and economic themes to explore narrower topics consistent with the new interests of social history. Themes redolent of 1970s anthropology, of the creation and transformation of ideas had, by the 1980s, become intrinsic to historical African fieldwork based studies. Some historians, such as Gloria Waite (1981), extended the interdisciplinary nature of historical fieldwork still further. In an attempt to deal with the self evident difficulties of writing history for non literate prehistoric African contexts, Waite incorporated not only anthropological, but archaeological and lexical analysis in her historical doctoral study of medicine and health care in pre-colonial east-central Africa.⁴⁰ In the 1980s a number of academics, including Ehret, Elphick and Wilmsen,⁴¹ published rich interdisciplinary studies of Khoisan peoples.

Although participation had long been recognised as central to anthropological fieldwork, since the 1980s there was increasing academic recognition that participation actually brings academics to another form of knowing. This is an idea presented by Victor Turner's wife, Edith, who, through participation, reassessed the meaning of her husband's earlier work amongst the Ndembu of Zambia. What changed Edith Turner's viewpoint dramatically was her observation of ectoplasm emerging from a patient's back during an Ihamba ritual.⁴² The anthropologist Roy Willis followed a similar line of participatory enquiry in his consideration of spirits and healing amongst the Lungu of northern Zambia. He likewise had experiences not readily acknowledged in academic accounts.⁴³

The particular popularity of fieldwork as an historical practice since the 1980s, is evident in Vansina's 1996 publication *In Pursuit of History*. Vansina's book demonstrates the extent of inter-relationship between history and anthropology. Of particular relevance to this thesis, it provides one

³⁹ C. Keyes and J.Vansina (eds.), *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa* (New Hampshire and Oxford, 1996), pp.xi;127.

⁴⁰ Gloria Waite, 'A History of Medicine and Health Care in Pre-Colonial East-Central Africa' (University of California at Los Angeles Ph.D. thesis, 1981).

⁴¹ For example: Christopher Ehret and Merrick Posnansky (eds.), *The Archaeological and Linguistic Reconstruction of African History* (Berkeley and London, 1982); Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding of White South Africa*; Edwin Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies* (Chicago, 1989).

⁴² E. Turner, *Experiencing Ritual: A New Interpretation of African Healing* (Philadelphia, 1992).

⁴³ R. Willis, *Some Spirits Heal, Others Only Dance: A Journey into Human Selfhood in an African Village* (Oxford, 1999).

example of an African historian, Sheryl McCurdy, who, following earlier participatory precedents, was initiated into an exclusive initiation ritual, 'in order to ask better and more informed questions'.⁴⁴

In Britain the allegiance between historians and anthropologists was less enthusiastic than in America. The earliest movement came from anthropologists. Malinowski, the Wilsons and Evans-Pritchard, all sought to place their anthropological subjects in some sort of historical relief.⁴⁵ This emphasis on change stood in contrast to Lévy-Bruhl's and other French sociological and anthropological appreciations of the primitive. French anthropologists and sociologists framed their discourse on primitive thought in a more static and universal paradigm. There are parallels with *Annales* historians having emphasised continuity through environmental influence. The difference between the British academic emphasis on change and the French on continuity, remains highlighted by a conference held at University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1960. Reflecting popular interest of the time the focus of the conference was on traditional and modern African systems of thought.⁴⁶ The conference engaged with the persistent and long running discourse on the relationship of civilised to primitive people.

Following the conference, Fortes and Dieterlen summarised the two broadly contrasted French and British academic approaches to African thought as, on the one hand, a French priority given to a peoples' 'total body of knowledge' and on the other, a British tradition that linked the body of knowledge and beliefs of people 'with the actualities of their social organization and daily life'. French scholars tended to emphasise persistent underlying belief, doctrine, myth and symbolism as the background to the manifestations of society. British scholars started from social and political relations that provided the context in which ritual, myth and belief were found to operate.⁴⁷

Anthropology of the 1960s took the debate on primitive thought to in depth consideration of African understanding of causes of illness and misfortune. Victor Turner was particularly influential in this capacity.⁴⁸ By the 1970s European anthropologists were, like the Americans, increasingly exploring African thought and African medicine in terms of medical systems. Intrinsic to this analysis was a perceived need to address reasons for the creation of mentalité, its transmission and change. These concerns clearly merged the classic boundaries between anthropology and history. They built

⁴⁴ S. McCurdy, 'Learning the Dance, Initiating Relationships', in C. Keyes Adenaike and J. Vansina (eds.), *In Pursuit of History: Fieldwork in Africa* (New Hampshire and Oxford, 1996), p. 43.

⁴⁵ E. Evans-Pritchard, *Nuer Religion* (Oxford, 1956).

⁴⁶ M. Fortes and G. Dieterlen eds., *African Systems of Thought* (London, 1965)

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

⁴⁸ V. Turner, *The Drums of Affliction* (Oxford, 1968).

especially on historical theory of Foucault regarding the construction and persistence of knowledge systems and knowledge as power.⁴⁹ In 1978 the American anthropologist John Janzen influentially refocused analyses of ‘primitive thought’ into an agency centred question of patient choice, or quest for therapy. Janzen additionally commented on the relationship of traditional medical strategies to change. He suggested that cultural continuity of health related beliefs and behaviour persisted amongst the Kongo of Lower Zaire despite superficial change.⁵⁰ Vaughan observes that this situation contrasted with Gwyn Prins’ conclusions regarding his work amongst the Lozi of Zimbabwe. Prins envisaged lasting core concepts that absorbed colonial influences.⁵¹ Prins’ findings seem to identify a deeper type of cultural transformation. In contrast to both Janzen and Prins who saw ‘core concepts’ as a more or less systematised body of knowledge, Murray Last (1992 [1981]), explored desystematized medical culture in Hausaland. Last identified a phenomena of ‘not knowing’ and not caring to know as a transitory feature of Hausa medical culture.⁵² His findings suggest that in some contexts patients do not choose between medical systems because ‘systems’ do not exist.

The emphasis on cultural continuity additionally surfaced in the 1960s and 1970s in Bushmen anthropology. In this exceptional context of Bushmen hunter-gatherers, however, there was a lingering influence of popular conceptions of Bushmen as isolated, primitive people. Leading anthropologists of the Bushmen in the 1960s and 1970s, Lorna Marshall, George Silberbauer and Richard Lee, all acknowledged historical contact between Namibian / Botswanan Bushmen, Bantu and, since the late nineteenth century, Europeans, but they played down the influence this might have had on Bushmen. Silberbauer and Lee conceived of the Bushmen within an ecosystem paradigm, in which the Bushmen filled an ecological niche through social and physical adaptation. Their approach emphasised continuity of egalitarian adaptive behaviour.

By the 1960s the influence of the Annales group contributed to the emergence of social history in Britain. British medical historians expanded research into medical alternatives, folk medicine and charlatanism,⁵³ and an exceptional study of mentalité in the guise of Roy Porter’s *Mind Forged*

⁴⁹ M. Last and G.L. Chavunduka (eds.), *The Professionalisation of African Medicine*, (Manchester, 1986), p. 8.

⁵⁰ J. Janzen, *The Quest for Therapy in Lower Zaire* (Berkeley and London, 1978)

⁵¹ M. Vaughan, ‘Health and Hegemony’, in D. Engels (ed.) *Contesting Colonial Hegemony*, (London, 1994), p. 197.

⁵² Murray Last, ‘The Importance of Knowing about Not Knowing: Observations from Hausaland’, in Steven Feierman and John Janzen (eds.), *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley and Oxford, 1992), pp. 393 – 406.

⁵³ D. Porter and L. Jordanova provide good reviews of this literature: D. Porter, ‘The Mission of Social History of Medicine: An Historical Overview’, *Social History of Medicine*, 8 (1995): 361- 82; L.

Manacles.⁵⁴ Studies of mentalité and environment encouraged British historians to lean upon anthropology for insight and inspiration. Witchcraft it seemed was an area of historical interest that might particularly benefit from anthropological input. Since 1970 comparisons began to emerge between the reasons and reasoning behind contemporary African witchcraft and similar scenarios in historical Europe.⁵⁵ Peter Burke identifies Evans-Pritchard and his interests in Annales history, French sociology and anthropology as a direct route of influence on the historian Keith Thomas and his followers regarding both witchcraft and the relationship of environment to thought.⁵⁶

Witchcraft research of this period suggested that stress, brought about by increasing urban population densities and social pressures, could give rise to a proliferation of witchcraft. This same idea, which was rooted in the early twentieth century, repeats itself in Thomas's analysis of witchcraft in sixteenth and seventeenth century English society, which he explicitly compares to 'modern African societies'.⁵⁷ Change therefore remained a central theme of English anthropological and historical research regarding witchcraft and Africa.

As historical interest in African change became more established so too it became more sophisticated. In the 1970s historians Marks and Elphick and the anthropologist Carstens examined factors of change amongst the Cape Khoikhoi. Marks (1971) and Elphick (1975) focused largely on materialist factors and hence material and political change. Both proposed that Khoi pastoralists and San hunter gatherers may have moved from one form of subsistence to the other, as need or opportunity arose; a conclusion of considerable significance to the later 'Kalahari debate'. Consequently there may not have been as much distinction between the two sorts of people as had been imagined by previous historical and anthropological analysts. Marks found in the nature and living patterns of Khoi culture, reasons why their culture had 'all but disappeared' from twentieth century South Africa.⁵⁸ Elphick similarly emphasised that traditional Cape Khoikhoi society was rapidly 'swept away' with colonial incursion. He elaborated that, 'unlike most African peoples their eventual subordination to the European colonists was not only structural but cultural'.⁵⁹

Jordanova, 'The Social Construction of Medical Knowledge', *Social History of Medicine* 8 (1995): 361 – 82.

⁵⁴ R. Porter, *Mind Forg'd Manacles: A History of Madness in England from the Restoration to the Regency* (London, 1987).

⁵⁵ E. Bever, 'Witchcraft Fears and Psychosocial Factors in Disease', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, xxx:4 (2000), 573-590.

⁵⁶ P. Burke, *History and Social Theory* (Cambridge, 1992), p. 93.

⁵⁷ K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, (Middlesex, 1971), p.634.

⁵⁸ S. Marks, 'Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *Journal of African History*, xiii, i (1972), pp.55.

⁵⁹ Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding*, pp. 67, 175.

Carstens (1975) examined religious and mythological structural change amongst the Nama⁶⁰ in relation to colonial incursion. Carstens analysed the relationship of ideas and symbols to different levels of Nama urbanization. Whilst his analysis pointed to modification of ideas his examples of change were not absolutely convincing. This is particularly true of his association of Nama beliefs concerning giant snakes around the Orange River with the arrival of a colonial threat and diamond prospectors. Reference to history suggests similar beliefs had been recorded some time before Carsten's postulated mythical genesis.⁶¹ An anthropological perspective also suggests that the idea of the snake as a symbol of threat and power that comes into communities from the socially exterior environment, has long persisted across southern African societies.⁶² Almost in acknowledgement of his lack of convincing evidence for change, and despite the apparent initial thrust of his paper, in his final analysis Carstens concludes:

in spite of these radical changes and the perpetrators of coercive change a cultural tradition (including some of the language) has survived, providing a continuity with the past. Much of this cultural tradition is embodied in myth, legend, and belief – the supernatural.⁶³

Carsten's examination of change focussed on Nama from a much later period than the Khoikhoi of Marks and Elphick's respective studies. He nonetheless carried a similar leitmotif of extensive change. Brigitte Lau, a southern African historian, proposed similar notions of deep cultural change in respect of Namibian Khoi as Marks, Elphick and Carstens had for Cape Khoikhoi.⁶⁴ Lau's influential work emphasised breakdown of Namibian Khoi culture as a result of the penetration of merchant capital and wider colonial influence (1979, 1982, 1987). Lau's emphasis on change seems partly to reflect the coterminous popularity of Marxist modes of historical analysis which explicitly articulated change as a primary focus of study.

⁶⁰ P. Carstens, 'Some Implications of Change in Khoikhoi Belief', in M.G. Whisson and M. West, *Religion and Social Change in Africa: Anthropological Essays in honour of Monica Wilson* (Cape Town and London, 1975).

⁶¹ E. Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery into the Interior of Africa* (2 vols., London, 1883), i, 115; Laidler identified the snake/light association Carstens referred to as diamond prospectors and located it in old beliefs of snakestones and bits of quartz shining in the moonlight: P.W. Laidler, 'The Magic Medicine of the Hottentots', *South African Journal of Science*, xxv (1928), 438.

⁶² See T. Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam: The Supreme Being of the Khoi-Khoi* (London, 1881), pp. 23, 62, 101, 77-79, 105.

⁶³ P. Carstens, 'Some Implications of Change', p. 93.

⁶⁴ B. Lau, 'A Critique of the Historical Sources Relating to the Damara' (UCT BA thesis 1979); 'The Emergence of Kommando Politics in Namaland, southern Namibia, 1800-1870 (UCT MA thesis 1982); *Southern and Central Namibia in Jonker Afrikaner's Time* (Windhoek, 1987).

The work of these and other historians of the 1970s and 1980s, coming on the back of an older tradition of recognising and studying change in southern Africa, has encouraged ongoing, largely unquestioned assumptions, that virtually nothing is left of Khoekhoe culture. The archaeologists Smith and Webley for instance, in a recent study of Khoekhoe gender relations, put together their reconstruction almost entirely from archaeological and historical data with barely any recourse to anthropology. They begin their report of their findings by asserting that ‘for all practical purposes, much of the Khoekhoe culture has virtually disappeared’.⁶⁵

Around the 1970s different corners of African history and anthropology were pursuing similar topics but doing so from different perspectives. In France from 1900 into the 1970s came ideas of universal primitive ways of thinking and perceptions of continuity of traditional cultures. The persistence of these ideas was born out in Levi Straus’s conception of cold and hot societies, referring to an opposition between traditional, static, African life on the one hand and modern, dynamic, acculturated or civilized life on the other. In contrast, academics associated with the English academic tradition, including historians of southern Africa, explored history and anthropology through a paradigm predicated on the premise that contact and political economic change have brought about extensive destruction and modification of African traditional life. Monica Wilson’s work was particularly influential in this capacity.⁶⁶ Although academics influenced by the English tradition considered, and to some degree conceptualised change in varied ways, this was the dominant theme and is evident in works by Marks, Elphick, Carstens and particularly Lau, specifically on the Khoekhoe.

Issues of change and the implications of contact became not only central to Khoikhoi history and anthropology of the 1970s and 1980s, but also to Bushman. A number of scholars, and especially Wilmsen, emphasised the longevity and extent of social exchange between Bushmen, Africans and Europeans. These dissenters from the dominant ecosystems analysis became known as ‘revisionists’ in the sometimes heated discourse that ensued. The debate itself is often referred to as the ‘Kalahari debate’. In *Land Filled with Flies* (1989), Wilmsen places the Bushmen within longstanding trade networks. He sees Bushmen moving in and out of pastoralism and as participants on the periphery of the global economy. Wilmsen explains the impoverished state of Bushmen of the last half century

⁶⁵ Andrew Smith and Lita Webley, ‘Women and Men of the Khoekhoen of Southern Africa’, in Dorothy Hodgson (ed.), *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa* (Oxford and Kampala, 2000), p. 72.

⁶⁶ M. Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest: Effects of Contact with Europeans on the Pondo of South Africa*, 2nd ed. (London, 1936); M. Wilson and G. Wilson, *The Analysis of Social Change: Based on Observations in Central Africa* (London, 1945); M. Wilson and Leonard Thompson (eds.), *The Oxford History of South Africa* (Oxford, 1969).

through the collapse of the regional economy following withdrawal of merchant capital. In Wilmsen's opinion it was the impoverished nature of Bushmen life that had led anthropologists to conceive of them as Stone Age survivors of our primitive past.

In the 1970s and 1980s Bushmen experienced changes that shaped the ongoing focus of 'isolationists' and 'revisionists' alike. War between South Africa and SWAPO drew in Bushmen. Development initiatives, continuing encroachment of African people and increasingly tourist initiatives, all imposed further. The Bushmen literally became more acculturated. By the 1980s, hunting was long gone as a common occupation. There were increasing signs of social differentiation and signs of Bushmen healers incorporating both Western and African healing or diagnostic strategies into their practices. Similarly, specialist and professional healers were seen emerging from the egalitarian Bushmen ranks.

Continuity?

Undoubtedly one cannot consider Khoisan medical history and current health strategies without factoring in change, even for the 'remotest' communities. What I wish to question, however, is the appropriateness of accepting the sort of sweeping change implied by many sources on the Cape Khoikhoi communities, as a phenomenon also applicable to all Khoi away from areas of early Cape settlement, and particularly across Namibia. Lau in particular does not seem entirely justified in her assertions of deep cultural distortion. Carstens' evidence suggests that change may not be as deep as has been assumed in all aspects of Khoekhoe culture. A recent study undertaken by Haacke similarly suggests that language, and by implication ideas, has been more persistent in Khoi culture than Lau and other historians have allowed. Haacke found that 70% of the 200 Khoikhoi words that comprised the earliest Khoikhoi wordlist, compiled by van Riebeeck in 1653, are still used by contemporary Khoe speakers in Namibia.⁶⁷

The Cape Khoekhoe experience predicated on profound change should not be assumed unthinkingly to represent the experiences of Namibian Khoi. Evidence suggests change affects some aspects of culture more than others and a blanket assumption that all aspects of culture have disappeared should be resisted. Ways of thinking about health, woven into wider Khoekhoe cosmology and ontology, may in particular be more resistant to change than has been recognised. Prins's historical fieldwork

⁶⁷ Wilfred Haacke, Inaugural Lecture, University of Namibia Sept 2000.

based study of the Lozi suggests, as my findings do of the Khoi, that the picture of complete change does not stand up to scrutiny. In relation to Lozi culture recorded at the end of the nineteenth century, Prins comments that, despite the 'enormous turbulence of colonial experience', 'time and again I came across (in recognizable form), proverbs, stories, explanations of misfortune, symbols whose present day significance I knew'.⁶⁸

Although it would seem change was becoming a watchword of Bushmen ethnography in the 1980s, at the same time an evolving ecological school held out for elements of continuity. Two significant voices in this context were Megan Biesele and Lewis-Williams. Biesele begun her research fieldwork on the back of Lee's initial project in Dobe, in Botswana, in the late 1960s. She specialises in Bushmen storytelling and mythology. Biesele suggests from her analysis of stories that, whilst stories change, they remain, even in the context of semi-aculturated Bushmen, rooted ' in a traditional hunter-gatherer vein', and born out of ' a hunting-gathering imaginative substrate'.⁶⁹ Lewis-Williams's claims of continuity came out of his association with Biesele and Lorna Marshall and their observations of Bushmen trance dances. He used archaeological, historical and anthropological sources to compare ancient Bushmen rock art, beliefs of Bleek's Cape /Xam Bushmen and observation of contemporary Bushmen trance dances. He argued for long term continuity of Bushmen culture over perhaps thousand of years.⁷⁰

Janzen, Prins and others have identified persistent core cultural beliefs in African pastoralist or agricultural communities. Bushmen anthropologists have produced their own explanations for cultural continuity. These, as suggested, have been built around models of ecologically adapted social behaviour. Similarly, Bushmen anthropologists have also produced a novel solution to the older and wider African primitive thought debates as played out in the Bushmen context. Recent consideration of the flexibility and variety apparent in Bushmen ideas has associated the phenomenon with a wider notion of Bushmen as ideological foragers.⁷¹ This flexibility is linked to resourceful and adaptive flexibility and the egalitarian tolerance that allows co-existence through peaceful acceptance of divergent opinions. Flexibility viewed in this manner is therefore a further example of long term environmental adaptation, and hence continuity. Barnard has examined

⁶⁸ G. Prins, ' A Modern History of Lozi Therapeutics', in S. Feierman and J. Janzen, *The Social Basis of Health and Healing in Africa* (Berkeley and Oxford, 1992), p. 340.

⁶⁹ M. Biesele, *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'hoan* (Indiana, 1993), p. 13.

⁷⁰ Lewis-Williams, 'Ideological Continuities in Prehistoric Southern Africa: The Evidence of Rock Art, in C. Schrire (ed.), *Past and Present in Hunter Gatherer Studies* (New York, 1984), pp.225-52.

⁷¹ M. Guenther, *Tricksters and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society* (Indiana, 1999).

Bushmen in a still wider 'foraging mode of thought context'. Barnard also points to continuity in his recognition that 'foraging populations are more resilient than has previously been acknowledged. Mode of thought is more resilient than mode of production..'.⁷²

In recent years Bushmen anthropology has followed wider historical debate. History and anthropology in the 1980s and 1990s has emphasised the role of individual and group behaviour in transforming both indigenous and biomedical healing knowledge. It has increasingly sought to demonstrate pluralism in how people conceive issues of health, illness and treatment.⁷³ Bushmen anthropology is still heavily influenced by the ecological context but there is new emphasis on ideas, flexibility and the social role of the healing dance. Guenther particularly has set out to explore the multi-layered world of Bushmen ideas. He brings local context into old debates concerning primitive thought.⁷⁴

There is a gap between literature on healing and broader anthropology. The Khoi healing story has been predominantly written from pre-1930s ethnography. This presents Khoi practice largely as primitive and pre-biomedical. In contrast, ethnography of Bushman healing comes primarily from post-1960s study of Bushmen wherein anthropologists considered healing from ecological and largely socio-psychological perspectives. Bushmen anthropology draws on an unusual Bleek legacy which is thought to indicate longevity and persistence of Bushman culture. Rock paintings have also been interpreted as indicating great age and persistence of Bushman ideas and practices. Collectively, Bushmen analysis has carried an underlying assumption of continuity. Whilst to some extent this represents an exceptional connection between the Bushmen and the environment it also reflects the interpretative paradigms of the anthropologists and archaeologists that have considered Bushman healing.

Like Prins, I was struck by the remarkable similarity apparent between contemporary practice and that included in old ethnographic accounts. Unlike Prins the similarity I found ran through not just one set of people with one history but effectively two sets of people with ill-defined similarity; the respective histories of which were, moreover, reflected in two different sorts of historiography. The

⁷² A. Barnard, 'The Foraging Mode of Thought', in H. Stewart *et al* (eds.), *Self- and Other-Images of Hunter-Gatherers*, Senri Ethnological Studies no. 60 (Osaka, 2002), p. 6.

⁷³ See for example, Waltraud Ernst (ed.), *Plural Medicine*; S. Cant and U. Sharma, *A New Medical Pluralism?* (London, 1999).

⁷⁴ Guenther, *Tricksters*.

unusual problem this poses is how to explain similarity using two different data sets, one principally historical, the other anthropological and archaeological.

In his archaeological analysis of North American Plains Indians, Philip Duke turned to Annales history in order to bridge a slow tempo of change in the prehistoric, recorded in archaeological evidence, with more rapid cultural change in the historic, recorded in ethnographic writings. Duke applied an Annales perspective for two reasons: it 'reasserted the value of the longterm', and 'introduced the notions that certain phenomena have different rhythms of change and that these rhythms have different effects on society and the individuals in it'.⁷⁵ I wish to build on Duke's mode of analysis in the context of Khoisan history.

In a recent context Bushmen healing has been considered using anthropological and archaeological data and primarily against a backdrop of the long-term, tied to ideas of environment, adaptation and continuity - a continuity that persists despite change. In contrast to this, Hoernlé and Laidler were the last researchers to consider Khoi healing in any detail from first hand experience and both researchers did so with a notion of degraded traditional culture paramount in their minds. Subsequently, key enquirers have only considered Khoi healing as something long affected by deep cultural change and have painted Khoi traditional medicine very largely from the palette of colonial ethnography. Although Elphick considered the Khoikhoi in relation to both the long term and the environment, Khoi medicine has not been tied to long term environmental influence. Guided by paradigms of change, historians have not explored ideas of continuity in a similar manner to anthropologists of Bushmen.

Following the Annales paradigm, I wish to explore the notion that shared long term experience of essentially the same environment has inscribed similar beliefs and understandings in Khoi and San. This environmental inscription also remains evident in cultural ties between the Khoisan and their Bantu speaking neighbours who share their environmental context. The premise which underlies this proposition is that the environment informs our ideas. That the Khoi and San in earlier contexts had similar relationships with the environment was one of Marks' conclusions. In contemporary contexts this certainly remains true for many rural and peri-urban Khoisan.

⁷⁵ P. Duke, ' Braudel and North American Archaeology: An Example from the Northern Plains ', in R. W. Preucel and I. Hodder, *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory: A Reader* (Oxford and Massachusetts, 1996), p. 242.

In summary, my thesis examines present understanding of Khoisan medicine as a reflection of the ongoing ethnography of Khoisan peoples. I seek to highlight the continued influence of the longterm on San and Khoi medicine. I explore the possibility that the longterm relationship between the Khoisan and their environment has contributed to a Khoisan way of thinking and doing medicine. In addition to outlining some significant contemporary healing practices, I consider the effects of recent change on traditional Khoisan healing strategies. As a means of examining the implications and realities of change, in the last section of the thesis, I explore the ingredients of Khoisan 'old time' and 'new time'. This is a way in which contemporary Khoisan talk about their lives.

In an examination in which issues of continuity are central, it seems important to define exactly what one means. For my definition of continuity I wish to recruit Bateson's ideas of patterns⁷⁶ and propose a notion of bounded thought, of, as yet indeterminable time depth, which is sufficiently recurrent in content and of sufficient density to dominate other ways of thinking and doing, to make a consistent pattern visible to contemporary eyes.

Khoisan knowledge

As noted, early English anthropologists believed African thought to be illogical. This was a conclusion based largely on the recognition that 'primitive' Africans did not appreciate the implications of contradiction. Or, put another way, they failed to recognise the self evident truth of scientific cause and effect. Alternatively, Lévy-Bruhl proposed that primitives were indifferent to contradiction and 'what we call the natural relation of cause and effect'.⁷⁷ In the 1960s, the topic was conceived in a wider schema by the philosopher of science Robin Horton. In his contentious paper, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', Horton applied Popper's theory of open and closed systems to the topic of African modes of thought. This model of analysis, which had parallels in Lévi-Strauss' cold and hot society theory, came under heavy criticism for implying dipoles of traditional / modern and static / dynamic. In 1982 Horton recognized a lack of sophistication inherent in his model and revised his position towards plurality. At the heart of Horton's thesis of closed traditional societies there is an idea he saw grounded in Evans-Pritchard's consideration of the Azande, that: 'in traditional cultures there is no developed awareness of alternatives to the established body of theoretical tenets', whereas in scientifically orientated cultures, such awareness is

⁷⁶ G. Bateson, *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (Chicago and London, 1972).

⁷⁷ L. Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think* (New Jersey, 1985), p.78.

highly developed.⁷⁸ The validity of the idea seems unaffected by Horton's subsequent revision of his broader thesis.

Horton seemed to be saying that if the Azande, for example, were aware of alternative theory they might have rethought their position on causality and contradiction. The Azande were quite capable of thinking alternatively but they had no way into it, they had no experience of it. In some sense then, this proposes a position of Azande ignorance.

Academic discussion of Bushman traditional ways of thinking is framed within a broader discourse on hunter-gatherer 'modes of thought'. Key issues considered in the Bushman context revolve around flexibility in thinking and foraging in mentality. In my Khoi research I encountered similar evidence for contradiction and plurality of ideas to that recently recorded amongst Bushmen and recorded for decades amongst other African peoples. For the Khoisan, and perhaps for wider African groups, there seems a better way of thinking about traditional thought than founding it in ignorance. The Khoisan live in a world of possibilities.

Time and again, when I presented questions from the ethnographic record concerning matters people claimed to know nothing about, such as use of snakestones to cure snakebite, or the existence of a snake with the head of a cockerel, or of people transforming themselves into animals, the possible existence of the phenomenon was not doubted. The few that did profess doubt did so from a position of not having seen the phenomenon. On the whole though people would respond to my question with: 'I do not know. We Damara [or Bushmen etc.] are all different', or, 'that is probably the other place, not here'.

Last approached a similar phenomenon of not knowing which he identified amongst the Hausa as a symptom of medical systems undergoing a transitory state of anarchy. In contrast, I suggest Khoisan attitudes towards the unknown and ignorance are built upon possibility and experience. Relative to Western behaviour, Khoisan outlook rests upon a different status accorded to knowledge. In a Khoisan context, Gellner's affirmation that in 'traditional society' knowledge has 'no diplomatic immunity',⁷⁹ points to, not an indifference to truth or lack of ability to recognise it, but to a culturally mediated personal access to truth which is not contradicted by the personal access of others. In effect

⁷⁸ R. Horton, 'African Traditional Thought and Western Science', in R. Horton, *Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West: Essays on Magic, Religion and Science* (Cambridge, 1993), p.222.

⁷⁹ E. Gellner cited by Prins, 'A Modern History of Lozi Therapeutics', in Feierman and Janzen, *The Social Basis*, p. 344.

this allows multiple truths within both individuals and social groups. But despite variation regarding what is possible, there nonetheless exists an underlying consistency in Khoisan ontology, epistemology and cosmology that generates consistency in their healing strategies. Khoisan peoples may allow for possibility but what they actually learn and see is contained within social and environmental parameters. In some respects these parameters are far less constrained than in the West. In other conceptual arenas, such as science and its own world of possibilities, Khoisan thought is more limited. But Khoisan thought can travel to spheres where Western thought is reluctant to tread, especially alternative ways of knowing. Most Khoisan accord validity to knowledge handed down from 'the old people', and acquired through dreaming, trancing, divination, 'presentiments' and more ambiguously from stories. It is a sort of knowledge not validated by scientific orthodoxy, despite the similarities with widespread historical patterns of thought.

To understand Khoisan healing we need to consider the knowledge behind its physical and mental ingredients. We need to know where knowledge comes from, what sort of knowledge it is, how it continues and why it changes.

The issue of change and continuity is central to any history that seeks to interpret past phenomena informed by the present. Academics have developed diverse strategies for examining change and continuity. At risk of oversimplification, these models favour either the environment or social relations as engines of stability or change. Historical models typically look for change and particularly so in Marxist or materialist analysis. Archaeological models frequently emphasise long term stability. As suggested, Annales historical interpretation pictures long and short term change operating at different rates. The pattern of healing strategies that I found comes from gradual invention, loss and reinvention. The transmission of knowledge over the long term, shaped by environment, frames the short term changes. The repetition of practice and ideas that we see in a pattern, comes from human participation in a particular environment. Recognising that Khoisan social structure is both the product and the medium of participation, I envisage the intellectual and creative conservatism of the Khoisan as arising from a particular kind of Khoisan way of living in their environment. Those who receive education or move out of more traditional communities and out of the environment, become increasingly aware of alternative perspectives and phenomena. This leads to an eventual erosion or transformation of traditional healing ideas and practice. Khoisan healing strategies are the product of a three way recursive relationship between environment, society and the individual. I envisage neither a homeostatic ecosystems model, nor simply adapted cultural

conservatism. Both these models downplay agency and are essentially evolutionary. From the wider academic debate a mixture of coevolutionary theory and theory of structure and practice seems to hold the most in common with my perspective.

As noted, Guenther has emphasised the notion of Bushmen as foragers of ideas,⁸⁰ a perspective that emphasises Bushmen creativity. Throughout my research I looked for the Khoisan thinking forager. I looked for examples of experimentation and creative thinking. Very few surfaced. Where creative knowledge was readily offered to me, it was explained through dreaming and intuition. These modes of thought moulded and elaborated familiar concepts rather than creating new concepts. My findings pointed to lack of innovative experimentation in the forager setting. Indeed, the most creative individuals in terms of experimentation were Khoisan peoples with greater involvement in an urbanizing world.

But despite my research suggesting a limited presence of innovative thought, and hence a more stable continuum of healing knowledge, this seems too clean a proposition. I see disparate communities of people within which small circles of individuals could well be influenced by the occasional appearance of exceptionally creative individuals. I met one Ju/'hoan man, for instance, who systematically tried the leaves, bark and roots of plants around his hut to treat his tubercular cough. He settled on the roots of one tree as the best treatment, despite others, to his knowledge, never having used this tree. Having found it successful he subsequently treated others who came to him having heard of his success.⁸¹ The influence of this man was however local and it seems quite probable that his overall influence was transitory. His ideas came from a way of thinking about the environment and a way of using the environment that was typically Khoisan. He was, however, exceptional in that he experimented. The results of his experimentation may well have been known before or be known elsewhere, but in a world without books and active, wide-ranging networks of intellectual exchange, it is quite possible his ideas may die with him. From this sort of behaviour a pattern of knowledge emerges which is like a patchwork quilt that maintains its appearance although individual patches are worn out and replaced. They are replaced with patch segments similar enough for the quilt to maintain its pattern or identity.

There are three categories of description that are helpful in determining what knowledge Khoisan use, where it comes from and how it is transmitted: prescriptive, creative, transformational. Knowledge from 'old people' is prescriptive, as is knowledge given out by healers and to a lesser

⁸⁰ Guenther, *Tricksters*.

extent information passed on by others from within or beyond the household. Prescriptive knowledge follows a hierarchy of resort. The hierarchy is based primarily on popular currency of an idea or practice followed by trial and error through more difficult solutions, such as trying successive plants and with each failure expending more effort on the search. Inevitable death as an outcome, and hence an end to the search, may be accepted soon in the process, particularly in cases of infantile illness. Prescribed healing knowledge is generally acted upon without personal adaptation of the ideas.

The feelings and images that appear through dreaming, trancing and intuition are meaningful, but are not expressions of spontaneous knowledge creation. They are built from formative ideas and symbols. These sorts of experiences I conceive of as transformations of knowledge. For the source of these ideas we must look toward the day-to-day participations of Khoisan within their cultural and environmental settings along the lines of coevolution, structure and practice. It is existence, growth and participation that creates knowledge.

The recursive relationship between structure and action has recently been explored by the sociologists Giddens and Bourdieu. Their particular kinds of social analysis, worked out within the respective ideas of 'structuration' and 'habitus', have drawn attention to the unconscious creation, articulation and transmission of knowledge through the act of participating in society and in particular skills.⁸² Knowing through doing is both an important part of becoming a healer and an important source of the meaning and symbols that underpin a particular society. Through doing healers develop unconscious or semi-conscious understanding that is played out in further practice. What they do is also determined by what they can do and need to do in order to survive, given the environmental, technological and social context. What they do therefore determines a particular sort of relationship with the environment, one that participates in it, in a particular way, to achieve particular objectives.

This sort of thinking, involving the body as our insertion point into life, underlies the phenomenological studies of Husserl, and later Merleau Ponty, that contributed to contemporary considerations of embodiment and cognition. Ingold proposes that the primary weakness of derivative embodiment theory has been that, whilst it has served to undermine Cartesian style ideas of the body as a primarily biological entity, rather than collapsing the mind/body duality model,

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⁸² A. Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: An Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, 1984); P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge, 1977).

embodiment has simply repositioned the body. The body, no longer simply biological, has 'reappeared as a 'subject' on the side of culture.' The problem, Ingold suggests, rests in the premise that some kind of biological body exists 'prior to, and independently of, the culturally constituted body'. Recognising the strengths of the enquiry into embodiment, Ingold pushes the theory one step further, 'to recognise that the body *is* the human organism, and that the process of embodiment is one and the same as the development of that organism in its environment.'⁸³

Ingold presents the idea that a person develops from a fertilized egg into a member of a social world, not because of some evolutionary force, which does not exist as a directional force per se, but through the ongoing relationship of an egg to its surroundings. The content of these surroundings and the egg promotes a particular outcome. The outcome is a human being that has a particular way of relating to their environment and pays attention to particular phenomenon in the world depending upon social and physical context. Ingold's theory carries co-evolutionist interest in the interaction between culture and biology (eg. Boyd and Richerson 1985; Spencer 1993) but differs in his recognition that information cannot exist prior to the process that gave rise to it.⁸⁴

Ingold effectively places cultural variation in the biological domain. Development, in hand with practice and training in a particular environment, generates the skills apparent in different cultures. This model provides a good way of thinking about what sort of knowledge Khoisan people are likely to accumulate and it ties the Khoisan very much to their specific environment. In relation to healing practice and ideas, these then come from individual and group participation in the environment and the playing out of the environmental relationship in the social setting. The sources for culture and hence healing are part of the environment, known through participation, and transformed in use.

Ingold's model of environmental development and practice points to the tools of healing, largely plant and animal based remedies, and also to where the understanding of healing might lie. It does not however directly tell us what these understandings are. To explore this point I wish to return to first Horton and then Lévy-Bruhl.

In 1967 Horton suggested: 'In evolving a theoretical scheme, the human mind seems constrained to draw inspiration from analogy between the puzzling observations to be explained and certain already

⁸³ T. Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London and New York, 2000), p.170

⁸⁴ See Preucel and Hodder (eds.), *Contemporary Archaeology in Theory*, p. 209-10.

familiar phenomena.’⁸⁵ Horton’s idea, that we look towards the familiar to explain the unfamiliar, is one that has been developed more recently by Gentner for Western modes of thought in relation to understanding electricity.⁸⁶ Horton and Gentner’s ideas have implications for my analysis of healing. Ingold follows a similar line of thought. He cites Gibson’s assertion that the kind of activity in which we are engaged attunes us to picking up particular kinds of information.⁸⁷ This essentially builds on Lévy-Bruhl’s ideas of mystical participation and collective representations.⁸⁸ Lévy-Bruhl further specified that ‘collective representations are very often acquired by the individual in circumstances likely to make the most profound impression upon his sensibility’.⁸⁹ The nature of rural life demands paying closer attention to the environment than is required in urban life. It seems reasonable to suggest that interactions with the environment, such as storms, flooding, lightning, dangerous animals and heat have a significant impact on rural African sensibility. Therefore, the environment would seem to play a key role in ‘collective representations’. In view of Horton and Gentner’s conclusions, it seems therefore highly probable that the environment is used as a good way of thinking about the more puzzling issues of life, including those relating to aspects of health strategies. Bieseles supports this supposition in her recognition that the Ju/’hoansi find animals ‘good to think with’.⁹⁰

Scholarly considerations of African medicine has long focussed on sorcery. In a Khoisan context this has been bound to both Bantu speakers style sorcery and Bushmen ideas of ‘potency’. The term ‘potency’ was used by Hoernlé in 1918 to denote the power of a Hottentot witchdoctor.⁹¹ In later literature the word has become heavily associated with Bushmen trance dancers and their healing power, sometimes known as */num* or *tssō*. Attempting to understand what this power is, can tell us much about Khoisan healing not just in terms of ‘sorcery’ but of all health strategies.

In the context of discussing collective representations Lévy-Bruhl proposed that when a primitive person encounters anything, be it man made or natural, he actually has: ‘an image of the object in his

⁸⁵ Horton, ‘African Traditional Thought’, p.213.

⁸⁶ D. Gentner, ‘Flowing Waters of Teeming Crowds: Mental Models of Electricity’, in D. Gentner and A. Stevens (eds.), *Mental Models* (1982, New Jersey), pp. 99-129.

⁸⁷ Ingold, *Perception of the Environment*, p. 166.

⁸⁸ cf. Evans-Pritchard on Lévy-Bruhl: ‘what [primitive people] notice in the world around them will be different, or at least the reason for their paying attention to phenomena will be different’: Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, p. 85.

⁸⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p. 36.

⁹⁰ Bieseles, *Women Like Meat*, p. 89.

⁹¹ Hoernlé, ‘Certain Rites’, p. 69.

mind, and thinks it real, but also that he has some hope or fear connected with it, that some definite influence emanates from it, or is exercised upon it. This influence is a virtue, an occult power'.⁹²

Lévy-Bruhl termed this occult power 'mystical influence'. I will not adopt Lévy-Bruhl's idea of hope or fear. But he captures a recursive relationship that implies a two way ability to influence; a developmental and experiential relationship. As influence suggests mutual participation between one thing and another, Lévy-Bruhl concluded that to primitive peoples everything is known to be alive and 'primitives' are not therefore interested in discerning the animate or inanimate. Objects, animals and other knowable phenomena, in the primitive's mind, have the power to do things and that is how they are known. Hence 'power is ascribed to rivers, clouds, winds..'.⁹³

Recognising this way of relating to the environment has highly important implications concerning historical interpretations of Khoisan religion - if they have a relationship with something they can talk to it. If they talk to the rain or the moon, in what sense are they praying?

Following Cushing's work on the Zuni, Lévy-Bruhl presented an idea that in the 'primitive' mind what things do is determined by their form. The form of something both gives it its power and restricts its power.⁹⁴ In a sense, the form defines the potency in strength and nature. An elephant is big and strong, it therefore does big and strong things. A feathered and winged bird flies because it has feathers and wings. In a more metaphorical sense these are similar ideas to sympathetic magic. A way of thinking about this link between form and potency is identity; some people or things do certain things and others different things.

A further idea of Lévy-Bruhl, was that primitive people live in one world that has no distinction between the natural and the supernatural.⁹⁵ In this world that ties people into relationships with phenomena, it is possible to exchange abilities or powers. It is in the sense of taking on an ability that Lévy-Bruhl recognised that Bhororo people of Brazil can actually become parrots. Similarly, Bushmen can become lions and this is, importantly, not a metaphor but a reality in their minds.⁹⁶

At the heart of Lévy-Bruhl's notions of the 'primitive' mind, lies his recognition of an intimate relationship between 'primitive' people and nature. Despite the effects of colonialism, it is apparent

⁹² Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p.38.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.43, 44.

that the Khoisan relationship with the African environment has been of long enough and intimate enough and consistent enough a nature, to provide persistent patterns of ideas regarding specific truths about the world. These truths are built from biological and cultural development as part of the environment and from day-to-day experiences.

In a Khoisan context there is much evidence that the way Khoisan peoples talk about diverse healing strategies and causes of illness is consistent with Lévy-Bruhl's appreciation of potency rooted in the environment. As Horton suggested in a broader context, from this bedrock of understanding they then move outwards to explain less 'obvious' phenomena in the light of appropriate familiar phenomena. One particularly recurrent theme in a healing context is wind. Wind is used to describe both identity and transference of potency. The multidimensional meaning attributed to wind by non-'Western' or pre-biomedical Western people has been a recurrent subject of discussion since the classical period.⁹⁷ Horton, identifies cross cultural associations between wind, breath and life principle, as early origins of theoretical explanations,⁹⁸ and these seem to be very much in evidence amongst the Khoisan. When they are examined in relation to Lévy-Bruhl's propositions, a consistent picture begins to emerge of a Khoisan way of thinking and doing medicine.⁹⁹

In the light of the above discussion I wish to present a version of the *longue durée* that has provided the Khoisan with the ingredients of their healing world. The southern African environmental backdrop to the Khoisan has supplied the key substances, idiom, symbols, meanings and ways of thinking in Khoisan healing strategies.

Change

My analysis thus far has encouraged an attention to a special African environment which may not seem to be a real setting for all, if any, modern Khoisan. Accordingly I wish to emphasise that the setting is not wild, untouched and uninhabited or worse still the romantic Africa of the popular imagination. In fact, many Khoisan have spent their lives on farms, or certainly living around them, or in small and large urban settlements. But, this does not divorce Khoisan people from a sort of life

⁹⁶ Ibid., p.77.

⁹⁷ R. E. Siegel and S. Kerger, *Galen's System of Physiology and Medicine* (Basel, 1968), pp. 106, 138-44.

⁹⁸ R. Horton, 'Paradox and Explanation', in Horton, *Patterns of Thought*, pp. 296-298.

⁹⁹ For a wider recent perspective on wind see Keyan, G., Tomaselli, ' "Dit is Die here Se Asem": The Wind, its Messages, and Issues of Auto-Ethnographic Methodology in the Kalahari', *Cultural Studies Critical Methodologies*, 3:4 (2003), 397-428.

that is different enough to warrant discussion of them as still utilising different cultural ways of thinking. A week before I arrived at //Aru camp near Tsumkwe an elephant had killed a community member at the camp water supply. On a farm near Otavi where I stayed rangers were out tracking a lion to return it to Etosha park. On a less sensational note, just living in poverty in a rural country requires an interaction with the environment that urban Western people seldom experience. Collecting wood in baking heat, picking up branches with cobras underneath them, coming face to face with mambas, getting caught in flash floods or struck by lightning - these things happen.

Having suggested that the Khoisan know a different world from most Western people, their world is undoubtedly changing. My research points to two primary forces that are affecting how the Khoisan think about healing; exposure to education and changes in the environment.

The role of environmental change is not a straightforward one. For one, urbanization and development of transportation links does not seem to kill all Khoisan ideas or reduce all access to resources. Many researchers have demonstrated that incidences of sorcery often increase in urban African situations. Similarly Khoisan peoples maintain a world of possibilities in urban situations and this world is in fact frequently richer than that known to rural Khoisan. The urban environment provides greater variety in terms of both resources for healing and ideas. Consequently new possibilities enter the hierarchy of resort. One Damara woman in Katatura, for instance, massaged people following insight obtained in a dream. In accordance with her dream she used brake fluid as her massage oil.¹⁰⁰

With post-Independence freedom of movement and improving transportation, many Khoisan from towns frequently travel to stay with rural relatives and rural family members similarly come to stay in towns. It is common practice for urbanised people to acquire animal and plant remedies from rural relatives or to fetch them personally. Increased freedom of movement has also produced a measure of mobility in and out of urban settings as people search for work across the country. Certain employment sectors, such as construction and road building, frequently place people back into the rural Namibian environment.

As the environment provides both practical and ideational healing resources, what really affects healing, are changes in the environmental resource base. This may be either a depletion in resources or an imposed lack of access through legislation or the construction of fences. Depletion of resources

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varies depending upon what resources one considers. In terms of remedies derived from large animals, nineteenth century hunting with rifles, by both indigenous and colonial peoples, severely depleted 'game' levels. The twentieth century saw the imposition of strict regulations on hunting by rifle, which, by the last decades of the twentieth century, was extended for most Khoisan to include restrictions on hunting with any weapon. In terms of both faunal and floral resources, cattle farming carried out on both commercial farms and at a more subsistence level, has a significant impact on availability. The balance of resources has similarly been guided by large-scale and small-scale conservation initiatives and the tourist opportunities often grafted onto them.

A subtler influence on Khoisan health strategies is the provision of food subsidies. Food subsidies, principally millet, tea and sugar, bring a lack of incentive to engage in the environment. Couple this with government compound living, provision of cheap housing, beer, televisions and the other highly desirable trappings of development and many people undoubtedly begin to disengage from the rural environment. The extent to which different sorts of people disengage relative to others and the rate at which they do so is an interesting question. Suro, my translator, had no electricity, no television, no telephone. She eats mainly mealie meal and goat, sitting outside by her black three-legged pot. She spends much of her time around her black pot or visiting others around their black pots. Suro continues to use a multitude of non-biomedical healing strategies. In a Windhoek location, 55 years old Libertina Garuses enjoys many of the comforts Suro does not have. Libertina goes to hospital to massage victims of car accidents. She takes her massage lubricant of choice, car brake fluid, with her. Her healing arsenal includes very many of the same healing remedies Suro might use.

In regard to education, my research pointed to thresholds that indicate the different ways Khoisan people think about traditional healing. Basic education of the type provided in Sesfontein and other rural schools, builds on the Khoisan world of possibilities. Quite unproblematically to themselves, Sesfontein children and young adults would describe to me human anatomy as they had learnt it at school and, when asked, could replicate the pictures from their school book. These same children and adolescents would then tell me in the next breath how organs could move around the body, how the cold dropped a man's testicles into his feet, how the liver was in the centre of the abdomen and a big, god given, worm lives in the forehead of everybody. Their wider healing ideas were linked to the other things they knew about the world, such as naked women sometimes coming at night to bewitch people and certain weather bringing out the scorpions.

Importantly, such plurality was not a rural phenomenon but extended to people within urban settlements. Healers in Katatura, for example, would use a greater percentage of references to

Western medical conditions as an extension of their traditional ideas but this was not a replacement for their Sesfontein-style knowledge. Khoisan carry ideas from one lifestyle setting to the other.

Amongst most of those I encountered with basic education, the Khoisan world of possibilities remains a reality. But it becomes increasingly distant as education increases. The world of possibilities becomes more a world of facts, held and transmitted in writing. To a researcher the effects of education begin to appear when Khoisan informants measure their knowledge with *provisos*, something along the lines of, 'the people say...' This prefix is a statement of distance that educated Khoisan insert between themselves and uneducated Khoisan. As education increases what was carried from personal knowledge and transmitted by word of mouth becomes subject to authoritative fact, dogmatic teaching and the restrictive printed word. With the publication of facts backed by the weight of educated society, the world of possibilities increasingly closes. In particular, with the publication of dictionaries subtler internal relationships of language to Khoisan life may be lost in the imposed rules and regularities of Western linguistics. It is significant that much of the early Khoe lexicographical research was undertaken by missionaries. From their selective bedrock, which remains as a unique historical resource, linguists have further explicated cross-cultural meaning for phenomenon which should not necessarily be assumed to have a Western equivalent.

The outcome of 'good education' for some urban Khoisan is a complete removal from their traditional world. Numerous Damara and Nama I encountered had absolutely no knowledge of Khoi traditional medical ideas, despite the fact that they undoubtedly had social links to people who carried and used such knowledge on a day-to-day basis. Amongst some educated Khoi, colonial paradigms of witchdoctors, long shrugged off by Europeans, still dominated their understanding.

Yet within this strata of educated people are those who reflect upon the colonial process and look openly at the traditional ideas and procedures that they grew up with or still surround them. Looking at the possible benefits of traditional medicine has, for example, been part of Namibian government policy for a number of years.¹⁰¹ Similarly, there is recent resurgence in respect for traditional knowledge evident in community groups I encountered in southern Namibia, who came together to present indigenous remedies at town festivals.

¹⁰¹ The Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services established the Traditional Healers Board in 1996. Government Gazette, Namibia, 1st March 1996.

Chapter I

A Loaded Encounter

Seventeenth and eighteenth century Khoisan ethnography was marked by paradox. Accounts of the period reveal that seeds of European prejudice against Africans existed, but the nature and extent of perceived difference from Africans was inconsistent. Hottentots were, for instance, considered skilled surgeons yet at the same time thought beastlike. Like other 'savages', consideration and treatment of Hottentots was uneven. The paradox was rooted in the uncertain relationship of primitive peoples to Europeans. European discussion and experience of Africa in the pre-modern hinged around the crucial question, how to accommodate the newly encountered variety of mankind and nature into a fixed story of Genesis? Mudimbe sees an end to this period of ethnographic paradox in the science of the Enlightenment which, through a conjunction of anthropology and colonial projects, 'hones the concepts and actualizes, in the image of the colonized, all the negative metaphors worked out by five centuries of European explorations of the world'.¹ This chapter concerns this phase of paradox and its run from the initial European / Khoisan encounter into Enlightenment science. Additionally the chapter raises major themes of the thesis and sets the scene for the consequent unfolding of later ethnographic analysis.

The ambiguity inherent in pre-Enlightenment European attitudes to Africans that Mudimbe identifies is apparent in the Khoisan medical context. Europeans recognised an undoubted Khoisan skill at using healing herbs, poultices and treating dislocations. At the same time Khoisan were considered ignorant and their society preoccupied with primitive belief in superstition and witchcraft. With burgeoning scientific medicine, the distance between European and Khoisan medicine increased. But, despite new rhetoric and scientific movement away from 'primitive medicine', and somewhat contrary to Mudimbe's suggestion, a positive side of the paradoxical equation persisted through Enlightenment enquiry into the present. At all times there has been some recognition of basic Khoisan medical skills. There was not a clear end to the paradox in the Enlightenment. In the late eighteenth century, ethnographers extracted new data through prolonged inland excursions. They situated their findings in new disparaging scientific and moral discourse. It was, however, earlier categories of interest and ways of thinking about Khoisan, some of which were positive, that set the corners of Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment enquiry.

¹ V.Y. Mudimbe, *The Idea of Africa* (Indiana and London, 1994), p. 29.

Paradoxical understanding of the Khoisan began with the arrival of Vasco de Gama in 1497 and mutual exchange of musical gestures of respect between De Gama's men and greeting Hottentots.² Tavernier concluded from his voyages, completed by 1670, that Hottentots were expert at treating wounds, and could treat an ulcer in 15 days that had defeated the finest surgeons in Batavia.³ But in 1677, William Petty, a member of the Royal Society, asserted that the indigenous inhabitants of the Cape were 'the Most beastlike of all the Souls [?Sorts] of Men with whom our Travellers are well acquainted'. Petty confirmed a position for Hottentots at the bottom of an old static medieval hierarchy of being,⁴ and reinforced negative imagery of Cape 'savages'. Through the late seventeenth and eighteenth century the Hottentot savage became known more by his greasiness than his medical skill; yet his skill was persistently, if unevenly, acknowledged.

Behind the gaze of seventeenth and early eighteenth century European travellers and colonists, lay a classical legacy of looking and writing, informed by contemporaneous notions of the savage and a European culture of curiosity. Whilst the medieval books of Peter Martyr (1455-1526) and François Rabelais (1494?- 1553), replete with their classically derived tales of the fabulous, were outdated for those reaching the shores of southern Africa in the mid seventeenth century, the themes of the classical texts upon which such European travel accounts styled themselves, continued. Boemus' influential *Manners, Lawes, and Customes of All Nations* (1611) stands testament to the continued seventeenth century reliance on the authority of classical texts. Boemus' categories of interest, which additionally included religion,⁵ are similar to those of early Khoisan ethnographers.

Following classical precedent, the primary means of evaluating and describing the foreign in the seventeenth century and earlier eighteenth century, was of gauging 'likeness' or 'unlikeness' and measuring people and places in terms of familiarity. The ethnographic 'other' was frequently distanced using familiar classical epithets. Ethnography of medicine up to the Enlightenment frequently combines an uneven balance of classical imagery, direct comparison, or location of the familiar, and genuine acknowledgement of medical knowledge. From the outset however, accounts, on the whole, meshed interest, and possibly respect, with the disparaging. In Morden's 1680 compilation of world geography he states for example:

² Ibid., p. 30.

³ Cited by P.W. Laidler and M. Gelfand, *South Africa Its Medical History 1652-1889: A Medical and Social Study* (Cape Town, 1971), p. 11.

⁴ M. Hodgen, *Early Anthropology in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Philadelphia, 1971), pp. 124, 422, 468.

⁵ I. Boemus, *Manners, Lawes and Customes of all Nations* (London, 1611), p. 3.

The Natives that cloath [sic] themselves with the Skins of these Beasts, are very swift, but brutes in their eating; and when they speak they gobble like Turkie Cocks. The Cafres⁶ are black, because they rub themselves with a Grease or Ointment, composed of several sorts of Drugs, to preserve themselves from being Hydropsical.⁷

Early European ethnographers of Khoisan medicine did not look for the truly different. This shallowness of the early colonial gaze reflected an inchoate theoretical backdrop to concepts of society and evolution. Because of the emphasis on categories of enquiry and looking for the familiar or comparable, what was seen tended to be pushed into entirely European categories of thinking and doing, the boundaries of which may and may not have been entirely appropriate. In effect, certain facets of Khoisan life went simply unnoticed or were thought too commonplace to be remarked upon whilst others were pushed into inappropriate categories of understanding. Different sorts of behaviour were thereby considered ‘religious’, ‘superstitious’ or examples of ‘primitive medicine’.

Simple Savages, Simple Medicine

Underlying seventeenth century accounts of the Khoisan was a recognition of simplicity and closeness to nature. The idea of simple savages having simple medicine was key to early colonial interpretation and has implicitly persisted well towards, if not into, the present. In 1686 Ten Rhyne, a transitory visitor to the Cape, wrote of the Hottentots: ‘suction and anointing are the chief, nay, the only remedies of the Hottentots, for all they fear is the poison of wild animals or of weapons’. Ten Rhyne suggested that, unlike civilized man, primitive man could deal to a greater or lesser extent with the problems nature confronted him with, but he did not hold the power to dictate or really control the terms of engagement. Ten Rhyne emphasised Hottentot proximity to nature in his affirmation that, if humans had learnt the use of emetics from dogs and phlebotomy from the hippopotamus, it should be no surprise that even brutish Hottentots have some method of healing. Similarly, if physicians of the Trojan armies developed particular skill in the treatment of war wounds, why should the Hottentots not have developed similar skills from their own hostile existence.⁸

Seventeenth century ethnographers do not on the whole display the idealisation and growing romanticisation of ethnographers such as Kolb and le Vaillant in the eighteenth century. Nevertheless, they indulge notions of simple savage Hottentot health and longevity. But, positive as this rhetoric appears, it is probably more strongly allied to classical precedents of the fabulous than to any feelings

⁶ Early ethnographers did not all make the distinction between ‘Hottentot’ and ‘Cafre’ that later authors would.

⁷ R. Morden, *Geography Rectified, or A Description of the World*, (London, 1680), p. 345

⁸ W. Ten Rhyne, ‘A Short Account of the Cape’, in I. Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape Hottentots* (Cape Town, 1933), p. 243.

that the Hottentots were in a sense superior to Europeans. Dapper (1668), author of one of the earliest authoritative accounts of Africa, suggested Hottentots ‘reach the ages of eighty, ninety, one hundred, one hundred and ten, one hundred and twenty years and even more’. Perceptions of Hottentot longevity long persisted as a theme of Khoisan ethnography.⁹ Despite this recognition of health, Dapper was in no doubt that Hottentots were ‘very uncouth, and in intellect more like beasts than men’.¹⁰

A further theme of rude health that speaks of classical legacy, concerns the rarity or absence of physical deformity. It is a theme that has endured at least into the early decades of the nineteenth century. Grevenbroek (1695), a Dutch East India Company employee and, later, free burgher at the Cape, commented that he:

never saw one among them that was marked from birth, fat, hunch-backed, squinting, or that had varicose veins, a swollen paunch, flat feet or spindle shanks, or one that went bow-legged or knock-kneed or had misshapen limbs of any kind.¹¹

Similarly to Ten Rhyne, Grevenbroek suggested that the only injuries the Hottentots sustained were from animals and war.¹² Both Grevenbroek and Ten Rhyne were participating in a seventeenth century discourse of simple Hottentots medicine based on assumptions that Hottentots were naturally healthy and untroubled by many medical problems. Beyond wild animals, poisoned bites and war wounds, there was nothing particularly nasty that affected Hottentots and they therefore never needed to develop more sophisticated medical procedures and understanding. Grevenbroek elaborated that the main ‘epidemic diseases’ of Hottentots at the Cape were the minor problems of sore eyes, colds and catarrh.¹³

Ethnographers of Hottentots rarely looked for indigenous explanations. Interpretations came from European assumptions of familiarity. Grevenbroek provides a useful record of Hottentot treatments. He additionally provides an example of ‘straightforward’ interpretation. Having noted that Hottentots ‘sometimes banish or avert diseases by the power of entrails and intestines which they hang round their necks’, he suggested this was done, ‘to check the excessive exhalation of the vital spirits, and, by closing the pores of the body, to keep out external cold and foster the native heat.’ Kolb, a mathematician sent to research at the Cape in 1706¹⁴ and author of a key account of early Hottentots,

⁹ Schapera, *Early Cape*, pp. 1, 63.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹¹ Grevenbroek, ‘An Elegant Account’, p. 175.

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*, p.241

¹⁴ M. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (London and New York, 1992), p. 41.

similarly thought that the medicinal value attributed to the fat of the hippopotamus, 'is reckoned an excellent thing against a surfeit and a redundancy of humours in the body.'¹⁵ Both ethnographers clearly translated what they saw using European humoral medical theory.

What early ethnographers recognised as medical says as much about the state of European medicine as that of Hottentots. There were a number of Hottentot medical practices that were recognised as familiar and reasonable. Taking plant extract orally or mixing extract into fat or warm body poultices was undoubtedly familiar. So too was sucking used to treat poisonous bites or as a primitive form of cupping. Bleeding was equally thought familiar in terms of venesection. Basic surgical methods including amputation, cautery and lancing of abscesses were also highly familiar. Grevenbroek acknowledged Hottentot medical skill with medicinal plants: 'Healing or noxious plants and their qualities they know extremely well'.¹⁶ Not quite so positively Ten Rhyne considered they had 'few vegetable remedies, but choice ones'.¹⁷ Kolb seems to vacillate a little as to how much credit to attribute to Hottentots: 'The Hottentot Materia Medicalies is a small compass; and their methodus mendendi is the simplest in the world'.¹⁸ A statement which sits uneasily with his earlier observation: 'They have great skill in the Vertues of the Herbs; and cup, and handle a lancet well.'¹⁹ But regardless of quite how much skill or how much knowledge Kolb grants Hottentots, it is quite clear from his use of such phrases as, 'as we do',²⁰ that he, like other early ethnographers, drew a direct parallel between Hottentot and European medical practice in regard to cupping, blood letting, sucking of poisonous animal and insect bites, use of herbal remedies, ointments, poultices and basic surgery.

Early ethnographic accounts of Hottentot medical practice stand as a good record of forms of practice. In some cases it also seems entirely reasonable to identify similarity of reasoning behind these practices. It is 'common sense' to try and put back a dislocated limb. It could be considered 'instinctive' to rub a knocked limb and to rub a tight or sore muscle. Equally, eating well, or eating 'good things' when unwell, seems a conscious decision that could be thought of as simple medical reasoning. Projecting such practices back into a Hottentot past as a package of ideas and practice is reasonable. The trap however, into which Viljoen and other historians of medicine sometimes fall, is to push this common sense reasoning onto all historically recorded practices.

¹⁵ Cited by J. Andersson, *Lake Ngami* (London, 1856), p. 415.

¹⁶ Grevenbroek, 'An Elegant Account', p. 245.

¹⁷ Ten Rhyne, 'A Short Account', p. 149.

¹⁸ P. Kolb, *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (London, 1731), p. 302.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.87.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p.303.

So far I have considered the sorts of practices and ideas that might be thought of as the pragmatic half of the ethnographic equation and I have suggested where problems may or may not lie in translation. In the following section I continue my analysis by examining some primary categories of enquiry: massage, witchcraft, religion, and trance dancing, in an attempt to explore the more problematic interface between European and Khoisan health strategies. In this section I begin to draw on my own findings in order to explore the significance of ethnographic material to constructing a wider model of Khoisan thought.

Massage

One of the starting points of this thesis was Hoernlé's brief mention of Nama massage. Consideration of Hoernlé's findings in relation to present and past material leads the discussion to some of the underlying notions behind Khoisan healing. In relation to manual therapy, two substances of considerable importance to Khoisan health strategies become drawn into the discussion: fat and buchu. Buchu is an aromatic plant mixture used by Khoisan throughout their recorded history.

Superstition, witchcraft and trance dancing are all subjects that have received very considerable coverage both in and out of the Khoisan context. In contrast to this, massage remains relatively seldom considered by academics. As background to a consideration of massage, it is worth briefly drawing attention to different European ideas of massage over time.

The word 'massage' is derived from Arabic *massa* to stroke²¹ and first appeared in 1818.²² The nearest precursor to the idea in Europe from at least the sixteenth century was 'medical rubbing'.²³ Before this, there was an older tradition of massage practice in ancient Greece when it was associated with bathing, gymnastics and dietary discretion.²⁴ Hippocrates is known to have used friction to treat sprains and dislocations and a kneading treatment for constipation.²⁵ The link between exercise, massage and bathing re-appears in a later context in the bath houses of the medieval middle east.²⁶ Quite possibly massage was similarly a feature of medieval bath houses of Europe in which cupping and bleeding are known to have accompanied the actual bathing.

²¹ C.T. Onions (ed.), *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 3rd ed. (Oxford, 1986), p. 1286.

²² H. Skinner, *The Origin of Medical Terms*. 2nd edn (Baltimore, 1970). p.265

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ R. Porter, *The Greatest Benefit to Mankind: a Medical History of Humanity from Antiquity to the Present* (London, 1997), p.51

²⁵ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2000 Deluxe Edition. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. CD Article : Massage.

²⁶ H. Baas, *Outlines of the History of Medicine and the Medical Profession* (New York, 1971), p.337.

In the sixteenth century medical rubbing in Europe was a feature of treatments by Fabricius and Paracelsus and the French army surgeon Ambroïse Paré.²⁷ There is little to suggest that these practitioners did much more than basic rubbing and stretching of surface tissues and restoration of dislocated limbs. From the early nineteenth century a Stockholm doctor, Ling, followed by his pupil, Brandt, developed rubbing treatments for joint and muscle problems. Like the Greeks, their treatments were associated with 'gymnastics', open air and nature.²⁸

By the end of the nineteenth century different types of massage were recognised: effleurage, petrissage and tapotement. These terms respectively referred to the relaxation and improvement of blood flow by stroking the skin, the stretching of muscles and tendons and stimulation of tissue through the striking of hands on the surface of the skin. Around 1900, the primary beneficial role of massage was thought to lie in the increase of tissue metabolism bringing nutrition to tissues and draining waste products. Massage served to increase arterial supply, increase venous and lymphatic drainage and to stimulate the nervous system.²⁹

Early twentieth century masseuses in England worked in an auxiliary medical capacity by referral from physicians and became integral to the founding of the modern physiotherapy profession.³⁰ After the two world wars and a series of polio epidemics, particularly in the 1940s and 1950s,³¹ the status and importance of massage was greatly raised in America and Britain, but massage remains to date seldom seen as any more than a valuable rehabilitative or superficially stimulating practice.

As an historical legacy, Hippocrates' use of kneading to treat constipation is one of few examples of massage applied to internal organs. Only within the last thirty years and principally within the relatively obscure field of osteopathy, have systematic theories of organ movement and corrective manipulation really emerged. It is difficult to assess the currency of similar ideas within the history of Western or colonial folk medicine of the past, and hence the likelihood of observers of the Khoisan having been on the look out for such practices. There is little, however, to indicate that early ethnographers were familiar with ideas of massaging misaligned organs. Observers did not seem to perceive that medical rubbing or massage might have been carried out in accordance with a theory of illness, or for other reasons beyond the everyday para-medical role. The cursory mention of massage in

²⁷ Skinner, *The Origin*, p.265.

²⁸ F.H.Garrison, *An Introduction to the History of Medicine*, 4th edn (Philadelphia, 1929), pp.509, 657, 852.

²⁹ H. Power and L. Sedgwick, *The New Sydenham Society's Lexicon of Medicine and the Allied Sciences*, iv (London, 1892), s.v. Massage.

³⁰ R. Cooter and J. Pickstone, *Medicine in the Twentieth Century* (Amsterdam, 2000), p. 539.

³¹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2000 Deluxe Edition. Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc. s.v. Massage; Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation; Poliomyelitis.

early ethnography reflects a 'simple' understanding. Up to the beginning of the twentieth century, when massage is mentioned, it is considered in an entirely familiar manner. In the early twentieth century, with increasing anthropological sophistication and fieldwork, hints that massage could be done for reasons other than the familiar, began to emerge. Hoernlé's interest in massage seems indicative of deeper ethnography. At the same time, the increasing prominence of massage in European medical settings might equally have raised awareness of massage and contributed to Hoernlé's interest. Despite the exceptional nature of her interest, her consideration was, however, ultimately meagre.

The scarcity of massage in Khoisan ethnography undoubtedly indicates a lack of thinking round the indigenous possibilities of massage. It also, however, probably says something of lack of access to the indigenous therapeutic setting and to time spent amongst Hottentot communities. In a contemporary rural and urban Khoisan context, it is only through pursuing a direct interest in massage, and following it into the public and private social settings in which it is carried out, that the significance of massage really becomes apparent.

Early ethnographers wrote about massage in a way that reveals persistent concern with classical precedents and their acknowledgement of a basic Hottentot medical skill. In regard to the use of fat as a lubricant and unguent it is also highly revealing of tensions inherent in the ethnographic paradox.

Schapera thought Kolb's *Caput Bonae Spei Hodiernum* (1719)³² 'the most detailed and serviceable treatise we have on the early cape Hottentots'.³³ It is testament to Kolb's detail that many of the less sensational features of Hottentot everyday life were recorded. Kolb provides one of few references to manual therapy. He noted that for joint dislocations, Hottentots rub 'vehemently with fat; and then move the limb briskly up and down, and press upon the joint, till the joint is restored to its proper place'.³⁴

Turning to the composite action of rubbing with fat, the ethnographic record immediately becomes both richer and more complicated. While early ethnographers fitted what they witnessed into familiar Western categories of analysis, they left both reasonable and unreasonable evidence of practice and ideas, and clues regarding the identity and continuity of wider Khoisan healing strategies. Fat played multiple roles in Khoisan life. Fat use occurs in many contexts and for each of those contexts its precise role is neither certain nor singular, nor necessarily fixed. Challenging European notions of

³² *The Present State of the Cape of Good Hope* (1731).

³³ Schapera, *Early Cape*, p.162.

³⁴ Kolb, *Present State*, p.305.

hygiene and senses of smell, day-to-day fat wearing has persistently fed a particularly ambivalent discourse.

Within certain contexts of fat use, the fat, or substances contained in it, seems attributed with inherent healing properties. In these situations it is application of fat, rather than the rubbing itself, that seems the paramount objective. In other contexts fat seems valued as a lubricant to enable rubbing the body. In other contexts again, lubricated rubbing seems an inseparable part of larger treatment rituals involving a variety of stages. Recruiting Bordieu's notion of 'habitus' of social practice, Khoisan massage is extensively carried out within close social networks in a prescribed and prescribing manner. At other times in more formal or 'professional' settings Khoisan practitioners might more consciously apply Khoisan and biomedical reasoning to treat a problem with massage or carry out a healing ritual which involves massage. In both these scenarios treatment is of a particularly prescribed, intuitive and ritualised nature which makes it hard, and largely inappropriate, to pin down precise biomedical reasoning behind the use of rubbing or fat. This is not to say that there is no theoretical understanding behind Khoisan massage treatment because, as the moving organ theory suggests, there patently is. The theory is, however, of a distinctly Khoisan nature bound to the Khoisan ideational and practical habitus.

To analyse Khoisan massage practice holds an inherent danger of explicating clean Khoisan reasoning and understanding where none exists. Despite this there are patterns visible in what Khoisan people do and think. In early ethnographic records there are also hints of theory that seem consistent with contemporary Khoisan ideas. These hints lie buried in the ethnography amongst classical epithets and recognition of comparable medical practice.

One way in which early ethnographers mention fat was as something applied to bruises. Ten Rhyne noted of the Hottentots that: 'All bruises they treat by anointing them either with sheep or cow fat, for they know no other kind of unguent'.³⁵ Although this particular fat application was a prelude to sucking treatment, it seems Ten Rhyne thought the fat was considered a healing application. There are many indications in the literature and in my fieldwork which support the conclusion that fat has been thought by Khoisan to hold inherent healing properties. Kolb noted Hottentots believed hippopotamus fat was used 'against a surfeit and redundancy of humours'.³⁶ The idea that fat makes you better is not surprising in view of the prescribed handed down nature of massage treatment, in which both rubbing and fat are used together, and both are seen as equally important. But this conclusion fails to recognise

³⁵ Schapera, *Early Cape*, p. 149.

³⁶ Cited by Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, p. 415.

an indigenous idea that, different sorts of fat hold and can transfer properties from the source animal to the human recipient. By the latter half of the eighteenth century more details begin to emerge on the matter.

Gordon, the Enlightenment soldier, traveller and natural scientist, described, in around 1780, Hottentots using sheep, buffalo and snake fat to smear on their bodies.³⁷ In 1786 Sparrman identified that Hottentots considered the fat of wild cats, lions and tigers particularly effective medicine for sores and gout. Sparrman makes the interesting observation that the fat of the wild cat, 'had a very rank and penetrating smell, and on that account was preferable to other fat'. This connection between smell and medicinal potency will shortly be elaborated upon.³⁸

In 1856 the adventurer Andersson recorded a Herero belief that, 'The fat of particular animals is supposed to possess certain virtues'.³⁹ In 1868 Baines recorded a Bushman treatment of snakebite wherein fat was rubbed on the wound and taken internally.⁴⁰ Möller (1895-1896), the army captain and explorer, recorded Khoisan undertaking a procedure for making themselves immune to snakebite and scorpion stings.⁴¹ Kaufmann of the Schutztruppe, working in Rietfontein in 1908 on behalf of Berlin's Museum for Ethnology, noted that Bushmen 'doctors' prepared a mixture of ground black mamba (or Cobra ?) lungs, bile, liver, fangs and poison glands, which they mixed with fat from the same animal. The mixture was taken orally by healers, in incrementally increasing amounts, to confer immunity from all snake bites except that of the mamba. It was also the substance used as an antidote for snakebites.⁴² Although there is a sense in which this immunity, built up through increasing exposure over time, replicates scientific understanding of immunity, my fieldwork suggests that the essence of the understanding lies in essential properties moving from one living thing to another, as they do in fat use. Fat contains the potency of the animal and the potency can be transferred by swallowing, or rubbing; particularly rubbing it into 'medicinal' cuts. Khoisan people still use medicines to protect themselves from snakebite and scorpion stings, although this appears to be less common.

Buchu is a substance often used in combination with rubbing and fat. Like fat it has been, and continues to be, used in a considerable variety of different and significant contexts. Buchu is both a generic name for a highly aromatic smelling mixture of ground plants, and a plant genus with different

³⁷ P. Cullinan, *R.J. Gordon, 1743-1795: The Man and his Travels at the Cape* (Cape Town, 1992), p. 23.

³⁸ A. Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, 2nd edn (London, 1786), p. 150.

³⁹ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, p. 173.

⁴⁰ T. Baines and W.B. Lord, *Shifts and Expedients of Camp Life, Travel and Exploration* (London, 1868), p. 82.

⁴¹ P. Möller, *Journey through Angola, Ovamboland and Damaraland 1895-1896*, ed. and trans. by L. and J. Rudner (Cape Town, 1974), p. 152.

⁴² H. Kaufmann, 'Die ꞤAuin. Ein Beitrage zur Buschmannforschung, *Mitt. Deuts. Schutzgeb.*, 23 (1910), 159.

species. The precise species of plants used in buchu mixture varies depending upon local availability, on trade networks in different historical periods and on the precise context for which it is collected.⁴³ Buchu use appears consistently in ethnography of both Khoekhoe and Bushmen throughout the colonial period in all manner of everyday contexts. It was used as a perfume and for ritual and healing. Laidler (1928), cites an alternative name for buchu, *Sa*.⁴⁴ Galton (1850) noted *sāāb* was a general Namaqua name for powders.⁴⁵ Hoernlé (1918) referred to *sāp* as an aromatic powder used by Nama to dust clothes and skin.⁴⁶ Because of historical, orthographic and dialectic variation, it is hard to differentiate between *sā* as a generic name for powder and *sā* as a synonym of buchu. Sullivan suggests buchu is the historical equivalent of *sāi* and she recorded forty species of plants currently used by Damara for making *sāi*.⁴⁷ Contemporary Ju/'hoan use the term *sā* in relation to a powder that smells like buchu and which seems to play a similar varied role in Ju/'hoan life as buchu has long played amongst other Khoisan. Marshall recorded that *sa* is a fragrant powder carried around by !Kung women in their tortoise shell to toss onto healers or visitors for their well-being or onto themselves as a cosmetic.⁴⁸ In contemporary Khoe the verb *sā* means to 'gather, glean, collect, pick up',⁴⁹ which points to the broad root behind Galton and Hoernlé findings, although Hoernlé used the word quite specifically. A Nama woman in Walvis Bay had ground *sāi*, or 'Hottentot perfume' as she also referred to it, from the plants *hai//gam* and buchu. She stored the powder in a small tortoise shell in a similar manner to both the !Kung women Marshall observed in the 1950s and a Namaqua girl observed by the soldier and traveller Alexander, during his 1835 expedition.⁵⁰ The Walvis Bay woman used *sāi* not only as a perfume but as something to be rubbed on sore legs.

Sā seems to be a word that since at least the time of Galton, has had a general meaning of powder made from plants. In twentieth century records the word has been used as an alternative to buchu. *Sāi* is a word that only appears in more recent literature as a specific buchu alternative. Buchu seems to be used more in South Africa and *sā* and *sāi* more in Namibia. Walvis Bay provides a distinctive coastal

⁴³ See Sullivan for contemporary use: S. Sullivan, 'People, Plants and Practice in Drylands' (U.C.L. Ph.D. thesis, 1998). Schapera described buchu as various species of *Barosma* and *Diosma*: Schapera, *Early Cape*, p. 40.

