

Praenotandum

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AT WAR WITH GOD: JU/'HOAN CURING DANCES

*Summary*¹

In the 1950s and 1960s, only a few !Kung speaking San, or Bushmen, continued to follow the traditional way of life of nomadic food gathering in the Kalahari semi-desert of Southern Africa. One group were the Ju/'hoansi of the Nyae Nyae and Dobe areas of the Northwestern Kalahari. It is their religion that is discussed in this article. Their central rite was the curing dance, an all-night ritual which they often practised (and practise now, after they have settled permanently, even more commonly than before).² It served as their major means of maintaining solidarity within their egalitarian bands³ and of removing conflict from it – another means being the sharing of the food they had collected and the meat they had hunted. Solidarity was maintained through the curing dance, partly because the dance was itself a process of sharing, of *n/um*, 'curing power', and partly because it served as a ritual of exclusion. God and the deceased were blamed for the evil present in the group, were declared *personae non gratae* and refused admission to the dances as unwelcome aliens, the !Kung waging a continual ritual war upon them as their sole enemies. The special interest of this religion and this ritual for the comparative study of religions is highlighted by an examination of the link between the anthropological study of the !Kung curing dances and recent archaeological research on San art, especially the thousands of rock paintings which have been found all over Southern Africa, and which are interpreted now as reflecting a tradition of San curing dances dating back for many millennia.

[3]

¹ I am grateful to Alan Barnard for his comments on this article. I have incorporated nearly all of them. His suggestion that I strengthen the application of my analysis of Ju/'hoan religion by applying it in even greater detail to San religions generally, I cannot, unfortunately, follow up now because of other pressing duties and the size of this article. That must, for the time being, remain as a task for the future.

² Barnard, comments, 9.07.1998

³ Barnard (comments, 9.07.1998) correctly points out that it is not their past 'mode of production', nomadic foraging, that accounts for the unifying function of the curing dances in San foraging societies, but their egalitarian social structure, *i.e.*, the absence of authority and of disparity of wealth among them.

Introduction

An analysis of the full variation of humanity's religions and of the whole length of its documented history, from the religions of the Neanderthals flowering from at least as long ago as 100,000 years to those of the numerous New Age groups of the present day,⁴ requires a thorough knowledge of not only the so-called 'great religions', but also of the religions in the 'margins' of that huge history. Of these 'marginal' types, two need to be mentioned. One consists of religions flourishing, or having flourished, in societies regarded as 'marginal' in terms of their habitat, subsistence mode, demographic size, and type of social organisation: the 'hunter-gatherer' societies found presently only in the ecological margins of the inhabited world – in deserts, or dense, primeval forests, and therefore in relative isolation from the rest of humankind – but which inhabited the entire globe until 10,000 years ago when they constituted the 'human universal'.⁵ Their religions are, therefore, extremely important in the history of religions and research on them is urgent because the few remaining are virtually all, at least in their 'purer', more typical forms, on the verge of extinction. The other group is constituted by the innumerable newest religions, which have appeared all over the world in the last few decades; they are located at the opposite end of the time, context and type continua from the oldest type. Though 'religion' has already assumed a huge variety of forms within the core part of man's religious history as constituted by the so-called 'world religions' and other well studied religions of literate societies, it may be shown to have taken exceptional, and even breathtaking, forms when studied in terms of the oldest and newest phases of the societal and religious history of mankind.

One such society and religion of the oldest kind is that of the !Kung Ju/'hoansi,⁶ the largest and ethnographically best described of the several San peoples, some of which still lived in small foraging bands in the Kalahari semi-desert in Southern Africa up to the middle of this century. For many thousands of years, the San hunter-gatherers were the sole inhabitants of the region between the Cape and the Zambezi. They were called 'San' by the Khoe (Khoi) pastoralists, who began to enter that region with their herds of cattle some three thousand years [4] ago; the Tswana of Botswana knew them as the Masarwa;⁷ the Boers, who entered that region in 1652, called them *Bosjesmans*, *Bosmanekens*, *Bossiesmans*, or *Boesmans*, and the British followed suit by calling them Bushmen.⁸ Ju/'hoan religion is remarkable for two reasons. Firstly, its

⁴ Cf. Platvoet 1993, 1996; Hanegraaff 1996

⁵ Lee 1968: 35; 1976a: 3; 1978: 94; 1979: 1

⁶ See below note 80 on this ethnographic label.

⁷ Since the 1970s, *Basarwa* has become the politically correct term and spelling of the traditional Tswana term *Masarwa* (Barnard, comments, 9.07.1998).

⁸ The more common label *Bosjesmans*/Bushmen was perceived by American anthropologists entering this field of study after 1950 as a biased category serving the interests of a victimising racism, into which an abundance of white 'fantasy and nightmares' (Gordon 1992: 1) had merged. The members of the expeditions of the Peabody Museum (1951-1961), and the Department of Social Relations of Harvard University (1963-1972), therefore, decided in 1973 to drop 'Bushmen' in favour of 'San', which they interpreted as meaning 'Aborigines' (cf., e.g., Lee 1976a: 5). Although 'San', from the Khoe 'Sonqua', did have that meaning, it also had the connotation of 'bandit', like the Afrikaans *bossiesman*

beliefs are of great comparative interest, because God and the deceased were *personae non gratae* for the Ju/'hoansi people: they barred them from their community, communication and communion, because they were believed to send them misfortune. Secondly, Ju/'hoan religion is of immense historical interest, because a modern interpretation of the numerous rock paintings and engravings found all over Southern Africa suggests that they provide it, and San religions generally, with a historical depth unrivalled by any other preliterate and literate religion, despite the very shallow collective memory which the Ju/'hoansi, like all bands of gatherers, cultivated and the absence of writing.

The structure of my article is as follows. I shall first discuss 'the riddle of the rock paintings', and how it has been solved in the past three decades, in an effort to show the vast perspective they open on the past of the religions of the San foraging societies of Southern Africa. I will then briefly survey the dramatic tail end of the history of the 'San' peoples. This will be followed a synopsis of their traditional foraging economy, social structure and conflict management, as found in recent decades in the small number of bands of Ju/'hoansi who maintained their traditional way of life in the Kalahari in the 1950s and 1960s.⁹ The main part of this article will be devoted to an analysis of Ju/'hoan religion as practised at that time; this, I will show, will effectively mean an analysis of Ju/'hoan 'curing dances'. I will conclude my article by discussing Ju/'hoan pedagogics of dissociation, and by presenting a summary of this religion's more remarkable traits.

[5]

The Riddles of the San Rock Art

The beautiful landscape of Southern Africa between the Zambesi and the Cape, is dotted in many places with *kopjes*, rock masses of basalt and other types of rock, varying in height from a few scores to over a thousand metres, as, for example, in the *Draakensberg* range and the rugged mountains of Lesotho. Many thousands of rock paintings and (fewer) rock engravings have been found all over Southern Africa, especially in caves high up in these *kopjes*, hills and mountains, and often in places not easily accessible but which offer a splendid panoramic view of the surrounding scenery.¹⁰ Most of the caves in which San rock paintings have been found were used for long periods as shelters by the small bands of San.¹¹ Archaeologists have unanimously

(Gordon 1992: 5-6). On these names, see also Marshall 1976: 12, 17-19; Tobias 1978b: 1-3; Lee 1979: 29-31, 424; Silberbauer 1981: 1-3; Guenther 1986a; Barnard 1992: 7-12; and especially Wilmsen 1989: 26-32; Gordon 1992: 4-7.

⁹ In the late 1960s, permanent settlement rapidly replaced the nomadic foraging of these groups. That, as well as a whole array of other causes, among them the droughts from the late 1970s to the early 1990s, gradually but profoundly affected their religious beliefs and rituals (Barnard, comments dd. 9.07.98).

¹⁰ Lewis-Williams 1990: 5; for a map of the main San rock art regions, cf. Lewis-Williams 1990: 1; Willcox 1990: 5; Rudner & Rudner 1978: 57.

¹¹ Willcox 1990: 1, 6, 7, 63-65, 99-115; Loubser & Laurens 1994: 85-92.

ascribed these paintings to the San,¹² despite the fact that the modern San, most of who live in the Kalahari, do not produce them, for one reason because the Kalahari is virtually without rocks. Archaeologists date the most recent of the rock paintings to the middle or even late nineteenth century on the basis of scenes such as a seventeenth century ship sailing the ocean, San raiding Boer and Bantu cattle, white men on horseback shooting with their rifles at fleeing San, and the British and the Boer on trek with cattle and wagons drawn by horses or oxen in the 1820s to the 1840s.¹³ The oldest San rock art has, however, been dated to as far back as 26,000 years ago, *i.e.* to the Upper Palaeolithic era (or Later Stone Age, LSA).¹⁴

San rock art, therefore, not only belongs to the oldest artistic traditions of humankind, but it also is 'in no way aesthetically and technically inferior' to the much better known Palaeolithic art of Western Europe. Nor is it a product, as some have held, of its diffusion from Western Europe through North Africa and the Sahara into East Africa and finally into Southern Africa: San rock art developed in complete [6] independence of it.¹⁵ As a result, it represents the longest by far continuous history of any distinct art (and religious!) tradition in the history of humankind and shows an undisturbed ideological continuity and internal consistency in its subject matter. That subject matter includes mainly 'naturalistic representations of animals and human beings, schematic or geometric designs, and figures combining human and animal form'.¹⁶

From their earliest discovery in the late eighteenth century, art historians have spoken in glowing terms of the 'breath-taking beauty' and 'sophistication' of San rock paintings and of the 'striking detail' and 'skilful ways' in which animals, and especially elands, have been drawn in 'delicate polychromes' of red and white and in a variety of postures, the most remarkable of which is the way they have been foreshortened, when depicted from the rear, the front or even from above.¹⁷ Lewis-Williams describes the draughtsmanship of San artists as unrivalled among preliterate artists an-

¹² At least 'by far the majority of them' (Van Rijssen 1994: 159; cf. also Garlake 1987: 24-31); for the meagre direct historical evidence for San authorship of the rock paintings, cf. Rudner & Rudner 1978: 58-59. Van Rijssen (1994: 159-175) argues that two small categories of rock paintings, sematographs and handprints, 'must be the work of [Khoi-Khoi/Khoenkhoen] herders' (cf. also Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994a: 5).

¹³ Cf. Lewis-Williams 1985: 56; 1990: 11, 87-88; Willcox 1978: 82-87; 1990: 8, 14-19, 60; Jeffreys 1978; Yates, Manhire & Parkington 1994: 42-43

¹⁴ Lewis-Williams 1985: 56, 59; 1990: 11, 17-18; Willcox (1990: 7) dates LSA in Southern Africa from 40,000 years 'until very nearly the present'.

¹⁵ Lewis-Williams 1985: 54, 56; 1990: 69-74; cf. also Lewis-Williams (1990: 69-71; 1996: 34-37) on the great French authority on Upper Palaeolithic art in Europe, Abbé Henri Breuil, who interpreted the central (male!) figure in a San rock painting in a cave on the Brandberg mountain in Namibia in 1947 as 'a lissome young woman of Minoan or Cretan origin', thereby lending his authority to the theories of diffusion. Prior to Breuil, Raymond Dart had 'discovered' in 1925 that clothing of Babylonian, Phrygian, Phoenician and Chinese origin was depicted in the rock paintings; and C. Van der Riet Lowe, professor of Archaeology, discovered a Greek musical instrument, the *aulos*, in some Drakensberg paintings (Lewis-Williams 1990: 69, 72). Willcox (1984; 1990: 3-5, 21, 26) rejects the theories of Dart, de Breuil and Van der Riet Lowe, but is still convinced that San rock art must be explained by diffusion from Spain into Africa and hence into Southern Africa.

¹⁶ Lewis-Williams 1985: 56, 59; 1990: 34; Willcox 1990: 60-61

¹⁷ Lewis-Williams 1985: 54; 1990: 1, 4-5; 12-13, 19; 1996: 34, 36, 41; Willcox 1990: 50-62

ynwhere in the world.¹⁸ Humans also feature abundantly in San rock paintings as do vivid scenes of human [7] life, from hunts to dances to battles. Humans, however, are usually depicted in greatly elongated shapes, or as therianthropomorphic figures which combine human and animal forms, or in flight, or swimming under water.¹⁹ The significance of these curious ways of depicting humans, as well as the meaning of the dots, broken lines, circles and crosses which are sometimes found in the rock paintings and are often evident in the rock engravings,²⁰ long eluded the scholars who studied San rock art.

One popular trend in the interpretation of San rock art which prevailed until the 1980s was in terms of sympathetic hunting magic: San artists, it was assumed, painted the elands and other animals in the inaccessible caves high above the valleys in the belief that they thereby ensured that the herds of elands remained large and ready to be killed by humans; *i.e.* the San painted their menu. Another cultic interpretation was that the San believed gods to be resident in the 'deep, dark and damp caves' which they decorated with the rock paintings, and that they must, therefore, curry favour with them by offering them sacrifices and by means of these paintings; *i.e.* they painted their prayers for this food on the walls of the caves in order to appease the gods who would then ensure the fertility of the herds of elands and other game for them. Both theories agreed that in producing these paintings the San were inspired by a concern for food.²¹

¹⁸ Lewis-Williams 1985: 54-56; Willcox 1990: 58-62. Willcox (1990: 70, 74-75) attributes the extraordinary quality of San rock art to the 'eidetic faculty', which he supposes San artists to have possessed. That faculty, 'quite different from ordinary memory', would have enabled them to record a very vivid picture in their mind's eye and by 'eidetic recall' project it at will, as it were, onto the surface in order to draw it. He actually proposes a racist theory. He holds that there is a 'basic distinction' in African art between the two-dimensional naturalist paintings of the San and the three-dimensional 'sculpture in the round' produced by Negroes from West and Central Africa, whose art is much less naturalistic, schematic and mixed with non-representational designs. To explain the differences between these two types, he suggests that there must have been an unusually high incidence of left-handedness among San artists, and therefore a genetically produced extraordinary dominance of the right hemisphere of the brain among them. And it is there that Willcox locates the special faculty of 'eidetic perception' which he thinks enabled them to paint the elands as they did. He also believes that his theory is supported by 'the marked differences' between Bushman and Bantu brains which electroencephalogram studies 'do show'.

¹⁹ Lewis-Williams 1985: 56-57; 1990: front cover, 6, 8, 14, 16, 24, 45, 47, 48, 49, 50, 72-73; Willcox 1990: 38-43, 58

²⁰ Lewis-Williams 1990: 7, 53, 55-68, 85. There are, however, important regional variations. One is that rock engravings are found in only two of the six areas of San rock art in South Africa and Namibia distinguished by Willcox (1990: 5, 73), to wit those in Namibia and in the Great Karoo region. Another variation is that the non-representational geometric patterns of dots, lines, curves, zigzags, etc., are completely absent from the Drakensberg area.

²¹ Both theories were proposed in the documentary film *Höhlen und Bushmannsbilder* ('Caves and Bushmen paintings') by Klaus Heller. It was broadcast in Germany by the Hessische Rundfunk in 1981 and in 1982, with subtitling in Dutch, in the Netherlands on TV2. I have a copy of the latter version. Willcox (1990: 6, 45, 66-75) favours a twofold explanation of the numerous and very delicate paintings of elands: they were inspired both by 'food-getting magic', because the eland, being rarely part of San diet, was their 'dream' menu; and the *l'art pour l'art* theory: the San artists loved to paint the elands by eidetic recall 'for [the] pleasure they had in the exercise of their skill and showing it off to their little community' (Willcox 1990: 66-67, 71; 1991a, 1191b; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 203, 205).

Another popular approach was the theory that San rock paintings, especially the vivid hunt, dance and battle scenes, could be read as a [8] faithful record of the San social life of the past. Though a certain number of paintings do undeniably record certain events from the past, some of which are even datable from European sources,²² archaeological as well as ethnographical research have shown, in the last few decades, that the great majority of San rock paintings present at most a highly selective and distorted narrative of the San past, with a heavy emphasis on the males, the dances, and the elands. San rock paintings have been shown to be far from representative of the male-female relationships actually obtaining, of the animals actually hunted and eaten, and the food, mainly vegetable, actually consumed.²³ This distorted image of the past, therefore, needs the *emic* perspectives of the San themselves if it is to be correctly understood.

In the past two decades, the leading scholars in San rock art research in Southern Africa, such as Patricia Vinnicombe²⁴ of Natal University, J.D. Lewis-Williams²⁵ and T.A. Dowson²⁶ of the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, J. Deacon,²⁷ University of Stellenbosch, and T. Huffman and Peter Garlake of the University of Zimbabwe,²⁸ have replaced the food and narrative theories²⁹ with a substantially different paradigm.³⁰ They have turned to two sources for a different hermeneutic inspiration in their interpretation of San rock art, firstly, the modern ethnographic research among the few remaining San groups in the Kalahari and in Botswana who still followed their traditional ways of life right up to the mid-1900s; and secondly, the research into San mythology and rock art and research carried out in the late nineteenth century by the German linguist Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law [9] Lucy Lloyd who asked

Cf. also Lewis-Williams 1990: 22-26, and especially his remark that San do not believe in hunting magic. On the theory of rock art as hunting magic, cf. also Schaafsma 1989: 253-254.

²² E.g. the trek by the missionary Captain Allen Gardener through the foothills near Underberg, Kwa-Zulu-Natal, on his way to Lesotho in 1825 is most likely recorded in a painting in a cave on Bamboo Mountain near Underberg (Willcox 1990: 14).

²³ Lewis-Williams 1990: 5-7, 22-27; Willcox 1990: 6, 45, 55, 59, 66-70

²⁴ Vinnicombe 1972: 132; 1976; cf. also Lewis & Dowson 1994a: 204-205

²⁵ Lewis-Williams 1975, 1980, 1981a, 1981b, 1983, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1987, 1990, 1992; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1989

²⁶ Dowson 1988a, 1989, 1992

²⁷ Deacon 1986, 1988a, 1988b, 1994: 237, 240-241, 252

²⁸ Huffman 1983; Garlake 1987a, 1987b, 1990

²⁹ As well as a third approach which had also rejected the food and narrative approach as too speculative. In a quest for scientific respectability, it had developed an exclusively descriptive and numerical approach that eschewed all interpretation and aimed to establish 'quantitative, statistically viable inventories of all the rock art images in a clearly defined region' and apply scientific dating techniques to them. Prime examples of this approach are Pager 1971 and Vinnicombe 1976 (Lewis-Williams 1990: 39-40; Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994: 1-3; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 202-206).