⁴⁴ Laidler, 'Magic Medicine', p. 441.

⁴⁵ Galton's orthography includes an elongated hyphen over the *āā*: UCL, Galton papers, 97 Journal, August 1850.

⁴⁶ Hoernlé includes ' ' on her *ā*. In Khoekhoegowab there is no difference between *b* and *p*. The *b* ending denotes male gender.

⁴⁷ S. Sullivan, 'Perfume and Pastoralism: Gender, Ethnographic Myths and Community-Based Conservation in a Former Namibian 'Homeland'', in D. Hodgson (ed.), *Rethinking Pastoralism in Africa: Gender, Culture and the Myth of the Patriarchal Pastoralist* (Oxford and Kampala, 2000), p. 152.

⁴⁸ Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung*, p. 56.

⁴⁹ W. Haacke and E. Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English Glossary* (Windhoek, 1999), p. 33.

⁵⁰ The girl used a horn for fat and a tortoise shell for buchu: Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery*, p. 268. See also Vedder who describes the relationship between buchu stored in tortoise shells and first menstruation: cited by Sullivan 'Perfume and Pastoralism', p. 153.

connection between South Africa and Namibia and a place of cultural intermingling. Use of the two terms in Walvis Bay is, in view of this, not surprising.

The reason for buchu's significance seems to lie in the richness of the smell and the Khoisan association of smell with potency. This is the same idea Sparrman alluded to when commenting on the penetrating smell of wild cat. Of *sâi* as a perfume, Sesfontein Damara say, 'when you wear it all the boys will come running'. Sullivan, building on Vedder (1928), notes the ritual and symbolic connection between buchu / *sâi* and a Damara girl's first menstruation. She additionally cites Schmidt's assertion that the buchu held in a Khoi woman's powder box (traditionally tortoise shell), 'was the symbol of her femininity, and buchu the symbol of her feminine potencies, of fertility and giving life'.⁵¹ In contemporary Hai//om, Ju/'hoan and Nharo healing dances, healers often produce a small tortoise shell containing *sā* and rub the powder onto participants, or place a smouldering coal in the shell and waft the fragrant smoke under the noses of all taking part.⁵² Marshall also noted this practice amongst the !Kung.⁵³ There is undoubtedly a Khoi association between women, perfume preparation and *sâi*. In a contemporary Bushmen context *sā* powder is very much part of the trance healer's arsenal, although Marshall's evidence supports similar associations with women and perfume as those found amongst the Khoi.

Early ethnographers frequently noted that Hottentots dusted people and things with buchu. It seems likely that this dusting was done, as in contemporary Khoisan life, to confer a pleasant smell, to attribute potency and to bring healing. Often buchu was mixed with fat and applied to damaged tissue to aid healing, or sprinkled on a person within broader healing rituals, usually together with an ample rubbing of fat. Kolb noted buchu and fat was used to stuff testicular sacks following Hottentot operations to remove a testicle. He additionally noted the application of buchu to alleviate pain, to help the healing of poisoned wounds, as part of the making of a charm and as something sprinkled onto new born babies after a fat application.⁵⁴

Rubbing a new born child with fat and allowing the fat to soak in was, like the everyday Hottentot practice of keeping the body amply covered with fat, something early ethnographers clearly struggled to understand. The apparent ethnographic ambiguity surrounding both fat use and buchu tells us much as to the difficulty of fitting the use and ideas surrounding these substances into neat European

⁵¹ Sullivan, 'Perfume and Pastoralism', p. 153

⁵² See also, L. Marshall, 'The Medicine Dance of the !Kung Bushmen', *Africa* 39 (1969), 36.

⁵³ Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung*, p. 57.

⁵⁴ Kolb, *Present State*, pp. 113, 133, 141, 305, 309.

categories. At the same time this very difficulty provides an opportunity to look for Khoisan understanding.

Böerving, Dampier and Le Vaillant thought Hottentots rubbed on fat to bestow strength, suppleness and agility. Kolb attributed such powers to *saar*.⁵⁵ Boemus (1611) observed of the ‘Acridophagi of Aethiopia’; ‘They bee nimble of body, swift of foote..’.⁵⁶ In so doing Boemus was repeating common classical epithets. The same epithets are not only recruited widely by Khoisan ethnographers but fat and *saar* rubbing were identified as means used to achieve these native phenomena ‘known’ to exist. Some contemporary Khoisan rub their babies with Vaseline and they do this because it ‘makes the baby strong’. Kolb observed that new born babies were rubbed with cow dung, Hottentot fig stalks, sheep’s fat and buchu, to ‘promote strength and activity’ of the body.⁵⁷ Whilst in one sense Kolb’s observation was probably correct, contemporary Khoisan ideas of what makes a baby strong suggest that, at another level, he was less accurate.

Hottentot ideas of rubbing, or of making a baby strong, only partly coincide with Western understanding. In terms of where different cultural understandings meet, it seems reasonable to recognise a level of pragmatism at which Khoisan understanding and practice overlaps with Western interpretation. Within their own medical context of the ‘reasonable’, early observers noted that applying fat could protect the skin from the climate. Kolb for instance thought fat was used because of the Hottentot ‘manner of life’ beneath a raging sun; ‘Were they not therefore to anoint their bodies with butter, fat, or some such thing, the continual excessive heat would, in all probability, exhaust and destroy them’.⁵⁸ Dry, hot and dusty conditions genuinely dry out the skin and lubricating the skin preserves its integrity. In explicit recognition of this, Vaseline and fat are used to protect the skin by many contemporary Namibian Khoisan. It is probable that historic Khoisan populations also attributed the cause of certain skin problems to their dry environment and therefore also greased themselves as a form of protection. Western interpretation of fat use was, in this sense, accurate.

Whilst at this pragmatic level the understanding of observers seems appropriate, at other times understanding seems to have been wider of the mark. At least amongst contemporary Khoisan, the idea that massage makes a baby strong draws on an unfamiliar backdrop of anatomical understandings and

⁵⁵ Kolb, *Present State*, p. 116; W. Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World, 1679-1691* (London 1699), p. 536; Le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior*, p.27.

⁵⁶ Boemus, *Manners, Lawes and Customes*, p .47.

⁵⁷ Kolb, *Present State*, p. 141.

⁵⁸ Kolb, *Present State*, p.50.

beliefs concerning transference of potency. Khoisan ideas of ‘strength’ in relation to potency have not been a part of past or recent Western explanations of massage.

Earlier I drew attention to the Khoisan idea that different fat was, and is, known to have different, animal specific, power-full characteristics. Sparrman, with his association between strong smell and effectivity, hints at this, but goes no further. Twentieth century ethnography picks up on ideas of potency but does not locate the idea broadly within Khoisan healing. The idea of potency in a wide context has been swallowed within European translation. Morden and Kolb readily translated the power of ‘grease’ to medically effective ‘ointment’.⁵⁹ Biomedically minded readers looking back at the word ‘ointment’ implicitly read chemical absorption, or see parallels with seventeenth century medical theory when the word was used. Potency and its transference into someone through swallowing, rubbing or sniffing, is not the same as either humoral theory or biomedical theory. Similar European smothering of Khoisan ideas is apparent in the scientific use of the word ‘immunity’ when applied to Khoisan using parts of snakes to protect themselves from snake poison.

In addition to fat use becoming tied to ideas of swiftness and strength, fat became tied to darker images of savages. Dapper noted that Hottentots: ‘smear their bodies and faces with grease and fat, so that altogether they are beastly, savage, coarse and dirty in habit’.⁶⁰ The sailor Cowley (1683) attributed blackness to the deliberate smearing on of fat and whilst linking this practice to protection from the harsh sun simultaneously tied the practice to universal savagery. He suggested Hottentots were born white and became black because they applied fat onto infants and then exposed these infants to the sun and the smoke of their huts, which were like those of the ‘wild Irish’.⁶¹ In 1718 another sailor, Beeckman, also linked Hottentot fat use to European peasantry and filth: ‘Their Skin is like our Chimney-Sweepers [from] daubing themselves with Soot and stinking Grease; which makes them smell most intolerable’.⁶²

In the seventeenth century ‘curiosity’ about natural history,⁶³ and unbridled colonial voyeurism led ethnographers, such as Ten Rhyne, to take particular interest in Hottentot genitals.⁶⁴ In the later eighteenth century disparaging comments regarding female Hottentot genitals became associated with

⁵⁹ Morden, *Geography Rectified*, p. 87.

⁶⁰ Schapera, *Early Cape*, p. 51

⁶¹ Cowley, ‘The Voyage of Master Cowley Round the World’, in *An Historical Account of all the Voyages around the world 1683-86* (2 vols., London, 1687), i, 455.

⁶² D. Beeckman, *A Voyage to and from the Isle of Borneo in the East-Indies* (London, 1718), p. 184.

⁶³ For discussion of natural history around this period see: N. Jardine and J.A. Secord (eds.), *Cultures of Natural History* (Cambridge, 1996).

⁶⁴ Ten Rhyne, ‘A Short Account’, p. 115.

the broader ongoing rhetoric of filthy, fat covered Hottentots. Sparrman ably demonstrates the recruitment of early science to a changing understanding of difference:

The women have no parts uncommon to the rest of their sex; but the clitoris and nymphae, particularly of those who are past their youth, are in general pretty much elongated; a peculiarity which undoubtedly has got footing in this nation, in consequence of the relaxation necessarily produced by the method they have of besmearing their bodies, their slothfulness, and the warmth of the climate.⁶⁵

Fat had previously been linked to climate as a protective agent, but here fat becomes linked to sagging bodies and slothfulness under foreign sun. Drawing links between climate and mental, if not physical, demeanour, had an old pedigree, stretching to classical periods. In 1621, Robert Burton, a ‘geography’ teacher, wrote in *Anatomy of Melancholy*: ‘As the air is, so are the inhabitants, dull, heavy, witty..’. An extract which Hodgen notes draws heavily from the climatic theory of the later sixteenth century of the French jurist Jean Bodin.⁶⁶ In the late eighteenth century Buffon and Blumenbach similarly engaged in rich debate concerning the relationship of climate to human variety.⁶⁷

Sparrman’s claims of sagging slothfulness reflected wider intellectual concerns.⁶⁸ Thunberg, a contemporary Enlightenment traveller, made similar observations. Influenced by Linnaeus, Thunberg expected Africans to be ‘phlegmatic’ and ‘relaxed’.⁶⁹ Seventeenth and early eighteenth century ethnographers, including Dapper⁷⁰ and Kolb⁷¹ found support for ideas of ‘relaxed’ Hottentots in their accounts of pendulous Hottentot breasts. Beeckman remarked that Hottentot women had ‘long flabby breasts, odiously dangling down to their waste; which they can toss over their Shoulders for their children to suck’.⁷² Thunberg, like Sparrman, made the link between fat, climate and sagging tissue: ‘from their frequent besmearing themselves, as well as from the heat of the climate, the Hottentot women have always very flabby breasts, that hang down very low’.⁷³

⁶⁵ Ibid.p.182.

⁶⁶ Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, p.277.

⁶⁷ J.Comaroff and J. Comaroff, *Of Revelation and Revolution: Christianity, Colonialism and Consciousness in South Africa* (2 vols., Chicago,1991),i, 98; C. J. Glacken, *Traces on the Rhodian Shore* (Berkeley and London, 1967), pp.587-92. For wider context see: M. Harrison, *Climates and Constitutions: Health, Race, Environment and British Imperialism in India 1600-1850* (New Delhi, 1999). For arguments that fuelled empire see: A. Pagden, *Lords of all the World: Ideologies of Empire in Spain, Britain and France c. 1500-c.1800* (New Haven and London, 1998).

⁶⁸ For the historical background to these concerns see: S. B. Schwartz, *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge, 1994).

⁶⁹ Thunberg cited by D. Chidester, *Savage Systems: Colonialism and Comparative Religion in Southern Africa* (Charlottesville, 1996), p.62.

⁷⁰ Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape*, pp. 45, 85.

⁷¹ Cited by Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 268.

⁷² D. Beeckman, p. 185.

⁷³ C. P. Thunberg, *Travels at the Cape of Good Hope 1772-1775*, V.S. Forbes (ed.) (Cape Town,1986), p. 85.

In missionary rhetoric of the early nineteenth century, Rev. Kicherer drew on similar themes about Bushmen hygiene. Rhetoric of filth was given new meaning in nineteenth century contexts of scientific and moral hygiene.

Their manner of life is extremely wretched and disgusting. They delight to smear their bodies with the fat of animals, mingled with a powder which makes it shine. They are utter strangers to cleanliness, as they never wash their bodies, but suffer the dirt to accumulate, so that it will hang a considerable length from their elbows.⁷⁴

Enlightenment ethnography added to the quantity of Khoisan ethnographic data. However, despite new scientific interest and increased ethnographic immersion, understanding remained tied to older colonial themes. There is no sense of science removing prejudice. Science did not clear the way for an open consideration of indigenous perspectives. Gordon noted, for example, that in addition to making Hottentots more supple, fat was applied to discourage sweating, to protect the body from insects and to make feet less vulnerable to hard stones. These conclusions seem thoughtful. Less clearly however, Gordon suggested fat enabled Hottentots to walk longer and be less exhausted by walking.⁷⁵ His latter affirmation seems reminiscent of Hottentots using fat to become swift of foot and strong.

Massage, Fat and Potency

To date, ideas of potency associated with rubbing treatments have not been much explored, except in Hoernlé's 1918 account of Nama 'witchdoctors'.⁷⁶ Since then potency has been deployed primarily in relation to Bushmen healers and 'shamanism'. It seems though that all Khoisan healing strategies should be considered with an eye to potency, however 'reasonable' and 'straightforward' they seem. Pragmatism, trial and error learning, culturally prescribed and enacted practices, all contain this idea. Even when one Khoisan person massages another, transference of potency is involved. The idea of potency lies underneath the historically recorded, multiple and overlapping uses of fat and buchu.⁷⁷

Lévy-Bruhl's idea of different animals being distinguished by their respective forms, and hence identities and potentialities, is helpful to understanding fat use. The most obvious example of how his theory might be applied is in snake fat giving a person something of the snake; a snake essence that makes the recipient immune. How we might think about the attributes of other animal fat, such as hippopotamus fat, is difficult, as it depends upon the Khoisan experience and ideas of hippopotami.

⁷⁴ NLSA, MSB 955 1(2) (Transactions of the Missionary Society in the Years 1803-1806, vol.II, London).

⁷⁵ Cullinan (ed.), *R.J.Gordon*, p. 23.

⁷⁶ Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites', p. 69.

⁷⁷ cf. Sullivan, 'Perfume and Pastoralism'.

Essentially, it is a question of how Khoisan *know* an animal through biological and culturally mediated experience. Often this knowledge does not seem to take a leap of profound insight. The eland is commonly used in a healing capacity because it is strong, like the elephant. When Khoisan people told me that massage makes a person strong it is these sorts of associations that lie behind their claim. But care must be taken when identifying Khoisan experience in this manner. Although at times the reasoning appears obvious, one must always keep the information tied to the Khoisan context. To take one straightforward observation as indication of how Khoisan people know an animal and its place in their world, is to divorce that information from its meaning. This holds the danger of losing indigenous understanding and knowledge.

Sesfontein Damara, Nama in Walvis Bay and Gibeon, Hai//om in Tsumeb and Tsintsabis and Nharo in Blaauwburg, all cook elephant dung and use the water and sometimes the warm dung, to massage swollen and painful legs. A too ready reading of this phenomenon, using either thoughtless application of Lévy-Bruhl's ideas of form, or European ideas of sympathetic magic, encourages a ready conclusion that elephant legs look large, as do swollen human legs, therefore the two are 'mystically' linked. Khoisan people however do not say this. Their understanding of why elephant dung is used is the same they give to the use of porcupine stomach⁷⁸; the animals eat all kinds of medicine plants. The elephant in particular roams far and wide consuming a large variety of medicinal plants.⁷⁹ Elephant dung is medicinal because the elephant eats 'bitter' plants,⁸⁰ as is the dung of other animals, particularly the porcupine and the goat.⁸¹ The idea of 'bitter' plants is often synonymous with poisonous plants and medicinal plants.

Like animal fat, buchu, or *sâi*, is known to Khoisan in a particular way, but its attributes are not apparent simply from the diverse social uses of the powder. Gordon provides the earliest example of a healing ceremony that sufficiently approximates contemporary Bushmen trance dances to be seen as a historical precursor. Gordon recorded that during the ceremony buchu was rubbed under the noses of several women sitting by the healer.⁸² Earlier I mentioned that contemporary Bushmen healers waft the smoke of smouldering buchu under the noses of participants at a healing ceremony. Some healers also rub buchu under the nose, on the neck and on the upper chest of participants – all areas of significance. Schmidt pinned buchu down as a symbol of feminine potency and as a life giving substance. Whilst

⁷⁸ Suro, 34, 59, 65

⁷⁹ 42, 52, 56, 58, 97.

⁸⁰ 37

⁸¹ 20, 34.

⁸² R.J. Gordon, *Cape Travels, 1777 to 1786*, P. E. Raper and M. Boucher (eds.). (2 vols., Johannesburg, 1988), p. 216.

this may be true, this is a conclusion drawn from a narrow context that negates the fundamental Khoisan understanding behind buchu, which is un-gendered.

For a different understanding of buchu we can turn to Bleek and Lloyd (1870 –1880) who provide the following record of a /Xam bushmen myth about capturing the rain-bull. /Xam bushmen thought of the rain as male and female, as do many contemporary Khoi and San. Heavy rain with thunder is male and light rain female. The /Xam associated male rain with a large, powerful, bull-like animal capable of making frightening noises and killing people with lightning. When rain was desired Bushmen *!Khwa-ka !gi:ten*, or, ‘medicine men’ with rain potency, would enter the spirit world and capture the rain-bull from the waterhole where it lived. Bleek’s informant recounted an episode concerning an attempt to capture a rain-bull: ‘you should have given the men who crept up with you buchu, so that they smelt of buchu.’⁸³ Bleek noted in brackets: ‘if the bull had smelt buchu, it would have been calm and gone quietly without struggling’.

An episode from a different context was reported to Bleek and Lloyd in relation to a Bushmen sorcerer:

When he (the sorcerer) returns from the place to which he has gone on a magic expedition he trembles. Then people let him smell buchu, for they want his veins to lie down, for his vertebral artery has risen up while he was returning.⁸⁴

In 1930 Schapera noted, probably using the same Bleek material, that young /Xam women must propitiate a waterhole, the home of the rain bull and a symbol of rain, by means of buchu.⁸⁵ In Hewitt’s 1986 analysis of the Bleek material he proposed:

The rain bull was not feared or respected in itself, although buchu (often used by girls to ward off and pacify !khwa) was sometimes sprinkled on the bodies or rainmaker novices to make the rain animal more placid.⁸⁶

My fieldwork allows further expansion on the wider context of buchu. Suro, my Damara assistant, guided me to a farm near Otavi owned by a young Damara man, Ferdinand, who very kindly offered to help me in my research. Ferdinand introduced me to two healers who were working at his farm, Aibi Haitua and Sam Ruxama. Aibi, a !Kung man in his early fifties was born at Kongo near Rundu. As a child white farmers took him to look after their goats. He had lived his life around the Otavi region.

⁸³ D. Bleek, ‘Belief and Customs of the /Xam Bushmen, Part VI, Rainmaking’, *Bantu Studies*, 7:4 (Dec. 1933), 382.

⁸⁴ D. Bleek, ‘Belief and Customs of the /Xam Bushmen, Part VII, Sorcerers’, *Bantu Studies*, 9:1 (March 1935), 22.

⁸⁵ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 179.

⁸⁶ R. Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning, and Ritual in the Narratives of the Southern San* (Hamburg, 1986), p. 298.

Sam was in his late forties and has since died from what one person thought was a *tokolosie* and another malaria.⁸⁷ Sam's parents were, respectively, !Kung and Tswana. He had grown up in Botswana, worked in South Africa and more recently on farms around Otavi. As I interviewed these healers they increasingly threw the conversation back at me and began to refer to my own reason for being there. I ended up staying a number of days with them, during which our time was taken up talking almost entirely about healing. I returned months later to undertake a healing ceremony with the two men and other farm workers. Conversations with these healers enabled me to explore in remarkable detail much of the information I had gathered from other Khoisan. The two of them, despite having had very different involvement with wider rural and urban southern African life, were in like mind about the vast majority of the healing details. In the light of what they told me, I followed up very particular ideas about Khoisan healing with subsequent informants. Other Khoisan recognised and consequently expanded upon Aibi and Sam's information, although they often did so drawing attention to local variations of words, names and practices. Aibi and Sam made a highly significant contribution to my interpretation and their combined influence features explicitly and implicitly throughout the thesis.

In the introduction, I raised the issue of what it means to pray. On the morning after the final night of my healing induction, Sam and I walked out of the farm compound. Sam pointed to a piece of drain pipe, about three metres long, lying on the ground in front of us. He said: 'If you see a mamba, like that pipe, he will not harm you. Last night you were given the */gais* of the mamba. The snake knows you, it will not harm you, it will slide away.' Sam continued, 'Last night you were also given the rain spirit, the */gais* of the rain. You must not be afraid if the lightning strikes in front of you. You must just go through and say, 'I am your child, one of you'. The rain will drop small shells. You must pick one up and leave the rest'.

The wider consequences of issues raised in this paragraph will be explored in a later context. For now I wish to draw attention to the relationship between people and a natural environment inscribed with identity. What Sam said of my relationship with the mamba is telling of the meaning of fat use and immunity from snakebite. Marieta Naoadoes, my Nharo translator, took me to talk to her very elderly Nharo grandfather. When he was young he was smeared with the fat of the mamba (and the bone marrow ?) and it was rubbed into small cuts made on his body. From then on he was not afraid of the mamba. It would just lie down if it saw him and the bite would not hurt him. Marieta's brother had also undergone the same preparation. The fat and other parts of the mamba can, like the */gais* of the mamba, confer something of the mamba into people. This seems highly reminiscent of Lévy-Bruhl's

⁸⁷ Respectively, Suro and Ferdinand Conradie, a 32 years old Damara man.

assertion that the Bhoró people of Brazil actually become parrots.⁸⁸ Use of the mamba in this context also confirms Kauffman's findings from the beginning of the twentieth century amongst Bushmen from the same region.⁸⁹

At an earlier period of my stay with Sam and Aibi, Aibi had told me:

The rain with thunder storms is the strong one. Like you use tools on a car to operate it, pour the *sâi* on the ground; if the rain falls the rain asks "why are you pouring on the ground?". I say "forgive me, it is me doing it". She [the rain] answers that from the sunrise to the sunset she will never make that noise [thunder]. She just rains. When rain is falling, if she makes too much noise I come out without my shirt on and talk to the rain and she stops.

These contemporary !Kung from northern Namibia seem to be talking of a similar practice to that of laying out buchu to calm the rain that Bleek recorded from Cape /Xam informants around 130 years previously. Schapera suggested that buchu 'propitiated' the rain. Schapera thought that the Rain seemed to be something 'respected or feared, since it has power to change people into animals and other objects, as well as to destroy with storms and terrible lightning. At the same time it also brings water and makes food grow'.⁹⁰ Schapera, like Dorothea Bleek, thought Bushmen did not represent the rain as a man or god.⁹¹

Hewitt suggests that buchu pacified the rain. He similarly draws the interpretation away from the reverential. Both Schapera and Hewitt's conclusions seem correct in removing any idea of animistic worship. They do not, however, recognise the sort of relationship between nature and man that I encountered and Lévy-Bruhl suggested.

To understand massage, fat and buchu use in Khoisan healing one has to grapple with a confusing web of meanings. Evans-Pritchard thought analysis of 'primitive religion' required ' a poetic mind which moves easily in images and symbols '.⁹² His assertion holds true for understanding Khoisan healing. The key to understanding lies in the properties something is known to have and the effect of the transference of these properties. How something is known is drawn from a contextual experience.

Bleek's /Xam provide us with the idea of pacifying both the rain and rain-bull with buchu; effectively making the bull still and calm. In the above quotation, buchu is used to pacify a trembling sorcerer's

⁸⁸ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p. 77.

⁸⁹ Kaufmann, 'Die Auin', 159.

⁹⁰ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 179.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Evans-Pritchard, *Theories of Primitive Religion*, p. 112.

arteries which have risen up on his return from a magic expedition. When calm, the arteries will lie down. Aibi expressed that when he dances the trance dance: things inside him, the /*gais* ‘stand up’. Aibi, like many Bushmen healers, rubs *sâi* under the nose, on the neck and on the chest of participants at the healing dance. For the participants the *sâi* ‘pushes everything to the normal place’. Aibi, like many Khoisan, thought in terms of moving organs. He believed the pancreas and the heart moved. If the heart ‘turns’ you feel weak. The /*gais* also move. If they are lying down, they cause problems or do not work. When awake they stand up. When Sam had his ‘mind opened’ the officiating healer mixed fat with *sâi* and spread it from his ears to his eyes. He related that his ‘eyes got full’ and he ‘saw everything’. They also rubbed the mixture on his neck arteries (anterior lateral) so that they ‘stayed open’.

Aibi and Sam’s relation of the use of *sâi* ties in with the wider practice of Khoisan healers. The wafting of *sâi* smoke and rubbing *sâi* under the noses of dance participants seems to play a dual role of opening and pacification. A Ju/’hoan healer from //Aru blew *sâ* by the ears of dance participants and rubbed it vertically on the forehead down to the bridge of the nose.⁹³ This prevented participants from becoming confused or sick. A Hai//om man in Etosha reported that his grandmother had used smouldering *sâi* smoke to treat headaches. She had also wafted the smoke into the mouths of small children with painful milk teeth and with sores in the mouth and used *sâi* smoke to treat scorpion stings.⁹⁴ Many Khoisan talk of heart problems that arise from the heart ‘turning’ or ‘standing up’ or ‘pumping too much’, which is the cause of mental agitation and bad dreams. A Hai//om healer near Outjo used an application of *sâi* to treat heart problems.⁹⁵

Using *sâi* under the nose points to the relevance of its highly aromatic smell. The smell carries the *sâi* into the person where it encourages the inside of the body to be in the ‘right place’. There is a sense of unblocked flow and alignment. The ears, nose, mouth and skin pores are particular ways *sâi* can enter the body. *Sâi* is seen as waking up the body. When one wakes up one stands up. When tired one lies down. This idea of /*gais*, or *gais*, may well be linked to Khoekhoegowab *!gai*,⁹⁶ to stamp in a dance. In a healing dance the movement wakes up and activates the *!gais*, the things inside a body. It may also be linked to Khoekhoegowab *≠khai*⁹⁷, to wake up and rise up or get up, and *gei*, to grow, to develop.⁹⁸ The way many Khoisan discussed animals also suggests that similar thinking lies behind their naming.

⁹³ 79

⁹⁴ 53

⁹⁵ 50

⁹⁶ Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, p.252.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p. 120.

⁹⁸ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 142.

The gemsbok, /*gae.b*⁹⁹, for instance, is most distinctive for its sharp straight, standing up horns. The black mamba, /*khaese.b, kai/ao.b*,¹⁰⁰ which along with the python seems to hold a particular significance to Khoisan, is a large, swift highly venomous snake that can stand up and meet a person eye to eye.

Contemporary *sâi* use is tied to this Khoisan way of thinking. Two Damara women from Purros, north of Sesfontein, used *sâi* to treat abdominal pain after given birth and what they thought was tuberculosis.¹⁰¹ In Swakopmund a Nama woman described how men ‘bitten’ (*nā*, to bite or nip,¹⁰²) by having sexual intercourse with menstruating women, must use *sâi* to push out the ‘dirtiness’ from the body. The dirtiness makes the testicles go up and rots the inside of the body.¹⁰³ In these contexts *sâi* seems used because of a perception that it encourages the dirtiness to flow out. In Gibeon, Nama women use *sâi* or, ‘the Herero *sâi, urubaba*’ in a similar manner to Sesfontein Damara, to enhance female attractiveness. One Nama woman said, ‘even if a man goes with another woman he comes back and the love starts again’.¹⁰⁴

Bleek’s material and my research suggests buchu and *sâi*, similarly to Haacke’s *sâ*, is something that pacifies and relates to lying down, calmness and dying and may be associated with the sun going down, an animal standing or lying still or an organ at peace. At the same time buchu has an invigorating quality that can open the senses. Hahn’s analysis points to an underlying meaning of *sâi* and buchu resting in heat and the effect of heat, something becoming hot and boiling.¹⁰⁵ A similar association is also indicated in Haacke’s glossary. Without the circumflex on *sâi*, Haacke lists *sai* as to sting, burn (of: nettles) and make itch.¹⁰⁶ Hahn explained the idea of love in terms of inflammation or hot desire. Hahn’s connection between *sâi*, heat and love could go some way towards explaining the role of *sâi* as a powder that raises passion. This inflamed idea also seems present in the stinging

⁹⁹ Ibid p. 179.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁰¹ 47

¹⁰² Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 30.

¹⁰³ 30

¹⁰⁴ 32

¹⁰⁵ Hahn observed that the name of *Heitsi-eibeb*’s son *!Urisib* is derived from *!ū* which he links to the colour white, the ostrich egg, and *!Uris*, the white one, also called *Suris*, the sun. *Suris* he continued: ‘gives the root *su*, to broil, to be hot; *Soris* or *Suris*, therefore, means the broiling one, the heating one, the inflaming one.’ Derived from *sū* comes: ‘*sâi*, to boil’, *sūs*, a cooking pot and ‘*Sureb* or *soreb* (masc.), *sores* (fem.), the lover, the sweetheart, the one who is inflamed- viz., with love, or who inflames with love’ (Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 141)

Haacke’s glossary lists Khoekhoegowab words as if tone marks are provided, ‘ie. according to clusters of basic meaning’ (Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, p.iii) Haacke lists: *sâ*, to ‘rest’, ‘die’ and *sâ.b*, ‘repose’, ‘tranquility’. *Sâ.-i*, buchu, is listed adjacent to *sâi*, to ‘boil; simmer; cook. (ibid., p. 35).

¹⁰⁶ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 33.

meaning of *sai*. *Sâi* is power-full. Its potency lies in how it is known, by its smell. The powerful smell can calm or stimulate.

The long recorded multifarious use of *Sâi* and buchu reflects the rich web of Khoisan associations in which it is embedded. *Sâi* is understood and used in relation to how it is known, how its characteristics relate to other phenomena and how it is conceived within Khoi and San cosmology and mythology. Behind *Sâi* use runs the same idea of potency that is fundamental to Khoisan understanding of fat use, massage and other healing practices. Although fat has a pragmatic use as a skin protector and massage lubricant, unfamiliar ideas of potency are bound up in the different sorts of fat used. Notions of potency and ideas of how properties, or strengths and illnesses move from one organism to another, are key to understanding Khoisan patient / healer interaction, be it through massage or a trance dance.

Witchcraft, Religion and the History of the Trance Dance

Elphick (1985) is dismissive of the ethnographic value of early sources relating to the Khoikhoi. He suggests many published sources ‘yield information which is trivial, false, or pirated from earlier authors’. Although reports from Dutch East India Company employees were ‘written by competent, businesslike observers’, Elphick opines that these authors ‘rarely questioned how Khoikhoi perceived their own problems and determined their strategies.’¹⁰⁷ In the context of Khoisan medicine, his ready dismissal of published sources is inappropriate. As the previous section has demonstrated, there is value in the record of medical procedure and wider ritual in early published sources. Kolb (1719),¹⁰⁸ attempts to define the precise plants that constituted buchu.¹⁰⁹ Such detail barely seems trivial. Elphick is, however, right to suggest that early ethnographers rarely considered problems and strategies from the vantage point of the Khoikhoi.¹¹⁰ This section discusses how early observers accounted for phenomena that related to ideas of well-being, death and treatment that were not ‘obviously medical’, within European intellectual categories of religion and witchcraft.

As suggested, interest in the pragmatic side of Khoisan healing has been a persistent feature of Khoisan ethnography. The remit and content of this interest up to the later eighteenth century, effectively lays out the themes and details which remain the primary concerns of later ethnographic research. Only occasionally is there mention of new or different practices or a clear demise of old. With this in mind,

¹⁰⁷ Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding*, p. xviii.

¹⁰⁸ Arrived at the Cape 1706: Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, p.41.

¹⁰⁹ ‘spirea afric.odorata folis pilosis’: Kolb, *Present State*, p. 96.

¹¹⁰ Elphick, *Khoikhoi and the Founding*, p. xviii.

the following section and proceeding chapters, whilst retaining interest in changes in pragmatic knowledge, are primarily concerned with changing understanding of the Khoisan world of ideas.

Examining the history of the trance dance provides a useful way of exploring both the history of Khoisan healing and the relationship between different types of ethnography and the understandings it encouraged. In recognition of this, from this point onwards through to chapter four, I frame discussion around tracing the history of the trance dance. Accounts of dance are interwoven with themes of witchcraft and religion. Analysis of how Europeans in southern Africa first interpreted Khoisan dancing and later developed an idea of a trance healing dance, entails a close look at how successive ethnographers have thought about Khoisan illness causation and its relationship to a primitive African world of spirits.

What is particularly significant about the history of the trance dance is the surprisingly late appearance of healing dances in the historical record and the reluctance of academics to consider Khoi dancing in similar terms to San dancing. This latter point reflects the exceptional status accorded to Bushman shamanic trance dancing. Although anthropologists have attributed the San trance dance with ancient roots, the ethnographic evidence only goes back as far as 1846 and missionary Arbousset's description of a 'mokoma', or, 'Dance of Blood' which he observed amongst Bushmen of the Drakensberg and Lesotho.¹¹¹ But even this reference, late as it is, can only be considered as speculative. Arbousset's account says nothing of the Khoisan ideas behind the 'mokoma'. His description merely provides vague details of a form of dance that appears similar to dances recently recorded amongst Bushmen. The first 'discovery' of a dance, replete with Khoisan ideas of healing, came in 1873, when a Cape Official, Joseph Orpen, discussed San cave paintings with his Bushman guide, Qing, in the mountains of Lesotho.

The first record of Damara trance dances comes even later than those of Bushmen. Schmidt notes von Eckenbrecher (1908) possibly observed the phenomenon at the beginning of the twentieth century.¹¹² It is Vedder (1923) however who provides explicit evidence from a few years later.¹¹³ As to the Nama, there is no direct evidence of them trance dancing, although both Schmidt and myself encountered Damara who thought they did, and hence may have done so in the past.

¹¹¹ R. Katz *et al*, *Healing Makes Our Hearts Happy* (Vermont, 1997), p. 54; J.D. Lewis-Williams, 'Paintings of Power', in M. Biesele *et al* (ed.), *Past and Future of Kung Ethnography* (Hamburg, 1986), p. 237.

¹¹² Schmidt, *Present Day*, p. 4.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

The late record of both San and Khoi trance dancing raises the following possible scenarios: Khoi and San healing dances do not feature earlier in ethnography because they did not exist prior to the first recorded observations. This idea conflicts with archaeological evidence of Bushman dancing. Khoisan dances may alternatively have existed but have remained unseen through lack of ethnographic social and geographical penetration. Lastly, healing dances may have been observed and recorded but not interpreted as 'healing'. Given the archaeological evidence, the relative wealth of details recorded by some early ethnographers, and the extent of ethnographic travel prior to the nineteenth century, this latter scenario seems probable - even allowing for the 'invisibility' of Bushmen. If so, the meaning attributed to early recorded dances, if it is not healing, must say something about early ethnographic interpretation. Examining alternative understandings of dances might then tell us something of the anthropological 'discovery' of the San trance healing dance, replete with the leitmotif 'shamanism' of contemporary anthropological discourse.

The History of the Dance

The history of the healing dance can be considered within four consecutive ethnographic phases. These lead to the present situation, wherein the dance is thought to typify a distinctive shamanic Bushman culture and focus on the dance overshadows interest in wider Khoisan healing, including Khoi trance dances. The proceeding section of this chapter concerns the first historic phase and explores the above proposition that healing dances may have existed at the time of early ethnographic enquiry, but were not recognised as such. It is clear from early accounts that interpreting the dance was problematic. The early ethnographic method drew the ambiguous dance into the remit of religion, superstition and witchcraft. It was not until the later eighteenth century that any real details began to emerge concerning healing style dances, but not actual healing dances.

Chapter two concerns phases two and three. Phase two covers the late eighteenth century to Orpen's 1873 description of a healing dance. Over this period familiar looking dance details began to appear as missionaries and travellers learnt more about the Khoisan. New interpretation of the dance around the mid nineteenth century involved spirit possession and soul wandering. The third phase, from 1873 to the 1930s, runs from initial discovery of the dance to increasing prominence of the dance in ethnographic accounts. This period significantly involved the advent of professional anthropology. It is an important time because much new ethnographic data emerged concerning the Khoisan, but the way it was interpreted contrasts strongly with interpretations that developed from the late 1950s onwards. Despite this contrast many of the details remain useful. Schapera's compilation, *The Khoisan Peoples* (1930), typifies academic understanding of the time. At this stage the healing dance

was thought of as one form of numerous primitive dance rituals. The healing dance received little specific attention. Although anthropologists of this period, and especially Hoernlé, brought new anthropological theories to bear on analysis of Khoisan societies, interpretation remained essentially animistic and focused on Khoi and San as primitive people with primitive beliefs. Despite new theory regarding the social function of phenomena, healing strategies were predominantly thought of as 'primitive' and pre-scientific.

The fourth phase of the dance history begins with the start of prolonged fieldwork amongst the Bushmen in the late 1950s. Henceforth the way Bushmen were thought of changed fundamentally. The Bushmen healing dance was at the heart of this changing understanding. In this new interpretive context, what was thought of as spirit possession and Bushmen connection with spirits, was reinterpreted within paradigms of ecologically adapted, egalitarian Bushmen who practiced shamanic healing. The ideas of sickness spirits lying behind disease, identified by earlier ethnographers, were swallowed within a predominantly ecological, social and psychological interpretation of Bushmen healing. The dance was increasingly interpreted as a social arena for mediating familiar problems and new challenges. Whilst there remained some pragmatic acknowledgement of Bushmen healing skills, illness became principally thought of as ecological and social threat, both of which were dealt with primarily in the context of the dance. Within this shamanic context Bushmen no longer believed illness was caused by ancestors, like many other southern African peoples, but by nameless dead people or arrows from a divine being. Their healing power was not witchcraft substance but a psycho-physiological experience in an ecologically adapted social setting. When they practiced witchcraft the phenomenon was predominantly read as evidence of acculturation, rather than a Bushman phenomenon.

The shamanic interpretation of Bushman dances seems to artificially segregate Bushmen cosmology and healing strategies from the wider Khoi context. The evidence for Bushmen as shamans hangs on a series of claims which forms a primary focus of chapter three, the final phase of the dance history. These claims include: the relationship of the living to the dead and to spirits; the meaning of spirit possession; the understanding of what causes disease; the difference of Bushman healing from Khoi; soul wandering; transformation of wizards; natural and supernatural worlds. A further important issue that emerged as ethnographic understanding changed, concerns the relationship between Khoisan religion and the physical environment, particularly rain, lightning and wind. The fourth chapter adds to the history of Khoisan dance by exploring the contemporary world of Damara healers. Consideration of these healers suggests that certain links early ethnographers made between Khoisan belief and the environment, should be reasserted in modern Khoisan anthropological discourse.

The Early Ethnographic Eye

Religion and witchcraft were subjects high in the minds of seventeenth and eighteenth century observers. From Herodotus into the Renaissance enquirers had explicitly or implicitly articulated ethnography around the apparent similarity and difference of familiar and foreign cultures.¹¹⁴ Out of this interest in likeness, from the classical period into the seventeenth century, the question of what gods people worshipped, how and where, had persistently stood at the frontline of ‘manner and customs’ ethnographic enquiry.

Defining the meaning of religion is problematic. The definition lies in a complex of beliefs held in different times and places, and thrown together in Euro-American intellectual and theological discourse around ideas of divinity, piety, superstition and state. In this thesis, determining precisely what ethnographers of different periods had in their minds in relation to religion and superstition, must for reasons of expediency be left to broad brush strokes. Despite this, the broad stance serves the thrust of this thesis; to determine influential trends and patterns in thinking.

In contrast to the consistent historical importance of religion, some historical periods have undoubtedly been more bound up with witchcraft than others. Interest in witchcraft has persisted into the present. In the seventeenth and eighteenth century, post-Reformation theology both permitted the co-existence of different religions and distanced Satan from human affairs. The threat of witches did not therefore hold the reality and possibility it had done in the late Middle Ages. Hutton specifies that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries ‘the majority of Europe’s social, political and intellectual elites’ ceased to believe that humans could do damage through ‘uncanny, non-physical means’. Although it was as late as 1782 that the last witch was executed in Europe, in Switzerland, trials in early modern Europe were rare. Despite statutes against magic continuing to be passed after 1782, witchcraft was not considered ‘real’ but treated as fraud or superstition.¹¹⁵ There is little indication that seventeenth century Europeans arriving in South Africa ‘believed’ in witches. The very possibility became increasingly slight as time progressed. As science became more established, European observers thought less in terms of real witchcraft and more of primitive people holding primitive beliefs. Colonial attitudes were frequently disparaging of Khoisan ignorance, or of exploitative charlatan healers, and apparent Khoisan mystical beliefs were derided in much the same way that educated Europeans derided the beliefs and practices of European peasants.

¹¹⁴ Hodgen, *Early Anthropology*, p. 26.

¹¹⁵ R. Hutton, *The Triumph of the Moon: A History of Modern Pagan Witchcraft* (Oxford, 1999), pp.132, 379.

On their arrival in southern Africa the early ethnographers looked at the Khoisan with preformed ideas of what was religious, superstitious and medical. Details of exactly what the seventeenth century observers saw in relation to dance are nowhere extensive. Despite this lack of detail, however, it is clear that the dances did not appear medical. In the previous section I laid out primary areas of interest and overlap between European medicine and Khoisan practice. The healing dance that has appeared since Gordon in the 1770s has involved all manner of actions which did not appear necessarily medical to seventeenth century eyes.

Before proceeding to the history of the dance, in order to better understand what sorts of phenomena observers of Khoisan healing dances may have witnessed - if the dances existed - I shall briefly describe a generalised contemporary dance scenario. The description is based around my own experience of Ju/'hoan and Hai//om dance. It is explained within contemporary anthropological paradigms of understanding and its details comply with material from 'healing dances' as identified and described from the late nineteenth century onwards.

Whilst reading the recent account of dance it is valuable to bear in mind that it is these sorts of details that have been interpreted as evidence, not only for Bushmen shamanism, but for a less clearly defined, burgeoning idea of Bushmen spirituality. The notion of Bushman spirituality has been particularly promoted over the last fifteen years or so, within a New Age celebration of indigenous peoples and the growth of 'eco-tourism', which has latched onto the idea of the ecologically adapted Bushmen. Katz's book, *Healing*, despite being a very careful presentation of the healing dance and associated ideas of spirituality, must be seen as a contributory factor to an increasingly popular public presentation of Bushmen as a 'deeply spiritual' people, in 'spiritual harmony with nature'.¹¹⁶ Katz clearly did not suggest that there was a ready translation of the culturally loaded idea of European spirituality, but his book helped identify elements that came to be seen as spiritual.

Dances are normally, though not exclusively, held at night and take place around a large fire. They may last all night, though increasingly run for only a few hours. It tends to be the women that sing and clap and the men that dance and heal, although it is certainly not uncommon for women also to dance and heal. The women sit shoulder to shoulder, or sometimes stand, facing the fire. They sing cycles of songs which are known as good healing songs and through their singing and very rhythmic clapping,

¹¹⁶ See for example forthcoming: Rupert Isaacson, 'The Healing Land.' 4th Estate (see Internet 5/1/03: www.travelintelligence.net/wsd/articles/art_63.html); Internet (5/1/03) Kindred Spirit magazine (www.kindredspirit.co.uk.) "The UK's leading guide for body mind and spirit"; Internet (5/1/03): www.biztravel.com/TRAVEL/SIT/sit_pages/7978.html

encourage healers to dance with increasing intensity and commitment. The dancers move in a circle around the ring of women, dancing in stamping movements, sometimes emphasised by the attachment of moth cocoon rattles to their ankles. As the healers dance it brings out the healing capacity within them. After a short period a healer will enter the centre of the circle where he may continue to dance or begin to stagger. Imminently, the dancer collapses dramatically. This collapse is explained as the result of the healing 'energy', referred to as *tssó* amongst Nharo and *n/um* amongst Ju/'hoan, having risen, or 'boiled', up through the healer's body from the lower abdomen to his head. Shortly following collapse, the dancer is helped to his feet by individuals who play the role of assistant, so that he may begin the curing process.

Moving round those assembled the healer begins healing by applying his hands, or the top of his head or his sweat, usually from under his armpits, on some if not all present, returning repeatedly to those deemed most in need of help. The sickness is often described as being pulled from the 'patient' into the healer, whereupon it runs up his arms to be expelled through a perceived opening at the junction of the neck and shoulders, or at the top of the head. In other cases the application of the sweat is itself deemed the prime healing mechanism. Alternatively again, objects such as glass and stone are removed by hand or sucked by mouth from the sick and placed in a pouch to be disposed of later. At some time during the healing dance, healers may seem to converse with the air. Healers describe that it is the dead people, or a supernal entity, that makes people sick and these entities can be seen in the darkness surrounding the dance. Healers talk, shout and sometimes rush aggressively into the darkness imploring these beings to leave the sick people alone. A Nharo healer, //Haisa !Noodoeb, described how: '*//Gawaba* is close, sitting in the dark, and throws grass at them'. He continued:

if someone is sick in the whole body, the traditional healers come together and sing and dance to find out. In the trance they go to heaven in the wind and take *//Gawaba*. If you die your heart goes to heaven, if sick your heart goes there too, so the healers go there and bring it back, they then take out the *//Gawaba* in the person. It is the *//Gawaba* that makes you sick. [My Nharo translator readily translated *//Gawaba* as 'the Devil'.]¹¹⁷

A Ju/'hoan healer, Cwi Cucga, also spoke of healers in trance encountering dead people. Cwi told me that:

when you are healing you collapse and the dead people put you on an animal. You go to the dead peoples' village and they want to leave you there. You can climb on any animal, giraffe, oryx, you can also go there by walking on a string.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ 96

¹¹⁸ 85

Healing dances might include frenzied dancing, shaking, possible collapse, the rubbing of a person's head or back onto another. Healers apply shaking hands to patients and emit stylised cries of apparent pain. Some healers additionally blow in the ears of participants, beat themselves and others with 'fly whisks', rub *sâi* on the gathered people, gather hot coals in their hands, rub smouldering branches on their heads and run off shouting into the night.

Even in the seventeenth century very few of these actions would have even vaguely fitted within the remit of Europe's classical medical heritage. This is, however, far from saying that such practices would not have been recognisable – they were just not 'medical'. These sorts of phenomena would, on the whole, have much more likely been associated with religious or superstitious folk ideas than typical practices of the apothecary, physician or surgeon. The ingredients of the Khoisan healing dance if not appearing conventionally 'medical' may, therefore, through the early colonial period, have been more readily associated with particularly religious healing in regard to the practice of laying on of hands, faith healing or healing through trance or divine inspiration. Similarly the dance may have appeared essentially magical, or more likely 'cunning', containing as it did elaborate performance in mysterious settings with magicians or charlatans drawing out solid or invisible objects from human bodies.

Having suggested how un-medical the dance may have looked in the seventeenth century, it is worth emphasising just where distance did and did not lie between visible Khoisan practice and seventeenth century medical practices. One potential and significant arena of overlap concerns sucking. Grevenbroek draws attention to a medical context of sucking that implies if it were observed in the dance, it could have been recognised as medical:

Angry humours, inflations, inflammations, tumours and other swellings they treat by sucking with their mouths as successfully as our physicians by cupping. I am informed by the parents that a European girl scarcely ten years old was treated in this way by a native woman who managed to suck from the pudenda a stone the size of a bean.¹¹⁹

In 1557, in England, Margaret Stothard put her lips to her sick child's mouth, 'and made such chirping and sucking that the mother of the said child thought that she had the heart of it out, and was sore affrighted'.¹²⁰ This sort of sucking practice must have looked remarkably similar to Khoisan sucking of objects causing sickness. Sucking had a European context and one that almost undoubtedly persisted in a folk context into the seventeenth century.

¹¹⁹ Schapera ed., *Early Cape*, p. 245.

¹²⁰ K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (Middlesex 1971), p.219.

The unfolding history of Khoisan healing dances suggests that the identification of a healing dance relied on more than simply observing a particular phenomenon. Often nineteenth century missionaries provide accounts of dances they observed which contain all the sorts of details found in contemporary healing dances. These missionaries did not, however, interpret what they saw as healing ceremonies.

Before Gordon it is impossible to say that Khoisan were categorically undertaking healing dances, the evidence simply does not exist. There is, however, enough in seventeenth century details to suggest the possibility that healing dances were a part of Khoisan life, but were simply not understood in that manner by early observers. Early ethnographers were clearly confused by what they saw. In the absence of any visible Khoisan religious cultural and physical architecture, the dance became interpreted as evidence for primitive religion. This religious association was a part of the wider discourse of the savage as outlined previously. From seventeenth century depictions of dance into those of the twentieth century, an ongoing polemic has existed linking dance with depravity and physical, moral and religious degeneration. In 1683 Cowley, for instance, noted: 'This day four of the natives came down to the city, dancing naked, and offering their wives to the Hollanders for little bits of tobacco. They were the filthiest men I ever saw...'.¹²¹

Seaman Dampier provided an account of Hottentot dancing that is typical of details given by both fleeting and longer-term seventeenth and earlier eighteenth century observers of Khoisan.

Their Religion, if they have any, is wholly unknown to me; for they have no Temple nor Idol, nor any place to worship that I did see or hear of. Yet their mirth and nocturnal pastimes at the New and full of the Moon, lookt [sic] as if they had some Superstition about it. For at the Full especially they sing and dance all night, making a great noise [...]. They traced to and fro promiscuously, often clapping their hands and singing aloud. Their Faces were sometimes in the East, sometimes to the West: neither did I see any motion or gesture that they use when their Faces were toward the Moon, more than when their backs were toward it.¹²²

Dampier's account highlights how early ethnographers situated dancing in tentative suggestions of Hottentot superstition, if not religion. Dampier demonstrates the classical legacy of drawing the foreign in terms of comparison. He took lack of familiar signs of religion as evidence against the presence of indigenous religion. Dampier engaged with a very common theme of the day, that Hottentots dance in the moonlight and seemed to hold a superstitious reverence for the moon. He remains, however,

¹²¹ Cowley, *The Voyage*, p.455.

¹²² Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World*, p. 541

remarkably questioning. In his comment, 'they dance to and fro promiscuously', he plays on images of the dancing pagan savage.

Kolb thought Hottentot moon worship evidence for the primitive nature of Hottentots and their Jewish origins. In identifying Jewish origins he repeated well known links from ancient history connecting Jews with moon worship. Kolb thought moon worship had 'enter'd into the Divine Worship in Times as early as the Flood'.¹²³ This Hottentot Jewish link became commonplace. Grevenbroek believed it was because of their Jewish roots that Hottentots practiced circumcision and testicle removal, and that it was ultimately from the Jews that Hottentots 'derived all their sacerdotal and sacrificial rites'.¹²⁴

In 1672 Hoffman, like Dampier, demonstrates bemusement with Hottentot dance and an interest in the question of its relationship with religion:

the men passed the whole night doing strange and wonderful posturings, with leaping, hopping and dancing; but the women made a continual hand clapping and did other such rare antics, and sang only ha, ho, Ho, Ho, until one almost lost hearing and sight because of the terrible noise [...] Whether this is religion I do not know.¹²⁵

Hoffman's description gives a further indication of the sort of dance details typically recorded by early ethnographers. Slight as these details are, they certainly comply with contemporary healing dance practices although the dance could just as easily have been serving other purposes. Despite Hoffman's transcription of the women's singing being undoubtedly simple, it also carries a remarkable suggestion of the memorable noise associated with modern Bushmen dances.

European observers associated dance with religion partly because of the absence of familiar religious paraphernalia and partly because dance involved ambiguous behaviour that was easily read as signs of worship. Dampier hints at this in his curiosity as to whether Hottentots made gestures or motions when facing the moon. Elsewhere he is less circumspect about the relationship with the moon and gives the impression that Hottentots are praying to it:

if the moon is seen again (the new moon) they crowd together, making merry the whole night, dancing, jumping, and singing; clasping their hands together, and also murmuring some words.¹²⁶

¹²³ Kolb, *Present State*, p. 98.

¹²⁴ Grevenbroek, 'An Elegant Account', p.209.

¹²⁵ Cited by Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 40.

¹²⁶ Cited by Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, 37.

Herport (1669) was more direct on the matter of Hottentot worship: ‘their religion or divine service is addressed to the sun and the moon, which they honour and pray to’. He noted moon worship involved drums, singing and shouting around a fire at night.¹²⁷

Chidester suggests accounts of Hottentots dancing and worshipping the moon were common enough in early ethnographies almost to be considered epitomes.¹²⁸ Despite many of the repetitious dance descriptions probably having been ‘pirated’, to use Elphick’s word, there is no reason to suppose that Hottentots did not dance, often under moonlight, and whilst doing so address either unseen things outside of the dance, such as dead people, or natural phenomena, particularly the moon or stars. Early observers do not seem to have been sensitive to the fact that this talking might have related to a different sort of relationship with the unseen, or with the physical world, other than ‘religious’ in a familiar sense. The link between words said in dance and religious prayer was particularly reinforced by George Schmidt, a member of the Moravian Mission sent to the Cape in 1737 and the first missionary amongst the Khoikhoi. In reference to the Hessaquas, Schmidt reported: ‘these natives celebrate an anniversary; as soon as these stars appear [...].The people of the kraal will assemble to dance and to sing. The chorus always sing: O Tiqua, our Father above our heads, give rain to us’.¹²⁹ The resemblance to the Lord’s Prayer is probably more a reflection of Schmidt’s bias than good ethnography.

The classical legacy behind the ethnographic search for religion, encouraged looking for evidence of devotion, good or evil, and establishing indigenous names, or equivalents, for God and the Devil. The difficulty of interpreting Khoisan belief within European notions of religion is more than evident across the colonial ethnographic record. As early as 1655 Müller was walking along False Bay, east of the Cape, when he came across a group of women lying down on a stone and pointing up at the sky. Müller concluded they seemed to be making an offering to God, ‘Hette hie’.¹³⁰ This mythical figure is a persistent feature of ethnography and Khoi ideas associated with *Hette hie* are intimately related to ideas found in Khoi and San medicine. In view of this, *Hette hie* requires a small diversion. Consideration of how ethnographers have encountered and thought about *Hette hie* equally says much about the construction of ethnographic understanding and the slippery nature of Khoi concepts.

Müller’s encounter led him to believe *Hette hie* was God. Van Riebeeck had a similar experience wherein he came across two Hottentot women lying on a big stone by the road. Each was holding a

¹²⁷ Cited by Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 40.

¹²⁸ Ibid.

¹²⁹ Cited by Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 43.

¹³⁰ Cited by Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 36

green twig. Through questioning, he concluded the twigs were a sacrifice, *Hettie hie*.¹³¹ During his travels, Alexander came across 'a hole which was supposed to be inhabited by Heije Eibeb, or the devil'.¹³² In 1856 Andersson recorded that when Hottentots passed the grave of 'Heitjeebib' they threw offerings at it. Andersson was unsure whether *Heitjeebib* or *Heitjekobib* was 'a deity, a goblin, or merely a deified ancestor'.¹³³ By the time of Andersson, this Khoi entity has been variously thought of as god, the devil, a sacrifice or some other mythical or deified figure.

Theophilus Hahn's (1881) interpretation of *Hettie hie* is both distinctive and informative. He observed that 'Heitsi-eibib', was still 'adored and worshipped' over Great Namaqualand. Hahn did not believe *Heitsi-eibeb* was god or the devil in a clear equivalent sense, although he believed he was worshipped. Hahn split the name *Heitsi-eibeb* into two roots, *hei* and *ei*. Through linguistic analysis he proposed *Heitsi-eibeb* did not mean 'to send a message' as some others had suggested, but, 'One who has the appearance of a tree'. He based this conclusion upon *Hei* meaning 'anything that has a wooden nature. We have thus hei-b, a pole, a stick [...] hei-s, fem., a tree'. The second root of the name, *ei*, Hahn identified as meaning 'face, appearance, likeness'. Hahn elaborated that in fact what was being referred to was the magnificent *Dawn Tree*, or the rising sun, with its 'beautiful beams and rays shooting up from a central point like the gigantic branches of a magnificent tree'.¹³⁴ Hahn recognised a notable characteristic of *Heitsi-eibeb* was his ability to change form. One form he took was the moon. Hahn traced an old Khoikhoi myth regarding *Heitsi-eibeb* as the moon and his relationship with his mother and wife, the sun. Hahn interpreted the incestuous liaison as a story about the waxing and waning of the moon and sun and essentially a story about growing big and small again, of birth and rebirth. Hahn tied this link with the moon to the long ethnographic record of moon worship, which he saw as fundamental to Khoikhoi belief.¹³⁵

Hahn's association of *Heitsi-eibeb* with rebirth is echoed in Laidler's understanding of the entity. Laidler (1923 c.) interpreted van Riebeeck's story as indicating the roadside stone was called *Hettie hie*. He noted Grevenbroek (1695) had observed bark offerings being left at a stone as if at an altar. Laidler connected van Riebeeck's stone to Grevenbroek's altar, and both in turn to fertility rites.¹³⁶ Despite this connection between *Heitsi eibeb* and fertility, Laidler concluded that *Heitsi eibeb* was the name of the Hottentot ancestral chiefs that led the Hottentots into southern Africa. The chiefs, he

¹³¹ van Riebeeck cited by P. W. Laidler, 'Manners, Medicine and Magic of the Hottentots', UCT, MS;BCS401 (1923?), pp. 184-185.

¹³² Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery*, pp. 122, 253.

¹³³ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, pp. 253, 327.

¹³⁴ T. Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 134.

¹³⁵ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, pp. 132-132.

¹³⁶ Laidler, 'Manners, Medicine', pp. 184-5.

observed, are buried around the Western Kalahari in cairns of stones and Nama passers by place offerings on their graves.¹³⁷

Barnard notes that piles of stones still exist throughout Namibia and South Africa, which are referred to as graves of *Haitsi-aibib* [sic] and Nama and Damara place stones and other sacrifices at the graves to allow them safe passage on their journeys.¹³⁸ Barnard links these graves to the death and rebirth of *Haitsi-aibib*, as described in a Khoikhoi myth wherein *Haitsi-aibib*, a mythological figure, dies, is buried, born again and continues to wander the countryside. This association with *Haitsi-aibib* and rising from the grave, or rebirth, was central to Hahn's link between *Heitsi-eibeb* and the moon, //Khāb. Hahn proposed the word //Khāb was a derivative of the root //khā, meaning 'the same again'.¹³⁹ Hahn thought *Heitsi-eibeb* and the moon synonymous with *Tsui-//goab*, the Khoekhoe supreme being. All three entities, Hahn noted, promised immortality to men. They all fought with bad beings and killed enemies of their people. They could change shape, disappear and reappear. Similarly to Hahn, Barnard concludes that *Tsûi-//goab*, *Haitsi-aibib* 'and perhaps the Moon', are virtually interchangeable ideas.¹⁴⁰ Carstens (1975), however, although he recognised an overlap of ideas concerning *Tsûi-//goab* and *Haitsi-aibib* at a mythological level, argued for a distinction between Nama belief and practice. Carstens proposed *Tsûi-//goab* operates in a collective sphere of influence whereas *Haitsi-aibib* operates in an individual sphere.¹⁴¹ He moreover thought the moon was not worshipped, but its phases determined periods of sacrifice to *Tsui //Goab*.¹⁴²

Through her analysis of Khoisan folklore, Schmidt (1986) concludes that *Haitsi-eibeb* is the consummate trickster figure whose identity is extraordinarily elusive.¹⁴³ Guenther (1999) further identifies this trickster figure not just as *Heiseb*, or *Heitsi-eibeb*, a jackal figure amongst the Damara, Nama and Hai//om,¹⁴⁴ but, a mythological figure also present in Bushmen groups under a very broad range of guises, including /Kaggen of the historic Cape /Xam and *Kaoxa* of the Namibian and Botswanan Ju'hoansi.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 187.

¹³⁸ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 258.

¹³⁹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁰ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 259.

¹⁴¹ Carstens 'Some Implications of Change'.

¹⁴² Ibid., p. 79.

¹⁴³ S. Schmidt, 'Heiseb-Trickster und Gott der Nama und Dama in Südwestafrika (Namibia)', R. Vossen and K. Keuthmann (eds.), *Contemporary Studies on Khoisan*, 2, QKF 5 (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 205-256.

¹⁴⁴ Barnard draws attention to the similar role of the trickster jackal in Khoekhoe and Bushman mythology: Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 258.

¹⁴⁵ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 97.

Ethnographers have struggled to pin down the identity of *Haitsi-aibib* and the existence of Khoisan moon worship. Schapera thought Bushman ‘had a religious cult’ of worship of heavenly bodies, including the moon, and Hottentots ‘formerly invoked the Moon’.¹⁴⁶ Although Hahn looked for familiar religious worship within Khoi society, his linking of *Heitsi-eibeb* with *Tsui-//goab* and the moon, demonstrates his understanding of the amorphous and flexible nature of beliefs at the heart of Khoi ideas. This understanding was exceptional for his time, but has since become essential to anthropological interpretation of the Khoisan. Carstens seems keen to impose a relatively rigid structure on Nama ideas and downplays the significance of the moon. Barnard contrastingly sides with Hahn’s interpretation, proposing that ethnographers viewing the moon as a separate entity have failed to see the moon relative to the structural position of other entities or to explore the ‘cosmo-semantic or syntactic context of indigenous statements about the Moon’.¹⁴⁷

Recent anthropological understanding of *Haitsi-aibib* by Schmid and Guenther points to the flexibility of the Khoisan notion. Barnard similarly emphasises the need to understand the moon, and by implication, *Haitsi-aibib*, embedded in a Khoi world of interrelated ideas. Central to understanding *Tsûi-//goab*, *Haitsi-aibib* and *//Khāb*, the moon, is the notion of rebirth and rising from a dormant state.

Barnard observes that Khoisan beliefs and mythology travel across linguistic, cultural and environmental boundaries.¹⁴⁸ The reason this seems possible, is the predisposition of the various peoples to thinking about phenomena in similar ways. The ideas bound up in *Haitsi-aibib* run out into pan-Khoisan ideas of growth of healing energy, and spirits and people waking. Buchu and *Sâi*’s ability to stimulate and pacify are characteristics that are conceptually linked with the rising and falling of the sun and moon. This way of thinking that requires relinquishing clean ideas of equivalence over religious figures or physical phenomena, eluded ethnographers before Hahn and possibly Bleek.

In view of the lack of sophistication of early ethnography, ascertaining the changing nature of Khoisan ‘religious’ ideas is highly problematic. Carstens proposes that missionary teachings were similar enough to traditional Nama belief, that a radical change in the Nama concept of God did not come about from missionary contact. He notes that through the spread of Christianity *Tsûi-//goab* moved from an omnipresent to an omnipotent god. He associates the demise of belief in *Haitsi-aibib* with the rise of personal property, the absorption of *Haitsi-aibib* related ideas within Christian beliefs and new personalised concepts of magic.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, pp. 177, 375.

¹⁴⁷ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 254.

¹⁴⁸ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 261.

¹⁴⁹ Carstens ‘Some Implications of Change’, pp. 93-4.

Although colonialism has undoubtedly influenced traditional belief, Christianity must not, however, be thought to have simply shuffled out traditional ideas. As noted, Suro told me, ‘you have one god, we have two’. Guenther notes that even the newest Christian Nharo flock still have doubts about much they have learned from evangelists.¹⁵⁰

Despite the limits of early ethnographic penetration, Müller and van Riebeeck encountered *Hettie hie*, a figure still familiar to the Khoi, during the earliest Cape colonial period. Other observers in the seventeenth century equally came across entities still familiar today. These entities were linked to observed ‘ritual’ and like *Hettie hie*, manoeuvred into positions of uneasy equivalence. Grevenbroek thought *Khourrou* or *Thikkwa* was the Supreme God and he thought *Damoh* was the Devil.¹⁵¹ *Thikkwa*, or derivatives and variations of the name, commonly appeared as a translation of God in ethnographies through to at least the early nineteenth century.¹⁵² Kolb variously listed *Tiquoa* and *Tiquoa Gouna* for God and *Touqua* and *Chamouna* for the Devil.¹⁵³ The similarity of *Tiquoa* to *Touqua* is self evident. Kolb thought *Touqua* the source of all ‘plagues...pain and vexation,’ and stated it was *Touqua* who taught ‘the Wicked Hottentots the cursed Art of Witchcraft’.¹⁵⁴ In 1804 Van der Kemp ambiguously thought that *Thuike*, the Hottentot name for God, literally signified, ‘one who induces pain’.¹⁵⁵ Which entity, and whether they were good or bad and the source of illness, remained unclear.

The confusing nature of mythological figures and religious equivalence is apparent in missionary Schmidt’s 1737 appraisal of Hessequa religion. Schmidt thought they ‘seemed to believe nothing but there is a Great Lord of All, whom the call *Tui-bqua*, and a devil called *Gbauna*, of whom however they do not seem afraid’.¹⁵⁶

Early observers were not only trying to insert their religious categorisation on unsuitable ground, but they had to record their findings with no established orthography or training in phonology, in the sense of the discipline that materialised from the late eighteenth century onwards.¹⁵⁷ What is more, they not only had to accommodate their ears to unusual speech sounds but to dialectic variation of those sounds.

¹⁵⁰ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 120.

¹⁵¹ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, pp. 380, 387.

¹⁵² See Nienaber, *Hottentots* (Pretoria, 1963), pp. 280-285.

¹⁵³ Cited in Nienaber, *Hottentots*, pp. 256, 281.

¹⁵⁴ Kolb, *Present State*, pp.

¹⁵⁵ Cited in Nienaber, *Hottentots*, p. 281.

¹⁵⁶ Cited in Nienaber, *Hottentots*, p. 281; cf. Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 387.

¹⁵⁷ Referring to Sir William Jones, the English scholar who argued that Greek, Latin and Sanskrit were related languages derived from a common source: G.W. Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, (New York and Oxford, 1987), pp.22-23.

Despite this difficult intellectual legacy, Hahn and Schapera arrived at conclusions regarding the significance of early ethnographic names of Khoikhoi deities. *Touquoa* and variations of it, Hahn and Schapera related to *Tsuni-//Goab* or *Tsûi-//Goab* and, *Gouna*, and variations of it, to *//Gaunab*.¹⁵⁸ Barnard identifies *Tsûi-//Goab* as a good but not omnipotent Nama creator and *//Gâuab*, an alternative name to *//Gaunab* still in use, as his rival. This pairing is only sometimes clearly opposed in terms of good and bad. Barnard suggests *Tsûi-//Goab* and *//Gâuab* have a collective sphere of influence over Khoekhoe people. On a personal level of influence the pairing is replicated through *Heitsi Eibeb* and *≠Gama-≠gorbib*, the latter a less prominent mythical figure of bad luck.¹⁵⁹

The etymology of *Tsûi-//Goab* has long been a subject of interest. Many Khoisan theorists have proposed a breakdown of the word into ‘wounded knee’, having justified the meaning through an apposite mythological story. Hahn undertook an unusually detailed analysis of the name based on two roots *tsû*, meaning sore, or with pain and metaphorically painful and difficult, and *//goa*, meaning to walk, to approach and metaphorically, approaching. Through associating *tsû* with a wound and blood red, Hahn arrives at the meaning, ‘the approaching wound’ or ‘redness’, and hence, the ‘Red Dawn’.¹⁶⁰ Hahn additionally observed that *Tsûi-//Goab*’s counterfoil, *//Gaunab*, was associated with pain, misery and death and was based on the root *//Gau*, ‘to destroy’. Hence the name literally meant ‘the destroyer’. He associated the destroyer with the night who brought ‘sleep’, *//ô*, or ‘death’, *//ôm*. The same root, *//ô*, also provides the word *//ô-b*, meaning ‘death’, ‘illness’, ‘disease’. In the pairing of *Tsûi-//Goab* and *//Gaunab*, Hahn identified that the names ‘were intended for nothing else than to illustrate metaphorically the change of day and night’.¹⁶¹

As noted, Hahn concluded that *Heitsi eibeb* had much in common with *Tsûi-//Goab* and both in turn were related to the moon. All three came from the east, alter their shape and disappear and reappear. They are all associated with cyclic rebirth. Schapera remained unconvinced. He focussed on information from George Schmidt and Hoernlé that pointed to *Tsûi-//Goab*, not just as the creator of all things, but the bringer of rain who was sometimes openly worshipped.¹⁶² He also drew on Hahn’s own evidence that ‘if a heavy thunderstorm is approaching and the country is resounding from the roar of the thunder [...] they also assemble for a */gei*, and while dancing, sing the following’. The following Hahn referred to was a ‘Hymn of the Thunder’, which included the lines, ‘Thou brave, loud speaking !Guru, Talk softly please’.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁸ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 42; Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 387.

¹⁵⁹ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 257-258.

¹⁶⁰ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, pp. 123-124.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 125-126.

¹⁶² Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, pp. 377-381.

¹⁶³ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 59.

There are a number of points I want to pull out of this analysis. Firstly, perhaps Van der Kemp was not entirely wrong in associating *Thuike*, the essentially good and creative *Tsûi-//Goab*, with pain. A characteristic common to both *Tsûi-//Goab* and *Heitsi-eibeb* is their status as powerful magicians.¹⁶⁴ Hahn provides the earliest mention of a Hottentot religious dance called a */geis*, the name used by contemporary Hai//om for a trance healing dance and by Damara for a celebratory dance in which people also enter trance.¹⁶⁵ At a healing dance participants dance until the healing force wakes up in them. When it is truly awake they scream with pain. In Nharo the force is called *tssô*. Hahn observed that the name *Tsûi-//Goab* derived from *tsû*, ‘painful’, ‘difficult’ and *//goa*, ‘approaching’. Regardless of whether the two words, *tssô* and *tsû* are etymologically linked, which they perhaps could be, the idea implied may not be ‘Red Dawn’, as Hahn concluded, but a translation offered by Kronlein in his Nama-German dictionary (1889) ‘painfully-invoked one’.¹⁶⁶ This idea complies with Van der Kemp’s ‘one who induces pain’. Dancing could therefore be summoning painful *Tsûi-//Goab* within oneself.

A further issue to arise from this discussion concerns the significance of rain and thunder to not just the Nama and Bushmen, as anthropologists have recognised, but the Damara. There has long been evidence of Hottentot links with rain and storms. In 1671 Dapper drew attention to a Cape Khoikhoi belief in one who sent rain, made the wind blow and brought heat and cold. He further claimed that the Hottentots knew how to make rain, and prevent the wind from blowing.¹⁶⁷ Grevenbroek and Valentijn identified *Khourrou* as a name for God.¹⁶⁸ Schapera interprets the word as a variation of *!Gurub*, meaning thunder.¹⁶⁹ In the early twentieth century Hoernlé encountered Nama rain ceremonies.¹⁷⁰ To date though, Damara ‘religious’ relationships with rain have received little attention. Damara trance healers, known as */nanu aob*, or rainmen, dance to ‘get the rain spirit’. Hahn noted that the cloud */Nanub* was often addressed ‘O cloud, our Lord, let rain’, and, as mentioned, if there was imminent thunder and lightning Hahn stated Hottentots would hold a */geis* and talk to the thunder.¹⁷¹ */Geis* is a word still used by Damara for a dance, although it seems used more for celebratory dances than healing dances. Dancing for the rain spirit, or in another sense *Tsûi-//Goab*, although the name is not mentioned, is a part of modern rural Damara life. Discussion of Damara rainmen is returned to in chapter four.

¹⁶⁴ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 377.

¹⁶⁵ Schmidt, ‘Present day’.

¹⁶⁶ Cited by Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 377.

¹⁶⁷ Cited by Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 37.

¹⁶⁸ Nienaber, *Hottentots*, p. 284.

¹⁶⁹ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 380.

¹⁷⁰ A. W. Hoernlé, ‘A Hottentot Rain Ceremony’, *Bantu Studies*, 1:2 (1922), pp. 3-4.

¹⁷¹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 59.

A final point to make returns to Hahn's identification of *Heitsi eibeb* with a woody growing thing, a tree. This point does not directly relate to the early sources but is highly relevant to the current discussion and to subsequent material in the thesis. Hahn followed a Max Müller-style word analysis in his identification of a tree with the dawn. Despite Hahn making associations that others might think opportunistic, his word analysis seems to support ideas that came independently from my research. Illness for many Khoisan is said to come from the supernal deity, such as //Gâuab in the case of the Damara. This deity fires arrows or sticks - wooden and growing or living - into victims. When these sticks are lying down in the body they cannot be removed. When standing upright they can be pulled out. Similarly the healing power that many Khoisan talk of 'waking up' or 'boiling' when they dance is sometimes referred to as again, arrows or sticks. Some Khoisan call it /gais. Hahn noted that an alternative name for *Heitsi eibeb* was *Heigeib*, which he translated as Great Tree from *hei* tree and *gei* great. Elsewhere he records that *gei* also has a sense of 'grow' or 'develop'.¹⁷² The /geis dance is therefore a place where /gais are 'woken up' and to become effective they 'stand up', or 'grow up'. In this sense of appearing and disappearing, growing and lying back down to sleep again, the very essence of the healing dance seems to echo the ideas of transformation, fertility and growth that run through the Khoekhoe cosmology and strongly interlock with many features of the wider San ideational world.

Early ethnographers identified key aspects of Khoisan belief and practice that have remained of persistent importance, such as dancing, the moon and divine or mythological figures. But the colonial gaze was slow to appreciate connections between ideas. Observation lacked sophistication because of the ongoing influence of classical ethnographic precedents and the blinkered search for readily translatable phenomena. The fluid and transformational nature of Khoisan ideas rendered them particularly hard to pin down.

The 'Appearance' of Healing

The first glimpse of an observer beginning to appreciate that there was something other than religion or superstition at stake in a dance type setting, comes from Johan Schreyer in 1688:

The sun was going down, when they made a small fire, which none of us might approach, and to ensure this they had kindled a separate fire for us. They seated themselves in a circle round the fire. The "doctor", after addressing himself to the sun with much gesticulation and talk, went up to the patient, who was lying completely naked on the ground, and begun to

¹⁷² Ibid, pp. 133, 142.

make water all over him, from the head down all over the body, until his flow had ceased; the other Hottentots, 7 or 8 in number, then faithfully followed his example¹⁷³

Whilst Schreyer's account does not deal specifically with a healing dance, it shows related practices of sitting around a fire and a man addressing the sun and carrying out some sort of treatment. Schreyer 'recognised' a medical treatment because there was clearly a patient, a man with an enlarged and very painful testicle. If the treatment had involved healing by touch to treat a non-visible problem and not the sensational act of urination, perhaps the medical nature of the occurrence would not have been so apparent. Although Schreyer draws attention to urination as a surprising treatment, it was none the less clearly a treatment, and the use of urine in healing settings was very probably not an entirely foreign idea to Schreyer, common as it had been to European traditions of healing.

Gordon's diaries (1777- 86) give the earliest recorded hint of a Bushmen healing ceremony. Gordon was an exceptional observer. Cullinan, one of Gordon's biographers, distinguished Gordon's southern African journeys as, 'the most remarkable and well documented of the time'. He spoke Hottentot and Xhosa and 'corresponded with great men in Europe - savants, scientists and statesmen'.¹⁷⁴ Part of Gordon's ability to bring new observations to the ethnographic arena undoubtedly came from the long and extensive nature of his travels. But what Gordon really contributed was a habit of moving away from repetition of received ideas. He used a keen enquiring eye coupled with his language skills to bring out new knowledge.

In 1777 Gordon commented on one dance he had observed:

The women clapped their hands as they sang, and one of them beat on a pot [...]. Their songs were the songs of the lion, the wolf, the eland and other animals, in which the qualities of each were extolled.¹⁷⁵

Gordon was clearly interested in the meaning of Hottentot singing and by translating song developed a new pragmatic approach to understanding the meaning of Hottentot dance. These songs that extolled the virtues of animals provide the first suggestion that songs, including dance songs, might not be prayers associated with moon worship or religion. In a contemporary context we might think of this praising as an encultured way of relating to the environment and carrying knowledge. Extolling animal qualities gives animals identities through which their personalities and habits can be better known. Unfortunately Gordon did not elaborate on his new findings. Contemporary Bushmen are known for

¹⁷³ Schreyer quoted by Schapera in, *Early Cape*, p.243.

¹⁷⁴ Cullinan (ed.), *R.J. Gordon*, pp. 15, 19.

¹⁷⁵ Raper and Boucher (eds.), *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p. 71.

the manner in which they recite animal qualities in the manner of a chant. Similarly, Damara informants from Purros, sang: ‘ the lion has a big head with a hairy body and eats raw meat’ and ‘ the ostrich jumps the net with its feet’.¹⁷⁶

It is perhaps testament to Gordon that the French ornithologist and naturalist le Vaillant, interpreted Hottentot dance partly through translation of song. Before le Vaillant had embarked on his 1780-85 travels, Gordon had offered him advice on how best to proceed.¹⁷⁷ Like Gordon, le Vaillant demonstrated both the ability and the will to talk and listen to Khoisan peoples in order to understand their culture. Writing in his typically corrective manner, Le Vaillant commented:

Had those authors, for instance, who have alleged that the Hottentots worship the moon, understood the meaning of the words which they chant whilst she shines, they would have observed that they address neither prayers, invocations, nor homage to that peaceful luminary. They would have understood that the subject of these songs is always something that has happened between them and the adjacent horde; and that, in the same way as the negroes do, they can sing a complete night on one subject, by repeating the words a thousand times over. They prefer night to day for this end, because it is cooler, and incites dancing and merriment.¹⁷⁸

In looking for meaning in Hottentot song both Gordon and le Vaillant reflected burgeoning scientific enquiry. Le Vaillant displayed particular ‘rationality’ in his comment that dances occurred at night because it was cooler. Sparrman, who arrived at the Cape in 1772, came to a similar conclusion.¹⁷⁹ The practice which le Vaillant observed, of repeating a refrain over and over again about something that has happened, is equally a feature of contemporary dances. I was quite surprised when I was told the words of a repeated Hai//om song accompaniment: ‘I take my donkey cart to Oshikati’.¹⁸⁰

Both Gordon and le Vaillant provided an exceptional level of detail regarding Dance.¹⁸¹ It was Gordon, however, who linked dance to healing. His account is rich and worth repeating at length. From his time in the Sand Mountains, Gordon related having seen an ‘old Hottentot witchdoctor’ healing and doctoring, and ‘practising magic on a youth after their fashion’. Gordon’s Hottentot helper, Itecki, thought the man used the language of ‘ Bushmen magicians ’. Gordon relates that the old healer:

made the youth come naked into his hut in the twilight [...] we went to sit beside the youth, who had a pain in his foot. He rubbed his thigh and his leg, and, holding his foot against his

¹⁷⁶ 43.

¹⁷⁷ Cullinan (ed.), *R.J. Gordon*, p. 16.

¹⁷⁸ le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior*, p. 54

¹⁷⁹ Sparrman, *A Voyage to the Cape of Good Hope*, p. 212.

¹⁸⁰ 66

¹⁸¹ See for example le Vaillant, *Travels into the Interior*, p. 54.

head, roared and growled like a lion and tiger. He then held his hands against the youth's head and heart and did this a few times, after which he sneezed three or four times in succession and, opening his hand, displayed some beetles which he said he had taken from the leg. First he rubbed some sheep fat on his leg, and rubbed himself with the rest. After that he fetched some thorn-tree or mimosa roots, bound together, which were hollow and in which were little stones rattling, and began his magic song, always sitting, but with many contortions of the body, beating on the ground with the bushes, often singing furiously and shaking his head, while his wife accompanied him, clapping her hands [...] When he stopped, wet with perspiration, I asked him several questions, but all I could get out of him was that *Tuiqua* (God) had taught him in a dream. Joubert said he must have been very afraid of me to have practised magic in my presence, since they say that things do not go well when a white skin is present, and that they had never been willing to do magic in front of him. I also pretended to be very serious, although I often almost burst out laughing at his cures and the fear of my Hottentots.¹⁸²

Gordon's account is remarkable for the new observations it includes. His details indicate the existence of healing practices that seem barely distinguishable from those carried out by Khoisan in contemporary Namibia. The rubbing of the afflicted limb on the healer's head, the healer removing objects causing sickness from the chest and head by using his hand and sneezing, the healer making growling noises; these are all features of contemporary healing ceremonies. Although the 'dance' involved the healer sitting with just his wife providing the clapping accompaniment, and does not accordingly fit the generalised description I provided earlier, very similar hut-based, small-scale dances are undertaken by contemporary Hai//om and other Bushmen. The fact that this dance was small in scale and, like Schreyer's, clearly involved a sick 'patient', was undoubtedly a contributing factor behind Gordon having identified this unfamiliar healing scenario for what it was. Ultimately though, a broad sense of scientific interest must take most of the credit.

In identifying that the healer was taught by *Tuiqua* in a dream, Gordon provides the first hint of the context or mechanism through which Hottentots, if Hottentot he was, became healers. Information regarding the role of the dream in Khoisan life does not reappear in Khoisan ethnography until Bleek's work. It is apparent that in *Tuiqua* Gordon was providing another alternative to Kolb's *Tiquoa*, the bringer of pain and teacher of witchcraft. This identification that *Tiqua* taught the contrary phenomena of witchcraft and healing further demonstrates the inappropriateness of European categorisation. It moreover supports the idea that it was, and perhaps is, *Tiquoa* or alternatively, *Tsûi-//Goab*, who is invoked or woken up in the dance. This role for *Tsûi-//Goab* is not however easily distinguishable from that of *Heitsi Eibeb* who also has a role in the dance.

¹⁸² Gordon, *Cape Travels*, p. 203.

Earlier I drew attention to Grevenbroek having been familiar with the idea of sucking out sickness causing agents from the body. If sucking had been a central feature of dances observed over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, than it seems quite reasonable to suspect the dance would have been thought of as medical. The connection does not, however, appear to have been made. As suggested, this might say more about observation than realities of Khoisan practice. Gordon seems to be the first to record sucking. In addition to the incident involving removal of sickness causing objects by hand, he gave the following account regarding Bushmen of the Doring River area:

I amused myself greatly with the Bushmen who were a pleasant people. I saw an old woman practising magic and snorting a devil or evil spirit - which she said she could see and looked like a cobra - out of her son's body, so that her nose bled. She staggered away with it as though she were drunk while another held her under the arm. She was swiftly given a stick with which she walked unassisted and struck the ground. She again snorted on her son, rubbed his stomach with buchu and also rubbed some buchu into the noses of several women who were sitting there as well.¹⁸³

This reference that could just as easily be describing contemporary Bushmen or Damara practice as that carried out two and a quarter centuries ago. Continuity of such behaviour is strongly indicated by its appearance in the ethnography in the interim period. Contemporary Bushmen and Damara healers, both in and out of the healing dance context, sniff sickness entities in and snort them out. Snorting out objects or entities was something recorded, using the description 'snoring', by Dorothea Bleek in the 1920s amongst the Angolan !Ku and earlier by Wilhelm Bleek amongst late nineteenth century /Xam 'sorcerers'. One /Xam informant related: 'Butterflies hurt us by entering our bodies, then a sorcerer snores us, he draws them out; he sneezes them out of his nostrils'.¹⁸⁴

What is particularly significant about Gordon's extract is the notion that a devil or evil spirit had entered a person's body and caused sickness. Contemporary Khoisan healers describe sucking out tiny animals, including lions and snakes, from the body. The healers I met all stated these were 'normal' but tiny animals. Gordon seems to have met something different, an actual spirit with an identity being the cause of sickness. This evidence supports the idea that Bushmen believed spirits could enter people, a point which does not resonate with the vast majority of contemporary Bushmen research. Post-1950s anthropological projections of Bushmen tend to disassociate them from ideas of spirits coming into their bodies. As I later examine, when illness is caused by an entity entering a Bushman, often described as an arrow that causes disease, this arrow or stick has been separated by anthropologists from the idea of spirit possession. My research identifies that the essence of animals is

¹⁸³ Gordon, *Cape Travels*, p. 216.

¹⁸⁴ D. Bleek, 'Bushmen of Central Angola', *Bantu Studies*, 3:2 (July 1928), 124; D. Bleek, 'Belief and Customs', *Bantu Studies*, 9:1 (March 1935), 3.

deliberately put into healers. One can have or possess the mamba for instance. This essence seems to very strongly overlap with the idea of a spirit. Gordon's information suggests that Bushmen healing did not slot as readily into the role of shamanism as anthropologists are wont to suggest.

Summary

European preconceptions and classical precedents shaped Khoisan ethnography of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Of particular influence was a persistent rhetoric of natives as dirty degenerates, moon worshippers and descendents of Jews. Equally significant, was a perceived closeness of relationship between 'natives' and their environment that encouraged an idea of rude health requiring little more than rude medicine. Over both centuries ethnographers were relatively good at recording what looked familiar. Certainly in the seventeenth century ethnographers moreover recognised medical skill and sometimes superior skill. As European medicine became more scientific, Khoisan medicine was increasingly viewed as primitive, although this distance was far more a phenomenon of the nineteenth century than earlier.

What was recognised as familiar in Khoisan medicine included use of herbal remedies, poultices and basic surgical procedures. What was not explainable or visible as medicine became interpreted within other European categories of interest, including particularly religion, superstition and witchcraft. Often treatments were described but done so in terms of useful treatment shrouded in superstitious ritual. This manner of ignoring the context and wider meaning of the entire 'treatment' ritual remained a persistent feature of ethnography well into the twentieth century. Behaviour that was unfamiliar or less familiar in European medical terms seems to have been recorded when it clearly related to an identifiable patient. Hence Schreyer identified group urination round a fire as a treatment method.

There is no clear evidence that healing dances took place in the seventeenth century. The earliest indication of the phenomenon is Gordon's observation of 1778. There is, however, much to suggest that prior to Gordon's observation Khoisan healing dances might have existed but not have stood out to a rather cursory or blinkered early ethnographic eye. At the very least, the dance descriptions given by early ethnographers indicate that recently recorded Bushman healing dances hold much in common with early Hottentot dances. Even the singing seems to hint of remarkable similarity. Contemporary healing trance dances often involve not just one 'patient' but the gathered members of the community. Poorly informed observers confronted with such dances may not have been aware of this phenomenon. The lack of an obvious patient to observers might therefore help explain why healing dances were not identified before Gordon. With no visible signs of religious expression, social or architectural,

Khoisan dances were focussed upon as evidence of religious devotion. This might again have diverted enquiry away from alternative interpretation.

By the later eighteenth century scientific travellers were drawing out more detailed ethnographic data from the field. This context of deeper enquiry seems enough reason, particularly in the proficient hands of Gordon, to account for the 'appearance' of the healing dance at this time.

It stands as testament to both the relative depth of observation achieved by early ethnographers and the continuity of Khoisan ideas, that the earliest enquirers identified supernal and mythological figures who remain familiar and recognisable in recent contexts. The limits of early ethnography are apparent in the confusion that clearly surrounded the roles attributed to these figures. It was not until ethnography became more sophisticated that the transformational and inchoate quality of Khoisan beliefs and ideas began to be recognised.

Although there is some evidence of ethnographers looking for ideas behind Hottentot practices, enquiry into ideas was seldom extensive or penetrating. Early ethnographers seem to have suggested, although the evidence is thin, that Khoisan thought illness was caused in a straightforward manner by natural phenomena. More clearly the divine entities were indicated as the cause. With Gordon's evidence comes a clear impression of sickness being caused by spirits. When ethnographers identified Khoisan reasoning behind treatments, it was not so much assumed that familiar humoral understanding underlay practice, although this was implied, but that Khoisan behaviour was understandable within European theory of the day.

Massage receives little direct comment in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This lack of interest reflects a 'straightforward' European understanding of massage. However, the extensive record of rubbing with various applications, often translated as medical ointments, does suggest that massage played an important role amongst Khoisan of this period and earlier.

At least in the context of the trance dance and shamanism, contemporary anthropologists and popular anthropologists promote notions of Bushman difference from Khoi. Early ethnography did not clearly distinguish Khoi from San and consequently encouraged ideas of homogeneity. Certain details were recorded that cast some perspective on the validity and nature of propositions of difference. Transformation of healers into animals is a key example of something played upon as a shamanic Bushman characteristic despite the phenomenon having been mentioned as early as 1695 by Grevenbroek in a Hottentot context and again, in a Nama context, by the missionary Moffat in the

early nineteenth century.¹⁸⁵ Equally, the identification by early ethnographers of Bushman spirit possession, pushes Bushmen towards the witchcraft camp and away from that of the benevolent shaman. What is more, these witchcraft ideas reflect underlying ideas of both Khoi and San cosmology and ontology. Kolb and Gordon pointed to magicians being taught by interaction with an entity. Contemporary Bushmen healers are known for travelling to the home of 'God' to learn healing songs or take back the heart of the sick. How different is this from Hottentots being taught by *Tsûi //Goab* in a dream or otherwise? The matter seems to come down to how Khoisan describe their interaction with the entity, whether 'god' comes to them through a dream of 'invocation', or whether they go to him.¹⁸⁶

In this chapter I have tried to emphasise the multiple meanings of phenomena in Khoisan life that point towards a particular way of thinking about and practicing medicine. Fat and buchu have multiple meanings related to knowledge of their intrinsic qualities, as do Khoisan supernal entities. An important part of this thinking rests in the way nouns are linked to verbs. Hahn pointed to *//goab* meaning knee and *//goa* meaning to walk or approach, something one does with the knee. Movement is, in this sense, an intrinsic quality of the knee. This idea is reminiscent of Lévy-Bruhl's animal form and function relationship. There seems a very real sense of having to think about walking as 'kneeing', as we think of bicycle and bicycling. The linguist Stopa recognised this same phenomenon. Speaking broadly of Bushmen language, Stopa commented 'the difference between verb and noun does not exist'.¹⁸⁷ Later I return to this idea through the work of Silberbauer.

In a Khoisan healing context, fat and, for example, particular ground up parts of a snake confer the intrinsic qualities of the snake into the recipient of 'medicine'. Anthropologists have moved towards similar ideas in the recognition of Bushmen 'possessing' potency of the eland, for example. The direct relationship between Khoikhoi supernal entities and natural phenomena points to sharing of intrinsic qualities. The sun and moon rise and set, *Haitsi-aibib* rises up and rests down in his graves. Things are known through what they do. People rise when the sun rises and lie down and sleep at night with the lowering of the sun. Sleep is like death. Trance is like sleep and death. Buchu makes blood vessels lie down but opens senses and wakes or inflames love; it holds the same primary qualities and components of life.

¹⁸⁵ Grevenbroek, 'An Elegant Account', p. 213; Moffat cited by T. Dederling, *Hate the Old and Follow the New* (Stuttgart, 1997), p. 44.

¹⁸⁶ For wider consideration of African relationships to dreaming see: M.C. Jedrej and Rosalind Shaw (eds.), *Dreaming, Religion & Society in Africa* (Leiden and New York, 1992).

¹⁸⁷ R. Stopa, *Structures of Bushman and its Traces in Indo-European*, (London, 1972), p. 43. Wilmsen points to the same phenomenon in Ju/'hoan: the verb *xhai*, 'to be wealthy' and the noun, *xhaiha*, 'master', 'wealthy person': E.N. Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago and London, 1989) p. 213.

This chapter has pointed to scientific travellers ‘finding’ the dance through pursuit of a new kind of observation. Many of the themes that the earlier scientific travellers engaged with become remoulded in the nineteenth century, particularly within the evangelical and self justificatory writing of missionaries. In the following chapter I examine how increasing familiarity with Khoisan peoples and widespread academic and popular interest in ‘primitive’ Khoisan, brings out new understanding of a very particular nature.

Chapter II

Vested Interests: From Missionaries to Professional Anthropology

It is too easy to talk of Gordon, le Vaillant, Sparrman, Thunberg, Burchell and other late eighteenth and early nineteenth century southern African 'scientific travellers', as if they were paid up members of a new science club with clear and strict rules of behaviour. Within a picture of ethnographic homogeneity, Pratt has argued that such post-Linnaean scientific travellers thought so little of natives and indigenous knowledge that they effectively removed the role of indigenous people from the creation of ethnographic data.¹ Beinart has responded by drawing attention to the diversity of personalities that lay behind the classification, domination and exploitation of the imperial project. Beinart identifies that a sense of racial difference underlay colonial observations of this period, but there was variety in the extent of the scientific travellers distance from, and sympathy with, Khoikhoi peoples. Beinart suggests necessity made interaction and cooperation between the travellers and their Khoikhoi guides unavoidable. Furthermore, interaction with indigenous people came from genuine interest. Sparrman, for example, was keen to learn of Khoisan knowledge and techniques regarding uses of plants and animals. Burchell was particularly interested in Khoisan botanical knowledge. For these enquirers at least, as well as Gordon and le Vaillant, Khoisan people were, as in earlier times, a key part of the ethnographic project.²

Pratt's proposition that ethnography changed with the arrival of the scientific travellers is not clearly applicable to the production of Khoisan medical knowledge. There is a consistency of interest by colonial observers in Khoisan peoples and interaction with Khoisan, before, through and after 1800. With each distinctive writer, working within different contexts, different emphases emerge, but what is written remains conceptualized within a relatively consistent and bounded pragmatic / superstitious dichotomy. This consistency persists despite an incremental unveiling of healing knowledge. Although observation covers more ground and penetrates deeper, it is not until the later nineteenth century and a particular new interest in the primitive mind, especially from philologists, that a significant qualitative change in ethnography is manifested. Hahn's work is indicative of new, and sympathetic, interest in aboriginal people and their ideas. This interest was part of a growing conception that Khoisan people and culture were disappearing in the face of change.

¹ Pratt, *Imperial Eyes*, pp. 38-68.

In 1881 Hahn criticized Sparrman's and Thunberg's lack of insight concerning Khoikhoi religious ideas. Hahn thought: 'Those travellers utterly failed to get into the confidence of the natives'. He based their ethnographic failure in the sensitivity of the Khoikhoi to the 'thinly disguised contempt of the foreigners', Khoikhoi natural shyness, fear of ridicule and chiefly, a 'stubborn unwillingness' of Khoikhoi to engage with the enquirers, 'based on a fear of ill treatment'.³ In relation to ill treatment, the earlier nineteenth century incidence of commando operations against Bushmen, might equally have detracted from the success of coterminous ethnographic enquiry.

Beinart is right to see a continued role for the Khoisan in this period of burgeoning scientific ethnography. Even if Khoisan were invisible in scientific traveller accounts, which they are not, their role behind the scenes cannot be doubted. In my experience, the influence of guides and the unavoidable reliance on Khoisan peoples whilst undertaking ethnographic research is a major determiner of the ethnographic product. It was through interaction with Khoisan, that travellers were able to follow their genuine interests in Khoisan healing knowledge, narrow as they may have been. Beinart is equally right to emphasize the diversity of the ethnographers, many of whom were sympathetic to local knowledge. Gordon's exceptional contribution to this story of healing is testament to his particular talents. But, Hahn's criticism of the superficial limits of Sparrman's and Thunberg's enquiry's, founded in racial distance, power relations and prejudice and sympathy should also be born in mind.

It seems best to conceptualise ethnography from the seventeenth through to the later nineteenth century, as moving but bounded. Scientific travellers did bring out new knowledge but their enquiries are characterised by old themes of interest and old forms of prejudice. In fact, some old themes persisted even through the new interest in the primitive mind and the arrival of professional anthropology, well into the twentieth century. The consistency of European interest is visible in the largely shallow and repetitious ethnography of dance and religious ideas that runs up to the later nineteenth century, despite Gordon and le Vaillant's perceptive comments. It is also visible in the repetitious interest in Khoisan medicinal remedies, buchu and fat use, use of rubbing and observation of other 'straightforward' therapeutic interventions, including midwifery and treatment of dislocations.

A particularly good example of persistent regurgitation of interest, are the ethnographic reports of Khoisan amputating finger joints, often from the little or middle finger. This practice appears regularly in ethnographies of all periods and can be traced through many observers, including Dapper, Kolb,

² W. Beinart, 'Men, Science, Travel and Nature in the Eighteenth Century and Nineteenth Century Cape', *JSAS*, 24:4 (Dec. 1998), 775-799.

Burchell, Galton, Vedder and Drennan. Wagner-Robertz observed the phenomenon in the mid 1970s⁴ and I encountered it amongst contemporary Damara women, who were in their late twenties and older. Reasons given for this practice vary from a ritual done at the death of a relative or husband,⁵ to a ritual done at marriage,⁶ to the more common explanation of treatment of, or protection from, sickness.⁷ Nama and Damara I encountered said it was done: as a tradition;⁸ to a woman whose child has died;⁹ if a woman has twins and one dies;¹⁰ to treat children's sickness;¹¹ for infertile women; or as a mark of the last born child.¹² One of Wagner-Robertz's informants related that the practice was undertaken as both a clan mark and a means of protecting a child. After a child stops breast-feeding it loses weight. On the understanding that the child is possessed by a spirit, the mother goes to the 'medicine man' to establish which spirit it is. The digit is sacrificed to the identified spirit. One of Wagner-Robertz's Damara informants thought this an old Xhosa custom, from whom the Damara were derived. He additionally thought it made men brave and was a method of treating illness through letting the blood flow.¹³

The deliberate amputation of finger joints is something that has long drawn the ethnographic eye. It has persistently been something which has affronted European sensibilities, in a similar manner to the wearing of fat seeming odd and unpleasant. This factor of interest, alongside the particular visibility of a mutilated hand, has encouraged consecutive ethnographers, including myself, to ask about the phenomenon and to mention it in their accounts as something interesting, almost in a sense of discovery, despite the theme being old. Because amputation does not have an 'obvious' role, healing or otherwise, the essentially curious enquiry in fact, becomes a rare question about Khoisan thinking. In this respect the example gives us an uncommon, if slim, glimpse at a history of Khoisan ideas. Over the colonial period the custom has been consistently associated with death, sickness prevention and local treatment of finger pain. Barrow and Wagner-Robertz cite release of blood as the principle

³ Hahn, *Tsuni -//Goam*, p.44.

⁴ Fritsch (1872) gives an historical summary: *Eingeborenen*, pp. 116-117; The phenomenon has also long been recorded amongst other southern Africans, eg. J. Chapman on Damara (Herero): *Travels in the Interior of South Africa (1849-1863)* (Cape Town, 1971); D. Wagner-Robertz, unpublished papers, file 39.

⁵ Dapper in Schapera (ed.), *Early Cape*, p. 63; W. Burchell, *Travels in the Interior of Southern Africa* (2 vols., London, 1953), i, 44.

⁶ Cowley, *The Voyage*, p. 455.

⁷ Kolb, *Present State*, pp. 306-307; UCL library, Galton Papers, Journal 97, notebooks (August 1850); Vedder, *South West Africa*, p. 66; M.R. Drennan, 'Finger Mutilation in the Bushmen', in, *Bushmen of the Southern Kalahari: Papers reprinted from 'Bantu Studies', vol. X, no.4 and vol. XI, no. 3, together with some additional material* (Johannesburg, 1937), p. 189.

⁸ 23

⁹ 39

¹⁰ 23, cf. 27 who added: the amputated part of the finger is thrown into the grave of the child.

¹¹ 37

¹² 30

¹³ Wagner-Robertz, MS 39.

behind the local treatment.¹⁴ The idea of sacrificing the severed phalanx to the spirits is also something common to Damara cited by Vedder and Wagner-Robertz. What the difference is, between this Damara spirit sacrifice or appeasement, and similar Bushmen amputation done to ensure growth to adulthood,¹⁵ remains open to question.

In 1822 the missionary John Campbell pointed to the ‘ignorance’ of Koranna for amputating a finger to release blood and thereby treat finger pain. In this portrayal of ignorance Campbell highlights the European assumption of superiority that discouraged interest in deeper Khoisan reasoning. His attitude was not new, nor exclusive to missionaries, but missionaries particularly demonstrated the increasingly disparaging emphasis that underlay the extraction and interpretation of the Khoisan healing data through the nineteenth century.

The long ethnography of finger amputation is one of numerous repeated themes of interest. Thematic repetition seems to indicate continuity of numerous Khoisan practices. However, because details of practices are seldom accompanied by any associated insights into Khoisan thinking, continuity can seldom be examined in terms of both forms of practice and the ideas behind them. To keep representing practices that reappear in ethnography devoid of associated Khoisan ideas, tells us little regarding changes in Khoisan concepts. It also adds little to an analysis of European interpretation. Through the nineteenth century, ‘pragmatic’ Khoisan knowledge is occasionally added to, for example new names for healing plants appear, but interests on the whole remain repeated and remarkably consistent. In order to avoid repetition and to remain focused on interpretation, this chapter draws on the ‘straightforward’ Khoisan healing practices, as previously outlined, only where details are particularly informative regarding Khoisan ideas and issues of continuity, change and interpretation. For the main structure of this chapter, I continue to use the history of the trance dance as a framework for analysis of ethnographic interest and a way of thinking about Khoisan medicine. Witchcraft, scientific and philological interest and ‘popular’ intellectual and social themes of interest are primary elements of this chapter.

The following section pivots around four distinctive phases of ethnography, differentiated from each other by distinctive themes of interpretation. The first phase revolves around the arrival of missionaries in Namibia at the beginning of the nineteenth century and runs approximately to 1858 when Carl Hahn added new depth to dance observations. Phase two focuses on the ‘discovery’ of the trance dance through the work of Wilhelm Bleek and Orpen. This section places dance discovery and new ways of thinking about Khoisan in wider social and intellectual interest in the primitive mind. The third phase

¹⁴ Barrow, *Travels into the Interior*, vol. I, 245.

examines the consolidation of the discovery and the wider medical context of German interest in Namibia around 1900. The final phase, spanning the first four decades of the twentieth century, examines the contribution of the first professional anthropologists to both information regarding the trance dance and wider medical ethnography.

Change in the Early Nineteenth Century

Pre-colonial Namibian history remains a neglected topic. Of the handful of historians who have addressed the subject, Lau's numerous contributions from the 1980s remain highly influential. Lau's analysis of Namibia in the nineteenth century reflected contemporaneous South African historiographical interests. Marks claimed in 1971 that Khoi culture 'had totally disappeared'.¹⁶ Lau proposed similar deep and rapid change and that the invasion of Oorlam groups through southern Namibia in the first half of the nineteenth century, accompanied by the related penetration of merchant capital, had rapidly broken down indigenous kinship systems, social structures and world views.¹⁷

Dederling has criticised Lau's analysis for encouraging the idea that social change took the form of a 'massive dose of modernization into more or less static indigenous societies'.¹⁸ Dederling suggests that social change was not solely dependent upon the input of merchant capital, missionary influence and colonial rule. He proposes that 'traditional' structures were not simply destroyed by 'invasion' but changed in relation to internal political and economic factors.¹⁹ Echoing Elphick's ecological perspective, Dederling emphasises the lack of control missionaries were able to assert on transhumant pastoralists in the veld, far away from the influence of the mission stations. He suggests the veld space allowed a larger variety of cultural practices than could have been engaged in under European supervision. These practices partly reflected the intimate environmental knowledge required of transhumant pastoralists.²⁰ As he continues though, Dederling seems to downplay any notions of cultural continuity born from day-to-day living habits in a relatively stable Namibian veld. This stands in contradistinction to what I envisage as a more durable and persistent environmental influence. Dederling supports what he terms, Marks' 'aphoristic statement' that the Khoikhoi 'literally acculturated themselves out of existence', by acknowledging 'the astonishing rapidity with which the

¹⁵ Singer, cited by Raper and Boucher (eds.), *Robert Jacob Gordon*, p. 199.

¹⁶ Marks, 'Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', 58, 80.

¹⁷ Lau, 'A Critique', p. 81; 'Emergence', p. 22; *Central*, pp. 1, 74, 81.

¹⁸ Dederling, *Hate the Old*, p. 16.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 21, 28.

loosely structured Nama culture absorbed selected elements of the Christian religion and European culture'.²¹

My evidence suggests that Dederling was correct to emphasise selective absorption. But it also suggests a more persistent Khoisan 'traditional' culture than Marks, Lau and even Dederling proposed. Nicholas Thomas provides a valuable cautionary note to ideas of radical and deep change in his observation that: 'A "fatal impact" has, however, been detected in European historiography far more frequently than it actually occurred'.²² Sesfontein Damara have had a Pastor for over a century. The Pastor, like his Pastor father before him, treats people in a manner that Europeans would regard as 'mystical'. The *arus* healing dance exists in Sesfontein. People who dance the *arus* and have the 'rainspirit' go to church and would nominally call themselves, and think of themselves, as Christians. Sesfontein Damara are not unusual in the way they hold distinctively Khoe beliefs and understandings alongside those which are distinctively Christian – to say nothing of holding confusing amalgamations of ideas and new ideas generated through 'traditional' creative paths, such as dreaming and communication with spirits. Many far more urbanised Khoisan than Sesfontein Damara have not, like the Sesfontein Damara, been 'acculturated out of existence', despite long and intimate colonial and post-colonial influences. The picture is more complex than has been recognised and Khoisan beliefs and practices are more durable.

A second factor concerning change relates to Dederling's other observation, that transhumant pastoralists retreated into a veld which they knew well and upon which they relied. Although in the nineteenth century material goods and ideas were exchanged between Khoe who moved between colonial spheres and the veld pastoralists, and new meanings and practices were generated in the process, this does not imply a transformation of ideas about healing. Even in contemporary Namibia, many Khoe living in urban and particularly peri-urban locations frequently use the same floral and faunal remedies as 'remote' living Khoe. They think about these remedies and their efficacy in a similar manner. Despite programs of medical intervention that have reached into remote regions through the twentieth century, day-to-day medical care, including that utilised in chronic and acute matters of life and death, remains linked to environmental resources for many Khoisan. This continued reliance and ideas associated with the environment stands as a correction to historical approaches that propose absolute change.²³

²¹ Ibid., p. 44.

²² Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialisms Culture: Anthropology, Travel and Government* (Oxford, 1994), p.15.

²³ A number of diverse scholars who heavily emphasise change have contributed to a recent publication : P. Hayes *et al*, *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility and Containment 1915-46* (Oxford and Windhoek, 1998).

Dederling accepts a degree of Khoikhoi cultural continuity by observing that practices continue to be mentioned from earlier ethnographic contexts; Wikar for example reported testicle removal practices and Tindall initiation practices, both of which featured in Kolb's far earlier account. Moreover religious dancing associated with the moon continued to feature in nineteenth century records.²⁴ Dederling rightly points to lack of missionary ethnographic skill and ultimately lack of missionary interest in customs, as the reason why few sources survive regarding Khoekhoe customs.

Lau was keen to suggest that little survives of early nineteenth century 'exotic' African Nama customs. She cites missionary Knudsen as exceptionally having observed initiation rites, and Andersson, 'speaking as if of ages past', when describing hunting celebrations, or *Heitsi-eibeb* and healing.²⁵ Despite her assertions of change, she admitted that reporting of sorcerers and traditional healers continued through the nineteenth century, even if details were slight. She observed that Swartbooï's brother had cured missionary Kleinschmidt of rheumatism, by rubbing him with ointment made largely from zebra bone marrow.²⁶

There undoubtedly were significant changes to aspects of the Khoisan social and material world in the early nineteenth century, but Lau's evidence suggests continuity in matters of healing. Between 1806 and the arrival of Namibia's first missionaries, Abraham and Christian Albrecht, and Carl Hahn's arrival in Windhoek in 1842, about ten missionaries had worked in Namibia. As late as 1842 the first permanent residents established themselves in Walvis Bay.²⁷ By the late 1860s there was somewhere in the region of 200 Europeans living in Namaland and Damaraland.²⁸ Hunters, farmers, traders and missionaries lived and moved through Namibia. Trade networks changed and Oorlam groups reshaped social and economic relations. But, would rural Khoisan have been under such strong compulsion from these factors, to change trusted practices and familiar ideas? Khoisan treatment of Europeans was far from uncommon²⁹ and testifies to the lack of availability or efficacy of Western medicine at this period. As in recent contexts, there is no reason to suppose healing knowledge was swept away by introduced Western medical practices. Khoisan medicine may have been influenced by incoming African ideas at this time, but this was nothing new and there is no indication of significantly different or new practices having emerged.

²⁴ Dederling, *Hate the Old*, pp. 20, 43-4.

²⁵ Lau, *Central*, p. 74.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 75.

²⁷ K. Dierks, *Chronology of Namibian History: From Pre-historical Times to Independent Namibia* (Windhoek, 1999), p. 12.

²⁸ Lau, *Carl Hugo Hahn*, II, ii.

²⁹ See for example, Alexander, *An Expedition of Discovery*, p. 64.

Dederling cites an early nineteenth century Nama, who purportedly thought, ‘there is a need for god at the station but not in the veld’.³⁰ This suggests that even for those Khoisan in intimate contact with Europeans, some distinction was maintained between Khoi thought and action in European settlement and Khoi veld contexts. Lorna Marshall observed in relation to her time amongst Nyae Nyae Bushmen: ‘our contact and that of the !kung with the Bantu who passed through Tsho/ ana consisted only of staring at each other for an hour or so, once in two weeks, and had no significant influence on our life there’.³¹ Whilst it is problematic to generalize from Marshall’s comment it is suggestive that contact often involves little if any exchange of ideas. Although the early nineteenth century social and economic environment was opening up, as Marshall’s comment might suggest, not all consequent interaction would have involved profound sharing of knowledge.

One way in which European’s at this time might have particularly influenced Khosian medicine is in relation to hunting. Extensive rapid depletion of animals must have affected medicinal resource use. In 1856 Andersson reported that one man with a gun in Walvis Bay had reduced the animal population so much that there was barely any meat to be had. In one day Larsen had shot nine rhinoceros.³² Elsewhere Andersson elaborated:

in the course of the few days we remained in Tunobis, our party shot, amongst other animals, upwards of thirty rhinoceroses. One night, indeed, when quite alone, I killed, in the space of five hours (independently of other game), no less than eight of those beasts, amongst which were three distinct species.³³

There is insufficient evidence to comment precisely on the impact of the gun on animal resources used in Khoisan medicine in the earlier nineteenth century. But, in view of the impact of recent hunting restrictions on Khoisan practices, as described by my informants, it seems reasonable to surmise that animal availability must have affected medical practice.

Time of the Early Missionaries

Schapera observed that although Robert Moffat was a dedicated missionary, he was a remarkably superficial ethnographer.³⁴ Hahn expressed a similar conclusion when commenting on his surprise that Moffat rather thoughtlessly seemed to interpret the meaning of *Tsûi //Goab*, as, quite plainly, the

³⁰ Dederling, *Hate the Old*, p. 21.

³¹ L. Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (Massachusetts, 1976), p. 8.

³² Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, p. 58.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

³⁴ I. Schapera (ed.), *Apprenticeship at Kuruman. Journals and letters of Robert and Mary Moffat* (London, 1951), p. xxv.

Devil.³⁵ As noted, Dedering thought early missionaries were clearly interested in indigenous religious matters but, like Moffat, their interest remained perfunctory. Missionaries were key collators of aboriginal ideas and customs. Their ethnography was both slanted to their own ends and often superficial but nonetheless, as will be seen, made significant contributions to knowledge of the Khoisan. When missionary reports are considered alongside the persistent, if repetitive, interest of European ethnographers, there is enough evidence to tell us both something of Khoisan medical history and of the ongoing construction of European understanding.

Whether or not Khoikhoi had any religion remained a key question in the nineteenth century. As before, the answer to this question was often associated with reports of dancing and illness. In the *Transactions of the Missionary Society* for the years 1803-1806, Kicherer reported that Bushmen had ‘no idea whatever of the Supreme Being’ and consequently practiced ‘no kind of worship’. However, he noted they did have ‘a superstitious reverence for a little insect known by the name of the Creeping-leaf’. They also held some notion of a disease causing evil spirit which was counteracted by, ‘a sort of men [...] employed to blow, and make a humming noise over the sick, which they sometimes continue for many hours together’.³⁶ Treatment that involved humming and blowing directed at evil spirits, sounds similar to that reported by Gordon and is typical of recent Khoisan healing both in and outside of dance settings, although the association of evil spirits with Bushmen remains distinctive. The reference to the Creeping leaf probably refers to a stick insect or possibly a praying mantis, both of which are associated with divine //Gauwa by some Nharo Bushmen.³⁷ The mantis is an enduring feature of Khoisan cosmology. Kolb noted reverence for the mantis amongst Hottentots.³⁸ The Cape /Xam seemed to think of the mantis as a trickster figure, sometimes called /Kaggen, which in 1874 Bleek thought Dutch farmers may have interpreted as the ‘Devil’.³⁹ Lee recorded the idea of the mantis as trickster amongst the Ju/’hoan.⁴⁰ The association between the mantis and a quasi-deity also remains visible in contemporary Khoe society in the use of the word //gâuab for the praying mantis.⁴¹

In 1849 the Wesleyan missionary Edward Cook, produced new information whilst shaping his commentary to the Christian endeavour. Cook engaged in ‘the glorious work of evangelising the heathen’⁴² amongst the degraded Hottentots of Great Namaqualand. With reference to Damara, Cook

³⁵ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 50.

³⁶ *Transactions of the Missionary Society in the Years 1803-1806*, vol.II, London MSB 955 1(2): 6-7)

³⁷ M. Geunther, *The Nharo Bushmen of Botswana*, QKF 3 (Hamburg, 1986), p. 236.

³⁸ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 41.

³⁹ W. Bleek, *Second Report Concerning Bushmen Researches* (London, 1875), p. 9.

⁴⁰ R. Lee, *The Dobe Ju/’hoansi* (Australia and Belmont Ca., 2003), p. 128.

⁴¹ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 239; Kolb cited by Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 41; Bleek, *Second Report*, p.9; Lee, *Dobe Ju/’hoansi*, p. 128; Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 223.

⁴² E. Cook, *The Modern Missionary as Exemplified in a Narrative of the Life and Labours of the Late Rev. Edward Cook in Great Namaqualand* (Liverpool, 1849), Preface.

provides us with what might clearly be thought of as a healing dance, but to him was evidence of devil worship:

The aborigines have also a mode of worshipping the devil, whom they call Konowap, which is as follows: A chief man of the rain-makers or conjurors, who is considered to have authority to initiate others into the art of healing or rain-making assembles a number of people generally in an unfrequented place, when a dance is commenced, accompanied by singing of praises to the devil, and the ceremony continues until this high priest of the devil becomes outrageous, and threatens the lives of those present, when all fly to hiding places, and so it ends.⁴³

In this example lie details clearly similar to the trance dance. If this was a trance dance, this stands as very early evidence for the tradition. Importantly the key dancer is identified as a rainmaker, a conjuror and a teacher of healing. The accompanying singers become acolytes in this celebration of *Konowap*, whose name is undoubtedly a derivative of //Gauwab and clearly linked to the Devil. Despite an identification of a 'high priest' there seems great ambiguity in what this key dance figure actually represents.

Missionary ambiguity and self-interested interpretation is evident once again in an 1856 lecture on Great Namaqualand by Rev. Henry Tindall. Demonstrating typical missionary enthusiasm for old themes, he reported that Bushmen and Hottentots are 'debased', 'degraded', 'ignorant' and ultimately, 'bound and clogged by [...] animal nature'.⁴⁴ He noted that the Zak River Bushmen know where his 'Sable Majesty' is buried. Yet, despite knowing the devil's burial place, he asserted that Bushmen ideas of the Supreme Being and of a spiritual world are 'extremely vague'.⁴⁵ Reinforcing the Luciferous link, Tindall claimed that many Bushmen were familiar with witchcraft, as was evident from their wearing protective wooden charms. The Nama, he identified, were 'passionately fond' of dance, which 'engulfs' them in a 'whirlpool of heathen dissipation'. Whilst their minds were 'almost blank' to religion, he acknowledged their language 'contains appellations for God, spirits, and also for the wicked one'.⁴⁶

Campbell, like others before, knew Bushmen were Fallen and wondered if they were Jewish. Justifying his Christian imperial mission, he emphasised that Bushmen were dirty, wild thieves whose 'system of depredation' could only be ended by missionary endeavour.⁴⁷ It was only missionaries who could

⁴³ Ibid., p. 92.

⁴⁴ H. Tindall, *Two Lectures on Great Namaqualand and its Inhabitants* (Cape Town, 1856), p. 26.

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 29.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 44.

⁴⁷ J. Campbell, *Travels in South Africa, undertaken at the request of the London Missionary Society* (2 vols., London, 1822), I. 174.

reform their habits, instruct Bushmen in farming and godliness and ultimately save their souls. Campbell enquired about Bushmen belief in God or the Devil. With a little 'pressing,' he learnt from the 'Chief of the Wild Bushmen' that there was a male God above called *Goha* and a female God below, *Ko*, who had attendants named *Ganna*. His Bushman informants elaborated that, 'When the Bushmen dance, *Ko* sometimes comes and informs them where game is procured'.⁴⁸ The Bushmen not only provided details regarding the appearance of *Ko*, a startlingly luminescent, large, white figure, but a story of how *Ko*, succeeded by her nymphs, came up from the ground to dance for a short while with the Bushmen. Campbell appends this with the comment: 'At this stage of the narrative, Makoon remarked, that 'these were old stories of the Bushmen, about which he cared little;' adding, 'that he wished to see and hear no more concerning them, but only to be taught the knowledge of the true God.'⁴⁹

In Campbell's exchange with this Bushmen 'chief'⁵⁰ one can feel the reluctant release of other knowledge and belief. This story is interesting because it provides early evidence of dance being a forum within which Bushmen interact with greater and lesser entities - *Ko* and nymphs. This might be a version of Bushmen interacting at a dance with gods, perhaps like Nharo Bushmen do with //Gauwa and the lesser entities, their //gauwani, spirits of the dead. The image of women coming up from the ground to dance is very similar to that related to Ilsa Schatz by a Hai//om healer in the 1970s in the context of a creation story.⁵¹ This story involved the first woman rising from the ground beneath a tree where she was seen by pre-existing male Bushmen, dancing with her 'maidens'. Bleek's /Xam Bushmen similarly mentioned an 'earlier race of people', one of whom was 'a cunning woman of this race, who lived alone in a house underground'.⁵²

The missionaries, like travellers of this period, were tapping new information, but never relinquished preconceptions of degenerate savagery far enough to really explore the indigenous meaning of the phenomena they observed. The above extracts reveal how, to this period of interpreters, both Hottentots and Bushmen seemed to hold strong beliefs in the role of spirits in the world. Both groups were also thought practitioners of witchcraft. In terms of Khoisan dance, evidence suggests that healing dances may well have existed but, as was the case with earlier ethnography, they remained invisible behind ambiguous actions.

⁴⁸ Ibid., vol. 2, p. 32.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Literature of this period often referred to Bushmen leaders.

⁵¹ I. Schatz, pers. com.

⁵² Bleek, *Second Report*, p. 14.

One of the clearest indications of Khoisan healing dances from the early nineteenth century comes from the Enlightenment traveller Burchell, who commenced his Cape adventure in 1810. Burchell described Bushmen dances he encountered that were different from those seen by Gordon. The dance was performed in a hut in the Prieska district, in front of spectators who sang and otherwise accompanied the dancer with clapping and a drum. The dancer wore rattles on his ankles, 'used one foot at a time, while standing on the other,' and leant on two sticks whilst he sang and danced'.⁵³ The words were recorded as repeated variations of 'Aye O Aye O..OO..WaWawa koo Wawa koo..' Several days after having observed this dance Burchell saw another that was similar.

Whilst Burchell's dance cannot be said to be a healing dance it includes very similar characteristics. Burchell's observation that the central dancer used two sticks is interesting. Contemporary Bushmen and Damara often use single sticks in their dance. Dance sticks are given particular significance amongst the Damara as possible channels through which illness and healing power can flow. Lewis-Williams notes that some cave 'paintings show men at so acute an angle that they have to support their weight on one or two sticks. Most men dance with at least one stick, they say it provides a sense of balance. For a similar purpose, some also carry the tails of animals in their hands (we observed giraffe, eland, and wildebeest tails)'.⁵⁴ Whilst balance may be a reason for using sticks or whisks this seems unlikely and I did not encounter this explanation. Gordon suggested that bending over when dancing was a particular characteristic of Hottentot dance.⁵⁵ It was a phenomenon I noted amongst numerous dancers in Sesfontein. The appearance of two sticks in cave paintings supports an idea of long-term continuity of stick use.

James Alexander's record of dance from the earlier nineteenth century indicates the wider way Europeans thought about dance. In 1838 he observed that no native dances were allowed at the Lily Fountain mission in the northern Cape, because: 'they opened the door to vice, the dancers being in the habit of remaining to sleep where they danced'.⁵⁶ This, he affirmed elsewhere, seems to have been a policy shared with many of the missions.⁵⁷ But Alexander, like Campbell, was interested in these 'primitive' events and the frequency of his references to dance indicates both his fascination and the centrality of dancing to Bushmen and Hottentot life. He tells us that the 'Humi Damap (Damara) dance was like the 'Boschman', involving women standing in a row clapping their hands and singing 'Hey, he hey ho!'.⁵⁸ The contemporary Damara I encountered did not clap but beat sticks together. Beating

⁵³ P. Kirby, 'A Study of Bushman Music', *Bantu Studies*, 10:2 (June 1936), 211.

⁵⁴ Lewis-Williams 'Paintings of Power', p. 234.

⁵⁵ Raper (ed.), *Robert Jacob Gordon*, pp.253, 287.

⁵⁶ Alexander, *An expedition of Discovery*, p. 58.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

sticks is not typical of Bushmen dance in Namibia but is found amongst Bushmen in Botswana. Alexander mentioned dancing Bushmen and Hottentot as a regular part of life but did not associate their dancing with religion.

The association of dance with degradation and immoderation continued through the nineteenth century. Between 1874 and 1879 Gerald McKiernan, an American trader in Namibia, noted various kinds of Bushmen dances. McKiernan related 'one kind of dance' in which: 'the women stand in a semicircle around the fire, singing in chorus, accompanied by hand-clapping, and the men dance in a circle around the fire'. The dance, with its 'limb shaking', 'frightful', 'nervous excitement', 'was the worst kind of dissipation'.⁵⁹

Missionary Carl Hahn practised in Namibia from 1842 to 1873. In his 1858 diary, Hahn included dance references which, to my knowledge, are the earliest identification of a 'trance dance'. He provides details which are later thought indicative of Bushman shamanism. Some of his details came from Samuel Edwards, an early hunter, trader and traveller of the Lake Ngami region. Hahn described the case of a Hottentot who became under the influence of something which drove him temporarily mad. The Hottentot described the experience in such a way that Hahn interpreted it as spirit possession.⁶⁰ At another point Hahn described Bushmen of Lake Ngami holding 'Zaubertänze' or magic dances, during which they fell down in convulsions when, he reported, their 'spirit is given up'.⁶¹ Hahn also recorded beliefs in 'Seelenwanderung', literally, soul wandering and 'Ekstatische Tänz,' literally, ecstatic dance, wherein Bushmen entered a senseless 'kind of frenzy, yes, even dead [selbst tot], fallen'. Hahn noted Bushmen believed in a good and bad spirit, first known as *Tora* and later *Pora*; that an evil spirit can possess them; that there is an afterworld for the soul, or paradise, where there is much game; that there was no belief in a hell, the soul world was in the West, and the soul can 'trans/migrate'. Hahn, elaborating on this latter point, observed a Gemsbok could be a dead person and not a normal animal and the spirit of a dead person could reside in a lion.⁶²

Hahn's evidence provides an interesting blend of Bushmen ideas and Christian interpretation. He provides us with a detailed description of what, particularly from the 1960s onwards, might be described as native shamanism, although even his accounts did not associate dancing with healing. To some Europeans of this period the phenomenon of shamanism might have held some familiarity. Asian shamanism had been recognised in a European context by at least the late seventeenth century. It

⁵⁹ P. Serton (ed.), *The Narrative and Journal of Gerald McKiernan in South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1954), p. 77.

⁶⁰ Lau (ed.), *Carl Hugo Hahn*, IV, 1017.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 1091.

seems, however, that to Hahn these were clearly cases of possession and whether or not he had encountered shamanic behaviour was not an issue. His accounts in fact contain the essential elements of 'classic' shamanism in terms of both possession ecstasy and wandering ecstasy. The 'possessed' exhibited extraordinary strength, trembling, shouting and raging. This phase was followed by a quiet trance. Wandering ecstasy, by contrast, involves the spirit leaving the body and travelling through the spirit realms. A further link with more recent understandings of shamanism can be seen in the example of Hahn's subject handling a burning coal, demonstrating a shamanic immunity from pain. This is still commonly practised amongst Khoisan healers. Hahn revealed what, for his times, was a deep understanding of Bushman spiritual ideas in his relation of how the Bushman conceived the afterlife and how spirits could metamorphose into animals. In a later context, the distinction between possession or non possession as a basis for trance, becomes important as a factor used by recent anthropologists to distinguish the Bushmen trance dance from Bantu healing rituals.

As the nineteenth century progressed Western medicine grew increasingly remote from the rural practices of Hottentots and Bushmen. This movement away is captured in a remark by the Namibian explorer Francis Galton, in his *The Art of Travel* (1855):

Bleeding and Cupping-Physicians say, now-a-days that bleeding is rarely, if ever, required; and that frequently it does much harm; but they used to bleed for everything. Many savages know how to cup, and they either suck at a hole in the top of the horn, to produce the necessary vacuum, or they make a blaze as we do, but with a wisp.⁶³

It is not until the latter half of the nineteenth century, a time of considerable European intellectual interest in evolution, philology and native primitive thought, that any real details regarding a different sort of Hottentot and Bushmen cosmological world begin to emerge.

The earliest hint of an alternative Nama medical cosmology - beyond the vague early ethnographic details of mantis worship, moon worship and supernal spirit teachers of healing and witchcraft - emerges from the Swede, Charles Andersson. Andersson accompanied Galton on his first expedition to southern Africa in 1850 and his account, *Lake Ngami*, provides us with the first indigenous name for a Hottentot 'witchdoctor' and a Khoisan idea of the cause of disease:

⁶³ F. Galton, *The Art of Travel* (London, 1971 [1855]), p. 16.

The Namaqua, like almost all nations who are sunk in barbarism, have great faith in sorcery; and male and female witch-doctors equally play conspicuous parts. These impostors are supposed to have the power to procure rain, to restore the sick to health, to discover the cause of a persons death and to perform other miracles [..]. The Namaqua witchdoctor is called Kaiaob,...

Kaiaobs believed ailments were:

Usually caused by a great snake (toros) having fired an arrow into the stomach. The sorcerer operates by feeling that part of the body, and by a good squeezing endeavours to coax the illness away.

And additionally:

To become a witch-doctor of any importance, a person is required to be instructed by one previously well versed in the mysteries of the black art. He must begin his lesson by swallowing animal poison, be bitten by venomous reptiles, or have poison inoculated into his body⁶⁴

Andersson was not a trained man of science. He went to Africa on the back of boyhood daydreams with an interest in field sports and natural history.⁶⁵ That he thought it important to detail observations previously ignored by earlier ethnographers, can largely be attributed to his participation in widespread early nineteenth century interest in folklore, as epitomised and generated by the publication of the first volume of *Kinder und Hausmärchen* (later popularly known as Grimm's Fairy Tales) in 1835. Andersson emphasised in the Preface to *Lake Ngami*, that he particularly wished to record superstitions:

for, too much attention as it has been truly observed, cannot be paid to the mythological traditions of savages [...] by attending to what many might call absurd superstitions, we [...] attain to a knowledge of the mental tendencies of the natives....⁶⁶

Andersson's reference to an arrow being the vector of illness is one that henceforth becomes increasingly common in the ethnographic literature. Prior to Andersson, immunity from snakebite had been mentioned by Burchell in relation to Hottentots and Thompson in relation to Bushmen.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Andersson, *Lake Ngami*, pp. 255-256.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p.2.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Preface.

⁶⁷ Burchell, *Travels in the Interior*, (1953), p. 236; G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures in Southern Africa* (London, 1827),i. 399.

Procuring immunity from snakebite by eating poison is similarly a feature of later ethnography.⁶⁸ Andersson's ready use of the word 'inoculation' further normalized a practice of simplistic colonial translation. Missionaries were interested in superstitions but not in the same openly interested and relatively neutral manner as Andersson. Andersson's contribution to healing details is however ultimately small.

Bleek, Orpen and the Discovery of the 'Healing Dance'

By the second half of the nineteenth century Bushman art had aroused considerable interest in educated Cape settler society. It was through interpretation of art that the first actual identification of a 'healing dance' emerged. As early as 1842 Moffat had visited Bushman rock art sites.⁶⁹ In 1846 Arbousset had commented upon Bushmen cave paintings as 'innocent playthings'.⁷⁰ Between 1867 and 1882 Stow particularly began to focus attention on Bushman rock art.⁷¹ Alerted by Stow's interest, Cape official, Joseph Orpen, examined examples of Bushmen art in Lesotho and provided what is usually cited as the origin of contemporary understanding of the healing dance.

In 1873 Orpen employed a Bushmen guide named Qing to lead him into the Maluti Mountains. Orpen later described how, during the evenings on expedition, 'happy and at ease smoking over camp-fires' he took the opportunity to discuss with Qing, via an interpreter,⁷² the meaning of certain cave paintings they had come across in the mountains. At the end of his trip Orpen sent his transcribed conversations to Cape Town for publication. Prior to publication of Orpen's article, which appeared complete with copies of some of the paintings in *The Cape Monthly Magazine* of July 1874, Bleek also examined the material and showed it to his Bushman informants. Comments from Bleek were included in Orpen's article. What was remarkable was the similarity of interpretations of Bleek's Bushmen, who came from the north west Cape Province, with the interpretations of Qing, who was from Lesotho. Qing said:

Cagn gave us the song of this dance, and told us to dance it, and people would die from it, and he would give charms to raise them again. It is a circular dance of men and women, following each other, and it is danced all night. Some fall down; some become as if mad and sick; blood runs from the noses of others whose charms are weak, and they eat charm medicine, in which there is burnt snake powder. When a man is sick, this dance is danced round him, and the dancers put both hands under their arm-pits, and press their hands on

⁶⁸ Moller, *Journey through Angola*, p. 152; H. Vedder, 'The Berg Damara', in L. Fourie (ed.), *Native Tribes of South West Africa* (Cape Town, 1928), p. 70.

⁶⁹ J.D. Lewis-Williams, *Contested Images: Diversity in Southern African Rock Art* (Johannesburg, 1994), p. 177.

⁷⁰ J.D. Lewis-Williams, *Believing and Seeing: Symbolic Meanings in Southern San Rock Paintings* (London, 1981), p. 3.

⁷¹ Lewis-Williams, *Contested Images*, p. 177.

⁷² Lewis-Williams, *Believing and Seeing*, p. 31.

him, and when he coughs the initiated put on their hands and received what has injured him - secret things.⁷³

In many ways there is little new in this account. *Cagn*, or *//Kaggen*, the mantis, had long been recorded in ethnography. The idea of being given a song by *Cagn* is similar to the conjurers mentioned by Kolb and Gordon having being taught their art by a spirit. People dying from *Cagn's* dance repeats the observations of Hahn. As for the circular dance pattern, in 1806 Barrow described that Bushmen were 'particularly joyful at the approach of the first thunder-storm after the winter' and would dance 'for several successive nights' visibly creating 'small circular trodden places around their huts'.⁷⁴ Even the details which are now thought of as characteristic of healing dances, were, as we have seen, phenomena seen and recorded by Gordon. Gordon had noted the bleeding of a healers nose, the role of coughing, the pressing of hands on the 'patient' and the removal of harmful objects from the patient's body.

Although Qing's account was of Bushmen dance and the above description of precursors is drawn mainly from what appears Bushmen related material, Hottentot and Bushmen dance descriptions were largely indistinguishable. After this period, however, focus developed around the Bushmen dance, and the association of Hottentots with the healing dance and the ideas identified in it became increasingly remote. Despite lack of clarity regarding whether early ethnographic data related to Hottentot or Bushmen, there is much to suggest that details which later became associated with Bushmen were also features of earlier Hottentot culture.

There is, therefore, much evidence to suggest that the differences rooted in Qing's description which relate to spirit contact through dance, and have since emerged as Bushmen shamanism, are differences of emphasis more than type.

The various ingredients of the healing dance had nearly all featured piecemeal in earlier ethnography. This suggests that the key to the 'discovery' of the dance lies in the social and intellectual context of the Cape at the time. The fertile exchange between Orpen and Qing, and the effects it had, was rooted in coterminous European ethnographic interests. Of particular importance to the story is the relationship of Cape Governor, Sir George Grey to Wilhelm Bleek. Grey employed Wilhelm Bleek as the librarian of his ethnographic collection.⁷⁵ Also important is Bleek's successor as custodian of the collection, Theophilus Hahn.

⁷³ J.M. Orpen, 'A Glimpse of the Mythology of the Maluti Bushmen', *Cape Monthly Magazine*, vol.9 (July, 1874), 10.

⁷⁴ Barrow, *Travels into the Interior*, p. 240.

⁷⁵ Chidester, *Savage*, p. 9.

Theophilus Hahn, author of *Tsuni- //Goam* (1881), succeeded Bleek in the post of Cape government philologist. Hahn, was born in southern Namibia to missionary parents. His doctorate on the Nama language was the first philology doctorate earned by a South African. Hahn was one of the first people to publish material under the rubric of ethnography and ethnology.⁷⁶ Hahn's *Tsuni- //Goam* received a favourable reception from Max Müller⁷⁷ and remains an exceptional analysis of Khoe language and thought. Hahn's academic exploration of philology has foundations in the same social and intellectual world that lay behind Bleek's Bushmen research. The following background places Bleek and Hahn in their historical context.

The influence of the British physician, James Cowles Prichard, provides one possible starting point for the nineteenth century discovery of the healing dance. Prichard, author of the highly influential *Researches into the Physical History of Man* (1813), helped establish the Ethnological Society of London in 1843.⁷⁸ Stocking places Prichard as a religious man of science, who worked within a British evangelical response to French post-Revolutionary atheism, and to the 'polygenist' ideas that followed eighteenth century scientific enthusiasm for comparative study of biology. From an essentially diffusionist perspective, Prichard's concern was to 'establish connections between the races of men on the basis of similarities of physical type, religion, political institutions, customs, and above all, language'. By the end of his career, he died in 1849, he was arguing for the unity of the human species by elaborating on ideas of the 'psychic unity of man'.⁷⁹ In Prichard's *Researches* he ranked the Bushmen of South Africa as 'the lowest in the scale of humanity'.⁸⁰ Prichard provides significant background to British intellectual influence in nineteenth century Cape ethnography.

Origins, derivation, similarity, difference and language were key concerns of the nineteenth century. In 1854, George Grey, a product of the same pious and intellectual climate into which Prichard published his *Researches*, was appointed Governor of Cape Colony and High Commissioner for South Africa.⁸¹ Grey was an enigmatic man who presents an amalgam of pious humanitarian desires intertwined with imperial opportunism and hard handed imperial dominance. During his early travels

⁷⁶ R. Gordon, *The Bushman Myth* (Colorado and Oxford, 2000), p. 45.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ *Researches* ran to five editions. A. Barnard and J. Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology* (London and New York, 2002), p. 587.

⁷⁹ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, pp.49-51.

⁸⁰ Prichard cited by: Gordon, *Bushman Myth*, p. 15.

⁸¹ Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 85.

in Australia, an account of which Grey published in 1841,⁸² Grey demonstrated considerable and sensitive interest in aboriginal life, learning the language and collecting extensive details regarding language, laws and customs. Stocking draws attention to Grey's remarkable account, included in his journal, of Australian social organization. Owing to the extreme reluctance of Australian Aboriginals to cite the names of the dead, collecting genealogical material was a difficult task. Grey, however, obtained exceptional details regarding Aboriginal genealogy by pursuing the subject with individual natives of 'loquacious humour'. It was 'round their fires at night' that Grey finally managed to 'involve them in disputes regarding their ancestors'.⁸³ Presciently Orpen's encounter, it seems that the camp fireside setting plays a significant role in the generation of ethnographic material.

Grey's relationship to burgeoning anthropology generally, at least in retrospect, seems important. Specifically he provided Bleek both with employment and a ready context and network of connections through which he could pursue his work. In terms of broader importance, Grey contributed to ethnographic theory with his argument that, contrary to popular opinion, aborigines required only two to three hours of each day to collect sufficient food for their needs.⁸⁴ Furthermore, although not the most important route, he had some influence in the emergence of anthropological ideas regarding relationships between chiefly power and reciprocity.⁸⁵ Both of these theoretical developments have considerable implications for anthropology as a discipline, hunter-gatherer studies specifically and, more specifically still, later interpretation of the healing dance. Returning to the direct influence on Bleek's researches, as curator of the Grey library, Bleek utilised contacts that Grey had established with missionaries, settlers and officials across Africa, in order to pursue his interest in ethnological and linguistic studies.

In 1855 Wilhelm Bleek arrived in Natal to collect Zulu myths and legends. Bleek was in search of evidence for human prehistory, the original human language and religion. His background was in theology, philology and Egyptian, Hebrew and African languages. He held a doctorate on the comparative study of Hottentot grammar. Chidester detects in Bleek a universalist and sympathetic approach to world religions founded in the influence of the theologian Frederick Denison Maurice.⁸⁶ In terms of his Bushmen research, Bleek was, however, more significantly influenced by his and Max

⁸² G. Grey, *Journal of Two Expeditions of Discovery in Northwest and Western Australia During the Years 1837-39*, (2 vols., London, 1841).

⁸³ Grey cited by Stocking, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 83.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 82.

⁸⁵ Stocking notes Grey was involved with the publication of Maclean's 1858 *Compendium of Kafir Laws and Customs* in which the missionary H.H. Dugmore 'showed how the power of chiefs was hedged by obligations of reciprocity': Stockings, *Victorian Anthropology*, p. 87.

⁸⁶ Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 141.

Müller's patron, Baron Christian von Bunsen. Bunsen was a Prussian diplomat, a distinguished Egyptologist and author of *Outline of a Philosophy of Universal History* (1854), in which he examined language and religion as 'the two Universal and primitive manifestations of the human mind upon which all subsequent social and national development is based.'⁸⁷ Bunsen's interests overlapped with those of both another Prussian diplomat and philologist, Wilhelm von Humboldt, who proposed a close relationship between language and culture, and the fairy tale and linguistic studies of Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm.⁸⁸

As Bleek's work in South Africa progressed, he ceased thinking that African religion was a degenerated derivative of higher religion. Alternatively he perceived African religion as a preserved primitive religion. As early as 1857 Bleek began to divert himself away from his work on Zulus, to the study of Bushmen and Hottentots, who, he was increasingly aware, could also provide evidence of the original condition of language and religion.⁸⁹ In 1870 he laid aside his *Comparative Grammar of Bushman and Hottentots*,⁹⁰ to devote himself entirely to recording all he could of the Bushmen before they disappeared, as a 'true record' ... 'of the original workings of the native mind'.⁹¹

To explore his interest in Khoisan peoples, with the support of Grey, Bleek drew on and fed a diverse network of educated persons in southern Africa including missionaries, teachers, traders, doctors and administrative figures; all of whom took an active interest in 'natives' and contributed to forums of presentation and discussion, particularly *The Cape Monthly Magazine*. Bleek's early Cape work was informed by the writings of Arbousset and Lichtenstein but he soon required the help of contemporaries with a good command of Nama. This particularly led him to work with the missionaries Tindall and Krönlein⁹² and his successor Theophilus Hahn.⁹³ In the search for information, Bleek and his sister in law and assistant, Lucy Lloyd, dispatched letters all over southern Africa requesting native stories and details drawn from personal colonial experience. In 1876, for example, Lloyd wrote to the Rev. Rath requesting some 'ancestral sticks of the Damaras':

⁸⁷ Bunsen cited in: Chidester, *Savage Systems*, p. 142.

⁸⁸ A. Barnard, *History and Theory in Anthropology* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 48.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁹⁰ D. Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary* (New Haven, 1956), p. i.

⁹¹ Bleek, *Second Report*, p. 1.

⁹² NLSA, MSC57/17(8); W.H.I. Bleek, *Report of Dr. Bleek Concerning his Researches into the Bushman Language* (Cape Town, 1873), section 2.

⁹³ Bleek, *Bushman Dictionary*, p. i.

for the sake of present and future students, I entreat you who are still living in the country and among these natives, kindly [...] to take down in their own language and from their own lips, all the information which they will impart to you.⁹⁴

By 1875 Bleek and Lloyd had produced 7,200 half pages of material relating to Bushmen culture, language, beliefs and mythology. After Bleek's death, also in 1875, Lloyd continued their work and by 1889 she had collected a further 4534 half pages.⁹⁵ Although Bleek's study began in theology, his interest in the 'mind', 'thoughts' and 'ideas' of the primitive Bushmen was principally philological. In view of wider early nineteenth century academic interest in origins and 'psychic unity' and Bunsen's particular influence regarding primitive belief and the human mind, it is not perhaps surprising that Bleek was interested in Bushmen cave paintings as indicators of 'the ideas which deeply moved the Bushman mind'.⁹⁶

As a Cape official, Orpen was a member of the educated colonial network that discussed and exchanged information regarding southern Africa's indigenous people. Within this setting the cave art findings of Arbousset and Stow were increasingly common knowledge as probably were details, such as they existed, concerning Bushmen. Informed curiosity was accordingly a starting point for Orpen's role in the 'discovery' of the healing dance. Added to this, Orpen was not an overt figure of religious authority. Orpen, sitting round a fire at the end of the day as Grey had done, could well have induced some measure of relaxation or equality which was particularly conducive to good discussion of rock paintings and a sharing of ideas.

When Gordon encountered a Bushmen magician, he was told that healing was not openly practiced in front of Europeans. This suggests that there was some sense of Khoisan reserve or vulnerability behind encounters with ethnographers. Bearing this in mind, it could be significant that Qing and Orpen were not observing a dance but studying art. Although Qing was a translator he was translating art in a relatively neutral setting. The setting in which Qing talked to Orpen, around Orpen's camp fire, looking at copies of paintings with no direct connection to Qing, might have enabled or encouraged Qing to relate far more personal or delicate matters than would have been possible had he been in front of, or talking of, his own people.

⁹⁴ NLSA, MSC57/18(6). Letters; from Lucy Lloyd, Grey Library, Cape Town 6 Sept 1876.

⁹⁵ Bleek, *Bushman Dictionary*, p. ii.

⁹⁶ Bleek cited in: J.D. Lewis-Williams, *Believing and Seeing*, p. 7.

There is a further possibility concerning what might have been special about Orpen and Qing's exchange. Rock art is a depiction of a real or imaginary event. It is essentially a distillation of key features that either directly represent the event, such as dancers being drawn to represent a particular dance, or of artistic symbols or motifs that signify the event to those familiar with Bushman culture. It has been inferred by recent scholars of Bushman rock art that much of the art specifically and deliberately depicts shamanistic healing dances and hence, unlike the many different types of dances that were frequently observed by earlier Europeans, these dances were specific. Contemporary healing dances are known for a phasic movement from conviviality, to dancing, to healing, which does not always complete its cycle. Earlier ethnographers may not have viewed entire dances, or the dances themselves may have entailed different phases, or have been carried out for different reasons, including dancing for better hunting, rain or for pleasure. The rock art dance was deliberately unambiguous in this respect and deliberately highlighted the healing element in association with the dance. When Qing was asked what the picture represented the message was, therefore, quite clear.

After the initial 1874 publication of Orpen's findings, interest in his copies of the paintings, and in Bushman rock art more broadly, continued. Stow's pictures, for instance, appeared in the *Cape Argus*, 1877. In the same year an article on Khoisan rock art, by missionary Carl Büttner, featured in South Africa's *Standard and Mail*.⁹⁷ Orpen's rock paintings were published again in 1899 and in the *Journal of Folklore*, 1919.⁹⁸ In the early twentieth century the subject of Bushman art, dancing and hunting was kept alive in popular books and journals, such as Balfour's and Tongue's *Bushman Paintings* (1909) and Impey's *Origin of the Bushmen and the Rock Paintings of South Africa* (1926). But despite this apparent continued interest, Lewis-Williams suggests that by the early twentieth century few shared Bleek's view that the paintings were meaningful. There was one notable exception, Werner, who in 1908 proposed that Bushman rock art painters, 'worshipped the eland' and their representations had, 'a very special religious significance'.⁹⁹ Significant academic interest in Bushmen paintings did not really develop until the 1970s and the work of Vinnicombe.¹⁰⁰

It seems reasonable to surmise that the 'discovery' of the Bushman healing dance owed something to the particular nature of the Qing and Orpen encounter. Just as important, however, was the prevailing

⁹⁷ *Cape Argus*, 1877, Sept. 15th; *Standard and Mail*, 1877, Oct. 30th.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Lewis-Williams, *Believing and Seeing*, p. 7. Alice Werner first became interested in southern Africa following visits to Nyasaland and Natal in 1893-1894. She became Professor of Swahili and Bantu languages at London's School of Oriental Studies. Her publications include *The Language Families of Africa* (1915) and *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (1933). [http://www.aim25.ac.uk/cgi-bin/search2?coll_id113&inst_id=19, accessed 8/10/04]. This quote comes from her: 'Bushman Paintings', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 7 (1908), 387-93.

¹⁰⁰ R. Yates *et al*, *Pictures from the Past: A History of the Interpretation of Rock Paintings and Engravings of Southern Africa* (Pietermanitzburg, 1990), p. 35.

social climate; the interest in native matters of missionaries, travellers, administrators and other colonists that fostered and received Orpen's findings. Orpen's work coincided with a widespread awareness of the disappearance of the Khoisan 'prehistoric' world. Through Bleek's publication of the comments on the art from his own Bushmen informants, Bushman art took on a particular significance as a window into the disappearing primitive mind.

Orpen's ethnographic sensitivity towards Qing's and Bleek's exceptional ethnographic research, reflects a new sort of penetrative and sophisticated ethnography that was more thorough in its search for understanding.

Bleek and Hahn's fascination with philology, religion and the primitive mind, cast in nineteenth century universalist and comparativist theory, encouraged them to record and, especially in Hahn's case, to analyse Khoisan ways of thinking about the world. Out of interest in origins, which they believed were visible in myth, philology and religion, Bleek and Hahn situated the Khoisan within a context of a primitive mindset, which was similar to that of other primitives. From their search for this mindset, Bleek and Hahn presented an understanding of Khoisan that gave prominence to the role of spirits and nature, particularly rain, thunder, wind, the sun and the moon in the life of the Khoisan. Similar perceptions of the Khoisan world prevailed in the early twentieth century in the writings of Dorothea Bleek, Hoernlé, Laidler, Schapera, Lebzelter and other ethnographers. By the 1950s and the post-Second World War anthropological swing to Bushmen research, anthropologists recognised biological universalism but increasingly subjugated the comparativist perspective, or ideas of unity, to the specifics of culture, place and time. In the process something seems to have been lost of the relationship between Khoi and San and between Khoisan and other Africans.

Reflections on Qing's Dance

It is widely acknowledged that Orpen's findings provide historical depth to recently observed Bushman trance dances. Katz and his colleagues have traced ethnographic references to Bushman trance dancing even further back to 1836 and a description by Arbusset of a *mokoma*, or 'dance of blood'.¹⁰¹ Schapera, however, had a different understanding of the *mokoma* from Katz. Schapera suggested that Bushmen dances were arenas for cult worship of the mantis, */Kaggen* or *Cagn*. He specified that */Kaggen* was worshipped in times of famine and before going to war, when the *mo'koma*, or dance of blood that Qing described, was performed all through the night. He did not consider the *mo'koma* a trance healing dance.

¹⁰¹ Katz *et al*, *Healing*, p. 54.

Evidence running up to the 1870s all suggests that historical Khoi and San peoples performed very similar dances. The dances were similar, not just in terms of form, but in the ideas underlying them. The ideational overlap is evident in Hottentot and Bushmen both having communicated with supernal entities. It is also evident in the shared role of the key dance figure, called */Kaggen* by */Xam* Bushmen, in Khoi culture. Schapera describes */Kaggen* as a human being with supernatural powers and magical charms, who can change himself into many forms and is often described as dying but coming to life again.¹⁰² Guenther confirms that these characteristics, which are so reminiscent of Khoi *Haitsi-aibeb*, do indeed reflect a belief in the same Khoisan trickster figure but conceptualised in different guises.¹⁰³

Schapera understood that Bushmen undertook war dances, rain dances and hunting dances and dances that aimed at healing. Amongst many contemporary Bushmen the healing dance is prominent as virtually the only surviving San ritual. Since the 1950s, boreholes have increasingly reduced fear of drought, reliance on hunting has decreased with the arrival of food subsidies, shops and a cash economy, and war dances, battles and skirmishes of an 'inter-tribal' nature, have become inappropriate within transformed and controlled social relations. Dancing to heal remains as a traditional means of solving problems. But, thinking of healing dances apart from their wider historical context, including mythical entities associated with dance, distorts our understanding. It removes the Bushmen from both the Khoi and the wider context of African ritual behaviour. If one does think of the healing dance as a new entity, devoid of its historical context, the ancient connection that anthropologists recognise in contemporary dance must be viewed with caution.

Recent anthropology has emphasised an idea of Bushmen as people highly adapted to survival in a particularly harsh and challenging environment. Central to this notion of adaptation anthropologists recognise equality, reciprocity, support and co-operation as fundamental attributes of Bushmen life. In particular, the phenomenon of Bushmen healers treating all present and applying 'charm medicine', as Qing referred to it, to everyone at the dance, has been interpreted as evidence of the exceptional community basis of the healing dance. The following consideration explores how such recent interpretation of the dance might be reconsidered on the basis of Schapera's perspective.

Schapera classified the *mo'koma* as a war dance. If, hypothetically, before going to battle a central figure, having entered trance, goes around a San group and gives to each warrior a charm or other such preparation for battle, would we think of this as sharing egalitarian behaviour? In this context all the warriors are threatened because they are going into battle, they are all involved. Switching to the

¹⁰² Schapera, *Khoisan*, pp. 180-1.

context of illness, if we perceive that all people may become sick, then all people involved with sickness would similarly receive attention in a dance setting as an adjunct to treating the sickest. The healing dance could be a ritual response to a shared sense of threat or vulnerability rather than an egalitarian statement. As becomes apparent in the following chapter, a shared sense of threat is an idea associated with Bushmen by some anthropologists.

Wendy James notes that for the Uduk of the Sudan, ritual serves as ‘the continuing defensive struggle of humankind against the wild, and especially wild animals’.¹⁰⁴ Victor Turner notes amongst the Ndembu of Zambia that divination is social analysis and ‘a patient will not get better until all the tensions and aggressions in the group inter-relations have been brought to light and exposed to ritual’.¹⁰⁵ Somé, a proponent of ‘African healing’ and ‘African spirituality’, notes amongst his own people, the Dagara of Burkina Faso, that ‘gatekeepers’, who might be thought of in a similar manner to San dancing healers, oversee the ‘healthy functioning of the community’ and bring over from the spirit world what is needed for the community to flourish.¹⁰⁶ Against this broader perspective the San dance is, like other African rituals, a mechanism for preserving and promoting community harmony from both internal and external threat.

Broader contextualisation of the healing dance also indicates that the act of treating every member of the dance, which is the essence of claims to the particularly egalitarian nature of the dance, are also less exclusive than might be suggested. Roy Willis observed amongst the Lungu of northern Zambia, that at one particular ritual to attract good *ngulu* spirits, the ‘doctor’ dabbed ‘the centre of each of the three drums with white maize flower to attract the *ngulu* (white being the colour of spirit) and puts a pinch of flour in the mouth of each person present, including RW’.¹⁰⁷ Drawing on group participation and strength is a typical feature of indigenous ritual and ceremony, as it is of organized religions in which members pray together and within occult séances. The egalitarianism identified within San dances seems remarkably similar to wider African ritual practices that work at a community level.

¹⁰³ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 97.