³⁰ On the genesis of that paradigm, cf. especially Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a; also Barnard 192: 91-94.

the then few remaining San in the Cape Coast area to explain the meaning of the rock paintings themselves.³¹

The anthropological studies of modern San religion, ritual behaviour and mythology³² in particular have enabled the modern researchers of San rock art to complement the groping outsider analytic, or *etic*, perspectives of the Western scholar on San rock art with the *emic*, or actor, perspectives of the San themselves, and thereby correct them, and produce a substantially different interpretation of San rock art. This interpretation suggests that the majority of San rock paintings, particularly these mysterious elongated human figures in the many vivid dance scenes, depict San curing dances or curing dance experiences. It proposes the hypothesis that the curing dances were as much the central institution of San religion in the past as in the present, *i.e.* it assumed that 'the San of long ago had essentially the same belief system as the modern Kalahari San'.³³ In short, the dance scene paintings, and by extension a good many other paintings,³⁴ are interpreted in this 'shamanistic hypothesis' as having been 'made by real people with, as Wilhelm Bleek found, a highly developed religion',³⁵ and as depicting the experiences of San trance dancers during their 'altered states of consciousness' (ASC). San artists are supposed to have remembered how their perception of the environment had changed during the curing dances; how they had felt their bodies to become long and thin; that they felt as if the top of their heads had blown off; that they had flown like a swallow or a flying buck in the sky, or had swum like a fish in the water, or had taken on some other therianthropomorphic shape; that they encountered, and battled, or killed, or chased away, or negotiated with 'mythical' beings, like 'rain bulls', which ordinary sight could not see.³⁶

[10] Lewis-Williams documents that San rock art reflects four categories of shamanistic ritual activities: 'healing, game control, extra-corporeal travel and rainmaking', as well as shamanistic dreaming.³⁷ Even more central to a proper understanding of San rock art is that it should not be seen as merely registering the memory of past trance experiences, but as being infused with the San belief that the trance dance itself served to activate in humans a 'supernatural potency', resident in themselves, which when activated enabled them to heal, to control game, to produce rain, to travel out of the body to the spiritual world in dreams, and for a purpose. Lewis-Williams would, therefore, rather term his theory the 'potency explanation' than the 'trance' or 'shama-

³¹ Lewis-Williams 1990: 34-38; Bleek 1873, 1875, 1911; Lloyd 1889. These reports comprise nearly 12,000 pages of verbatim accounts of San daily life in the Cape area in the mid-19th century and of their folklore and myths; cf. Deacon 1994: 252.

³² The link between San rock art and San curing dances is clearly direct and intimate, whereas that with San folklore, or mythology, is much more indirect and often not at all demonstrable.

³³ Lewis-Williams 1990: 41; cf. also Walker 1994: 119-120

³⁴ Cf. Lewis-Williams & Dowson (1994a: 211, 220): paintings, which had been interpreted until 1980 as pure 'contact art', and were seen as merely recording historical events such as San cattle raids, proved upon re-examination to have been conceived from a 'shamanistic' perspective: they portrayed the mystical participation of San 'shamans' in these events.

³⁵ Lewis-Williams 1990: 39.

³⁶ Lewis-Williams 1990: 44-54; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 211-212

³⁷ Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 211-212; Lewis-Williams 1987

nist' hypothesis.³⁸ He held that the rock art in San shelters served as the transparent 'veil' between this world and that of 'potency' for the San, in the same way as did the stained glass windows in cathedrals for Christians.³⁹ To the San, rock paintings were even 'powerful things in themselves, reservoirs of potency and mental imagery', rather than mere memories of past trance experiences.⁴⁰

This ASC-interpretation, these scholars proposed, also solved that other major riddle of the past, the non-representational geometric designs of dots, lines, curves, zigzags, etc., in the rock paintings and engravings. They were interpreted as 'entoptics': the luminous patterns of zigzags, grids, vortices, dots, etc., seen by 'all people regardless of their cultural background' within the optic system with eyes closed or open during the initial stages of ASCs, like dreams, visions, and trance states in which they are produced by the human brain; if the eyes are open, these forms are projected onto surfaces, such as walls.⁴¹ San artists regularly used some of these entoptic patterns in their paintings and engravings as one type of symbol for representing the 'work' of the 'potency' activated in trance dancers during the rituals.

It is now assumed by most interpreters of rock art in Southern Africa, therefore, that the major inspiration of this longest art tradition in human history was the trance experience which numerous San had during their many curing dances. A secondary inspiration was their, [11] also religiously inspired, interest in the eland which, as hunters, they regularly observed closely; it was the object of their artistic fascination, in that it served as a rich polysemous symbol which 'featured in widely practised and important Bushmen rituals: boys' first kill, girls' puberty, marriage, and shamanism, including rain-making'.⁴² A third, but clearly minor source of inspiration of rock paintings was reporting events that had actually happened.

Lewis-Williams confidently asserts that 'the debate about the general framework of [San rock] art is over', because it 'has become generally accepted' that the San 'trance dance and the spiritual experiences of shamans lie at the heart of San rock art'.⁴³ Though he speaks of 'contested images',⁴⁴ opposition to the 'shamanistic hypothesis' seems minimal at the moment, despite certain reservations which a few scholars voice.⁴⁵ Only Willcox explicitly rejects it.⁴⁶

³⁸ Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 212

³⁹ Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 209-210

⁴⁰ Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 215; cf. also Willcox 1990: 72-73

⁴¹ Lewis-Williams 1986; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1988; Dawson 1989; Dowson, T.A., & A.L. Holiday 1989; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 213-217; Hall 1994: 75-81. Entoptics patterns are also found in the art of the Tukanoan Indians in Brazil; cf. Reichel-Domatoff 1987.

⁴² The eland, however, features in rock art only in relation to trance experiences and, or in, rainmaking rituals; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 208-210, 212.

⁴³ Lewis-Williams 1990: 44. Virtually all the contributors to Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994b use it as their general framework of interpretation. Apart from the ethnographic and neuropsychological approaches, the 'potency explanation' also employs modern social theory derived mainly from the structural Marxism of Godelier *et al.*, and the structuration theory of Anthony Giddens (Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 217-211).

⁴⁴ Dowson & Lewis-Williams 1994b

⁴⁵ Dowson & Williams 1994: 6; Morris & Beaumont 1994: 23; Yates, Manhire & Parkington 1994: 29-30; Lewis-Williams & Dowson 1994a: 207, 216-217, 218. The strongest dissent (and even that is am-

The San

The San, or Bushmen, are a special part of humanity.⁴⁷ They have lived as nomadic food gatherers for at least 11,000 years, and probably [12] for over 50,000 years, between the Zambesi and the Cape.⁴⁸ They are classified under the Negroid 'races', but their complexion and physique differ considerably from those of Negroes. Their skin is much more yellow, their cheekbones much higher, and their heart-shaped, youthful faces much smaller and flatter than those of Negroes. Their hair does curl, but is implanted in small 'islands'. They have a short, slender physique. The average length of males is 1,60 m., and their average weight 49 kg.; and women measure on average 1,50 m., and weigh 41 kg. The relatively short stature and light weight of the San is explained as an anatomical adaptation to San methods of hunting which required San hunters to track the game they had wounded with their poisoned arrows over long distances.⁴⁹ Other special physical features of the San are their relatively small forehead, jaw and ears, relatively thin lips, protruding chin, and flat and broad nose. Their skin is susceptible to sunburn and that of older people wrinkles strongly. An extra fold in the upper eyelid affords protection against glaring sunlight. Cholesterol levels in the blood serum of foraging San are among the lowest in the world, and neither is there any increase in blood pressure as they grow older. Lastly, women show marked steatopygia, have elongated *labia minora*, and the males have a semi-erect penis.⁵⁰ The steatopygia and erect penis feature very often in rock paintings.⁵¹ Namibian settlers and Nazi ideologues have abused San physical, especially genital, distinctiveness for racist purposes.⁵²

bivalent), comes from Guenther (1994: 259, 264-269) who stresses that 'Bushman art is not all religious art'; that there is a big divide between San ritual and rock art on the one hand, and San mythology on the other, and that one cannot extrapolate from the one to the other; that San religion and cosmology is much more 'ambiguous and heterogeneous, fluid and lacking in generalisation' than is apparent from the trance hypothesis, and that the Bushman is very prosaic, pragmatic and common-sensical and not at all a 'veritable *homo religiosus*, acquirer with Ottoesque numinosity'.

⁴⁶ Willcox (1990: 35, 67-68, 71-73; 1991a, 1991b) rejects this 'hallucination theory', because it is 'metaphysical', 'more elaborate than necessary', and 'impossible to prove'. Hallucinations cannot be remembered long enough to be painted or engraved. They are always bizarre and this theory therefore 'totally fails to account for the naturalism, often of a high order, found in San art'. It also makes 'no allowance for ordinary memory or eidetic recall' or the 'exercise of normal imagination'. The latter can as easily account for the therianthropes in San rock art as it can for the giants in fairy tales.

⁴⁷ On the problem of the several criteria (biological, linguistic, and cultural) by which to define 'the San', or 'Bushman', cf. Tobias 1978b: 1-3, 8-9.

⁴⁸ Marshall 1976: 28-49; Lee 1976a: 5; 1979: 76; Tobias 1978c: 29; Silberbauer 1981: 6-7; Barnard 1992: 28-29. On bored stones and other 'Bushman' utilitarian artefacts, such as stone scrapers and arrowheads, bone awls, and sewn pieces of leather, found in archaeological sites in the last 12,000 years, cf. Inskeep 1978: 38-48.

⁴⁹ Marshall (1976: 32-38), Tobias (1978c: 25-32), and Lee (1979: 287-292)

⁵⁰ Cf. Marshall 1976: 39-47; Truswell & Hansen 1976: 171-173, 181-186; Tobias 1978b: 9-10, 1978c: 21-32; Singer 1978: 116- Lee 1979: 285-287, 373; Silberbauer 1981: 222; Glazenburg 1994: 9-11

⁵¹ Cf. e.g. Rudner & Rudner 1978: 60, 61, 62, 66, 70; Singer 1978: 120-125; Lewis-Williams 1990: 16, 23, 24, 26, 28, 49, 50, 62, 70, 73

⁵² Cf. Gordon 1992: 212-216

The San speak tonal languages which belong to ‘four or five distinct families’.⁵³ They are ‘the world’s most complex from the phonetic point of view’, exhibit vast glottochronological distances between them,⁵⁴ and are very special because they have four to five extra consonants in the form of clicks.⁵⁵

[13] The recent history of the San is dramatic. It is marked by two major encounters with immigrants into ‘their’ territory: the agro-pastoral Bantu groups (who both herded cattle and practised agriculture) which we now know as the Shona, Venda, Nguni, Swazi, Zulu, Xhosa, and Tswana, and the pastoral Herero, all of which settled south of the Zambezi in the last 3,000 years; as well as the Boers of Dutch descent⁵⁶ since 1652, and the British since the late eighteenth century. San relations with the Bantu and the Boers have generally been both relatively peaceful and to a measure mutually beneficial, and have resulted in limited intermarriage.⁵⁷ At times, however, these groups were distinctly hostile. Relations with them became very destructive for the San in the eighteenth and much of the nineteenth centuries, when they were hunted down, and killed or enslaved, by the whites because the San were raiding their cattle; or they were exterminated by the epidemics of exotic diseases like measles and smallpox to which they had no resistance.⁵⁸ In the Cape, the San groups completely disappeared by merging mainly into the ‘coloureds’ and to a lesser degree, in the Eastern Cape, into the Xhosa. In the Orange Free State, they were systematically exterminated. In Botswana, most San served the Tswana as servants, serfs, or cattle herders.⁵⁹

⁵³ Barnard 1992: 22. They are !Kung, !Xo, Nharo, /Gwi, and //Gana. Barnard (1992: 20-27) also includes the Khoe, Ta’ a and /Xam language groups.

⁵⁴ Traill 1978: 139, 147. Lee (1979: 12) describes a !Kung word as ‘an explosion of sound surrounded by a vowel’.

⁵⁵ On San languages and their clicks and tones, cf. Traill 1978; Lee 1979: xxv; Tanaka 1980: 6-13; Silberbauer 1981: XIX-XX, 4; Barnard 1992: xviii-xxiii, 20-27, 30-36. The !Kung language has four clicks: dental < / >, palatal < ! >, alveolar < ≠ >, and lateral < // > (see Lewis-Williams 1990: 43; Marshall 1976: XIX-XX). The first Dutch settlers named the speakers of click languages *Hottentotten* as an onomatopoeia for their ‘stuttering’ speech (Inskeep 1978: 33). The Sandawe and Haza in Tanzania also have clicks, but it is disputed among scholars whether they are related to the San language group; but cf. Tobias 1978b: 4; 1978c: 19.

⁵⁶ *Boer* is, of course, not ‘a Bantu word meaning farmer’ (pace Tanaka 1980: 18, note 6).

⁵⁷ Cf. Wilmsen (1989: 64-157) for a survey of the data, obtained from archaeological records, linguistic analysis and the written records from the mid-18th century onwards, on the development of trading networks and ‘pastroforaging’ among San of the Kalahari in the past 2,000 years.

⁵⁸ Lee 1976: 5; 1979: 31-32; Silberbauer 1981: 8-9, 14-16, 289-291; Glazenburg 1994: 79. This is, of course, a much too brief synopsis of a highly complex social history of peaceful as well as hostile interaction between San foraging bands and other groups, black and white. For greater detail, cf. Denbow 1984, 1986 for prehistoric times; Szalay 1983 and Parkington 1984 for the Cape in the 17th and 18th centuries; Wilmsen 1989 for the Kalahari; Gordon 1992 for Namibia in the 19th and 20th centuries; and Silberbauer (1981: 6-16) for Botswana in that period.

⁵⁹ Lee 1976: 5-6; 1979: 32-33, 1983: 3, 17, 119. Cf. also Willcox 1978: 76-80; Silberbauer 1978: 181; 1981: 7-9; Tanaka 1980: 4-6; Glazenburg 1994: 67-69; Lee, Biesele & Hitchcock 1996: 108. Cf. esp. Wilmsen (1989: 96-157) on the San of Botswana becoming an exploited underclass after 1850 when Tswana overlordship over the San was firmly established, and in the colonial period when it became entrenched. Gordon (1992: 10) emphasises that the San, ‘far from being “beautiful people living in primeval paradise”, are in reality the most victimised and brutalised people in the bloody history that is southern Africa’.

[14] In the seventeenth century the number of San in Southern Africa is estimated to have been somewhere between 150,000 and 300,000.⁶⁰ By 1960, their numbers had dropped to about 40,000,⁶¹ most of Southern Africa having been completely 'cleared' of San by then. The remaining groups with a San identity now live in and around the Kalahari.⁶² There are approximately 24,000 San in Botswana, 12,000 in Namibia, and 4,000 in the south of Angola. !Kung is spoken by 15,000 of them, whilst 2,000 speak !Xo, and the remaining 23,000 speak Nharo, /Gwi, and //Gana.⁶³ By 1960, most San had opted for a sedentary, or a partly sedentary, existence, as cowherds or servants of black or white farmers.⁶⁴

Only some 2,500 San were by that time still following a mainly foraging way of life in the Kalahari, 'with minimal alien contact'.⁶⁵ It should, however, be emphasised at this point that the foraging life of these San was not an unchanging world, impervious to outside penetration and set completely apart from other societies, in the past as well as in the present. Lee has therefore designated the foraging San of the 1960s as 'semi-independent'.⁶⁶ The 'historical school' in San ethnography⁶⁷ has emphasised strongly that all San have always been in touch, [15] in varying degrees of intensity, with the other societies of Southern Africa in the past 2,000 years, not only through trade networks in which they bartered ivory, ostrich feathers, ostrich eggshell beads, salt, pelts, cattle and hides, etc., for tobacco, marijuana, iron pots and iron, Portuguese glass beads, guns, gunpowder and other articles,⁶⁸ but also through raiding and being raided; and more recently through the establishment of the Tswana state into which most San were incorporated as serfs or as cattle hands, and through European commercial penetration and colonialism. In trading with, or serving, these outsiders in pre-colonial times, the San incorporated several new elements into their cultures, such as

⁶⁰ Lee 1976a: 5

⁶¹ Lee 1979: 33-35. In 1976, he put their number at 'an estimated 45-55,000' (Lee 1976a: 6); in 1983 at 50,000 (Lee 1983: 9-10). Tobias (1978a: v; 1978b: 10-13) estimated their number as high as 55,000 or 60,000: 31,000 in Botswana; 26,000 in Namibia; 4,000 in Angola, 200 in Zambia, and 25 in South Africa. Tanaka (1980: 6-7) gives slightly different and older (1956) figures. His total is 55,531. Gordon (1992: 7) was more conservative: he estimated that the total number of San stood in 1980 at 39,100. Glazenburg (1994: 84) puts their 'present number' at 45,000.

⁶² Historical and linguistic evidence contradicts the popular myth that they are the remnant of the San who were driven from other parts of Southern Africa and sought refuge in the Kalahari (Lee 1979: 33, 76; Silberbauer 1981: 3).

⁶³ Cf. Lee 1976a: 7-8; Trail 1978; Lee 1979: 33-36; 1983: 9-10; Tanaka 1980: 6-10.

⁶⁴ Lee 1979: 23-28, 32-33, 36-38, 51, 361-364, 368-369, 401; cf. also Guenther 1976; Tanaka 1980: 3-4. On the history of the integration of these 'tame Bushmen' (cf. Wilmsen 1989: 150) into Bantu and white society as a dispossessed, 'degraded, disintegrated and demoralised' (Silberbauer 1978: 183) rural underclass in Namibia and Botswana, and attempts at their emancipation, cf. Guenther 1976: 132-133; Heinz 1978b: 179-184; Lee 1976a: 17-24; 1979: 76-86, 401-431; Silberbauer 1978; 1981: 3-16; Wilmsen 1989: 96-157 (esp. 99-105, 131-134, 137-157), 315-325; Gordon 1992: 220; Barnard 1992: 44-45; Glazenburg 1994: 70-86; Lee, Biesele & Hitchcock 1996: 110-111, 116.

⁶⁵ Silberbauer 1981: 20; Lee 1966: 36. By 1975, foraging San were less than 5% (Lee 1976a: 8).

⁶⁶ Lee 1979: 10. That is more accurate than 'these wilder Bushmen' of Wilmsen (1989: 150); cf. also Tobias 1978b: 13-14; Lee 1978: 94.