¹⁰⁴ W. James, *Moral Knowledge, Religion, and Power among the Uduk of Sudan* (Oxford, 1988), p.7.

¹⁰⁵ Turner cited by R. Horton, ‘African Traditional Thought’, p. 54.

¹⁰⁶ M. Somé, *The Healing Wisdom of Africa: Finding Life Purpose through Nature, Ritual, and Community* (New York, 1999), p. 184.

¹⁰⁷ Willis, *Some Spirits Heal*, p. 85.

Bleek, Hahn, Healing and Witchdoctors

Bleek's focus on recording the 'primitive' Bushman mind before it disappeared was broad. His starting point was myth and folklore but much of his material and especially that gathered by his associate, Lloyd, included customs and belief. Bleek and Lloyd did not have a particular interest in medical knowledge. Despite this, owing to the exceptional nature of their undertaking, their material has much to contribute to understanding Khoisan healing. Bleek's starting point for enquiry into universal primitives was language. Unusually, his aim was not so much to explore clean and loosely translated European ideas or categories of enquiry, but to produce a thoroughly accurate linguistic account of what Bushman thought and actually said, recorded in detail, with the most accurate linguistic interpretation possible - even if the product must sometimes have seemed, at least initially, to make little sense. He believed that only in the interstices of the language could one look for deep meaning.

In the previous chapter I drew on Bleek and Lloyd's report that buchu pacified the rain-bull. The unusual and useful nature of the Bleek archive is evident in the following example that builds on ideas associated with buchu use. At least amongst contemporary Khoe speakers, sick organs are associated with 'standing up'. This idea seems tied to the role of buchu as something that excites, associated with rising, and pacifies, associated with reclining. Amongst contemporary Khoisan dancers, helpers rub a healer after they have tranced. In the Bleek material we find that when the '!gi:xa', or 'sorcerer', returns from healing or trancing, people massaged him and sang to him to make the 'vertebral artery' 'soft', so that it might 'lie down':

he would be ill, if they did not by singing make his blood vessels lie down. The people must look out for his vertebral artery, for he would turn into a lion if they did not by singing make it lie down¹⁰⁸

The consistency of the associations across different Khoisan groups in different places, bridging the last 130 or so years, suggests an older root of the ideas.

The Bleek archive includes considerable detail concerning *!gixa* and many diverse details of belief and practice that contribute to the healing record. Bleek first translated *!gixa* as sorcerers but in the later published editions of his work, edited by his daughter, Dorothea, the alternative 'medicine man' was adopted. Bleek's record provides the earliest clear attribution of a name and details of the practices and beliefs associated with Bushmen 'witchdoctors' or 'medicine men'. These details,

¹⁰⁸ Bleek, 'Belief and Customs', *Bantu Studies* 9:1 (1935), 22.

which were pulled together and analysed by Hewitt (1986), provide an unparalleled access into Bushman thinking.

The unusual contribution Bleek and Lloyd's material makes to understanding Khoisan healing is evident in the support the above quoted material lends to my research. Drawing on Lévy-Bruhl's notions of mystical participation, my findings, with Bleek's material, suggest the following three significant propositions. Firstly, that properties of living things, such as those of a lion or a baboon, can enter people. Secondly, these properties can be good or bad. A bad property can be thought of as an excess or being too strong. If something enters the body that is too strong for the body it can make arteries, and from my fieldwork, organs, *stand up*. Additionally, softness is equated with things lying down or in some sense, being peaceful. The corollary born out in contemporary Khoisan thought is that unhealthy things are hard. I return to these ideas and Bleek's work in later contexts.

The strength of Theophilus Hahn's contribution to understanding Khoisan healing lies, like Bleek's, in his project of philological analysis. Exceptionally however, Hahn brings an intimacy to his analysis born from long experience of Nama peoples and their day-to-day lifestyle in southern Africa. This intimacy gave Hahn considerable knowledge of not only Khoekhoe ways of thinking but details of their customs and society.

Previously I drew attention to Hahn's proposition that *Tsûi-//Goab* translates as 'red dawn' and *//Gaunab* as 'destroyer', or in another sense 'the night'. Hahn proposed the two deities opposed each other as day and night and were tied to Khoekhoe ideas of man dying every night and being offered new life every morning.¹⁰⁹ Although this conclusion might be dismissed on the basis of unsophisticated anthropological investigation and the currency of such ideas in the late nineteenth century, the idea seems to play out through ideas of Khoisan healing. Hahn identified that Nama hold */geis*, or 'religious' dances. My research points to the Khoe */gais*, the Damara *arus* and other Bushmen trance dances all involving ideas of sickness entering the body as an arrow. If the arrow is horizontal it sticks, if it is vertical it can be removed. Similarly the essence of animals, plants and people can enter healers and is known as */gais*. In everyday life the */gais* sleep, are horizontal. In dance they wake up and stand up. Hahn's stress on the experiential importance of day and night plays out in wider ideas of life being synonymous with rising, movement, or healing 'energy' rising, and death and illness being associated with lying or stasis and 'sticking'.

¹⁰⁹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 126.

An important detail that Hahn provides us with is the name *gebo aogu*. These were Khoikhoi people Hahn thought of as ‘prophets’ who, ‘could tell to new-born children as well as to heroes their fate’.¹¹⁰ The name continues to appear through the ethnography and is one I also encountered as a self referential name of Hai//om healers.

Both Bleek and Hahn added body to previously vague associations between Khoisan and the dead and the close tie between Khoisan beliefs and customs and environmental phenomenon. One /Xam Bushmen thought:

dead people who come out of the ground are those of whom my parents used to say, that they rode the rain, because the thongs with which they held it were like the horse’s reins, they bound the rain. Thus they rode the rain, because they owned it¹¹¹

Binding the rain speaks of dead people having some power over the rain. Owning the rain is a similar idea to one proposed by Lorna Marshall. Marshall identified that !Kung medicine men own or possess *gaoxa* from the supernal entity, ‡*Gao na*.¹¹² The idea also seems similar to Damara rainmen possessing the rain ‘spirit’ or ‘wind of the rain’. To the Damara, the rain wind is the most powerful of a number of /*gais*.

Hahn tells us that Hottentots commonly attribute death to *Gaunab* or the ghosts of the dead, the /*hei /nun*.¹¹³ The name /*hei /nun* (/*hei /nūn*¹¹⁴) is one that reoccurs in the early twentieth century but is not one I encountered, although it appears in Haacke’s dictionary. The word breaks down into /*hei*, or /*hai*, meaning ‘grey’ or ‘indistinct’ and /*nū.b* meaning ‘leg’.¹¹⁵ Schapera translated it as ‘fawn feet’.¹¹⁶

Early German Ethnography

The anthropologist Robert Gordon identified a ‘revolution’ in the scientific conceptualisation of Namibian Bushmen between Galton’s ‘pseudoscientific’ visit of 1851 and a visit by the Swiss botanist Schinz in 1884. The revolution involved the arrival of philology and physical anthropology.¹¹⁷ If the

¹¹⁰ Cited by Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 394.

¹¹¹ Bleek, ‘Belief and Customs’, *Bantu Studies* 7:4 (1933), 305.

¹¹² Marshall, ‘!Kung Bushman Religious Beliefs’, *Africa*, 32 (1962), 227.

¹¹³ Hahn, *Tsun-//Goam*, pp. 85-86.

¹¹⁴ Hoernlé, ‘Social Value of Water’, in P. Carstens (ed.) *Social Organization of the Nama* (Cape Town and London, 1975), p. 80.

¹¹⁵ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, pp. 63,72.

¹¹⁶ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 366.

¹¹⁷ Gordon, *Bushman Myth*, p. 43.

usefulness and credibility of the research of the philologists has proved more enduring in terms of insight and numbers of publications, as Gordon notes, it was the physical anthropology discourse that dominated Bushman studies at that time.

A major figure in shaping this physical anthropology discourse was Gustav Fritsch. Fritsch's book, *Eingeboren Südafrikas: Ethnographisch und anatomisch beschreibt*, published in 1872 after three years of fieldwork (1863-1866), was one of the earliest anthropological studies of southern Africa.¹¹⁸ Fritsch was an active member of the Berlin Anthropological Society, publishers of 'Zeitschrift für Ethnologie', which over a few decades either side of 1900, carried a number of significant articles regarding Khoisan beliefs and practices.¹¹⁹ Fritsch held a chair in Comparative Anatomy at Berlin University.¹²⁰ One time dissector and collector of Hottentot genitals,¹²¹ Fritsch described in meticulous detail in *Eingeboren Südafrikas*, the anatomy of Bantu, Hottentot and Bushmen peoples as recorded during his 'fieldwork'. Although his book has little to say of direct relevance to Khoisan healing, it is important as background to the colonial, German speaking, amateur and professional anthropologists who engaged in and moulded the ongoing Khoisan discourse.¹²²

Unlike Fritsch's interest in different ethnic groups, wider German anthropological interest was heavily focussed on Bushmen, as the number of articles in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century testifies. This literature was generated by professional anthropologists such as Fritsch and amateurs, notably including, from a later context, Heinrich Vedder. In addition to preoccupation with physical anthropology and, out of colonial administrative necessity, language, much German literature concerning South West Africa focused on poisons. Although little was published directly concerned with indigenous medicine, the German sources demonstrate the emergence of new findings and the consolidation and perpetuation of old.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ For example: V. Lebzelter, 'Zur Heilkunde der Bergdama', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 60 (1928), 296-305. H. Werner, 'Beobachtungen über die Hieikum', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 38, (1906), 241-68; P. Bartells, 'Beitrag zur Volksmedizin der Kaffern und Hottentotten', *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, 25 (1893), 133-5.

¹²⁰ A. Banks 'Gustav Fritsch as Physical Anthropologist and Anthropometric Photographer'. Paper presented at, 'Public History: Forgotten History', University of Namibia, 22-25 August 2000, p. 6.

¹²¹ Ibid., p. 8.

¹²² For a broader perspective on German ethnography see: H. Glenn Penny, *Objects of Culture: Ethnology and Ethnographic Museums in Imperial Germany* (Chapell Hill, 2001).

Schinz reported in some detail in his major work, *Deutsch-Südwest Afrika* (1891), on a Bushmen ‘magician’ massaging, applying sweat and sucking a Damara with malaria.¹²³ His description is notable because it demonstrates a desire to understand the Khoisan phenomena with an objectivity and relativity not apparent in the rhetoric of deliberate deception, or devil worshipping, typical of earlier ethnographic reports. Schinz concluded the above account of sucking with the comment, ‘From this hour on, Kairob, my companion, was healthy and fresh as never before’. Schinz continued:

Even if the demonstration of the removal of things from the body, which the bushmen of course had hidden in his curly hair, and therefore the explanation can be labelled as fraud, I do not doubt that the magician carried this out in good faith and was himself surprised by his results. What the magician carried out on the patient was a hypnotising suggestion and is by no means, if we put ourselves in the position of the involved, inconceivable.¹²⁴

The sense of relative equality in this statement stands in strong contrast to Fritsch’s identification of Bushmen as zoologically between humans and apes.¹²⁵ The explanation of hypnosis also reflects the increasingly popular late nineteenth century scientific interest in this phenomenon, and more generally in altered states of mind.

Schinz’s analysis was both relatively detailed and sympathetic, but not all German observers were so well disposed towards the Khoisan. Gordon suggests that geographer Schultze’s comment on the Bushmen, in the encyclopaedic *Das Deutsche Kolonialreich* (1914), is ‘in pompous convoluted language, which is almost as obnoxious as the ideas expressed’.¹²⁶ But despite Schultze’s clear belief in colonial superiority, Hoernlé described his 1907 book, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari*, as providing, ‘an admirable account of the Hottentot methods of treating sickness and disease’¹²⁷. The regularity with which Schapera refers to his work in *Khoisan Peoples* similarly attests to Schapera’s high regard for Schultze’s information.

Schultze’s colonial ideas are offensive but nevertheless, by applying scientific interest he provided new information concerning ‘witchdoctors’ and massage. Schultze had little to say of Khoi ‘witchdoctors’ but he proposed that the name *!gai aob* was derived from *!gaib*, a magic medicine used by the

¹²³ H. Schinz, *Deutsch-Südwest Afrika: Forschungsreisen durch die deutschen Schutzgebiete Gross Nama 1884-1887* (Oldenburg and Leipzig, 1891), pp. 340-1.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Gordon, *Bushman Myth*, p.43; Banks contests the validity of this conclusion: Banks ‘Gustav Fritsch’, 2.

¹²⁶ Gordon, ‘Status of Namibian Anthropology’, 4.

¹²⁷ Hoernlé, ‘Certain Rites of Transition’, 77.

!gaiakwa and made from plant and animal substance mixed with goat's fat. The mixture was kept in a horn and used benevolently or maliciously on other people. Vedder suggested in 1923 that the name *!gai-aob* derives from *!gai*, 'to rise from the stomach'¹²⁸ I believe Vedder was much closer to the mark and Schultze's *!gair* was probably something like buchu or *sā* used by healers.

Thinking of massage in a European para-medical capacity, Schultze described in some detail Hottentot use of massage to help pregnancy. His account included: the number of times a week massage was undertaken - two or three; the length of time allotted to each session - an hour to an hour and a half; who did it - two old women; and what they did - monitor the position and growth of the foetus. Furthermore, Schultze described Hottentot definitions of pregnancy, ideas of conception and understandings of the anatomy involved in the birth process.¹²⁹

Schultze's consideration of Khoisan massage was ethnographically unusual but he was not alone in turning his attention to the phenomenon. A doctor affiliated with the German Schutzgebiet, Anton Lübbert, produced new information concerning moving organs. Lübbert stated:

The inner sicknesses for most South West Africans come from the self movement of the intestines, which is known from their war surgical experiences.[..]
In the body the intestines cross to the head, or they move to the leg or other part of the body, where they cause long problems, until they, voluntarily or through treatment, are forced back to their natural place. From having this understanding massage is used to bring the intestines back.¹³⁰

Lübbert's conclusion that intestinal movement came from war experiences is interesting, although it is hard to see how observation alone could explain movement of the intestines to the head or leg. It is clear from his account that, not only did he identify an indigenous way of thinking about the body and illness, which he justified empirically, but he also observed that massage was used to correct internal bodily dysfunction. Although he does not explore these findings in greater detail, his attribution of empiricism suggests he granted some sense of rationality to South West African people. Unfortunately Lübbert's extract does not specify the provenance of his findings beyond the natives of South West Africa. It is possible that he believed his findings related to all the various ethnic groups found in South West Africa. His article continues by providing an account of particular Herero healing practices, which may or may not suggest that his massage findings related to the Herero. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the relationship of Herero healing practices to Khoisan, but to bring this comparison would be most enlightening in terms of understanding inter-indigenous sharing and

¹²⁸ H.Vedder, *Die Bergdama* (2 vols., Hamburg, 1923), i, 104.

¹²⁹ L.Schultze, *Aus Namaland und Kalahari* (Jena, 1907), pp. 215-7.

¹³⁰ A. Lübbert, 'Klein Nachrichten', *Globus*, 80:4 (July, 1901), 67.

movement of knowledge. Regardless, however, as to whom these particular findings relate, Lübbert's account provides an historical indigenous precursor to Hoernlé's findings. Other details Lübbert's short account included were that fractures were treated with traction, movement, massage and splinting and that specific plants were used to treat venereal disease.

In 1903 Gentz of the German Schutztruppe, a man who had spent many years in Namibia and had prepared himself for his ethnographic research by reading both Fritsch and Schinz,¹³¹ made some very interesting observations of Bushmen he found between Gobabis and Rietfontein.¹³² Gentz's description provides the earliest ethnographic observation of a recognisable and explicitly labelled healing dance. Gentz revealed that he frequently observed Bushmen dancing and he described, complete with diagram, the most common form of the dance: 'The men lined in "Indian file" and, with the whole lot stomping, they strode in a circular way round and round, during which the women in a semi-circle some steps away, stood or squatted and with their rhythmical chant and hand clap, accompanied the dance'.¹³³ He described the caterpillar cocoon rattles tied around the dancers legs as being like the Zulus. At one point Gentz recounted how he asked his interpreter, 'a young Hottentot girl', why the 'Grossdoctor' seemed to perform a solo dance in front of the women. The girl replied 'He loves the women'. On the one hand this reply might be deemed unhelpful or off hand, on the other it may point to the difference between the ethnographic search for deeper explanation and local reality. It also indicates the multiple meanings and roles of dance and indeed wider ritual performance. Lorna Marshall detected a hint of the erotic in !Kung dance¹³⁴ and Willis relates similar elements identifiable in Lunge *ngulu* ritual: 'So many disparate and contrary emotional ingredients: its frightening and funny, violent and gentle, deadly serious and lightly playful, weird and erotic, all somehow combined in *ngulu* at its best'.¹³⁵

Gentz asserts that despite the erotic element, the dance:

is often religious, or is somehow equivalent, has a medical purpose, the healing of a sick person, expelling angry spirits, awakening dead ones etc. Frequently the dance also has the character of pure pleasure. Each single dance lies in a single designated idea. In most cases it deals with performing the lives of animals and the hunt, but also, like the song of the Herero, around an imitation of the idiosyncrasies of the European.¹³⁶

¹³¹ Gentz, 'Einige Beiträge zur Kenntnis der südwestafrikanischen Völkerschaften', *Globus* 83: 19 (21 May, 1903), 297.

¹³² Rietfontein is on the Botswanan border of Namibia, just north of Gobabis.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 156.

¹³⁴ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance of the !Kung', 365.

¹³⁵ Willis, *Some Spirits Heal*, p. 96.

¹³⁶ Gentz, 'Einige Beiträge', 156.

Of specific interest as a detail that becomes the staple of later healing descriptions and something I also encountered, Gentz elsewhere tells of a dance at which he witnessed the ‘doctor’ press his hand and ‘woolly skull’ alternately against the back and stomach of the sick person. Gentz specifically recognised this action of a healer rubbing their head on someone as medical practice. Earlier writers may not have interpreted it in this way.

In addition to information concerning the dance, Gentz also provides us with some interesting details concerning the Bushmen healer more generally. He related that the doctors trained to become immune from poison. They additionally trained up younger doctors through rigorous dietary restrictions, ‘consecrated’ amulets for children and others to wear as protection against an early death and did not believe in god but had a great fear of deceased grandparent ‘on whose incantation their entire cult rests’.¹³⁷ He attributed the healer’s collapse into trance to prolonged singing and dancing and excessive chewing of tobacco, he described how in trance the sweating healers seem immune to the cold of the night. Whilst the doctors were in trance, Gentz observed they could walk on hot coals, apparently immune from burning. Though ostensibly impressed, he reflected upon the thickness of their bush hardened feet.

Amongst Kaufmann’s rather thin notes on Bushmen doctors (1908), based on his work in Rietfontein, he includes the detail that a kind of fragrant black unguent is daubed by Bushmen doctors under the noses of men. He is not sure if this is for beauty or whether it acts as a stimulant.¹³⁸ This is interesting from a contemporary perspective because a black unguent containing buchu was rubbed under noses and on chests at the commencement of Hai//om and Ju’hoan healing dances I observed. This might suggest some degree of formal continuity. I was told this was done to ‘open’ the mind and make healing power effective.

These German speaking ethnographers bring an ambivalent mixture of scientific enquiry to Bushmen ethnography. Science, as an adjunct to progress, is used as a tool of discrimination yet at the same time new details are recorded and new ideas explored. The remit of science encouraged a relative open mindedness regarding the collecting of information and some of this information hinted at a different sort of Bushmen healing. Nowhere though is there any real sense of distance from the ongoing European habit of analysis using the categories of the natural, scientific and the supernatural. Wider

¹³⁷ Ibid., p. 159.

colonial concerns and scientific interests clearly contributed to the sort of information collected and how it was interpreted. A colonial interest in poisons led to particular comments on Khoisan ‘poison doctors’.¹³⁹ Contemporaneous ideas of hypnosis were also looked to as a scientific explanation for Bushmen therapies. The emergence of interest in massage probably again reflected the growing para-medical prominence of massage in Europe. Spirits were also a subject long of interest. Gentz’s information regarding the notion that summoning deceased grandparent was the key idea behind Bushman cult practices, is particularly interesting and shadows a host of related details that have since been identified regarding dead people and dance.

The particular German ethnographic emphasis on Bushmen brought new Bushmen material to surface. The healing dance that had been identified by Orpen was found amongst the Bushmen. The German mention of the phenomenon may have confirmed ideas that this was a peculiarly Bushmen phenomenon. Having said that, in Gentz’s consideration of the matter the dance remains just one of many types of Bushmen dance and does not have the status later attributed to it.

In spite of such new interest and detail, the range of practices mentioned by these German ethnographers ultimately remained small and the understanding behind those practices was not explored beyond a ‘common sense’ appreciation of massage and medicine in line with European biomedical thought of the time, or beyond a description of the primitive and superstitious practices of witchdoctors.

Laidler, Vedder and the Professional Anthropologists

At the end of the short German colonial period came the first professional anthropologists. In 1918 Winifred Hoernlé published an important article entitled ‘Certain Rites of Transition and the Conception of !Nau among the Hottentots’. The article drew on findings from research material she had collected during 1912 and 1913 whilst working amongst different groups of Hottentots. Her research focused on an undefined community found on the southern bank of the Orange River, who included !Gami -#nūn peoples amongst them, and a further two other groups, both in German South West Africa, the #Aunin or Topnaars of Walfish Bay and the /Hei /Khuan of Berseba. Echoing Bleek’s notion of capturing the primitive before it disappeared, Hoernlé believed that these Hottentots

¹³⁸ Kaufman, ‘Die #Aunin’, 141.

¹³⁹ For colonial relationships with indigenous poison see: David Bunn, ‘The Brown Serpent of the Rocks: Bushman Arrow Toxins in the Dutch and British Imaginations, 1735-1780’, in B. Cooper and A. Steyn (eds.), *Transgressing Boundaries: New Directions in the Study of Culture* (Athens (Ohio), 1996), pp. 58-85; *ibid.*, Jane Taylor, ‘The Poison Pen’, pp. 86-113.

were ‘a passing people, who have practically given up the struggle of keeping alive their traditions. What vitality is left is spent in the absorption of the ways of incoming Europeans’.¹⁴⁰

Hoernlé’s article is a distinctive product of a new type of fieldwork based anthropological enquiry. Her ethnography is distinctive for her early use of theory to explain her Khoisan observations. Hoernlé’s interpretation of *!nau* was based on the French linguist and ethnographer Arnold van Gennep’s conception of *rites de passage* (1909), that divided rituals in the human life cycle into a three part structure of separation, transition and incorporation.¹⁴¹ It was whilst researching puberty rites that Hoernlé first came across the focus of her article, the concept of *!nau*, which she analysed as ‘transition rites’. Hoernlé thought *!nau* was a state of ritual danger intrinsic to Hottentot periods of crisis and transitions through crisis. A *!nau* person is both exposed to danger and dangerous. Whilst in a state of *!nau*, the behaviour of the individual and their contact with other people is governed by strong behavioural and social constraints.

In addition to *!nau* associations with puberty, Hoernlé identified *!nau* in cases of certain diseases, the names of which were new to Hottentot ethnography. In outlining her material Hoernlé acknowledged Schultze’s account of Khoisan ‘surgical methods’, ‘cupping a patient, etc.’, and she specified that she wished to record the ceremonies attached to the sorts of procedures Schultze had mentioned. In her use of the word ‘attaching’ in this context, Hoernlé betrays her conception that Khoisan healing is rational and ceremonious. In her thinking, cupping is, for example, presented as reasonable but attached to primitive ceremony. By tackling Khoisan medicine in this dichotomising manner, Hoernlé was not looking for Khoisan meaning of the treatment in the wider social and cosmological Khoisan context. Nonetheless her examination of *!nau* and its relationship to illness begins to identify new Hottentot types of illness and treatment and to place this medical knowledge in a deeper Khoisan context.

Hoernlé separated Hottentot sickness into two groups. The first group which she tentatively thought was not clearly related to ideas of *!nau*, she termed: */áisená*, ‘sickness’. These sicknesses were due to ‘misplacement of the internal organs.’ The organs, Hoernlé observed, wandered around the body ‘according to their notions of anatomy’. The sickness was treated by skilled massage. This is Hoernlé’s only mention of massage and it added little to that presented by Lübbert, whom she appears not to have read. It was, however, Hoernlé that brought the phenomenon to the attention of a wider audience. The second group of illnesses Hoernlé identified was *//óp*. In this latter *!nau* category, she

¹⁴⁰ Hoernlé, ‘Certain Rites of Transition’, 66.

¹⁴¹ A. van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage* (London, 1960 [1909]); Barnard and Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 592.

described //kèis, or fever, ǀúrub, which she called varicose veins; //autas, which she termed paralysis and !nomis, a disease her interpreter called ‘lupus’ but she suspected was cancer.¹⁴²

Despite Hoernlé’s theoretical foundation, she failed to explore further the significance of massage to theories of illness and remained uncertain about the distinction between !nau and non !nau sickness. She recorded though that one of her informants told her: ‘Everything is !nau, or used to be; warriors returning from battle were !nau, a sick man is !nau, a widow..etc.’. This suggests that Hoernlé believed the //aisena sicknesses, the displaced organ sickness, would also have involved such !nau ideas, but that owing to acculturation the ideas had died out.

Since Hoernlé identified !nau little more than mention has been made of the phenomenon. Schapera provided one of few accounts of the idea, and his was almost a verbatim repeat of Hoernlé’s information. He did, however, elaborate that Wikar, in addition to Kolb, whom Hoernlé mentioned, also seemed to have written about the same phenomenon, albeit less comprehensively, and had referred to it as ‘andersmachen’ or ‘alteration’.¹⁴³ Schapera also observed, with no elaboration, that ‘Kolb’s description of urination may possibly also be interpreted in this light’.¹⁴⁴ In a later chapter I will examine Khoisan ideas of organ movement in relation to this idea of !nau which is still present among contemporary Khoisan, as are the illness categories that Hoernlé identified.

Hoernlé proposed that Nama ‘formerly’ thought the /Hei /Nūn were the cause of most sickness ‘either themselves or through the !Gei Aogu, the medicine men’.¹⁴⁵ She elaborated that //Gaunagu is another name for /Hei /Nūn and that //Gaunagu is the plural form of //Gauab. One of her informants affirmed the link between ghosts and the deity: ‘The names are two, but the thing is one’.¹⁴⁶ Hoernlé noted that this informant’s views strongly reflected missionary influence. This was evident in his belief that illness came as evil spirits sent by the devil, //Gauab.

Hoernlé’s framing of Nama /Hei /Nūn beliefs in the past tense and her emphasis on missionary influence, points to the extent to which she envisaged destruction of ‘traditional’ beliefs. Recent Khoisan researchers have encountered a similar apparent contradiction in informants’ views regarding sickness coming from both a supernal entity and dead people. This contradiction has not, however, been read as indication of acculturation. I was frequently told ‘the God is good and bad, he sends

¹⁴²Hoernlé, ‘Certain Rites of Transition’, 78.

¹⁴³ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 256.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 258.

¹⁴⁵ Hoernlé, ‘Social Value of Water’, p. 80.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 82.

sickness and cures’, but at the same time, ‘sickness is from the dead people, from the devil’. Through Schapera, Guenther, Barnard and others, such apparent contradictions as Hoernlé observed have become viewed as an idiom of ideational flexibility, wherein Khoisan ideas are plural, multi-layered and ambiguous. Hoernlé effectively missed the point that her informant was articulating something quite distinct from Christianity and not a confused notion having emerged from the effects of acculturation. Her informant used the notion of ghosts as a vector of illness or vector of power and potency. The social constitution of a particular illness - what it is, where it comes from, how it is treated and reacted to, who gets it and when - shapes the idiom that is used to identify the origin of illness. Thinking in terms of ‘mystical participation’ and knowing humans through experience, certain types of illness are associated with the power of people, living or dead. When no living person seems to be the cause of illness then the cause may be attributed to the dead. Living people make others sick through their *Ʇoab* (Khoe), their wind, which is also translated as their smell. In *Khoekhoegowab /nū.b* does not only mean ‘leg’, as in */Hei /Nūn*, fawn foot or leg, but ‘rancid smell’.¹⁴⁷

Hoernlé recorded that when a whirlwind, a *Sarés*, comes near a Nama hut the occupants throw cold water in front of it saying, ‘please depart, what do you seek here, go’. They did this to avoid the sickness and death the wind brings.¹⁴⁸ This association of wind and dead people is one that features in both recent Khoisan research and the Bleek archive and will be returned to. It is enough to note here that the whirlwind serves as a vector of illness; it is a grand idiom based on the scale of the problem. A big wind of dead people brings big sickness or death.

Hoernlé observed Nama throw water on the grave of a person newly buried. For the explanation for this she turned to Hahn (1881) who proposed it ‘cooled the soul of the departed’.¹⁴⁹ This use of water is similar to that of throwing water in front of the whirlwind. It is also similar to a primary role of buchu; it pacifies things and makes them lie down. I encountered a Nama woman in Swakopmund who after a bad dream sprinkled water next to her bed to prevent the dream from affecting her.¹⁵⁰ The idiom of coolness carries a sense of healing similar to that found in many African cultures.

Influenced by Radcliffe-Brown, Hoernlé analysed Nama relationship with water in terms of its social role. She concluded that water had great protective powers against antisocial forces, yet at the same time it was highly dangerous to members who were withdrawn from Nama society.¹⁵¹ Within this

¹⁴⁷ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 72.

¹⁴⁸ Hoernlé, ‘Social Value of Water’, p. 81.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

¹⁵⁰ 25

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 79.

context Hoernlé identified that when a *!Gèi Aop* [sic], ‘witch doctor’, was deemed to have caused sickness and hence to have become a threat to the community, he was dunked in water, whereupon his power ‘oozes away from him’. Having recounted this detail Hoernlé told the story of a young girl who had been ‘!Gèied’ and nearly died. Eventually however, ‘she got the medicine which is all powerful against all !Gèi methods. This is the //Á !naip, the kidney of a species of jackal, which has a smell so strong and penetrating, that it is too much even for !Gèi medicine’.

Hoernlé admitted she had never met a Nama witchdoctor and she suggested it was difficult to learn of details regarding *!Gèi Aogu* because missionaries had discouraged the practice and subsequently few were left. Hoernlé recorded that witchdoctors were ‘men’ who could make people ill or die through bewitchment, or could cure bewitched people. More sensitively she observed that:

the !Gèi Aop was considered in some way connected with the /Hei /Nūn, and therefore had an immunity which others had not. He could impart his immunity to others and so cure them of disease by inoculating them with his essence, as it were, which was contained in his body dirt and perspiration, and which he could scrape off as he needed it¹⁵²

This description laid the foundations for later analyses of Bushman ‘potency’, although the parallels with Khoi belief are seldom flagged up and nowhere explored in any detail. This description serves to explain Bushmen healers rubbing their body ‘dirt’ and sweat on ‘patients’. The tension between these impressive new research findings and the overpowering European hermeneutic paradigms that overshadowed Hoernlé’s analysis is evident in her use of the word ‘immunity’ and the hesitant use of ‘inoculating’.

Where I wish to push Hoernlé’s findings further is in relation to her observation regarding the kidney of the jackal. Jackal kidney, sometimes of the black backed jackal, is a very widely used ingredient of Khoi medicines. The question that Hoernlé did not resolve, is why the strong and penetrating smell of the jackal kidney should be too much for *!Gèi* medicine. If one considers smell as potency and essence, then the strong smelling jackal kidney contains strong jackal potency. The power seems to be related both to the experiential knowledge of jackals and to the strong smell itself. Thoroughly pungent aardwolf dung is similarly burnt in Khoe huts and houses to rid the dwelling of ‘evil spirits’ or bad dreams.

Regarding the nature of *!Gèi Aogu*, they possess potency, as ghosts also possess potency. This potency gives them immunity depending upon its identity, for example, snake potency gives snake

¹⁵² Ibid., p. 83.

immunity. A *!Gèi Aop*'s potency is transmitted through their smell and held in their sweat and body dirt. Their potency is diminished if they wash. Transferring potency is not the same as inoculation.

Before leaving Hoernlé there is one further healing belief worth drawing attention to. Hoernlé was told that a child born with a caul might become a *gebo aop*, or seer, or a clever *!Gèi Aop* if he were given the caul to eat as a child. Being born with the caul is still thought to signify the birth of a seer or healer to some Damara and *!Kung*.¹⁵³

Laidler's accounts (1923, 1928) combined details from earlier observers, especially Grevenbroek and Kolb, with his own research which he undertook in Namaqualand, from the Richtersveld in the north to the district of Garies in the south.¹⁵⁴ Laidler sought partly to reconstruct pre-colonial Nama life and partly to provide an update to earlier Nama ethnography. As a doctor he was interested in Nama medicine.

Laidler's consideration of the Nama is distinctive from Hoernlé's research, in as much as it is not written by a trained anthropologist. Laidler thought about the Nama in a more clearly pre-scientific and less culturally relativist manner than Hoernlé. Consideration of the resemblance between the Nama pharmacopoeia and that of Western medicine Laidler stated, is enough 'to cause the scoffer to cease his scoffing, and realise that here after all lies the root and commencement of modern medicine'.¹⁵⁵ Laidler saw Hottentots as acculturated primitive forebears who at times showed glimmers of scientific thought. He was keen to emphasise that whilst Khoisan were superstitious, as 'children of Nature', it is not surprising that they placed such importance on observing and reading natural phenomena. Nor was it surprising that observation of sequences of events led to associated ideas, such as meeting a chameleon in the veld, indicating the imminence of rain.¹⁵⁶

By way of introduction to his chapter on medicine, Laidler drew upon contemporaneous interest in psychology and psychoanalysis as a means of explaining a Khoisan belief that objects enter the human body and cause sickness. In a statement of his position, he quoted directly from Satow's *Hypnotism and Suggestion*. Satow was referring to generalised primitive beliefs of intruding objects causing sickness:

¹⁵³ 44, 65

¹⁵⁴ Laidler 'Manners, Medicine and Magic' MS, p. ii.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 153.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., p. i.

By experience they know that spears, sharp stones, thorns splinters and similar objects may cause wounds, sickness and pain. They, therefore, conclude in all simplicity, that in the case of internal illness, which also causes cutting pain, that in some mysterious way, a stone, splinter, or thorn has been introduced into the affected part of the body, and who could have done this? Obviously only an evil spirit. Hence a medicine man, or man with knowledge of their methods...must be sent for to remove the foreign body¹⁵⁷

It is difficult to know what to make of this explanation. Clearly though, if this is in some sense an explanation, it is not the full story. Satow's theory does not, for example, explain why some contemporary Khoisan report extracting relatively benign miniature song birds from sick people. Satow's explanation points towards objects being known by their action, such as being sharp, and hence the experience of the action, sharp pain, seemingly indicating the presence of the object. This explanation does not capture the subtlety of indigenous understandings of sickness causation and object or organism centred potency.

Laidler looked toward experience of the environment as a prime shaper of Khoisan beliefs. He identified generalised primitive behaviour in the Hottentots. He observed, for example, that 'in the beginning' man noticed that he felt best when the sun rose and tired when it went down, and Laidler deduced from this specific behaviour: 'Therefore, the old tooth was thrown towards the rising sun..'.¹⁵⁸ Despite his discursive generalisations on the primitive, Laidler included much useful and insightful information. From historical sources he proposed that in pre-colonial times major ailments of Cape Hottentots were sore breasts, sore eyes and umbilical hernias. His fieldwork suggested that so many medicines existed for helping labour that pregnancy problems must also have been an old Hottentot medical concern.¹⁵⁹ Chief ailments that he observed being treated, and which he thought were consequently probably also those of past times, were pains in the stomach, fevers, 'flatulence as an entity', diarrhoea and burns.¹⁶⁰ He observed that Nama herbal medicine was prepared at certain times of the moon and that Nama herbalists inspected the roots of gathered plants to gauge their quality.¹⁶¹ He thought both these latter practices demonstrated pre-scientific knowledge.

In relation to change Laidler noted smallpox, measles and venereal disease had arisen from colonial incursion¹⁶² and he observed that treatments for tuberculosis and syphilis were a recent innovation.¹⁶³ He, like Hoernlé, suggested the practices of medicine men had diminished under missionary influence,

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 145.

¹⁵⁸ Laidler, 'Magic Medicine', 435.

¹⁵⁹ Laidler, 'Manners, Medicine and Magic', MS, p.150.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., p.154.

¹⁶² Ibid., p. 150.

¹⁶³ Ibid., p. 151.

but unlike Hoernlé he thought magic ‘so deep rooted, its use remains, but is not seen by the antagonistic or superficial observer’.¹⁶⁴

Much of the information Laidler presented is remarkably similar to contemporary Khoisan practice. His modern looking data includes not only herbal, animal and commercial remedies, such as rock dassie excretions and ‘Bo Meester’,¹⁶⁵ but also massage practices, poison immunity and ideas of environmentally based omens, such as rain, wind or clouds bringing news of a death, something I also heard in Sesfontein.¹⁶⁶ In relation to massage Laidler recorded that it ‘is and was in common use’.¹⁶⁷ He noted that a rolling movement of the hand on the stomach was used for women behind their time with menstruation, that ‘un-fruitful’ women were massaged downwards on the abdomen and that pains and sprains were punched, kneaded and rolled.¹⁶⁸

In relation to my fieldwork Laidler’s emphasis on ‘bitter plants’ as a major source of herbal medicine,¹⁶⁹ and on frights that crystallise in the body as lumps,¹⁷⁰ is particularly interesting. He also recorded wind as an entity, in his case ‘wind in the head’.¹⁷¹ This latter phenomenon relates to Lübbert’s mention of the intestines moving into the head. Laidler significantly learnt that it was the smell of a ‘poison doctor’ who was immune from snakebite that frightened snakes away. This smell was found in the doctor’s sweat and spittle. He was told that anti-venom or sweat deactivated venom by drying it out or congealing it.¹⁷² Although Laidler mentioned these indicators of a different sort of way of thinking about the body, which are congruent with my own material, he did not seem to recognise or wish to attribute to the Hottentots an alternative vision of the world. He remained glued to familiar ideas of primitive thought and pre-scientific behaviour.

Rhenish missionary Heinrich Vedder was an influential amateur historian and ethnographer. In recent years his work has been heavily criticised for its racism.¹⁷³ Lau has additionally questioned the validity of Vedder’s Damara findings for Damara ethnographic interpretation. Despite these criticisms the continued widespread reliance on Vedder’s material is testament to the extensive and

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 130.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 169;

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 132.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 172.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., p. 160.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., pp. 153-4.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., p. 171.

¹⁷² Ibid., 180.

¹⁷³ Lau, ‘Critique of the Historical Sources’; Wallace, ‘Health and Society in Windhoek’, p. 57; Hayes *et al*, *Namibia under South African Rule*, p. 44.

detailed quality of his ethnography.¹⁷⁴ Vedder undoubtedly held a missionary's partiality but, as a missionary, he was also particularly interested in ideas and his material contains exceptional detail of beliefs.

Vedder based his Damara ethnography on an isolated group of Damara he met in the Otavi Mountains in the 1920s. Lau posits that Vedder's Damara findings cannot be considered in any way representative of geographically non-specific nineteenth century Damara culture. She asserts the group he stumbled upon were an impoverished product of 'massive changes' in the country.¹⁷⁵ However, much of Vedder's material is similar to beliefs and practices I encountered around Sesfontein which, in turn, ties in strongly with older recorded Khoisan material. The Otavi group's ideas and practices seem to have been part of a wider and almost undoubtedly older cultural nexus. This practical and ideational homogeneity suggests that impoverishment resultant from the uneven intrusion of merchant capital and wider multi ethnic contact, as Lau pictures, does not necessarily generate profound ideological change at the expense of older and more widespread cultural ideas and practices. In relation to botanical knowledge of plants, this is a phenomenon Guenther noted in regard to Nharo he encountered in his 1960s fieldwork. Guenther observed that even 'highly acculturated' Nharo women held most of the botanical knowledge that was found in remote living Nharo.¹⁷⁶

Vedder, like Laidler, perpetuated older concepts of Khoisan as primitive 'children of Nature'.¹⁷⁷ This proximity to nature tied Hottentots to their environment and particularly water. Whilst Hoernlé considered the importance of water to semi-desert living Hottentots in terms of biological necessity and social value, Vedder stressed the fundamental importance of water, and especially rain, as a shaper of fundamental Khoisan ideas. Vedder thought the Damara deity //Gamab was derived from //gami, meaning water. //Gamab was therefore the god of the 'rising cloud, thunder and fountains'.¹⁷⁸ This relationship with the weather seems particularly relevant to my identification of Damara healers as /manu aob, rainmen.

According to Vedder, the Damara thought all serious illness was of 'supernatural origin' and required supernatural treatment. Vedder overstretched this point in his assertion that this explained the impoverished nature of Damara knowledge of herbal remedies.¹⁷⁹ Sullivan has subsequently demonstrated the very extensive nature of Damara environmental resource knowledge, including

¹⁷⁴ See for example Barnard 1992.

¹⁷⁵ Lau, 'Critique of the Historical Sources', p. 2.

¹⁷⁶ Guenther, *The Nharo Bushmen*, p.235.

¹⁷⁷ Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, p. 64.

¹⁷⁸ Vedder cited in I. Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 397.

¹⁷⁹ Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, p. 64.

herbal medicines.¹⁸⁰ The source of Damara superstitious illness was //Gamab. It was his prerogative to 'direct sharp and deadly arrows from his heavenly seat at the bodies of men so that they take sick and die. Whoever feels in him the arrow of //Gamab loses heart and takes no more food'.¹⁸¹ This idea of arrows causing disease is one found throughout recent Bushmen anthropology.

Vedder interpreted Damara belief in terms of witchcraft, witchdoctors and exorcisms. Despite his bias he provides exceptional detail of Damara healers. A witchdoctor was authorised and empowered by //Gamab. When called by //Gamab the recipient went temporarily out of his mind and hid in the bush, to return a few days later, naked, and covered in blood because the spirits had beaten him. Vedder observed that witchdoctors 'may pray ie. speak to Gamab' and removed sickness by sucking with the mouth at the site of the sickness. Having associated //Gamab's arrows with illness causation, Vedder went on to suggest that sickness causing objects or animals put in and sucked out of people, came from 'the old ones'. This again points to the overlap of ideas around //Gauab and the /hei /nūn or //gaunagu as the causes of illness. Vedder's details of witchdoctors being 'called' by //Gamab, comply with accounts recently given by Sesfontein /nanu aob describing their initiation as healers in the Damara arus or healing trance dance.

During the arus, or trance dance, I attended, each /nanu aob talked very vaguely and occasionally to invisible entities involved in the procedure. They did so in an almost ritualised manner expressing, for instance, that they were in pain and needed help to treat the illnesses. Wagner-Robertz recorded this sort of conversation in 1975 as a far more significant feature of the arus.¹⁸² Vedder's information points more firmly to Damara communicating with spirits during the arus. Vedder stated Damara witchdoctors were asked questions while out of their minds and their answers thereby contributed to new 'religious' knowledge. This creation of knowledge consequently contributed to greater variety of knowledge between different Damara groups. On the return to consciousness the witchdoctor would give long accounts of journeying in another world.¹⁸³ This sort of encounter and journeying in a 'spirit world' is something not otherwise attributed to Khoi peoples but is seen as part of the Bushman shamanistic experience.

Vedder talked of exorcism amongst the Damara but it is not entirely clear if he thought spirits entered people and caused illness. He differentiated between 'spirits' that retain their human shape and 'ghosts' that wander as animals. One cause of sickness he identified was hairs of ghosts entering the

¹⁸⁰ Sullivan, 'People, Plants and Practice'

¹⁸¹ Vedder, 'The Berg Damara', p. 62.

¹⁸² Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama'.

¹⁸³ Vedder, 'The Bergdama', p. 65; Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, I, 92.

body and causing sickness.¹⁸⁴ Guenther similarly records that some Bushmen believe sickness results from //Gauwa firing tiny arrows or hairs.¹⁸⁵ Bleek's research, recent anthropology and my fieldwork, all suggest that this hair-related belief sits in a wider Bushmen context of understanding. Bleek recorded that Bushmen could feel in their body the hairs of an approaching springbok.¹⁸⁶ If a 'sorcerer's' blood vessels would not lie down the sorcerer would grow hairs and transform into a beast of prey, particularly a lion.¹⁸⁷ Marshall recorded amongst !Kung that hairs contained the healing power /num, and if hair was burnt it released /num.¹⁸⁸ It is probably no coincidence that burning hair smells exceptionally strong. A Ju/'hoan man, Oma Kgau, told me that dead people put hairs on his body and he burns them off with fire, or simply rubs them off.¹⁸⁹ A number of Hai//om use hair in medicines, such as dog hair rubbed on a bite made by the dog, or for snakebite.¹⁹⁰

Vedder asserted that 'Bushmen firmly believe that mountains and valleys, plains and lowlands, springs and rivers are inhabited by spirits of some kind'. In this respect Bushmen were identical to the Berg Damara. He clearly envisaged the Bushmen as believers in, and practitioners of, witchcraft. It was through the spirits of wicked people that sickness and sickness causing objects such as scorpions and stones were implanted in people. It was the job of the Bushman 'witch-doctor' to suck them out. Moreover, Vedder describes a 'Bushman revolver', or miniature bow and arrows, procured by Bushmen from witchdoctors to drive off evil spirits. The weapon could also be used to kill 'a far-distant enemy, who is sitting unsuspectingly in his hut making wicked plans'.¹⁹¹

Vedder's interested eye picked up many unusual details including a number related to massage. He can be seen as both the observer and the colonist when he states:

Massage, for which fat is usually used, is really among the remedies most favoured in the treatment of illness. The massaging itself is seldom executed with the proper skill. The main point is 'to disperse the site of the illness' through capable kneading, stroking and rubbing. The fat serves not only to lubricate the massaging hand when doing so, but is itself also credited with healing power. It is therefore not right to remove the remaining fat from the body afterwards.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁴ Vedder, 'The Bergdama', pp. 67-8.

¹⁸⁵ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 241.

¹⁸⁶ W. Bleek and L. Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (London, 1911), p. 333.

¹⁸⁷ D. Bleek, 'Belief and Customs', *Bant Studies* (1935), 1, 22.

¹⁸⁸ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance', 352, 371.

¹⁸⁹ 85

¹⁹⁰ 68, 56

¹⁹¹ Vedder, *South West Africa*, pp. 66, 88, 89.

¹⁹² Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, unpublished trans. by A. Inskip, p. 64-5.

That the ‘proper skill’ might depend on what one was wishing to achieve, and there might be different things to pursue than European medicine, was a point apparently not considered by Vedder. Yet at the same time he was aware of wider Bergdama understandings of fat. Elsewhere in *Die Bergdama* Vedder again demonstrated his knowledge when he noted that muscle and limb pain was relieved by heating the shell of a nut in ashes and massaging with it. This supports an observation Laidler made regarding the importance of heat treatments amongst Hottentots.¹⁹³

In 1926 and 1927 Lebzelter travelled more than 3,400 miles in his car in pursuit of Khoisan biological and cultural data. He visited schools, prisons and farms throughout much of Namibia.¹⁹⁴ His research led to a number of articles and the publication of an influential book: *Eingeborenkulturen in Sudwest- und Sudafrika* (1934).

Lebzelter’s use of a car enabled him to gather and compare information from an unusually wide cross section of Khoisan. Lau however, was critical of his work on the Damara because he gathered Damara material from Okombahe.¹⁹⁵ Since the 1870s, Lau proposed, Okombahe had been a settlement where many different ethnic groups mixed together, where ‘tribal’ social structures had dissolved, the population was discontinuous and people were economically and politically reliant on the station.¹⁹⁶ Envisaging deep change, Lau thought Lebzelter’s Damara information could have little bearing on past Damara and broader Damara life. But comparing Lebzelter’s healing information with that of other Khoisan informants, both historical and recent, suggests little of the profound cultural distortions Lau envisaged.

Lebzelter was interested in both ideas and practices. His analysis followed a dipolar assumption of the natural (*natürlichen*) and supernatural (*übernatürlich*) world, as others had before him.¹⁹⁷ The former category included using medicine for local symptoms and the latter, illness caused by sickness spirits.¹⁹⁸ Although he provides good detail within each of these categories and hints at an alternative reality, he does not emphasise internal coherence in Khoisan medical thought.

Lévy-Bruhl emphasised the ‘mystic properties’ bound up in ‘native’ understandings of ‘whistling wind, the falling rain, any natural phenomenon whatever’.¹⁹⁹ Hahn, the Bleeks, Lloyd, Hoernlé, Laidler

¹⁹³ Laidler, *Manners, Medicine and Magic*, p. 172.

¹⁹⁴ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen: The Denver African Expedition of 1925* (Ohio, 1997), p. 106; NAW/NAO;26;21.

¹⁹⁵ Guenther raises similar criticism regarding the superficial nature of Lebzelter’s study: Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 9.

¹⁹⁶ Lau, ‘A Critique of the Historical Sources’, p. 2.

¹⁹⁷ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen in Sudwest- und Sud Afrika* (Leipzig, 1934), p. 50.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁹⁹ Lévy-Bruhl, *How Natives Think*, p. 43.

and Vedder all particularly emphasised the role of natural phenomena in Khoisan belief. Schapera followed the same interpretation and especially latched on to Lebzelter's emphasis of eastern and western !Kung belief in supreme beings who, were 'lord over' rain and lightening and punished through lightening.²⁰⁰ This emphasis on thunder and lightening and wind is something that diminishes significantly in future intellectual contexts.

Lebzelter also saw Khoisan medicine as a primitive pre-cursor of European scientific medicine. He summarised the medicine of the Damara as comprising of: highly trained massage; bloodletting; sweating cures; vaccination; powdered decoctions; treatment with raw medicine roots.²⁰¹ He believed the Damara medicine men had learnt their skill from !Kung Bushmen of Sandfelds.²⁰² He proposed, rather dubiously, that as hunters and cattle breeders their anatomical knowledge was small as was their use of remedies owing to the scarcity of plants. Interestingly, he observed that smouldering sticks were applied to an aching stomach or other aching part of the body and often relieved the pain. Although not mentioning dance, he recorded that Damara 'doctors' went into trance and, whilst singing, placed their stick onto a region where a patient's sickness was identified, in the belief that the sickness was thereby reduced. Doctors also dug holes next to the fire for a patient's sickness to run into. Ideas very similar to these are present amongst Sesfontein Damara and considered in the later chapter on Damara rainmen. Supporting Laidler's notion of a 'crystallised fright', he noted a Damara belief that if one starts from stepping on a snake, the snake actually enters the human body.²⁰³

Unusually Lebzelter attributes Khoisan illness to the dead or the supernal deity sending sickness spirits. For the !Kung these are little yellow men with big bellies called *Dsao*. The worse a person feels the more spirits were said to be inside him. Amongst the Damara the spirits are small, red, hermaphrodite and with big bellies. Only the doctors can see them.²⁰⁴

Lebzelter proposed eastern !Kung both saw and spoke to spirits. He noted that *//gauab*, the ghosts of the dead, lived in graves but also roamed around and that malicious spirits dwelt in water. The western !Kung, by way of contrast, only believed in small, roaming, joking spirits.²⁰⁵ This idea of small mischievous spirits seems to strongly resemble Bantu speaking peoples beliefs in sickness and disease bearing *tokolussi* (Zulu variant of the name). In the 1970s Wagner-Robertz thought *tokolussi*

²⁰⁰ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 184.

²⁰¹ Lebzelter, 'Zur Heilkunde der Bergdama', 305.

²⁰² Ibid., 297; Near Rietfontein?

²⁰³ Ibid., 304.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 297.

²⁰⁵ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 188.

new Damara beliefs.²⁰⁶ Schapera adopted Lebzelter's idea of intruding 'spirits of disease', along with 'foreign bodies' and 'disease poisons', as his explanations of Bushman illness.²⁰⁷

In *Eingeborenkulturen* Lebzelter gave relatively good descriptions of medical practice and associated beliefs. He similarly provided a detailed account of a Bushmen healing dance. Lorna Marshall later called upon some of Lebzelter's findings to support her account of the Bushman healing dance. In relation to pragmatic medical knowledge, Lebzelter's observed that !Kung, in contrast to Damara, have good anatomical knowledge, because they are hunters, but that their repertoire of medicines was small. He gave a particularly detailed outline of major problems and why and how they were treated, listing, for example, eye infections, ear sickness, sore throats, flu, heart and vascular diseases. In an inclusion concerning 'teeth' his outline provides an example of how he prominenced indigenous belief, in this case !Kung, in his material:

Generally straight, they use iron arrowheads as tooth pick. Strong toothache means //Gauab has stuck needle in and they call doctor to take it out. If you do not generally feel bad there are no Dsao there (illness spirits). Take a small piece of wood, sharp at one end, hold the pointy bit on root of tooth and hit the other end with a stone, called an Oie²⁰⁸

Lebzelter provides an interesting !Kung account of gastro-intestinal disease and the importance of liver and gall bladder problems. This is indicative of a new deeper level of ethnographic enquiry concerning medical issues and medical knowledge. It is related to an early twentieth century growth in medical scientific knowledge and a concurrent South West African administrative preoccupation with measuring and controlling Africans, broadly, and African medical problems, specifically. Much of the concern moved around ideas of diseased natives infecting white populations. Wallace highlights similar concerns in relation to outbreaks of gonorrhoea in three white schools in Otjiwarongo district in 1938.²⁰⁹ Lebzelter observed that gastro-intestinal problems were a particular concern of the !Kung, that malaria places a particular strain on the liver and that, despite myth, Bushmen may be able to gorge themselves on large quantities of meat, but they, like anyone else, will suffer the next day. His ethnography in one sense narrows 'otherness' by recognising shared organic humanity in Bushmen, but at the same time generates knowledge as a tool of colonial control.

²⁰⁶ See also Nama 'tokoloshe': Carstens, 'Some Implications of Change', p. 90. 'Tokolussi': Wagner-Robertz, unpublished MS, 54 'Gespenster, Geister'.

²⁰⁷ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 197.

²⁰⁸ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p.44.

²⁰⁹ M. Wallace, 'A Person is Never Angry for Nothing', in Hayes *et al* (eds.), *Namibia under South African Rule: Mobility & Containment 1915-46* (Oxford and Windhoek, 1998), p.87.

The dance Lebzelter described was held to treat a child who had been bitten by a snake, to treat many people suffering from fever and because one man wanted to take the 'doctors examination'. The healers achieved trance or 'self hypnosis' through singing and very specific muscular actions. They healed by passing hands over the afflicted body parts, from the armpits to the soles and from the shoulders down to the fingertips. Interestingly the dance was led by a woman, who was herself under the influence of the chief doctor, also a woman, who sat away from the dance in the dark. Lebzelter described the chief doctor as having been 'possessed' by */Nawa*, the highest of the *//gauab*, who actually spoke through her.²¹⁰ This idea of possession is unusual in later interpretations of healing dances.

Lebzelter presented a new level of detail about the healing dance. He noted that occasionally the doctors sucked at diseased places or took in the breath from the mouth of the sick. From time to time, he observed, the doctors practiced these operations on each other which, they said, distributed the sickness poisons onto all doctors equally but also gave individual doctors strength from each other. Having been 'charged' in this manner, doctors returned to remove poison from patients.²¹¹

During the dance healers requested */Nawa* to transfer sickness into them from the patients. Having received the sickness, they thrust their hands to the sky to give the sickness back to */Nawa* who, Lebzelter described, was thought to walk up and down on a string between heaven and earth. This raising of hands was not however a sign of prayer. Thrusting the hands up had the same action as holding their hands over the fire; it removed the little sickness spirits from the doctor's body. Lebzelter elaborated that the doctors asked */Nawa* to unite all the little sickness spirits on the doctor candidate to try and kill him. The initiates death would free the people of diseases. The experienced doctors transferred the sickness spirits onto the candidate by stroking, rubbing and blowing.²¹²

Lebzelter not only identified that 'spirits' were behind disease but he interpreted the function of the healers as movers of the spirits from one body to another and ultimately back to */Nawa*. In later contexts the disease spirits are interpreted within paradigms of symbolism and healing energy and the possibility of spirit possession becomes alien to the practices of Bushmen shamans.

²¹⁰ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 48.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Ibid., pp. 48-9.

Hoernlé, Vedder, Laidler and Lebzelter were not the only ethnographers to consider Khoisan medicine in the early twentieth century but their accounts are distinctive for their scope and the influence they asserted on later material. The most influential work of this period is undoubtedly Schapera's *Khoisan Peoples* (1930). Despite Schapera's anthropological training the vast majority of this book is, however, simply a summary of earlier material. Schapera relied heavily on the sources I have considered. His account was written with the underlying implication that the material provided some indication of 'traditional' Khoisan culture. Although his book lacks first hand anthropological data, it provides important broad summaries of key material and stands as a reasonable summation of the facts and ideas concerning Khoisan, held in the early twentieth century. *Khoisan Peoples* has undoubtedly been highly influential in its field.

Schapera essentially thought Hottentots and Bushmen similar enough to constitute a larger 'Khoisan' ethnic unit.²¹³ For Schapera the background to the Khoisan remained a black Africa in which their culture, if not their existence, was in imminent threat of disappearing. All Khoisan were superstitious, believed in witchcraft and had magicians, sorcerers or witchdoctors who could cause or cure illness. Their land was filled with spirits and their culture with social prohibitions, both of which could, if offended, cause illness. Whilst most illness resulted from superstition, Khoisan also had some pre-scientific primitive knowledge of medicine, such as herbal knowledge and use of poultices. As primitives their relationship with nature was intimate and many key religious beliefs were based in the importance of thunder, wind, rain and lightening.

Conclusion

Late nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnography reflected both broad ongoing fields of interest and new themes related to the development of anthropological theory. Hoernlé's 'social analysis' of water is indicative of the growing sophistication of anthropology. Interest in Khoi massage was most significant in the early nineteenth century, when the information emerged that Khoisan believed that organs moved, caused illness and could sometimes be massaged back into position. Indicative of the relationship of ethnographic interest and analysis to findings, is the identification of a similar phenomenon around the same period by W.H.R. Rivers in a Polynesian context.²¹⁴ Psychological explanations for primitive belief and action, such as Khoisan witchdoctors performing hypnosis, also began to appear as the subject became popular in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe.

²¹³ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 5.

²¹⁴ Rivers cited by Garrison, *Introduction to the History of Medicine*, p. 27.

From the early nineteenth century, indigenous ideas involving transference of qualities, or potency, from objects and organisms to human beings, was looked upon as scientific inoculation and immunisation comparable to ‘primitive science’. Although there is some indication of hesitancy with the use of the words inoculation and immunity by Lebzelter and others,²¹⁵ researchers seldom looked for a different kind of extra-scientific, or non European explanation, when procedures seemed familiar. A longstanding European interest in ‘native’ poisons focused attention on Khoisan ‘immunization’ from snake and scorpion poison, and witchdoctor immunization practices were often mentioned in nineteenth and early twentieth century ethnography.

Orpen’s findings concerning the healing dance emerged from, and contributed to, nineteenth century Cape academic and popular interest in Bushmen. By 1930 Orpen’s dance details had been published reasonably widely and were joined by a number of other ethnographic accounts of Bushmen dances involving healing. Before Orpen’s account it is hard to distinguish between records of Khoi and Bushmen dances. After Orpen, Khoi dances are rarely mentioned whilst Bushmen healing dances become increasingly widely known. Interest in Bushmen seems to overshadow enquiry into Khoi trance dancers. Despite this growing interest in healing dances, by 1930 Schapera still considered the dance simply like other Khoisan dances for rain or war, in which supernatural entities are entreated for help.

Some ‘revisionists’, principally Wilmsen, have argued that the resilient idea of Bushmen as isolated, ecologically connected, preserved hunter gatherers, have their roots in the post-World War Two influence of Laurens van der Post and a social context of immanent nuclear annihilation, ecological dissolution and communist menace. Robert Gordon however roots the romanticization of Bushmen in the activities of earlier entrepreneurs such as those who participated in the Denver expedition of 1925.²¹⁶ From the 1850s onwards ‘popular anthropology’²¹⁷ continued to influence both popular and academic understanding of Bushmen, and entrepreneurs generated information at times when official anthropological projects were declining in number. Popular anthropology of the first half of the twentieth century had, however, little direct influence on the generation of data regarding Khoisan medicine.

Owing to the financial depression of the early 1930s, the four years old annual Government grant to South Africa’s new anthropology departments was withdrawn. This led to a significant downturn in

²¹⁵ Hoernlé: ‘the injection of the essence’: ‘Certain rites of Transition’, p. 68. Lebzelter: ‘something like immunity’; ‘Zur Heilkunde der Berdama’, p. 304

²¹⁶ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 9-10.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

the number of research projects concerned with South Africa's native populations.²¹⁸ Between 1930 and the 1950s both academic and amateur ethnography continued in South Africa but little of influence or significance was produced. One exception to this, though not of immediate significance, was a contribution to the field of Bushman studies made by a multidisciplinary team from the Witwatersrand University. The team investigated largely biological matters amongst seventy Bushmen whom the hunter and explorer Donald Bain had assembled at his camp for the Johannesburg British Empire Exhibition of 1936. The findings of the University team were published in the journal *Bantu Studies* (1936, 1937). Tobias identifies a break in further Bushman medical research until 1951 and Balsan's 'Expedition Panhard-Capricorn'. In 1956, out of a perceived need to consolidate resurgent interest and efforts into Bushman research, Witwatersrand University instigated the Kalahari Research Committee, which Tobias connects to the American Bushmen research of Washburn and his protégés, Irvin de Vore and Lee.²¹⁹ In South West Africa in the inter-War years, the political and economic climate discouraged anthropological research and the only academic ethnographer to have visited the territory was Lebzelter.²²⁰ Khoisan research did not resume until the arrival of Pater Gusinde in the early fifties.

²¹⁸ I. Schapera, 'Ethnographical Research in South Africa', *Bantu Studies*, vol. 8:3 (Sept. 1934), 228.

²¹⁹ P. V. Tobias, 'Fifteen Years of Study on the Kalahari Bushmen or San: A Brief History of the Kalahari Research Committee', *South African Journal of Science*, vol. 71 (March 1975), 74.

²²⁰ Gordon, 'The stat(u)s of Namibian anthropology', 5,6.

Chapter III

Kalahari Shamanism

Between Schapera's *Khoisan Peoples* (1930) and the early 1950s, limited research interest was focused largely on Bushmen. The scale of research was small and predominantly scientific or along the lines of what Gordon terms 'popular anthropology'.¹ In 1950 the Marshall family began their highly influential and persistent involvement with Bushmen. Largely in association with the newly formed Kalahari Research Committee, the late 1950s and the 1960s saw increasing professional anthropological interest in Bushmen. This phase of research heralded the beginning of continued intensive Bushmen anthropology. Despite renewed interest in the Khoekhoe in the 1960s and 1970s, research around this period remained more heavily Bushman than Khoi and Khoi research tended to be more historical than anthropological. In the hands of a small number of key researchers, Bushmen healers were presented, largely through the 1950s and 1960s, as distinctive trance dancers, different from the Khoi and Bantu speaking peoples. This healing difference was emphasised despite academic recognition of Khoisan linguistic homogeneity.

By the late 1960s Lee and Katz presented Bushmen healers as ecologically adapted, benign 'shaman'. Despite later 'Revisionist' criticism of such ideas of Bushmen as, in Gordon's felicitous phrase 'virtuous ecologists living in happy equilibrium with their environment',² related ideas of Bushmen healers as spiritually and environmentally attuned shaman have developed. Gordon has drawn attention to the social and intellectual dangers of inserting difference into indigenous contexts through the use of settler constructs of identity, such as 'tribe' or 'nomad'.³ Emphasising Bushmen difference through their healing ideas and practices, similarly reinforces and perpetuates colonial distortions of identity. Moreover, the focus of research on the spiritual Bushmen trance dancer overshadows the far wider context of Bushmen as Khoisan healers. At the same time, however, the anthropological investment in the Bushmen healing dance is highly informative of wider Khoi healing initiatives.

Two significant shifts in understanding of Khoisan healing are distinguishable from over the colonial period and into the present. Firstly, up to the early twentieth century the Khoisan practiced witchcraft. After 1962 this notion was almost universally thought to run contrary to benign, egalitarian Bushmen existence. Secondly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, longstanding associations between nature and primitive man were reshaped into a discourse that emphasised the formative role natural phenomenon played in Khoisan cosmology. By the 1970s the emphasis on the role of the

¹ Gordon, *Picturing Bushmen*, pp. 8-10.

² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

³ Gordon, 'The stat(u)s of Namibian anthropology', p. 3.

environment had changed to one of Bushman ecological adaptation. The notion of shaman fitted well with wider ideas of benign ecological Bushmen. The removal of witchcraft as a possibility, coupled with the ecological presentation of Bushmen, transformed Bushmen illness causing agents from spirits, to arrows or other metaphors of environmental or social threat. In the interpretative recasting Bushmen ceased to be Khoisan witchdoctors, who could be possessed, and became Bushmen healers and spirit-travelling shamans.

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries pragmatic Khoisan medical skills, such as massage, were identified and elaborated upon. But at the same time the overbearing conceit of scientifically or religiously inclined observers of this period led some, such as Vedder, to downplay Khoisan knowledge of plant remedies and other healing strategies. In contrast to this, much post-1950s Bushman research has been particularly concerned with emphasising the extensive nature of Bushmen environmental knowledge and resource use. Few researchers, however, have explored these issues in the context of healing. Research into Khoi environmental knowledge has only been a very recent undertaking. It has primarily involved only Damara who survive as an identifiable community, and has again not focussed specifically on healing.

Following the methodology of previous chapters, I proceed by identifying the key scholars who have contributed to current understanding of Khoisan healing for the post-1950s period. The primary focus of this chapter on the healing dance reflects recent research interest in Bushman medicine. Central themes of the chapter examine how researchers have interpreted Bushmen ideas concerning the origins of illness, the origin and nature of a Bushman trance healer's power and Khoisan ideas concerning transmission of power by arrows. Sub-themes include a critique of ecological functionalism and the notion of 'benign' Bushmen and the comparability of anthropological data. I have categorised researchers into two groups based on similar theoretical paradigms, themes of interest and approximate chronology. In the second section, the format of the chapter changes in recognition of the significance of work from this group to wider understanding and my interpretation. In contrast to the first section, the second section involves not so much reporting but synthesis and analysis. I offer some alternative considerations of healing that have arisen from my own fieldwork. My analysis seeks to highlight similarities between Khoi and San healing. Additionally, and occasionally, I attempt to situate Bushmen ideas in a wider context of African healing.

The chapter is implicitly framed around a critique of the validity, and consequences, of identifying Bushmen as 'shamans'- recognising that the word functions as an ultimately Western category distinction despite its eastern Siberian origins among the Tungus .

Dowson has sought to explore San rock art as a means of getting at the 'day-to-day lives in which the art was produced and continued to be consumed'. He believes:

it is not 'metaphors' of spiritual experiences that provide shamans with their identities and power bases. Rather it is the intimate and real relations that person has with the spirit-world.⁴

Dowson is right to reject what seems to me an ultimately patronising perspective that indigenous people live lives based on metaphor; the implied corollary being that there exists a closer 'Western' proximity to lived reality. But Like Lewis-Williams, Katz, Biesele and others, Dowson is in danger of losing the reality of the Khoisan world by glossing over Khoisan understanding of ideas that are translated as 'spirit' and 'spiritual'. Despite these researchers explicitly rejecting romantic interpretations of Bushmen, their glossing of an essentially unexplored San spirituality, has obscured deeper academic understanding of Khoisan healing and cosmology.

Rather than engage extensively with the long running and rich anthropological debate concerning the imposition of words such as 'spirit' and 'religion' on aboriginal peoples, or the positions various scholars have taken regarding differences between possession and shamanism, I wish to start from the recognition that the word 'shamanism' may or may not ultimately be applicable to Bushmen depending on ones viewpoint. Ultimately, it is less important to argue over the validity of using the word 'shaman', than to explore the reality held within the contextualised usage of the word and the consequences of perpetuating ideas of Bushmen difference.⁵ With these provisos in mind, there are however two initial observations I wish to first make related to the literature.

In 1961 Mircea Eliade published the English edition of *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*. This book not only renewed academic interest in shamanism but emphasised both its mystical practices and the centrality of trance.⁶ It may well be that the use of the word 'shaman' in Lee's work in the 1960s reflected wider academic interests of this time. By setting the precedent of calling Bushmen shamans Lee may well have encouraged use of the word by subsequent researchers and popular anthropologists. The idea of the Bushman shaman seems to have become further cemented as the subject of shamanism grew increasingly popular through the 1970s, amidst the associated rise of ecological awareness and alternative therapies.

⁴ T. Dowson, 'Like People in Prehistory', in G. Harvey (ed.), *Shamanism: a Reader* (London and New York, 2003), p. 167.

⁵ For a perspective on the multiplicity of recent anthropological positions taken on shamanism see: G. Harvey (ed.), *Shamanism: a Reader* (2003).

⁶ B. Saladin D'Anglure, 'Shamanism', in Barnard and Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 506.

The anthropologist Lambek recognises a broad definition of possession that includes, ‘voice and agency being attributed to the spirit rather than the host’. In his definition spirits ‘are conceptualised and experienced as discrete persons’ and could be ‘ancestors, foreigners, historical figures, gods or members of an alternate species’. Lambek rejects the usefulness of distinguishing between possession and shamanism on the basis that much of the south and east Asian material fits the same general terms as the African. Lambek proposes that whether one exorcizes a demon or assimilates a spirit seems ‘less a distinction of kind than a politics of religion as well as an informed reading of the immediate social context and personal circumstances of the particular host’.⁷ Lambek’s latter point seems born out in the arbitrary changes in interpretation apparent in Khoisan ethnography.

Bushmen trance healers talk to ‘spirits’, and report travelling in the spirit world on ‘strings’ or on the backs of animals. Recent anthropologists have tied these ideas to shamanic spirit travel. With these Bushmen accounts there is therefore a sense of leaving the body and, unlike possession, agency being retained by the host.

These same trance healers have a potency or healing power inside them that wakes up when they dance. This is the Ju/’hoan */num* that Katz has brought to popular attention. This power is ultimately from ‘god’ and of the wider world but lives within the healer. The act of this potency waking up during dancing or singing is to open the healer’s connection to its power. When a healer has ‘boiled’ he trances. In trance, healers can see dead people outside the dance setting and communicate with supernal entities. Although the healer retains some control, this recognition that */num* and other powers lives in the Khoisan healer’s body begs the question whether this ‘energy’ might be thought of as spirit possession.

This internal power can be differentiated from the idea of spirit possession by examining the nature of what is said to be in the healer. The */num* in the healer, for example, is not typically described as an ancestor or foreigner or god or other *personality*. But */num* is only one description of what wakes up, given by one group of people. Different Bushmen and Khoi talk of different but similar phenomena that wake up in them. The Nharo for example describe *tssó*. Khoisan healers also talk of other things that are both connected and not connected to */num* and its equivalents. These are the */gais* I mentioned previously. A Damara */nanu aob* has the rain/spirit/wind/essence of ‘rain */gais*’

⁷ M. Lambek, ‘Possession’, in Barnard and Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia*, pp. 439-440.

in him. */Gais* live in specific places in the human body and also wake up or stand up with dancing and singing. */Gais* give the healer certain abilities. They also talk to the healer. I was told that one of the */gais* put into me will always tell me the opposite of what I should do. I must not listen to it.

Whether or not Khoisan with */gais* are possessed, because the */gais* are in them and talk to them and might even direct a person's thoughts and actions, would seem to depend on how the */gais* are described. Essentially this is a question of whether or not */gais* have *personality* and if they could loosely be called 'spirits'. The idea of Khoisan healers as shamans seems to partly depend on how one thinks about what Khoisan people say is inside them. What does it mean when Khoisan people relate that their */gais* is telling them things? Are these 'pictures that come into the head' or 'voices in the head' or 'presentiments', as Bleek described them, 'spiritual' phenomenon or creative accounts? Are they an assertion of authority or socially and experientially mediated intuition, inspiration and dreaming?

Other ethnographers do not seem to have encountered the phenomenon of */gais*. Why this might be so is hard to say. Regardless, for the moment, however, of the longevity or cultural spread of the idea, consideration of the notion raises pertinent questions regarding how we think about recent anthropological presentation of Bushmen healing energy and consequently of Bushmen as shamans. It additionally embeds ideas of potency, as a phenomenon related to */gais*, into a wider Khoisan healing context.

Closer examination of the wider context behind indigenous ideas, including ideas of potency and */gais*, not only fleshes out a Khoisan way of thinking about illness, but it begins to address the other key question of recent anthropological literature regarding whether or not Bushmen practice 'witchcraft'.

The chapter proceeds with a very brief introduction to Bushmen research in the 1950s and 1960s. Two sections follow, each of which analyses, in the light of issues raised in this introduction, the contributions of key scholars to recent understandings of Bushmen trance dances.

Background

Despite the 1950s academic interest in the Kalahari and the seven Bushmen research expeditions undertaken between 1958 and 1960 by the Kalahari Research Committee,⁸ very little was produced from this period of relevance to healing. One exception worth considering, concerns a monograph published by Potgieter in 1955, based on his research amongst the //Xegwi, a southern Bushmen group of the eastern Transvaal.

Potgieter related that the head of a newborn child was smeared with medicines to close up the soft opening in the skull (the anterior fontanel). After a few days of seclusion for the mother and newborn child, the infant was taken to a place known to have been struck by lightning. At this spot a cut was made above the child's navel and a drop of blood allowed to fall. The child was then taken home and given an enema to drive out 'the bird of heaven'. Barnard equates the 'bird of heaven' with lightning and describes this //Xegwi ritual as a rite to aid childhood development.⁹

This extract raises an interesting example of one form of possession. The importance of the anterior fontanel to Khoisan medicine is discussed later. To these Bushmen lightning seems to be inside the child, in the form of a bird and transferred between a spot where it once struck and the child. The direction of transference is unclear. This enactment suggests a Bushman idea that the phenomenon of lightning, known by experience, remains manifest in the world in the form of potency. An enema was performed to drive out the potency or essence of the lightning which the child possessed.

The link between lightning and birds is one made in other African and non African cultures in past and present contexts. Gabriel, a Damara *!nanu aob*, who had become a powerful healer by twice having been struck by lightning, imitated a bird when dancing the *arus*. This was the only imitation apparent at the dance I observed. Possessing lightning remains a significant idea to contemporary Damara and Hai//om healers, and probably to other Bushmen.

⁸ Tobias, 'Fifteen Years of Study', p. 75.

⁹ Potgieter cited by Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 86.

a.)The New Vanguard: Marshall, Silberbauer and Lee

Between 1950 and 1961 the Marshall family from the United States, made eight expeditions to the Kalahari.¹⁰ Led by the father Laurence, the Marshalls applied themselves to different aspects of Bushmen research. Lorna Marshall, wife of Laurence and an English literature graduate, had prepared herself for the Kalahari with a crash course in anthropology. It was Lorna who wrote up the ethnography of the expeditions and her research was published in a number of articles in *Africa* between 1957 and 1969, and in a book *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (1976). Her 1962 article, '!Kung Bushmen Religious Beliefs', dealt quite extensively with the 'ceremonial curing dance'. This was followed in 1969 with an explicit account of the dance, 'The Medicine Dance of the !Kung Bushmen'. The daughter, Elizabeth Marshall, produced a best selling popular anthropology book, *The Harmless People* (1959). *The Harmless People* must take some responsibility, along with van der Post's various Bushmen books, for perpetuating romantic Bushman mythology. The son John made a number of ethnographic films including *N/um Tchai: the Ceremonial dance of the !Kung Bushmen* (1965). The father, Laurence, undertook a photographic record of Bushmen.

South African born George Silberbauer went from a training in forestry to becoming District Commissioner for Ngamiland, Kasane and Ghanzi districts.¹¹ In 1957 he attended a brief course in linguistics and anthropology at Witwatersrand University to prepare himself for his new appointment as Bushman Survey Officer for the Bechuanaland Protectorate, which he commenced in October 1958. From Silberbauer's consequent fieldwork he produced two primary reports, the 1965 *Bushman Survey Report* and a more comprehensive work entitled *Hunter and Habitat in the Central Kalahari* (1981). Both publications have considerable bearing on the history of the dance.

In 1963 Richard Lee began his long and highly influential academic association with the !Kung. He completed his PhD, 'Subsistence Ecology of !Kung Bushmen' in 1965 and in 1967 he published an article in the popular journal, *Natural History*, entitled, 'Trance Cure of the !Kung Bushmen'. This was followed in 1968 by a more thorough consideration of the healing dance in, 'The Sociology of !Kung Bushman Trance Performances'.¹² His major work, *The !Kung San* (1979) included further details of the trance dance. Lee's early work moulded future studies of the Bushmen and provided foundations on which subsequent research could build.

¹⁰ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 41.

¹¹ http://www.monash.edu.ac/pubs/montage/Montage_96-08/p14.html. Accessed 1/12/03 at 15:28 hrs.

¹² R. Lee, 'The Sociology of !Kung Bushman Trance Performances', in R. Prince (ed.) *Trance and Possession States* (Montreal, 1968), pp. 35-54.

Much of the research published in the 1950s and the early 1960s retains a sense of style and thematic content that in retrospect appears allied to early twentieth century material. In 1964 Silberbauer published, 'A Stone Age race in modern Africa'. The article captured the wistful tone of the era. Whilst acknowledging the acculturation of many Bushmen, Silberbauer related that, 'the "wild" Bushmen are still to be found' in remote regions of the Kalahari, enjoying a daily life 'like that of their Stone Age ancestors of 10,000 years ago.'¹³ Silberbauer proposed that, amongst these 'egalitarian' Bushmen, 'aggression could have played no useful part in their lives'.¹⁴ Such ideas of passive egalitarian Bushmen became central to anthropological interpretation of Bushmen and informed notions of Bushman shamanism.

In 1966 Lee and de Vore co-convened the influential 'Man the Hunter' symposium. Lee and Devore prefaced the published conference proceedings (1968) with the observation: 'many of us were led to live and work among the hunters because of a feeling that the human condition was likely to be more clearly drawn here than among other kinds of societies'.¹⁵ Wilmsen, rather overplaying the evidence, later singles out this phrase as proof of nineteenth century primitive evolutionary theory in Lee's theoretical stance.¹⁶ What is more clearly apparent from the symposium, is that much of the analysis of conference delegates built on influential functionalist theory of the late 1920s and 1930s, including that of Parsons (1934).¹⁷

In the 1966 symposium, Turnbull, author of a romantic primitivist view of pygmies, *The Forest People* (1961), provided an example of the wider anthropological context behind Bushmen studies in the 1960s:

I am bothered by the assumption that hunters are aggressive. Although I do not know the Bushmen or Hadza, I feel that what I have to say is probably true of them also. In the two groups known to me, there is an almost total lack of aggression, emotional or physical, and this is borne out by the lack of warfare, feuding, witchcraft and sorcery.¹⁸

Turnbull and other hunter-gatherer researchers of this period linked aggressive behaviour with witchcraft and scales of social organisation. This association was tied to ongoing academic perspectives that envisaged increasing levels of urbanisation led to increasing social tensions, which in

¹³ G. Silberbauer, 'A Stone Age race in modern Africa', *Optima*, 14, no. 4 (Dec. 1964), 209.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.208, 214.

¹⁵ R. Lee and I. De Vore (eds.), *Man the Hunter* (New York, 1968), p. ix.

¹⁶ Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies*, p. 33.

¹⁷ T. Parsons, 'Society', in E.R. A. Seligman (ed.) *Encyclopaedia of the Social Sciences* (15 vols., New York, 1934), xiv. 225-231.

¹⁸ Lee and De Vore, *Man the Hunter*, p. 341.

turn resulted in an increasing predilection for witchcraft.¹⁹ Thomas Lambo (1963), a consultant psychiatrist at University College Hospital, Ibadan, provided evidence of a psychiatric context for these associations: 'When adaptation to new and stressful life situations becomes difficult for the African, anxiety, with aggressive behaviour is apt to occur'.²⁰ Marshall, Silberbauer and Lee were all theoretically disposed to the idea of benign isolated Bushmen existing in a simpler world.

Marshall

In late nineteenth and early twentieth century work the 'simpler' world of the Bushmen remained an actual remnant of modern man's past. In the research of these three ethnographers the absolute equivalence between Bushmen and primitive man had gone but each researcher made certain ties and associations between modern Bushmen and prehistoric man. Of the three, Marshall, certainly in her earliest material, was perhaps the least theoretically and thematically removed from the earlier ethnography of Bushmen. Her dance descriptions included familiar details, such as use of sticks, and the grunting, screaming and coughing of healers.²¹ Where possible she added new explanations, such as blowing in ears serving to clear the senses and Sã being used as a cosmetic powder, a powder used to greet visitors, a powder thrown on medicine men for their well being and a powder tossed or rubbed lightly on medicine men to enable them to see sickness.²²

Marshall's ties with older ethnography are evident in her description of !Kung religion (1962), in which she developed observations of Schapera and by implication Lebzelter and Vedder. Reflecting older interests, she noted the western !Kung and the Heikum [sic] 'prayed' to the supreme god for rain, hunting and matters of sickness,²³ although she concluded that only vestiges of an ancient personification of rain and lightning remained. Marshall recognised a fundamental dipole in !Kung thought between rain the life-giver and the sun as death-giver. She did not follow this observation through in terms of its significance to the wider structuring of !Kung thought.²⁴ A dipole of, wet, soft, cool verses dry, hard, hot seems apparent in wider contexts of Khoisan thought. The sprinkling of water on a grave to 'cool' the departed soul, for instance, relates to this idea.²⁵

¹⁹ Fortes and Dieterlen, *African Systems of Thought*, pp. 25-26.

²⁰ T.A. Lambo, *African Traditional Beliefs and Concepts of Health and Medical Practice* (1963), p. 6.

²¹ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance', 363, 370.

²² *Ibid.*, 378, 359, 365.

²³ Marshall, 'Bushman Religious Beliefs', 234.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222-235.

²⁵ Hahn cited by Hoernlé, 'Social Value of Water', p. 80.

Marshall rightly equivocated on the nature of ‘prayer’, noting that !Kung in reality seem to ‘speak’ to the rain and lightning which she cautions is only prayer ‘in a manner of speaking’. Having alerted us to the fact that something else is going on, she does not then explore the nature of this relationship. By retaining the notion of personification she demonstrates a reluctance to look behind the Western religious category. She seems overly keen to have envisaged Bushmen relationships with these environmental forces as a dying phenomenon.

Marshall observed, as did Hoernlé, that whirlwinds were seen as vectors of sickness. Amongst the !Kung, whirlwinds are associated with //Gauwa, the lesser god and with //gauwasi, the ‘spirits of the dead’. The name //Gauwa is also used for a spirit of a dead person and as an alternative name for the creator god, otherwise known as ≠Gao !na.²⁶ ≠Gao !na ‘has so much power in him that he is dangerous’.²⁷ Hoernlé included details pointing to a relationship between the power of !Gèi Aogu, the Nama ‘witchdoctors’, and their smell. Marshall presented a related idea in a !Kung context. The !Kung ‘creator’ divinity, ≠Gao !na, she observed, commands //gauwasi to carry sickness or death to mortals.²⁸ A whirlwind is called by the !Kung, //gauwa ≠a, ‘which means //Gauwa smell. ≠A is not an ordinary odour, which one can actually smell’. ‘//Gauwa walks in the whirlwind and his smell is in it and death is in it. If a wind passes over the person, the ≠a goes into him, and he will get sick and die’.²⁹

This association between wind and smell seems to make some sense if one considers that a person or animal is known by its smell and the smell represents the ‘power’ of the ‘owner’ of the smell. Wind can carry the power and it can accordingly enter others if it blows over / into them and makes them sick. The faceless nature of the //gauwasi encourages Marshall to conclude that the !Kung had no concept of a special relationship with ancestors.³⁰ If the //gauwasi had names or a clear sense of identity, one could think of this spirit power entering bushmen as ‘possession’ and perhaps Marshall might have come to a different conclusion. Although Bleek did not consider the matter of ancestor relationships in relation to possession, he did encounter the idea that /Xam Bushmen ‘prayed’ to deceased medicine men, !giten, who had been specialists in bringing rain or controlling game animals.³¹ There is therefore some hint that, at least amongst other Bushmen groups, spirits of the dead could sometimes have been specific named individuals. This allows the possibility of possession and it is a possibility that we shall see Barnard encountered in the 1970s.

²⁶ Marshall, ‘Bushman Religious Beliefs’, 238.

²⁷ Ibid., 237.

²⁸ Ibid., 235.

²⁹ Ibid., 239; also Marshall *Nyae Nyae !Kung*, p. 42.

³⁰ Ibid., 241.

³¹ Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning and Ritual*, pp. 289, 298.

Marshall asserted, influentially, that, ‘the !Kung do not have sorcerers, witches, or witch doctors, and do not believe that the divine beings enter into the medicine men or speak through them’.³² This is an interesting conclusion considering that Marshall specified ≠*Gao !na* created all medicines, both ‘material’ and ‘spiritual’, which the !Kung call *n/um*. ≠*Gao !na* created the medicine songs to cure people and ‘put medicine power in the medicine men (*n/um* *kxau* is medicine man, owner of medicine), and he calls that power *gaoxa*.’³³ Possessing *n/um* in Bushmen terms is possessing or owning the power of ≠*Gao !na*. But it is also more than this. In the same manner that the smell of someone holds all the power of the person, ≠*Gao !na* is held in his medicine. ≠*Gao !na* is his power, he is *n/um*. There is a real sense therefore that ≠*Gao !na* is in people and accordingly also a sense of possession.

Marshall’s identification of *n/um* and the handling of *n/um* was a significant new detail of dance descriptions. The idea of *n/um* contributed to the notion of the healing dance as a phenomenon distinct to Bushmen. The growing focus on the distinctive nature of the dance was further confirmed by the publication of ‘Medicine Dance’ (1969). In her earlier consideration of the dance Marshall analysed the phenomenon as a forum for curing sickness, driving away evil and providing general protective *gaoxa*, or ‘goodness medicine’ to the participants. Additionally she noted the dance united people and the drama of the dance had the effect of releasing and purging emotions. Through the ceremony ‘Fear and hostility find outlet and people have acted together to protect themselves.’³⁴ This was a new interpretation that reflected the application of structural functional anthropological theory. In her later article Marshall added greater emphasis to the social role of the dance. She proposed that ‘curing may contribute to survival’. The value of the dance lay not just in curing but in reducing social tensions within the community.³⁵ This emphasis of the link between ecological survival and dancing reflected Lee’s conclusions regarding Bushmen as hunter gatherers in equilibrium with their environment. The idea of Bushmen as peaceful, ecologically-adapted hunter-gatherers was actualised in Marshall’s analysis that Bushmen cured through ‘the laying-on of hands’.³⁶

³² Marshall, ‘Bushman Religious Beliefs’, 249.

³³ *Ibid.*, 235.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 251.

³⁵ Marshall, ‘Medicine Dance’, 379-380.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 375.

Lee

Marshall's analysis of the dance gave it a role as a religious phenomenon, a place of curing and a community ritual. From the outset Lee engaged with these same issues but embedded the dance more firmly in theory. Lee's theory placed the dance further away from religion and !Kung cosmology and linked it with distinctive !Kung shamanism. Marshall (1969) thought of *n/um* as 'supernatural potency'.³⁷ Lee's theoretical interpretation further removed personality and identity from *n/um* and expressed it as a symbolic unit of exchange more than a divine potency. Lee's work broadly developed four particular themes that have directly contributed to fixing new paradigms about the trance dance: isolation, non-aggression, egalitarianism and lack of witchcraft.

Lee's focus on egalitarianism encouraged the idea that the dance is a forum of exchange. His concepts of isolation allowed the dance to become a very old, ecologically adapted, ritual. The idea of the dance as an ancient !Kung ritual was further cemented with the renewed interest in Bushmen rock art from the 1970s onwards.

Lee's idea of peaceful !Kung was embedded in the notion of !Kung bands representing simple ancient community life with low levels of social tension. The dance as an adapted cultural-ecological mechanism, played the role of diffusing the already low levels of tension. Drawing on the 1960s understanding of witchcraft as an index of social tension, Lee proposed that the !Kung, with low levels of sociality, had low levels of social tension, little need for witchcraft and hence were closer to shamanism than witchcraft.³⁸ He justified this conclusion theoretically in the proposition that Bushmen illness comes from outside the community, principally from the *//gangwasi*, or spirits of the dead. In order to resist illness the living must unite together to defend themselves from the dead.³⁹ By contrast, in Bantu speaking societies, within which witchcraft is endemic, the source of misfortune comes from within the community, and is typically manifest in accusations of blame and jealousy between neighbours.

Lee asserted that 'the role of "witch" is not an institution of Bushman society'. His position regarding witchcraft however, is slightly more guarded than Marshall's. Lee's analysis did not entirely ignore the presence of witchcraft ideas amongst the !Kung. Unlike Marshall he identified that some !Kung believed that they 'can (wilfully or unknowingly) cause harm to others by neglecting to propitiate ancestors'. Lee also specified that malevolence was normally attributed to a single ghost acting of its

³⁷ Ibid., 350.

³⁸ R. Lee, 'Trance Cure of the !Kung Bushmen', *Natural History* (Nov., 1967) p. 36.

³⁹ This idea persists in Lee's later work: *Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, p. 138.

own volition.⁴⁰ This latter point almost suggests ghost personality. Lee emphasizes that the dance served as a mechanism of dissipating hostility was influential. He further linked this idea into notions of ecological equilibrium, shamanism and ultimately almost a notion of Bushmen stewardship of the land. This latter point is one that Bushmen, like other Africans, have developed and brought to the political domain.⁴¹

The way Lee's theory affects his understanding of the dance is subtle. In view of the significant consequences of his analysis, it is worth taking a closer look at his theoretical background. Lee's research began in a search for 'core features' being 'the techniques, knowledge and organizational features whose sum total we call the hunting or gathering, or foraging, way of life.' These core features, Lee proposed, represent the basic human adaptation 'stripped of the accretions and complications brought about by agriculture, urbanization, advanced technology, and national and class conflict.'⁴² In *The !Kung San* Lee specified that he sought to avoid the possible associations between his 'core feature' principle and the idea of primitive man, by conceiving his work around an axis of ecology. This enabled him to explore 'continuities and discontinuities in subsistence, energetics, spatial organization, group structure and demography,' and, importantly, history, to deal with the specifics of social structure: kinship, marriage, ritual, descent and ideology.⁴³

Because Lee's interest was primarily materialistic he downplayed the wider world of !Kung ideas behind the dance, including those related to religion and healing. The theoretical starting point for Lee was a broad cultural ecology derived from Julian Steward's evolutionary cultural ecology (1936).⁴⁴ Steward is credited with founding cultural ecology which is essentially anthropology that emphasises the relationship between biophysical and cultural factors. It is a variant of materialism that locates technology as a mediator between culture and the biophysical environment. A concept of mutual causation, between the environment and culture, is central to cultural ecology. The ecological model that Lee applied directly reflected wider American anthropological response to Sahlin's and Service's developments of Leslie White's culture ecology. The wider notion of 'cultural ecology' expanded White's ecology to include 'historical, cultural, social, and economic factors'.⁴⁵ Although Lee included historical factors and notions of continuity and discontinuity in his analysis, there was a lack of history in his work.

⁴⁰ Lee, 'Trance Cure', 37.

⁴¹ See for example the film: 'The Bushmen's Last Dance', shown on BBC 4, 19/7/03.

⁴² R.B. Lee, *The !Kung San* (Cambridge and London, 1979), pp. 2-3.

⁴³ Lee, *!Kung San*, p. xvii.

⁴⁴ J. H. Steward, 'The Economic and Social Basis of Primitive Bands', in R.H. Lowie, (ed.), *Essays in Anthropology Presented to A.L. Kroeber* (Berkeley, 1936), pp. 331-50.

⁴⁵ N. Thin, 'Environment', in A. Barnard and J. Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 186.

Revisionists criticised Lee's ideas regarding the longevity and nature of contact, the effects of change and hence, crucially, the validity of his conclusions concerning what constituted the core features of the !Kung and, by implication, the human condition. Lee's history of contact is notoriously short. He proposed that the first known visit to the Dobe region interior by non-!Kung was in the 1870s. White intrusion, Lee suggested, was never more than occasional. Relations with the Tswana consisted solely of 'modest' and 'seasonal' summer hunting parties, that dominated the nineteenth century. Non !Kung first settled in the Dobe area between 1900 and 1925. Between 1890 and 1925 the first cattle came to the interior and some Ju/'hoansi were involved in boarding cattle for wealthy Tswana. Cattle were only an intermittent presence up to and past the period of Bantu colonization. In 1963 the majority of !Kung at Dobe were full time hunter-gatherers. In terms of exchange networks, Lee proposed that 'for over 100 years' the Dobe !Kung had traded with the Bantu for European and African goods on their periphery and that trade for purely African goods may have existed for 'several hundred years'.⁴⁶

Both Lee and Marshall saw !Kung contact with others as a recent phenomenon, although Marshall postulated a longer-standing Christian influence, via the Tswana.⁴⁷ Lee simply suggested: 'During the time of my fieldwork, there had been no Western missionary working among the Dobe Ju/'hoansi, and thus there had as yet been no ideological attack from that quarter on Ju beliefs'.⁴⁸ Although in his later work Lee addressed the criticisms of the Revisionists regarding concepts of isolation, his response has been more one of justification of his position, with adjustments, rather than a reassessment.

Lee turned to Marxism in order to deal with the problem of how 'ideological factors interact with ecological factors' and for a subtler understanding of internal structural relationships and the historical processes of transformation. Explicitly rejecting the full implications of 'dialectics', Lee worked with the idea that 'elements within a society [...] are constantly in process of adjustment and readjustment relative to one another.' Lee perceived this idea to be as relevant to the resolution of contradictions in 'pre-class' society as in Marx's class societies. Recognising the usefulness of this Marxist concept of change, Lee then expanded these theoretical foundations by drawing in ecological systems theory. This encouraged Lee to think of !Kung society as a dynamic complex web of systems, in which he placed the !Kung as conscious actors in dialectic relations with a physical and biological environment.⁴⁹ This reflected wider intellectual interest in culture as a cybernetic, self-regulating, system between people and their environments. Roy Rappaport applied a similar line of analysis in his 1968 *Pigs for the*

⁴⁶ Lee, *Kung San*, pp. 77-79.

⁴⁷ Marshall, 'Bushmen Religious Beliefs', 221.

⁴⁸ Lee, *Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, p. 137.

⁴⁹ Lee, *!Kung San*, pp. 1-5.

Ancestors (1968).⁵⁰ From 1979 onwards, Lee's materialist neo-Marxist interpretative emphasis becomes particularly significant. Ironically, this was a similar theoretical starting point to that of Wilmsen, one of his harshest Revisionist critics.

Lee's 1967 account of the 'trance cure', following Marshall, described the dance in terms of 'cooperation', 'mutual aid', widespread psychological rewards and 'a drama in which the stresses and tensions of social life are transformed into a common struggle against external sources of malevolence'.⁵¹ In *!Kung San* Lee proceeded to situate the dance more firmly within a fleshed out essentially economic 'forager mode of production' discourse. Lee built on Marxist anthropologist Meillassoux (1973)⁵² who distinguished instantaneous from deferred returns and Jordaan (1975)⁵³ who employed a similar definition, to develop a model of 'generalized reciprocity' as a primary characteristic of the foraging economy.⁵⁴ Lee saw a strong distinction between subsistence 'left to nature' and that practiced by farmers and herders who molded nature.⁵⁵ In a later context Lee confirms the division in his assertion that:

there are real contradictions between the organization and the ideology of farming and the organization and ideology of foraging. The most important of these is the contradiction between sharing, or generalized reciprocity, which is central to the hunter gatherer way of life, and the saving, or husbandry of resources, which is equally central to the farming and herding way of life.⁵⁶

By emphasising the association between hunter-gatherers and sharing, Lee encouraged the conclusion that the dance was also a forum of reciprocity and egalitarianism. Accordingly, in Lee and Katz's later work, *!Kung* medicine men are determined not to store healing energy and not to be hierarchically differentiable. This stood in contrast to older ethnography which identified leaders in a dance. We have already encountered Lebzelter, for instance, who spoke of a 'chief doctor', a *!Kung* woman who led a dance.⁵⁷ Lee's emphasis on the social role of the dance is evident in his observation that 'over 90% of all illnesses are self limiting',⁵⁸ the implication being that the dance does not really do much biophysical healing.

⁵⁰ Cited by N. Thin, 'Environment', in A. Barnard and J. Spencer (eds.), *Encyclopedia*, p. 186.

⁵¹ Lee, 'Trance Cure', p. 37.

⁵² C. Meillassoux, 'On the Mode of Production of the Hunting Band', in P. Alexandre (ed.), *French Perspectives in African Studies* (London, 1973), pp. 187-203.

⁵³ K. Jordaan, 'The Bushmen of southern Africa: Anthropology and Historical Materialism', *Race and Class* 17:2, 141-60.

⁵⁴ Lee, *!Kung San*, p. 117.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ Lee, *Dobe Ju'hoansi*, p. 159.

⁵⁷ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 48.

⁵⁸ Lee., *Dobe Ju'hoansi*, p. 131.

Lee was interested in the ideas of foragers but not particularly in a cosmological sense. The meaning he found in the dance restricted largely to identifying symbolism without linking it to the wider healing context. Lee built on Lorna Marshall's identification that *n/um* was put into a healer's back, stomach, head and hair. He identified key centres into which 'teachers' rubbed *n/um* into their pupils as part of their training - the chest, belly, base of spine and forehead.⁵⁹ He drew attention to 'boiling, fire, heat and sweat' as the 'key symbols and metaphors' of the Bushman 'trance complex'. Lee translated *n/um* as 'boiling', symbolically related to *n/um*, to boil, elaborating that *n/um* refers 'not only to the boiling of water on the fire but also to the ripening of plants'. Additionally Lee noted that !Kung teachers vigorously massaged a pupil's body, 'always from the extremities to the torso, and on the torso towards the stomach, symbolically working the boiling *n/um* back into its resting state in the pit of the stomach'.⁶⁰

Although Lee identified *n/um* as a physical substance, he played down day-to-day use of *n/um* in a wide healing context and stressed a symbolic working of *n/um* which was ultimately tied to environmental adaptation. Wilmsen voiced a similar criticism of Lee's analysis, though in a broader context, in his observation that Lee's research relegated 'social relations to epiphenomena, secondary consequences of energy flow'.⁶¹

Lee's dance analysis was embedded in 'factors of production' and economic energy flow. Without greater contextualisation he interpreted the healing dance by theoretically placing it somewhere between a study of work in its ecological setting, being a study of input-output analysis of !Kung subsistence, and a study of land or pre-contact spatial organization. Lee excludes healing from a strict work definition leaving it a slightly unclear subsidiary role that could still be measured in input output analysis. Accordingly he estimated the caloric demands of the healing dance.⁶² In terms of land, Lee placed the dance within a !Kung 'dialectic of organization and ecology'.⁶³ Following Marcel Mauss (1904-5),⁶⁴ Lee describes the !Kung year as being divided into two phases – 'a period of concentration (the public life) and a period of dispersion (the private life)'. This inherently flexible arrangement was an 'adaptation to the perennial problems of the arid environment'.⁶⁵ The winter camp (public life) was

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 133.

⁶⁰ Lee, *Dobe Ju/hoansi*, p. 135.

⁶¹ Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies*, p. 196.

⁶² Lee, *!Kung San*, p. 272.

⁶³ Ibid., p. 364.

⁶⁴ M. Mauss, 'Essai sur les variations saisonnières des sociétés eskimos: Etude de morphologie sociale', *Ann. Soc.*, 9 (1904-5), 39-132.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

a phase which was partly dictated by ecology and partly by the social benefits of large numbers of !Kung coming together. During the winter camp initiation rituals were held, *chomas*, and big trance dances 'went on around the clock for 12-36 hours', at which many medicine men from far and wide would participate and enter trance in the same dance, which was deemed to be particularly efficacious.⁶⁶ Within Lee's ecological framework he identified that to achieve the social benefit of the dance at least 50 adults were required in the camp to provide adequate subsistence support to the dance participants.

In many ways Lee's entire understanding of the dance is a reflection of his modes of analysis. His post-1930s structural functionalism emphasised the group. His materialism played down the religious context and his environmentalism played up the social context. The core value of reciprocity identified as a foundation of Lee's band society was materialised in Lee's conception of the healing dance. Bound to a Marxist substructure that encouraged ideas of transformation and an ecologically based perception of equilibrium or energy exchange, Lee's dancers worked together exchanging *n/um*. *N/um* was brought on, and its effects presented, through stereotyped cultural procedures and was in essence a social creation, the manipulation of which was integral to !Kung hunter gatherer adaptation. *N/um* was faceless and specifically Bushmen. It was part of their distinctive adaptive strategy.

Silberbauer

Silberbauer reflected that at the outset of his research he could only make sense of the G/wi Bushmen of the Ghanzi district, by thinking of them in a context of ecology theory, which was an approach he was familiar with from his forestry work.⁶⁷ Having discerned the relevance of ecological factors to the structure of G/wi society, Silberbauer could then, similarly to Lee, begin to think of the G/wi within a socio-ecosystem analysis. Whilst this theoretical perspective influenced Silberbauer's interpretation of the dance, he also retained the broader contextualisation of earlier authors, including Marshall. In all, Silberbauer provides a particularly distinctive take on Bushmen culture. His work moves closely towards my ideas concerning the interrelatedness of forms and the transmission of potency, but ultimately his understanding becomes too heavily bound to ideas of social and ecological systems in balance. Similarly, although his evidence seems to point towards indigenous ideas of witchcraft, his wider understanding of Bushmen seems to steer him towards denying its existence.

⁶⁶ Ibid., p. 356.

⁶⁷ G. B. Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat in the Central Kalahari Desert* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 29.

Like Marshall, Silberbauer gave some religious context to the dance. According to Silberbauer the G/wi believe in two beings, *N!adima* and *G//awama* (*G//amama*). *N!adima* who lives in the sky is invulnerable and invisible, omniscient and omnipresent. *G//awama* has no fixed abode and is less powerful than *N!adima*. Since *N!adima* created a benevolent world *G//awama* has worked to disrupt it. It is *G//awama* who is responsible for most evil and illness. Humans can resist *G//awama* by using medicines given by *N!adima*. *N!adima*'s medicines also cure misfortune, treat persistent failure in hunting and bad behaviour of one's children.⁶⁸

Silberbauer recognised that the G/wi have an 'intense preoccupation with rain'. Silberbauer agreed that the rain is not worshipped but is 'praised' and 'entreated'.⁶⁹ Having made this observation he fails to explore the further implications of this finding. Like Lee and Marshall, Silberbauer did not investigate extensively the wider world of Bushmen healing and its relationship to the dance. He believed 'vernacular medical practices are not elaborate and the materia medica is not extensive'.⁷⁰ He did, however, attempt to develop his ecological systems analysis in terms of a theory of G/wi ideas and understandings of illness. Silberbauer, unlike Lee, recognised endogenous as well as exogenous causes for illness. Behind illness, he suggested, runs a G/wi understanding of entropy. The G/wi envisage a world constantly driven towards disorder by *G//awama*. Medicines and healing serve to 'correct departures from normality',⁷¹ or, to restore balance or equilibrium. In G/wi thought 'the world is seen as a gigantic version of a self regulating life-support system in which component subsystems, themselves subregulating within certain limits of tolerance, interact to correct perturbations'.⁷²

Silberbauer identified two dances amongst the G/wi that were associated with healing, the 'exorcising dance' and the 'medicine dance'.⁷³ According to Silberbauer, *G//awama* fires arrows of evil at the G/wi. The men are strong and can resist the arrows and are not directly affected, but the women become afflicted and may then pass the evil on to the men. In order to rid the people of evil the G/wi hold the Gemsbok dance (*/xoma*⁷⁴), or more recently also the Iron dance (*/anu*), at which healers pull out the evil. The same dance(s) may also be used to pull out sickness caused by *G//awama*. The dance treatment of sickness is considered more effective if is accompanied by the simultaneous use of herbal

⁶⁸ Silberbauer, *Report*, pp. 95-97.

⁶⁹ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 102.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p.58.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

⁷³ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 56; *Report*, pp. 97, 99.

⁷⁴ Possibly linked to Khoe *xoma*, meaning sucking healer.

remedies and the sucking out of blood or 'bad things' from the 'patient'. The healers cough out the evil they have removed.⁷⁵

This description suggests that while the dance is fundamentally similar to other Bushmen dances, there is a distinctive idea found amongst the G/wi that the dance protects against a universal attack of evil. Eibl-Eibesfeldt, a German ethnologist, noted that !Xõ Bushmen have a similar idea. !Xõ men touch the women as they dance past them to withdraw the evil. The G/wi, Eibl-Eibesfeldt specified more precisely, believe an arrow of evil has penetrated the women and hence, the G/wi actually suck and pull out an arrow of evil.⁷⁶ Silberbauer does not directly talk of arrows being removed from people. In the historical ethnography the idea of arrows of sickness or medicine is attributed to the /Xam,⁷⁷ the Bergdamara,⁷⁸ the Naron and the Auen.⁷⁹ I came across very similar ideas amongst contemporary Damara, Nharo and Ju/'hoan.

Silberbauer situated the dance not only within the context of a G/wi fear of attacking evil, but additionally within a broader concept of constant supernal struggle between *N!'adima*, who represents order, and *G//awama*, who represents entropy or disorder. Things naturally 'fall apart', 'run down' or 'go awry' unless proper relationships are maintained. An example of such natural relationships lies in plants needing rain.⁸⁰

The "arrows" that are thrown down by *G//amama* to lodge in women induce entropy in the local social system. Trance dances are performed to correct this deviation from the steady state, and in transcending normal order in their trance states, the dancers restore the entropy in the system to zero or to a minus value.⁸¹

Silberbauer seems right to identify an awareness of relationships as a key Bushmen idea but wrong to interpret relationships through theories of entropy. He takes the G/wi talk of arrows of *G//amama* as metaphors for environmental stress but clearly the G/wi do not think in terms of entropy, nor necessarily metaphor.

Explicitly building on Lévi Strauss' idea of 'untamed thought' and the systems theory of von Bertalanffy, Silberbauer elaborates that for the Gw/i 'the structure of causal relationships is not linear',

⁷⁵ Silberbauer, *Report*, p. 99.

⁷⁶ Eibl-Eibesfeldt cited by Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, pp. 114-115.

⁷⁷ Hewitt, *Structure, Meaning and Ritual*, p. 292.

⁷⁸ Vedder, *South West Africa*, p. 64.

⁷⁹ Fourie, *Native Tribes*, p. 104.

⁸⁰ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 117.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 118.

it entails a web of causation, interrelationship and transformation.⁸² Within this web ‘some phenomena are more interrelated than others’. Illness is a breakdown of order. What restores order are particular phenomena with the right characteristics in relation to the illness. Sweat rubbed onto the ‘patient’ transfuses the right ingredient and restores order, as do medicinal herbs.⁸³

Whilst medicinal transformation can be thought of as restoring equilibrium, this does not seem to adequately represent the Khoisan emphasis on what Marshall termed ‘supernatural potency’. Silberbauer seems right to recognise that some things affect or transform some other things, and the transfusion of state or ability from one apparently distinct organic or inorganic substrate to another does depend on relationships. His idea, however, does not seem to identify why one phenomenon might be linked with another beyond vague notion of correct relationship. Silberbauer observed, for the G/wi:

all objects are considered to have a measure of similarity. Even if it might make cultural nonsense, it would be structurally possible to express the idea that a stone might possess some of the characteristics of a man, that is, the language permits exploration of this concept. Consequently, the language permits free comparisons, the formation of analogies, and the expression of the isomorphism of systems.⁸⁴

Silberbauer seems to be talking of the ability of organisms or objects to take on, or intrinsically possess, the same characteristics or powers as other organisms or objects which seem unrelated to the ‘Western’ mind. He recognised, as I have previously observed, that Khoisan language has the ability to demonstrate affinity between different phenomena. Hahn remarked on a similar phenomena apparent in Khoe linguistic agglutination. The linguist Stopa also recognised that the difference of noun and verb does not exist in Bushmen languages. The idea of potency provides an alternative way of thinking about this same phenomenon. Returning to ideas of physical engagement in the natural world through a mediating social process, Silberbauer’s relationships seem founded in experience. Likeness, affinity or relationship, is recognised by Khoisan between two phenomena where experience teaches it.

Similar ideas of relationships spill out into wider Gw/i belief. Silberbauer noted that the G/wi believe in sympathetic, or what he calls, analogous magic, giving the example of bulbs that wilt if touched, being worn around the neck’s of young girls, so that when they bear children, the children will be good

⁸² Ibid., p. 116.

⁸³ Ibid., p. 119.

⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 132.

and fall asleep easily.⁸⁵ Elsewhere he recorded that the G/wi believe the duiker ‘practices sorcery against his animal enemies’ and even against rivals, and, moreover that, ‘some steenbok are thought to possess a magical means of protecting themselves from a hunter's arrow’.⁸⁶ On the other hand, Silberbauer also stated, ‘the G/wi have no sorcery’.⁸⁷ Whilst he suggested that witchcraft, as a culture of internal blame and recrimination or jealousy, does not operate within G/wi society, his evidence demonstrates Gw/i existence of a mystical witchcraft idea but operated in the context of animals. If they do not have ‘sorcery’ it would seem the G/wi have the same ideas, although this is not a connection Silberbauer makes.

Silberbauer, like both Lee and Marshall, emphasised the ‘cathartic’, ‘purging’ and ‘unifying’ role of the dance beyond any other function.⁸⁸ His analysis subordinated the healing context to a socio-ecosystems analysis based on G/wi ideas of entropy, reciprocation and relationship. Silberbauer’s quasi-scientific energy exchange analogy provides an alternative explanation of ‘supernatural potency’. Whilst he presented previously unappreciated Bushmen ideas around issues of relationship, Silberbauer’s analysis does not seem sufficiently tied to a G/wi way of talking and thinking about the dance and healing.

As an addendum to these key accounts Jiro Tanaka’s work is pertinent and underlines the contingency of academic research. Tanaka, from Japan, began his fieldwork amongst the G/wi, the same ethnic Bushmen group that Silberbauer researched, in 1966. Tanaka’s background was primatology and he examined G/wi and G//ana groups from an ecological perspective, attempting to ‘elucidate the original configuration of human society’.⁸⁹ He thought these San egalitarian and peaceful and similarly to Silberbauer he perceived their society was always in a sense of crisis from the sickness, injury, starvation, drought, and death brought by *g//wama*.⁹⁰ Essential to this crisis, Tanaka, similarly to Marshall’s findings amongst Ju’hoan, identified the sun as a constant evil which was ideologically opposed to the rain as basically good. Tanaka observes that the notion of ‘thirsty’, */amaha*, derives from */am*, ‘sun’. This again demonstrates the relationship between nouns and verbs.

Although Tanaka proposed the Bushmen had ‘no systematic beliefs about any supernatural powers’⁹¹ his interpretation of sickness revolved around notions of evil spirits and unspecified ‘magical power’.

⁸⁵ Silberbauer, *Report*, p. 97.

⁸⁶ Silberbauer, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 64.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁸⁸ Silberbauer, *Report*, p. 98.

⁸⁹ J. Tanaka, *The San Hunter Gatherers of the Kalahari* (Tokyo, 1980), p. i.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

In Tanaka's understanding it was not arrows which carried sickness into the women from the deity, as Silberbauer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt identified, but evil spirits. In the dance women were 'inhabited' by an evil spirit, the men absorbed the evil spirits, trance came from an accumulation of evil spirits and ultimately the dance 'exorcised' evil spirits.⁹² Similarly, rubbing the sick drove out evil spirits and medicinal cuts were made to allow the sucking out of evil spirits. In terms of why sweat might be used in healing, Tanaka simply tied this to 'magical powers'.⁹³

Tanaka curtails his analysis by too readily recruiting notions of 'supernatural', 'spirit' and 'magic'. By doing so he inserts his own structure of thought on his Bushmen material. This structuring is most evident in his identification of evil spirits 'inhabiting' San women. Pre-1950s ethnographers thought Khoisan peoples lived in a world of spirits. Although these interpretations owed much to an intellectual tradition of animism they at least situated specific behaviour, such as the dance, within wider ideas. The dance interpretations of Marshall, Lee, Silberbauer and Tanaka all seem to represent as much their personal models as Bushmen reality. These modes of analysis are undoubtedly revealing and valuable but hold the danger of obscuring aspects of Khoisan reality. They moreover leave the Khoisan vulnerable to further misrepresentation.

Amongst the Zaramo of Tanzania, those wishing to become diviners must be possessed by the Rungu spirit who gives the waganga the power to 'see'. The Rungu spirit is also commonly referred to as the spirit of the snake.⁹⁴ Khoisan become sick by different causes: shadows of birds; eating parts of animals not suitable for one's age, sex or experience; 'wind' of other's or the wind of dead people. Healers heal because they have attributes of power from divine beings, other organisms or human abilities. These are the Khoisan contexts of healing to which arrows and spirits are tied. They are contexts not dissimilar to those of other African peoples.

b).The Second Wave: Barnard, Katz and Guenther

By the late 1960s Bushmen research in the Kalahari was well established and prompted a wave of new academic interest, following Lee into the field. The most influential study to date of the Bushmen trance dance was undertaken by Richard Katz who, in 1968, worked for three months with Lee amongst the !Kung in the Dobe area of the north west Kalahari. Katz, holding a doctorate in clinical psychology, undertook a psychological and sociological study which was principally published in 1976

⁹² Ibid., 115.

⁹³ Ibid., 111.

⁹⁴ L. Swantz, 'The Role of the Medicine Man among the Daramo of Dar es Salaam' (Dar es Salaam Univ., Ph.D. thesis, 1972), p. 69.

as a section of Lee and DeVore's Kalahari Hunter Gatherers, and in 1982 as the highly influential: *Boiling Energy: Community Healing among the Kalahari Kung*. In 1997 this work was updated following his return to his fieldwork site accompanied by Biesele and St. Denis. The resultant book of his return trip, *Healing makes our Hearts Happy*,⁹⁵ seeks to bridge a lay and academic audience and place Ju/'hoan healing in a contemporary context.

In 1968 Mathias Guenther, based in Canada, commenced research on Nharo farm and mission Bushmen in the Ghanzi district of Botswana. The Nharo are a Khoe speaking Bushman people. Guenther completed his Ph.D. in 1973 and since then has engaged in additional fieldwork and published extensively on the Nharo and other Bushmen. From the outset Guenther was interested in issues of socio-cultural change. As his work progressed he became increasingly interested in Bushmen religion and Bushmen ideas, both of which he recognised as having been largely neglected by ecologically orientated Bushmen anthropologists. Three publications of Guenther's are of particular relevance to the current discussion, a monograph on the Nharo, *The Nharo Bushmen of Botswana* (1986), a paper, 'Not a Bushman Thing: Witchcraft among Bushmen and Hunter-Gatherers' (1992) and a recent book, *Trickster and Trancers: Bushman Religion and Society* (1999).

Like Guenther, Alan Barnard, also worked on the Nharo. Barnard, who began his anthropological studies in the United States, commenced his Nharo research in 1974. Since then, in addition to *Hunters and Herders* and other work on wider Bushmen issues, he has published on a number of topics relating to the Nharo, including ethnobotany (1984, 1986), Nharo language (1985) and ritual (1979).⁹⁶ It is with this latter work, entitled 'Nharo Bushman Medicine and Medicine Men', that this immediate discussion will be concerned.

Each of these authors brings new details and interpretations to trance dancing. All three share much in common with the earlier researchers regarding ideas of Bushmen contact and the persistent existence of 'core feature' hunter-gatherer characteristics within certain isolated groups. All three, however, have also revised their positions more clearly in response to Revisionist criticisms than the earlier vanguard. Guenther particularly develops ideas of acculturation and pluralism in a rich context of

⁹⁵ This book seems very much a Katz led endeavour. For reasons of clarity I subsequently refer to the authorship of the book with reference only to Katz, despite its joint authorship.

⁹⁶ A. Barnard, *The Perception and Utilization of Morama and other Food Plants by the Nharo of Western Botswana*. University of Edinburgh, Centre of African Studies, Occasional Paper no. 4 (Edinburgh, 1984); Barnard, 'Some Aspects of Nharo Ethnobotany', in R. Vossen and K. Keuthmann (eds.), *Contemporary Studies on Khoisan 1*. QKF 5.1 (Hamburg, 1986), pp. 55-82; Barnard, *Nharo Wordlist*.

change. Of the three, Katz's studies seem the least removed from lingering romantic ideas of isolated Bushmen.

Although Barnard and Guenther both carried out research amongst the Nharo, there is no neat overlap in their findings and conclusions. In fact, Barnard's research is distinctive not only from Guenther's but also from that of other researchers of Bushmen. What is particularly distinctive is his identification of sorcerers and spirit possession in Bushmen society. He additionally provides a relatively detailed account of wider medical practice and its relationship to healers.

Barnard

Following pre-1950s Bushmen ethnographers, Barnard proposes Nharo medicine men can do good and evil medicine. Partly in recognition of this, and partly in recognition of his identification of possession belief, he explicitly uses the term 'medicine man' as opposed to 'shaman'. Barnard divides medicine into physical and spiritual. The physical medicine can be 'good' or 'evil' and consists of plant or sometimes animal based substances. These can be taken orally as remedies or rubbed into incisions. The spiritual medicine, by contrast, is always good. Good medicine requires the healer to go into trance and the cooperation of a *g//āuā*, or spirit of the dead. Atypically Barnard identifies a substance for disease, */ki*, which is amorphic and corresponds to the different types of sickness. Different sicknesses are caused 'naturally', or more rarely by the sorcery of a human or spirit.⁹⁷

Barnard (1979) thought that Bantu speakers, Afrikaans ranchers and white missionaries and doctors, had had 'only slight' influence on the religious and medical beliefs of the Nharo.⁹⁸ Whilst Guenther identified Nharo sorcery as symptomatic of acculturation and increased social tension,⁹⁹ Barnard recognised it as 'a traditional practice most often attributed to outsiders and social misfits'. He described that sorcerers use small 'grass arrows' to maim people.¹⁰⁰ Dorothea Bleek (1928) had also encountered grass arrow use amongst the Nharo as had both Vedder and Lebzelter in relation to !Kung and other Bushmen. Vedder and Lebzelter clearly associated miniature grass bows and arrows with Bushmen witchcraft.¹⁰¹

⁹⁷ Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine and Medicine Men', *Africa*, 49 (1) (1979), 68.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁹⁹ M.G. Guenther, 'The Trance Dancer as an Agent of Social Change among the Farm Bushmen of the Ghanzi District', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 7 (1975), 161-6.

¹⁰⁰ Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 71.

¹⁰¹ D. Bleek, *The Naron: a Bushman Tribe of the Central Kalahari* (Cambridge, 1928), p. 28; Vedder, *South West Africa*, p. 89; Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 51.

Barnard proposed that *g//ǃuǃ-ne*, spirits of the dead, are not specific people. They are male and female and, in the words of one informant, ‘short (about 50 centimetres tall) and dark skinned, before changing into a porcupine’.¹⁰² The *g//ǃuǃ-ne* are in one sense evil, in as much as they bring death, but their presence in spiritual medicine is good.

Nharo achieve trance by the medicine, *tsho*, boiling, *tsa*, in the medicine man’s stomach (Hahn lists *tsǃ* as ‘to feel’ in Khoe and as ‘buchu’ in /Kham Bushmen¹⁰³). *Tsho* then becomes united with a *g//ǃuǃ* that enters the healer’s body. As Barnard points out this is different from Marshall’s version of events (and that of all other trance dance writers). For Marshall the boiling alone of *n/um* brings on the trance and the healers then draw the sickness into themselves and, in a half conscious state, leave the body to plead with the *g//ǃuǃ* to take it away. Barnard asserts the Nharo therefore distinctively seem to have both ‘spirit possession’ and ‘soul loss’ as explanations of trance healing.¹⁰⁴

In 1975 Barnard observed an ‘extraordinary medicine dance’ in which a woman was apparently entered by a female *g//ǃuǃ* who was passing by. The possessed woman had the spirit pulled from her by a healer who held onto her shoulders and arms for some twenty minutes.¹⁰⁵

Rather than considering, like Barnard suggests, that the Nharo hold particularly different beliefs regarding healing and trance, I suspect Barnard’s different account is more representative of his particular interpretation combined with a Khoisan variability of description.

Schapera asserted that Hottentots and northern Bushmen ideas concerning both //Gaua and the way the dead can affect the living are ‘vague, inconsistent, and ambiguous’,¹⁰⁶ Barnard, Guenther and Biesele have since recognised this phenomenon as part of a wider Bushman characteristic of ideational flexibility.¹⁰⁷ Is it variability tied to flexibility, therefore, that is responsible for researchers encountering different and confusing explanations of what make people ill, what a healer’s medicine is and what he pulls from the sick person? Or are variable explanations symptomatic of researchers providing fractured and partial explanations?

It seems possible to shed light on the variety and apparent contradictions of Khoisan explanations of healing phenomena, by exploring the notion that wind and arrows are good for Khoisan to think with.

¹⁰² Barnard, ‘Nharo Bushman Medicine’, p. 71.

¹⁰³ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, pp. 6, 25.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

¹⁰⁶ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁷ Barnard, ‘Nharo Bushman Medicine’, 72; Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 197; Biesele, *Women Like Meat*, p. 14.

In broad terms the following provides a possible preliminary overview of Khoisan thought and practice as suggested by my comparative study and examined through this lens.

Ultimately, the deities are responsible for everything. Wind and arrows are key ways a deity is thought to affect the living. Dead people can also, like living people, affect others through arrows and wind. Different healers have different power. The power comes from interaction with a deity, from interaction with other healers or from potent organisms and again can be transferred as arrows or wind. Examples of power are a healer's ability to dance or the elands attributes of strength. Some Khoisan call powers manifest in the body, /*gais*. Sickness comes from a deity or dead people and is transferred through arrows and wind. The wind of a dead person seems to have been translated by some researchers as the dead person. This allows the idea of possession.

Invisible dead people are a way of thinking about repositories of ambivalent potency. Barnard describes healing as being reliant upon a *g//ãuã* uniting with *tsho* medicine. The dead, like the living, can pass on good and bad attributes. In this context the *g//ãuã* performs good. A healer could, like the patient, be described as possessing a dead person or recruiting one when healing is required. I envisage the *g//ãuã* is the waking up, or the coming in of life, to a dormant, horizontal arrow, wind or /*gais* potency. This explanation is difficult but should become clearer as the ideas are returned to and developed in later contexts.

Katz

Katz's *Boiling Energy* and *Healing* have been highly influential in bringing ideas of Bushman medicine to an academic and popular anthropological audience. True to his background, in both books Katz tackles the dance from a sociological and psychological perspective. In both works he particularly applies a concept of synergy that was popular in psycho-social analytical studies in the late 1960s and 1970s. His earlier analysis also reflected the concurrent interest of radical psychologists in group therapy. Behind Katz's sociological analysis his theoretical standpoint, like that of one of *Healing's* co- authors, Biesele, is rooted in ideas of ecological equilibrium and egalitarianism. In *Healing*, Katz draws on the rock art studies of Lewis-Williams and Dowson to suggest that the Bushmen healing dance is thousands of years old. He accommodates the concerns of Revisionists by emphasising that, 'the dance expresses a vital and dynamic tradition. Change is essential to keeping that tradition alive'.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Katz, *Healing*, pp. 52, 55.

Although his studies do not claim to be ethnographies of Bushman medicine, Katz, like most ethnographers, barring perhaps Barnard, presents the healing dance largely devoid of its wider healing context. There is undoubtedly much strength in Katz's analysis, particularly in the manner in which he gives prominence to Bushman individual experience in relation to understanding ritual and belief. However, certain aspects of the healing dance which Katz explains in relation to his theoretical sociological or ecological starting points, seem better explained within a wider context of Bushmen healing ideas and cosmology. Sometimes Katz's evidence seems inappropriately slotted into preconceived theoretical paradigms. This is particularly true regarding issues of spirituality, payment of healers and whether or not healing is hierarchical.

Katz acknowledges that the Ju/'hoansi bring medical and psychological problems to the dance and that, in addition to the dance, Ju use 'healing massage'¹⁰⁹ and 'medicinal herbs and salves for minor injuries and infections'.¹¹⁰ Despite recognising the presence of other treatments, Katz elevates the dance to the Bushmen's 'main method of treating sickness',¹¹¹ stating other strategies are 'supplementary treatments, usually reserved for less serious or more localized ailments'.¹¹²

Katz's claim may reflect conclusions of a 1994 survey of the Nyae Nyae area of Namibia. The survey found that 82% of households are actively engaged in traditional medicine and although 'herbal curing' is practiced in the majority of households, it is the healing dance that is the most common form of curing.¹¹³ In 2001 healing dances at //Aru village were reported to occur only around once a month. Kgao N!aici, a Ju/'hoan man from //Aru, suggested that when people lived near roads, and not far from the road as they did at //Aru, they would go to other areas and participate in dances 'many times in a month'. I asked him why people danced less and he replied, 'it just depends how they want..now people just stay near'.¹¹⁴ This observation highlights that for most people most of the time participating in a dance is not a matter of personal necessity nor part of personal day-to-day health care. The healing dance will statistically appear the most common form of curing because large numbers of people participate in it at each occasion. In each dance the number of sick individuals around which the dance focuses will however be small, often only one or two out of maybe twenty. The statistics do not adequately take the social aspect of the dance into account.

¹⁰⁹ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 52.

¹¹⁰ Katz, *Healing*, p. 18.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Katz, *Boiling*, p. 51.

¹¹³ Botelle and Rhode cited by A. Barnard, *Research and Development in Bushman Communities: Two Lectures*, Edinburgh University, Centre of African Studies, Occasional Papers (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 47.

¹¹⁴ 82

Suggesting the dance is the primary healing practice ignores the fact that many illnesses, including the most severe, are treated by herbal and animal based remedies and not by the healing dance. These illnesses include malaria, tuberculosis¹¹⁵ and, in a recent years, AIDS. Katz also ignores the primary Ju/'hoan recourse to massage and remedies, and even perhaps medicinal cuts, tried by sick people before they participate in a dance, to say nothing of 'healthy eating' strategies. These primary health-seeking practices are part of day-to-day life, which does not diminish but emphasise their importance. One could therefore think of the dance less as supplementary and more as a 'last ditch' healing resort. More sensitively, the dance should perhaps be considered as healing particular types of problems or accommodating particular Bushmen ideas within which the Western idea of healing and curing are not entirely appropriate.

Katz's material does not engage extensively with wider ideas of Bushmen cosmology, but despite this, he makes some important points regarding religion. Katz draws attention to the dangers of inserting Western paradigms of the natural and supernatural, or the sacred and profane, into Khoisan thought. He observes that the !Kung do not 'even categorise their experience in such a dualistic fashion in the first place'.¹¹⁶ He recognises that prayer is better thought of as 'speaking directly' to the gods. In terms of locating !Kung reality he specifies that 'symbols are not merely symbolic; they are also real'.¹¹⁷ Katz is impressively persistent in wishing to provide a !Kung perspective on life. He rejects, for instance, use of the word 'trance' in favour of the meaningful !Kung word, *!kia*, for the experience ethnographers recognise as trance. He also deliberately emphasises the inaccuracy of earlier stereotypes of the !Kung, such as the peaceful nature of their existence.¹¹⁸ But despite Katz's sensitivity and all his cautions regarding misinterpreting and misapplying the !Kung's story, he does not take account of the wider healing context. He both misses connections between some healing ideas and the practices in the dance setting, and overemphasises the significance of others.

In *Healing* Katz implicitly builds on the shamanistic interpretations of Lewis-Williams and Dowson and emphasises the dance as an ancient means of social and personal 'spiritual' transformation.¹¹⁹ Although he keenly advocates the removal of Western ideas of 'healing' and 'religion' and he draws distinction between Western ideas of 'spiritual knowledge' and those of the !Kung, he ultimately fails

¹¹⁵ Cf. Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 70.

¹¹⁶ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 28.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

¹¹⁹ Katz, *Healing*, p. 54.

to maintain the distance he proclaims in practice. The dance to Katz remains a spiritual !Kung experience.

In 1934 Lebzelter specified in relation to the !Kung: 'These little sickness spirits are no magical beings but banal realities in the eyes of the bushmen'.¹²⁰ In the introduction to *Boiling Energy* Lee acknowledged that Katz 'struggles largely successfully' to avoid the pitfalls of a romantic portrayal of Bushmen.¹²¹ Katz's continual return to the dance as a place where !Kung 'enhance consciousness', play out social values of 'harmony, equality and spiritual connectedness' and grow in understanding and use of *n/om* [sic] the 'spiritual energy',¹²² leaves me unconvinced that Lee was harsh enough, or that Katz became more objective in his later work, or that he really believes what Lebzelter had proposed. Katz seems deliberately to avoid use of the words 'sorcery', 'witchcraft', 'possession' or 'shamanism', but his message of the Bushmen as a deeply spiritual people undoubtedly, nonetheless, feeds inappropriate ideas of the Bushmen as shaman. Despite his care, his use of ideas of 'spirituality' does not stand up without a deeper contextualisation of the meaning of *n/um* and a more thorough understanding of !Kung ideas concerning the cause and transference of sickness. Katz's work nevertheless is undeniably rich. Engaging with his detail allows an exploration of Bushmen healing in relation to wider ideas regarding arrows, spirits and witchcraft and underlying conceptions of continuity and change.

Thinking of n/um

Lorna Marshall first drew wider attention to the phenomenon of *n/um*. Marshall described *n/um* as 'magic' medicine or 'the special potent 'spiritual' medicine.'¹²³ Lee thought it 'a physical substance in the pit of the stomach'.¹²⁴ Lewis-Williams envisages *n/um* as 'supernatural potency'.¹²⁵ Amongst the Nharo, Barnard and Guenther identified *tso* (*tsho;tsô;tssô*),¹²⁶ which Guenther equates directly with Ju/'hoan *n/um*,¹²⁷ as medicine and poison.

¹²⁰ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 50.

¹²¹ Katz, *Boiling*, p. xi.

¹²² Katz, *Healing*, pp. 18, 55,.

¹²³ Marshall, 'Bushmen Religious Beliefs', 227, 235.

¹²⁴ Lee, 'Trance Cure', 31.

¹²⁵ J.D. Lewis-Williams, *Images of Power: Understanding Bushman Rock Art* (Johannesburg, 1989), pp. 93-94.

¹²⁶ Barnard: *tsho*, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 68; *tsô*, *Nharo Wordlist*, p. 85. Guenther: *tso*, 'The Nharo Bushmen', p. 287; *tssô*, *Tricksters*, p. 189.

¹²⁷ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 189.

The earliest references to the name and the phenomenon seem to emerge in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Dorothea Bleek thought the northern !Kung (!Ku; !Xū) had two types of medicine men, *!num k?au*, who ‘officiate at initiation rites, do the tattooing, see ghosts etc.’, and the *t/o k?au* who heal the sick by singing, dancing, and extracting the evil from the patient's body by smelling or snoring it out.¹²⁸ In the context of the Naron [sic], Schapera also identifies */nu k’au*, *tsho k’au*, and *!geixa*.¹²⁹

Barring *!geixa*, these names are composed of two words, the second of which, *kau* (*kxau*; *kxàð*)¹³⁰ means ‘ownership’ or ‘possession’. Katz suggests *n/um* should be known by its action and its effects.¹³¹ This is an important contribution to understanding *n/um*. It has the danger, however, of denying *n/um* a more solid identity. Katz interprets the ownership of *n/um* in terms of healers being stewards, masters and informed carers of *n/um*, the spiritual energy of transformation.¹³² Following ideas of !Kung as egalitarian, Katz suggests *n/um* is shared between community members, not stored and personalized and no one can possess it or control it completely.¹³³ But *n/um* is held in people and does accumulate. It is related to *n/um* held in other organisms or objects. Healers are afraid of *n/um* and the skill of the healer depends on trying to control a force which could kill him. Despite this factor of control, stress of mastership and stewardship seems inappropriate. Katz, like Lee in his symbolic appreciation of *n/um*, seems to play down the physical possession of a potent substance, which can be amassed in some more than in others and used for good or ill.

The first respective word of the historical names for medicine men, *!num k?au* (!Kung) and */nu k’au* (Nharo), seem orthographically related to Lee’s !Kung *!num*, meaning to boil and directly, *n/um*. This suggests that !Kung use the word *!num* as a synonym for */num* and the Nharo also used the word *n/um* as an alternative to *tssō*. In Nharo *n/um* also means belly,¹³⁴ which might well be related to the belly as the home and boiling place of */num*. The broad suggestion is therefore that in a healing context there is a surprisingly intimate cross over of ideas and language between these

¹²⁸ Bleek cited by Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 198; Bleek, *The Naron*, p. 124.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-198. Unfortunately Schapera’s references are inaccurate regarding these names.

¹³⁰ *Kau*, Lewis-Williams, *Images*, p. 32.; *Kxau*, Marshall, ‘!Kung Bushman’, p. 235;

¹³¹ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 94.

¹³² Katz, *Healing*, p. 16.

¹³³ Katz, *Healing*, p. 94.

¹³⁴ Barnard, *Nharo Wordlist*, p. 68.

otherwise linguistically distinct groups. The use of words in this manner by both groups also again points to the interchangeable usage of noun and verbs.¹³⁵

The alternative first words, *t/o* and *tsho*, seem related to *tssō*. Two elderly !Kung healers at Mangetti told me *tssō* (identified by Guenther as the Nharo *n/um* equivalent), is a ‘thread’ or ‘tendon’ in the back;¹³⁶ !Kung Abi said, ‘it is the bag of the */gais*, when the */gais* get warm is when you see things in the person’.¹³⁷ This has interesting parallels with Dorothea Bleek’s central bushman (C1), *t/o-kau*, listed as ‘bag of medicine’ and *tso* as ‘thread’.¹³⁸ Ju’hoan Kxao *#oma* thought it ‘a string we see, like a rope and you follow it. It looks like yellow and green and goes to dead people..it just floats there, it goes to places, one goes to another, we follow it, we walk on it’.¹³⁹ The idea of *tssō* seems to be one of something that is a collection of */gais* or potency which, when woken through warmth, is a connection to dead people. Lebzelter and Marshall encountered this idea of spirit string pathways.¹⁴⁰ Bleek and Lloyd also mentioned ‘strings’ and threads that /Xam bushmen spoke of as connecting them to invisible realms. One example is a lament sung after the death of a bushman’s friend, the magician and rain maker, who died from the effects of a shot he had received when going about, by night, in the form of a lion:

People were those who broke for me the string. Therefore, the place () became like this to me on account of it, because the string was that which broke for me [Footnote: Now that the “string is broken”, the former “ringing sound in the sky” is no longer heard by the singer, as it had been in the magician's life time]. Therefore, the place does not feel to me, as the place used to feel to me, on account of it, for, the place feels as if it stood open before me. Therefore, the place does not feel pleasant to me.¹⁴¹

In Nharo *tsòm* and *tsã* mean ‘green’ and ‘to grow’.¹⁴² As noted, *tsã* also means both *buchu*¹⁴³ and to boil. The imagery is that of */gais* waking from dormancy or string unravelling, as rain brings forth new growth. In Chapter One I noted that Khoe words *sâi* or *sãi* are derived from the root *su*, to boil. In the meanings of *tsã*, Nharo therefore displays the same ideational link between *buchu* and boiling. The idea seems additionally linked to *tsòm* and consequently to derivatives of *tsho* (*tssō* etc.), the energy

¹³⁵ Barnard provides an example of this phenomenon: *tsam*, hot drink ‘frequently used as verb’, in *Nharo Wordlist*, p. 97.

¹³⁶ 63

¹³⁷ 76

¹³⁸ Bleek, *Bushman Dictionary*, pp. 233, 764.

¹³⁹ 80

¹⁴⁰ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, p. 49; Marshall, ‘Bushman Religious Beliefs’, 240.

¹⁴¹ Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman*, p. 137.

¹⁴² The *tsã* has an additional descending tone mark: Barnard, *Nharo Wordlist*, p. 121.

that boils. As noted, Lee drew attention to a similar ideational link in Ju/'hoan between *n/um* the healing energy and *!num*, boiling and growing. In summary buchu and *n/um* or *tssō* seem to share the quality of transformation through growing and boiling.

Comparing words across these Khoisan languages is methodologically difficult. Somewhere, however, in the variation clearly apparent in different researchers hearing and notation of Khoisan words, and in the exchange of language across and beyond the Khoisan, cognates still remain. Despite the real possibility of locating false alliances, such clusters of meaning seem to point to Khoisan conceptions of */num* and *tssō*.

Marshall observed that *n/um* is strong, it is 'a death thing', a 'fight'. It exists in diverse things such as medicine songs, plants, rain, the sun, ostrich eggs, blood, bees, honey, eland, giraffe and aardvarks.¹⁴⁴ Ju/'hoan /Kunta Bo told me *n/um* meant 'medicine tablets' and that a person with medicine is a *n/um !gaias*, a name similar to Schapera's *!geixa*, which may be linked to historical Cape /Xam *!gi:xa*. Bo related that animals have *n/um* and you can use those parts of the animal that contain *n/um*, found on the side of the spine and the bicep, to improve your hunting. This presents an interesting idea that animals, like people and other phenomena, have potency that lives in special places in a body or object.

Animals hold the essence of particular aspects of themselves, in particular places. In this location of essence lies the basis of Khoisan ideas of 'taboos' that restrict certain experiences, such as eating the chest of the eland, to certain age groups or gender. In Khoe, essence filled things and parts of things are *sōxa*. *Sō/ōa* in Khoe means medicine. The postpositional *xa* of *sōxa* means rich in or full of.¹⁴⁵ *Sōxa* means full of essence to the point of being dangerous to certain people in certain circumstances.

Marshall identified that *n/um* needs activating to be effective and the !Kung use the word *gam* which means to 'get up in the morning'. This idea holds the sense of 'awakening'.¹⁴⁶ Guenther says of the Nharo that *tssō* is lodged in the stomach in its frozen inert form and performing the trance dance melts the *tssō* which then comes out as sweat.¹⁴⁷ He emphasises that heat, along with fire and //Gauwa, are

¹⁴³ Ibid., p. 61 with and without descending tone mark.

¹⁴⁴ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance', 351.

¹⁴⁵ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 132: hei-xa, rich in wood, full of trees.

¹⁴⁶ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance', 352.

¹⁴⁷ M. Guenther, 'Not a Bushman Thing: Witchcraft among Bushmen and Hunter-Gatherers', *Anthropos*, 87 (1992), 89.

key symbols of the dance. Heat is intrinsically therapeutic and destroys disease or drives it from the body.¹⁴⁸ Building on Marshall and Lee, Katz emphasises *n/um* as something that boils and rises as vapour. I suggest key Khoisan associations in these ideas relate to broader associations of stillness, recumbency, sun rising, activity and heat. Too much heat can be a dangerous thing. There is more a sense of a living thing, a personality, in healing potency than is recognised by anthropologists. There is perhaps even a sense of awakening ‘spirits’, potency with identity. Katz provides details that support this idea although he interprets them differently.

Katz relates that Tikay claimed he was given a new dance, the Tree dance. This dance, Tikay said, quite typically, was from god, who is the normal source of dances. Unusually though, Tikay also specified that the kite and puff adder had equally given the dance. Tikay referred to these animals as *his* ‘spirits’. The relationship of animals to San dance is not clearly understood by anthropologists. The ethnomusicologist Olivier, for example believes that at a Ju/’hoan dance, ‘each shaman must perform the song bearing the name of the animal with the greatest supernatural powers. By performing this song, the shaman gradually absorbs the power of the animal until he ‘becomes its equal’ and is able to go into a trance.’¹⁴⁹ Rather than becoming the animals equal, dancing Bushmen might be thought of as using the animal dance as a way to achieve a healing state. The particular animal or dance is good for them, it works for them. Katz presents his story of Tikay’s exclusive relationship with these spirits as an example of acculturation and change that has encouraged ideas of personal accumulation. The story can, however, be interpreted a different way. Whether Bushmen are given an animal dance by god, or they dance the dance of an animal given by the animal is a subtle difference. The difference seems less significant if one thinks in terms of Bushmen ‘working’ with animals.

Bleek provides the following that supports this idea of working with animals and spirits: ‘A man who is an old rain medicine man and knows how people work with the rain-bull’; the children of the first Bushmen ‘were those who worked with the sun’,¹⁵⁰ and from Dorothea: the ‘old medicine man worked with Hije [who] might be the spirit of the bush’.¹⁵¹ In Sesfontein rainmen *work* with the lightning, because they possess the lightning, they have the lightning /*gais*. Hai//om and !Kung informants

¹⁴⁸ Guenther, ‘Not a Bushman Thing’, 89; *Nharo Bushmen* p. 270

¹⁴⁹ E. Olivier, ‘Ju/’hoan Music, Shamanism and the Conception of Time’, Ninth International Conference on Hunting and Gathering Societies (CHAGS 9), Heriot-Watt 9-13 September, 2002. www.abd.ac.uk/chags9, accessed 1/3/03, no page.

¹⁵⁰ W.H. Bleek, *A Brief Account of Bushman Folklore and other Texts* (London, 1875), p.378; Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman*, p.55.

¹⁵¹ Bleek, ‘The Naron’, p. 25.

described how when dancing they call upon their personal defenders, called //gâuas.¹⁵² !Kung Thomas /Gomkhaos specified that //gâuas was the same as /gais. He was given the elephant /gais by his parents. He worked with the elephant. Hai//om Salinda !Nawases had many /gais, including the bat eared fox. These Khoisan healers called upon the different /gais as required or appropriate when they danced and healed. These /gais are worked with.

The idea of having defender 'spirits' is one common to many cultures as is the notion of 'working' with 'spirits' in ceremonies. Roy Willis notes amongst the Lungu of northern Zambia, 'Mr Simpungwe has agreed to 'perform' – he says 'work', khuomba for us'.¹⁵³ Tikay seems to be working with the kite and puff adder as Bleek's rain men, contemporary Khoe and !Kung worked with their //gâuas (//gãuās) or /gais defenders. The wider context suggests this is not a new idea of accumulation as Katz proposed, but a widely held African idea of defenders. It is hard to say how much a Khoisan idea of 'spirit defenders' being worked with, predates Bleek's /Xam material.

Andersson (1850) noted Hottentot illness came from an arrow fired by a snake. Schapera observed Hottentot sickness was from //Gaunab via spirits, //gaunagu. Schatz, an amateur ethnographer, related to me that the Hai//om medicine man on her farm told how he sneezed out //Gamab's sickness arrows from people and how people were afraid of him because he too could send such arrows.¹⁵⁴ The idea of Bushmen sending arrows of sickness also appears in Lloyd (/Xam),¹⁵⁵ Vedder and Lebzelter (northern central !Kung)¹⁵⁶ and Barnard and D. Bleek (Nharo).¹⁵⁷ Marshall, describes that sickness and misfortune comes from the spirits of the dead ancestors, the //gauwasi.¹⁵⁸ The word is the plural form of //Gauwa. Guenther observed that Bushman believe sickness comes from intrusive tiny arrows.¹⁵⁹ Amongst the G/wi Silberbauer and Eibl-Eibesfeldt thought illness and misfortune came from arrows whilst Tanaka thought it from evil spirits. Guenther relates how Nharo healers obtain their power through invisible arrows from god. Marshall also records a similar belief, which she views as a 'variant concept', amongst the !kung¹⁶⁰ and Katz similarly that n/um is sent by arrows from god.¹⁶¹

¹⁵² 62, 63, 65, 71.

¹⁵³ Willis, *Some Spirits Heal*, p. 88.

¹⁵⁴ Schatz (pers. Com.).

¹⁵⁵ L.Lloyd, *A Short Account of Further Bushman Material* (London, 1889), p. 223.

¹⁵⁶ Vedder, *South West Africa*, p. 89; Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 51.

¹⁵⁷ Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 26; Bleek, *The Naron*, p. 28.

¹⁵⁸ Katz, *Healing*, pp. 29, 40-1.

¹⁵⁹ Guenther *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 241.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 224; Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung*, p. 53.

¹⁶¹ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 46.

In Khoekhoegowab, the word for arrow is //gau.b and the deity //Gauab. This relationship supports the interchangability of the idea of arrows and spirits which is evident in the above summary of Khoisan ethnographic details. Earlier I suggested animals hold potency, which as *n/um* we can now think of as arrows, in a number of places in the body. Although Katz, like other ethnographers, has concentrated on the idea that *n/um* lives primarily in the belly, his evidence can be used in conjunction with mine to explore a wider conceptualisation that begins to place *n/um* potency more as different types of ‘spirits’ who live in different parts of the body, rather than just spiritual energy focused in the abdomen.

Katz observed that *n/um* is sent from teachers to initiates by invisible arrows, *n/um tchisis*, ‘which are felt as painful thorns or needles’. A !Kung woman, he reports, believed these arrows were located ‘in two centres in the back and in the side of the neck’.¹⁶² Katz identified the //gebesi as the home of *n/um*. It is the ‘area between the diaphragm and the waist, especially towards the sides’. The term is also used for the liver and spleen.¹⁶³ I did not encounter the word //gebesi, but I was told of //gabas by two Ju/’hoan healers. They related that when learning, arrows are shot into the //gabas. Arrows are additionally shot into the !nun gumi.¹⁶⁴ Ju/’hoan variously described the !nu koomee (!nun //oomi; !nun Ꞥoomi;) where the arrows live as: animals have it; it is the place you are born with that you put arrows into when learning; it is close to, or on, your spine [around 1st and 2nd lumbar vertebra]; it is the part that allows you to move; it is the blood thread [aortic artery?].¹⁶⁵ There is a distinct overlap in these ideas with Katz’s //gebesi.

Amongst my informants, //Gabas seemed also to be called gauas. If the gauas is ‘soft’ trance comes more easily.¹⁶⁶ Katz records the same of a ‘soft gebesi’.¹⁶⁷ //Gabas was a term used across the Khoisan I encountered. A Ju/’hoan woman described //gauas as [perhaps] being the !nun koomi but definitely being the cervical dorsal junction (base of neck) and the top of the head. This is reminiscent of Marshall’s observation that *n/um* is stored in the head and hair and Bieseles that the nape of the neck is an exit point for sickness.¹⁶⁸ A Hai//om healer offered to put //gâmas into me. He said this was the same as //gabas or /gaiga.¹⁶⁹ Two !Kung healers related that //gabas was the same as /gais. One

¹⁶² Ibid., pp. 46, 168.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 45.

¹⁶⁴ 85,94

¹⁶⁵ 80, 82, 84, 85, 88, 91, 94.

¹⁶⁶ 87

¹⁶⁷ Katz, *Healing*, p. 167.

¹⁶⁸ Marshall, ‘Medicine Dance’, p. 352; Bieseles, *Women Like Meat*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁹ 50

woman at Mangetti spoke of her grandfather giving her his /*gais* by transferring //*gau* into her chest and ears.¹⁷⁰ A renowned Tsintsabis !Kung healer was given his elephant /*gais* by his parents. They saw he was born with a caul and ‘opened’ him.¹⁷¹ A Sesfontein healer described, rather confusingly, nine types of //*gabas* he had: for life, for dancing, for death, one to stop him dancing, one that tells him the sickness, one that tells him which plants or animals to use, one that tells him to dance, one that tells him not to dance, ‘the time when you treat this person I am with you’.¹⁷²

It seems that across these Khoisan arrows live in a number of centres in the body. Katz’s informant described his //*gebesi* being rubbed to stop the arrows popping out like a pin-cushion.¹⁷³ During my ‘healing initiation’ I had /*gais* rubbed into my abdomen, back, chest, legs, lateral throat and forehead and blown into my ears. The lateral throat (anterior borders of sternocleidomastoid) seemed particularly important. The /*gais* were rubbed and stimulated with a fly-whisk until they sat straight and upright so they could ‘work’. These sites equate with the sites where *n/um* is found, as located by Marshall and Katz. Of significant historical note, Bleek (1874) recorded ‘the Mantis misleads Bushmen by putting evil and mischievous thoughts into their minds (really into the sides of their throats, where, according to Bushman notions, the thinking powers of man are to be found)’.¹⁷⁴ /*Gais* living in the lateral throat may well be linked to this idea, and both ideas may, in turn, be linked to the site of the voice, known as a marker of identity and potency.

My initiation as a healer was highly informative regarding the nature of /*gais* and in view of this warrants a brief diversion. Sam and Abi, on the farm near Otavi, recognised me as a healer and offered to ‘open me up’. The process involved two visits spaced some months apart as too much could not be done in one go. One evening, during the first visit, Sam, wearing beads around his head and neck, sat down with me, Abi and Ferdinand (the Damara farm owner) in a candlelit room and consulted a ‘book’ of bead patterns. Using a wooden pointer he traced his way through various patterns, intermittently addressing ‘spirits’ as his did so. He told me matters concerning my mission as a healer, what he could do to help me become more powerful and what experiences and vulnerabilities that might expose me to. After a brief discussion with Abi and forty minutes or so of reading the beads, Sam decided he would straighten the /*gais* (/ais) already inside me and add others. He spent about twenty minutes

¹⁷⁰ 63

¹⁷¹ 65

¹⁷² 5

¹⁷³ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 214.

¹⁷⁴ Bleek, *Second Report*, p. 9.

primarily rubbing my forehead, throat and chest and blowing in my ears. At times he pressed his wooden pointer firmly along the paths where the /gais were being positioned.

The second visit resembled a healing dance. After dark about ten farm workers, me, two healers and a Damara woman who danced, all sat round a large fire in the dusty farmyard. Abi danced whilst the others sang and clapped. I was told to remain seated with my legs in front of me on the ground because in my country I would not be able to dance around the fire. I must learn a different way. Over the next two hours of the 'ceremony', Abi occasionally crouched down beside me and each time rubbed and blew /gais into me, as before, though also into my low back and legs. After about forty minutes of increasing activity directed solely at me, my body was becoming hyper-stimulated. My muscles twitched, my legs jumped involuntarily and my torso swung. The process ended in a crescendo of release that left me collapsing back onto the ground. From this point the ceremony wound down as my friends checked on my progress, the singing died down and the others gradually departed into the night. One of the most significant characteristics of the /gais put into me was that they will lie to me, and I must never trust them. This seems reminiscent of Bleek's observation concerning the mantis putting evil thoughts into Bushmen's throats.

Katz's //gebesi is most probably a //gabas site where arrows from the 'god', or 'spirits', or other healers, sit in the body. When these arrows are given personality or potency they seem to be termed by some Bushmen /gais, by Damara //gabas and by Hai//om //gamas or /gaiga, although there is clearly much overlap. Some healers have more /gais than others. The !Kung that gave me the /gais suggested I had thirteen, to which they added seven. The strongest healers have twenty one.¹⁷⁵ Willis encountered a similar understanding, amongst the Lungu, of spirits living in the chest. He was told he had sixteen.¹⁷⁶

Katz records that owing to changing social conditions some healers are accumulating *n/um* and flaunting their power. Toma Zho points his finger and shoots his arrows at other dancing healers, thereby knocking them over. Katz interprets this as Toma not 'relating to his num synergistically'. Set against a 'struggle against sedentism' Toma seeks to distinguish himself professionally.¹⁷⁷ Since

¹⁷⁵ 76

¹⁷⁶ Willis, *Some Spirits Heal*, pp. 152, 160.

¹⁷⁷ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 264.

Lloyd (1889), however, sorcerers have been recorded shooting one another in this manner,¹⁷⁸ and I shortly present more examples in the context of Bushman witchcraft.

What is particularly confusing in Katz's account is his identification that healers accumulate skill, but his simultaneous failure to recognise this as some form of hierarchy. Katz observes that healers can become increasingly skilled by other healers snapping their fingers and shooting them with more arrows.¹⁷⁹ '*!Geiha*', he notes, are 'completely learned' healers, whilst *!geiha ama ama* are the most powerful or 'real ones'. Of the few *!geiha ama ama* that exist, Katz states they pursue 'a special life style [...] governed by an intense and dedicated pursuit of num'.¹⁸⁰ This relationship of skill to numbers of arrows does not support the egalitarian non-hierarchical picture of Bushmen that Katz presents elsewhere.