⁶⁷ Denbow 1984, Wilmsen 1989, Gordon 1992

⁶⁸ Cf. Wilmsen 1989: 64-129 *passim*

iron-working and limited stockholding.⁶⁹ In colonial and post-colonial times, numerous ties continued to exist between the few San who still preferred to live mainly by foraging, and the majority who worked for Bantu or white farmers in increasing poverty.⁷⁰ Much visiting and exchange occurred between them. Those working for Bantu or Boer farmers often reverted for shorter or longer periods to the foraging way of life in order to supplement the inadequate wages and rations they earned on the farms, or indeed permanently.⁷¹ The more traditionally inclined, foraging San also continued to incorporate elements from Bantu rural life into their own way of life. Examples of the latter were the iron cooking pots which had been used for several decades by all foraging San, as well as iron tipped arrows and spears, and knives; and more recently, the acquisition, in the 1960s, of a donkey by some foraging Ju/'hoansi for carrying home mongongo nuts, or the meat of an animal killed in the hunt. At that time also, several Ju/'hoan families at Dobe, Lee's main research site, attempted with limited success to cultivate tobacco, melons, maize and other crops in years with abundant rain, and some kept a few goats or cattle. A small number of Ju/'hoan women had married Herero or Tswana men, their children usually being raised as Herero or Tswana. In addition, young Ju/'hoan men left to seek work as unskilled labourers in Namibia and Botswana, or in the mines of South Africa. When the first store in the area was opened at nearby !Kangwa in 1967, Ju/'hoan women began to brew beer there with sugar bought at the store. Their beer trade resulted in much drunkenness among the local Ju/'hoansi, especially when the production of traditional crafts for sale to tourists began to [16] bring in much money. In 1974, the first Ju/'hoan children began to attend school.⁷²

It is mainly these foraging San 'with minimal alien contact', but on the verge of their incorporation into wider society, who have become the object of anthropological research.⁷³ This article deals with their religion only, and more in particular with that

⁶⁹ Cf. Wilmsen 1989: 64-96

⁷⁰ Cf. Guenther 1976: 126-127; 1986: 50-60, 286

⁷¹ Cf. e.g. Guenther 1976: 122-125; 1986: 289-290

⁷² Cf. Lee 1978: 94-97; 1979: 8-38, 73-86, 128-129, 133, 137-137, 146, 155, 348-350, 368-369, 403-431, 440-441; 1983: 14-1, 17-18, 113-157; for recent developments, cf. Lee 1993: 177-181; Lee, Biesele & Hitchcock 1996; and below note 77. Cf. also Lee 1979: 412-414 on the conflict-ridden character of this incorporation of food production (which requires saving resources, and fosters differences in wealth and power) into a foraging economy (with its ideology of sharing and egalitarianism); see also below note 165.

⁷³ For a survey of San ethnography from Harvard, the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, Witwatersrand, Tokyo, Kyoto, Austin, Toronto, London, Munich, Bonn, Bayreuth and elsewhere, and the great diversity of perspectives and disciplines from which they have been studied, cf. Lee 1976a: 9-17; Dart 1978; Barnard 1992: 296-297, *passim*. For a survey of the ethnography of !Kung speaking Ju/'hoansi, who 'today are regarded as one of the best documented non-hierarchical societies', cf. Lee 1976a: 3-5, 10-17; 1983: 10-12; Barnard 1992: 41-43; Lee, Biesele & Hitchcock 1996 (quote on p. 112). For a passionate critique, and even indictment, of 'the serious methodological flaws of the Harvard Kalahari Project' (from the point of view of historical anthropology conceived 'as an intensely ideological practice'), cf. Wilmsen 1989: XI-XVI, 33-40; Gordon 1992. On the so-called 'Kalahari debate', sparked by this accusation, cf. Barnard 1992b for a bibliographic survey; cf. also Lee 1992; Lee & Guenther 1991, 1993; Solway & Lee 1990; Wilmsen & Denbow 1990. Wilmsen (1989: 36) accused his colleagues of studying San foraging societies selectively in order to portray them as 'the unspoilt and untouched rem-

of the bands of !Kung speaking Ju'hoansi⁷⁴ on the Namibia-Botswana border who were [17] studied from the 1950s to the early 1970s by Lorna Marshall and by members of a Harvard research team, led by R.B. Lee. I also draw on the publications of Biesele (1976, 1993), and, for comparative purposes,⁷⁵ on those of Heinz (1975) on !Ko, Silberbauer (1981) on G/wi, Tanaka (1980) on ≠Kade,⁷⁶ Valiente-Noailles (1993) on Kua (or G/wi and G//ana) and Guenther (1976, 1979, 1986, 1989) on Nharo 'Bushmen' religions of the 'veld' as well as of the 'farm'.⁷⁷

nant population of the original hunter-gatherers', for the purpose of proving their ecological evolutionism. Wilmsen (1989: XII, 34-63, 130-134) and Gordon (1992: 3, 216-220) warned against an 'isolationist' 'ethnographic anthropology [excising] societies from their historical [political and economical] contexts', and presenting the traditional San romantically as if they lived in splendid isolation, relatively conflict-free *ad intra*, and especially *ad extra*, in uncontaminated purity and in primitive affluence, whereas they were in fact brutally massacred. Wilmsen (1989: 320) correctly argued that 'San history is one of neither stasis nor of isolation' (cf. also Gordon 1992: 217-218; Barnard 1992: 55). Gordon (1992: 216-220) accused these anthropologists of 'scientific commoditization' of the Bushmen. Lee (1979: 86) himself was aware that anthropologists contributed considerably to 'a general expansion of knowledge of the ways of the outside world' among the foraging San by creating 'a minor industry [of anthropological research] in its own right' among them and thereby fostering their (further) incorporation into modern society. Barnard (1992: 297), however, notes that, though Wilmsen c.s. do indeed present 'a more accurate [long term] description of the place of Bushmen groups in the southern African economic system as a whole', they do so by 'focusing on those aspects of culture which are most susceptible to outside influences – those related to trade and production'. These are, in Barnard's view, 'the least "structural" elements' in their culture and 'at the opposite end of those which give the Bushmen their cultural identity'. Guenther (1986: 286) adds that his comparison of the foraging *veld* and sedentary farm Nharo shows that the latter have 'adopted [recently] some entrepreneurial and capitalist values that were not part of Nharo culture before'.

⁷⁴ Cf. below note 80

⁷⁵ Heinz (1975: 19) correctly warned against blanket descriptions of 'Bushmen religion'. In view of the differences between them, anthropologists should always specify the groups on which, the places in which, and the times at which, they gathered their data. He was impressed nonetheless 'by the considerable degree of similarity between !ko and !kung beliefs as described by Biesele'. Recent comparative studies of Khoisan mythology in particular have shown a 'considerable degree of homogeneity' between the San religions and a 'common grammar' for all the Khoisan religions, precisely because of their fluidity (Guenther 1989: 34; Barnard 1988: 217, 230, 232; 1992: 251-264), as was previously suggested by Shapera (1930: 160-195).

⁷⁶ ≠Kade [San] is Tanaka's label for the odd 200 G/wi and G//ana speaking San residing in the ≠Kade area in the central Kalahari in Botswana with whom he spent 24 months of research between 1966 and 1974 (Tanaka 1980: XI, XII-XIII, 15-16, 117).

⁷⁷ Guenther (1979) has strongly emphasised the marked changes which have occurred in the religions of the Nharo Bushmen in the process of their transition from a relatively secure foraging life in the *veld* to a much more stressful existence on the farm. He portrayed the traditional religion of the 1,800 Ghanzi Bushmen (15%), still living as free-roaming hunter-gatherers in an 'affluence without abundance' and in relatively ecological and emotional security at the time of his research, between 1968 and 1974, as emotionally low-key, and as one from which fear and awe of the supernatural were markedly absent (Guenther 1979: 102, 103-105, 108, 111, 114, 116). The religion of the *veld* Nharo was cognitively amorphous, vague, fluid, fragmented, unsystematic, incoherent, disorderly, ludic, imaginative, whimsical, surrealistic, dreamlike, casual, prosaic and utterly matter-of-fact (Guenther 1979: 105, 109, 110, 111, 116, 118, 119, 120). It was also divorced from the practical and social concerns of everyday life, institutionally and psychologically 'insignificant', with a paucity of ritual and of ritual specialisation (Guenther 1979: 105, 110, 111-112, 114, 116, 118, 119). In contrast, the religion of the sedentary Nharo Bushmen on the farms had become emotionally intense (Guenther 1979: 102, 114), and the supernatural was inspiring fear and awe into them (Guenther 1979: 102, 108, 114). It had also become (much more) coherent, integrated, standardised, defined and systematic and related directly to the economic and social realities of their lives, in which inter-ethnic tensions were acute (Guenther 1976: 127;

[18]

The Ju'hoansi of the Kalahari

The 900 traditional !Kung speaking, or northern, San⁷⁸ studied by Marshall in the Nyae Nyae area in Namibia, and the 500 investigated by members of the Harvard team in the Dobe area just across the border in Botswana, referred⁷⁹ to themselves as

1979: 102, 103, 111, 113, 114). The trance dancer had become a prestigious, relatively affluent, full time, itinerant specialist, to whom the qualities of a prophet and leader were beginning to be ascribed, as well as a 'potentially political role' (Guenther 1979: 113; 1976: 129-130). The trance dances had become very regular and elaborate events attracting large crowds of participants and spectators from far and wide (Guenther 1979: 112, 113). They generated 'sentiments of emotional recharge and positive ethnic identity' (Guenther 1976: 129-130; 1979: 113) in these farm Bushmen who had acquired an 'extremely low ethnic self-image' (Guenther 1976: 128; 1979: 104). Guenther concluded that, whereas the religion of the farm Nharo could correctly be interpreted in functionalist and structuralist terms, the religion of the *veld* Nharo could not, because 'hovering above reality' (Guenther 1979: 116) as it was, it had no economic, social or emotional functions (in Guenther's opinion) in the secure traditional foraging life. That had enabled it, Guenther (1979: 119, 121) argued, to serve the ludic purposes of surrealist imagination and become 'thoroughly' and 'intrinsically "anti-structural"'. This quality, which Bushman *veld* religion displayed to the extreme, however, was in Guenther's view (1979: 119-126), a normal quality of the religion of all 'ordinary man on the street, or in the bush'. Cf., however, also Barnard's comment (1992: 262-264; 1988: 217, 230, 232) that the marked fluidity of the traditional Khoisan belief systems was precisely the common trait that enabled these 'disorderly', 'idiosyncratic' religions to display at once marked intra- and cross-cultural diversity and structural uniformities both through time and across ethnic boundaries.

⁷⁸ Most !Kung speaking Ju'hoansi live in Northeast Namibia, in the adjacent Northwest of Botswana and in Southeast Angola. They all speak dialects of one single language. Lee (1979: 31, 37-38) divides them into three groups: the northern-most !Kung proper in Angola and the extreme North of Namibia; the southern-most ≠Dau/keisi in Namibia and Botswana; and the central Ju'hoansi. Of the latter, 3,300 live in Botswana, and 2,000 in Namibia (Lee, Bieseles & Hitchcock 1996: 108). For maps of the distribution of the San languages, cf. Lee 1979: fig. 2.1; Tanaka 1980: fig. 3.

⁷⁹ The ethnographic data which I use in this article have been collected by anthropologists between 1950 and 1975. I present them in the past tense, and not in the 'ethnographic present', for the sake of historical accuracy, as I have no means at my disposal for gauging their validity for the religious beliefs of the Ju'hoansi after sedentarisation. In the light of Guenther's analysis of the major differences between *veld* and farm Nharo religions (cf. above note 77), the validity of my description for the present Ju'hoan beliefs seems to me to be doubtful, for the Ju'hoansi have been transformed, in one generation, from a society of foragers to a society of small-holders, by three decades of rapid economical, political and social change. They now eke out a living by herding, farming, craft production, along with some hunting and gathering. Whereas foraging provided 85 % of their calories in 1964, it now supplies perhaps only 30 % of their food intake. In these three decades, wildlife has severely been reduced by population growth and firearms, and the variety of 'wild' food plants by overgrazing; and the formerly extensive knowledge about them is rapidly being lost. Cf. Lee, Bieseles & Hitchcock 1996: 114-115; Lee 1993: 177-181, and above notes 73, 75, and 77. As early as the 1970s, Tobias (1978b: 15; 1978c: 16-18), more generally, regarded it as 'inevitable that, within a generation or two, the palaeolithic hunter-gatherer life-style will have become completely extinct among the San'. He predicted that they would all have passed through the 'neolithic revolution' by the year 2000, and have exchanged their food collecting lifestyle for some mode of sedentary food production. Barnard (comments, 9.07.1998) finds me (and others) guilty here of implying too close and too mechanistic a connection between the 'transition [of foraging San] to a more mixed economy' in the last few decades, and change in their culture and religion. He would have preferred me to present the rest of my article in the ethnographic present, because of the major continuities between the religion of Ju'hoan (and San) foragers and their beliefs after sedentarisation. I present my views on context, change and religion in some greater detail in the two last parts of this article.

Ju'hoansi, 'ordinary people'.⁸⁰ [19] Three quarters of them lived primarily by foraging,⁸¹ *i.e.*, by gathering food and hunting mainly small animals, in an open savannah with sandy dunes, many low and thorny bushes, and a fair number of solitary trees.⁸² On average, their nomadic bands consisted of some 25 members.⁸³ Their core contained a few siblings – brothers and sisters – who shared a claim of 'ownership' to a permanent waterhole and the territory around it (*n!ore*).⁸⁴ These 'owners' (*kxausi*) acted as a band's informal leaders, which for the rest consisted of their wives and husbands, their children, and a few in-laws and/or friends.⁸⁵ Although these bands comprised a relatively stable core, they were nonetheless open and flexible with some members regularly moving in from, and out to, other bands.⁸⁶ A fundamental condition of living within such a group was a sense of trust, born of experience, that members of the band would get along well, reach decisions on the basis of consensus,⁸⁷ and would share the meat of the game which the men hunted, the vegetable food collected by the women, as well as the tobacco and other articles which they obtained through trading networks.⁸⁸ They roamed over an area of some 50 to 70 km. long and wide with at least one or two permanent waterholes, or 'pans', which the band regarded as its own, although they often shared them, especially in wintertime, with other bands.⁸⁹

[20] The Kalahari is a savannah or semi-desert at an altitude of 1,100 m., located in a depression in the heart of the plateau of Southern Africa. In wintertime, from May to August, the climate is dry and cold with strong easterly winds. Temperatures drop to around or below 0° C at night, but may rise to the pleasantly mild 25° C in daytime.⁹⁰

⁸⁰ In order to distinguish the 'central' !Kung speaking San from northern and southern !Kung, they have increasingly been labelled in the ethnographic literature after either the area in which they lived (e.g., the !Kung of Nyae Nyae, the !Kung of Dobe) or after their self-appellation *Ju'hoansi* (plural; *Ju'hoan* singular) (Barnard 1992: xxiii-xxiv, 39-61). I follow the latter option. I have chosen to follow the orthography of Bieseles (1993), and Lee, Bieseles & Hitchcock (1996). Other orthographies are *Zhu/twasi*, or *Zhu/wasi* (Lee 1979: 31, 38; 1983: *passim*), *Zhu/oāsi* (Barnard 1992: xxiv, 23, 39-45, *passim*), or *Ju/wasi*. Wilmsen (1989: *passim*) refers to !Kung speakers as *Zhu*.

⁸¹ Lee 1968: 35. The remaining quarter was attached to Herero cattle posts (Lee, Bieseles, & Hitchcock 1996: 113), but 'shared fully in the ritual and religious life' of their bands (Lee 1968: 36).

⁸² Cf. Yellen & Lee 1976; Marshall 1976: 62-155; Lee 1979: 87-115; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 32-50, 193, 260-264; Tanaka 1980: 3

⁸³ In the Nyae Nyae area in the early 1950s (Marshall 1976: 196). Their size varied from as small as 8 members to as large as 42. In the Dobe area, they varied from 4 to 34 members in the 1960s and early 1970s, with a mean size of just below 20 (Lee 1979: 54-67; 1966: 35). The size of the six G/wi bands studied by Silberbauer varied from 21 to 85 members, and averaged 56 persons (Silberbauer 1981: 193); and the nine camps researched by Tanaka ranged from 7 to 57, with a mean of 22 members (Tanaka 1980: 117).

⁸⁴ On waterholes and *Ju'hoan* spatial organisation, cf. Lee 1976b: 82-90, 92-94

⁸⁵ Lee 1976b: 77-79; 1978: 107-108; 1983: 57-61

⁸⁶ Lee 1979: 42-43, 52-67; Barnard 1992: 43-44. On openness and interband relationships, cf. also Tanaka 1980: 116-135; Silberbauer 1981: 178-180, 185, 187

⁸⁷ Lee 1979: 55. On how it was achieved in G/wi bands, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 188-190

⁸⁸ Marshall 1961; 1976: 287-312; Barnard 1992: 54

⁸⁹ Yellen 1976: 54-61; Lee 1979: 55, 58-61, 334-339, 457; cf. Barnard 1992: 54; Silberbauer 1981: 133-142, 191-194

⁹⁰ Lee 1979: 103, 104; on the five seasons in the Kalahari as the *Ju'hoansi* and the G/wi distinguish them, cf. Lee Yellen & Lee 1976: 32-33; Lee 1978: 98-100; 1979: 103; 1983: 25-28; Silberbauer 1981: 104-107

The Ju/'hoansi survived these cold nights by building a good fire in front of a low windscreen of branches which their women constructed once they had set up camp somewhere, and by sleeping closely huddled together under their antelope skins.⁹¹ Their staple food in wintertime were the *g//kaa*, nuts of the *Ricinodendron rautanenii* trees which bore abundant fruit in a number of places in the Kalahari and which are more commonly known as mongongo or mangetti nuts in Botswana.⁹² In addition, !Kung women gathered the fruits of the baobab trees and dug out numerous types of roots and bulbs.⁹³

As most pans in the dunes did not have water in winter and food was relatively abundant, Ju/'hoan bands tended to congregate in the autumn (March-April) and early winter (May-June) for some three months, or much longer,⁹⁴ in the neighbourhood of a permanent waterhole, several bands camping at a distance of a few hundred yards from each other.⁹⁵ Social contacts, therefore, were much intensified during these months. There was much visiting to other camps, marriages were arranged, young men between the ages of fifteen and twenty went through their initiation rites,⁹⁶ and there were frequent curing dances.⁹⁷

[21] These dance ceremonies were multi-functional and 'total' phenomena which usually served several purposes simultaneously: they were held for the sake of mere recreation and the aesthetic pleasure of singing and dancing, for enjoying the company of friends, for fraternising with strangers, for celebrating a good hunt, for expressing the distinct, but complementary domains, roles and functions of males and females, and for protection and healing, but also to forestall, or solve, the conflicts which the heightened social communication of these months might provoke.⁹⁸ The major source of friction souring otherwise amicable relations was the gradual depletion of the vegetable and animal food resources around the camps in the course of the

⁹¹ Cf. Lee 1979: 107

⁹² Lee 1966: 39; Barnard, comments, 9.07.1998

⁹³ Cf. Marshall 1976: 92-123; Yellen & Lee 1976: 37-38; Lee 1979: 158-204; Barnard 1992: 43

⁹⁴ On that variation, cf. Barnard 1992: 44-45

⁹⁵ Lee 1979: 104, 364-368, 446

⁹⁶ !Kung male and female initiation rites were practised in the past, but have been on the wane since the 1950s (Barnard 1992: 59-61, with references to literature from 1928 to 1981; cf. also Bieseles 1993: 205-207). Cf. Lee (1979: 236-240) for a description of the tattooing rite by which a young man became an adult hunter after he had made his first kill of an antelope; and Bieseles (1993: 116-123) on its reflection in the Ju/'hoan creation story of the marking and naming of animals. On initiation rites among the !Xo Kung, cf. Barnard 1992: 71-72; on /Xam female initiation, cf. Barnard 1992: 80; on those for males and females among the //Xegwi, cf. Barnard 1992: 86; among the G/wi, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 89, 99, 151-152, and Barnard 1992: 112-113; among the Kwadi of Angola, cf. Barnard 1992: 132; and among the Nharo, cf. Guenther 1986: 274-281; Barnard 1992: 154-155.