Even the name *!geiha* should be considered in wider perspective. Hahn noted in Khoikhoi and in /Kham Bushmen, */geixa* means 'strong'.¹⁸¹ This seems like *sōxa* to indicate a fullness of */gei*. */Geis*, as mentioned, is the Hai//om name for the healing dance. */Geis* were also what were described to me as 'spirit defenders'. This */gei* is conceptually related and very probably orthographically to *!gei* or *!gai*, each of which different ethnographers frequently use interchangeably, often depending on German or English linguistic heritage. *!Gai* in Khoekhoegowab is translated as 'to practice black magic'¹⁸² and healers who are described as 'witchdoctors' are termed *!gai aob*. There are different ways therefore of thinking about Katz's *!Geiha*.

A further criticism can be made of Katz understanding of acculturative change. This concerns the matters of payment for healers. Katz suggests that 'gifts' are given in exchange for healing but they are soon dispersed within the *hxaro* reciprocal exchange network.¹⁸³ Exploring Katz's second book title, *Healing Makes our Hearts' Happy*, can tell us a little regarding the actual relationship between healers and payment. In *Boiling Energy* Katz had already laid the bones to the quote that forms the books title and Katz's source material is revealing:

¹⁷⁸ Lloyd, *Short Account*, p. 223.

¹⁷⁹ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 46.

¹⁸⁰ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 239.

¹⁸¹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 7.

¹⁸² Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 96.

¹⁸³ Wiessner has examined the *hxaro* phenomenon in detail: P. Wiessner, 'Hxaro: A Regional System of Reciprocity' (Michigan Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 1977).

We healers help people, we help each other. That makes our heart glad. When I make a sick person well, my heart is glad. And then when that person gives me a nice shirt or jacket to put on, like this jacket here – he fingers the Western-style jacket he is wearing, a payment for his curing – I feel good about having a shirt on my back, it covers my body. And then, that person who gives me something like this jacket, god will shoot arrows into that person. One arrow, then another, and another and another. And then that person too will be able to kia.¹⁸⁴

Clearly Ju/'hoan Kau Dwa had not quite lost his jacket in the *hxaro* network, and Katz had a clear idea of payment. In fact he had such a clear idea that he quite literally concluded this interview by giving Kau Dwa the shirt off his back.¹⁸⁵ The idea that payment is a cultural introduction following increased contact and acculturation is one tossed between the 'Isolationist' and Revisionist camps. Lee,¹⁸⁶ Guenther¹⁸⁷ and Katz,¹⁸⁸ all see payment as new and an indication that dancers are no longer working for the group but for themselves. By contrast, Wilmsen argues from linguistic evidence that, 'labour for wages is not a late twentieth-century innovation for Zhu', and furthermore there is 'good evidence that a notion of compensated exchange distinct from reciprocity (*haro*, 'prestate') is indigenous to Zhu understanding'.¹⁸⁹

History suggests that at least for other San, payment of healers existed well before the post -1950s period of acculturation experienced by the Dobe Ju/'hoan. Schapera, proposed that Bushmen 'magicians' were paid for their treatment of the sick and, citing Fourie, related a Bushmen myth explaining the origin of 'Naron magic' in which arises the notion of payment in exchange for power.¹⁹⁰ The Bleek material recorded that, 'if a man does not pay the sorcerer, the sorcerer does not do good work. For he becomes a rascal [...] if people cool his heart (by paying him), then it is comfortable.'¹⁹¹ Hewitt suggests /Xam payment of sorcerers was as 'an anomaly in /Xam economic and community relations'.¹⁹² But rather than thinking of this as an anomaly, because it doesn't fit contemporary egalitarian, sharing notions, might this not suggest the model is not quite accurate.

A !Kung woman healer in Mangetti, !Harebes Bungu, related to me that when dancing she experiences 'a burning feeling in her chest that sticks' and her body feels like vomiting. Money stops that feeling she said. If she is paid she puts spit on her forehead to make her chest cooler. This seems very similar to the /Xam notion of money cooling and may tie into wider associations between rain and cooling. In

¹⁸⁴ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 218.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁸⁶ Lee, *Dobe Ju/'hoansi*, p. 139.

¹⁸⁷ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 262.

¹⁸⁸ Katz, *Boiling*, pp. 59, 256, 261.

¹⁸⁹ Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies*, p. 255.

¹⁹⁰ Schapera, *Khoisan*, pp. 215, 199.

¹⁹¹ Bleek, 'Belief and Customs', *Bantu Studies* 9:1 (1935), 21.

a Damara context, money or a gift is always given to healers, or it is thought the sickness may start again. It is also said that money must be given to some plants if they are picked and be placed on the grave of certain dead people if one passes by. A Nharo healer in his eighties related: 'In the San tradition if you heal someone then they pay you, they give you a pot, cups, dishes, clothes, blankets'.¹⁹³

One could argue that all this evidence is drawn from acculturated peoples, in which case Katz and the other 'quasi-isolationists' might be right in seeing a new development of professionalisation amongst the Dobe !Kung or the Nharo. There seems a danger, however, of anthropologists' preconceived ideas of egalitarianism leading to their too ready recognition of payment as a symptom of acculturation. Exchanging money for a healing plant and leaving money on sites to appease ghosts suggests that at least the Damara frame exchange, not simply between people, but between people, nature and dead people. This suggests indigenous existence of what might be thought of as abstract notions of value, and possibly points to pre-pecuniary exchange values operating in Khoisan cultures.

The idea that the patient must give something, or the treatment would not work, was universal amongst Khoisan I interviewed, although cash was not always required. Nama and Damara who massaged or supplied remedies in towns charged between \$5-\$10 (Namibian).¹⁹⁴ Damara */manu aob* seemed the most flexible as to what must be given but the rate was about the same for a 'prophesy'. Suro's grandmother, who unlike the rainmen frequently dealt with Herero and Himba, was clearly engaged in a wider economy and seemed to operate a fixed notion of exchange or cash payment for her massage and other healing services. She initially charged \$20, and \$100 in total if the treatment worked.¹⁹⁵ Two Hai//om healers similarly worked on a semi-professional, informal basis. They had set fees for their services, respectively \$30 and \$50 to check the problem using their 'defenders' and \$60 to \$100.00 to 'clean' your body.¹⁹⁶ Unfortunately I was not able to ascertain payment rates amongst Ju/'hoan although the pattern was clearly that if you were treated by someone outside your family you should pay them, although not all did.¹⁹⁷ As an indication as to how these prices related to the wider social sphere, the nurse in the government clinic in Sesfontein followed state policy and charged \$4 per session, or treated for free if the patient had no money. By contrast, a well known Damara 'witchdoctor' near Uis, charged about \$20 to check a problem, but for healing problems, or such matters as the apparently spontaneous disappearance of police reports, between \$300 and \$400.¹⁹⁸

¹⁹² Hewitt, *Structure*, p. 294.

¹⁹³ 96

¹⁹⁴ 21, 27, 29.

¹⁹⁵ 1.

¹⁹⁶ 50, 62.

¹⁹⁷ 79, 92, 98.

¹⁹⁸ 45, 38.

Katz's envisaging that gifts to Ju/'hoan healers are entirely disinterested and community driven, has the danger of negating both the personality and the status of the healer. Amongst the /Xam, it seems there was undoubtedly a tradition of social difference intrinsic to the identity of *!giten* whom Hewitt describes as having been 'set apart' from the community by their appearance and behaviour.¹⁹⁹ Katz cannot help acknowledging that some sense of difference is recognised in the existence of *!geiha ama ama*. Contextualisation of the name *!geiha* suggests the idea is tied to a wider Khoisan context within which ideas of payment are entrenched and have been established well before the 1950s.

Guenther

Like other key researchers of the trance dance, Guenther essentially subscribed to ideas of long-term Bushman isolation. In 1986 he proposed that until the latter half of the nineteenth century, 'the Ghanzi District had been occupied for centuries, or even millenia, by only the Nharo and some of their Bushmen neighbours'. He envisaged there to have been 'sporadic' contact between Bushmen and trekboers in the 1870s, and that the 1890s brought the Tswana, Kgalagari and Rolong to the Ghanzi region.²⁰⁰ In the 1920s and 1930s came the gradual encroachment of the cash economy and the commencement of improved communication and trade. During the 1940s and 1950s a predominantly white cattle economy began. This period lay at the beginning of 'decades of development'. As farming became increasingly sophisticated, the role of Bushmen as relatively unskilled farm hands diminished, leading to unemployment.²⁰¹ Guenther identified a key symptom of acculturation and unemployment in a Nharo concept of 'sheta', which he linked to oppression, hunger and suffering.²⁰²

Guenther explicitly sought to rectify the post-1950s focus on Bushman cultural ecology and has exceptionally concerned himself with Bushman ideas. He identified the 'religious' trance dance as 'a uniquely Bushman event',²⁰³ and, following Lewis-Williams, considers the Bushmen trance dancer a shaman, 'a figure rarely encountered in African religious studies, wherein spirit possession, divination, witchcraft and sorcery constitute the predominant form of preternatural operation'.²⁰⁴

¹⁹⁹ Hewitt, *Structure*, p. 294.

²⁰⁰ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 36.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 41, 46.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 52.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰⁴ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 7.

Schapera observed that Khoisan beliefs regarding //Gauwa 'are not clear cut conceptions, but are vague, inconsistent, and ambiguous'.²⁰⁵ Guenther expands on this recognition and identifies the phenomenon of ideational fluidity, variability and flexibility, as characteristic of Bushmen cosmology.²⁰⁶ When Guenther sees consistency, he interprets this as an indication of increasing destructive social pressures having necessitated that 'various beliefs, myths and symbols must first be rendered coherent.'²⁰⁷ Throughout his analysis of Bushmen ideology and his interpretation of the trance dance, Guenther looks for changing belief structures, new ordering, grafting onto, or displacing, old. This is particularly evident in his consideration of Nharo disease categories. Despite his interest in the wider context of the trance dance, Guenther fails to explore the practice and meaning of massage and other day-to-day health strategies.

Guenther distinguishes three Nharo disease categories, Bushmen, Bantu and European. To the Nharo all disease is essentially intrusive. Bushmen diseases are tiny arrows or hairs sent from //Gauwa. Bushmen diseases are treated by the trance dancer *n̄a k'au*. Bantu diseases are *khaba*, or witchcraft, and *moloji*, or sorcery. They enter the body through 'bad thoughts' or 'foul substances transmitted by witches and sorcerers' and are treated by *nagaba*, Bantu doctors. European diseases are thought of as contagious air born particles that were brought by Europeans. They are treated by Europeans, especially doctors and nurses, and the treatment is symbolized by the idea of the hypodermic needle, called *!kai*, meaning to prick.²⁰⁸ Guenther does not elaborate on his awkward use of the scientific idea of 'contagion' in a Bushmen ideological context.

Guenther's account of Nharo belief differs in certain details from Barnard's despite Barnard having studied the Nharo around the same period. Guenther, for example, draws attention to the opposition between //Gauwa, the trickster god, and *N!eri* the sky god, whilst Barnard identifies a more fluid relationship between the good god *N!adi*, the bad god *G//aua* and the evil spirits *g//aua-ne*.²⁰⁹ Differences such as this point to the local nature of knowledge and the variability of knowledge drawn out by different researchers.

A similar tension between data variability and interpretative variability is evident in Guenther's recognition that //Gauwa is associated with wind and, like Marshall's *!Kung //Gauwa*, particularly with whirlwinds. Nharo whirlwinds are termed *Gauwa ̄a*, which Guenther translates as //Gauwa

²⁰⁵ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 396.

²⁰⁶ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 3.

²⁰⁷ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 287.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 240-241. see Louise White...?American Historical Review on centrality of injections in Africa

²⁰⁹ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 104; *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 222. Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 72.

'breath'.²¹⁰ Marshall translated //Gauwa Ꞥa in !Kung as //Gauwa 'smell'.²¹¹ Rather than seeing these ideas as different, the linguistic overlap is indicative of an overlap between the Khoisan ideas of breath, wind and smell.

Guenther's account of the Nharo trance dance demonstrates the great similarity of ideas held between different San groups. The Nharo, according to Guenther, believe Bushmen disease comes from //Gauwa. //Gauwa, being envious of N!eri, shoots disease arrows, //xobe, into dancers whilst they dance round the women. The arrows may or may not be immaterial, contain disease and are shot at the stomach and sides of the dancers, stimulating pain, burning, dizziness and trance. The site where the arrows lodge reminds us of Katz's !Kung //gebesi. If //Gauwa's arrows hit non dancers they cause serious illness.²¹² In addition to the use of arrows, //Gauwa spreads disease in every day circumstances by covering Nharo with his shadow as they sleep during the day, or shaking some of his hair into the wind, whereby it may fly into men and make them sick.²¹³ //Gauwa's disease arrows are countered by healers firing arrows back at him. These defensive arrows are given to healers by //Gauwa when they are learning.

Guenther and Witchcraft

Guenther (1992) has specifically examined the question of whether or not Bushmen believe in and practice witchcraft. He concludes that where there is evidence for such phenomena amongst contemporary or historic Bushmen, this is symptomatic of change. He hinges his argument on Woodburn's dichotomy between immediate and delayed return in social organization.²¹⁴ He equates the witchcraft and sorcery free /Gwi and !Kung with the former state and the /Xam and Nharo, amongst whom forms of witchcraft and sorcery have been found, with an incipient latter state. His argument recruits the conclusions of Mayer, Marwick, Mitchell and others who, in the 1950s and 1960s, identified a link between increasing social complexity, concomitant increases in social tension and increasing proclivity for witchcraft. He equally builds on the cultural ecology of Lee and identifies the Kalahari as a relatively healthy benign ecological environment in which disease incidence is low and death accepted as natural. This, coupled with the low existential stress engendered by life in the 'easy' Kalahari, as opposed to say hunter-gatherer life in Siberia, encourages Bushmen not to look for

²¹⁰ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 220.

²¹¹ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 220. Marshall, 'Bushmen Religious Beliefs', p. 239.

²¹² Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 272.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

²¹⁴ J. Woodburn, 'Egalitarian Societies', *Man* 17 (1982), 431-51.

supernatural causes of death and contributes to a 'benign cosmology' amongst 'precontact' Bushmen. Within this setting Bushmen healers operate as benign shamans.²¹⁵

Guenther's findings have undoubtedly contributed to misleading popular notions of Bushmen healers. Close consideration of his work is revealing as to how someone clearly aware of the problems associated with the notion of isolated Bushmen, is nevertheless led to conclusions that ultimately support an 'isolationist' stance. Unlike other contemporaneous ethnographers Guenther specifically set out to study Bushmen ideas and the effects of change amongst Bushmen. He is clearly aware of the dangers of romanticizing Bushmen, but his theoretical baseline predisposed him to see imposed witchcraft practices. Guenther proposes that witchcraft was made available to Bushmen through contact with Bantu speakers and adopted and assimilated into an existentially stressful, dissolving benign Bushmen life, now (1968-1970) typified by notions of 'sheta'.

Guenther's baseline for analysing change lay in the !Kung and /Gwi as 'found' principally by Marshall, Lee, Katz and Silberbauer.²¹⁶ Against their respective findings of witchcraft free Bushmen, which he takes as the essential Bushmen condition, Guenther then takes a selective reading of historical ethnography to buttress his position. Guenther dismisses the findings of Vedder, Kaufmann and Wilhelm regarding witchcraft amongst the !Kung, on the basis of their inferior ethnography. He implies that missionary Dornan's few references to sorcery amongst the Hiechware and Basarwa Bushmen of eastern Botswana suggest low levels of such phenomena, which are probably borrowed from neighbouring Bantu speaking people. He explains the identification of witchcraft amongst historical /Xam, the Kxoe of the Caprivi strip, and amongst the farm Nharo with whom he worked, in terms of Bushmen having undergone extensive social changes.

Guenther's argument runs that, through their respective ecological settings, /Xam, Kxoe and Nharo Bushmen have enjoyed better hunting than !Kung and /Gwi, and in the case of the Kxoe, fishing. This has led to greater social differentiation, increases in technology and sedentism. Sedentism removes an option of withdrawal from one Bushmen group and movement to another group in times of conflict. Guenther identifies the withdrawal option as a key mechanism of conflict resolution. Removal of the option hence leads to increasing social tension. Both the /Xam and the Nharo have additionally experienced far more extensive interaction with Bantu and Europeans than the !Kung and /Gwi. This has exposed them to ideas of property and a cash economy. These factors of increased social complexity contribute to existential stress and the adoption of witchcraft.

²¹⁵ For witchcraft studied in other recent southern African contexts see Isak Niehaus et al, *Witchcraft, Power and Politics: Exploring the Occult in the South African Lowveld* (Cape Town, 2001).

Guenther's argument is teleological and determinist. He identifies /Xam and Nharo witchcraft as dilute versions of that found in pre-modern East Essex.²¹⁷ He seems so keen to look for insertion of ideas onto benign ecologically friendly Bushmen, that he fails to see the parallels between phenomena said to characterise the !Kung and /Gwi, and those he identifies amongst Kxoe, /Xam and Nharo as imported Bantu ideas. Ironically, deeper consideration of ideas of *n/um* and certain aspects of Katz and Silberbauer's material, in fact points to similarities between these 'essential' Bushmen phenomena and wider African material. Guenther's material seems to demand a closer analysis that seeks to identify how Khoisan people think about phenomena that are labelled 'witchcraft' and how this thinking might be related to wider African concepts. If similarity does exist between all Bushmen and some other African peoples, should this be explained in terms of synchronic structural equivalence or perhaps deeper and more extensive intermingling between Bushmen and Bantu speakers than has been recognised?

As I proposed in the introduction, I see grounds for explaining similarities in terms of particular ideas being good to think with. Following Horton's notion that the familiar is used to explain the unfamiliar and Gibson's assertion that the kind of activity in which we are engaged attunes us to picking up particular ways of thinking, the similarities that run across Khoisan thought and between Khoisan and Bantu, could reflect similar engagement in similar worlds.

Lévy-Bruhl suggested that 'primitive' thought was different because associations were drawn between phenomena that seem unconnected to the 'Western' mind. There are patterns in the way Khoisan associate phenomena and the way they interact with phenomena such as healing remedies, game animals or whirlwinds. Similar associations and patterns seem the basis of some Bantu speakers witchcraft beliefs and practices. Contextualizing Guenther's analysis of witchcraft points to increasing social organization encouraging particular types of 'sorcery' beliefs and practices. These phenomena do not, however, seem essentially different from practices and ideas found throughout recent and historic reports of Bushmen, including the !Kung and the /Gwi. Guenther confuses proliferation of certain types of ideas with absence and presence of a poorly understood academic idea of African 'witchcraft'.

²¹⁶ Guenther, 'Not a Bushman Thing', 90.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 98.

Guenther sees evidence for the adoption of witchcraft in three primary ‘perversions’ of the essential Bushman.²¹⁸ Firstly, he relates that Bushmen healers in the past protected others by transforming themselves into lions. Reflecting the strains of increased social complexity, some healers now become a ‘were-lion or were-leopard shaman’ and terrorize or kill people.²¹⁹ His language is emotive.

As mentioned, transformation of this nature has been recorded since Grevenbroek (1695) in a Khoikhoi context and is deeply embedded in Khoikhoi and Bushmen mythology. Bleek and Lloyd made frequent mention of /Xam *!giten*, sorcerers who practiced both good and bad deeds and sometimes transformed themselves into lions. A *!gixa* might additionally become a lion if their ‘vertebral artery’ would not lie down.²²⁰ The /Xam also believed that lions were known to transform themselves into other animals, including men.²²¹ In 1964 Lee recorded an elderly !Kung healer, Wa Na, as having remarked that, ‘great healers went hunting as lions, searching for people to kill’.²²² Transformation has a longer and less benign tradition than Guenther acknowledges. To propose there has been a shift in behaviour towards aggressive transformation is an argument that builds on partly discredited notions of benign, principally !Kung, Bushmen.

//Haisa !Noodoeb, an 82 years old Nharo healer clearly distinguished between the Kgalagadi people who changed into hyenas and ‘witched’ people and Bushmen, who danced to heal the bewitched. Nharo, including himself, only changed into lions. What //Haisa told me about transformation, seemed to say more about young men trying it out, as a means of flexing young muscle, rather than a ‘reconceptualization of traditional concepts’²²³ in the face of social change.

C.L. Can people turn into animals?

A. Yes

Q. Can you?

A. Yes, when still young, now I am old and the wind is very strong in the sky and I will fall off. When I was young I was dangerous in that work, I did not play.

Q. Why do you do it ?

A. We have learnt it, we write a contract with the devil.

Q. Is it to help people ?

A. We just want to see around, how big god made the world.

Q. So you have been around ?

A. Yes, when I was young I was doing it. If I want to go from Blaubeerg I stand up straight, like an aeroplane, if I go to Ghanzi I must go straight, usually take off and become a lion.

Q. Do you do this when sleeping ?

²¹⁸ Ibid., 86.

²¹⁹ Ibid.

²²⁰ Bleek, ‘Belief and Customs’, *Bantu Studies* 9:1 (1935), 22.

²²¹ D. Bleek, ‘Customs and Beliefs of /Xam Bushmen’, *Bantu Studies* 6:1 (March 1932), 62; *A Brief Account*, pp. 206, 207.

²²² Lee cited by Katz, *Healing*, p. 227.

²²³ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 189.

A. Yes, this body is sleeping.

Q. When young were you hunting or living on a farm?

A. I was not a hunter, stayed on farm, if someone angers me I change into a lion and show him what I can do.²²⁴

Prior to post-1950s ideas of peaceful Bushmen, Lebzelter, Vedder and Lunkenbein all recorded that malevolent !Kung medicine men used 'magical' small bows and arrows to harm their enemies. Lebzelter further noted that Seiner had encountered Bushmen who 'seemingly often used' small arrows covered in highly toxic caterpillar extract as a weapon for 'underhand murder'.²²⁵ These earlier ethnographers clearly believed the Bushmen to be as much prone to ideas of jealousy, envy and revenge as other people.

The idea of non-violent, non-competitive, San is undoubtedly present in the notion of benign Bushmen shaman. It was a theme initially emphasised in the Marshall's early research and, although approached more realistically, one which persisted in the Lee and de Vore expeditions of the 1960s and 1970s,²²⁶ and one which still continues to influence anthropologists. But even in Lorna Marshall's material there is ample evidence that conflicts and jealousy was a part of life. One of Marshall's !Kung informants for instance related that: 'If you want to sleep with someone's wife, you get him to sleep with yours, then neither of you goes after the other with poisoned arrows'.²²⁷ Two very elderly Ju/'hoan I met were in no doubt that in the old days people often grew angry and even killed each other. Boo Saakambanda told me: 'In the old days, if you are hunting and you sit in the shade to rest for two minutes and someone sees your spear and says, "your spear is dull, you are nothing" ..like that, you listened and then just stood up and put your spear into them. In the old days it was not good, just killing each other.'²²⁸

Jealousy and revenge are common themes in Bushmen folklore and mythology and seem similarly apparent in oral accounts of past and present Bushmen life. In view of the embedded nature of ideas of transformation in Bushmen culture there is therefore little reason to conclude that Bushmen killing whilst in the form of lions is a new phenomenon.

The second feature of behaviour that Guenther recognises as a practice influenced by witchcraft, is the firing of sickness arrows by Nharo healers. Similarly to ideas of transformation, this idea also has a

²²⁴ 96

²²⁵ Vedder, *South West Africa*, 89; Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 51

²²⁶ M. Biesele (ed.), *The Past and Future of !Kung Ethnography: Critical Reflections and Symbolic Perspectives. Essays in Honour of Lorna Marshall* (Hamburg, 1987), p. 71.

²²⁷ L. Marshall, *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae* (Massachusetts, 1976), p. 279.

²²⁸ 86, 94

deeper context than Guenther suggests and his conclusion very much depends on the notion that Bushmen healers are non aggressive. Barnard explicitly contradicts Guenther and asserts that the Nharo healers firing sickness causing grass arrows are a 'traditional', if uncommon, feature of Nharo culture.²²⁹ This evidence, taken in addition to the historical evidence considered above concerning !Kung firing 'magical' arrows, suggests the practice may be widespread amongst Bushmen and of longstanding. The wider contextual evidence examined below supports this notion.

Arguing for continuity between Bushmen cultures across time and space, Lewis-Williams observes that /a remarkably means 'fight' or 'powerful potency' in both historic southern /Xam and recent !Kung.²³⁰ In !Kung, /a means strong, to the point of being dangerous, *n/um*. Hahn recorded that in Hottentot /ā means 'to be sharp, to be pointed'.²³¹ In Khoe sharp tongued is /ānam and /ākhunu means pointed index finger. Also in Khoe, /numi means 'to penetrate (of thorn)'.²³² Katz relates that 'num [sic] is usually sent by means of invisible arrows which are felt as painful thorns or needles'.²³³ These linguistic cross-overs between !Kung and Khoe point to a shared idea of transference of sharp thorn like potency that is born out in wider overlaps of health related beliefs and practices.

Marshall commented that a !Kung medicine man must not point his finger fixedly at anyone, or snap his fingers at anyone, or the *n/um* 'fight' will be fired into whoever they point or snap at.²³⁴ Silberbauer and Katz record that, respectively, /Gwi and !Kung healers 'shoot' by snapping their fingers to send others into trance and to send arrows of potency.²³⁵ If young /Xam women snapped their fingers at someone they would arouse the anger of the rain.²³⁶ Lewis-Williams identifies pointed fingers in prehistoric San rock art. He associates these with healers shooting potency. Additionally, he established from a 'last known surviving member of a family of San rainmakers in the Transkei', that medicine men of the old days hunted dassies (rock rabbits) by pointing at them. This 'froze' the dassies and allowed them to be picked up. He elaborates that Bleek was similarly told people pointed particular sticks at springboks to make them run slower and consequently more vulnerable to the hunter's arrow. /Xam medicine men also pointed with a finger or stick to send a fight into an animal.²³⁷

²²⁹ Barnard, 'Nharo Bushman Medicine', p. 70.

²³⁰ Lewis-Williams, 'Paintings of Power' p. 244.

²³¹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 25.

²³² Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, pp. 50, 72.

²³³ Katz, *Boiling*, p. 46.

²³⁴ Marshall, 'Medicine Dance', p. 351.

²³⁵ Silberbauer, *Survey Report*, p. 97; Katz, *Boiling*, p. 46.

²³⁶ Schapera, *Khoisan*, p. 179.

²³⁷ Lewis-Williams, 'Paintings of Power', p. 249.

Amongst historic and recent Bushmen, firing potency at people or animals by pointing fingers, sticks or snapping fingers has a wider context than just in the dance. The phenomenon is related to a broader notion, as identified by Lebzelter amongst the !Kung, that, ‘an object thrown in the general direction of a hated person will enter this person’s body in a mysterious way and damage it heavily’.²³⁸ In view of the recognition that Bushmen are competitive, violent, jealous and revengeful, if less so than members of some other societies, it should not be seen as surprising that within the dance or outside it, Bushmen maliciously or mischievously fire sickness arrows from magical bows or as shots of potency. Again there seems little reason to point to this phenomenon as new and symptomatic of adoption of witchcraft ideas and indicative of new behavioural response to new social pressures. Proliferation of the practice may however be an indicator of social disharmony.

Further evidence for the deeply entrenched nature of the shooting of arrows or potency amongst Khoisan peoples can be found in Khoi culture. I asked a Damara healer if he ever became sick whilst treating people, and his wife replied, ‘if the person arrow you, you will die’.²³⁹ This illustrates a wider belief that some people, animals or phenomena, can harm others involuntarily through potency. When this potency is talked of in the context of its transmission the idea is often expressed as one of arrows.

In Khoe, *ẓnan* means to snap fingers.²⁴⁰ Suro, my Damara assistant told me one must never sleep with menstruating women lest they *nā* you. This was just one of many things that could *nā* a person and make them ill. This is not an idea that features in the literature but the term is common currency amongst Khoi. A set of words with variable clicks but with ‘*na*’ as their stem seems to tie a multitude of significant interrelated ideas together.

Hahn identified */na* as a root meaning ‘to filter, to stream’ especially the kind of streaming a man can observe if he digs for water in the sand of a periodical river.²⁴¹ At least in a recent context the meaning spreads wider than this. Hahn states in Khoikhoi belief *Tsui//goab* is identical with */Nanub*, the thunder cloud or the filterer or pourer.²⁴² In Sesfontein a Damara rainman, */nanu aob*, is given the ‘rain spirit’ by being struck by lightning. Wagner-Robertz recorded *nawab* as ‘lightning’,²⁴³ Haacke lists *napa.b* as ‘flash of lightning’.²⁴⁴ Lebzelter recorded that */Nawa* was the chief *//gauab* of the eastern

²³⁸ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, p. 51.

²³⁹ 5

²⁴⁰ Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 247.

²⁴¹ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 128.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 127, 128.

²⁴³ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Magic and Magicians’, MS.

²⁴⁴ Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 200.

!Kung. /Nawa was the spirit that entered healers and controlled the movement of sickness arrows.²⁴⁵ In Khoe, //gau means ‘arrow’, //gawa, ‘strike of lightning’, †gau, ‘healer’.²⁴⁶ Hahn identified the root //gau as to destroy, to annihilate.²⁴⁷ A very elderly Ju/’hoan healer at Mangetti told me her grandfather gave her the /gais. He blew it into her mouth and ears. He was transferring //gau, ‘the thing you put into dance’. One can acquire //gau ‘in different ways, as Damara /nanu /gais and !Kung /gais’.

The rain is the strong one, I do not have it. I pound the perfume /nanu //nao and the rain falls. The lightning cannot strike me because I have my /gais. I am ripe not raw. The other people who have the rain is the Bugu people of Rundu.²⁴⁸

In Khoe /nâ.b means ‘light’, †nā, to kick, shock of electricity and †nau to ‘hit, strike; beat; thrash, flog; strike (of lightning)’.²⁴⁹ Additionally †nâ.b means ‘dance’ and †nā to tread or stamp in a dance.²⁵⁰ The Nharo name for trance dance healers is n/a k’au and n‡a k’au.²⁵¹ These Nharo names probably carry a similar understanding of ‘na-ing’, in a sense of pouring or shooting potency, as that held in the Khoe relations of the word. A link between arrows and the dance also seems apparent in the ‘Chu’ Bushmen Doke studied. Doke lists txa as ‘to shoot’ and txani as to dance’.²⁵² Returning to the word †nan, to snap fingers, there also seems a strong possibility that this word is associated with an idea of ‘na-ing’. This link also explains why spirits are said to ‘beat’ people and how a ‘fight’ can travel.

This complex Khoisan nexus of ideas around notions of people and natural phenomena firing or transferring potency, for different purposes, voluntarily and involuntarily, may not be found in each Khoi or San ethnic group. But, enough wider associations do exist in each group, including the !Kung and /Gwi, to counter suggestions that firing sickness arrows is a new phenomenon associated with notions of property, new social relations and Bantu contact.

The final primary way in which Guenther proposes witchcraft ideas have been adopted by Nharo, lies in his recognition of *kgaba*. The word, he states, is of Tswana origin. *kgaba* is illness ‘mystically perpetrated’ by an evil ill-intended human using bad thoughts, *tsu †i*. It is what causes the heart to hold strong thoughts of hatred. It is a ‘potency’ strengthened by quarrelling, anger and resentment.

²⁴⁵ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, p. 49.

²⁴⁶ Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, pp. 80, 115.

²⁴⁷ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, pp. 92, 125.

²⁴⁸ 63, Rundu is near the mouth of the Caprivi strip.

²⁴⁹ Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab*, p. 200, 123.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

²⁵¹ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, pp. 288, 240.

²⁵² Doke, ‘Phonetics of Chu Bushman’, 153.

From the heart the potency is exuded in saliva and breath, which in turn causes sickness in others. Although Guenther emphasises the evil nature of *kgaba*, at the same time he states illness caused by *kgaba* is not 'deliberate', 'it just happens'.²⁵³ 'In the jargon of old anthropology', Guenther notes, the victim is 'bewitched'.²⁵⁴

Guenther recognises that *kgaba* means something different to Nharo and Tswana and that the Nharo concept is cogent and 'logically consistent with Nharo concepts of physiology'.²⁵⁵ Rather than seeing this difference as indicative of the Khoisan nature of the concept, Guenther reads this as sign of adoption of the idea and of significant acculturation. He suggests the *tso* or *n/um* concept has been paralleled and inverted through Tswana ideas producing a Nharo idea of *kgaba* that is an amalgam of Bushmen and Tswana influence. Whilst crossing over of ideas between Bushmen and Bantu speakers does seem indicated, the cross over is not specific to the acculturated Nharo but applies to the 'witchcraft free' !Kung also. Moreover, the intrinsically Khoisan nature of the idea might suggest a root of the name or concept amongst Khoisan.

In a context of traditional understanding, Katz demonstrates that the notion of *kgaba* is not restricted to Nharo on farms. He identifies amongst the Ju/'hoan that 'envy is an emotion of the heart that is believed to cause arrows of sickness or *xabasi* to pass from the envier into the envied [...] The sicknesses caused by disquiet hearts are pre-eminently those that Ju/'hoan healers seek to cure.' Katz, notes *xabasi* is derived from Tswana *dikgaba* referring to the power of ill will to cause sickness.²⁵⁶ Katz and Guenther each link their respective findings to the same Tswana word but only Guenther emphasises the idea as evidence for acculturation.

The ideas behind *kgaba*, involving the heart as a place of thought is central to all the Khoisan I encountered. To treat an agitated mind the Khoi treat the heart. Katz's description of *xabasi* is based around arrows. The idea of *kgaba* working involuntarily against someone is reminiscent of a Damara patient 'arrowing' the healer. Many Khoisan I encountered conceptualised movement of intention between people, good or bad, conscious or unconscious, in terms of arrow movement. They also used the word *//gabas*, as a noun and verb relating to the home of the arrows and the arrow movement. The idea of arrowing from the heart seems essentially Khoisan. Earlier I demonstrated the link between the *//gabas* I encountered and Katz's *//gebesi*. The concepts of *//Gabas* and *//gebesi*, in turn seem essentially linked to that of *xabasi*. It seems very probable that the three words reflect regional

²⁵³ Guenther, 'Not a Bushman Thing', 87.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 88.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 87.

²⁵⁶ Katz, *Healing*, pp. 141, 201.

variations of related ideas. Although Katz specifies *xabasi* is derived from *kgaba* the Tswana origin of the idea, at least in a new context, becomes highly questionable.

Amongst the Damara, Vedder thought saliva and urine, to be ‘vehicles of the soul’s substance’,²⁵⁷ and Wagner-Robertz recorded them both as substances that held the essence of a person. Saliva could be used for magical purposes and to bless and curse someone.²⁵⁸ Guenther notes that amongst the Nharo boiled *tssso* is secreted in sweat and saliva.²⁵⁹ The notion of saliva as transferor of potency is readily apparent in a /Xam account wherein a sick girl, or a girl in a transitional state to womanhood, ate only the meat killed by her father. If a young hunter had given her his catch of springbok to eat, her saliva would have travelled through the springbok food into the hunter’s bow, ‘cooling’ it and making it ineffectual.²⁶⁰

A link between breath and a wider Khoisan idea of potency also exists. Lebzelter noted the !Kung belief that breath is connected with the heart and some healers when sucking out disease, sucked out a patient’s breath.²⁶¹ This suggests the breath was holding the sickness. Amongst the Damara and Nama, it is common knowledge that sickness travels from a patient into a person massaging them. The masseur must *!gai* or belch out the patient’s wind to rid themselves of the sickness. In the minds of many Khoisan a link is made between the heart, wind, breath and the ‘soul’, the latter being a concept of life based on the phenomenon of breath and breathing. Three Ju’hoan I encountered described that the heart breathes.²⁶² A Nama woman in Maltahöe told me ‘the */om*, soul, works with the heart. It is the wind.’²⁶³

Guenther’s assertion that that malicious transformation of Bushmen into animals, Bushmen use of destructive ‘magical’ arrows and the phenomenon of *kgaba*, all indicate distinctive recent adoption of witchcraft behaviour, needs to be contextualised in terms of wider belief and behaviour. Contextualisation suggests the existence of similar phenomena across many groups of Khoi and ‘benign’ and acculturated San. To add a further perspective, it is worth briefly highlighting some similarities between the Kxoe Bushmen of the Caprivi strip, researched by Köhler, with other Khoisan and additionally Evans-Pritchard’s Zande. Guenther cites the Kxoe as further evidence of sorcery practicing, ‘socially complex’, Bushmen. Closer examination of Köhler’s research however, points to

²⁵⁷ Vedder, *Die Bergdama*, p. 63.

²⁵⁸ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Speichel’, MS.

²⁵⁹ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 244.

²⁶⁰ Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman*, p. 77.

²⁶¹ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, pp. 43, 48.

²⁶² 86, 82, 91.

²⁶³ 27, similarly 37, Damara 29.

similarity between the Kxoe and Bushmen designated ‘benign’ by Guenther. Guenther draws his conclusions based more on Köhler’s use of language than the root ideas he presents.

The following account from Köhler is reminiscent of Silberbauer’s concepts of entropy and restorative relationships between phenomena in ‘benign’ /Gwi cosmology. Köhler (1971)²⁶⁴ notes that the Kxoe believe the world is filled by dangerous *tçò* (*tcóò*²⁶⁵) ‘Kraft’ (power / strength). *Tçò* comes from the High God Kxyani and the ‘Ahnen’ (ancestors), //áwǎ (//gǎ wǎǎ).²⁶⁶ It also comes from humans, through ‘Schwarzzauberer’ (black magic), or from animals and other ‘things’.

Köhler continues: Sickness must be countered by ‘anti- *tçò*’ force. Simple sickness amongst the Kxoe is treated using *tçò* filled herbal remedies. Very Powerful *tçò* requires treatment by a *yéu.kx’ào.mà*, a ‘Schamane’ (shaman). If the *yéu.kx’ào.mà* decides he can help he will hold a healing dance at which he sings a special *yéu* song.²⁶⁷ The ‘Schwarzzauberer’ is called *tçò-kxò.mà* or *tçò-kx’ào.mà*, which simply means that they are skilled and knowing about ‘medicine’. *Tçò* can be used by *tçò-kxò.mà* for good or bad depending on their intent.²⁶⁸

The High God Kxyani sends sickness and death by //xǎó (//xàó), a ‘Macht’ (potency, force). //Xǎó literally means spear and Kxyani shoots or stabs people with the spear. Kxyani may send the ‘ancestors’ to kill people with a spear. The spears can change into other objects, such as, as Brezinger notes, stones coins and pieces of wood.²⁶⁹ The ancestors can also cause sickness on their own volition by hiding a person’s shadow in a bush or ‘beating up’ a person.

Köhler’s account of the Kxoe used language of blackmagic, witchcraft and bewitching that was increasingly old fashioned for 1970s anthropology. Using such words as ‘Schwarzzauberer’ tells us little and without further clarification obscures Kxoe meaning. Close examination of the ideas which Guenther looks to as evidence of adopted witchcraft beliefs, indicates their essentially Khoisan nature. There is little in Köhler’s account that seems intrinsically different from other Khoisan beliefs regarding origin, transmission and cure of illness. In the light of previous discussion regarding benign

²⁶⁴ O. Köhler, ‘Die ‘Krankheit’ im Denken der Kxoe-Buschmänner’, in Veronika Six *et al* (eds.) *Afrikanische Sprachen und Kulturen – ein Querschnitt (Festschrift Johannes Lukas)*, Deutsches Institut für Afrika-Forschung ,HBAK 14, (Hamburg, 1971), pp. 317-325.

²⁶⁵ M. Brezinger and D. Naude, *Mahure, Sacred Healer of the Kxoe: Kxoe Texts on Health and Healing, Magic and Death Part 1*, Khoisan Forum at the Institut für Afrikaistik, University of Cologne, Working Paper 12 (Cologne, 1999), p. 12.

²⁶⁶ Brezinger, *Mahure*, p. 21.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 322.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

²⁶⁹ Brezinger, *Mahure*, p. 12.

Bushmen, Köhler's observation that *tçò* can be used for good or bad depending on intent does not point to the Kxoe as essentially different. If one considers Brezinger's orthography of the Kxoe word for ancestors, //gǎ wǎǎ, there is a very apparent cross over with Khoisan ideas around the evil aspect of the good god //Gǎǎ and the spirits of the dead, variously 'g//ǎǎab, g//ǎǎaba, g//amama, etc.'²⁷⁰ As noted, //gau means arrow in Khoekhoegowab, but it also means to destroy or annihilate. This may well be related to Köhler's //xǎǎ, the sickness potency sent (fired) by Kxyani.

Köhler's observation that ancestors may beat a person is reminiscent of a *n/um* fight or lightning 'beating'. As shadows are associated with breath and soul, hiding the shadow also has the meaning of taking the soul. As wind or soul lives in the heart this parallels the common Bushmen idea that in the healing dance the heart is stolen by 'spirits' and must be retrieved.

The idea of shooting potency or sickness is one that seems to have a wider context than Guenther attributes the phenomenon as a symptom of increasing social complexity and Tswana influence. Evans-Pritchard observed that a Zande witchdoctor tries to beat his rivals by 'shooting' small objects into his colleagues when dancing with them.²⁷¹ Witchdoctors might also, 'by a jerk of a leg' shoot pieces of bone into one another at a distance.²⁷² Evans-Pritchard elaborated: 'Zande thought expresses the notion of natural and mystical causation quite clearly by using a hunting metaphor to define their relations. Azande always say of witchcraft that it is the umbaga or second spear.'²⁷³

Whilst remaining wary of notions of metaphor, a similar idea of arrows, spears or even pointed fingers and sticks firing potency is apparent throughout Khoisan ethnography. In Zande the word translated as 'to bewitch' is *no*. The only other uses for this word relate to 'shooting' with bow and arrow or gun. Evans-Pritchard's concludes that the way hunters live determines how they structure their ideas of causation. Zande and Khoisan perhaps share similar ideas born from similarities of experience.

Recruiting a language of magic and sorcery, Köhler notes that certain animals, including lion, leopard, duiker, wild dogs and the bushdove, can 'behexen', people with *tçò*. The Kxoe say //o'é, which, literally, means 'coming down', to cause sickness.²⁷⁴ Similarly other phenomena can //o'é, including a tree struck by lightning, foreign lands, contact with a persons shadow and sitting where a sick person has sat.

²⁷⁰ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 259.

²⁷¹ E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (abridged) (Oxford, 1976), p. 114.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

²⁷⁴ Köhler, 'Krankheit', p. 318.

What is important here is rejecting the interpretation of ‘hexing’ and bewitching that Guenther uses as evidence for socially complex Kxoe developing witchcraft. Instead, one should consider how the Kxoe express the notion of sickness and sickness movement. Kxoe ideas Köhler and Guenther identify as witchcraft, seem intimately related to beliefs held by other Khoisan and other Africans. The beliefs seem to reflect a way of thinking about causation that is tied to the experience of hunters. Amongst the Damara, if one becomes ill after sitting where a sick person has sat, the causal principle is expressed as transference of *oab*, wind. Across all the Khoisan I encountered the notion of the wind of animals causing sickness was common. This idea sometimes interlocked together the idea of the animal’s wind and its shadow. Links between wind, smell and illness and transference of potency through wind, shadows and arrows seem neither ‘new’ nor necessarily related to social complexity.

As noted, across the Khoisan there exists the idea, expressed in Khoe, of *soxa*, which in some sense equates to the Polynesian idea of *taboo*. This notion attributes dangerous smell and wind potency to animals. Lee was bewildered that !Kung did not eat zebra because they ‘smelled bad’, //’o /’xau.²⁷⁵ Smell in this context refers to the !Kung relationship with the wind or potency of the zebra.

Guenther draws parallels between *kgaba* and *n/um* or *tso*. Kxoe *tçò* holds much in common with Nharo *tso*, a link that might be evident linguistically. Both *n/um* and *tçò* are recognised in all manner of things that exists as environmental influences and possible threats. Although the significance of the similarity must remain circumspect, *n/um*, *kgaba* and Zande witchcraft substance also share certain similarities. *kgaba*, like personal potency, and like *n/um*, can work of its own volition. Zande witchcraft substance was found in the ‘small intestine’. *N/um* is located in various places in the abdomen. Zande witchcraft substance, like *n/um*, *tso* and *kgaba*, when inoperative, is cool. It becomes active when heated.²⁷⁶

Conclusion

Marshall, Lee, Silberbauer, Katz and Guenther all share an underlying notion of Bushmen as more or less benign, egalitarian and ecologically adapted. Their theoretical dispositions encouraged each of them to think about Bushmen as different from Khoi and Bantu peoples. These highly influential researchers have contributed, implicitly and explicitly, to a notion of Bushmen healers as shamans. Despite all his provisos, Katz’s accounts of Bushman healing have emphasised the idea of Bushman difference and romantic notions of Bushman spirituality. Within this context Katz artificially

²⁷⁵ Lee, *!Kung San*, p. 233.

²⁷⁶ Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles*, pp. 16, 58.

prominences the healing dance as the primary mechanism of Bushman healing which affects body, soul and community.

Although Guenther exceptionally focuses on ideas and change, he takes a baseline for his research from 1950s to 1970s anthropology of the !Kung and /Gwi. This provides him with the idea of an essential pre-contact Bushman and distinctive Bushman shaman. He contrasts the culture of these Bushmen with that of Nharo, /Xam and Kxoe peoples, amongst whom he identifies implantation and absorption of witchcraft from Bantu speakers. Guenther identifies differences between acculturated and 'isolated' Bushmen groups despite the very strong continuities apparent in the practices and ideas of both Bushmen groups in relation to witchcraft type practices.

When Khoisan people are compared there is variety in their concepts regarding the nature and transmission of illness. But equally there is homogeneity in underlying themes. Key themes that emerge cannot be easily understood within 'Western' categories of thought. This applies to ideas of cause and effect, physiology, theories of infection and immunity. Khoisan healing ideas and practices are built from familiar experience. Khoisan ideas particularly revolve around smell as a distinct characteristic of day-to-day experience. This is especially true in relation to humans and animals but also to other phenomena such as some plants and rain. Plants, as we shall see, are distinguished more by taste.

The idea of potency is based upon how phenomena are known and how they interact with humans. The smell of someone identifies them and carries their potency, as may their sweat and breath. The idea of potency overlaps with ideas of personal wind, which in turn overlaps with ideas of soul and ghost.

Consideration of Khoisan healing is particularly difficult because of the variety and fluidity of ideas encountered. Some of this variety comes from the lack of comparative and comparable study. Variety also comes from the different explanations and conclusions different researchers provide depending upon their theoretical inclinations. The difference between Tanaka's /Gwi sickness being evil spirits or Silberbauer's being arrows of entropy is a good example of this. A further factor that encourages variety is the difficulty of Khoisan languages to primarily Western researchers. Not only are language sounds unfamiliar but, to date, there has been little orthographic consistency. Just examining the orthography of the French researcher Olivier relative to that of Euro-American researchers points to her exceptional predisposition to add accents to Ju/'hoan in a similar manner to their occurrence in

French. Köhler's orthography of the Kxoe (Khoe, Kxoé²⁷⁷) is also clearly distinctive from that of many other linguists of Bushman.

Despite the difficulty inherent in comparing Khoisan healing across time and space there is enough consistency in the ethnographic material to suggest there is a Khoisan way of thinking about health and illness. Identifying ties between my research and other anthropological Khoisan and Africa material helps bring Bushmen shaman back to a more representative setting. The link between Bushman and Bantu speakers is tentative. The consistency of ideas between the two peoples is, however, suggestive of either greater or more prolonged contact than is sometimes acknowledged, or universality in the way similar ideas and practices develop synchronically within socio-environmental contexts which have significant factors in common. Wilmsen has notably brought issues of contact to bear on Kalahari San and his broad history seems useful but less so his approach to culture and ideas.²⁷⁸ In terms of identifying specific exchanges of healing information between Khoisan and Bantu speakers, what seems required is a sensitive unravelling of ideas, from the different groups, which are often still too readily collapsed together under banners of 'witchcraft' or 'traditional inoculation' and other such European insertions on local African thought

²⁷⁷ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*; Kxoé: Haacke *et al* 'Internal and External Relations'.

²⁷⁸ Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies*.

Chapter IV

Damara and Hai//om Healers of Northern Namibia

Hai//om and Damara healing strategies have much in common with those of Kalahari Bushmen and other past and present Khoisan populations. Amongst both groups there is a greater preponderance of phenomena researchers, as well as many Damara and Hai//om, refer to as 'witchcraft'. However, the explanations that lie behind such behaviour undoubtedly wear a common Khoisan face. This reminds us that witchcraft is not something distinct to sedentary, socially complex societies, but is an elaboration of pre-existent understandings of cause and effect.

Damara and Hai//om speak Khoekhoegowab, like the Nama. For both groups this has long been thought to indicate loss of their respective 'traditional' cultures. In recent years the issue of whether Hai//om are Bushmen who have lost their tradition, or are not Bushmen at all, has become politicised. Being or not being a Bushmen has different advantages at different times, not least in relation to funding initiatives.¹ There is, however, enough cultural and physical similarity between Hai//om and Kalahari Bushmen for anthropologists, and most Hai//om, to see very clear associations. It is widely recognised that the Hai//om healing dance is evidence of traditional, if changing, Bushman practice.

How to deal with the similarity of the Damara dance to that of the Bushmen is a harder question. As previously indicated the historical record of the Damara healing dance does not go beyond Vedder and the early twentieth century. Some Damara suggest a Bushmen origin of the dance,² others simply assert it is their tradition. Recent linguistic analysis rejects the popular notion that Damara language, and by implication culture, has been totally subsumed by the Nama. New analysis, founded on the assumption that Nharo is closest to the Proto-Khoe nucleus, suggests the Damara were already Khoe-speakers before they encountered the Nama.³ Comparison of Damara healing dances with Bushmen dances suggests variation around longstanding common ideas and practices together with more recent exchange of phenomena between the two groups.

Barring Wagner-Robertz's 1972-1975 research, virtually nothing has been recorded of Damara healing dances. Many scholars remain unaware that they exist. The following section seeks to build on Wagner-Robertz's material and explore the relationship of Damara */nanu aogu*, rainmen, to the wider Khoisan context. This is followed by a brief consideration of Hai//om healers which further explores

¹ Ute Diekmann's ongoing doctoral project (Köln University) concerning Hai//om identity brings to light local tensions around such matter.

² Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama', p. 31.

³ Haacke *et al.*, 'Internal and External Relations', p.150.

the relationship of environmental phenomena to healing. For reasons of clarity, this section follows the theme of the previous chapter and restricts itself primarily to dance healers and their healing strategies. The subsequent chapter considers contemporary Khoisan healing in its broader context.

Wagner-Robertz (2000) encountered rainmen in the Sesfontein region as far south as Okambahe. One of her informants thought Sesfontein a longstanding stronghold of healers.⁴ Over the last three years I have heard of healing dances, *arus* (Wagner-Robertz: */gais*) having taken place around Sesfontein, Outjo and Khorixas. I encountered no rainmen outside Sesfontein.

In Sesfontein in 2001 there were six rainmen⁵ and one rainwoman.⁶ One further man described himself as a *kēbō aob*, a prophet.⁷ All were aged approximately between their late forties and seventy. Wagner-Robertz noted the age one becomes a rain-person as between 25 and 30 years.⁸ It is possible that younger people are not becoming rainmen.

Suro suggested a rain-person was called *xoma aos*, which meant ‘sucking person’. Wagner-Robertz translated *xoma aob* simply as ‘magician’.⁹ *Xoma aob* is the term the Hai//om generally use for healers, although Widlock specifies *!gai aob*.¹⁰ All Damara and Hai//om I met were keen to point out that *!gai aob* were different, they were ‘witchdoctors’. Wagner-Robertz distinguished *!gaexab*, ‘black magician’, from *!gai aob*, a magical helper.¹¹ There appears to be flexibility in the use and connotations of the name *!gai aob*. Evidence suggests that the root *!gai* has old links with dancing and medicine men.

Schmidt’s (1986) Nama informants knew of trance dancing amongst northern Damara. Intriguingly her Damara informants thought the Nama also participated in the */geis*, ‘trance’ phenomena. No Nama I encountered participated in trance dancing. Schmidt’s informant referred to trance as */gei //ōb*, derived from */geis*, and meaning ‘dance death’. Amongst the Damara she met, none of whom were dancing healers, falling into trance was termed *!gai-//ōb*, which was translated as ‘witchcraft death’. Schmidt links *!gai* with */geis*, the dance, and *!gai* from *!gai aob*, ‘medicine man’, noting that Vedder translated *!gai* as ‘to rise up from the stomach’.¹² This latter idea recalls not only Bushmen */num* and its variants

⁴ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Heilungsritual der Dama’, p. 33.

⁵ 2, 4, 5, 6, 11, 15; out of a Sesfontein population of 7,358 (Census, 2001).

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⁸ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Heilungsritual der Dama’, p. 23

⁹ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁰ T. Widlok, *Living on Mangetti: Bushman Autonomy and Namibian Independence* (Oxford, 1999), p. 179.

¹¹ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Heilungsritual der Dama’, p. 84.

¹² Schmidt, ‘Present Day’, p. 11.

but the broader Khoisan idea of growth and awakening of /*gais* considered previously in chapter one. /*Gai* however also means ‘to belch’ in Khoekhoegowab. Healers belch to release the illness they have literally massaged out of the sick. Illness, when it is conceptualised by Khoi is, as amongst Bushmen, often referred to as ‘wind’. Bad wind is the same phenomena anthropologists have described as bad potency or negative *tcóò*, as Bresinger named it amongst the Kxoe.¹³

Once more, a mixture of ideas presents us with a sense of wind or potency in people that can be good or bad and moved by the healers that dance the /*gais* (*arus*, /*gais*¹⁴). The good potency wakes up in the /*gais*, predominantly in the abdominal area. It can then be exchanged between healers in the dance. Bad potency is withdrawn from others as wind, objects or small animals.

/*Nanu* means thunderstorm. Rainmen possess the rain ‘spirit’ or ‘wind’ which they acquire by being struck by lightning. Wagner-Robertz’s Damara informants attested that a healer’s ability came from special lightning from //*Gamab* (//*Gauab*).¹⁵ My informants thought the lightning from god, usually termed *Elob*. A related key difference in nomenclature, and perhaps evidence of change, lay in Wagner-Robertz’s informants attributing sickness to both //*Gamab* and //*gamagu*, the latter being spirits of the dead who put miniature animals that cause illness into people. Sesfontein Damara I encountered specified that illness was caused by dead people, *aogekhoe*. Some thought they fired arrows,¹⁶ or put animals or objects inside people.¹⁷ Others again thought it was the wind of dead people that caused sickness.¹⁸ There was a propensity amongst more urbanised Damara, like Nama, to frame the reality and potency of dead people more within the context of powerfully bad dreams.¹⁹ This seems indicative of a rationalising process drawn from formal education that separated them from traditional understanding.

Being struck by lightning conferred the most power to a rainman, but one could become a rainman through alternative means. The key role attributed to lightning highlights the shaping of Khoisan cosmological ideas around environmental phenomena, particularly thunder, lightning and rain. In contrast to older ethnographic studies, recent researchers have downplayed the importance of these phenomena to the Khoisan. This has possibly been the case because interest in such universal natural phenomena seems to be perpetuating old ‘natives’ and nature discourse, or outmoded animistic

¹³ Brezinger, *Mahure, Sacred Healer*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 96.

¹⁵ Wagner-Robertz, ‘Heilungsritual der Dama’, p. 23.

¹⁶ 7, 11, 13, 25

¹⁷ 6, 13

¹⁸ 18

¹⁹ 29, 28

interpretation. The significance of lightning to Sesfontein Damara, however, suggests both continued importance of these phenomena to some Khoisan people and a need to recognise a real and continued environmental influence on modern Khoisan life. Gabriel, the most powerful rainman in Sesfontein, had been struck by lightning twice; the second time nearly killed him.

Johannes is a 48 years old Damara rainman. When he was 33 he ate something 'not eaten by anyone, in the goat stomach'. He was observed by spirits who thereupon 'came into him' and caused him to be struck by lightning. After the lightning struck, he tore his clothes off and ran naked into the bush. There he roamed, eating nothing and in another world, for about two days, until he heard the noise of a drum. He followed the sound to the 'big rainman'. When the people of Sesfontein noticed Johannes's disappearance, they gathered in a clearing in the nearby bush and held an *arus*. The *arus* is a dance at which singers and spectators assemble around a fire in a semi-circle. Within the circle a man beats a drum and rainmen and rainwomen, accompanied by women singing and clapping with their hands or sticks, begin to dance in order to bring out the rainspirit from within themselves. When they have the spirit they can begin to heal the afflicted.

When Johannes was drawn to the *arus* by the drum, the head of the rainmen, the strongest, taught him how to dance. Following instruction (I could not elicit a timescale for this), the big rainman made four small holes in the ground, each about 3' in diameter, stabbed a goat in the throat and allowed the blood to fill the holes. The big rainman, followed by Johannes, then drank the blood from the first three holes, but not from the last; 'the last one you don't drink, it is for the dead spirit'. Since this time Johannes had been a rainman. He likes being a rainman because it 'gives him spirit'.²⁰

There is some variety in accounts regarding what happens once a person has been struck by lightning. All the rainmen concurred that when you are struck you run naked in the bush, in another world. This seems to last about two or three days. The *arus* drum is played to draw the lost person in and continues until he or she arrives. Johannes related that when one is 'in that spirit', one 'gets the smell of the *tūhorabeb*'. Elizabeth and Julia Tauros,²¹ two Damara women from Purros, a remote, principally Himba settlement, about 60 kilometres north west of Sesfontein, thought that big rainmen 'feed the new person with the *tūhorabeb* and *!hūnib* plants'. They added, 'all the old people who are doing this have died'. The two plants 'opened the mind', which they seemed to refer to as *!haibe*. Additionally, they suggested that, 'if you become as a rainman, the first thing you do is, even in the darkness, you have to see that plant *tūhorabeb* and pick him. The plant is different, there are females

²⁰ 4.

and males, if you are the male you pick the male and if you are the female you pick the female. Even if you see that plant *tūhorabeb* twice you become also a rainwoman (if your mother's one?)'. One of the women's mother's was a rainwoman.

The involvement of the plant *tūhorabeb* in the creation of a rainman also appeared in Abraham Ganuseb's account of his initiation at the *arus*:

The old rainmen covered me in clothes from the women. They made seven holes in the ground [each about 4' across]. They killed a black goat . Black was preferable but if there was no black one then a white one would do. The old rainmen filled all the holes with blood and the rainplant *tūhorabeb*. I drank blood from holes 1,3,5,7. Then they cut through my hair [about an inch wide strip through the scalp hair] from my nose to here [occiput] and rubbed in goat blood. Then I could dance the big dance.²²

Informants described a number of ways they might be able to acquire and 'work' with the rain spirit and hence become a rainman. One way involves eating *soxa* food, the *//khai*, lungs and heart, or *!naxun*, abdominal viscera, from a rainman's pot. Guenther noted the Nharo associate wind, spirit and life force with the lungs and heart. This seems to involve a similar rationale to the transformative power Damara associate with these organs. The abdominal viscera also seem to play a potent role in both Bushmen and Damara contexts. Katz's *//gebesi*, or home of arrows, equated with the liver and spleen and Barnard specified that a *g//aua* latches onto the abdominal organs. Damara healers 'read' present and future misfortune and sickness in the shape and detail of the intestines. I witnessed Johannes reading the intestines of a slaughtered goat. He asserted that the intestines were the home of the ancestors, elaborating that if the bladder was 'blunt' the sick person for whom the reading was being undertaken would die.

A further way one might become a rainman is by stealing food that had been given in payment for help, from a rainman's pot. Eating the content's of a goat's stomach is yet another way. Those born with a caul are thought to be capable of causing misfortune and scrying. There was an additional strong suggestion, affirmed by Abraham, that there was a hereditary requirement to becoming a rainman.

The role of rainmen I encountered was principally twofold: to diagnose the cause of illness and misfortune, and to treat illness through sucking, which takes place during an *arus*. Evidence suggests that in the past the role of the rainman was broader. Wagner-Robertz proposed rainmen dealt with the

²¹ 47
²² 5

daily experiences of life: drought, hunting, childbirth and difficulties arising from new eventualities.²³ Vedder believed *!gai aogu* were listened to and questioned for insights following their excursions in the spirit world.²⁴ Outside the dance, rainmen are readily consulted as prophets. On one occasion, when filming the dismemberment of a goat that was hanging from a tree by Suro's house, I asked rainman Johannes to tell me something of the future. He traced his finger across the blood vessels of the goat's disembodied stomach and intestines. He saw my car and an accident together on the road to Sesfontein. He said I would drive past but I must be careful. Given severe need, it seems possible that rainmen in contemporary dance contexts might also be turned to as possible sources of authority, inspiration or knowledge.

Like the Bushmen, Damara sometimes use highly obscure plant and animal remedies, such as the anal gland of the aardwolf. I remain unconvinced by the idea that such usage has arisen from trial and error. One alternative solution I enquired about was the possibility that rainmen were, or are, the source of such behaviour. In response to this enquiry, Abraham volunteered:

Long time ago they made the *arus*. At the *arus* they saw which animals, parts of animals; which plants, parts of plants to use. If they went to a new place like Tsumeb or Grootfontein they could make the *arus* and know what to use. It even tells them which way to turn to find the plants.²⁵

Evidence suggests Damara communities used to draw on insights of rainmen to solve a very broad range of problems but this role is now being fulfilled by other means, or becoming irrelevant in changing social contexts of sedentism and urbanisation. Anthropologists have recognised Bushman 'healing' dances as arenas for dealing with change and, particularly in older contexts, ways of influencing rainfall and hunting. The Damara evidence also emphasises the wider role of 'healers' and dances.

The *arus* I witnessed held much in common with other Khoisan trance dances. The location of the dance was a patch of scrubland out of sight from the village, which was about a mile away. An area, about five yards in diameter and by the side of a large tree was cleared of grass stones and any larger rocks. The dance was held in the daytime and lasted about three hours. The timing of the dance depends on need and whether it is day or night is unimportant. Dances are held at any time of the year. It was hard to ascertain the frequency of *arus* dances. Apparently a dance had been held around the time of my arrival in Sesfontein but, beyond the one I witnessed, I heard of no others in my four

²³ Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama', p. 25.

²⁴ Vedder cited by Schmidt, 'Present Day', p. 5.

²⁵ 5

months in Sesfontein. No special clothing was worn at the *arus* but clothing was rearranged. One lady danced with a bare chest. Gabriel and Johannes removed their trousers and Gabriel his coat. Both of them tied their clothing round the waste, wearing it draped like a skirt. In all, three rainmen and two rainwomen danced and principally three ladies beat sticks and sang. Quite a number of Damara wandered up from the village to watch.

Some Khoisan use drums in their dances like these Damara, although it is not typical of the Ju/'hoan. The *arus* drum was struck with a repetitive finger flick, which the drummer made with the palm of his drumming hand resting on the drum skin. The drum consisted of an old metal German milk canister which was purloined from a Damara lady whenever a dance was held. A black inner tube of a car tyre was stretched over its mouth. Apparently, a red tube would have been better. Water was regularly splashed on the rubber apparently to acquire and maintain the right tone.

The dancing wakes up the rainspirit, or the *//gawas*, inside the healers. When it is awake those who simply 'dance the spirit' go down on their hands and knees by the fire, fleetingly gather hot coals in their hands, and snort the *//gawas* onto the coals. The heat kills the *//gawas*. When they feel their *//gawas* is ready, the healers smell out sickness and remove it by sucking. The sucked illness is then coughed or snorted onto coals, which are similarly briefly scooped up and released by the dancer. Some healers, like Bushmen, rub their abdomens in pain and cry out when the *//gawas* is building inside them. Again like some Bushmen dancers, Damara sometimes apply smouldering branches or coals to their upper bodies or scalp to stimulate the potency.

Wagner-Robertz's conception of *//gabas* (*//gawas*) was a rather confusing amalgam of ideas. She thought it included the idea of sickness discovery, based on communication with spirits, and healing undertaken with the help of spirits.²⁶ But *//Gabas* has a far more material element to it, as was discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Katz's notion of *//gebesi*. As also noted earlier, in Khoekhowgowab *//gawa* means 'strike of lightning'.²⁷ *//Gabas* or *//gawas* for the Damara is very much a potency derived from god via lightning and other means, that can be transferred from one healer to another in a similar manner to the way arrows of potency are transferred between Bushmen healers. If a Damara dancer has too much *//gawas* they can blow it into the ears of other dancers, who often then stagger with its powerful input.

²⁶ Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama', p. 121.

²⁷ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhowgowab-English*, p. 80.

When //gawas rises powerfully in a person they collapse. Sucking healers must gauge the point at which their //gawas is strong enough to heal, but not so strong that they are incapacitated. By contrast, the dancing women at the *arus* I witnessed allowed the //gawas to overcome them. When overcome, they spasmodically performed elaborate handstands, frequently collapsing dramatically and painfully onto the hard ground. Apparently unconscious, they were brought round by a concentrated singing around their head. When the singers see a woman collapse their immediate impulse is to rush over to the 'unconscious' person and gather their skirts. This might not be just for modesty's sake, but to prevent the ingress of wind.

Some Damara healers, again like Bushmen past and present, dance with walking sticks. //Gawas can be transferred from one healer to another, or between a patient and healer, by rubbing a stick point between the shoulders of the other person. This action can both stimulate //Gawas and remove sickness from the chest. If a sickness lies in the genitals of a healer's sibling or parent, the healer avoids sucking the area by laying the patient on the ground and drawing a line in the sand between themselves and the sickness. The line terminates in a circle by the healer. The sickness //gawas is sucked down the line, into the circle and into the healer. If the //gawas gathers in the healer's groin and wants to run downwards, the healer squats over a specially prepared hole filled with fire. The fire drives the //gawas upwards, whereupon it can be coughed out.

Bushmen healers relate that whilst in trance they journey through the spirit world. The rainmen I met did not describe journeys into a 'spirit world' or any encounter with //Gauab. Wagner-Robertz, however, reported that during healing the rainmen called to //Gauab, asking him if the sickness they smelt was the right one and requesting the power to cure it.²⁸ She described how Damara healers, like Bushmen healers, reported riding to //Gamab on Kudu. Their blood was strongest when they had been with //Gamab. She furthermore described that the attendants, whose job it was to look after falling dancers, caught them and rubbed them with fat. They also gave them a powder to smell, which was probably *sâi*. This giving them powder to smell is reminiscent of the historical Cape /Xam mentioned in chapter one, who made trembling magicians, returned from the veld, smell buchu to make their blood vessels lie down.²⁹ Sometimes, Wagner-Robertz's informants told her, the rainmen saw ghosts and would rush into the veld to kill them. On their return the rainman's stick was full of the ghost's blood. Healers also ran into the veld at the behest of //Gamab, returning some time later with their

²⁸ Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama', p. 28.

²⁹ D. Bleek, 'Belief and Customs of the /Xam Bushmen, Part VII, Sorcerers, *Bantu Studies*, 9:1 (March 1935), 22.

noses bleeding. Nose bleeds are a feature of both historical /Xam Bushmen dancing accounts and of recent !Kung healers' behaviour.³⁰

Some dancers at the *arus* I witnessed stamped their feet in a loosely choreographed, stylised manner, whilst others moved within the circle with no apparent set pattern. Exceptionally, Gabriel seemed to emulate the flight of a bird in his dance. This may have been linked to a wider association between healing dances and birds. Wagner-Robertz attributed a particular Damara significance to eagles or vultures and proposed that the thought of dying far from ones family and being eaten by vultures was particularly dreadful to the Damara.³¹ She described that at the outset of the dance the vulture appears in the songs as a threat to the patient. As the dance progresses the virtues of the bird are increasingly extolled, until eventually the bird is praised as a great expeditious messenger.³²

I am not of the impression that words and songs always unfold in such a set pattern. There were, however, set songs that people began with, or returned to, at intervals. I asked Julia Tauros and Andreas !Kharuxab the meaning and importance of dance songs. They both agreed that the first song had to be about !*Haoros*, a mountain. Julia described the first song as 'a feeding song of rain people', stating that, 'if they don't play that song the person doesn't have that desire to dance'. Julia and Andreas provided two examples of a !*Haoros* song. I suspect there are many suitable songs:

If you get that rain spirit you have to run to !Haoros, biroob , ꞑaesab , /homꞑgui and Korokoro
Kaie (mountains)
Do I come to die at this land
Do I come to die at ꞑhabebe

Sing a song about !Haoros
The top of the mountain is spring
Follow our rivers
The bones of the person lie down in these rivers

Andreas provided the following example:

!haoros dixami
Hirobi xami
ꞑaesabi xami

Suro professed difficulty with the dialect of these Damara from Purros but nonetheless translated the above as: 'the lion comes from !Haoros. Hiros is a mountain, lions live in mountains'.

³⁰ Lewis-Williams, 'Paintings of Power', p. 237.

³¹ Wagner-Robertz, 'Heilungsritual der Dama', p. 64.

³² Ibid., p. 76.

When one song finishes another starts spontaneously. If new dancers join the *arus* the *!Haoros* song is started again. Julia said if you come to join the singing after it has started: ‘you can come up with *!hoaros* so that they can answer’.

I asked Andreas if they have different types of song for different stages of the *arus* and he replied, ‘Yes, they have different types of song, it is like the Christian songs’. I enquired as to whether there were many songs about animals and mountains, to which he answered, ‘There are two songs *tsuxubi da /awa kara i xa* and *//gaibe*’. He expanded that one of these songs was about the two mountains that came together to form the pass into Sesfontein. Abraham also described songs about ‘birds, rivers, animals, people, about the wind blowing down the Hoanib river’.

Reasons are looked for in the wider environment if a dance does not appear to go well and the *//gawas* does not build, or ‘the drum is not good’. The *arus* I attended was not deemed strong. The following day it was heard that a man had died far from Sesfontein and this was thought the cause of the problem. Suro similarly described a dance at which the rainmen had reported things not going well and attributed it to ‘something smelling not good from the sea side, the west’. Later, the problem became known. An 18 years old man had been cycling home from a fishing trip at the coast. The east wind killed him on the way home [the east wind is a hot summer wind].

The success or failure of the *arus* tells the participants something about the world they live in. In fact the whole form of the *arus* might be considered as a public articulation of knowledge and knowledge creation. The songs that accompany the drum and dancing tell truths about the world which present important realities. In the small example given earlier, lie both lessons and powerful histories that tie the Damara into their landscape. The Damara followed the rivers, some died along the way, people can die along the river valleys. Mountains have lions in them. That mountain, *!Haoros*, has lions in it. Beware. We live with lions; it is how it is.

The Sesfontein rainmen had a particular means of diagnosis I have not encountered in any other Khoisan context or literature. This entailed the sick person secretly going in the night to the rainman’s house and securing to the outside wall either some money wrapped in a cloth, \$5.00 Namibian was suggested, or tying something else there of value, like clothing. The object or money is called an *anib*. With the *anib* secretly secured the rainman asleep inside the hut will, according to Abraham, wake up or, as other rainmen remarked, remain sleeping. Regardless the *anib*, being ‘a kind of ancestor or spirit’ talks to the rainman and tells him what is wrong with the person and how it should be treated.

One man described this state of knowing as *!gom*, a strong or heavy feeling.³³ The following day the sick person will come to the rainman's house and he will tell them what should be done and what the cause of the illness is. The *anib* only functions if it is attached to the side of the house that works with the rainspirit. Andreas suggested this was the north side where the rain came from. Abraham said it was 'the side of sunrise' that worked. The idea of the *anib* may be related to that of a bird, *anib*, as a messenger with the world of //Gamab, although this was not a connection I heard from rainmen.

The lack of popular and academic knowledge regarding rainmen and the *arus* may have something to do with its association in the minds of some members of the Christian church with witchcraft. The Sesfontein Pastor hinged his rejection of the *arus* and rainmen, which he was not keen to admit existed, on two factors; firstly, that people exploited the vulnerable for money and secondly, that the dancing and the drum led to accusations of blame. The Pastor proposed that the *arus* and rainmen were like 'witchdoctors' who he said were 'not in our culture, they are especially Herero who do it for cattle. It then expanded to other cultures'.³⁴

The Pastor seemed able to accept certain 'traditions' but not others. He denigrated the *arus* and rainmen for not being Damara and labelled them witchcraft. This conflicted with the opinion of all the other Damara I spoke to, who asserted strongly that the rainmen and the *arus* was not the same thing as witchdoctors. The Pastor was happy to accept that there were some sicknesses which God had given the Damara and Nama the ability to treat through massage. These especially included stomach, heart and neck problems. Massaging babies was also a particular Damara / Nama speciality. The Pastor's recognition of these skills may have reflected a new idiom of respectability of traditional treatments. The ability to treat, the Pastor believed, was granted through prayer or came from dreams:

There are people who have dreams; sometimes they tell no one, but the dream comes and comes again. It becomes a reality. Sometimes it is misused to make money. Dreaming people realise they can make money. If people are born with the vellum [Afrikaans for caul], the thing covering your whole body, you are special. My father, the Pastor here before me, would treat people, but he limited it to his family because it was against the church. St. Paul said you must massage with oil. Because of this my father would treat his family.³⁵

The Pastor's father was evidently not confident enough to massage people within the community. He, like his son, was clearly torn between church and 'tradition'. The Pastor continued to relate how he spits on his hands and massages children and talks to the ancestors. I asked him whether the ancestors could make people sick and he replied:

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If your relationship with someone is bad, the old people cause sickness...running and talking in your sleep. If you talk to them it is okay. It is like if you go to an area without a gift there will be trouble. Like the place on the road to Purros. There are certain areas of Sesfontein where you must talk to people and bring things. If you go somewhere and come back the elders spit water at you and ask the ancestors to welcome you back.

I asked the Pastor if his praying and massage was like faith healing. He replied:

These things are different. They confuse things, they can make money out of it, later they are witchdoctors. The old people wanted two things. First they wanted to make people happy. Then they wanted money. This is the new desire, maybe the last twenty years. In the old days people did not ask, now they want to make money. Witchdoctors are not in our culture. Sometimes someone visits you in the evening, the naked people. Through that action money comes. They do not harm, but there are always accidents in your house, marks on your body. It is a South African thing, Alexandria medical company.

The more I talked to the Pastor the more apparent it was that his Christianity was sitting uneasily alongside his cultural convictions. The problem with the rainmen and the *arus*, wherein they alone of the many cultural beliefs concerning healing represented witchcraft, seemed to lie partly in the lead the Lutheran Church had tried to take against charlatan healers and witchdoctors. In 1992 the Lutheran Church held a workshop in Windhoek in co-operation with the African Eagles Traditional Healers Association. The meeting gathered together 'faith healers', herbalists and 'witchdoctors' with the aim of establishing guidelines for the church as to which healers they could support. The Pastor reported that the meeting was not a success, the church was disappointed and all the delegation left except for five South African herbalists.

Perhaps the Pastors association of the *arus* with witchdoctors said something about a changing *arus* or changes within rainmen. 'We are a money people' Suro would remind me at regular intervals. As the 'people who dream' and massage had started to ask for money, so too had the rainmen. This might have encouraged the Pastor to bracket them with other healers who seem to operate entirely for profit. But the Pastor was of the opinion that 'the dancing and clapping are bad because someone is blamed, they are accusing. They use drums. Maybe there is some kind of power. This causes division'.³⁶

Namibian witchdoctors often practice through gatherings which have strong resemblances to the *arus*, in as much as they bring singing and clapping people together, often around a fire and at night, and the witchdoctor goes into a trance and shouts or leaps quite wildly and unpredictably around the

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³⁶ 44

proceedings. I witnessed one such occasion near Uis and heard of many others. Many members of the Pastor's Lutheran church outside Sesfontein would know of witchdoctors, but relatively few probably know much about Damara *arus*. Most would consequently view the *arus* from a superficial perspective, and consider it very much as a witchdoctor event. Accordingly, if the Pastor was seen to support the *arus*, and by implication rainmen, he would be placing himself in a very difficult position, on side with the witchdoctors. This might be a further reason for the Pastor's antipathy towards the *arus*. Another again might be a longer tension between local ceremonies and churches attempting to provide an alternative. Rather than face examination of his beliefs and culture, it is easier for the Pastor to show outward hostility to the *arus* and to protect his continued belief in Damara gifts of massage and dreaming and ancestors. I suspect his father and the Damara Pastors before him, similarly moved secretly and uncomfortably between their different positions.