⁹⁷ Cf. Yellen & Lee 1976: 44-45; Lee 1979: 365-366; 1983: 110. Curing dances have become even more frequent with permanent settlement in the last three decades (Barnard, comments 9.07.98).

⁹⁸ Barnard (comments 9.07.98) points out, quite correctly, that this 'total' aspect of the dances should be emphasised to counteract their many partial presentations as in, e.g., Katz 1979 and 1981, as merely trance performances. Cf. also Lee (1968: 37-39, 53) on the dance as a 'social and recreational event as well as a context for trance performances'; on the 'basic asymmetry of roles in the curing dance', the men dancing, yet the women providing the fundamental musical framework which makes their dance experience possible; and on the several reasons for initiating the dances.

winter months (May-August), in addition to the increased pressure to share food, and the grudges of those who received a smaller share than they expected, or even no share at all.⁹⁹ These and other tensions in an autumn and winter camp, were dissipated in the curing dances,¹⁰⁰ or by bands setting off for their own territories.¹⁰¹

In the summer, from October to March, temperatures rose to between 33° and 43° C in daytime. By the time the rains came, in November or December,¹⁰² the bands had long dispersed to their own territories to collect mongongo nuts,¹⁰³ berries, melons, and other vegetable foods there, and to hunt the migratory waterfowl, which congregated in the smaller waterholes in the dunes in the summer. The rains were never abundant: on average some 250 mm a year, although they could be plentiful in one place and year, and very sparse in another place and year.¹⁰⁴

[22] The hunt was an exclusively male affair. In both seasons, the men formed small parties of two to five persons, and often accompanied by dogs, for hunting giraffes, elands, kudus, wildebeests, hartebeests, gemsbuck, ibex, hogs, or duikers (but never ostriches, zebra, buffaloes, elephants, lions, leopards or cheetahs) with their bows and poisoned arrows. In addition, steenboks and other small antelopes, hare and game birds were snared, clubbed, speared or chased with dogs, whilst springhare, ant bear, porcupine, pangolin and aardwolf were dug out from their burrows.¹⁰⁵ The men might also climb trees to collect honey from a beehive. By these activities, the men contributed roughly one-third of the total food requirements of a band.¹⁰⁶ The remaining two-thirds consisted of the vegetable foods (nuts, berries, other fruits, melons, bulbs, tubers and roots) which were collected by the women, although in part by the men too.¹⁰⁷

The obligation to share was strictest in respect of meat of the big game which the men might occasionally kill: it had to be shared among all the members of the band or

⁹⁹ Lee 1979: 366-369

¹⁰⁰ Lee 1979: 364-368, 446-448; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 54, 105-107, 174-178, 195-196; Guenther 1986: 256

¹⁰¹ G/wi bands were forced to disperse in late winter (June-July) if severe frost drastically depleted the food resources, after which they congregated again in midsummer (January-February) (Silberbauer 1981: 159, 196, 245; cf. also Tanaka 1976).

¹⁰² Lee 1979: 103-104

¹⁰³ Lee 1979: 182-204

¹⁰⁴ Cf. Yellen & Lee 1976: 30-32; Lee 1976b: 80-81; Lee 1979: 108-115, 182-204, 438; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 33-35, 220-222

¹⁰⁵ Tortoises, certain kinds of snakes, and iguanas were caught, and caterpillars, grasshoppers and termites were gathered by both sexes. Cf. Marshall 1976: 124-155; Yellen & Lee 1976: 39-42; Jones & Konner 1976; Lee 1978: 100-101, 104-106; 1979: 133-151, 205-247; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 202, 204-220; Guenther 1986: 236-240

¹⁰⁶ Lee 1979: 450; cf. also Lee 1978: 103-104. Different percentages have been given: Marshall (1976: 124, referring to Lee 1965: 40) put the contribution of the males by hunting at 25 %; Lee himself, however, put it at both 40 % (Lee 1979: 205), and at 30 % (Lee 1979: 262, 270-271). Even so, the males worked harder than the women: they spent a mean of 3.3 workdays a week to bring in that more irregular and more prized part of the Ju/'hoan diet, whilst the women toiled 1.3 workdays a week to bring in their much bigger and regular share (Lee 1979: 261-262, 450-451; 1983: 50-55).

¹⁰⁷ Lee 1978: 102-103; 1979: 261-262, 450; 1983: 34-55

bands.¹⁰⁸ The vegetable food, collected mainly by the women, belonged in principle to their own families, or households, but some of it was usually shared with other families of the band, or camp.¹⁰⁹ The sharing of food was the concrete embodiment of the most important social principle and central norm by which hunter-gatherer societies are constituted: that of generalised (i.e., [23] ‘unbalanced’ and ‘non-exhaustive’) reciprocity, or sharing without expecting an equivalent return at short notice.¹¹⁰ The constant sharing of food constitutes the foraging band:

The essence of this way of life is sharing. The hunting band or camp is a unit of sharing and if sharing breaks down, it ceases to be a camp.¹¹¹

The sharing of food, then, expresses the fundamental solidarity between the members of a foraging band. It is also an important means by which tensions in the group are kept low. As nomads, the Ju/hoansi did not accumulate more possessions than they could carry.¹¹² Surpluses of food, and the handiwork they made in their relatively ample free time,¹¹³ were therefore the most important items to serve as ‘social capital’ for gift giving for the purpose of maintaining friendly relations with members of their own or other foraging groups.¹¹⁴ The circulation of the meat of animals killed in hunts was effected by the regular practice of exchanging poisoned arrows between hunters, on the principle that the meat of the animal killed belonged to the owner of the arrow with which it had been killed, rather than to the hunter.¹¹⁵

This generalised reciprocity, created by sharing food, meat, etc., in the everyday life of the face-to-face community of the band, was complemented by the wider networks of *hxaro* trading relations which the Ju/hoansi males cultivated. In these, close kin as well as distant relatives and friends acted as partners in gift-giving and trading networks, in which the Ju/hoansi circulated prized goods by gift-giving in a relationship of long-term, balanced reciprocity. Thereby these extensive long-distance *hxaro* networks with ‘trading partners’ had strong levelling effects on the accumulation of

¹⁰⁸ Cf. Marshall 1976: 295-303; Lee 1978: 106; 1979: 247-249

¹⁰⁹ Cf. Lee (1979: 118): ‘Food is never consumed alone by a family; it is always (actually or potentially) shared out with members of a living group or band of up to 30 (or more) members’; cf. also Lee 1978: 101, 106. Ju/hoan women, however, seemed to share vegetable food more generously than the G/wi and ≠Kade females because the food stocks, especially the mongongo nuts, available allowed them to do so, as did the time they needed to collect the required daily portions (Lee 1979: 177, 200-201; Tanaka 1980: 144-145, 146). G/wi women usually collected no more than they needed for their own households, but they did share some of it with elderly and invalid people who were not members of their households, and the playmates of their own children, or their prospective marriage partners (Silberbauer 1981: 232-233).

¹¹⁰ Lee 1978: 101; 1979: 117-119, 156, 201-202, 247-249, 354-361, 412-414, 456-461; cf. also Tanaka 1980: 95-96, 98-99, 109, 110, 123 for the ≠Kade of the Central Kalahari; Silberbauer 1981: 232-235, 238, 249-256, 295 for the G/wi; and Draper 1975: 84-85

¹¹¹ Lee 1979: 118, 458-459; also 201

¹¹² Lee 1979: 456. Cf. Lee (1979: 124-128; 1983: 37-40, 42-43) on Ju/hoan load-carrying technology essential for both their foraging and their mobility

¹¹³ Lee 1979: 13, 258-259, 262, 280

¹¹⁴ Lee 1979: 365-366, 456, 460; 1983: 50, 97-102

¹¹⁵ Lee 1979: 247-248; 1983: 50

prized articles.¹¹⁶ In addition, the partners existed by these networks not only in a mutual state of delayed, balanced reciprocity, but also in one of generalised reciprocity of rights to water and plant resources, i.e. to hospitality within the territory of their trading partners.¹¹⁷

[24] Apart from perfect equality in wealth, Ju/'hoan bands also made virtually no distinction in terms of higher or lower authority, power, status or any other social barriers that separated men from women, and young from old.¹¹⁸ Despite some clear separations between male and female domains, such as the males hunting meat and the females collecting vegetable food, or the men dancing during the curing rituals and the women singing and clapping,¹¹⁹ their bands were amongst the most egalitarian societies which human history has known.¹²⁰

None of this, however, should be understood to imply that these bands always lived in perfect harmony, devoid of serious conflict. Minor conflicts, particularly very 'funny', or angry, or insulting verbal exchanges were not uncommon when someone felt that his or her share of the meat, other food, or gifts was too small, or when it was felt that they had been 'improperly' distributed, or when someone had been 'lazy'; and major friction might arise from jealousy, unfaithfulness in sexual relationships, or broken promises of marriages. Such tensions might not only result in an exchange of verbal abuse, but could also provoke a violent and even fatal fight.¹²¹

[25] Such violence threatened the very existence of a Ju/'hoan band, because their egalitarianism prevented them from establishing the formal leaders who could

¹¹⁶ Lee 1979: 365-366, 456, 460; 1983: 50, 97-102

¹¹⁷ Barnard 1992: 55

¹¹⁸ The only relationship in which authority was intrinsic was that between parents and children (Silberbauer 1981: 143, 162-165). It was softened, however, on the part of the parents, and subtly strengthened on the part of the children, by the fact that this relationship was also ruled by the more general prescriptions ruling the wider category of respect, or avoidance, relations. San social behaviour was expected to be reserved and, if at all possible, indirect between those who were in an avoidance relationship: roughly all relations between persons of the opposite sex, and those between persons belonging to an ascending or a descending generation; and they were expected to be frank, unrestrained and direct between persons in a 'joking relationship': mainly those between persons of the same sex, and those between persons of the same or alternate generations (cf. Silberbauer 1981: 143-149; Barnard 1992: 47-51, 267-271).

¹¹⁹ Cf. Lee 1979: 447-454; Lee 1983: 110. Silberbauer (1981: 157-158) also notes a slight superiority of males over females in G/wi society, whereby the 'children belong to the father' and remain under his custody in the event of divorce. Cf. also Biesele (1978: 170; 1993: 22-23, 116-185) on Ju/'hoansi exploring 'the balance of power between men and women' in their stories, especially those about a daughter of //Gauwa, G!kon//'amdima ('Beautiful antbear maiden').

¹²⁰ On Ju/'hoan egalitarianism, cf. Marshall 1976: 287-312; Lee 1979: 24, 221, 244-249, 457; on G/wi egalitarianism, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 167-178, 181; on sexual egalitarianism among the Nharo farm Bushmen, cf. Guenther 1986: 229-232; 1989: 60-64. Cf. also Barnard (1992: 53) on the changes in the relationships between parents and children, and husbands and wives, as a result of sedentarisation. It causes the women to stay at home more, and the men to be away from home, a tendency, which Lee (1984: 137) says, may mark the beginning of female subordination; cf. also Silberbauer 1978: 183. On elements promoting and restraining male dominance among the Nharo farm Bushmen, cf. Guenther 1986: 290-292.

¹²¹ Marshall 1961; 1969: 373-374; 1976: 288-293, 311-312; Lee 1978: 110-111; 1979: 370-382; 1983: 81, 87, 90-97. For an analysis of the G/wi political process and conflict containment, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 167-178; for that of the ≠Kade, cf. Tanaka 1980: 107-110, 122.

forestall or end such brawls and punish the guilty.¹²² It was for this reason that the Ju/'hoansi never fought wars¹²³ or developed weapons specifically for attacking their fellow humans, nor did they possess the shields with which they could defend themselves in battle.¹²⁴ The most important means they had to prevent such events was that whenever there was serious tension, the disaffected left the band to join another camp, or hived off to form a separate band which then went off to collect food elsewhere.¹²⁵ If, however, the band had not split in time, the poisoned arrows and short spears used in the hunt might also be used to kill an opponent. A killing, in its turn, might develop into a feud and result in several more killings between two opposing parties. Someone who had killed several persons might himself be executed by the band, if it saw no other way out of the misery.¹²⁶

The maintenance of harmonious relationships between the members of a band, and between neighbouring bands, therefore, was of utmost importance to the Ju/'hoansi. The curing dances played a central role in maintaining harmonious relations.¹²⁷

Fire

Fire was a dense, polysemous key symbol for the Ju/'hoansi: it had a central place in their social life. The first thing they did on arrival at the place where they would set up camp for a few weeks was to build a fire, and, from this fire, each family built its own fire in front of the windscreen which the women had constructed in the meantime. The row of fires was what actually constituted the camp,¹²⁸ because it [26] was the fire, rather than the screen, that served as the centre of each family group in the camp.¹²⁹ The fires were kept burning throughout the night but were covered during the day.

The making of a new fire upon arrival in a new site belonged to the domain of the men and was a male prerogative, as was the preparation of the poison for the arrows and the hunt. The Ju/'hoansi regarded fire and poison as the two gifts with which God, ≠Gao N!a, had entrusted them in order to enable them to live in this world.¹³⁰ Custom decreed that a new fire had preferably to be made by the oldest male of the band and

¹²² Lee 1979: 381

¹²³ Cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 186-187) on the 'non-militaristic' nature of G/wi bands and territory 'ownership'.

¹²⁴ Lee 1979: 157, 381, 388-389

¹²⁵ Lee 1979: 395-396, 397. For a G/wi example, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 173-174; for the ≠Kade, cf. Tanaka 1980: 122-126

¹²⁶ Lee 1979: 382-400, esp. 392-397. In recent decades, the Ju/'hoansi of the Dobe area have increasingly preferred to resolve their conflicts by bringing them before the court of the Tswana headman Isak Utuhile, established at the !Kwangwa settlement in 1948 after a Ju/'hoan had killed a Tswana in 1945 (Lee 1978: 94, 96-97, 111).

¹²⁷ Cf. e.g. Lee 1968: 51-53; 1979: 377. Cf. also Eibl-Eibesfeldt (1978: 132-136) on how San educate young children to control their aggression.

¹²⁸ On Ju/'hoan camps, cf. Yellen 1976: 61-69

¹²⁹ Marshall 1976: 88; Lee 1979: 77-78, 154

¹³⁰ Marshall 1979: 85, 152, 348-350

its production was something of a ritual in itself.¹³¹ Fire was also very closely associated with another aspect of their lives in which the males were dominant, *i.e.*, ritual.

However, before a curing dance commenced, it was always the women who signalled that a dance was on by making a new fire from the existing ones,¹³² and that fire was spatially and symbolically the heart of the entire event.¹³³

≠Gao N!a, //Gauwa, the //gawasi, and n/um

One possibility, and perhaps the best, is to see creator and trickster as two facets of a single important character. [.. Even so,] the trickster incarnation seems to belong to an entirely separate realm of belief from that of the Ju'hoan creator.¹³⁴

Ju'hoan traditional religion was as sparsely populated, and as orderly organised, as their natural and social worlds. Their religious representations consisted of only three, perhaps four, categories: the creator-god, ≠Gao N!a; perhaps a lower 'counter'-god, //Gauwa; the deceased, or //gawasi; and 'healing power', n/um.¹³⁵ The first three (two?) categories [27] were intimately related and formed the personalised 'outside', or 'super-natural', religious world of the Ju'hoansi, whereas their 'inside', or 'social' and 'tangible', non-personal, but equally meta-testable, religious world was constituted by n/um.¹³⁶

In their discussions with Marshall about ≠Gao N!a and //Gauwa, the Ju'hoansi maintained that //Gauwa, or Kauha, the trickster and fool, who figures prominently in Ju'hoan 'long ago' stories, and about whom the elderly Ju'hoansi, males and females especially, would laugh uproariously, was identical with ≠Gao N!a, the creator-god:

The people [...] tell tales of the old ≠Gao N!a doings without restraint, say his name aloud, howl and roll on the ground with laughter at his humiliations, whereas when they

¹³¹ Marshall 1976: 83-84; cf. also Lee (1979: 147-148) and Silberbauer (1981: 229) on fire making

¹³² Marshall 1969: 357

¹³³ Lee 1968: 37, 42, 44, 47

¹³⁴ Bieseles 1993: 180, 181

¹³⁵ Marshall (1957) and Barnard (1992: 58-59), in addition, mention a Ju'hoan belief in *n!ow*, an ability attributed to some babies to negatively or positively influence the weather at the moment of their birth. If they had 'good' *n!ow*, they were believed to cause rain and if they possessed 'evil' *n!ow*, to cause the weather to turn cold. *N!ow* was believed either to be formed in the foetus in the womb, or to have been implanted into it by ≠Gao N!a before birth. Animals like the giraffe, eland, and other big antelopes were also believed to possess lucky or unlucky *n!ow* and to release it at the moment of their being killed by a hunter, thereby causing rain to fall or the weather to turn cold. For a more extensive discussion of this Ju'hoan belief in *n!ao* (Bieseles's orthography), cf. Bieseles 1993: 103-115. Cf. also Guenther (1986: 234-235) for a similar belief among the Nharo.

¹³⁶ G/wi religion was distinctive: the G/wi also believed in an underworld, inhabited by 'angry things' and the deceased after their bodies had decomposed. The first were nondescript monsters believed to surface and kill people, or stealthily cause other major harm, but only after major rules had been broken (Silberbauer 1981: 113-114).

... speak of the great one in the east, they whisper and avoid his name. Yet they think somehow in the rightness of things these two beings must be one, so one they are said to be.¹³⁷

Marshall herself, moreover, recorded that //Gauwa was one of the (eight) names given to ≠Gao N!a.¹³⁸ Despite these two facts,¹³⁹ however, [28] she explicitly separated the two and, rejecting their identification by the Ju/'hoansi themselves,¹⁴⁰ regarded them as two distinct gods.¹⁴¹

¹³⁷ Marshall 1962: 228; cf. also Bieseke 1976: 307, 308, 316-317; 1993: 23, 103-115. Cf. further Bieseke (1976: 309-310; 1978: 170; 1993: 22) on the great god, G//aoan, featuring as the trickster in primal time when he was still on earth, and being referred to most often as Kaoxa (i.e., //Gauwa) in the Ju/'hoan stories about creation. Bieseke suggests that Kaoxa (//Gauwa) may, therefore, be best translated in the creation tales 'as "God", since Ju/'hoansi say he is the same personage thought to have later ascended the sky and become divine'. Bieseke proposed, therefore, that one may perhaps best consider the creator and the trickster 'as two facets of a single important character' (Bieseke 1993: 180). Cf. also Bieseke 1993: 106. And Barnard (1988: 224; 1992: 257, 259): 'For the !Kung, [...] God merges into the evil spirit, he commits incest and cannibalism'. Cf. also Barnard (1992: 56, 259) on //Gauwa being 'a common term in several Khoisan languages for 'God', 'Devil', or the spirits of the dead'. For the 'hilarious' stories about 'old ≠Gao N!a', cf. Bieseke (1976: 316-321; 1978: 170 1993: 171-185); Katz (1982: 30-31); Barnard (1992: 57); Glazenburg (1994: 59). About this duality in Ju/'hoan beliefs of the creator having ordered the world in a benevolent way, yet at the same time being the capricious source of incomprehensible evil, see also Marshall (1962: 228-229, 233); Katz (1982: 29-31); in those of the G/wi, Silberbauer 1981: 51-54; and in those of the !Ko: Heinz 1975: 21; Barnard 1992: 70.

¹³⁸ Cf. Marshall (1962: 223-226) and Barnard (1988: 223; 1992: 56, 256) on ≠Gao N!a as his 'earthly name', and on his 'seven divine names' (Hishwe, Huwe, Kxo, !Gara, Gana ga, ≠Gaishi ≠gai, and //Gauwa), each of which ≠Gao N!a shared with //Gauwa; and Wilmsen's suggestion that they signified attributes of God.

¹³⁹ And the fact that some of her other data, which I will present below (see notes 233-237), seem also to contradict her view; see Marshall 1962: 245, 247; 1969: 350; cf. also the latter part of note 141.

¹⁴⁰ Marshall 1962: 223-228, 238

¹⁴¹ Marshall 1962: 245, 247; 1969: 350. So did Lee (1983: 103, 106-107), Katz (1982: 29-31) and also Bieseke (1978: 162; 1993: 22, 180-181) for Ju/'hoan religion. Though Bieseke acknowledged that 'the picture is as yet very confusing', she too opted for 'the dual conception' of creator god and lower trickster god, because 'there is little connection between the trickster in the world of the tales and the Ju/'hoan sky god conception': the earthly exploits of the gods seem to be placed in a realm quite separate from their roles in religion as creators and divinities (Bieseke 1993: 22, 181). They may either 'represent beliefs from two different historical strata', or 'both concepts were anciently held by Bushman peoples at some time, but came to share a name or set of names' (Bieseke 1993: 180-181). Heinz (1975), Tanaka (1980), Silberbauer (1981), Guenther (1986), Wilmsen (1987: 292-293), and Valiente-Noailles (1993: 194-197) also opt for this dual conception. Heinz (1975: 20-23) presented the !Ko as distinguishing between Gu/e, the creator, and /oa, 'the intermediate spirit which can represent both good and evil'; cf. also Barnard 1992: 70. To the ≠Kade, wrote Tanaka (1980: 110-111), N!odima 'represents all that is good', and the evil spirit G//wama, 'all that is bad'. Though the Gw/i did not regard the creator N!adima as 'the personification of goodness', Silberbauer wrote that they considered him as fundamentally 'supportive of order', whereas they took the 'shape-shifter' G//amama, or G//awama, as 'innately hostile to man' (Silberbauer 1981: 54, 117-118). For the beliefs of the Nharo farm an de *veld* Bushmen about N!eri, 'the creator god of the upper sky', and //Gäuwa, 'the trickster god of the veld and the lower regions of the sky', cf. Guenther 1979: 106-111; 1986: 218-225. However, Lee, Heinz, Silberbauer and Guenther all had also doubts about their dualist position. Lee (1983: 107, note 3) found many aspects of the High God/Low God dichotomy puzzling and wondered whether the split might be a recent one because in some myths there is only one god; in addition, in other myths, the roles were reversed; and some Ju/'hoansi insisted that the high god is 'both the creator and the killer'. Heinz (1975: 22 n. 3, 35, 39) recorded his doubts three times: 'perhaps, Gu/e and /oa are one and the same'. Silberbauer (1981: 55-56) noted that, despite the 'consensus among the desert G/wi' about the creator and lower god as separate beings, 'a few informants expressed a vague concept of N!adima and G//amama as two aspects of being', and that he encountered the same idea among other Bushmen. Heinz, more-

She presented ≠Gao N!a as 'the great god who [was believed to have] created the earth and men and women and all things',¹⁴² and to live in the East at the place of sunrise in a two-storey house with his [29] wife¹⁴³ and his children, the //gawwasi, next to a big tree. After he had created the earth, the sky, the rain, the waterholes, the plants, the woman and the man (in that order!),¹⁴⁴ he was said to have presented the woman with fire to enable her to cook the food which she was to dig up from the earth. In addition, he was said to have presented the humans with the poison,¹⁴⁵ bow and arrows and short spear for hunting, and with the digging stick for uprooting, in order that they might have food to eat.¹⁴⁶ But it was also believed that he had made men mortal, transformed the dead into his children, the //gawwasi,¹⁴⁷ and sent them out to spread disease, misfortune and death among humans.¹⁴⁸ [30] It was believed, in short, that he

over, recorded that /oa is also the !Ko term for the powers of God (Heinz 1975: 20); that Gu/e was believed to be sexually very active; that no one could stop him from committing incest; and that he 'ate' people: 'when he gets angry with men, they die' (Heinz 1975: 21). Even so, !Ko believed that Gu/e 'dislikes [the] incest, stealing, lying, adultery, jealousy and murder' of men and punishes them for it (Heinz 1975: 22). Guenther (1979: 106-111) found a clear-cut, mission-inspired opposition between //Gauwa as Satan and N!eri as creator among the farm Nharo, but 'an uncertain association' between them among the veld Nharo, some of whom identified //Gauwa and N!eri, while others regarded //Gauwa as N!eri's son or servant. For the wider perspective of the Khoisan religions, some of them merging, others separating the good from the evil god, but in ways which were 'not always apparent and clear', cf. Wilmsen 1987; Barnard 1988: 224-228, 1992: 252, 256-259.

¹⁴² Marshall 1962: 223; cf. also 234-235. This seems a much too Western-Christian and 'theologically' straightforward formulation to do justice to the ludic qualities of Ju'hoan beliefs in respect of the role of ≠Gao N!a in the two stage creation of the world in 'primal' time. In their myths, the creator's first attempt was presented as producing a flawed creation in which animals and humans were undifferentiated, and each took the names and the roles of the other (e.g., animals hunting other animals, fish living on land, and hunted animals tasting foul). God's attempt to reverse did achieve the 'proper' order, although the tales presented much of it as the unintentional side-effect of the pranks of the trickster //Gauwa gone wrong. However, even this second creation had serious deficiencies, such as death, and the division of humankind into superior and inferior groups, with the San at the bottom because of an in-built inferiority (cf. Guenther 1986: 226-228, 232-233, 238; 1989: 31-33, 41, 42, 86-88, 115; Barnard 1992: 82-83; Biesele 1993: 116-138).

¹⁴³ Or two wives (cf. Barnard 1992: 56)

¹⁴⁴ In the !Ko creation story, however, 'man was made before woman' (Heinz 1975: 21).

¹⁴⁵ On its preparation and use by the Ju'hoansi, cf. Marshall 1976: 147-148, Lee 1979: 102, 133-135; by the G/wi, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 207-208; cf. also Glazenburg 1994: 22-24.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. also Heinz 1975: 21 for similar !Ko beliefs.

¹⁴⁷ Marshall 1962: 226, 241-243. Most !Ko believed that it was the 'job of Gu/e's children to collect the spirits of people when they die'. These latter served for some time as Gu/e's servants (Heinz: 1975: 21, 22). The G/wi, however, did not believe that the deceased (*g/amadz*) became children, or servants, of ≠Gao N!a or //Gauwa. They believed them to hover for some time after their burial near the graves which they themselves shunned because the deceased were thought to be intensely hostile to living persons, in particular to beloved relatives, and to attack anyone venturing near a grave, especially a recent one. After the body had decomposed, the *g/amadz* were said to depart for, and to remain in, an underworld, where they gradually became harmless (Silberbauer 1981: 113-114). Guenther (1986: 245-247) found two different views among the Nharo farm Bushmen. The more acculturated held that 'after life man goes to N!eri' (the creator god). The more traditional view, however, was that after death man was briefly a ghost and then dissolved permanently.

¹⁴⁸ Marshall 1962: 226, 235, 237, 238, 244; 1969: 350; Biesele 1978: 162-163; Katz 1982: 102, 112. Cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 53) on the beliefs of the G/wi in respect of N!adima, the creator, who intervenes capriciously in the order he has himself established. The G/wi and ≠Kade believed that women were much more vulnerable to these attacks than men. By G//awama shooting tiny arrows into the bodies of the women, evil was spread into the band (Tanaka 1980: 115; Silberbauer 1981: 54, 109, 118,

often showed himself to be a ‘capricious and largely indifferent deity’, who sent misfortune for no other reason than that he simply felt inclined to do so, or because he had grown tired of a particular man’s face, or had succumbed to his inscrutable wish to inflict pain.¹⁴⁹

However, ≠Gao N!a was also said to have given men the means to counteract death in *n/um*, the invisible healing power resident in the bodies of those whom the Ju’hoansi called the *n/um kxau*, the ‘owners of *n/um*’.¹⁵⁰ It was also believed that he continued to do so by revealing in dreams, to the owners of *n/um*, the songs which were to be sung at the healing dances, the vegetable medicines they might prepare for curing people, and by increasing their *n/um* during the dreams he gave them.¹⁵¹ Although he was believed to have made men mortal and constantly to send them disease and death, it was also held that he had given them, and continued to give them, the means by which they might live in harmony.

In Marshall’s view, //Gauwa was a lower god even more capricious and destructive than ≠Gao N!a.¹⁵² He was believed, she said, to live with his wife and children, i.e. //gauwasi, in the West where the sun sets.¹⁵³ He was also said to wander over the face of the earth in the shape of whirlwinds, to spy on humans, and to spread disease, dissent, [31] death and other evil among them, at the command of ≠Gao N!a, or simply out of spite.¹⁵⁴ But even he was held not to be purely destructive: he might at times be

175). Cf. also Valiente-Noailles (1993: 197-199) on the narrow etymological link between //gama, ‘God’, and //gamahare, spirits of the dead, and the Kua (G/wi and G//ana) Bushmen regarding them as evil and as ‘the most feared source of evil’.

¹⁴⁹ I am rephrasing here Silberbauer’s description of G/wi ‘stoic’ analysis of the part which they believed the creator N!adima played in their lives (Silberbauer 1981: 174). But cf. also Lee (1983: 106), quoting a Ju’hoan healer: ‘Sometimes God himself kills people; sometimes it is the //gangwasi’; and: ‘In some myths, the high god is portrayed as good and the lesser god as evil. In others the roles are reversed. Some !Kung regard big //Gangwa as a creator, remote and inaccessible, and see small //Gangwa as the destroyer, the main source of death. Others insist that it is the high god who is both the creator and the killer. Whatever its ultimate source, the !Kung agree that the main agency that brings misfortune is the //gangwasi, the spirits of the dead’ (Lee 1983: 107; also Katz 1982: 29-30, 102, 112).

¹⁵⁰ In addition, *n/um* can be used to describe anything that is believed to possess an ‘energy’, or ‘power’, by which it can work to the benefit or detriment of humans, or exhibit amazing qualities. Examples are herbal medicines and menstrual blood, but also a tape recorder, or the vapour trail of jet plane (Barnard 1992: 57, referring to Lee 1984: 109). Cf. also Guenther (1986: 243-245) on the Nharo parallel notion *tsoo*.

¹⁵¹ Cf. also Shostak 1981: 295-296; Silberbauer 1981: 56; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 199-201

¹⁵² It is important to note that Guenther (1979: 106-111) regarded the beliefs about the god of the *veld*, //Gauwa, as the heart of the religion of the Nharo, rather than those surrounding the remote creator N!eri. Guenther emphasised that //Gauwa was regarded as the ‘most ambiguous’ god because he was considered to be both good and evil; cf. also Guenther 1986: 219-225, 247-249.

¹⁵³ Another Ju’hoan informant, however, said that he lived in the East. Cf. also Heinz (1975: 20-22) on /oa living with Gu/e in the sky, the bigger dwelling of Gu/e being not too far apart from /oa’s more humble dwelling at a lower place beyond the sky.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. also Biesele 1978: 164-165; and Heinz (1975: 22-23) on !Ko belief that /oa makes men lie, steal, commit adultery and suicide, and causes severe droughts; Silberbauer (1981: 54) on G/wi belief that G//awama spreads all this evil among men by the invisible small arrows that he showers on the band from the sky, and is particularly active in doing so at the time of the autumn camps when thirty or more families congregate for visiting, and when ‘exorcising dances are performed three or four times a week to counteract the evil that G//amana bestows’; Valiente-Noailles (1993: 196-197) on Kua belief about !kaonxa as ‘master of all the bad things’; likewise Guenther (1986: 220, 223, 241, 247-248) for the

of assistance to humans. One Ju'hoan 'owner of *n/um*' said that it was //Gauwa who had persuaded ≠Gao N!a to give *n/um*, the songs of the curing dances, and vegetable medicines to men. Men might also ask him to help them in the hunt.¹⁵⁵ But he was also said to be a simpleton who brought humankind the wrong medicines causing them to grow more ill instead of being cured.¹⁵⁶

The //gauwasi or deceased, were also viewed by the Ju'hoansi with much ambivalence. Though they had no (unilateral) lineages,¹⁵⁷ they did recognise the 'old people', who had died, collectively as the source of their present stock of knowledge¹⁵⁸ and used them to legitimise their customs and social order, thereby connecting them in that respect with ≠Gao N!a, the creator, who served as the foundation of the broad rationality of their worldview as a general systems theory of a fairly open type capable of coping with the anomaly of disorder in a largely orderly system.¹⁵⁹ At the same time, they saw the //gauwasi as the most important threat to the well-being and harmony of their bands. They [32] held that the //gauwasi, like //Gauwa, spread disease and dissent among them, both at the bidding of ≠Gao N!a, and of their own free will, and mainly out of spite for their own deaths, or because they wished the living to join them,¹⁶⁰ and were essentially evil.¹⁶¹ The Ju'hoansi believed that at night, when the curing dances were held, and on other occasions too, the //gauwasi lurked around the camp in order to shoot evil into humans with their tiny invisible arrows.¹⁶²

It follows from their attributing to the deceased, and God, both the ordered world, the harmony among men, their health and life and vitality, as well as the disorder, dis-

farm Nharo. Cf. also Wilmsen (1987: 293, 294; 1989: xi) devising the name 'administrator deity' for the lower god Gxanwa, who eats flies when he is short of human corpses, his primary food. The /Xai/Xai Zhu (= !Kung, JP) of the Lake Ngami area explained the death of humans by saying that 'Gxanwa has no sense', because the death of animals is proper for they are meant to be food for humans and carnivores; but that of humans is improper and can only be explained by Gxanwa's cannibalistic lust for human corpses. Barnard (1988: 226-227) found that //Gauwa was 'almost universally among the Khoisan peoples a term for the evil god, the evil aspect of the good god, the evil spirits, or the spirits of the dead', and particularly so among the Ju'hoansi.

¹⁵⁵ Marshall 1962: 247; 1969: 352. Cf. also Heinz (1975: 22) on !Ko belief that /oa may intercede for a man's life with Gu/e, and assist them in other ways; and Guenther (1979: 106-111; 1986: 218-225; 1989: 34, 115-117) on the trickster //Gäuwa being both a god of death and of life in Nharo religion and the key figure in, and unifying element of, all Khoisan religions; cf. also below note 204.

¹⁵⁶ Marshall 1962: 238-241; Silberbauer 1981: 51-57, 117-118, 174-175

¹⁵⁷ On Ju'hoan bilateral kinship, cf. Lee 1978: 107; 1983: 58-60. Cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 142-166, 181-184) on the absence of lineages in the (G/wi) San kinship system.

¹⁵⁸ Cf. Silberbauer 1981: 57-58

¹⁵⁹ Cf. Silberbauer 1981: 114-118

¹⁶⁰ E.g. Katz 1982: 50; Lee 1983: 109. Cf. also Valiente-Noailles 1993: 199

¹⁶¹ Barnard 1992: 252. Lee (1983: 107-108) found conflicting and confused opinions, some Dobe Ju'hoansi holding that it was in the nature of the deceased to hurt the living, others that they bothered only those who did not behave well, and again others saying that though some people had evil //gangwasi, others had good ones who, e.g., assisted them in the hunt. The traditional Ju'hoan notion of the dead being collectively and indiscriminately malignant (see below notes 162-164) seems to be shifting here towards the (Tswana) belief in a person's own, and basically benevolent, 'ancestors'. Cf. also below note 169.