Hai//om Healers and Healing Dances:

The Man with his own Story can Dance his own Dance

Locating Hai//om healers was not easy, although I suspect a significant number operate both on white owned farms and in community farming areas. I witnessed dances in three regions, Mangetti, Tsintsabis and near Outjo. The dances resembled both Damara and Bushmen performances. Hai//om singing bares much closer similarity to that of other Bushmen than Damara, although, unlike the Ju/'hoan and like the Damara, Hai//om often beat wooden sticks in addition to clapping. Some dancing very much resembled Ju/'hoan, involving large groups of singers and dancers. Other dances were reminiscent of accounts of Hottentot dances recorded in the nineteenth century. They involved just one or two healers who were accompanied by singing and clapping family members. These dances were performed in a defined 'yard' area at the entrance to the dancer's hut.

Dancing style tended towards individuals making small stamping and shuffling movements and moving randomly around the central fire. Dancers bedecked themselves in colourful beaded headbands, necklaces and bead loops worn diagonally across the torso. Sickness was removed from the patient's body by sucking at the site of the problem, or through absorption by pressing the head, hands or beads onto the defined region. Once removed the sickness was placed into bead pouches strung round the healer's neck, to be buried after the dance. One healer pressed a pouch firmly to my forehead. After a few seconds he removed it and pulled out a small stone from within. He informed

me the stone removed from my forehead was responsible for my bad luck. Fly whisks are swished across sites of illness in order to align sickness for easier removal. The healers I observed going into ‘trance’ did so in a manner that emphasised bodily rigidity far more so than other Khoisan groups. Helpers were required to massage a healer’s ‘spastic’ limbs and chest back into life.

Some healers only suck illness during a dance. Others perform a more generalised and commercialised service, offering a ‘checking’ service in addition to sucking, in which they diagnose problems by asking their *augukhoe*, defenders. There seems some overlap in the use of this word between ideas of defenders and dead people. They might also massage sickness and provide plant and animal remedies.

Salinde !Nawases of Tsintsabis,³⁷ who is half !Kung and half Hai//om, described herself as a *!gaia*, ‘a witchdoctor, but not a witchdoctor to magic someone, but one to make them healthy’. A similar meaning of the word occurs in Ju’hoan. *N/um !gais* is a person with medicine.³⁸ She is alternatively known as a *xoma*. She knows that the !Kung, Hai//om and Ovambo all *machite* one another because they are jealous. For \$50.00 she will diagnose a problem by ‘playing’ with the *//gabas*. Her father gave her her *//gabas* by dancing with her when she was young. It is her defenders: *!ura, //ab, !nans, tsaba*³⁹ that tell her what sickness to remove. For \$100 she will ‘clean’ your body. Weak sickness she removes by sucking. For difficult sicknesses she rubs her hands or beads on the area. If she diagnoses chest pain, whole body pain or AIDS, she prescribes a decoction of the *!hoa!hub* plant.

Off the road between Outjo and Kamanjab lives a 53 years old, partially blind, *xoma aob*, Paul ≠Hawabeb. Paul charges \$30 to check and \$60 if he can help. Paul has made a number of small bead tapestries. He uses these tapestries to ‘read’, or communicate with his */gais*, to find out what sickness is present. Paul sometimes referred to */gais* as *//gawas*, which Suro translated as ‘rain devils’. His wife suggested he could give me some healing ability, although it would be painful. She referred to this as *//gâmas*, which she said was the same as *//gabas*, elaborating that Hai//om in Outjo mostly call it */gaiga*.

I observed Paul treat a young Damara woman. He first read his beads, talking as he did so with the */gais*. He then rubbed a small bead tapestry on the woman’s throat and sucked briefly at her back where ‘something black was sitting that was taking her luck and money’. After the sucking, which lasted only about a minute, Paul sat down. He looked distracted and briefly waved his hands at the air.

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³⁹ I did not ascertain a clear translation of these except for *//ab*, bat-eared fox.

He was agitated. He saw the spirits he was taking out of the woman going to his house. He proclaimed to the air: 'If you come here I will get a gun and shoot you'. A moment later he returned his attention to the woman and told her the cause of her problems: 'a lady at home who makes noises in the roof at night...it is a naked woman'. He announced that his spirit told him the woman had sores on her leg. With this, the young woman, whose legs had been entirely covered by an ankle length skirt and high boots since she arrived, lifted the skirt from one of her legs to reveal the entire limb covered in small red sores. Paul was not surprised. The woman asked Paul if it was a woman or man that *machited* her and what colour they were. He replied, 'it is a woman, a /ō/khābe, a naked woman'. Paul declared that by treating the woman he would send the power back to the woman who was causing the trouble. The *machiting* woman was sleeping with her husband. The *machite* was working on his patient's *sinawee* (Afrikaans, 'senuwee') and was the cause of a heart problem and the woman's sores. He added, it was the naked woman who put human faeces in his patient's house. The woman confirmed that she knew the *machiting* woman and she had heard things in the night at her house. Paul concluded the session by stressing that after three months the sores might break out again and kill her. This was possibly preventable if they performed a /*gais*, healing dance, for her.

Paul treated most problems except 'the new ones', AIDS and cancer. If he diagnosed these, he suggested treatment by a medical doctor. He was generally reluctant to treat people because he had missed the 1992 workshop in Windhoek when many healers were given certificates to treat people. He thought that as he had no certificate, if his patients told the authorities, he might be sent to jail.

Paul's story of how he became a healer is rich and typical of much that I heard. At the basis of his account is a relationship between Paul and the lightning that gave him the //*gawa* which is reminiscent of Barnard's Nharo healers having *g//aua* attach themselves to their internal organs. Additionally Paul's epiphany involved interaction with a lion, an animal of considerable significance to Khoisan peoples, as it is to so many other Africans. Rather than reconstruct Paul's story, I feel there is value in presenting my notes 'raw'. This unfiltered narrative of an interview involving Suro, myself and Paul, demonstrates how these two Khoisan articulated and translated Paul's very Khoisan experience into English. The section of interview presented below followed on from Paul relating how he dealt with the pain that came from treating difficult things, the 'tokolosie kind of things, the *machite* and the people who order Alexandria medicines, South African kind of things':

Suro: When he get sick or when he not feeling well then that devils help him.
C.L.: What kind of devils?

A: When he looks after the goats in the field that lightning always throw him away, the lightning always struck at his body and throw him away and sometimes he saw the things; he get mad and then he run away, it is now the way of that things.

Q: Is this how he started treating people?

A: Yes.

Q: How many times has he been struck by lightning?

A: It was near the house the lightning struck him and he falling down and he says 'what is going on with the rain'; he struck something there and then he stays. The second time he is in the field the lightning struck and the rain falling and he can't go to the house and he sit under the tree and that lightning took him out and he falling down and he say 'what is going on?' and he stays at his own and he walks for the white person and he start frightening that white person and when he came he leave the goats there and he stand far away.

Q: Because he was frightening the white person?

A: Yes, the things start now, and then he goes to his friends and they said no.

Q: Said no...

A: Yes, and then he went to that Ovambo man and that Ovambo man telled him to go to these things who making these things.

Q: What things?

A: Opening, the things we started with.

Q: Where did he go for this opening?

A: He went to Tsumkwe, to the !Kung bushman. But those people were singing another way but they can't help him, they just opening him there and he dancing there.

Q: How did they do this opening?

A: When they help someone, when you dance with those people they say, okay you have to do those things like this. Now another time when he was not helping those people, he was living in the field and just running as he wants to, mad, and there is something making a sound into his ears. But those things went and when he dance with them they show you how to do the things, and when you dancing on your own then you see the things.

Q: And does he use a drum?

A: Just clapping hands, not the drum.

Q: Is it only lightning that starts this thing off or can it begin in another way?

A: You can't get that spirit; there must be things that give you that spirit and it is only the rain and he has got only...he go through many things. When he lost in the field the lion he bring him to the house.

Q: A lion?

A: Yes a lion.

Q: And this is because of the rain spirit in him?

A: Yes.

Q: And does the rain spirit go into him... so he has got some rain spirit in him?

A: Yes, now the spirit of the rain, inside your body there is some of the things like liver, now they touch onto those things.

Q: And it is there all the time?

A: Yes.

Q: How long ago did this happen to him?

A: Before the lightning struck him, the lion, when he lost in the field the lion bring him to the house, before the lightning, and then the other start but that time he was young?

Q: Could he tell me about this lion?

A: When he saw the lion he doesn't want the lion, but the lion he come and push him with his head, and he so frightened he just crying, and later he get the mind and he say 'why can't I just follow him' and he follow him. Also the lion he wants Paul at his tail, but he didn't want to, and he crying but he pushed him and then he get the mind and he say 'why should I have to follow him?'

Q: Was he lost?
A: Yes he was.
Q: And the lion took him back to his house?
A: Yes.
Q: How old was he?
A: He was young.
Q: Teenager?
A: Maybe...
Q: Where was this?
A: In that district of Outjo, in that district there is no lion but when he lost the lion bring him to the house.
Q: Was this a normal lion or a special lion?
A: Yes it was a lion. [normal]
Q: Do people sometimes take the shape of animals?
A: Yes some people change, he is the one who can't change into the animals but the lion self just brought him to the house.
Q: Did his father or mother have these experiences, or his grandparents?
A: His grandfather and his father also has that kind of things also to treat the people.
Q: Is it a good thing to have?
A: It is not good, but now his work is very hard, he don't have the way to go, he does not agree with those things, it is very hard.
Q: Is this given by god?
A: Yes, the god gave that kind of mind, spirit experience.

There are a number of interesting points to be pulled out of this interview segment. This excerpt demonstrates the run of so much of my interview material as narratives of truth. Suro's translation represents a fluid acceptance of what Paul tells her. She feels no need to question what has happened to this man, this is simply his story. It may be entirely different from anyone else's story but it is his. As it is, it is not so different. Regardless, whatever possibilities it presents in terms of what someone thinks or what has happened to them, these, Suro views, as real possibilities. It is not normal to question them 'objectively'. Everything tells us something.

On the other side of the event, Paul presents us with a selected narrative of what has happened to him in his life and how he has made sense of it. What he reveals is that the white man from whom he sought help, following his lightning incident, had nowhere to put his experience or state of being. An Ovambo man by contrast recognised that Paul was undergoing or being invited to undergo a transformation. Perhaps because many contemporary Hai//om spend their lives on white owned farms and the farm owners have discouraged 'traditional' practices,⁴⁰ it seems that Paul did not have immediate access to a Hai//om network of healers that could recognise and help him with his condition. The idea of a ritual and training being required following certain types of personal

⁴⁰ Informants reported that many farmers would not allow dancing round fires and strongly discouraged the use of certain bush remedies.

experience was however familiar to another African Namibian. All over Namibia the !Kung are known for their ability to change into animals and to dance and heal. Conceptually what Paul knew of !Kung behaviour must have seemed familiar enough for him to feel that they were the right people to help him. It seems that Paul knew he must be opened through dance and song, perhaps because these things happened to his father and grandfather, but his experience with the !Kung was not quite right. They could 'open him' but their dancing and singing did not work well for him. Consequently he now dances his own steps. His movement from Hai//om to Bushman illustrates the extent of the proximity of the two peoples. His creativity is indicative of the room in Khoisan culture for the individual. The man with his own story can dance his own dance.

Although there are differences between rainmen and Bushmen healers, the similarities are striking. Not only do Damara dances appear to be variants upon a Bushmen theme but, more significantly, there seems very considerable overlap of the ideas upon which Bushmen and Damara dances, and healing more broadly, are founded. Even aspects of rainmen behaviour that initially may look unfamiliar can be recognised within the historical and contemporary Khoisan context. As we saw in the previous chapter, lightning, for instance, which is so important to rainmen, seemed to play a similar role, also associated with a heavenly bird, amongst the //Xegwi Bushmen from the eastern Transvaal.⁴¹ Divining is something that rainmen also practice that might also initially look 'un-Bushman'. Divining has however long been observed amongst bushmen, although it tends to involve throwing oracular bones as opposed to examining carcasses.⁴² Close examination of rainmen and Hai//om healers supports the notion of cultural homogeneity and fleshes out the wider parameters of the Khoisan healing world, within which Bushmen shaman are at one end of the spectrum.

⁴¹ Potgieter cited by Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p. 86.

⁴² Dornan, *Pygmies*, p. 155; Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 89.

Chapter V

Ideas and Practice

This chapter attempts to identify patterns of practice or ways of thinking that may be considered, if not a Khoisan medical system, a distinctive Khoisan nexus or web of medical behaviour. Drawing heavily on my fieldwork, I provide details of key Khoisan ideas concerning health and illness and examples of a number of treatment strategies for particular illnesses. I explore the relationship of these ideas and practices to issues of change and continuity, with direct and indirect reference to notions of core principles and medical pluralism. The chapter ends with an examination of health issues in relation to a Khoisan notion of 'old time' and 'new time'. Many Khoisan frame their experience of life within these expressions. Examining health issues through this framework brings out different types of personal, community and regional Khoisan experiences over time. Where appropriate, I particularly engage with Khoisan ideas and responses relating to primary health concerns of the colonial and post-colonial periods, particularly: malaria, smallpox, tuberculosis, venereal disease and AIDS.

Throughout the thesis I have questioned the validity of approaching Khoisan material through Western categories of analysis, principally: natural, supernatural, witchcraft, bleeding, cupping, inoculation or vaccination. Whilst such categories of enquiry may provide a way into Khoisan material, by using them, historians and anthropologists risk an inherent danger of searching for the familiar and missing the specific. By moving away from these categories and examining issues of Khoisan health in a wider local social and environmental context, it becomes possible to discern patterns of Khoisan strategies which are distinctive from those of burgeoning and realised biomedicine. As a means of relating practice to change, there is some value in equating visible persistent patterns of Khoisan medicine with core principles, along the lines explored by Janzen and Prins. In identifying core principles one must, however, remain cautious not to confuse these features with a notion of isolated, almost pre-contact, Khoisan culture.

Amongst anthropologists of Bushmen, the idea of persistent core principles predicated in hunter-gatherer life is well supported. Even the 'revisionist' Wilmsen acknowledges continuity in Bushmen cosmology and consequently social relations over a very long history into the archaeological past.⁴³ My research suggests that there is very considerable homogeneity in terms of health related issues between many Nama and Damara and Bushmen who have been thought of by anthropologists, such as

⁴³ E. Wilmsen, 'Of Paintings and Painters, in terms of Zu/hoasi Interpretations', in Rainer Vossen and Klaus Keuthmann (eds.), *Contemporary Studies on Khoisan*, QFK 5.2 (Hamburg, 1986), p. 358.

Lee, Biesele and Guenther, as more or less isolated. As previously considered, even by the early decades of the twentieth century little was thought to be left of 'Hottentot' culture and Marks, Carstens, Dederig and, in a Namibian context, Lau, have since been active in promoting notions of longstanding deep acculturation of Khoi society. Homogeneity between Bushmen and Namibian Khoi suggests notions of deep Khoi cultural change may have been overlaid, at least in a Namibian context.

I have not been able to do anymore than draw attention to some apparent parallels between Khoisan and Bantu speakers health strategies, but there is much to suggest that the extent and longevity of the relationship between Khoisan and Bantu should not be underestimated. Similarities between Khoisan, African and other 'traditional' cultures also suggest Khoisan culture shares regional features.

Ways of Thinking

Language

A number of ethnographers have looked towards language as a point of entry into the Khoisan mind. Whilst Bleek provides the most notable example of this approach, owing partly to their more practical experience of Khoisan life, Theophilus Hahn, Barnard and Silberbauer have more interesting things to say regarding what language study can tell us about underlying factors and concepts of Khoisan medicine. A number of distinctive features of Khoisan medicine begin to become apparent through the consideration of language. These key ideas can be boiled down to three features: association between phenomena; transference of characteristics or potency; subsequent transformation of individuals.

Hahn observed the Hottentot language had 'an agglutinative peculiarity'⁴⁴ wherein related ideas run through derivative roots and suffixes serve further to develop the root idea into an abstracted meaning. Whilst this process is hardly unique, it is through identifying and understanding the specific abstracted links that Khoisan medicine can begin to be understood.

From a number of examples, Hahn provided us with the following words that he proposed demonstrated ideological continuity in Khoi thought:

/au.b, snake; */au.b*, blood; */au.s*, fountain; */au*, to bleed; */au*, to flow; */au*, to bear ill-feeling; */avi* (from */avi* to stream) to rain; */ava*, red⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 30.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

The link between these words lies in both Khoisan experience of shared properties - principally in these examples notions of flowing movement and colour - and the apparently universal characteristic of humans using the familiar as a conceptual template for the unfamiliar. How Khoisan make associations between different phenomena depends not only on experience in a broad sense, but on their spheres of concern and invested interest. Lee addressed the question of how Ju/'hoan accommodate the unfamiliar by asking some Ju/'hoan to name as many parts of a truck as they could. Lee identified that the vocabulary of their truck description was assembled from several familiar areas – anatomy, dress and hunting technology. The Ju/'hoan named the whole truck *do*, which means metal but is also the same word used for tin cans. This is indicative of Ju/'hoan ways of recognising equivalence. Although the Ju/'hoan description provided little detail, and this may say something about their engagement with Lee's request, at another level it says something deeper about relative importance of the event, priority and the construction of knowledge. What broadly seems apparent is that Khoisan peoples have very detailed tracks of knowledge but they cannot be easily superimposed on Western thought roads. Many things are known, and the things anthropologists are looking for are often known, but the details are tied to unfamiliar associations.

In 1992 Barnard made an observation similar to Hahn's regarding the nature of Khoe languages. Barnard observed that, unlike languages of Northern and Southern Bushman, Khoe has 'an in-built morphological facility for abstract expression'. He gives the examples *khoe*, meaning person, *khoesi* meaning friendly and *khoeaxis* meaning kindness.⁴⁶ Following essentially the same line of analysis, the point can be emphasised by elaborating on Hahn's above example. Hence, */audâu* Haacke lists as 'flow (of spring); reduce to a trickle (of: subsiding river); (fig.) stream/water/weep (of: eyes)'. */Aumû.s* is a noun for an eye and an opening of spring.⁴⁷

Despite Barnard noting that !Kung and other 'isolating' languages do not make abstracted constructions like Khoe, there is much to suggest in Lee's example of a truck that Ju/'hoan make associational links like Khoe speakers, which are revealed in the way they use their vocabulary. Stopa points to the non-existence of difference between verb and noun meaning in certain Bushman languages, such as */na* meaning both 'a head' and 'to see'. Stopa suggests, similarly to Barnard, that this represents a weak linguistic ability to abstract.⁴⁸ Whilst linguistically this may be true, such multiple uses of words seems to be expressing a similar way of thinking to that I outlined earlier

⁴⁶ Barnard, *Hunters and Herders*, p.256.

⁴⁷ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 52.

⁴⁸ Stopa, *Structures of Bushman*, p. 43-4.

regarding Khoe speakers and as demonstrated in Khoe usage of nouns and verbs such as ‘a knee’ and ‘kneeing’, as a way of understanding walking.

Although San languages may not demonstrate an agglutinative proclivity for abstraction, Silberbauer identified a San propensity for abstraction in the relative complexity of /Gwi noun structure. /Gwi nouns, Silberbauer observed, allow versatility of meaning and the possibility that different objects in the natural environment share the same noun stem. He elaborated that:

this indicates an awareness of, or at least a concept of, the relationships between objects that are named by the same noun stem and their ability to have some contrasting qualities when accorded different genders.⁴⁹

He continued:

The absence of any structural distinction of human versus nonhuman and animate versus inanimate and the existence of two genders of equal status, indicate that all objects are considered to have a measure of similarity. Even if it might make cultural nonsense, it would be structurally possible to express the idea that a stone might possess some of the characteristics of a man, that is, the language permits exploration of this concept. Consequently, the language permits free comparisons, the formation of analogies, and the expression of the isomorphism of systems.⁵⁰

Despite differences in language construction, examination of Khoe and San language and its use points to a particular shared associational way of understanding the world. This way of thinking provides the cornerstones of Khoisan concepts of the body and illness. At an obvious level this way of thinking is played out in such Khoisan understandings as, for instance, red plants become healing plants because they share ‘redness’ with blood or ostrich leg tendons being tied to human legs by Damara to treat leg stiffness. A further example is evident in the Khoe word *dom.mi*, which means throat, voice and river.⁵¹

It is difficult determining how conscious this process of association is as levels must almost certainly vary between individuals. Pastor Eiseb, co-author of the Khoekhoegowab dictionary, told me in answer to my enquiry regarding whether Damara people had names for different blood vessels, that the blood vessels were like a river that splits into many paths and when it reaches certain places it is named according to the area. The artery at the radial pulse, for instance, is called *!om !arab khu*, which breaks

⁴⁹ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 132.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 9.

down into *!om*, to escape from a burrow,⁵² *!arab*, aorta or main bed of river⁵³ and *khu*, a variant of *≠khuru.b* meaning blood vessel.⁵⁴ His assistant further suggested that Damara had detailed names for other parts of the body, including the nerve supply and the chambers of the human heart. No other Khoisan I encountered knew of words for such details. Khoisan I met did not have very diverse names for different parts of the body nor for different types of sickness.

Silberbauer observed in relation to the G/wi that ‘mammalian anatomical terms and physiological processes are equated with those of man’.⁵⁵ Barnard similarly noted the Nharo shared use of anatomical terms between animals and humans. My analysis of Damara animal / human anatomical correlation suggests that for the Damara at least much of their interpretation of human anatomy is drawn from their knowledge of domestic and stock animal anatomy, particularly the goat. This was particularly evident in Damara and many other Khoisan specifying that the liver sits in the centre of the upper abdomen, the position a goat liver appears in when a goat is strung up and gutted. There are, however, known differences between the goat and the human: the goat not having an *!arab*⁵⁶ being a principle example. Other Khoisan peoples emphasised that they cannot know what is inside the human body, they do not cut them open. Only the healers can see.⁵⁷ For most Khoisan their anatomical knowledge would seem to be derived from practical experience of handling and encountering animal carcasses, observation of healthy and sick live animals and human beings, received knowledge from elders and observations of healers.

In relation to Nharo plant use, Barnard identified that Nharo thoughts are, ‘based to a greater extent on use value, as well as on such factors as size and structural similarity, and even on metonymic association’.⁵⁸ He further suggested:

a case could be made with the extensionist premise that there exists a focal sense, which may or may not be perceived intuitively, but which is useful as a formal device. Thus the focal meaning of *≠aro* might be defined as body, in which sense it can refer to the torso of an animal, the trunk of a tree, or the storage root of a plant⁵⁹

⁵² Ibid., p.94

⁵³ Ibid., p.93.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p.122.

⁵⁵ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 68.

⁵⁶ Whilst the *!arab* equates to the palpable aortic artery in humans, this distinction seems differently made in goats.

⁵⁷ 39, 50, 94.

⁵⁸ Barnard, ‘Some Aspects of Nharo Ethnobotany’, p. 69.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 72.

For most Khoisan, I suspect relationships visible in words are, most of the time, active at a level more of practice than conscious thought. If a new situation requires an explanation or name for something, this might be a time when associational ideas come more to the forefront of a person's mind.

In addition to language indicating associations Khoisan make between phenomena, there is some evidence of a more direct relationship between language and environment. Across all the Khoisan groups I studied it is known that if a bird flies over a baby and the shadow falls on the baby's head, the child can become sick and die.⁶⁰ A Ju/'hoan woman at Nhoma referred to this illness as *tsaba /kae*.⁶¹ Lee similarly identified the phenomena amongst the Dobe !Kung, who referred to 'bird sickness', *tsama*.⁶² The Hai//om called the bird //gores or *gori anis* (gori bird).⁶³ A !Kung woman described that the bird makes a 'koo' noise and it is because of that noise that people say the bird will //gou the child, a word she explicitly related to the noise of the bird.⁶⁴ Similarly a Hai//om woman described that the bird will !goe a child.⁶⁵ Barnard lists *g!oo* as a name Nharo use for the korhaan (*Eupodotis kori*).⁶⁶ These examples suggest that the word used for the action of illness causation is onomatopoeic.⁶⁷ Both Nharo and Hai//om, as far apart as Blaiberg and Mangetti, also used a plant, named //gori and //goro, respectively, to treat chest problems - such as those instigated by the //gori bird. This demonstrates the naming of a plant in relationship to what the plant is perceived to do. The same process is evident in a plant used to treat the Nama Dama sickness //autas, which is simply called //autas haib, meaning //autas plant or stick.

Just as a simple description of a plant or a plant's utility suffices for regional Khoisan plant identification, so too descriptions and actions serve for reference to illness. Khoisan peoples I interviewed all referred to sickness in relation to the part of the body affected or to an action induced. At its most fundamental Khoisan nosology accordingly consists of such illnesses as head sickness, chest sickness or leg sickness. In Khoekhoegowab, for example, *!nāb* means stomach, innards and diarrhoea. With the suffix *hî*, which is the verb 'to do', *!nāhî* means literally 'to do the stomach' or to have diarrhoea. 'Head' in Khoe is *danas*. With the suffix *tsûb*, meaning pain, it becomes *danatsûb* or headache. Similarly, stomach pain is *!nātsûb*. With a different suffix //ōb meaning chronic illness or death, *!nā//ōb* means stomach or abdominal sickness. While these labels seem straightforward enough

⁶⁰ The Kite is said to do this amongst many southern African peoples

⁶¹ 95

⁶² Lee cited by Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung*, p. 44.

⁶³ 56, 57, 59; pied crow Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 12.

⁶⁴ 99

⁶⁵ 54

⁶⁶ Barnard, *Nharo Wordlist*, p.43.

⁶⁷ See for further discussion of this idea D. Abram, *The Spell of the Sensuous* (New York, 1997), pp. 137 ff.

and follow familiar English constructions, in terms of explicitly identifying details regarding specific sicknesses, this is nearly always as far as a specific Khoisan label will go.

Although Khoisan use very generalised terms for illness this does not mean, however, that closer distinctions are not made between the characteristics of different types of illness and their appropriate treatment. For instance, on questioning many of my informants distinguished types of cough. For a non-stop cough with phlegm William Touxab, a Hai//om man, suggests drinking half a cup, morning and evening, of a decoction made with hot water and the root of the *garise* plant. He suggested the decoction can also be taken if someone is thinking bad thoughts about you and makes your throat feel like something is moving up and down in it.⁶⁸ Drinking a decoction of particular parts of a plant, often the roots in hot water, is probably the most common form of medication amongst Khoisan communities. Other Hai//om specified that they used a decoction of *!urob* to treat children who have a cough with an itchy throat.⁶⁹ A Damara woman suggested taking a decoction of the *≠hanab* plant for a dry cough.⁷⁰

In Katatura a Damara woman described how when she was young she had massaged her dying younger brother. She had used first the kidney of the *//ab* (bat eared fox) and then her own urine, both common traditional medical ingredients. She described that as she massaged him he coughed white mucus and passed green stools.⁷¹ The nature of excretions is often observed by Khoisan and used as a determining factor in an appropriate treatment strategy. Diarrhoea is often distinguished as being with or without blood. One woman in Maltahöe used decoction of *≠gan* for normal diarrhoea and drank goat blood or a decoction made from warm water and the red strands of bark from the Acacia tree for bloody diarrhoea.⁷² Nama and Damara women made particular references to bad smelling diarrhoea and babies with green stools or diarrhoea.⁷³

Despite the lack of specific labels attributed to different types of illness and to the plants used to treat them, treatment regimes can be very particular and involve far more consideration and activation of knowledge than might at first seem indicated. A Ju/'hoan man, Boo Saakambanda, for example, specified that he drinks a scratched off part of the root of *!nunhum*, cooked in water, to treat chest pain. If it is a new pain he drinks it for four days, three times a day and by the fifth day he is better. If he has had the chest pain for a long period, he begins by drinking a decoction of *//how* bark in warm water for

⁶⁸ 53

⁶⁹ 52

⁷⁰ 30

⁷¹ 22

⁷² 29

⁷³ 7, 19, 21, 22, 23, 24, 33

three days, three times a day, and on the fourth day switches to *!nunhum*, which he drinks for four days. Boo also uses *!nunhum* to treat whole body pain, a common Khoisan affliction that he knows is caused by the dead people. For whole body pain with head ache, he takes the roots of the plants *Chway chwayah*, *Ch aha*, *Tui Zah* and *G!ouree*, cooks them in a pot, puts the pot between his legs, covers the pot and himself with a blanket and allows the steam that comes from the pot to go into him. This again is a common form of Khoisan treatment. Boo does this four times a day. Whilst it is tempting to think of this as a familiar inhalation treatment, Boo knows that it is the smell of all the plants that takes out the sickness and the smell enters him through the holes at the base of his body hairs.⁷⁴

It is difficult to gauge the relationship of Boo's treatment regime, involving a specific number of treatments per day, to Boo's familiarity with regimes prescribed for clinic medicines. He said he had been going to the clinic in Tsumkwe since it opened in the 1960s. He would try the clinic medicines if he has no success with his plant remedies. He 'just knows' how much and when to drink his own remedies.

The Broader Picture

Heart, Soul, Breath, Blood, Wind and Potency

In 1906 Dennet expressed a popular turn of the century conception regarding 'primitive' thought when he observed that many African peoples used the same word for breath, shadow, ghost and soul.⁷⁵ In Khoekhoegowab we find: */om*, to breathe, */om.mi*, breath, */om soul*.⁷⁶ Regardless of whether or not the Khoe word for shadow, *som*, is linguistically related to */om*, a link between breath, shadow, ghost and soul exists conceptually amongst Khoi, as it does amongst Bushmen. To begin to grasp the essence of Khoisan thought, this group of ideas must be extended. Ideas of breath, soul, ghosts and possibly shadows, overlap with ideas relating to the heart, the blood, wind and potency. In essence the Khoisan link breath with the potency of life.

Silberbauer seems convinced that the G/wi think of organs in linked 'conceptualized systems eg. the cardio-vascular respiratory system and the G/wi accounts of those systems matched fairly closely of those of Europeans'. He observed that there was some variation between European and G/wi thought, in that the G/wi believe blood flows away from the heart through the veins and returns through the

⁷⁴ 94

⁷⁵ R. Dennet, *At the Back of the Black Man's Mind: Or Notes on the Kingly Office in West Africa* (London, 1906), p.

78.

⁷⁶ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 54.

arteries and that semilunate vascular valves are seen as pumps whose action is auxiliary to that of the heart.⁷⁷ None of the separate Khoisan ethnic groups I encountered talked in consistent and extensively detailed terms, such as semilunate valves, regarding systems of the body. Ideas were almost invariably fractured and inchoate. In particular none distinguished between arteries and veins. Some thought in terms of the heart as a pump but clear ideas of arterial circulation were rare and almost exclusively associated with more urbanised Khoe speakers. A number of Nama and Damara thought that the *!arab* (aortic artery) pumps in addition to the heart and not because of it.⁷⁸ Many members from all the Khoisan groups knew the anterior fontanel, or soft 'hole' at the front of a baby's head, also pumps on its own initiative. In the light of my findings, the level of G/wi understanding Silberbauer encountered seems rather exceptional or at least unusually systematic.

Guenther has presented details regarding Nharo ideas of the human body and its function. Like Silberbauer, he has interpreted his findings systematically and in a manner that suggests greater consistency and understanding than was apparent amongst my informants. Guenther noted that the heart is thought of as the central organ that houses most of the soul, *≠i*. The heart provides the key organs with blood, */ao*, and the blood carries the soul. The brain is the thinking function of *≠i*, and gives power to the heart to think. Guenther postulates that germinal thoughts are formed in the heart, which go to the brain. The brain returns the thoughts, more fully formed, back to the heart to be pumped via the blood to activate the body.⁷⁹ Similarly to Guenther's findings, Lebzelter observed that the *!Kung* thought the heart the seat of life and conceptualized breath in connection with the heart.⁸⁰

In some respects Guenther's rather rationalised circuit of understanding can be taken to represent ideas of other Khoisan. A related comment from one of my informants indicates the level of detail I typically encountered: 'it is the blood that tells our arms and legs to move' (Nama).⁸¹ Many Khoisan, if asked the purpose of blood, will or can go no further than asserting such observations as, 'blood allows us to move, it is life, energy' (Nama);⁸² 'blood is the life, if the blood becomes cool you die' (Nama);⁸³ 'we

⁷⁷ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 68.

⁷⁸ Damara: 18, 21, 43; Nama: 23, 31, 34, 36, 37.

⁷⁹ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 243.

⁸⁰ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenenkulturen*, p.43.

⁸¹ 37

⁸² 23

⁸³ 33

survive from blood, it is our life from the heart' (Damara);⁸⁴'blood runs in the body to give us energy to work' (Hai//om).⁸⁵

In Khoisan thought blood is something that carries life. It is important because when it drains out of an injured beast, or a car accident victim,⁸⁶ the body dies. Similarly, if your blood becomes cold you die and when blood does not move you cannot work and have no energy.

No Khoisan I met had any real understanding of nerves. Some knew of them but called them by the Afrikaans derived word *senuwee*. Blood was commonly attributed with the motor function biomedicine attributes to nerves. Guenther noted for the Nharo that the strength of muscles, */xa*, is explained in terms of *≠i*, the soul, which is often thought the same as breath. Throughout the Khoisan breath is recognised as a life force of an individual organism. An alternative way of thinking about breath is like wind or, better still, as wind.

Guenther specified that *≠i* moves in the blood and provides strength. This ties into a wider recognition that wind runs in the arteries and tendons as the life and strength of a person. One Nharo man pointed to my pronounced wrist tendons and proclaimed: 'you are strong, you have much wind in your body'.⁸⁷ Guenther elaborates that different people have different *≠i*, or souls. More broadly this may be thought of as different Khoisan people and animals and plants have different wind that can be found in their blood. It can also be found particularly in their sweat or 'dirtyness', smell and urine. This wind holds the potency and, as a personal life force, the identity of an organism. Central to all aspects of Khoisan healing, including the trance dance, is the recognition that illness, as potency, as a wind, can move into and out of people. The way Khoisan relate to blood in their health strategies is as potency. This idea may help explain why Damara healing initiates drink blood. The notion that potency can be transferred into someone else is particularly clear in the Damara assertion that being with //Gamab makes blood strong.⁸⁸ Healers take in the potency of //Gamab.

⁸⁴ 43

⁸⁵ 59

⁸⁶ 22, 23

⁸⁷ 96

⁸⁸ Wagner-Robertz, MSS, 'Zauberdoktoren', 50.

The identity or potency of people is founded predominantly in the heart. At death the heart leaves the body. A Damara man told Wagner-Robertz that at burial only the bones of a person stay in the grave. With death the heart leaves the body and travels around as a ghost. The best evidence for this, she was told, is that in a grave one only finds bones and sand. The heart of a human that became a ghost, 'goes to half heaven and travels around there'.⁸⁹ Amongst the !Kung Lorna Marshall identified the belief that at death *ǀGao !na* (big or great *ǀGao*) takes the heart, blood and spirit of the dead and hangs them in a tree over a smoking pot of medicines, thereby transforming the deceased into a *//gauwa*, one of the dead people.⁹⁰ In death the dead people maintain their heart. As the heart is the centre of their wind or spirit they therefore maintain their wind.

Wind of the dead people is a primary explanation of illness across all the groups I studied. A Ju/'hoan man called this *//Gaua ma*, or *//Gaua* wind.⁹¹ In a similar way that living people fire arrows of potency, or stare or smile or simply pass by living people and make them ill, so too can dead people. The Cape /Xam had a belief that sickness could be caused by certain animals passing behind a person and additionally that *!Giten*, medicine men, could cause sickness by staring at a person.⁹² In the previous example of a bird's shadow causing sickness, informants related, on further questioning, that it was the wind of the bird that caused the sickness. My Damara assistant Suro told me if a dog stares at a pregnant woman the pregnancy would abort. In the dog's stare there is an expression of intention, potency and wind.

Khoisan ideas around illness causation seem to operate at a number of levels. To translate these ideas as either natural or supernatural causes, has the danger of implying a Khoisan distinction where none necessarily exists. Silberbauer thought G/wi believed disease was caused by endogenous weakness in the patient, interaction with external factors, a pathological factor directed by the deities or simply random misfortune.⁹³ The problem with Silberbauer's factors of causation is the implication that clean distinctions between ideas can be made in Khoisan thought processes at the same junctions apparent in Western thought processes. There is undoubtedly a level at which Khoisan relate illness to 'everyday' environmental phenomena, such as chest pain and colds caused by cold and damp conditions, but even such apparently simple association is tied to wider understanding. The direction and time of year of the wind that brings the rain, for example, is of conscious significance to Khoisan, as is the disposition

⁸⁹ Ibid., MSS, '*//Gamagu, Die Ahnen*', 52.

⁹⁰ Marshall, 'Bushman Religious Beliefs', 243.

⁹¹ 83

⁹² Hewitt, *Structure*, p. 295.

⁹³ Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p. 58.

of different types of people to the 'rain wind'. For instance, Damara, Nama and Hai//om children, and particularly boys, are very vulnerable to wind, as are women around times of pregnancy.

Disease causation is often tied to social regulations. Amongst Ju/'hoan sickness can be caused by not sharing meat.⁹⁴ Cause may also be built in to more complex webs of ideas. A Nharo woman, for example, stated that if one ventures to foreign lands the foreign wind could cause sickness.⁹⁵ This environmentally centred understanding ties into a broadly held Khoisan idea that disease comes from outside a community.⁹⁶ Another obscure cause of disease is stinky meat.⁹⁷ Biomedical theory certainly provides good reason for avoiding stinky meat, as does 'instinct'. To the Khoisan however, wider conceptions of smell and potency are linked to ideas of stinky meat and sickness.

There is undoubtedly a Khoisan sense of misfortune just happening, but for many Khoisan this seems indicative of a lack of interest in certain types of questions. This could be thought of as an associational hole not plugged by analytical enquiry. Many Khoisan will plug this hole, when pushed, by referring to a supernal entity, or derivative wind, as the ultimate sources of misfortune and other events. In many cases of misfortune god, or the wind, or arrows of god, or dead people, are immediately cited as the cause. Most Khoisan I encountered readily asserted that behind everything lies the will and way of a supernal deity.

In a human being there is the normal wind, which is a gift and is synonymous with breath and life. As a life bringer this is at the same time, as one Damara woman put it, a special 'god wind'.⁹⁸ The inherent ambiguity in the idea is indicated in the Nharo and Auen use of the word //gauwa for wind,⁹⁹ which clearly relates to //Gauwa the entity and the derivative //gauwasi spirits of the dead. This wind lives in the heart and moves from there into the body. Many Khoisan seemed to equate the function of the lungs with that of the heart; both involve movement of wind. Lorna Marshall identified that the !Kung thought, 'life ≠toa, is inside the body of a person or animal, that it is put there and held there by the creator. It exists in all the vital organs in the abdomen, in blood, in the heart, lungs, throat, and mouth, and is everywhere in the head.'¹⁰⁰ It seems quite possible that what she encountered here was a variant of Khoe ≠oa, meaning wind.

⁹⁴ 94

⁹⁵ 98

⁹⁶ Harriet Ngubane noted a similar phenomenon amongst Zulu relating to ties between people, movement, land and illness; Ngubane, 'The Predicament of the Sinister Healer', in Murray Last, *The Professionalisation of African Medicine*, p. 191.

⁹⁷ 7, 65

⁹⁸ 29

⁹⁹ D. Bleek, 'The Naron', p. 25.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 242.

Numerous Nama specified that the whole body has a spirit, it is what makes a human alive, what tells a man in the veld when he is in danger. One Nama woman observed that animals have spirits, on the basis that when someone approaches them they know about it and rise up, because they ‘saw it in the wind’.¹⁰¹ For her at least the wind is the motive force that brings in information, feeds the body and enables participation in life. At the same time wind can bring, or be, illness. It is the wind of dead people that attacks people.

The idea that people and animals possess wind was recorded by Bleek amongst the /Xam. Lloyd also cites information from an earlier nineteenth century Bushman context recorded by Van Wyk. Collectively, these three nineteenth century informants had a number of ideas around wind that tie in with both my Bushman and Damara findings. The Bleek and Lloyd material relates, for instance, that Bushmen believed crying wind told of a friend dying.¹⁰² Bad information carried by wind was something Damara spoke of in Sesfontein. Like living Khoisan, nineteenth century Bushmen knew that individuals had wind and animals had wind. Personal winds could be good, warm and blow gently, or they could be cold and make other things cold, such as animals in contact with the cold person or a star stared at by them. Stars, like people, were also known to possess wind.¹⁰³ Not only did these historic Bushmen express that they possessed winds, but some additionally told of possessing rain. This is highly reminiscent of ideas of /gais I have previously covered in detail. The idea of /gais as attributes and potency crosses over into notions of wind.

Khoisan ideas of wind encompass the multi-dimensional impact the environmental phenomenon makes on hunter-gatherer and pastoralist life styles. /Xam Bushmen related how wind brought evil and could call to beasts of prey, telling them where the hunter was.¹⁰⁴ Wind allowed beasts to approach a dwelling without being heard.¹⁰⁵ Wind kills by its temperature; it makes things move although you cannot see it; it brings smells into people and takes smells out of people. Wind blows away the signs of those departed.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ 36

¹⁰² D. Bleek, ‘Belief and Customs of the /Xam Bushmen, Omens’, *Bantu Studies*, 6:4 (Dec. 1932), 330.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 338.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 331.

¹⁰⁵ Lloyd, *Short Account*, p.20.

¹⁰⁶ Bleek, *Specimens of Bushman*, p. 426.

Massage

It is with an understanding of wind in mind that one must approach many Khoisan health strategies and ideas of illness. The concept of wind ties in to Khoisan ideas of moving organs and massage. Some Khoisan specify that organs move around the body and thereby cause illness, whilst others believe that it is the wind of these organs. Amongst many Nama, Damara and Hai//om it is known that if a woman becomes cold just after giving birth, perhaps if she leaves her legs open, the wind of the uterus, or perhaps placenta, //khas ≠oab,¹⁰⁷ can rise to the chest or the head. This is probably the ‘intestines moving to the head’ sickness described by Lübbert (1901) and the ‘wind in the head’ described by Laidler (1928). Some expressed this idea as the wind of the //khas, seeing this as equivalent to the organ itself,¹⁰⁸ whilst others thought it was pain that moved. Some thought the organ could move left, right and down into the groin. If //khas ≠oab moves to the head, unless treated, a woman will become mad and die. Treatment consists of placing a warm stone or pot lid on the head of the patient and leaving it to cool. The warmth moves the ≠oab, wind, down. This treatment was known by some Ju/’hoan / !Kung.¹⁰⁹

A very common Damara and Nama massage treatment involves the *!arab* or aortic artery. The *!arab* is palpable when beating in thinner people down the midline of the abdomen. Khoekhoe translators sometimes refer to it as the ‘pumpy pumpy’. The *!arab* was known to one !Kung woman at Blaubeurg as /ui.¹¹⁰ She knew that the intestines can bend round the *!arab*, which will block wind and could cause death. Two other !Kung, living near Otavi, knew the *!arab* in the same manner as the Nama and Damara.¹¹¹ To the Nama and Damara, *!arab* problems are potentially fatal and a common cause of sickness. Problems arise when the *!arab* moves either a little bit backwards or to the side, usually the left, and possibly as far to the side as the nipple line. If the *!arab* moves, the patient may suffer loss of appetite, vomiting or diarrhoea. It causes sharp ‘sticking’ pains in the stomach and chest from ‘wind sticking’. It may pump harder and move under the heart. This will in turn affect the heart function and could consequently lead to chest pain, shortness of breath (*!huwa*) and feelings of dizziness. If it ‘stands up’ it might break and the person die. The most common cause of *!arab* problems is lifting heavy objects. Other causes are shock, lying in the wrong position, moving intestines, wind from eating and the cold.

¹⁰⁷ 21

¹⁰⁸ 19, Suro

¹⁰⁹ 63, 79, 99

¹¹⁰ 99

¹¹¹ 76

Treatment of the *!arab* is entirely by massage. Using two hands the practitioner gently but firmly palpates the lower abdomen to confirm the position of the *!arab* and slowly and firmly, pushes the flattened fingers towards the midline. When the organ is in its normal position, it ceases to pound excessively. Treatments are done once a day for between five minutes and half an hour for two to three days. Sometimes, if there is no one available to massage, people gently place a heavy stone on top of the *!arab* and leave it there for a few minutes to ease the organ back into place.

Across the Khoisan there are indications of belief in the salience of moving organs. Amongst my Nharo informants, only the liver was thought to move. Some Nama and Damara south of Windhoek knew the liver moved but thought the movement slight.¹¹² The moved liver was very gently pushed back to 'its normal place'. Part of the treatment involved making a popping noise with the finger coming off the inner cheek of the mouth. They call this by a verb - *abu* – that relates the effect to the organ.¹¹³ One could also *abu* a heart that has moved.

Some !Kung thought that the heart could 'turn' a little,¹¹⁴ or that it was the pain of problems that made it feel like movement.¹¹⁵ Many Nama and Damara knew the heart moves. The heart can move backwards or to the side, usually the right, perhaps as much as a few inches.¹¹⁶ The heart pumping too much is a very widely known Khoisan health problem. Some Khoi relate this to the heart being in the wrong position. This pumping makes a person feel dizzy, or 'like being drunk', and prevents sleep.¹¹⁷ Heart problems are generally associated with bad dreams that have come to the heart, troublesome memories, shock¹¹⁸ and mental perturbation. A sick person's heart having to be retrieved from 'god' is a key theme of Bushmen trance dances. All ideas of heart movement sit in the wider Khoisan context of organ movement. A Nharo informant described how the heart swells, 'stands up' and then you die. Dead people can take the heart. He described that the illness caused by the bird flying over children involves the bird taking the heart.¹¹⁹ This had happened to my Nharo translator. If the heart represents the wind of a person, taking the heart takes the life of a person.

If the *!arab* pumps too much it can affect the heart. Disturbed intestines can affect the heart and a beating heart can push the liver down. A common remedy for heart problems is roasting a pangolin

¹¹² 21, 22

¹¹³ 29, 31, 34, 36

¹¹⁴ 76

¹¹⁵ 83

¹¹⁶ 34

¹¹⁷ 50

¹¹⁸ 22

¹¹⁹ 102

scale, //khomsoros in Khoe, grinding it and eating or drinking the powder.¹²⁰ A scale may also be worn as a necklace.¹²¹

One !Kung man, based at the charitable Ombili Foundation, knew the intestine moved with the cold.¹²² Nama, Damara and some Hai//om were also familiar with the idea of the intestine moving with the cold.¹²³ A Hai//om woman, living at Halali in Etosha National Park, thought this might occur if children went outside whilst not wearing underpants or shoes.¹²⁴ Generally the intestine was thought to move up, sometimes as far as the ribs. This particular lady thought the intestines only moved up 'to the nipple or the breast, she stop everything, you feel full up in your stomach and your back also is painful'.¹²⁵ Intestines in the wrong place were treated by gentle deep massage, using repeated downward movements on the anterior abdomen and sometimes additionally down the back. Warm water was thought to help. Drusilla Urichos, a 33 years old Damara woman in Swakopmund, treats all kinds of sicknesses and especially pre-natal and post-natal problems. Drusilla told me not only intestines moved, but cold caused the testicles to move down the body.¹²⁶

Khoisan do not conceptualise the body in intricate biological detail. Khoisan use massage, like 'Western' practitioners, to restore mobility and function and at the most fundamental level, to give people energy and a sense of well being. They also intuitively diagnose through massage. However, despite appearances, Khoisan massage is essentially unlike orthodox medical Western massage because it is predicated in different theoretical premises. Most Khoisan I encountered carried out massage to ease organs back into their correct place and to simply make a person feel well. Most, when pushed, suggested the aim of their massage was to not only restore organs to their correct position, but to move the blood. Movement of blood brings movement of wind and therefore movement of life. Few could go beyond this level of detail.

Amongst Khoi living in more urban locations and familiar with popular medical ideas, massage is talked about in more detailed biological terms than amongst other Khoisan, and its role is unusually related to Western diseases. Nonetheless, Western ideas such Khoi articulate are superimposed on basic underlying pan-Khoisan ideas of health and illness. A Nama woman in Walvis Bay and a Damara woman in Katatura used massage for a number of reasons, including: to treat stiffness of babies, a very

¹²⁰ 15, 21, 22, 24, 43, 52, 54, 59, 61, 100

¹²¹ 25, 101, 102

¹²² 58

¹²³ 9, 21, 34, 64, 73

¹²⁴ 54

¹²⁵ 54

¹²⁶ 25

common treatment; to straighten infertile women's fallopian tubes; to help the *senuwee*, muscles and blood; to treat 'rheumatics, stroke and polio'. The Nama woman massaged with vinegar on the face of stroke victims and gave them a little dagga to suck to 'loosen the tongue'.¹²⁷

Blood

Khoisan massage is often carried out against a backdrop of ideas about blood as a cause of a problem. Blood problems are founded in blood not moving, blood drying up, blood having too much water in it, blood being unevenly spread, either too much or too little, blood being dirty, blood being too cool or warm and blood being painful.

How blood is known seems related to experience. Cold blood and blood draining from a body are associated with death. Observation of bruises may have contributed to Khoisan ideas of 'black painful blood'.¹²⁸ The darkness of menstrual blood may also be associated with the idea that the blood is 'dirty' (*!urib* in Khoekhoegowab). Knowledge that cuts or wounds sometimes appear to heal better if they bleed might also have influenced wider understandings of blood. In Andersson's 1856 account of his southern African travels he referred to 'blood-sickness', an illness that was known to 'natives' to be fatal to sheep and sometimes people. The illness involved blood conglomerating in diverse places under the skin. Observation of animal sickness such as this may also have contributed to Khoisan understanding. A Ju/'hoan man referred to a similar illness, *!nun !khurees*, translated as 'blood balls'. These 'balls' are very painful and the skin has to be cut to release them.¹²⁹

Guenther related that in Nharo understanding, the membrane surrounding the heart is thought to contain water that cools the constantly pumping action of the heart.¹³⁰ There is much to suggest that many Khoisan associate the heart with maintenance of a correct blood water relationship. One Ju/'hoan man from ≠Ninim had a particularly thorough understanding of blood. He believed water is stored in the gall bladder, and gall bladders taste salty because of this brackish water content. He elaborated that water runs from the gall bladder to the heart. Water goes into the heart to emerge in equal quantities with blood. It is water that enables blood to flow. This particular man believed tuberculosis was caused

¹²⁷ 21, 23.

¹²⁸ cf. Marshall on !Kung ideas of pain felt in the blood, bright red blood being healthy and dark blood having sickness in it: Lorna Marshall, *Nyae Nyae !Kung: Beliefs and Rites* (Cambridge (Mass.) 1999), p. 46.

¹²⁹ 84

¹³⁰ Guenther, *Nharo Bushmen*, p. 243.

by too much blood leaving the heart relative to water entering it. To rectify this one could eat the roots of the *zow* plant to remove the excess heart water.¹³¹

Like the Ju/'hoan man, a Damara woman in Katatura thought the heart takes in water and gives out blood.¹³² A Damara man in Sesfontein knew of a particular sickness that affects young children. The illness was caused by too much water entering the top of the heart.¹³³ A !Kung healer in Tsintsabis specified that part of the reason he massaged patients was to feel if there was too much water and insufficient blood in the patient's body.¹³⁴ Sucking at an incision site is one means of removing an excess of water from the blood. Across the Khoisan there was an understanding that a primary purpose of massage was to keep blood moving in the body and to ensure that it was distributed in the correct proportions. Symptoms of excess of blood include headache and madness,¹³⁵ and of deficiency, 'rheumatics'¹³⁶. Returning to normal menstrual cycles after giving birth is an important consideration to Damara and Nama and massage is often employed if blood is not thought to be flowing freely.

Although all Khoisan groups made cuts on the forehead to release blood, the Ju/'hoan more readily made cuts all over the body to release dirty, black, painful blood. At //Aru village, Ju/'hoan reported making cuts to prevent madness, to stop swelling, if, for example, a leg were sore, to treat head aches and to release the painful blood in painful joints. Headache treatment, perhaps the most common bleeding treatment, normally entails a single small cut at the temples or above the bridge of the nose.¹³⁷ In some instances hair is shaved off and a long cut made in the midline from the forehead to the back of the skull.¹³⁸ Hot stick ends are also applied to the temples¹³⁹ and the smoke of aardwolf dung, or sometimes a smouldering anus gland, inhaled for headache.¹⁴⁰ Aardwolf dung is used because it is believed to calm bad phenomena and consequently the heart, which is in turn thought to lower the blood.¹⁴¹ It relieves chest pain,¹⁴² and prevents bad things happening.¹⁴³ The reason attributed to the use of aardwolf dung, or alternatively the anal gland, is their remarkably strong, potent, smell.

¹³¹ 91

¹³² 20

¹³³ 41

¹³⁴ 65

¹³⁵ 79

¹³⁶ 26

¹³⁷ 51, 54, 58, 59

¹³⁸ 18

¹³⁹ 63

¹⁴⁰ 12, 18, 21, 34, 57

¹⁴¹ 7

¹⁴² 10, 27, 52, 60, 72

¹⁴³ 44, 65, 39, 68, 69, 71, 54, 61

The notion of too much blood causing headaches has, in the minds of some Khoi, merged with the idea of ‘high blood pressure’ and aardwolf dung is accordingly prescribed for ‘high blood pressure’.¹⁴⁴ A man in Sesfontein identified dirty blood as the cause of high blood pressure.¹⁴⁵

Since early colonisation dirt and ‘natives’ have been closely associated in European rhetoric. From the nineteenth century missionaries and government officials sought to entice filthy natives into cleaning their minds and bodies. Against this backdrop it is hard to gauge the contextual background of words that are translated as ‘dirty’ and ‘clean’. Khoes use the same word */urisa* for what one cleans up around the house, the potent ‘dirtiness’ on a healer’s skin and the ‘dirt’ in blood that needs removing.

One !Kung man specified that when he massaged he brought his blood together with the patient’s and he ‘cleaned’ their blood by belching.¹⁴⁶ The latter assertion is highly reminiscent of the very widespread Damara and Nama practice of belching throughout their massage treatments, expressed by the verb *!gai*. The effectiveness of massage is deemed by many Khoisan to work on the idea of transference of sickness through the healer. If the healer does not belch they can detrimentally take on the sickness. Many Bushmen crack their knuckles or throw their hands into the air at the end of a treatment. This is done, like belching, to throw the acquired patient’s sickness out of them. This notion is clearly related to expulsion of sickness arrows through the top of the neck during Bushmen trance healing dances.

Cleaning the blood is a key role of the Khoisan healer. Dirty blood is caused by sickness or pain which makes the blood black.¹⁴⁷ Dirty blood can be removed through bleeding, or can be encouraged to flow out of the body in the case of menstrual blood, or dispersed in the body, or cleaned, by other treatments. Cleaning blood is related to the wider Khoisan notion of cleaning out the body of sickness. This is frequently achieved by consumption of emetics and laxatives. Klip dassie dung, for instance, cleans out the placenta and thereby induces better menstrual blood flow.¹⁴⁸ In Maltahöe women use the plant *!gaebé* to clean the stomach, uterus and fallopian tubes.¹⁴⁹

Venereal disease is associated with dirtiness. Again the links between this and missionary moralising are hard to establish, although eruption of genital sores and excretion of foul smelling urine, both possible symptoms of venereal disease, would at least in present Khoisan conceptual contexts, be

¹⁴⁴ 26, 32

¹⁴⁵ 7

¹⁴⁶ 65

¹⁴⁷ 57, 58, 63, 99

¹⁴⁸ 23

¹⁴⁹ 32

thought of as indication of dirt in their own right. The fact that menstrual blood is ‘dirty’ and thereby makes men sick, further contributes to the net of venereal associations. Bitter plants play a central role in cleaning the body. Venereal disease requires a really good cleaning and consequently the bitterest of plants. In Maltahöe they use *ausana* (*au-aub*). In Khoe *au* means bitter. It is this plant that people in Maltahöe use to treat AIDS. In the early twentieth century Dorothea Bleek encountered the use of bitter plants amongst Angola !Ku¹⁵⁰, and Laidler recognised the importance of bitter plants amongst Namaqualand Nama.¹⁵¹ Barnard observed the Nharo use bitter plants for constipation.¹⁵² Some Hai//om told of people using Koreb (aloe) for AIDS, a very bitter plant, although one man considered !gubib to be better.¹⁵³ Koreb is used very widely. It is particularly good at cleaning the blood and the stomach.¹⁵⁴ One Hai//om man thought that gonorrhoea might have changed into AIDS. He therefore suggested a gonorrhoea treatment, a decoction of Koreb and Devils Claw, for AIDS. In Sesfontein they use the *Nara* plant for gonorrhoea and possibly AIDS.

Most health education that warns of the danger of sexually transmitted and blood born disease, particularly AIDS, is distilled down in Khoisan understanding to ideas of ‘dirtiness’ spreading disease. A !Kung healer used a concoction of the plant *ǀgara* to treat AIDS. It cleans the patient and gives them diarrhoea. He was taught plant use by his parents who, when he was younger, had said ‘we will eventually die. You must learn about the healing plants from us before this happens’. He diagnoses AIDS by making small incisions above the bridge of the patients nose and at the low back (over the posterior, superior iliac spines). He checks the blood that emerges to see if it is dirty and black. If it is dirty a diagnosis of AIDS is indicated. To further clarify his diagnosis, he gathers the patient, three healers and some women singers, around the fire and the healers check the person. He had first used the plant *ǀgara*, his AIDS treatment, for people with stomach problems and who ‘do not urinate well’ - a phrase informants used frequently.¹⁵⁵

There were indications that the practice of making incisions is on the decline and this was coming as a direct response to education initiatives. One Nharo woman, for instance, proclaimed: ‘Nowadays the blood of the people is dirty; everyone’s blood is dirty, the doctors cannot even use your blood. The traditional healers try and help you to have clean blood’.¹⁵⁶ A Hai//om woman declared: ‘the doctors

¹⁵⁰ Bleek, ‘Bushmen of Central Angola’, 114.

¹⁵¹ Laidler, ‘Magic Medicine’. 441.

¹⁵² Barnard, *Nharo Bushman Medicine*, 69.

¹⁵³ 52

¹⁵⁴ 53, 56, 72, 71

¹⁵⁵ 58

¹⁵⁶ 98

talk about making cuts and we don't do it anymore, we just go to the clinic, the doctors ask why we cut the marks'.¹⁵⁷

In addition to incisions being made to release blood, like many Bantu speakers, Khoisan make small incisions as sites for rubbing in various substances. For low back pain a Ju/'hoan man made incisions at the site of the pain, into which he put a mixture of two ground plants, *gonu* and *mai*.¹⁵⁸ Many Damara in Sesfontein treat leg pain by rubbing mixtures of ostrich egg shell, kudu skin and sometimes the healer's 'dirtiness', into small incisions. For coughing children, a Hai//om man used a shaving from a roasted eland hoof rubbed into cuts on the chest.¹⁵⁹ An elderly Nama woman, Lauda, in Sesfontein provides an example of the sorts of medical transformations Janzen, Etkin and others draw attention to as important indications of local rationality.¹⁶⁰ Lauda treated moved intestines with incisions made with a sharp //gurus stone, into which she rubbed Bolmeister, a commercial South African remedy for stomach problems.¹⁶¹ If cold had moved a man's intestines down, perhaps into his testicles, and he excreted blue urine, this woman made one large vertical cut on each side of the pelvis (inferior and slightly medial of the anterior superior iliac spine). If the intestines had moved up, she made a similar cut on either side of the chest (nipple line, level of ninth rib).

All Khoisan insisted that incisions only work if made at the site of the problem. One Ju/'hoan man accounted for the action of such treatments by the blood carrying the plants to the painful blood.¹⁶² Another man thought rubbing plants into incisions removed water from the blood.¹⁶³ When Hoernlé encountered similar practice during her Nama fieldwork of 1912-13, her informant translated the phenomenon as an 'injection'.¹⁶⁴ A number of my informants reported that the incisions worked like an injection.¹⁶⁵ The ready recruitment of the word 'injection' by Khoisan, often obscures the distance between the biomedical associations of the word and the wider Khoisan context. This wider context must be remembered when one considers the rationality behind all 'medical incisions'. The wider context of incisions includes not only different theories of blood, but such actions as: the administering of parts of poisonous animals to confer immunity; the rubbing of the plants *!goi* and */horubeh* into Ju/'hoan distal bicep tendons to confer hunting ability;¹⁶⁶ or the use of parts of the eland in either a rub

¹⁵⁷ 54

¹⁵⁸ 92

¹⁵⁹ 60

¹⁶⁰ Janzen, *Quest for Therapy*, p. 33; N. Etkin, 'Drugs and Traditional Medicine' in John Middleton (ed.), *Encyclopaedia of Africa South of the Sahara* (4 vols., 1997) ii, 274- 283.

¹⁶¹ 9

¹⁶² 92

¹⁶³ 91

¹⁶⁴ Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites', 78.

¹⁶⁵ 4, 5, 18, 31

¹⁶⁶ 90

form mixed with Vaseline or in cuts,¹⁶⁷ or as a necklace.¹⁶⁸ In Eugenia Herbert's consideration of traditional 'inoculation' practices in Africa, she suggests a Portuguese origin for the practice in Southern Africa.¹⁶⁹ The embedded nature of ideas of transferring potency in Khoisan culture, whether through incisions, oral remedies, necklaces, wind, lightning, arrows, pointing or other means, suggests that such conclusions should be made very tentatively.

To emphasise how one should think about Khoisan healing, I briefly proceed with outlines of specific illnesses, treatments and associated beliefs as described by my informants. I specifically emphasise Khoi examples in view of the near absence of research undertaken amongst this group.

I have previously drawn attention to personal wind, 'dirtiness', urine and smell as factors thought to hold the essence of people and used by healers to confer their protection. According to Hoernlé, healers professed that to treat a disease successfully, the healer must have had the disease first. As considered earlier, Hoernlé explored the application of a healer's potency through ritual ideas of *!nau*.¹⁷⁰ A notion of transference of essence, good or bad, and the consequent transformation of a person, is fundamental to Khoisan medicine. The idea of *!nau* that Hoernlé identified did not seem familiar to my informants, although lingering currency of the notion was evident in the name of a plant, *!ui !nau* (slim *!nau*), which a Nama woman from Gibeon said was used as 'a kind of make up' when a girl has her first menstrual period.¹⁷¹

An important example of Khoisan ideas of transference involves the eland, an animal of considerable significance to historic Cape /Xam. An eland is a strong 'and kind of angry' animal, who 'takes time to die'.¹⁷² That is what makes an eland dangerous but also suitable for 'medicine'. Another 'strong' animal is the bird who causes illness with its shadow.¹⁷³

The skin of the eland, along with that of the kudu, is a common ingredient in Damara, Nama, Hai//om and Nharo health strategies, but not in Ju/'hoan. Parents from these groups tied bits of eland into little pouches to be worn as necklaces by their children, or ground and rubbed eland into incisions cut on little children to 'make them strong'. Some tie the skin into a thread, which is looped and worn by their children diagonally, from one upper shoulder to the opposite underarm. When asked how the

¹⁶⁷ 61

¹⁶⁸ 50

¹⁶⁹ E.W. Herbert, 'Smallpox Inoculation in Africa', *The Journal of African History*, 16:4 (1975), 557.

¹⁷⁰ Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites'.

¹⁷¹ 32

¹⁷² 36

¹⁷³ 54

strength of the eland or kudu could help their children, people almost invariably replied that it was the wind of the eland that went into the child from these procedures. The wind makes the child ‘strong’.¹⁷⁴ Amongst these Khoe speakers, it is thought that if children played with other children who had eland incisions, or even the pouches and perhaps the thread, the wind of the child with the strong eland, would be too much for their playmates and they would die. Amongst Damara, Nama and Hai//om, if one child did this to another child, the powerful child would be said to *!gau* (*!gao*) the other child. Haacke and Eiseb list Khoekhoegowab *!gau* as to throw down, as in wrestling, or to throw or unseat a rider.¹⁷⁵ Because eland meat is strong, only the elderly can eat it. If the young eat it they develop a cough. The cough is treated using chest incisions containing eland or, less commonly, by drinking a decoction containing part of the eland.¹⁷⁶

The idea of wind causing illness is again apparent in an illness known by some Sesfontein Damara, *!gao #gom*, which is caused by stepping over someone’s legs, sitting on a bed after another ‘strong’ person has recently sat there, or if a person walks behind you.¹⁷⁷ The illness manifests as pain, starting from the *!nais* (kidneys), and moving round the low back to the anterior abdomen. Someone suspected of *!gao #gom* must be examined by the healer, from the neck to the lower back. *!Gao #gom* is said to separate the joints of the back, similarly to another sickness called *//autas*. Unlike *//autas* the pain is only felt at the lower back. *!Gao #gom* is diagnosed if the healer can put a finger ‘about two inches’ deep into a gap in the spine.

!Gao #gom is treated by a person who has had the disease removing their belt and giving it to the sick person to wear for about a week, so that the ‘dirtiness’ from the ‘healer’ can go onto / into the patient. After this time, if there has been improvement, the healer slaughters a goat, takes some dung from the goat and mixes it with goat blood, taken from the region of the goat’s upper posterior pelvic bone (posterior superior iliac spine). The dung and goat blood mixture is put on the skin of the same animal and the patient wears the skin for about ten minutes, like a pair of underpants. The skin increases the warmth of the region covered and sweating seems desirable. After wearing the skin, the patient is massaged with the fat of the goat, from the lower back up to the neck, and round to the anterior abdomen.

¹⁷⁴ 5, 18, 37, 39, 43, 46, 54, 58, 63

¹⁷⁵ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁶ 21

¹⁷⁷ 1, 3, 5

The next stage of the treatment entails the healer making some small incisions, called *!gao* (to cut or slice¹⁷⁸) or */gores*, an incision,¹⁷⁹ either horizontally or vertically just below the patient's cervico-dorsal junction (where the neck meets the torso) and additionally at the level of their fifth lumbar vertebra. It is important that a small amount of blood emerges from the *!gao*. He then makes some more incisions on the patients anterior lower abdomen, removes some of the blood, mixes it with his own 'dirtiness' and the top of a match (a plant, *!uri-haib* (white plant) can be used instead of the match) and rubs it into the small incisions on the patient's back and neck. The patient must then stay for three days in their house, without their partner, and still wearing the healers belt. During this time the patient cannot touch the black, three legged, cooking pot, cold water and red meat. Pregnant women, and men and women who have had recent sexual contact, cannot eat the meat of the goat that was killed for the treatment. At the end of the three days the partner of the patient goes with the healer to the patient, lies down and is beaten by the patient on the front and lower back with the patient's underwear. The patient jumps into the air whilst being beaten. Both of these last measures are to prevent the partner from developing *!Gao ≠gom*.

This elaborate treatment is highly reminiscent of certain Nama procedures detailed by Hoernlé.¹⁸⁰ A similar treatment was also related, by an elderly Damara woman in Sesfontein, for men who sleep with menstruating woman and subsequently develop abdominal pain and urinate blood. If this occurs both partners have two small incisions, *!gao*, made bilaterally on their lower abdomens and blood from each person is mixed into the other person's incisions. The treatment is called *!gao-!hao*. Haacke and Eiseb list *!hao* as meaning variously, to meet socially (get together for a chat) and shouting, yelling or barking of a baboon.¹⁸¹ Both meanings revolve around communication and coming together, which would seem to be a shared relationship with *!hao* in *!gao-!hao*, a coming together or communication of incisions.

All the illnesses Hoernlé encountered amongst southern Namibian Nama, over ninety years ago, are known to Damara and Nama of north and south Namibia. One of the illnesses, *//âutas*, is particularly common.¹⁸² Hoernlé described *//âutas* as paralysis. Although what my various informants treated sometimes involved paralysis, this characteristic was not essential to *//âutas*. Bertha, from Katatura, described *//âutas* as a general term for people who are *!om* (to coagulate, congeal, clot; solidify, set¹⁸³)

¹⁷⁸ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 97.

¹⁷⁹ cf. *Ibid.*, p.61.

¹⁸⁰ Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites'.

¹⁸¹ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 101.

¹⁸² eg. 1, 11, 12, 13, 17, 21, 34, 39

¹⁸³ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 94.

and *!hora* (crippled¹⁸⁴) and this seems a reasonable generalised description of the condition. *//âutas* often involves stiffening and bending of a limb or a twisting of the neck, side bending of the tongue and perhaps adduction or abduction of an eye. The problem was more often, though not exclusively, associated with older people. Some babies with *//âutas* like symptoms would be described as having *//âutas*, whilst others would be said to have */gôaron//ôb* or children's sickness.

Bertha thought *//âutas* could come from a 'stroke' caused by 'high blood pressure', from 'Polio' or from 'Rheumatics' (all related in English). She thought the problem was inherited, */umi*. Helena in Maltahöhe seemed to have combined *//âutas* with rheumatoid and osteoarthritis, elaborating that it was caused by eating too much red meat, a classic aggravator of rheumatoid arthritis no doubt often trotted out in Namibian medical scenarios. Bertha typically diagnosed the problem based on appearance and by placing her hands on the effected part of the body. This contact told her, as a gift from god, what and how to treat. Despite Bertha and Helen's apparently biomedical explanations of *//âutas*, their understanding of the disease was based on a Khoi idea of illness. Like ideas associated with other limb dysfunctions and Polio, *//âutas* was characteristically known to 'divide the joints'. The notion of */gora*, to divide or separate in the context of joints, was one I encountered amongst many Nama, Damara and Hai//om. One Hai//om man related that if he has incisions on his knees with extract of the plant *kaikai* in them, if someone were to walk in front of him the incisions could 'divide the hip joints of the person'.¹⁸⁵ A Nama woman described that if joints are divided you get pain and feel weak and if it is bad you cannot talk and the tongue gets stiff.¹⁸⁶

Treatment of *//âutas* depended upon the region affected and was framed on notions of old and new time. Southern Khoi, such as Bertha and Helen, used new time treatments, which were primarily variations on massage. Typically of all Khoi, Bertha treated *//âutas* with vigorous mobilization of affected spastic joints using a pumping action. Atypically she massaged affected limbs with Menthol, Geber oil, Deep Heat¹⁸⁷ and Camphor oil. Helen deliberately tried to rub the blood vessels of affected limbs to induce heat. She additionally tied a black thread around the affected limb that 'pushed the *//âutas* down'. A red thread would have made the sickness stronger, an idea probably linked to blood and redness. All Khoisan I encountered commonly used threads of this nature for various physical problems. Threads are normally left on at all times, eventually falling off on their own accord.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., p. 102 and S. Ganuses.

¹⁸⁵ 53

¹⁸⁶ 37

¹⁸⁷ Commercial sports therapy spray for strained muscles

The treatment for //âutas practiced in Sesfontein, was either not known by other Khoi, or described as the old time treatments. Sesfontein healers aimed to 'bring the joints together' by pressing hard with the thumbs on the wrist, elbow, knee or ankle, according to whatever joint was affected. They emphasised that the patient must not talk to the practitioner before, during or immediately after the massage. An elderly Sesfontein woman renowned for her healing ability,¹⁸⁸ when treating back //âutas, massaged with a combination of burnt and ground ostrich egg shell, ground kudu skin, her 'dirtiness' (scrapings and sweat off her skin) and extract from a plant, //horape.¹⁸⁹ A different Damara lady related that dirtiness was used as a treatment for //âutas because it is a bitter, *au*, thing.¹⁹⁰ In Khoekhoegowab *aosen* means 'sweat'.¹⁹¹ This has interesting wider implications as a possible reason why Bushmen might apply bitter sweat as part of the healing dance.

After the massage stage of treatment, the patient is rubbed in warm goat dung or warmed by being wrapped in goatskin and then isolated in a hut for normally a few days, although some suggested this phase could last weeks. During the isolation they are massaged again every day if necessary and wear a sinew of a black goat tied around the affected limb or around the neck. A Nama woman from the south said in the old days a cloth or beads was given for the patient to wear round their neck that contained the sweat of the person treating, the one with the //âutas essence.¹⁹² Whilst in the hut the patient cannot touch the cooking pot, or drink cold water, or talk to others, except the mother or grandmother attending them. If more than massage seems required, incisions are made in the patient's body at the site of the problem.¹⁹³ For the neck//âutas one woman described that one cut was made over her third cervical vertebra, two over her seventh and more on her anterior midline chest. Blood was then taken from the anterior throat artery of the goat, mixed with the plant *uri haib* (white plant) and placed into her incisions.¹⁹⁴

An alternative to tying the goat sinew around the affected limb was offered by one informant in Sesfontein who specified that female goat tarsal bones were tied on her leg and worn for one week.¹⁹⁵ This tying of sinew and bones is highly reminiscent of that described by Hoernlé in the context of Hottentot remarriage ceremonies.¹⁹⁶

¹⁸⁸ 1

¹⁸⁹ Perhaps //horapob, *Gomphocarpus fruticosus*, Milkweed, Wild cotton: E. Eiseb *et al*, 'A Preliminary List of Khoekoe (Nama/Damara) Plant Names', *Dinteria*, (21 May 1991), 21.

¹⁹⁰ 30

¹⁹¹ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 3.

¹⁹² 37

¹⁹³ Suro, 13, 16, 18

¹⁹⁴ 16

¹⁹⁵ 1

¹⁹⁶ Hoernlé, 'Certain Rites', 70.

Sickness of children, and particularly chest sickness, is commonly termed /gôaron //ôs. Like //âutas, /gôaron //ôs is very widely known amongst Damara and Nama throughout Namibia. Also like //âutas, historical evidence for the illness is very thin. The key ideas present in Khoi accounts of /gôaron //ôs, however, are related to ideas of wind recorded in the nineteenth century amongst Bushmen, and Wikar and Kolb's eighteenth century observations regarding ritual alterations or 'andersmachen'.¹⁹⁷ In 1923 Laidler briefly mentioned 'an old and much praised hottentot remedy', *oubae C/namop*, which consisted of burned and powdered ostrich egg shell mixed with the tail or kidney fat of a sheep or goat. The mixture 'was rubbed into chests of children affected with snuffles'.¹⁹⁸ In 1975 Wagner-Robertz encountered children wearing eland 'amulets' to protect them from sickness of the chest.¹⁹⁹ Both these treatments are typical of contemporary Khoi treatments for /gôaron //ôs. Sian Sullivan has recorded details of 'goaron //os' which tally well with those I encountered.²⁰⁰

/Gôaron //ôs is not a precise category. At its most basic /gôaron //ôs is a reference to sickness that affects babies and young children, although adults are also sometimes attributed with the sickness. Different signs of /gôaron //ôs may include , a protruding chest, often described in reference to the resultant hollow below the sternum, stiffness of the body, posterior arching (extension) of the back and head, rigidity of limbs, and possible panting and speechlessness. A baby may have loss of appetite, fever, vomiting and, or, diarrhoea. It may have blue lips and blue sclera. Urine may be pink, and stools are regularly said to be green. If the stool is black the baby will soon die. A key sign is a sunken soft patch on the front of the baby's skull (anterior fontanel). Dorothea Bleek had similarly observed the importance of the fontanel amongst Bushmen. She noted: the 'head's hollow place is that which the mantis had pressed down'.²⁰¹ Schapera observed that new born Hottentot babies had a powder and salve of ostrich egg shell rubbed on their forehead, nose, temples and thickly on their anterior fontanel.²⁰²

Children with /gôaron //ôs were sometimes diagnosed by doctors as having meningitis²⁰³ or gastroenteritis²⁰⁴. A clinic nurse in Sesfontein equated /gôaron //ôs with fever, diarrhoea and dehydration and not meningitis.²⁰⁵ One Sesfontein child who was said to have /gôaron //ôs was brought to her clinic and she prescribed anti-malarials. After a few days of no improvement, the

¹⁹⁷ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 256.

¹⁹⁸ Laidler, *Manners, Medicine and Magic*, 171.

¹⁹⁹ Wagner-Robertz, MS, 'Amulette, Fluche', 58.

²⁰⁰ pers. com.