¹⁶² Marshall 1962: 235, 244; Lee 1983: 107-109; Silberbauer 1981: 113-114; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 197-199.

sent, disease and death, that the Ju/'hoansi practised no form of ancestor cult:¹⁶³ having buried their dead, they forgot them, and their graves, as soon as they could.¹⁶⁴ The Ju/'hoansi also had no witchcraft or sorcery beliefs,¹⁶⁵ nor beliefs in [33] 'magic' for hunting, curing, protection, or attack.¹⁶⁶ Their beliefs in the soul, or souls, of humans and animals were so amorphous as to be virtually absent.¹⁶⁷

Apart from the curing dances, Ju/'hoan religion was virtually devoid of rituals of any kind.¹⁶⁸ Neither ≠Gao N!a, nor //Gauwa, nor the //gawasi received any cult whatsoever.¹⁶⁹ No attempt was made to pacify ≠Gao N!a after the Ju/'hoansi had burned bees in order to get at their honey, even though it was believed that ≠Gao N!a

¹⁶³ 'The concept of [...] ancestors is lacking [in Ju/'hoan religion]' (Marshall 1962: 241). Cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 57): 'The physically dead are also the socially dead and are not venerated [among the G/wi]'; Barnard (1992: 252) on the lack of ancestor worship as a general feature of Khoisan religions; and Guenther (1979: 110; 1986: 218-219, 245-247) on the 'immensely varied' notions of afterlife among the *veld* Nharo, some of whom held that after death one just dissolved, others that the dead became ghosts hovering around graves (*kwe /gau/gau*), and again others that they became //gawani, 'things of //Gauwa', his instruments for sending dissent, disease and death.

¹⁶⁴ Descriptions of burials and graves are virtually absent from San ethnography. For exceptions (all of them recent), cf. Heinz 1986, as summarised in Barnard 1992: 72-73 and Valiente-Noailles 1993: 108; cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 113) and Barnard (1992: 114, 153) on the G/wi and Nharo staying away from graves of the recent dead because of their belief that the spirits of the dead were evil and intensely hostile to the living, and particularly to those whom they loved, during the time that their bodies were decaying in the grave; and Guenther 1986: 281-284.

¹⁶⁵ Marshall 1962: 249; Lee 1983: 116-118; Lewis-Williams 1990: 25; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 58; Guenther 1979: 112; 1986: 240). The context in which Lee (1979: 413) reported a witchcraft accusation is highly significant. It was that of the transition to successful food production by an exceptional Ju/'hoan at Dobe and the ensuing conflict between the opposing ideologies of sharing, the bedrock of traditional life, and of (the need for) saving and accumulation in food production. It is also significant that witchcraft and sorcery beliefs had become an integral part of the religion of the Nharo farm Bushmen by the 1960s and were expressly linked by the Nharo to the Bantu among which they lived (Guenther 1986: 60-67; 240-241, 287; cf. also Valiente-Noailles 1993: 197).

¹⁶⁶ It would have been illogical for them to have beliefs in witchcraft, sorcery or 'magic' for attacking fellowmen, because they would then have to put the blame for disease and dissent on fellow members of the band and thereby, in a religious fashion, introduce the disharmony which they sought by all means to avert or redress; cf. Lee 1968: 50-52; 1983: 117; cf. also Guenther 1979: 109.

¹⁶⁷ Marshall 1962: 222; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 113; Guenther 1976: 111-112; 1986: 241-243; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 201

¹⁶⁸ Cf. also Tanaka (1980: 114): 'Religious ceremonies among the [≠Kade] San are surprisingly rare. There is no praying or offering of sacrifices.' Of their rare religious rituals, the most important is 'dancing, which functions not only in curing sickness but in driving away all the evil spirits wielded by G//wama and in delivering peace and relief.' Cf. also Guenther 1986: 251; Barnard 1992: 113; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 193.

¹⁶⁹ The only exception I have found is mentioned by Lee (1968: 52-53) who cites it as 'an isolated occurrence'. It is the brief ritual which an old Ju/'hoan, Nyesi, was required to perform at the bedside of another old and ailing fellow Ju/'hoan, Kumsa. The latter had accused him of having incited his forebears to cause him to fall ill, on account of the long feud which the two of them had had. Nyesi addressed his forebears as follows: 'This territory here is ours to share. Now the ghosts should just go away and let this man live in peace. ... Because of my words, the ghosts are trying to kill Kumsa. Now I say: Kumsa is my child. Ghosts! Go away!' See also Lee (1983: 117), where he interpreted this case as 'a new syncretic explanation', combining Bantu witchcraft explanation with Ju/'hoan belief in the dead as the source of evil. Cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 53-54 on the absence of 'prayers, hymns, worship, sacrifice, or acts of celebration and praise of N!adima', the creator. The G/wi did 'address the sun, moon, and thunderstorms', but not in order to 'pray to them', but 'to dispel any suspicion in N!adima that they may be disrespectful to these his (presumably) prized creations'; on those addresses, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 102-103, 107-109.

abhorred the burning of bees.¹⁷⁰ Although they were adepts at ASCs, Ju'hoansi knew of no spirit possession, for none of the beings who inhabited their spirit world was ever believed to manifest themselves in the Ju'hoan possession trance dances.¹⁷¹ Nor did they have priests, although the Ju'hoansi did on occasion 'pray', albeit in a rather peculiar way: they either addressed ≠Gao N!a publicly in a short formula which they spoke [34] respectfully but assertively and in which they complained in a mildly indignant manner about the trouble he had sent them; or they vented their grievance so loudly in a conversation with others that God could not possibly fail to overhear and take note of their complaints.¹⁷² Finally, the Ju'hoansi also practised a form of 'divination', in which they took five or six leather disks in a closed fist and threw them so that they would know the direction in which they were to hunt or whether or not it would be successful, i.e. whether to go at all or stay put. Neither the disks nor the ritual itself had any meta-empirical referents. Marshall therefore correctly refers to it as a 'secular ritual'.¹⁷³ What it boils down to is that the Ju'hoansi had only one important religious ritual, *i.e.*, the curing or healing dance, and that that dance constitutes the heart and soul of Ju'hoan religion (and society).

The Curing Dance (n/um tshxai)

The Ju'hoansi often held curing dances.¹⁷⁴ It was a nightlong healing ritual performed at least once, and often twice, a week in the bigger autumn and winter season camps.¹⁷⁵ When dispersed, they would dance it at least once a month, at full moon. It could be started for various reasons: to celebrate the success of a hunt that had brought much meat into the camp; to provide entertainment for visitors; and to cure

¹⁷⁰ Marshall 1962: 226, 236, 243, 245; Silberbauer 1981: 57. Silberbauer (1981: 103) mentions a curious *ad hoc* ritual, the killing of a chameleon. It was killed with the express aim to anger N!adima a bit in order to provoke him 'to dry up the land' at a time when excessive rains had flooded the country and an epidemic of malaria caused many people to die. The logic behind this ritual was that N!adima was expected to respond to the killing of the chameleon by withholding rain.

¹⁷¹ Marshall 1962: 249

¹⁷² Marshall 1962: 222, 227, 237 note 2, 246-247; Katz 1982: 31; cf. also Barnard 1988: 219. Heinz (1975: 22) records that 'Gu/e is frequently addressed in prayer' by the G/wi. But the three instances which he records all have the character of a reproach. Guenther (1986: 251) says that Nharo farm Bushmen directed private prayers to N!eri or //Gauwa, and that trance dancers might punctuate 'their highly public ritual performances with short prayers directed to one of the deities'. Valiente-Noailles (1993: 194-196, 199), who stressed the benevolent character of //gama, 'God', in Kua religion, recorded 'prayers' of the supplicative as well as of the assertive type.

¹⁷³ Marshall 1962: 222. Cf. also Lee 1979: 149-151, 247. He compares the set of disks with 'a suit of playing cards'. Cf. also Silberbauer (1981: 55): 'The G/wi have no processes of divination. They cannot find out whether the creator N!adima caused a disease or death, or whether G//amawa did so.' Cf. also Tanaka 1980: 111-112 on the very limited extent of ≠Kade 'magic and ceremonialism'; and Guenther (1986: 251-252) on divination among the Nharo.

¹⁷⁴ For descriptions of the curing dances, cf. Marshall 1962: 248-261; 1969; Lee 1968; 1983: 109-111; Katz 1976; Katz 1982; Biesele 1978: 165-169; Tanaka 1980: 114-115; Silberbauer 1981: 175-177; Shostak 1981: 291-303; Guenther 1986: 254-261; Valiente-Noailles 1993: 182-184, 205-206.

¹⁷⁵ Lee 1968: 38-41; 1979: 272; 1983: 110. Cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 243: the G/wi spent two or three nights a week from late January onwards 'in curative and exorcising dances'.

and dissipate tensions by driving out the evil sent by the supernatural world.¹⁷⁶ [35] It was both entertainment and religion, beginning in the late evening and lasting well beyond daybreak the next morning. It comprised a number of separate rounds of singing and dancing, with brief pauses of five to fifteen minutes between each dance, and longer pauses between the rounds. The first trances and healing would occur some two hours after the dances had started, with another burst of trance dancing and healing after midnight, and a third at daybreak.¹⁷⁷

The symbolic space in which this ritual was enacted, consisted of a centre and four circles around it.¹⁷⁸ The physical and symbolic centre of the event was constituted by the large dance fire which some women had begun to build after the evening meal in the very early evening to signal that a curing dance would be on. It was kept burning throughout the night.¹⁷⁹

The first circle around it consisted of women sitting in a tight row, shoulder to shoulder and knee to knee, facing the fire.¹⁸⁰ They sang the special curing dance songs which ≠Gao N!a was believed to have taught the *n/um kxau*, the ‘owners of *n/um*’, in their dreams. The women clapped the fierce rhythms of these songs with their outstretched hands. These songs were also believed to possess *n/um* themselves.¹⁸¹ Whilst they had names, such as The Rain, The Sun, The Giraffe, The Eland, The Honey, The Mongongo Nut, ≠Gao N!a, The Buffalo, and The Mamba (a poisonous snake), and ‘beautiful complex melodies’, they had no words.¹⁸²

[36] The second circle was formed by men dancing in a row behind the women, with whom they sang, with their bodies bent slightly forward and either supporting them with a stick, or stretching their arms backwards. They danced with small, intricate steps while heavily stamping the sandy floor with their feet¹⁸³ in tune with

¹⁷⁶ On the dances as ‘total’ and multi-purpose events, cf. above note 98. Being analytical, my presentation of them is necessarily selective, and therefore partial. Its focus is on two of its major and intimately connected functions only: how the Ju/’hoansi conceive of them as the means for driving out the evil sent by the supernatural world, and for healing. Cf. Guenther (1986: 253): ‘The explicit purpose of the [Nharo] trance dance is to heal Bushman patients who have become afflicted with diseases perceived [... to] stem from either N!eri or //Gauwa’; Tanaka 1980: 115; Silberbauer 1981: 54, 175.

¹⁷⁷ Cf. Lee (1968: 39-41) on the ‘typical dance trance sequences’.

¹⁷⁸ My spatial model runs more or less parallel to the diachronic one of the five phases into which Lee (1968: 39-41) divides the curing dance performances: (1) warming up; (2) entering into trance; (3) the ‘half death’ stage; (4) the curing phase; (5) the return to normal; cf. also Barnard 1992: 58; Guenther 1986: 256-261.

¹⁷⁹ Cf. above note 133. Guenther (1986: 255-256) stressed that the dance fire had to be ‘large and bright’ for the Nharo in order to attract //Gauwa. The dance fire was not absolutely indispensable, however, among the Ju/’hoansi, who might exceptionally hold a curing dance during daylight without a fire (Marshall 1969: 357, 360).

¹⁸⁰ Lee 1968: 37

¹⁸¹ Something of the ‘power’ of these songs is apparent in Tanaka’s description of the ‘gemsbok’ [curing] dance songs of the ≠Kade: ‘In between the shrill choruses of the women, the men’s low restrained voices combine nicely. At first hearing, the unfamiliar interlocking melodies are unsettling to the point of madness, for an outsider; as the melodies become more familiar, however, one’s body gradually and imperceptibly begins to fall under their influence, until the realisation hits that this is powerful music.’

¹⁸² Marshall 1962: 249; 1969: 351-352, 366-369; Lee 1966: 39; 1983: 111; Katz 1982: 125; for the Nharo, cf. Guenther 1986: 254, 257-258

¹⁸³ Cf. Lee 1968: 39, 49

the clapping of the hands of the women which was amplified by the rattles they had bound to their legs.¹⁸⁴ These four elements – the singing, the clapping, the stamping and the rattles – produced the sonic drive¹⁸⁵ that facilitated the induction of trance in the dancing men. Whenever a dancer's steps began to falter, following the onset of dissociation, the dancer behind him began to escort and accompany him physically and, as I will explain below, support him spiritually. The dissociation was induced by the subtle interplay of several elements in the dance event: the sonic drive; the dancer's concentration on the rhythms of the song and the dance; physical exhaustion; hyperventilation, and the synchronisation of the dancer with the collective event by means of the culturally conditioned expectations.¹⁸⁶

The central role of the cultural expectations in trance induction needs to be stressed at this point, for it was that expectation that set Ju'hoan cosmology in action in the induction of *!kia*, trance. The belief central to the Ju'hoan worldview was that many Ju'hoansi, and especially many Ju'hoan men,¹⁸⁷ were *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*'. It was believed that their *n/um* resided in their stomachs and at the base of their [37] spines as a covered fire in ordinary life, and that the *n/um* in their bodies became alive and hot in the course of the dance. When a dancer began to sweat profusely, it was said that the dance had begun to cause his *n/um* to 'boil' and 'steam'.¹⁸⁸ The dancer then felt *n/um* 'stand up' in his stomach and lower back and rise up along his spine. He felt his head 'swim' and 'get empty', and he began to feel sick and to perceive both the environment and himself in strange ways: while things around him became

¹⁸⁴ On their production by the G/wi, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 228. The Ju'hoansi, in addition, played other musical instruments such as thumb pianos (Shona: *mbira*) and bowstrings (Marshall 1969: 359). These, however, were never used in the curing dances. The Ju'hoansi traditionally possessed no drums, though they had lately been introduced into their society (cf. Marshall 1996: 359; and below note 206).

¹⁸⁵ Sonic drive is one form of sensory bombardment which is often used in 'spirit possession' rituals in many religions in order to facilitate the onset of trance and direct its course during the actual 'possession'. Other means used are sensory deprivation; concentrated attention; relaxation of attention; and actions by which the internal chemical balances of the body are significantly altered, including fasting, heavy bodily exertion (such as vigorous dancing), and the taking of drugs. All five means of trance induction are subsidiary tools for bringing about 'spirit possession' (cf. Prince 1966: 69-96). The most important factor in achieving trance is the culturally-conditioned expectation of the participants that someone may, or should, enter into the state of hyperkinetic dissociation, or trance, and the whole system of ideas informing this expectation.

¹⁸⁶ On trance induction with the Ju'hoansi, cf. Lee 1968: 39-42, 48-50; cf. also Guenther 1986: 256, 269-270

¹⁸⁷ In the bands in which Marshall (1969: 366, note 1, 372-373) did her research 'virtually all !Kung men' went into trance and 'only a few women'. One group counted 46 males of whom only one never went, and never had gone, into a trance; 4 were too young; and 9 had at some time entered the trance state but no longer did so because they were now too old. The 31 others were *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', who went into trance regularly. Lee (1968: 36) and Katz 1976: 285) estimated that half of the men of the camps they visited went into trance regularly against one-third of the women. The explanation which the Ju'hoansi themselves gave for fewer women than men entering into *!kia* regularly and becoming *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', was that the women had the special task of singing and clapping around the fire, and that women had to avoid the dangerous state of *kwe!i*, 'half-death', which often occurred in the early part of a trance career, as long as they were still able to bear children (Shostak 1981: 298).

¹⁸⁸ Cf. Lee (1968: 43) on the complex symbolism of the connected notions of the fire, heating, boiling, and steaming (as sweat) of *n/um*, cf. Lee 1968: 43-45.

small and began to fly, his own body elongated and began to float, or to fly in the air, or to swim in water. Fire seemed to engulf his head and he felt the huge power of *n/um* surge up inside him. This experience caused young trance dancers to break through the circle of the singing women and enter into the life fire, take burning branches into their bare hands and press them to their breasts or heads.¹⁸⁹ The Ju'-hoansi believed that fire would not burn *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', during their trance states, and they bolstered that belief with many strong stories about past feats of famous *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', in this respect. Marshall, however, had to dress several bad burns during her fieldwork.¹⁹⁰

The symbolic message of this violent trance behaviour, from which they were usually restrained in time, was that the fire of *n/um*, the healing power, had completely taken possession of them; that its power was much more fierce than the ordinary fire used for cooking the food and warming the night; and that these dancers, who were now in *!kia*, or trance, were now much more powerful than the *//gauwasi* or anyone else intent on shooting evil into the community with their invisible [38] arrows.¹⁹¹ One Ju'hoan described his trance or *!kia* experience to Katz as follows:

You dance, dance, dance, dance. Then num lifts you up in your belly, and lifts you up in your back, and you start to shiver. Num makes you tremble; it's hot. Your eyes are open, but you don't look around; you hold your eyes still and look straight ahead. But when you go into *kia*, you're looking around because you see everything, because you see what's troubling everybody. Rapid shallow breathing draws num up. What I do with my upper body with the breathing, I also do in my legs with the dancing. You don't stomp harder, you just keep steady. Then num enters every part of your body, right to the tip of your feet and even your hair.¹⁹²

Having become fiery *n/um* from top to toe and sweating profusely, experienced healers would then step into the third circle in order to begin the 'healing' process there. The third circle was the area around the central dance event in which the spectators were sitting around small fires, together with the dancers who were resting and the women who had taken a break from singing and clapping. Anyone requiring healing would be treated in this area.¹⁹³ They might be ill and in need of healing, but the *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', would more often simply go around to share their *n/um* with

¹⁸⁹ Lee 1968: 41-44, 47-48; 1983: 109; Marshall 1969: 377; Katz 1976: 286-287; 1982: 41-48; cf. also Guenther (1986: 243-244, 270) about *tssso*, the Nharo parallel notion to *n/um*, and its being heated through dancing; and Guenther (1986: 258-259) on the dramatic behaviour, in respect of the dance fire, exhibited by Nharo trance dancers at this point.

¹⁹⁰ Marshall 1969: 358; also Lee 1968: 42. But Silberbauer (1981: 176) said that even after careful examination he could 'find no signs of injury to [G/wi trance] dancers who had thrown themselves into fires too hot for me to stand near without discomfort or those who had held large, glowing coals to their chests'.

¹⁹¹ Marshall 1962: 226-227, 248; 1969: 374; Lee 1966: 42-44, 49-50; 1983: 110; Katz 1982: 121-122

¹⁹² Katz 1976: 286; 1982: 42; for other such statements, cf. Lee 1968: 43

¹⁹³ Cf. Lee 1968: 37, 40-41

anyone present as a prophylactic designed to make them strong and immune to the spirit arrows by which the //gawasi sent disease and dissent into the camp.¹⁹⁴

They would not only transmit *n/um* by rubbing their sweat onto others, and especially onto the ailing parts of the body of the sick, but they would also pull the evil out of them.¹⁹⁵ They would stand or sit behind them, place their hands on their breasts or backs and then, trembling, sighing, moaning, panting, pull their hands off and away from them in fluttering and jerking motions in order to shake the evil off and then, with a few high shrieks, absorb it into themselves where [39] it would be conquered by their *n/um*.¹⁹⁶ Having dealt with several ailing band members and shared their *n/um* with everyone, the dancers would finally throw their head and arms up in a violent motion, in order to rid themselves of all the evil they had absorbed and send it back to its place of origin, the fourth circle.

The fourth circle was the dark night around the camp and its fires. In Ju/'hoan perception, and in particular that of the *n/um kxau*, the 'owners of *n/um*', when their *n/um* was steaming and boiling and they were 'seeing everything, because you see what is troubling everybody',¹⁹⁷ the fourth circle of the dark night was that of //Gauwa and the //gawasi who were watching the dance from the trees and the shrubs around the camp.¹⁹⁸ The //gawasi, in particular, were always thought to be watching because they were believed to love the curing dances and to be irresistibly drawn to them, for one reason because they loved the songs and the dancing, for another because ≠Gao N!a had charged them to spread disease and dissent among the humans by means of their invisible arrows.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁴ Lee 1966: 370-371; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 119, 120; and Barnard (1992: 58) remarking that this sharing out of *n/um* 'has the effect of binding the group as a whole and makes participants of everyone, including ethnographers'.

¹⁹⁵ Marshall 1969: 370-371; Lee 1983: 109-110. ≠Kade and G/wi dancers, who had entered into a trance, also 'pulled evil' from the women singing and clapping at the dance fire while dancing behind them. Women were the primary object of the 'pulling out of evil' and the 'transferral of *n/um*', because it was believed that G//awama spread evil into human societies through the bodies of women into which he had shot his invisible arrows, as tiny slivers of wood, from the air (Tanaka 1980: 115; Silberbauer 1981: 54, 176; Barnard 1992: 114-115). Cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 175-176; Guenther 1986: 271.

¹⁹⁶ Marshall 1969: 370; Shostak 1981: 292; cf. also Barnard 1992: 153-154

¹⁹⁷ On the experience of 'X ray vision' by Ju/'hoan healers during trance, cf. Lee 1968: 45.

¹⁹⁸ Cf. also Valiente-Noailles (1993: 200, 204-206) on the belief of a Kua healer that it was 'God' (//gama, Biize) himself who attended the healing dances. He and other Kua, however, emphasised the benevolent role of Biize as legitimising, instructing, and supporting the healers. They also regarded the healing songs as a sort of prayer imploring //gama to help the sick person to live. They considered the 'falling unconscious' (see below) of the healer as the climax of the trance event, during which the healer was believed to enter into communication with the //gamahare, the spirits of the dead, who had sent the illness, and to beseech them not to kill the patient but to instruct the healer on how he might heal him or her. Kua had also begun to differentiate between the deceased, conceiving of some of them as assisting in the curing, and the rest as thwarting it. Valiente-Noailles (1993: 208-209) is at pains to stress that Kua beliefs had not been affected by Christian beliefs, on the grounds that he had found very little evidence of attempts to convert Kua Bushmen to Christianity and no interest in it on the part of the Kua. His data seem to indicate nonetheless that Kua beliefs had been modified considerably by Christian influences in the past decades, albeit in much more subtle and indirect ways than direct attempts at mission and conversion, as they were by Tswana traditional beliefs, e.g. in witchcraft as another major source of illness and death.

¹⁹⁹ Marshall 1962: 227, 244; Lee 1983: 103-106, 107-109

The ‘owners of *n/um*’, having done their healing work, discarded all the evil they had gathered into themselves by throwing it back, with a violent motion, at the //gauwasi. At the same time, they often made a vigorous charge towards them, with a burning stick or fire in their hands, which, with much verbal abuse, they would throw at them, together with the death, disease and dissent which the //gauwasi had sent them, [40] in order to return that misfortune to its evil place of origin, the unholy trinity of ≠Gao N!a, //Gauwa, and the //gauwasi.²⁰⁰ However, when curing and pulling out disease, the *n/um kxau*, ‘owners of *n/um*’, might also plead with //Gauwa and the //gauwasi to come and help them in this difficult work.²⁰¹, or they might plead with them to no longer bother them and go away.²⁰² Ju/’hoan healers were here, in their own way, ambivalent towards the supernatural, as were Nharo trance dancers. They, says Guenther, had to be strong and courageous because they had to seek out //Gauwa lurking in the dark, not far from the fire-lit dance circle, and plead with him, or threaten him, on behalf of the sick in order to obtain from him, as custodian of the medicines, the healing arrows with which they could cure the sick. //Gauwa might grant the request for a life, ‘or vindictively, and equally arbitrarily, deny the request and kill the sick person or even the dancer’. The Nharo evidently associated //Gauwa with death for they connected him with those dead they called //gauwani,²⁰³ as //Gauwa’s instruments of death, and they believed that he might lash out bad-temperedly at men, shoot disease arrows at them, and cause strife among them.²⁰⁴

One Ju/’hoan ‘owner of *n/um*’ described his experiences as follows:

In !kia [trance] your heart stops, you’re dead, your thoughts are nothing, you breathe with difficulty. You see things, *n/um* things; you see ghosts killing people, you smell burning, rotten flesh; then you heal, you pull sickness out. You heal, heal, heal, heal ..., then you live. Then your eyeballs clear and then you see people clearly.²⁰⁵

That ‘clearing of the eyeballs’ brought the hyperkinetic trance event of a particular healer to a close, at least for the moment. The older, experienced ‘owners of *n/um*’ slipped easily in and out of trance several times during a healing night because they were well experienced in it and their trance had become less deep by habituation. They could, [41] and would, heal several times during a night of curing dances. That was not the case with the younger and less experienced trance dancers, however.

²⁰⁰ Marshall 1962: 227, 237, 241, 242, 250; 1969: 350, 370, 376-377; Lee 1968: 42, 45; Shostak 1981: 292; Katz 1982: 102; cf. also Silberbauer 1981: 54, 109, 118, 175, 297

²⁰¹ Marshall 1969: 377

²⁰² Lee 1968: 45

²⁰³ Cf. above note 163

²⁰⁴ Guenther 1989: 116. Because of his obviously evil side, Boer and missionaries identified //Gauwa with Satan. Against them, Guenther (1986: 218-225, 271) emphasises that //Gauwa was the most central figure of Khoisan religions and, though ‘a confounding bundle of contradictions’, for the Nharo also ‘essentially a deity of the here-and-now and of life’, ‘the deity who heals diseases’, the ‘owner of the [curing] dance’ and of all the medicinal plants, and the deity to whom most Nharo dancers attributed their powers of trance healing.

²⁰⁵ Katz 1976: 291

Their trances were much deeper, more violent, dramatic, fearful, and exhausting. When they came out of a trance event, they were usually so exhausted that they collapsed and drifted off into a sound sleep for the rest of the night.²⁰⁶

Ju'hoan Pedagogics of Dissociation

Every Ju'hoan young man knew that he too was expected to become an 'owner of *n/um*' and, once he had acquired it, to make it 'boil' regularly in the curing dances in order that he might share it with everyone in the band and protect them from disease, dissent and death. The novice trance dancer, however, was very well aware that learning to enter into the state of trance was a long and painful process. It was also greatly feared because the first trance experience was known as *kwe/i*, '(half-)death',²⁰⁷ a state of very deep trance which the Ju'hoansi considered extremely dangerous.

The Ju'hoansi had therefore incorporated into their curing dances an institution which Katz has aptly called 'education for transcendence' which was designed to help any young Ju'hoan, young males in particular, to overcome that fear, to accept the pain of the trance dance [42] for the sake of the well-being of the band, to guide them through the '(half-)death' of their first trance and to become new 'owners of *n/um*' who could also regularly heat their *n/um* and share its protective and healing powers with the other members of the band or bands. Although virtually all young males attempted at some time to endure this training, only about half of them completed it. The rest quit for fear of the pain and '(half-)death' it caused but continued to participate in the curing dances for just the fun of it without ever entering into *!kia*; others who had entered into *!kia*, also failed to continue and thus never became *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*'.²⁰⁸ These were regarded as perfectly respectable decisions.

The young men who did persevere, however, were coached intensively by one or two experienced *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', usually by their father or one of their

²⁰⁶ Lee (1968: 36-37; 1979: 18; 1983: 15, 113-115) and Shostak (1981: 297-303) reported that a special trance dance for women only, the 'women's drum dance' or *Gwah tsi*, which was in several respects the reverse of the curing dance, had spread in the Dobe district and the surrounding region in the 1960s. It had been first introduced into the Dobe area as early as 1915. By the 1980s, it had even exceeded the traditional curing dance in popularity. Like the curing dances, it began at nightfall, but had no fire for its centre. It was danced to the accompaniment of a drum, which was played by a male drummer, some eight to twelve females standing in a semi-circle around the drummer, whilst the women themselves sang, clapped and danced. They remained in one place where they danced with short steps, swaying from side to side. As many as half of them might enter into *!kia*, the onset of which was heralded by an intense bout of trembling in the legs. A few of the women who regularly went into a trance in these dances later became practising healers. In special healing sessions, they would enter into *!kia* and pull out evil from those in need of curing in the same manner as did the 'owners of *n/um*' in the curing dances. They were believed to also 'see' the *//gauwasi* at that point and to negotiate with God for the life of a seriously ill person. Male and female healers might also team up in such sessions. Nisa, the woman whose life and words Shostak recorded, was a healer who regularly danced this new dance, and also practised as a healer. Cf. also above note 97.

²⁰⁷ Barnard (1992: 58) regrets Lee's translation of *kwe/i* by 'half-death' (Lee 1968: 40, 47) as 'an unfortunate phrase which has stuck in the literature. In my view, this phase is best described as metaphorical death; indeed, it is called "death" (not "half death") in several Bushman languages'.

²⁰⁸ Lee 1983: 113

father's brothers, or their own elder brother. Whenever a novice took part in a curing dance, his coach would dance behind him, not only to give psychological support and encouragement,²⁰⁹ but also to steady him when the onset of the trance began, and especially to assist him 'spiritually' by 'transferring his own *n/um*' to the novice either through the 'spiritual arrows' (*n/um tchisi*) which it was believed he could shoot into the body of the novice,²¹⁰ or, when he had entered into *!kia* himself, by transferring his own *n/um* to him by rubbing him with his sweat.²¹¹

At the onset of the first full trance, the staggering novice was usually steadied by two 'owners of *n/um*', one in front of him, the other behind him²¹² in order to 'carry him through' his fear and into *!kia*, and prevent his straying into the fire. The first trance, however, was often signalled by the novice uttering a shriek, jumping high and then falling to the ground, trembling all over and foaming at the mouth or lying unconscious in a catatonic spasm.²¹³

At that point, he was believed to have entered *kwe!i*, the feared state of '(half-)death', *i.e.*, the world of //Gauwa and the //gauwasi, with whom he would plead, or fight, for the lives of the sick.²¹⁴ This was [43] thought to be a dangerous liminal situation, because his body was believed to be in this world and his mind, or 'soul', in the other. As long as he was in that state, therefore, he was the object of intense care and attention.²¹⁵ The women intensified the singing of the dance songs and the *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', especially those who were at that time in *!kia* themselves, constantly rubbed him with their sweat, drawing all evil from him, blowing into his ears or shouting his name in order to inform his mind where it might find the body and persuade it to return to it. This care and supervision continued until he had regained consciousness and could be left to sleep off his exhaustion.

Another mark of these early, very deep, trance experiences was complete amnesia: the young trance dancers neither remembered their trance nor anything they had done, said or experienced during it. Amnesia, however, was a mark of the early phase of Ju'hoan trance careers only, for the *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', preserved and cultivated the memories of their mental experiences during trance and spoke much about them. It was these memories which they recorded in the rock paintings.

After this '(half-)death' experience, the young trance dancers usually exhibited violent and dangerous trance behaviour for several months, such as running into the

²⁰⁹ Katz 1976, 1981; Shostak 294

²¹⁰ Among the Nharo farm Bushmen it was believed that it was //Gäuwa who might shoot such arrows into the trance dancer (Guenther 1986: 271, 272).

²¹¹ Lee 1968: 46-48; 1983: 111-113; Katz 1976, 1981. Lee (1968: 43) regards the need to transfer *n/um* 'from one body to another' as the main reason why experienced healers rub their sweat onto novice healers in order that they too may become experienced healers.

²¹² Katz 1976: 292-294; 1982: 47-49

²¹³ Lee 1968: 40, 47

²¹⁴ Some said they saw them as real people, others as eerie ghosts, or as having only one leg and suspended in mid-air. Most were said to have been silent, but a few to have explained why they were there (Lee 1983: 107).

²¹⁵ For G/wi parallels, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 176, Valiente-Noailles 1993: 183; for the Nharo one, cf. Guenther 1986: 259-261

fire, scattering red-hot embers over themselves, setting their hair ablaze, often running into the night shouting abuse at //Gauwa and the //gauwasi and ‘attacking’ them with burning sticks.²¹⁶ Others stepped in to restrain them at such a moment, or went after them to bring them back from the dark, or attended to them if they again entered into the catatonic state of ‘(half-)death’. It nonetheless usually took these young trance dancers a long time and much teaching and coaching from their tutors before they gradually learned [44] to control their trance state and slowly reached the stage, and the status, of experienced *n/um kxau*, ‘owners of *n/um*’, who were able to slip easily in and out of a relatively light dissociation with relatively little loss of motoric control, to heal with their *n/um* two or three times in a single night of curing dances by abundantly sharing their healing power with others, or entering into a trance for healing when someone had fallen ill.²¹⁷

All in all, however, the Ju'hoansi saw the trance dance training as a long and painful process that brought them to the brink of death. *N/um* was for them ‘a thing of death’ and ‘a fight’ for life. In terms of Christian theology, one might say that *n/um kxau*, ‘owners of *n/um*’, practised vicarious suffering.

The Exceptional Traits of Ju'hoan Religion and Curing Dances

I will discuss only four of the many remarkable traits of Ju'hoan religion and curing dances and subdivide the third into five points.

(1) The foraging societies of modern times belong to the oldest type of human society and their religions to those that have endured the longest in the history of human religions. They are, in a limited way, a window, however opaque and narrow, on the oldest human religions: although they tell us nothing about the origin itself of religion, indirectly they tell us something about the general traits of hunter-gatherer religions since palaeolithic times. Among the religions of modern foraging societies, those of the San are exceptional, however, because the San peoples of the past have left us innumerable documents which have been interpreted to conform so precisely to the present San religions that it may be concluded that the latter do indeed directly tell us a great deal about the religions of the palaeolithic past. Let me explain these two statements one by one.

²¹⁶ Lee 1968: 47-48. Such violent and ‘uncontrolled’ acts should not be classified as ‘deviant’ or ‘hysterical behaviour’, nor labelled as ‘attacks’. Such classifications stem from two important sources of Western ethnocentric bias which developed into a strong hostility towards public hyperkinetic trance, namely the demonisation of such behaviour by the Christian churches – which associated it exclusively with being possessed by ‘the devil’ and in need of exorcism – and more recently the psychiatrisation of possession behaviour in Western psychology and secular culture – a prejudice which has slanted most anthropological interpretation of trance behaviour until recently. ‘Violent’ behaviour, however, is a culturally coded form of dramatic behaviour fully expected in the novice trance dancers: it expresses in dramatic form the stage of the trance career the dancer has so far achieved; cf. Lee 1968: 47-48.

²¹⁷ Lee 1968: 48

The foraging societies, including those of the San, have always lived in contexts marked by a set of common conditions, which defined for them the parameters of their existence. As these components of their existence ‘behave in a tightly articulate way’,²¹⁸ they exerted considerable constraint on the range within which ‘key variables [could] fluctuate’,²¹⁹ thereby limiting their possibilities of change and variation in various matters, including their religions. Lee has formulated the fundamental [45] assumptions behind this view in his ‘uniformitarian’ (cum Marxist) theory of the constraints the foraging mode of food production put upon the variability range of the cultural expressions of foraging societies in the present as well as in the past. It holds that we can observe at present processes which were also operating in the past, and that they produced results ‘uniform’ to those in the present. It proposes that these processes were largely responsible for the particular traits these societies had throughout their history, and have in common right up to the present day.²²⁰

In my view, Lee’s theory may serve also as a theoretical instrument for the analysis of the long-term developments in the general history of religions,²²¹ or of a particular kind of religions. Lee restricted his uniformitarian approach to the economic base of foraging societies by applying it only to the correlation between their ecology, food production, demographic density and spatial organisation. He kept it distinct from his Marxist (historical materialist) analysis of their cultural practices as the ideological ‘superstructure’ which was in its turn determined by the ‘economic base’. In my ‘contextual & ergological’ analysis of religions, I do not separate these two approaches but postulate a complex, dialectical interplay between the ‘material’ and the ‘ideological’ factors. I integrate these two approaches in a loose ‘general systems theory’, as indeed does Lee also.²²²

I assume, therefore, that a set of common constraints caused foraging societies from earliest times to the present to be marked by important morphological and functional similarities. The ecology in which they lived, their nomadic way of life, and their technology,²²³ well-adapted to both, often enabled them to live a relatively good and leisurely life, but in small bands only, ‘at a level well below the [feeding] capacity of their land’.²²⁴ Their social organisation in small, egalitarian bands, or ‘camps’, ‘without authority structures or great disparity of [46] wealth’,²²⁵ produced another

²¹⁸ Lee 1979: 435

²¹⁹ Lee 1979: 436

²²⁰ The theory was originally developed for geology by Lyel in 1830. It is now applied by Lee (1979: 434-437sq.) to the social history of foraging societies; for a critique, cf. Wilmsen 1989: 33-40.

²²¹ Cf. Platvoet 1993 for the application of my ‘contextual & ergological’ theory to the general history of the religions, ‘from Neanderthaler to New Age’.

²²² Lee 1979: 443-447

²²³ On San ‘proto-scientific’ knowledge of plants, animals and the human body, cf. Heinz 1978a.