²⁰¹ D. Bleek, *Bushmen Dictionary*, 502.

²⁰² Schapera, *The Khoisan Peoples*, p. 262.

²⁰³ 72

²⁰⁴ 23

²⁰⁵ 45

mother of the child visited an elderly Damara woman who diagnosed the condition as separated bones in the neck, a /gôaron // ôs, and accordingly proceeded to massage the child. The mother stopped giving the anti-malarials and the child soon died in the arms of the elderly woman.

I identified a number of ideas about the causes of /gôaron //ôs. A baby may be shocked or stressed either before it is born or after, by a dream or other encounter.²⁰⁶ If a pregnant mother is stressed, fighting, arguing or depressed, her baby may be born with /gôaron //ôs.²⁰⁷ A child having wind in its stomach, *khû* (to be bloated) or producing too much mucous, *honib* may develop /gôaron //ôs.²⁰⁸ One form of /gôaron //ôs entails a baby's intestines moving down and green diarrhoea. This was attributed to the baby crying too much and not having enough fat.²⁰⁹ A further and possibly more significant cause of /gôaron //ôs is wind. If a pregnant woman travels around it is thought the winds of different people can induce /gôaron //ôs in her baby.²¹⁰ A travelling child exposed to many people's different winds is similarly vulnerable.²¹¹ One 43 years old Nama woman based in Swakopmund, who travelled quite extensively with her work as a care assistant of the young and elderly, offered a particularly detailed description of the relationship of wind to /gôaron //ôs.

There are different types of wind, she suggested, and the type of wind will determine the sort of /gôaron //ôs that will develop. It could, for example, be sores on the head if it is the head that is exposed or it might be a stiffness of the back if it is the back that is exposed. Strong smelling people coming into contact with pregnant women are the primary cause of /gôaron //ôs. These could be very sweaty men or menstruating women. Normal menstruation, //khâ/aesen (/ khâ, moon, month²¹² sickness) is termed *≠au !gâ*, or slow, not smelly menses. Strong smelly menses that makes a person feel 'drunk' is termed //ho!gâ. It is the strong menses that can make a child or adult sick. A woman, or her smell, will *nā* the men or bite them. If a pregnant woman gets the wind of someone it is termed *sa hego †oaba*.²¹³ A Namib Nama woman commented that a particularly common origin of the sickness is a child with /gôaron // ôs lying next to a pregnant woman in hospital.²¹⁴

/Gôaron // ôs is treated in a number of different ways depending on the specifics of the presentation and the knowledge and skills of the healer. Massage is undertaken for stiff babies or those with moved internal organs. Often this sort of presentation is poorly distinguishable from //âutas and massaged in a

²⁰⁶ 20, 23

²⁰⁷ 31

²⁰⁸ 26

²⁰⁹ 24

²¹⁰ 30

²¹¹ 31

²¹² E. Eiseb and W. Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab – English*, p. 88.

²¹³ 30

²¹⁴ 34

similar manner. A Sesfontein Damara man described that patients with coughing */gôaron //ôs* were massaged and confined to a hut where they underwent treatment everyday and observed the social prohibitions as applicable to *//âutas* patients. On the fourth day of confinement the healer made */gores*, incisions, approximately over the patients fourth thoracic vertebra, over the proximal, central sacrum and about three centimetres below the navel. Into these incisions he rubbed a powder made from ground kudu skin, *xai khob*, and heated and ground ostrich egg shell, *abu //oro*.²¹⁵

All the groups I encountered used ostrich eggshell for children's sickness. Amongst the Damara and Nama it is heated, which makes it easier to grind and powder, and used as the key ingredient in a medicinal mixture prepared especially for children. Amongst the Hai//om of Etosha, ground ostrich egg, */ami !ubi*, is given orally, dry, or in breast milk, if a child has a cold or is not breathing well.²¹⁶ Amongst the Ju/'hoan, although eggshell was not powdered, ostrich eggshell beads necklaces were given to children up to about the age of two, to promote their general well-being.²¹⁷ They were also worn strung around the waist of adults to help backache.²¹⁸ A Nharo woman used a black thread tied around the neck or waist of her child to prevent general sickness, weakness and to stop 'runny stomach'. She elaborated that in the old days they used ostrich eggshell but since the whites came they could no longer find the shells.²¹⁹

Treatment of */gôaron //ôs* seems to be associated with a mixture of ingredients. These may be either rubbed on to specific parts of the body, taken orally, worn in a pouch sewn onto a necklace or rubbed into incisions. Nama refer to this mixture, which is not consistent, as a traditional Nama or 'Hottentot' powder. The ingredients vary according to local resources, inherited tradition and personal initiative. Nama in Hoachanas²²⁰ used the following in a concoction of childrens' medicine: kidney of the bat eared fox, *//ab !nais*; wild cat (unspecified part), */hawin*; jackal liver, */gire ais*; elephant dung, *!hoa xaus*; aardwolf dung, */gib !nona*; aardwolf anus gland, */gib huni xus*. In Rehoboth a concoction consisted of: kidney of the bat eared fox; *//ao !guis* plant; wild pig stomach, *!noab /garas*; aardwolf anus.²²¹ A Topnaar woman from the Kuiseb river treated */gôaron //ôs* with 'Nama powder': ostrich egg shell; oryx horn; kidney of the bat eared fox; hyena dung. She rubbed an afflicted child's chest, back

²¹⁵ 5

²¹⁶ 59

²¹⁷ 83, 95, 100

²¹⁸ 101

²¹⁹ 98

²²⁰ 35

²²¹ 31

and front, with the powder and gave some to drink. She additionally sowed some into a pouch, */ores*, which was strung around the child's neck.²²²

A Sesfontein Damara woman used ostrich egg shell, a plant *//huribe //kha*, commercial garlic and kudu horn as a concoction and, when mixed with Vaseline, as a rub.²²³ Others used a concoction containing the stomach of the *!huib* bird (*!huib //hom, guib*) sometimes mixed with a tiny insect, a *!hutibis*.²²⁴ In Gibeon, a Nama woman used incisions containing powdered aardwolf anus and the kidney of the bat eared fox. Other Gibeon residents used concoctions of commercial garlic, jackal liver, ostrich egg shell, the stomach of the porcupine, *!noab /hara*, the */goa* plant, marijuana and the South African medicine, 'Bolmeister', mixed with sugar.²²⁵ Bolmeister was a primary ingredient in incisions and child medicine of Nama and Damara all over Namibia for conditions ranging from */gôaron // ôs* to knee pain, intestine problems and snakebite. Laidler (1928) recorded that 'Bo Meester' or 'grand big master' was a highly popular commercial preparation consisting of potassium nitrate extracted from 'dassiepsis', the inspissated urine and faeces of the rock rabbit. It was used for all kinds of poisoning, in decoction and infusion, rubbed onto scarified snakebites and used for stiffness of the back and pains in the stomach.²²⁶

²²² 24

²²³ 19

²²⁴ 18, 42

²²⁵ 32, 33, 34

²²⁶ Laidler, 'Magic Medicine', 443.

Old Time, New Time

‘In the old time the people were healthy, but nowadays everybody is sick’ – /Hoa//ai Bakar Naoodoes, a 44 years old Nharo woman at Blaubeerg.

‘The sickness which comes now is like a gunshot, very dangerous, you see someone get sick one day and they are dead the next’ - //Haisa Beatrus !Noodoeb, an 82 years old Nharo man at Blaubeerg

In Khoisan communities people expressed particular thoughts about their lives in terms of ‘old’ and ‘new’ time. Almost invariably old time was better than new time, despite the differences in Khoisan experiences and individual reference to the past being to different historical periods. A clear point of homogeneity in Khoisan ontology is a shared perception that in the old times people did not get sick and die in the numbers that they do in present times and particularly not the young people. This is believed despite increasing population growth and life expectancy.¹ Khoisan people offer their perceptions of decreasing quality and longevity of life in terms of social contact, social change and failing state health care. Despite the undoubted negative impact of AIDS on health within Namibia, few informants singled AIDS out as the primary source of their problems. There is also little to suggest that more distant Khoisan experience of disease, such as the devastating smallpox epidemics of the eighteenth and even nineteenth centuries, have much conscious bearing, at least at a rhetorical or political level, on recent Khoisan thought. Smallpox was barely mentioned despite epidemics having ravaged populations in relatively recent times - as late as 1950 amongst Bushmen of the Ghanzi district of Botswana.² This contrasts with Guenther’s experience amongst the Nharo in the 1970s. Guenther identified that smallpox, tuberculosis and venereal disease were introduced sicknesses that had produced significant changes in the role of traditional healers and remained paramount in the minds of his informants.³

Khoisan perceptions of health sit within a broader Khoisan sense of despair that distinguishes bad new time from good old time. Many Khoisan express notions of despair similar to *sheta* that Guenther identified amongst the Nharo. Despair is linked to experiences of poverty, unemployment, hunger, oppression and destructive social behaviour, which is in turn often linked to alcohol or less commonly drug abuse.

¹ See, for example, statistics for Kunene region 1991-96: <http://www.healthnet.org.na/grnmhss/jpg/kunehinmap1.jpg>. Accessed 14:22 hrs., 11/3/04. These statistics do not however suggest the lowering of life expectancy that one might expect from the effects of AIDS.

² Silberbauer, *Hunter and Habitat*, p.56.

³ Guenther, *Tricksters*, p. 195.

Smallpox was a key factor in negative perceptions of health that Guenther encountered in his 1968-70 research. Since this time smallpox has been eradicated, but in the 1980s the scourge of AIDS arrived. Whilst mention of smallpox seems to have dropped from Khoisan discussion of despair, AIDS has not explicitly taken its place. There are two important reasons for this. Firstly, owing to fear of AIDS and the stigma attached to it, there is an undoubted reluctance amongst individuals and communities to admit to the presence of AIDS within their ranks. A physician at the Tsumeb mine hospital suggested that staff 'were not allowed' to write 'died from AIDS' on death certificates for fear of insurance companies not paying out and families of the victim being asked to leave the settlement. People also do not allow their blood to be tested for fear of the consequences. The physician deemed records that suggest tuberculosis and malaria are on the increase inaccurate. She attributed the increasing death rate to AIDS.⁴

The second reason that AIDS does not explicitly dominate pictures of despair stems from the fact that AIDS presents itself in a number of ways. If people either refuse to recognise AIDS, or cannot diagnose AIDS, death will be attributed to other forms of sickness, perhaps for example a lung problem or intestinal disorder. Together, these factors help explain the broadly held feeling that it is a general rash of new sicknesses that are killing people, not one disease phenomenon. The advent of AIDS, when coupled with bouts of malaria, ongoing incidence of tuberculosis and perceptions of increasing social disharmony and deteriorating medical services, seems to have brought out a rhetoric of despair. Khoisan talk about their lives in terms of new illness and new problems coming in. Problems informants volunteered, hinged around different issues in different areas, including white farmers and Nature Conservation. The counter to this despair is a quasi-mythical old time before the hospitals, before the doctors and before the fences. Such 'nativism' is a very widespread phenomenon amongst the dispossessed.

I proceed with a brief review of health problems identified within Namibia over the last century. This provides a biomedical background to Khoisan ideas of old and new sicknesses, embedded in old and new time. The paucity of statistical information regarding the health of rural and urban Khoisan only allows the drawing of a speculative historical picture. The picture is, nonetheless, detailed and consistent enough to show the persistence of malaria, tuberculosis, venereal disease and gastric problems as primary health concerns over the last century. What appears only recently in medical reports is cancer and AIDS. Barring these latter sicknesses, the reports indicate that many of the

⁴ Anonymous by request

problems Khoisan build into a picture of new disease, have been a feature of Khoisan life, in different regions of southern Africa, for well over a century. In addition to sketching a broad historical picture of health problems, I have contrasted three medical reports, drawn from across the twentieth century, which concern the predominantly Damara Sesfontein region. This regional focus provides a closer backdrop to my Sesfontein Damara informants' ideas of health problems over time.

Nineteenth century reports record not only the ongoing problem of smallpox amongst Khoisan people, but tuberculosis, venereal disease and, at least in the Cape, leprosy. In Namibia around the mid-nineteenth century, Carl Hahn encountered consumption⁵ and Hahn and Galton, syphilis.⁶ With German interest in Namibia came detailed medical reports. Drawing on reports from Seiner and Kaufmann, Schapera concluded that amongst Bushmen malaria caused many deaths. Other sicknesses listed by Schapera include: smallpox, tuberculosis, coughs, typhoid, dysentery, measles, influenza and scarlet fever.⁷ Different groups of Khoisan clearly suffered different problems. Lebzelter for example thought syphilis very rare amongst 'wild' Bushmen although he met some farm Bushmen with gonorrhoea.⁸

Evidence suggests that smallpox, venereal disease and tuberculosis were common phenomena well into the second half of the twentieth century. Compulsory testing for venereal disease was instigated for certain segments of the native population as early as the German occupation.⁹ Köhler, however, noted in 1956 that the incidence of venereal disease in Native Reserves was on the decrease, 'through the use of modern and more effective medicines'.¹⁰ A mobile X ray service was deployed around Namibia from 1960 to detect cases of tuberculosis within the urban and rural population.¹¹ A similar initiative involving mobile clinics was undertaken in Botswana around the same period. In 1964, the administration's health service in Mariental considered the problem of tuberculosis serious enough that they took 'control measures' to curb patients absconding from treatment.¹² In 1974 a clinic out of Maun began making regular visits to /Kae /Kae, a primary Ju/'hoan site of Lee's fieldwork. Katz noted that by 1974 ten percent of the Ju/'hoan population had been treated for tuberculosis.¹³

⁵ B. Lau, *Hahn: Tagebücher*, II, 352; Ibid V, 1260, 1330.

⁶ Hahn, *Tagebücher*, IV, 917; University College London, Galton Papers, 97 Journal (August 1850).

⁷ Schapera, *Khoisan Peoples*, p. 203.

⁸ Lebzelter, *Eingeborenkulturen*, p. 46.

⁹ M. Wallace, 'A Person is Never Angry', p. 79.

¹⁰ O. Köhler, 'The Stage of Acculturation in South West Africa', *Sociologist*, 6 (1956), 151.

¹¹ N.A.N. Annual State Health Reports, various; Native Affairs, annual reports, various.

¹² National Archives Namibia (N.A.N.), MMA/14/H1. Annual Health Report

¹³ Katz et al, *Healing*, p. 40.

Sesfontein

The 1907 records of Fort Sesfontein reveal that malaria was the primary concern of the medical officer. Out of 103 patients, 43 of whom were classified as Bergdamara and 49 Hottentot (Nama), 55 were diagnosed with malaria. Respiratory problems were the next most common, including colds, bronchitis, pneumonia and tuberculosis. The remainder of problems consisted of a few cases of syphilis, diarrhoea, eye, ear and tooth problems and a case of laryngitis.¹⁴ With the abandonment of the fort, a permanent medical facility did not return to Sesfontein until the 1960s.

In 1958 a broad survey was undertaken of the medical services in native reserves. Around this time the Orumana mission was the only health facility of the Kaokoveld. Its records provide reasonable evidence of health problems of the Sesfontein region at this period. In the June 1959 monthly returns the most admissions, including returns, were for gonorrhoea, (181), followed by constipation (71), T.B. (69) cold and head ache (56), rheumatism (36), conjunctivitis (32), pregnancies (31), syphilis (29), diarrhoea (28), otitis media (24) and malaria (22). A number of other minor conditions made up the final admission number of 750. These included predominantly wounds and after birth pains.¹⁵ Although these statistics include returns, they give some indication of the nature and scale of significant problems.

In 2001 the Sesfontein clinic was staffed by a trained nurse and a doctor visited Sesfontein once a month. Emergencies were taken by ambulance to Opuwa. The clinic nurse reported the primary problems at the clinic were coughing, pneumonia, breathing difficulties and throat and ear infections. She attributed these conditions to the dustiness of the settlement. She reported hypertension was a problem because of excessive red meat, oil and salt consumption. Skin lesions were also a particular irritant, and she attributed these to a lack of washing. Conjunctivitis additionally affected a reasonable number of people. In June 2001 there were 56 cases of malaria.¹⁶

Statistics from the Namibian Ministry of Health and Social Services, 1995-2000, provide the following additional recent picture of health problems in the Kunene region, which includes Sesfontein:

Incidence of malaria per 1000	105
T.B. per 100,000	309
AIDS inpatients	148

¹⁴ N.A.N., ZUB/HIh4 Report, Station Sesfontein 30.9.1907.

¹⁵ N.A.N., HEA;26;H1/16/116. Annual Reports D.R.C. Mission Kaokoveld.

¹⁶ 45

Primary killer diseases:

Cancer	11%
T.B.	10%
Acute Respiratory Infections	9%
Gastroenteritis	8%
Cerebro vascular accidents	8% ¹⁷

These various health reports provide a biomedical picture that broadly speaking complements the occasional details recorded in older colonial ethnography regarding ‘native’ health problems. Malaria and tuberculosis feature prominently as highly significant health problems of the last century. The biomedical story differs considerably from the old time health problems volunteered by many of my informants. High cancer rates in the Ministry of Health statistics suggest that Khoisan must relatively frequently hear of cancer as a diagnosis. As widespread access to medical care is a recent phenomenon for many Khoisan, diagnoses of cancer must also be a recent phenomenon. This new diagnostic identification of a ‘disease’, when previously a reason for death, now attributable to cancer, may have not been apparent, might help account for perceptions of new disease amongst Khoisan communities. The level of cerebral bleeds in the Ministry statistics may be related to the relatively high level of *//âutas*, or stroke like presentations identified by informants.

Old and new sickness

Nama and Damara recognised a number of sicknesses that are not typically found amongst Hai//om, Nharo and Ju/'hoan. In Hoachanas a very elderly Nama woman identified the old sicknesses as *//âutas*, *‡gaob* (heart), *//hās* (uterus), */gûis* (intestine), *!arab*, *‡oa ‡gā* (to go mad, literally ‘wind put in’). Excepting this last inclusion, these were all illnesses typically thought of by Damara and Nama as old. To a typical list could also be added *danatsûb* (headache) or ‘older’ *hādanatsûb* (horse headaches), */gôaron//ōb* (children’s sickness) and *‡gurub* (leg pain).¹⁸ One Nama Damara woman expressed the old illnesses as heart falling, liver falling, intestine up and down.¹⁹

Whilst for all Khoisan AIDS was clearly a new time illness and colds or headache or backache were old time illnesses, tuberculosis and gonorrhoea moved in between old and new time. Whether or not tuberculosis and gonorrhoea were old or new depended upon a number of factors, including relative exposure levels and the timing of that exposure. In Sesfontein and Tsumeb, Damara and Hai//om related that in the old time there was *//nobas* (chest pain), which white people and doctors call

¹⁷ <http://www.healthnet.org.na/grnmhss/jpg/kunchinmap1.jpg> Accessed 14:22 hrs., 11/3/04.

¹⁸ 37

¹⁹ 31

tuberculosis, and Khoe called 'T.B. *sā*'.²⁰ Pastor Eiseb reported the old people called T.B. */hai //uib* 'a grey coughing'.

Ju/'hoan ideas of old illness did not have the specific identity attributed by Nama and Damara but essentially involved the same sort of symptoms. An eighty years old !Kung woman at Mangetti summarised old sickness and treatments of the past in terms of stomach pain, coughing and diarrhoea. To treat these they used one plant, *garisā*. They also made incisions to protect men from menstruating women.²¹ A young Ju/'hoan woman at Nhoma village related that an old sickness was called *aun/chum*, it was like stabbing in the chest and is now called 'T.B'. She also specified that there was a bad wind sickness that, when the wind blew, could cause many illnesses, particularly diarrhoea, colds and malaria.²²

One elderly Ju/'hoan woman, who was born far south of Tsumkwe and grew up in Gousha, unusually said there were many sicknesses around in the old days, including *shao goh bah*, of which she said 'it kills you. It gives a pain in your head. The old people are okay but the children can die'. She did not know where it was from. She also described *gnum /um* as a stabbing in the chest, now called 'TB'.²³ A further Ju/'hoan informant, who came to Tsumkwe from the far north, said tuberculosis used to be known as *ai kon*.²⁴

An elderly Hai//om woman who lived at Tsintsabis, thought the problems of old were *//hais*, colds, *//noba*, chest pain or non stop coughing, now called 'T.B.' and *!gams*, gonorrhoea.²⁵ Another Hai//om woman, sixty years old and living in Tsumeb, described the old sicknesses as *//nobas*, *!nātsûb*, stomach pain and *!numis*, which is an elusive idea of skin falling off or being eaten away, often translated as cancer or rodent ulcers²⁶. At the same time she also suggested that in the old times there were in fact no sicknesses and they only started when white and black people started to come from Africa and further afield, to Namibia. That was when AIDS arrived. The new sicknesses came on the north wind, particularly from Rundu, Katima and Kavango, which are all large predominantly Ovambo towns running across the northern Namibian border.²⁷

²⁰ 14, 71, 74

²¹ 63

²² 95

²³ 93

²⁴ 89

²⁵ 72

²⁶ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 109.

²⁷ 72

Talking about the old time

The contents of different individuals' old time varied depending upon personal experiences. Variation in old time is most obvious between those who have lived in rural or urban environments. Often phenomena mentioned as old time still persisted either locally or further away.

Khoi

For many older residents of Sesfontein, old time was related to an era before white men, a time also before nature conservation when people could hunt and forage freely to provide themselves with food and medicines. This old time is envisaged despite European interests in Sesfontein having existed for over a century. Missionary involvement in Sesfontein began in 1891.²⁸

At Sesfontein old time was a time associated with people living together peacefully, when families would share the catch of hunters or divide gathered grass seed foods. In the old time people did not drink, argue and fight. The only alcohol consumed was the honey beer made for and drunk by the old men. It was a time when Abob was God and one never said the word for rain but said *auma kai* (great or esteemed grandmother)²⁹. The only regular activity beyond everyday subsistence was the *arus* and the */gais* dances. At marriage ceremonies the man brought a gemsbok blanket and an *Ꞥaub* (a wooden tray for sifting seeds) to the ceremony³⁰. There were no roads or cars. It was a time when there was no hospital and no clinic; the *arus* was the clinic and people would prophesy what was wrong with others. They would also prophesy what plants and animals they could use in their remedies³¹. There was no one to help but God. People just used the ostrich egg and the kudu skin as medicine.³² People made up medicines in cow fat and stored the fat in special tortoise shell containers, warming it up by rubbing it in their hands before they used it. People tied goat or sheep sinews to limbs to help sickness. The old old people sucked out the illnesses. The old time was a good time but it was a hungry time.³³

Now in Sesfontein there is no one to help with the sicknesses, the old people are dead, there is no one to suck the illness.³⁴ Sometimes the clinic medicines help and are good, sometimes they are not. It is

²⁸ Schneider, 'Mission Parish', 1.

²⁹ 46

³⁰ 46

³¹ 5

³² 46

³³ The unreferenced body of this summary is drawn from the collaborative information of interviews 1,42, 46, 77.

Comments very much represents information supplied by other informants.

³⁴ S. Ganuses

good to use the traditional plants and it is good to use the clinic medicines.³⁵ Now you cannot use the kudu skin and other medicines because of Nature Conservation.³⁶ People are not hungry in Sesfontein but they only have the maize to eat.³⁷ In the old days the food was better.³⁸

The theme of despair indicated above in the protestation that all the old healers are dead, was something common to many Khoisan groups I encountered. Khoisan repeated such messages despite the continued existence of healers and other resources. Talk of being helpless and socially vulnerable seemed to reflect almost a stylised manner of conversation – at least the sort of conversation initially entered into with a researcher.

Urban Nama and Damara often related similar themes to those of rural Khoe. Across Khoisan communities people spoke of new time arrival of alcohol, drugs and violence. To urbanised Damara and Nama, new time brought new knowledge of what old time sicknesses really were. The past was a time of ignorance as much as difference. Bertha in Windhoek related that in the old time people used to suck out poison from snake or scorpion bite wounds and put petrol on the wound, or encourage the victims of stings and bites to swallow petrol. Some ‘old people’ - which is often more an ideological associative tie than an age related comment - still store petrol in their houses in Katatura for this purpose.³⁹ These days, new time people, and in a sense ‘new people’, just go to the hospital; they know better.⁴⁰ In contrast to this, a number of Khoe from beyond Windhoek thought petrol a contemporary treatment.⁴¹

In both urban and rural Khoisan contexts there seemed a general trend away from the use of animal sinews, usually goat, as ‘medically’ protective bracelets or necklaces or body ties. For urban Damara and Nama, a black thread is used as a substitute and using animal sinew is considered old time. In Sesfontein black threads are used but so too are ostrich tendons and sinews of goat. Again symptomatic of general changes but more pronounced in urban contexts, a Nama woman living near Mariental stated she was now too frightened to cut incisions on the temples, ‘because of the high blood pressure’ and because ‘the doctors talk too much’.⁴² For her, cutting incisions was now old time. In Sesfontein incisions were still cut and bottles, stones and razor blades used for the cutting. One

³⁵ 42

³⁶ 5, 9, 14, 16, 18, 42, 44

³⁷ 42, 46

³⁸ 1, 73

³⁹ A Windhoek ‘location’.

⁴⁰ 21

⁴¹ 16, 21, 29, 34, 50

⁴² 37

Damara couple in Sesfontein thought that people still used the razors but, 'these days the razors are poisonous'.⁴³ In certain instances in Sesfontein blood is still mixed between people via these cuts, although this is fast becoming an old time thing. A further widespread idea of old time concerned the use of fat as massage lubricant. Although some urban Khoi still made up fat in a fat container, as more rural Khoi did, massage with Vaseline was considered the new way to treat. Perhaps reflecting the continuance of old belief or creation of new belief, it was widely recognised that after treating the lid of the Vaseline pot must not be replaced immediately or the sickness will not go. Certain practices are easier to maintain or more acceptable in rural locations and these were becoming part of urban Khoisan old time. The *arus*, for example, was only rarely known in towns and was definitely old time to urban Khoi.

Nama and Damara within towns use animal and plant remedies widely. Like their rural counterparts, urban Khoi spoke of using eland in remedies in the old days but now having to use kudu as an alternative.⁴⁴ Both urban and rural Khoi spoke of old sicknesses in a very similar manner. But, when it came to new sicknesses, urban healers, particularly in Windhoek and Walvis Bay, were clearly far more familiar with English biomedical terms, such as 'rheumatics', 'stroke' and 'high blood pressure', than their rural counterparts. The words, often said in English, did however sometimes appear in rural locations in the context of new illnesses. Car accidents were a new problem all over Namibia.

Hai//om

Many of the good and bad polarities enunciated by northern and southern Nama and Damara are echoed amongst Hai//om peoples. The picture of old time having been healthier was particularly common. One Hai//om woman in Tsumeb, thought that in the old days the sicknesses would leave the body but these days they just do not leave. 'In the old time if you got sick you would stand up, now many people die. It is because of the medicines'. It was better before the money came. Now everything is money and if you do not have money you cannot go to the clinic and you cannot get treatment.⁴⁵ One Hai//om man in Mangetti gave another slant: 'Old time, white people chased us all the time, we didn't even have water, now we meet and talk, now life is better'.⁴⁶ Some Hai//om stated that in their old time, with the veld foods available, people were never hungry.⁴⁷

⁴³ 18

⁴⁴ 33, 36, 37

⁴⁵ 70

⁴⁶ 60

⁴⁷ 52, 60

Generally Hai//om old time seemed tied to a criticism of whites as people who restrict access to resources: ‘since they had arrived Hai//om can no longer hunt or gather plants because the land is owned and if they try they go to jail’.⁴⁸ In effect this was a very similar protest to that made against ‘Nature Conservation’ by Sesfontein Damara, whose access to the ‘traditional’ resources of their ‘homeland’ is at present a particular issue between Sesfontein residents and a non governmental organisation, the IRDNC (Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation).⁴⁹

The Hai//om live predominantly in urban locations and in and around privately owned farms, many of which are still owned by white Namibians. For these Hai//om, fences, land ownership and jail, are phenomenon still related to as things of white colonialism, as is the removal of access to the Etosha Pan that came with the establishment of the Etosha Game Reserve in 1954. Contrastingly, fences are not such a significant feature of conservation initiatives in Damara north west Namibia and despite the conservation initiatives being a phenomenon at least instigated by predominantly white run organisations, Sesfontein Damara do not seem to articulate their resentment against whites or a colonial legacy. This difference may reflect the fact that Hai//om continue to be threatened by white farmers if they hunt or gather foods and medicines without permission on farm land, whilst, in Sesfontein, it is black conservation workers, representing an organisation, that present the challenge.

One Damara woman in Tsumeb stated that, ‘old time life was good, now people die like flies’. They ate different foods, milk, meat, honey, veld foods. Now they are hungry.⁵⁰ This contrasted with a number of Hai//om who said that, like Sesfontein Damara, now they are not hungry but they only have the maize to eat that came with the white men.⁵¹ Hai//om Alwine, now in her 70s, told of trading biltong for maize in the old time, when she was young and everything could be bought for 50 cents.⁵² One man suggested that up to 1993 white men poisoned the trees and stopped wild foods growing. Like many others he attributed new sickness to foreigners.⁵³ Alwine knew that AIDS was brought by foreign people.⁵⁴ Stefanus, at Mangetti, who was in his sixties, thought he was about six years old when white people came to the region. In the early days things were good and they were free. Now the young people smoke, drink and even smoke marijuana.⁵⁵

⁴⁸ 70

⁴⁹ Operating in north-west Namibia since 1982. See S. Sullivan ‘Folk and Formal, Local and National – Damara Knowledge and Community Conservation on Southern Kunene, Namibia’, *Cimbebasia*, 15 (1999), 1.

⁵⁰ 73

⁵¹ 52, 54, 70, 72, 74

⁵² 72

⁵³ 70

⁵⁴ 72

⁵⁵ 60

A Hai//om man in Etosha unusually thought that the making of incisions was ‘a new thing of the old time’. It was done because the old people were afraid of the Ovambo and Herero. He additionally observed that in the old time people used to suck illness with horns and the young people did not cough. Like other Hai//om and Sesfontein Damara, he identified the idea of dead firing arrows at the living to make them sick as an old time thing. He, again like other Hai//om, said in the old time you could not say the name of God.⁵⁶

Ju’hoan

Tsemkgau, a 71 years old Ju’hoan man, had seen old people with headaches treat themselves by rubbing their temples with smouldering stick ends. He thought that in the old days there were no chest problems. New sicknesses were T.B. and AIDS. He did not know how people caught AIDS or what it does.⁵⁷ Dam Kxao, like Tsemkgau, knew the trance healers could not treat AIDS. AIDS and the other new disease, gonorrhoea, he said, cannot be seen in a trance. A person will use plants to treat them.⁵⁸ Unlike the Hai//om or Damara, the Ju’hoan in ‘protected’ land around Tsumkwe talked not in terms of fences or Nature Conservation restricting their hunting and gathering of foods and medicines, but of land becoming occupied and denuded by Herero and Tswana cattle herders. Unlike the Khoi, some attested to the old days being violent, when a bushman would kill another with little provocation.⁵⁹ Tixai, a woman probably in her eighties, living at //Aru, related that, ‘in the old days people would fight and argue but now they die from sickness, maybe two or three in one year.’⁶⁰

Two Ju’hoan reported that in the old time the whites gave medicines that helped.⁶¹ The implication being that these days, new time, the black medical staff do not. This theme also appeared in the context of a Damara woman in Tsumeb who specified that in the 1950s the white doctors were good, but since 1993 the hospitals and clinics only gave Chloroquine and Panado tablets.⁶² Kaeesje Kgwara, a man at //Aru, knew there are many gods because there are many churches. Before the church ‘there was a god and that was the one the healers worked with, !Xu’.⁶³ Eighty two years old /Ui thought that before the church and missionaries came to Tsumkwe (in the 1960s), people ‘did not have anything to believe in’.⁶⁴ He knows it is the wind of the dead people that makes people sick.⁶⁵

⁵⁶ 53

⁵⁷ 84

⁵⁸ 89

⁵⁹ 86, 94

⁶⁰ 86

⁶¹ 100, 101

⁶² 73

⁶³ 83

⁶⁴ cf. 93

Elderly Tixai described how when the white people came they accumulated more things and could not move to another place. She likes being in one place because ‘carrying water and everything was heavy’. When she was young ‘the country was not full of any nation, only Bushmen. We saw others and traded with them but they were not here’. She did not want the other nations in the region, only the white people, ‘because they were the first’. The white people have been good to them. Their medicine is good because it saved her husband from dying.⁶⁶

Conclusions

Across Khoisan communities the cause of sickness is attributed to dead people through arrows, wind or by stealing the heart. In urban settings or amongst more educated Khoe the idea of the dead causing sickness by firing arrows was not familiar, although the dead were known to cause sickness through frightening people in dreams.⁶⁷

Some urbanised or educated Khoisan, such as those in Katatura, describe new sicknesses like breast lumps, high blood pressure, heart disease and AIDS entirely in relation to introduced changes in diet, stress or even to viruses that came with white people. In a socio-biological sense, aspects of what they said may be right, but the emphasis of their understanding very seldom came from biology. It remains embedded in an underlying opposition between old and familiar, verses local, new and foreign. The half Damara half Nama woman from Swartdam, who travelled around her region working as a midwife, combined new with old in her assertion that all the new sickness came because people now travel around so much. Through this increased travel they become sick because the winds of so many different people touch them.⁶⁸

The idea of sickness coming in, is one that runs from what are very probably old Khoisan associations of climate and weather bringing in change and illness. Amongst many of the Khoisan I encountered there seemed to be an idea of the familiar local world not being a particular generator of newness. This preconception of stasis and continuity seems tied to wider Khoisan social and ideological tendencies that have a preference for conservatism; which is not to undermine the real existence of agency, opportunism and creativity. It also seems tied to often repeated ideas of difference, expressed as, ‘people over there are different, they do different things’.

⁶⁵ 90

⁶⁶ 86

⁶⁷ 20, 21, 25, 30

⁶⁸ 30

I have identified the multi-faced presentation of AIDS as one reason why Khoisan feel themselves besieged with new diseases. A further reason may lie in a combination of improved access to health facilities, over the last fifty years or so, and an improving biomedical diagnostic ability. Both of these factors may have led Khoisan to think of a particular sickness, which they had previously only thought of in vague general terms, as something specific, in the light of it being granted a new medical name. A proliferation of diagnoses of, for example, breast cancers, may well have emphasised notions of new disease arriving with foreigners.

The old/good and new/bad dichotomy ran throughout the Khoisan, but clearly different experiences shaped individual's periodisation. The dichotomy operated on both a very personal level and a shared grander level. The Tsumeb Damara woman who identified the 1950s as a good time and post-1993 as a bad time, had structured her account on her good experiences with a white doctor in Otjiwarongo and her bad experience with staff at the Tsumeb hospital. At the same time though, Khoisan such as herself tapped into an old time before the old time. The earlier time was one that a number of elderly Damara, Hai//om, Ju/'hoan and Nharo described from first hand experience. Underlying themes of this shared old, old time, pointed to a simpler life based on hunting and gathering for food and medicines. Many aboriginal peoples similarly express perceptions of life over three time scales, now, old and old old. The anthropologist Brody, for example, found this amongst the Inuit.⁶⁹

Khoisan resentment at the causes of their present debilitating social condition were not aimed so much at types of people, such as white, black, soldiers or conservationists, but at the hardship of being denied access to a wide variety of wild foods and medicines. Most Khoisan were remarkably pragmatic about their situation and the changes they had endured. They recognised that some traditional remedies were good and some bad, just like white medicines. Some had clearly had bad experiences with power holding individuals, but these experiences were similarly often looked upon with pragmatic resignation; some people are good, some people are bad. Reading between the lines, one can see in these various descriptions of change both the social strain of an over stretched Namibian health infrastructure and the very significant impact of AIDS that has added to ongoing problems with other sicknesses, particularly tuberculosis and malaria.

In terms of healthcare, Khoisan time is collapsed as 'old'. This relates to a time both before the hospital, the clinic and the doctor and to a time before services deteriorated. If pushed informants pointed beyond this to a simpler past. 'New' time was often used in relation to the arrival of significant

⁶⁹ Hugh Brody, 'The Arctic', Waynflete Lectures, Magdalen College, Oxford Univ. 10/02/04.

colonial infrastructure and facilities. More commonly it was applied to the very recent, which is truly the time associated with decreasing standards and increasing illness. Notions of old and new time are not internally consistent and tie in with wider social themes of identity, colonisation, status and access to resources in independent Namibia.⁷⁰ They also, unavoidably, tie in with informants perceptions of what I, as the interviewer, wanted to hear .

Old time for more remote populations, such as some Damara around Sesfontein and Ju/'hoan around Tsumkwe, tended to be a time before white people, doctors and clinics. A number of elderly rural Khoisan described an old time that they had experienced when young, before the white men, the church, the maize and the new sicknesses. This old time, though healthier than now, was not unequivocally good; it was hard. More urbanised Khoisan tended to talk of old time in terms of contrasting health care services. This latter contrast was never articulated explicitly around Independence but around availability, and quality, of doctors and medicines. Often Nama and Damara living in Windhoek, Swakopmund and the small settlements and towns in the southern half of Namibia, described old time practices that remained everyday practice in northern Khoi communities.

Across Khoisan communities biomedical knowledge as received from hospitals, clinics and health awareness programs has filtered into folk understanding. Rural Khoisan tended to profess ignorance regarding what they hoped to achieve, in a physical sense, by carrying out particular treatment strategies. Khoisan with some education, or exposure to urban living, tended to try and explain traditional practices within a very basic biomedical paradigm. Universally, informants drew instant parallels between their own healing strategies and biomedicine. Accordingly, traditional healers, healing dances and prophets were just like the doctors and hospitals. Herbal and animal based oral remedies worked like tablets. Putting 'dirtiness' into incisions was a traditional injection. One Damara man, speaking in English, explained the effective use of dirtiness in incisions in terms of something learnt, 'through the centuries, they call it survival of the jungle, life of the fittest'. He related that the dirtiness of people, 'who are very strong, who have a very strong immune system', can be added to weak people.⁷¹ The persistence of such 'educated' translations as this, wherein Khoisan ideas of potency are displaced by scientific ideas of immunity that legitimate traditional practices, will continue to fragment traditional Khoisan ideas. In effect, such 'translation' represents a scientific colonization of aboriginal thought and perpetuates some of the distortions of Khoisan practice and ideas I have identified at the hands of colonial ethnographers.

⁷⁰ Suzman identified a similar phenomenon amongst the Omaheke Ju/'hoan: J. Suzman, *Things fromt the Bush*, p. 130 ff.

⁷¹ 17

Vaughan has suggested that much literature concerned with traditional medicine suffers from emphasising difference over pluralism.⁷² Close examination of recent Khoisan medical practice and ideas reveals both difference and pluralism. The fate of Khoisan medical practices that are maintained almost exclusively in rural communities, such as the trance dance and treatment with incisions, is difficult to assess. The variety of different peoples, circumstances and environments will no doubt play a key factor in the nature of change. My research indicates that different aspects of traditional medicine will persist, transform or diminish at different rates. The reasons for such unevenness lie in a number of factors.

Groups such as the Gibeon Women's Cultural Group testify to a post-colonial celebration of traditional knowledge. This celebration of knowledge is however partial. Following dominant biomedical, religious and wider 'progressive' paradigms, certain traditional practices are not encouraged by church members and health officials. Nor are they encouraged by other influential governmental or non-governmental organisations, particularly those concerned with conservation and tourist initiatives. This leads to a situation where plant remedies taken orally are encouraged, but animal medicines taken orally, or particularly rubbed into incisions, are strongly discouraged. A physician at the Tsumeb Mine Hospital confirmed reports I had heard from Tsumeb residents that traditional remedies were indeed being encouraged by Tsumeb medical staff. She attributed this to the proven efficacy of herbal remedies and a particular cultural enthusiasm for herbal remedies amongst staff of German heritage. It was also symptomatic of a lack of state funding behind the provision of pharmaceutical remedies.⁷³

In Bushmanland the trance dance is becoming an increasing focus of tourist interest and a symbol of Bushman cultural traditions. Indications are that these factors more than any others will encourage persistence of the phenomenon. Amongst the Damara the *arus* remains almost as an underground phenomenon. Pressure exists to suppress the dance at least from church members who associate it with witchcraft. Similarly, the hunting and tracking skills of Bushmen draw tourists from far and wide. Amongst Sesfontein Damara, by contrast, they are afraid even to pick up springbok knocked down by a car lest they are reported to the nature conservationists. Without hunting rights certain aspects of Khoe medicine can be maintained but not others. Parts of animals become illegal to obtain but treatments using dung remain or become a viable option. Amongst both Bushman and Khoi communities, reasons why blood or other body products should not be used in medicines were iterated in a Khoisan idiom. One Nharo woman, for example, expressed remorsefully that in these new times

⁷² Vaughan, 'Health and Hegemony', p. 198.

⁷³ Anonymous

even the urine of young children could not be used to treat eye problems because all the children are having sex earlier. Now she must go to the doctor.⁷⁴

My research points to differences between both traditional medicine of Khoisan with different levels of education and between rurally based Khoisan as opposed to Khoisan participating regularly in a modern urban African environment. It is hard to determine whether these differences give good indication of the probable fate of traditional Khoisan medicine in Namibia; whether the attitudes and practices of 'educated', urbanised Khoisan, will to some extent be replicated by later generations as the recipients of Development ambitions. What is clear, is that most Khoisan in the near future might increasingly repeat scientific ideas and attempt to explain traditional belief through an 'educated' idiom, but they will not adopt biomedical understanding in a predictable, 'Western', manner. If present patterns of behaviour continue, certain understandings may seem to displace others, but, for most Khoisan, below the surface remains a plurality of understandings and resort. Often poorly understood biomedical notions are grafted onto a variety of distinctly Khoisan ways of thinking about health and illness. These Khoisan ways of thinking reflect Khoisan attitudes to knowledge - its creation, use, holding and perpetuation. They are founded on a rich, varied, unstructured and flexible bedrock of distinctive ideas.

The veneer of biomedical familiarization is visible in the following thoughts of Frederick //Awaseb, a thirty five years old Hai//om man living at Tsintsabis. Frederick told me: 'polio can come from the wind. You can catch T.B. from the wind or if you stay at a place that is dusty, or if you do not behave and drink and smoke. Even the work, bicycle riding can give you TB if you get tired.'⁷⁵ A fusion and transformation of ideas is further epitomised in the statement of a Ju/'hoan man regarding tuberculosis and clinic treatment:

Q. When do people go to the clinic and when do they use this treatment for malaria ?

A. If it is normal [mild] malaria, if it is not mixed with dead people, then they will just massage and it will be okay; if it is mixed with dead people [serious] they will take it to the clinic.

Q. So the clinic can treat illness caused by dead people?

A. They cannot. First they massage and the healers dance and take things out. Then if all is taken out and just the sickness is left the clinic can treat it.⁷⁶

In terms of Janzen and Prin's ideas of change, Prins' notion of lasting core concepts that take in the colonial, and in this context the post-colonial, seems appropriate. It is however clearly not enough to

⁷⁴ 98

⁷⁵ 66

⁷⁶ 81

look at 'Western' influence alone. The distinctive patterns visible in Khoisan medicine, including ideas of potency, wind, smell, transference of qualities and moving organs, must in themselves be seen as the product of a constant process of creation, assimilation, rejection and re-creation of ideas and practice, between Khoi and San and other peoples, both African and European, along a continuum of social and environmental experience.

Conclusion

My thesis has used historical and fieldwork based sources to explore Khoisan medicine. I hope to have demonstrated that there exists a rich world of Khoisan ideas around issues of medicine. Some of these ideas have been recognised in other Khoisan cultural contexts, some have parallels amongst other peoples, but many are new to considerations of the Khoisan. That I encountered some new information seems dependent upon four principal factors. Firstly, collating information from a diverse range of historical and anthropological sources allowed me to begin my study with insightful questions. Secondly, my recognition of the contingency of accounts concerning Khoisan medicine encouraged me to explore issues of healing from different perspectives other than that of biomedicine. Thirdly, by setting up a two-way dialogue between the past and the present, each informed the other and encouraged me to explore new avenues of enquiry. Lastly, my study was comparative, in terms of both the historical and anthropological material and my own fieldwork. Comparing different material and interpretations cut across disciplinary boundaries. This highlighted patterns in Khoisan medicine and allowed me to use insight from one detailed ethnographic context to help interpret less well researched material.

In recognition of the fact that a history of Khoisan healing requires a history of ideas, I have focused part of my analysis on understanding. This has necessitated presenting both Khoisan understanding and the interpretation of Khoisan by 'Western' commentators. I have used insights from my research to critique Western interpretations and to build upon those that seem to best represent the Khoisan. By examining Khoisan in this reflective manner, I hope to have narrowed academic distance from the Khoisan and historical distance from the Khoisan past.

The homogeneity of the ideas I encountered, not just across contemporary Khoisan but also across historical and contemporary Khoisan populations, suggests their embedded nature. Whilst change is always a factor in traditional medicine, the key ways of thinking I have explored and their relationship to the environment and environmental resources, suggests that there may be a persistent pattern to Khoisan medical thinking and behaviour. I suggested at the outset of the thesis that histories of Khoisan medicine are incomplete and potentially misrepresentative if they do not take account of ideas inherent in practice. Any claim to have identified ideas in historical cultures which do not have a literate tradition is necessarily highly speculative. But, the pattern of Khoisan medical behaviour that emerges from my study, seems consistent enough to at least point to a more representative

understanding of the Khoisan past than biomedical paradigms of historical interpretations currently permit.

The existence of significant patterns in Khoisan medical thought and behaviour supports the validity of considering the different peoples, Khoi and San, within one compound term. Patterns exist which not only tie the contemporary groups together, but anchor them in an intermeshed colonial past. Without evidence the nature of earlier forms of healing can only be speculative. Despite enormous change, continuity is, however, apparent in beliefs and practices over the colonial period. This suggests that many of the ideas and practices presented in this thesis have long historical roots. The particular importance of the environment as a consistent formative backdrop to Khoisan culture especially points to longevity of health related ideas and practices.

There is no clear evidence of early Hottentot healing dances. However, in details such as Schreyer's encounter, involving a group around a fire with a central doctor 'addressing the sun', and Kolb's identification that during dance Hottentots were 'taught witchcraft' by a deity, there is strong indication that Hottentots have long used a dance type setting as an arena for healing. Although the earliest descriptions of dance are generally thin on detail, significant similarities are, nonetheless, evident between Hottentot dance and Bushman dance as it is inscribed in cave paintings and still practiced. The similarity between Damara and Bushman dance was explicitly remarked upon in an early context by Alexander (1838).¹ For both Khoi and San groups, dancing has long been a way of achieving a number of outcomes, including bringing in knowledge from the unseen world, inducing rain, preparing for war and healing or simply enjoyment. In recent contexts, social changes and availability of resources preclude the need to dance for outcomes desired in the past. The 'discovery' of the Bushman healing dance is indicative of the contingency of ethnography. The dominance of Bushman trance dances in recent research, whilst pointing to an undoubted importance as community ritual and an example of socio-ecological adaptation, says much about the erosion of wider contexts of ritual expression, such as Bushman war dances recorded by Arbousset and Thompson in the early nineteenth century.² It also says much about the categories of enquiry and distinctive interpretations of recent researchers.

The lack of knowledge of the existence of the Damara trance dance amongst academics is associated with lack of ethnographic interest in traditional Khoi practices. Lack of enquiry stems from over emphasised assumptions of thorough Khoi cultural erosion, having been inappropriately thought to

¹ Alexander, *Expedition of Discovery*, p. 137.

² G. Thompson, *Travels and Adventures*, p. 114.

apply to all regions and Khoi people of Namibia. Since the late nineteenth century, Bushmen have been a continued subject of fascination for Euro-Americans. The belief that there is little traditional left of Khoi culture, and little therefore available to study, has further encouraged an already overshadowing interest in Bushman at the expense of Khoi, who share many cultural similarities. This overshadowing has served to dislocate Bushman healing from its wider Khoisan cultural context.

Historical records, close consideration of the contingencies of Khoi and San ethnography and comparison with other African cultures, all suggest caution when trying to find distinctive Bushman characteristics. In particular, examining Bushman healing in a wider context than just the trance dance, indicates care should be taken when associating 'core principles' with Bushman as shamans and Bushman culture as witchcraft free. Shamanism and witchcraft are useful as handles for discussion of broad cultural distinctions. However, close examination of the relationship of Bushman to shamanism and witchcraft, suggests it is valuable to recognise these phenomena as variations of wider Khoisan patterns of behaviour. Distinctions can be made regarding whether Bushmen belief is shamanistic or possession based, but the usefulness of such distinctions is questionable, as is the outcome. At times the evidence behind these distinctions seems to represent as much the different interpretative paradigms of researchers as clear-cut expositions of Bushman beliefs.

Silberbauer's research provided one example of how theory has led understanding. Silberbauer's theoretical inclination towards peaceful, ecologically adapted, egalitarian Bushmen, encouraged him to identify witchcraft type behaviour in G/wi hunting practices, but not in their social practices, and to ambiguously conclude that the G/wi did not practice witchcraft, despite the evidence of similar G/wi beliefs held in the context of animals. Barnard's interpretation of a Nharo healer's stomach based medicine substance needing to link with a dead spirit to become effective, stands in contrast with other anthropologists interpretations of Bushman trance healing. Such contradictory findings are relatively common in San research. Close consideration of Barnard's findings, however, suggests that his data might not in fact be so different from that of other anthropologists. Rather than identifying substantial difference, Barnard's apparently different data, and different interpretation, points to real difficulties in comparative Khoisan studies at a linguistic level and at a level of ideas. My comparative study has scrutinised diverse Khoisan sources in order to comment on differences and similarities between Khoi and San healing. Differences identified by anthropologists do relate to real cultural distinctions. But they also demonstrate the contingency of the ethnography. The existence of contradiction also points to a significant characteristic of Khoisan culture. Many Khoisan live in a world of possibilities. This idea complements anthropological findings regarding the fluid and flexible nature of Bushman thought.

If there is a distinctive Khoisan medical system it lies somewhere within the Khoisan world of possibilities and a way of thinking about potency which is rooted in experience of the Khoisan social and physical environment. The world of possibilities is symptomatic of a distinctly receptive predisposition to experiential truth. It also reflects a tolerance towards different knowledge held by different people. Without evidence, phenomena which may to 'educated' ears sound extraordinary, are not typically dismissed out of hand but merely recognised as unknown. Similarly to Last's findings amongst the Hausa, a phenomenon of 'not knowing' also exists amongst the Khoisan. This is often accompanied by an apparent lack of interest. In the Khoisan context the phenomena of 'not knowing' is part of their world of possibilities. The world of possibilities is equally tied to a Khoisan receptivity to information acquired through dreaming, trancing and intuition as channels of authority, insight and knowledge transmission.

My project began with an enquiry into the presence of historically recorded Nama massage practices. This starting point provided not only a chance to examine the contingent construction of Khoisan healing history, but the possible existence of a Khoisan medical system. My wide ranging fieldwork confirmed my suspicion that massage was, and is, far more important to Khoisan than has been recognised. The absence of massage in ethnographic accounts illustrates the partiality of Khoisan healing history. Nama massage practices are part of a fundamental Khoisan conception of the body and illness. Aspects of this core understanding are suggested at intervals throughout the colonial record but nowhere have they been extensively examined. Bleek's record of /Xam Bushman ideas of wind, and Lübbert's of Hottentot 'wind in the head', give exceptional historical depth and breadth to some of the core ideas I encountered.

Behind all aspects of Khoisan healing, ideas persist, often consciously, of potency and transformation of potency. The Khoisan form of these ideas is predicated on different ways of knowing and thinking. The apparent variety of Khoisan potency ideas reflects the multifarious ways in which the world is known and continues to be known. Potency is known in different contexts by different phenomena. Sweat, 'dirtiness', urine, smell and blood, are holders of potency in a healing context. Massage, incisions, exposure to smoke and odour, wearing necklaces, breathing, sucking, snorting and shaking ones hands into the air, are all ways healers move potency around. Parts of animals contain potency and can confer certain strengths, or equally illness, to people. An animal's shadow can be a vector of wind potency and parts of a snake rubbed into incisions can bestow anti-poison potency. Wind and smell are particularly prevalent ways of thinking about moving potency. Wind is good to think with. Knowledge of wind is drawn into explanations of life including understandings of the body, and especially the role of breath, blood, the heart and the soul.

Potency, or the essence, of supernal beings is sometimes thought of as being transmitted by arrows. This idea of arrows is based upon everyday understanding of arrows as used by hunters, replete with poison, the hunter's intention and materialising power. In life people affect each other through thought, action, such as staring intently, firing arrows or simply being in a certain physical condition, such as in a state of menstruation. So similarly do dead people, although their range of influence is restricted primarily to smell or rather wind and arrows. Amongst more urbanised Nama and Damara dead people are thought only to cause harm by their appearance in dreams.

Allied to ideas of transmitting human or animal potency is the idea of 'defenders', with whom healers work. Healers I encountered identified these defenders as */gais* or *gais*. Defenders or spirit helpers are a common feature of other African cultures. In the Khoisan context, the idea seems historically linked to the Khoi */gais* dance and perhaps beyond to nineteenth century /Kham (/Xam) Bushmen */geiya*, meaning 'strong'³. Schmid recognised the close connection between the */geis* trance dance, the *!gai-//ōb*, medicine man or witch doctor and *!gai*, the 'rising from the stomach' that Khoi healers experienced while sucking out sickness.⁴ In view of the fact that *!geiha* in !Kung means an experienced, or strong, and by implication dangerous, healer and in Nharo *g!ai.xa* carries similar meaning, in poison and to shoot,⁵ there may well be a connection between the idea of */gais* I found and similar ideas centring around healers, potency and healing, found amongst Bushman as well as Khoi over the last two centuries. Vedder's identification of Khoe *!gai* as something rising from the stomach suggests *!gai* is not only related to ideas of potency and */gais*, but also to Bushman notions of */num* and *tssō*. This cross over of ideas between Khoi and San belief refutes Schmid's conclusion that there is no evidence of a link between Damara and Bushmen trance healing. More significantly, it further questions the validity of thinking of Bushmen trance healing apart from the wider context of Khoi healing.

The importance of the environment to Khoisan cosmology and ontology has been downplayed in recent research. Consideration of healing suggests the environment provides, and has long provided, the Khoisan with key ways of thinking about health, illness, life, death and bodily function. Wind and lightning remain particularly significant to Khoisan ideas of potency transference. Standing and lying, like the sun rising and lowering, seem key ways Khoisan think about potency and illness potency. Sleep is like half death, sleep and death are horizontal. The sun rises and stands up like the horns of an oryx to sit white in the sky like an ostrich egg. To wake up */gais*, or 'open the healer', or remove

³ Hahn, *Tsuni-//Goam*, p. 7

⁴ Schmid, 'Present Day', pp. 11, 13.

sickness, the body must be massaged and swished with a fly whisk until the potency is ‘standing’ in the correct position. The /*gais*, like the dead people that latch onto Nharo *tssō* to enable healing, must be awake in special parts of the body. In the human body key sites of /*gais* are the lateral throat, the chest and the lower abdomen. Potency is particularly strong in these parts. Potency may be thought of as medicine. Medicine in Khoekhoegowab is *sō/ōa*.⁵ It is because concentrations of potency exist in particular parts of animals that these parts are associated with food prohibitions or healing ability. The eland chest, for example, makes children cough, and is consequently poisonous, *sōxa* in Khoekhoegowab.

Buchu or *sâi* with its strong smell is full of potency. It has power to pacify or inflame. Too much potency equates to too much life and causes sickness. Organs with too much potency move around the body. The *!arab* and heart stand up and pump too much when a person experiences shock. To be treated they need to be coaxed back to their ‘normal place’ and pacified. A /Xam sorcerers blood vessels needed rubbing and buchu to make them lie down or he would transform into a lion.

Even urban educated Namibian Khoisan, whom one might expect to be far removed from the sort of ideas I have identified, maintain many of the traditional practices and ways of thinking found amongst rural communities. For many urban Nama and Damara formal education has not, as yet, closed their world of possibilities. Through maintained rural contact, urban Khoi continue to use a very wide range of environmental resources. To these they add new resources such as car break fluid. Although new ideas, new resources and biomedical terminology are part of contemporary Khoisan healing, for most Khoisan these phenomena are given medical validation through Khoisan ways of knowing; dancing, trancing, dreaming, intuition, prescribed practice and experience.

My research identifies a remarkable homogeneity of medical ideas and practices operating across diverse Khoisan communities. It moreover locates an underlying set of persistent ideas around which Khoisan healing strategies articulate. These ideas are widespread, relatively consistent and appear ‘traditional’. If a system is a set of connected things working together, then the Khoisan do have a medical ‘system’. If a ‘system’ is a theoretical basis, that provides a creative means of adapting known ways of treating to new situations, then again the Khoisan have a system. They use familiar ways of thinking and doing to treat new illnesses using novel methods. The problem of identifying a system, however, is the implication that reasoning and rationality should be at a conscious, readily articulated level, and one moreover familiar to ‘educated’ ways of thinking. Despite my search for a story of

⁵ Katz, *Boiling*, pp. 312, 314; Barnard, *Nharo Wordlist*, p. 107.

⁶ Haacke and Eiseb, *Khoekhoegowab-English*, p. 38.

understanding and interpretation in the distorting 'Western' categories of enquiry, I have looked for Khoisan 'medicine'. This follows a necessary requirement of defining ones starting point of study. It is not perhaps surprising that what I encountered, phenomena that do and do not fit 'Western' ideas of medicine and systems, is best understood by drawing on the rich compass of interdisciplinary study and insights proffered by diverse individuals over a long 'Western' association with Khoisan.

Appendix 1

Recorded Interviews: 3rd April 2001-13th Sept. 2001. Arranged by date of interview

Name	Date of Interview	M = Male F = Female	Age '~' = estimate	Ethnicity	Other
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N.B. ethnicity: Despite academics defining !Kung and Ju/'hoan as the same people, I have retained the word used by each informant.

Sesfontein environs

1. Phillipina //Nowaxas. 3/4/01, F, ~ 80+ , Damara, Grandmother of Suro, experienced well known healer, worked from her hut. Deceased.
2. Andreas !Kharuxab, 4/4/01, M, ~ 60+, Damara, rainman massages.
3. Hans Ganuseb, 5/4/01, M, ~ 37, Damara, brother of Suro, policeman, massages.
4. Johannes Taurob, 6/4/01, M, 48, Damara, rainman.
5. Abraham Ganuseb, 7/4/01, M, 55, Damara, rainman.
6. Gabriel Amxab, 8/4/01, M, 71, Damara, very powerful rainman born Hoanib river, struck by lightening twice.
7. Jeramiah Rakondo, 9/4/01, M, 56, Damara 'prophet'.
8. Mariah //Hoes, 9/4/01, F, 78, Damara, massages.
9. Lauda Daubes, 10/4/01, F, 86, Nama.
10. Sid Nuab, 10/4/01, M, 65, Damara, lay minister for church, massaged heart problems.
- 10a. Lydia //Hoes 10/4/01, F, ~ 70, Damara, not recorded, massaged pregnant women.
11. Joshua //Nowaxab, 11/4/01, M, 68, Damara born Aob (near Sesfontein).
12. Fransina /Uxams, 11/4/01, F, 77, Damara.
13. Emgard Awises, 11/4/01, F, Damara and Grandmother, Losia Ganuses, 82, Damara.
14. Jacob Hoeb, 12/4/01, M, 61, Damara, born Warmquelle, son of rainman.
15. Petrus Taurob, 13/4/01, M, 51, Damara, born Sesfontein.
16. Anna Ganuses, 15/4/01, F, ~ 50+ Damara.

Franzfontein

17. E. Eiseb, 16/4/01, M, Damara, Pastor and co-author with W. Haacke, *Khoekhoegowab-English Glossary*.

Khorixas environs

18. Thomas Noab, M, 71 with Justina Noas, F, 16/4/01, both Damara. Thomas born Sesfontein, Olga Hurubes, south of Sesfontein.
19. Justina Haraes, 16/4/01, F, 72, Damara.

Windhoek, Katatura

20. Martha Scrywer, 8/5/01, F, ~50+, Damara. Full time healer working from home.
21. Bertha ? 12/5/01, F, 52, Damara, born Liegenstein District, Windhoek.
22. Libertina Garuses, 13/5/01, F, 54, Damara.

Walvis Bay

23. Tina Elizabeth Nero, 15/5/01, F, 63, Nama, born Windhoek and moved to Walvis Bay 1965. Father from South Africa, mother Windhoek.

Kuiseb River

24. Sophia Herero, 15/5/01, F, 62, Topnaar.

Swakopmund

25. Drusilla Urichos, 16/5/01, F, 33, Damara (Tsoxaub), born Okahandja, lived mostly in Swakopmund.

Kuiseb River, Uduseb

26. Ruth Bam, 17/5/01, F, 54, Nama / Topnaar, born Walvis Bay.

Maltahöe

27. Helen Muzorongondo, 19/5/01, F, 53, Nama, born Namib, Neuhof. In Maltahöe since 1990.

28. Joanna Andon, 19/5/01, F, 64, Nama father, Dama mother, lived mostly in Maltahöe.

29. Sophia Hanse, 19/5/01, F, 74, Damara, born Namib, Naehof. In Marientale district since 1968.

Marientale environs

30. Salphina Janjies, 21/5/01, F, 44, Nama, born Otjimbingwe, schooled in Swakopund. Sister of Lutheran Church.

31. Johanna !Khachas, 22/5/01, F, 83, Nama Dama, born Three Rivers District of Rehoboth. Since 1968 lived around Swartdam.

Gibeon

32. Gibeon Womens' Cultural Group, 23/5/01, 8 members, predominantly Nama, aged ~ 25-50.

33. Elizabeth Apollos, 23/5/01, F, 70, Nama, born Amob farm, Maltahöe, lived in Windhoek, moved to Gibeon 1978. Contributor: Alwina Swartbooi, F, Nama.

34. Katrina Joseph, 24/5/01, F, 70, Nama, born in Namib.

35. Veronika Matinga, 24/5/01, F, 42, Nama. Moves between Gibeon and their 'farm'.

36. Dorothe Apollos, 24/5/01, F, 65, Nama, born Rehoboth district. With Paulos Apollos, M, 66, Nama Dama, born Maltahöe.

Hoachanas

37. Eta Taseb, 25/5/01, F, 73, Nama, with Maria Tsia Tsiab, F, 81, Nama. Both born in Hoachanas.

Uis Mine environs

38. Mathew Kuvare, 1/6/01, M, ~55, Damara Herero. Witchdoctor, very well known.

Abu Huab

39. Betrina //Hoes, 2/6/01, F, Damara (Namid), born !Hubu Gabes, Uhab River, moved to Uis. With Prisilla †Saraes, F, 60; Sagarias /Uiseb, M.

40. Martha Tsuses, 2/6/01, F, 60, born Rehoboth district.

Sesfontein environs

41-2 Abraham Ganuseb, 13-14/6/01 see above, no. 5.

43. Julia !Kharuxas, 14/6/01, F, 81, Damara (†Nu Khoe); Alwina †Gawusas, F, 47, Damara (//Uba).

44. Theodor Hendriks, 16/7/01, M, ~45, Damara, Sesfontein Pastor.

45. Veronica Ganuses, 17/7/01, F, ~40, Damara, Sesfontein clinic nurse.

46. Phillipina //Nowaxas, 18/7/01, see above, no. 1.

47. Elizabeth Tauros, 19/7/01, F, 77, Damara, with Julia Tauros, F, ~62. Both from Purros, moved to Sesfontein in 1962 because of the war.

48. Jacob Hoeb, 20/7/01, see above no. 14.

49. Elizabeth and Julia Tauros, see above, no. 47.

Outjo, Etosha and Otavi environs

50. Paul †Hawabeb, 22/7/01, M, 53, Hai//om, *Xoma aob*, lives Namatange West, communal farm.

51. Piet †Nâibeb, 23/7/01, M, ~60, Hai//om, living In Outjo, mostly lived around Otavi.
52. Group interview ~ 14 people. 25/7/01 Principal contributors: Ankelina Kandegoses, F, 71, Hai//om, born Narigub; Attie Tsam, M, 61, Hai//om; Fransisca Tsam, F, 38, Hai//om. Farm Hester, 40 kms. south Otavi.
53. William Touxab, 26/7/01, M, ~50+, Hai//om, born Halali, living Etosha, always lived in Rietfontein region. With Jacob Upi, M, ~50+, Hai//om. Both at Halali, Etosha.
54. Johanna †Gaeses, 28/7/01, F, ~46, Hai//om, living at Halali, born Namutoni region.
55. Olga Tsam, 28/7/01, F, ~40+, Hai//om, born and living Okakuejo.
56. Jan Tsumeb, 29/7/01, M, 56, Hai//om, born and living Namutoni.
57. Hans Haneeb, 29/7/01, M, 71, Hai//om, born Namutoni, living Oshivelo, lived most of life in the region.
58. Daniel Apia (/Hae hoa!ga/nâia), 30/7/01, M, 44, !Kung, born Paroga, living Ombili Foundation. Trance healer.
59. Group interview at Tsintsabis, 31/7/01, 14 people, 7 Hai//om, 7 !Kung.
60. Stefanus //Gam//aeba, 1/8/01, M, ~60, Hai//om, born Kotjoro, Ovamboland. With Jakob †Aroxab, Hai//om, born Mangetti. Both living at Mangetti.
61. Jan Serengboom, 1/8/01, M, 71, !Kung / Audamab. Headman, Tsintsabis, lived there most of his life.
62. Salinda !Nawases, 1/8/01, F, 47, Hai//om mother, !Kung father, born Ovamboland, *Xoma aos*. Living Tsintsabis.
63. Maritha !Harebes, 2/8/01, F, born Bungu, district of Rundu. With Sofia Hauses, F, 81, !Kung. Living at Mangetti, both moved there because of the war. Trance healers.
64. Helena Kamkais, 2/8/01, F, 68, Hai//om, born !Gom-ais, living at Tsintsabis and lived there most of her life.
65. Group interview, 2/8/01, 6 men, all !Kung, aged 39-73. All living at Tsintsabis. Principle informant Thomas Hunibeb, 66, born /Gom khaos. Trance healer, travels around and has demonstrated at cultural shows.
66. Frederick //Awaseb, 3/8/01, M, 35, Hai//om, lives Tsintsabis and Oshivelo.
67. S. Garises, 3/8/01, F, Hai//om, Tsintsabis clinic nurse.

Tsumeb environs

68. Manie Gaib, 5/8/01, M, 51, Hai//om, born at Outjo.
69. Frieda /Nuas, 5/8/01, F, 51, Hai//om, born /Nuas /hom-ais. With Hilde, F, 72, Hai//om, born //Gamamûs, grown up in Tsumeb.
70. Lena Ailâ, 6/8/01, F, ~90+, Hai//om, with sister Helena, ~90+. Both born at Outjo.
71. Erika Gubes, 6/8/01, F, 62, Hai//om, mother from Otavi, father from Hobabis. Lived in Tsumeb all her life.
72. Alwine Kandagos, 7/8/01, F, ~70, Hai//om born Grootfontein. With Paulina Tsume, F, 52, Hai//om, born Tsumeb area. Both living at Farm de Rust, Grootfontein region.
73. Christine /Oxurus, 7/8/01, F, 87, Damara, born Kaputa district.
74. Magdalena !Naos, 8/8/01, F, 60, Hai//om, born Outjo, lived Otjiwarongo and Tsumeb.
75. Petrina †Naises, 8/8/01, F, ~68, Hai//om, born at †Naguseb, lived mostly on farm Hikenhof.

Otavi environs

76. AibiHaitua, 8/8/01, M, ~50+, !Kung, born at Kongo near Rundu, lived mostly around Otavi, trance healer. With Sam Ruxama, M, ~45, !Kung / Tswana, 'opened' by a healer in South Africa, experienced healer, deceased. Both interviewed on a farm near Otavi.

Kovareb, near Sesfontein

77. Andreas !Kharuxab, 10/8/01, see above, no. 2.

Tsumkwe environs

78. Debe Dam, 20/8/01, M, ~70+, Ju/'hoan, lived Tsumkwe, then /Gausha, then //Aru (Xaru).
79. †'Oma Kxoaro, 21/8/01, M, 55, Ju/'hoan, born at Gam, now living //Aru.
80. Kxao †'oma, 21/08/01, M, 80, Ju/'hoan, born /Garo !an in Hereroloand, lived south most of his life, lived at //Aru for four years. Moved for water access.
81. David Cisje Kgao, 22/8/01, M, 49, Ju/'hoan, living at //Aru.
82. Kgao N!aici, 22/8/01, M, 65, Ju/'hoan, born N‡aqmchoha, far away, lived there most of the time. Moved because of his wife's family, now living at //Aru.
83. Kaesje Kgwara, 22/8/01, M, 46, Ju/'hoan, born and lived mostly at Gam. Now living //Aru.
84. Tsemkgao Cgaesje, 23/8/01, M, 69, Ju/'hoan, born Gam, now living //Aru, live mostly at and between the two.
85. Oma Kgau, 23/8/01, M, 57, Ju/'hoan, trance healer living at //Aru. Regular dancing healer.
86. Tixai G‡kao, 24/8/01, F, 83, Ju/hoan, born !Gau !kuru. Now at //Aru, lived around this region, 'it is all her place'.
87. Ncaoka Ciqae, 24/8/01, F, 61, born /Owan !a, a day from Gam, lived moving around this area.
88. /Kunta Bo, 26/8/01, M, ~60, Ju/'hoan, born !Oqma /hui /ua about one hour from Tsumkwe by car. Now lives at Tsumkwe and has been here a long time, since John Marshall met them for jobs.
89. Dam Kxao, 27/8/01, M, 65, Ju/'hoan, born !Uca, far in the north. Moved to Tsumkwe in 1970 when there were many South African soldiers there and many jobs. He worked as a cook.
90. /Ui Ciqae, 27/8/01, M, 92, Ju/'hoan, born and lived at Tsumkwe all his life.
91. !Ai!ae †'oma, 27/8/01, M, ~50, born and now living at ‡Ninihm, spent childhood in Botswana.
92. Kxao /Ai!ai, 28/8/01, M, ~40-50, Ju/'hoan, born Gobabis, moved to Gam, now living at Tsumkwe. White people took his parents to work on a farm near Gobabis, paid then \$10.00 a month and beat them. They eventually ran away.
93. Xoe Debe, 28/8/01, F, 82, Ju/'hoan, born at N/uha, far in the south, grew up near Gousha, now in Tsumkwe.
94. Boo Saakambanda, 28/8/01, M, 79, Ju/'hoan, grew up in Kaudom region.
95. /Xoan Tsemkgao, 1/9/01, F, 37, living at Nhoma village.

Blauberg (east of Gobabis, near the Botswanan Borderpost)

96. //Haisa Beatrus, 10/9/01 !Noodoeb, M, 82, Nharo, trance dancer, born locally, lived mostly at Mokunda, nearby on the Botswanan side.
97. !Hao !hare, 11/9/01, M, ~60, Nharo, born at Zelda farm. Always lived in this area.
98. /Hoa//ai Bakar Naodoes, 11/9/01, F, 44, Nharo, born at Friedorhorf farm. Always lived in this area.
99. Hanna /Haba, 11/9/01, F, 49, !Kung, born Ousahaies, far away, lived there most of the time.

Tsumeb

100. Albert D. Nouseb, 4/9/2001, Pastor Lutheran Church, Tsumeb.

Drimiopsis (resettlement camp)

101. Petrus Zhahab, 13/9/01, M, 68, Nama mother, Ju/'hoan father, born farm 411 nearby. Always lived in this area.
102. Joseph Makuba, 13/9/01, M, 66, Ju/'hoan. Born Henderland Farm, near Gobabis, lives in Tsumkwe.
103. Hendrik Gowardeh, 13/9/01, M, Nharo, born Borderpost, came to Drimiopsis when the president decided the old people should live there.

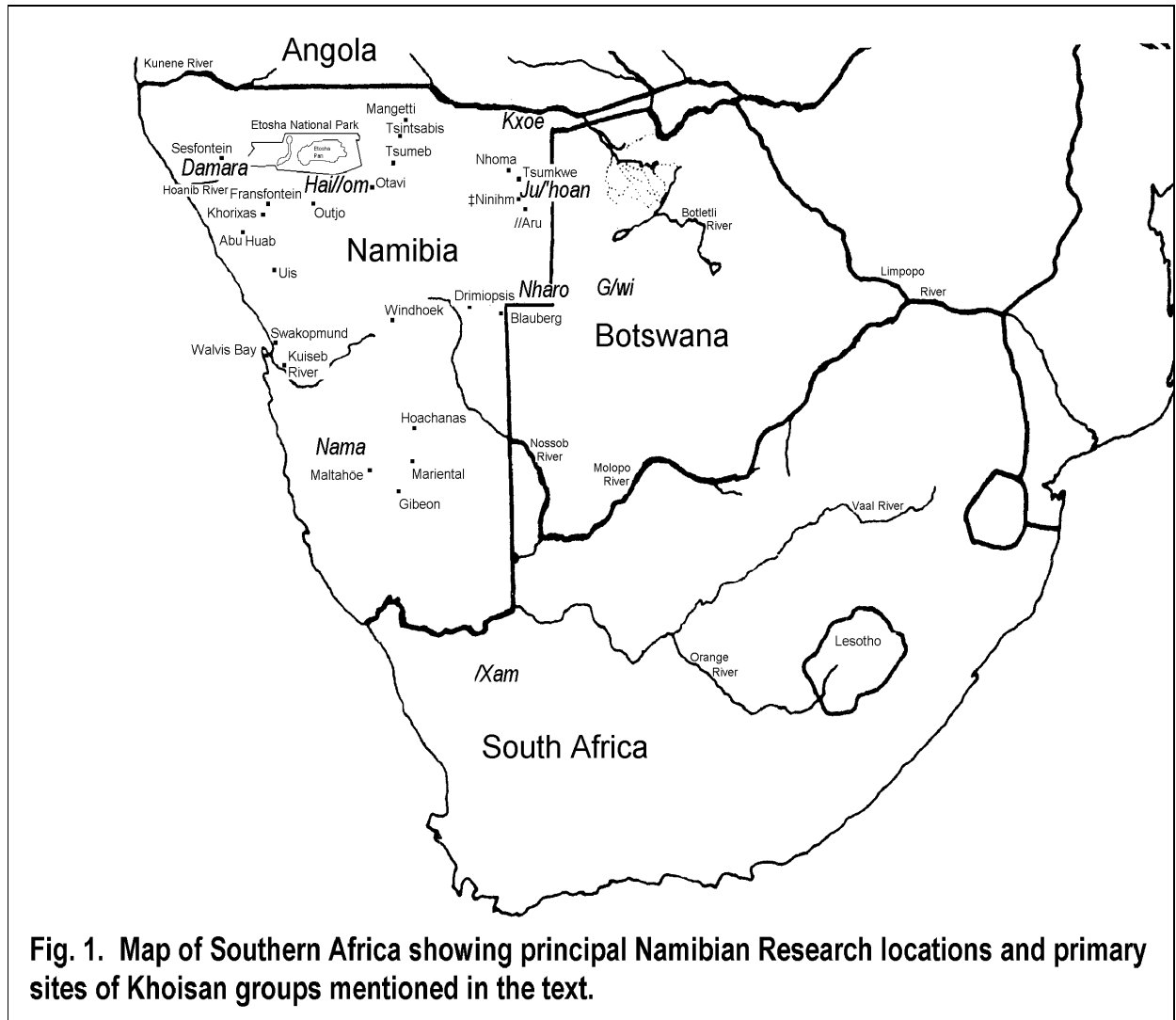
Additional informants:

Ilse Schatz, 3/9/01, has published her findings regarding a Hai//om healer, /Garugu //Khumob (1904-1987) resident on her farm near Otjikotosee. Ilse Schatz, *Unter Buschleuten* (Windhoek, 1993). Now works at the Tsumeb Museum.

Ms. [name withheld by request], 4/9/01, medical staff, Tsumeb Mining Corporation Hospital.

Mrs. Weir, 4/9/01 active member of Tsumeb Municipality.

Appendix 1a.



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