²²⁴ Lee 1979: 442; cf. also Silberbauer 1978: 184. On !Kung Ju/hoan ‘population control’ by birth spacing, cf. Lee 1978: 97-98; 1979: 48-49, 312-332, 441-443. The G/wi San considered that a couple could, and should, have no more than four children (Silberbauer 1981: 120, 153, 160, 192-193; also Glazenburg 1994: 15-16). On their good and leisurely way of life, cf. Lee 1978: 98-114; 1979: 432-433, 437-441.

²²⁵ Barnard, comments, 9.07.1998; cf. above note 3

major constraint: the absolute imperative to avoid disharmony. These – their ecology, technology, demography and particular brand of social structure – forced them to develop a culture of sharing the very limited possessions their life style allowed them to gather or produce, and to use them as their social capital for marking out who belonged to their group and who did not, by sharing them in a highly flexible manner at any given moment; and to create a non-competitive, leaderless society marked by an ideology of egalitarianism on ‘the principle of generalised reciprocity’.²²⁶

Therefore, although the more than 100,000 years-long collective history of foraging societies and the possibly 27,000 years collective history of the rock art producing San societies, clearly represent dynamic histories with significant variations between them, those changes, and that variation, were limited to possibilities within a certain range by the specific constellations of the prevailing ecology and technology, the food gathered, the demographic numbers, and the social organisation of these societies. A number of changes, which occurred in the historically later types of religions and were produced in them by societies under historically later and significantly different ecological, technological, economical, demographic, socio-structural and communication constellations, very definitively fell outside the range of the potential for change and variability, inherent in foraging societies, their cultures and their religions. The foraging societies, which anthropologists have been able to study in depth in the course of this century do, therefore, to a limited extent inform us about the general traits common to the oldest type of religions of humankind. Their study is very important, not only because their collective history is the longest in the history of religions, but also because we have by far the poorest knowledge about precisely these religions.

In addition, however, Ju/'hoan and other San religions are exceptional among their kind, the religions of foraging societies, in that they [47] not only reveal the general marks of the religions of the foraging societies of the past to us, but specifically inform us about their own past in an unparalleled way by serving as our key to the understanding of San rock art. They allow us to show that what is central to San religions now has been central to them for a very long time. Thus understood, San rock art proves that the curing dances, as ‘total’ phenomena, have taken the centre stage of the social and religious life of foraging bands of Southern Africa for many millennia.²²⁷ They are documents of a religious history unparalleled in its duration anywhere in the history of human religions. They prove that San curing dances are no recent innovation. On the contrary, they have been danced for thousands of years as they were

²²⁶ Cf. Lee (1979: 437) on sharing as ‘central to the conduct of social life in foraging societies’ and on ‘the principle of generalised reciprocity’ as ‘universal among hunting and gathering peoples’. He concluded that ‘sharing and other central features of !Kung foraging’ are not ‘unique to them, but rather [...] an expression of a universal theme in the foraging mode of production’. Barnard (comments 9.07.98) wonders whether Lee and I may not be overemphasising the (foraging) mode of production. Further comparative research of foraging societies is indeed in order to test whether ecology, foraging and demographic size articulate as tightly with an egalitarian social structure and generalised reciprocity in other societies of hunter-gatherers as they did with the Ju/'hoansi and other San.

²²⁷ Cf. Shapera 1930: 202-204 for descriptions of San (curing) dances in the 18th and 19th centuries.

danced in the Kalahari right up to the middle of this century (and are being danced even now in, despite, and even because of, rapidly and fundamentally changing circumstances), and they have functioned for millennia as they function now. It seems, therefore, that, ‘from time immemorial’, God has been to them both the creator of their world and their enemy.

The combination of San ethnography and San rock art enables us, therefore, to look back much further and in much greater detail, into the history of these religions, and thereby into the oldest kind of religions of humankind, than ethnographies of the other foraging societies will allow us. They throw light, not on the origin of religion – that will remain shrouded in the mists of anthropogenesis forever –, but rather on the oldest religions in historical (*i.e.*, documented) terms. Further comparative analysis of the religions of the foraging societies studied over the past one hundred years, and the archaeological and iconographic study of the rock art produced by other foraging societies in the past,²²⁸ will allow us to show, I suggest, that the central institution of the religions of foraging bands around the globe has consisted, throughout their history – the longest of its kind –, of some blend of two types of religious dissociation: (1) the hypokinetic²²⁹ visionary trance, [48] or vision quest, or ‘astro-travel’, of shamans, and (2) the dramatic hyperkinetic public trance for the purposes of healing and of consolidating social solidarity between healers and their communities. San rock art, and rock art elsewhere, I suggest, makes it plausible that some such blend has been characteristic of foraging societies since religion became part of the documented religious history of humankind some 100,000 years ago.²³⁰

It is very remarkable that a historical interpretation with such a huge time span can be proposed on the strength of, to a large extent, the ethnography of societies which cultivated the briefest of all collective (institutional) memories of humankind. Their memories retained nothing for much longer than one generation beyond the living.²³¹ The San loved to forget the dead as soon as they had buried them. They did bury them, but would never visit a grave or perform a ritual in their honour. Ju/’hoan cos-

²²⁸ E.g. those of palaeolithic times as in the caves of Lascaux (cf., *e.g.*, Goodman 1988: 74; 1990: 20-23); and those by Australian Aborigines (cf., *e.g.*, Isaacs 1989; Stanbury & Clegg 1990).

²²⁹ Trance behaviour may be divided into two major groups in so far as it is accompanied by, or expressed in, bodily motor behaviour: the hyperkinetic behaviour usually seen in public spirit possession drama, in which limbs shake and motor control is diminished to various degrees; and the hypokinetic behaviour, in which motor control is perfect and bodily motion, and/or uncontrolled motoric behaviour is absent. Hypokinetic trance is typical of visionary trance, as in dreams and meditational states.

²³⁰ An MA thesis on dreaming in the Aboriginal religions of Australia which was very recently completed under my supervision in the Faculty of Theology of Leiden University (Mohkamsing-Den Boer 1998) has, however, failed to adduce evidence that hyperkinetic public trance is, or was ever, part of Aboriginal religions. In the light of this, admittedly very preliminary, negative evidence, it seems unlikely that this working hypothesis can be maintained for the religions of all foraging societies.

²³¹ For an example, see Silberbauer (1981: 110). The G/wi observed the stars at night well and took proper notice of the new phenomenon of the satellites in the night sky. When they saw the spectacular Ikeya-Seki comet in 1965, ‘nobody could remember having heard of a comet before, which means that the 1910 appearance of the Halley’s comet had been forgotten’.

mological time was extremely shallow.²³² Creation happened only a short time ago, in 'primal time', which the San, however, did not regard 'as past, the past that is over and done with, but as a [non-present] time that spills over into the present', and which was recent enough to incorporate modern elements.²³³ God was very near, and much too near for the liking of the Ju'hoansi (as //Gauwa was 'altogether too close' to men for the farm Nharo).²³⁴ To rid themselves of him, in his evil aspect, they, and the women in particular, made [49] 'old ≠Gao N!a' the object of their derision in their stories about the (nearby) 'long ago'. A quote from Marshall illustrates this well:

≠Gao N!a, we were told, was the oldest name of the great god. Through that name the !Kung identify the great god with an old ≠Gao N!a, the protagonist of many ancient tales. [...] In those older days, according to the tales, people were always eating one another or parts of another or parts of themselves. In appearance and characteristics the old ≠Gao N!a was more man-like than supernatural. He lived on earth among men. Like man he was subject to passions, hungers, sins, stupidities, failures, frustrations, and humiliations, but men imagine his to be on a larger scale and more grotesque than their own. Like the Bushmen of today, his great concerns are hunger and sex. To the !Kung the two worst sins, the unthinkable, unspeakable sins, are cannibalism and incest. ≠Gao N!a committed both these sins quite unconcernedly. He ate his older brother-in-law and his younger brother-in-law and raped his son's wife.²³⁵

(2) Ju'hoan religion was also special, like other religions of foraging societies, by virtue of its very thinly populated supernatural world, when compared with that of very many other religions, especially those of food producing preliterate societies (cattle nomad as well as sedentary agrarian), and the many polytheistic religions of the more complex, urbanising societies. It was also special because it virtually had but one ritual: the curing dance. The purpose of that ritual, moreover, was not to address that supernatural world and maintain community and communion with it, but to drive it off, to establish a border between it, to declare the supernatural beings the source of dissent, disease and death among them, and a bunch of unwanted aliens. That sentiment was forcefully expressed by an elderly Ju'hoan of Nyae Nyae. When Lorna Marshall asked him what image of God he had, he replied: 'God is a White-man on a horse with a gun'.²³⁶

²³² As was the San numerical system which contained only four numerals (1, 2, 3, and terms indicating 'several', or 'many', although the fingers were also used to count numbers up to ten, e.g. of lunar months for reckoning pregnancy. In their memory of the past, events which took place longer than three years previously belonged to an indistinct and soon forgotten past; cf. Lee 1979: 230-231; Tanaka 1980: 113; Silberbauer 1981: 110-112, 130, 133. Cf., however, also Wilmsen 1989: 345: 'All Zhu can count and carry out addition and subtraction easily in their own system, and most of them can also do so in Otjiherero or Setswana or both and some in Afrikaans'.

²³³ Guenther 1989: 115; cf. also Guenther 1986: 227-228

²³⁴ Guenther 1986: 247

²³⁵ Marshall 1961: 228-229; cf. also above note 140; Marshall 1962: 229-233; Biesele 1976

²³⁶ Quoted in Gordon 1992: 217

Gift giving, which, together with spirit possession and divination, functions as the central institution for maintaining relationships with the unseen beings in virtually all other preliterate religions, was completely absent in traditional Ju/'hoan religion, as was also suppliant prayer. Ju/'hoan address of the supernatural ranged from abuse to an assertive reproach. All this is very remarkable in a society in which sharing was the central institution, whether it was the meat hunted, the food gathered, poison arrows, prized artefacts and trade articles, or the *n/um* transmitted in the curing dance. It means that the curing dances were the oft-repeated emphatic statement that ≠Gao N!a, [50] //Gauwa, and the //gawasi were central notions in Ju/'hoan religion, but were by no means part of Ju/'hoan society.²³⁷

(3) The morphology of the Ju/'hoan curing dance shows five remarkable traits when compared with the more run-of-the-mill spirit possession phenomena in other religions, be they preliterate or modern.

Firstly, it was egalitarian. By its pedagogic of dissociation, it attempted to have as many *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', as possible, male and female, though the number of male *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', was always much greater and their active role much more prominent.²³⁸ Mediumship, therefore, did not confer power on the *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', within their bands.²³⁹ It might occasionally bring an exceptional 'owner of *n/um*' a great reputation, especially if he was also thought to be able to 'manage the weather' and if his services were also in demand by non-San, such as Tswana.²⁴⁰ But it brought him no power over his fellow San. Extraordinary skill did earn a person prestige, admiration and acclaim, as well as leadership in the execution of the activity in which he or she excelled, but never conferred power or authority to him or her.²⁴¹ Lee is explicit on the absence of the headman among the Ju/'hoansi.²⁴² The classical distinction which I.M. Lewis has made between 'central' and 'peripheral' spirit possession cults²⁴³ has no heuristic, analytical or theoretical value for the

²³⁷ For another mechanisms of exclusion, cf. Biesele (1993: 109-112) on the Ju/'hoan belief in *!kui g!oq*, the 'strong fear' that a human (i.e., a Ju/'hoan) might be attacked by a 'lion' (*!jom*, 'wild animal') because of 'bad luck' (cf. supra, note 135), or certain reprehensible actions. The notion of 'lion' included not only all the other large clawed predators, but also Bantu and (angry) whites; cf. also Lee 1968: 46; 1983: 131; and below notes 240 and 245.

²³⁸ Lee 1983: 111; Katz 1976: 288

²³⁹ A point extensively argued by Lee (1968: 50-53)

²⁴⁰ And cause some uneasiness that he might perhaps be a 'lion' (cf. Lee 1968: 46; and above note 237 and below note 245).

²⁴¹ Silberbauer 1981: 177; Tanaka 1980: 108. The pressure of acculturation on 'farm Bushmen', such as the Nharo, turned some of them, however, into renowned professional trance dancers who went on extended tours, performed all year round, demanded high fees for their expert ritual services, and spear-headed the beginning of a revitalisation movement among the Nharo (Guenther 1986: 262-269, 288-289; see also below note 244).

²⁴² Lee 1979: 60, 343-350. Among some Ju/'hoan groups, however, more formal forms of authority and leadership were emerging in the last decades due to the intensification of contacts with the outside world (cf. Lee 1979: 1979: 348-350, 368-369).

²⁴³ Lewis 1989.

study of Ju/'hoan curing dances.²⁴⁴ It simply does not apply in a society with no clear power distinctions.

[51] Secondly, in virtually all religions in which spirit possession is a central or prominent feature, it consists in a spiritual being taking possession, in the view of the believers, of a medium for the purpose of a brief (but regularly repeated) incarnation in the world of its believers in order that it may converse face-to-face in bodily form with them through that medium. Ju/'hoan religion is, to my knowledge, the only religion in history in which a non-personal and non-spiritual, yet non-empirical, but very human, power, *n/um*, was believed to act as the possessing entity and in that capacity constituted the very heart of the religion, symbolised by the dance fire as the centre and focal point of the curing dances.

In addition, the Ju/'hoan *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', were virtually the only ones in the history of religions 'possessed' by a non-personal potency believed to be resident in themselves, handed on among themselves, and constantly shared out among themselves. It came 'from above' only in so far as it was by origin a power in man with which he had been endowed at the time of creation, and in so far as ≠Gao N!a was believed to increase it occasionally in the *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', when they were in touch with him in their dreams and he taught them new songs for the curing dances.

Unlike all other forms of spirit possession, Ju/'hoan believers did, therefore, not enter into any personal, or personalised, communication with *n/um*, for *n/um* was not a person and could not be addressed as such. It received no gifts nor was it addressed in prayer, incantation, order, curse, or whatever. Ju/'hoan believers did not converse with *n/um* or use it for establishing or maintaining community, communion and commerce with ≠Gao N!a, //Gauwa and the //gawasi. *N/um* merely served two purposes: to be shared out amongst themselves for cultivating harmony and health within the band, and to enable them to reject and eject the spiritual world.

Thirdly, by sharing the *n/um* as widely as possible and by increasing it as much as possible, by training as many male and female *n/um kxau*, 'owners of *n/um*', as they could, the Ju/'hoansi maintained an introverted society, the logic of which required that they attribute the mystical causes of the dissent, disease, and death that occurred among them to beings beyond the borders of their bands. The result was not only the maintenance of an egalitarian society, but also a religion without any belief in sorcery and witchcraft.²⁴⁵

²⁴⁴ But it does have analytical usefulness for *e.g.* the Nharo farm Bushmen, among whom some Nharo and Ju/'hoan trance dancers began to take on the marks of prophets; see above note 241.

²⁴⁵ Lee 1968: 50-53. Lee (1966: 46) found an exception to this rule. Ju/'hoansi do believe that some exceptionally powerful 'owners of *n/um*' are capable of transforming themselves into lions and, in that shape, of attacking humans. This belief, however, seemed to serve more to explain the anomaly of lions attacking humans (which lions, Ju/'hoansi believe, would 'normally' never do), than to express a strong belief that famous 'owners of *n/um*' might consciously and willingly spread evil among humans. But cf. above note 237 on Ju/'hoan fear of the 'wild lion' and on their extending that notion to include also Bantu and whites, thus using it as a mechanism of exclusion of everything and everyone threatening internal solidarity.

[52] Fourthly, although the curing dance was not a ritual of communication between the Ju/'hoansi and *n/um*, and although the Ju/'hoansi did not worship ≠Gao N!a, //Gauwa and the //gauwasi, the curing dance was still without doubt a religious ritual as well as a public and dramatic communication event of two kinds: an empirical one between the Ju/'hoansi themselves as singers, dancers, and healers and those in need of fortification and healing; and a postulated one between the Ju/'hoansi and the spirit world. The former was 'an extraordinarily effective method of social healing';²⁴⁶ the latter served as an exorcism, a ritual of exclusion and of boundary maintenance. Discussing the huge and fearful size of ≠Gao N!a's body and his 'wild' behaviour with Lorna Marshall, the 'owner of *n/um*', Tikay, said:

Even a very big medicine man, long in medicine, having seen ≠Gao N!a many times [in visions, JP] would still be frightened, but when sickness came and he was curing and full of power [during the curing dance, JP], he would keep a "tight heart" and take a stick [from the dance fire, JP] and would rush at ≠Gao N!a and hit him and yell: "You sent a bad sickness. You must take it back."²⁴⁷

This contradicts not only Marshall's report that the Ju/'hoansi had once told her that ≠Gao N!a himself would never come to spy on the curing dances,²⁴⁸ but also her suggestion that the creator god himself was not seen as the source of evil. Ju/'hoansi, however, explicitly described him to her as evil:

The great god created the earth and men and women and all things. [...] He gave himself his names to praise himself [...]. He praised himself with the name !Gara when he did something against the people, and [when] the people said he causes death among the people and causes rain to thunder, [the great god said:] "I am ≠Gaishi ≠gai, I am *chi dole*. I am a bad thing. I take my own way. No one can advise me." His being the cause of sickness among the people was the reason for his giving himself many names, we were told.²⁴⁹

And the 'owner of *n/um*', ≠Toma said to her: '≠Gao N!a is evil. Even now he goes about killing people.'²⁵⁰ By this view of God, the Ju/'hoansi ejected the causes of disease, dissent and death *ad extra*: they attributed [53] them to the 'wild',²⁵¹ unruly, capricious and (morally) incomprehensible spirit world, in the exorcist part of the ritual, the dramatic theatre of their war against it. By exonerating themselves, they cultivated harmonious relationships *ad intra*, the dominant value of the San bands, in its healing part, and a view of themselves as humans inherently possessing the qualities of friendliness, generosity, wisdom, calmness and good humour.²⁵²

²⁴⁶ Lee 1983: 109

²⁴⁷ Marshall 1962: 237

²⁴⁸ Marshall 1962: 236

²⁴⁹ Marshall 1962: 223, 244, 246

²⁵⁰ Marshall 1962: 231; cf. also above note 141

²⁵¹ Marshall 1962: 237

²⁵² As Silberbauer (1981: 59-61) summarises G/wi views of themselves.

Fifthly, whilst the Ju/'hoansi believed in God and the continued existence of the dead and entertained an expressly religious worldview, the Ju/'hoansi were in fact not at all religious. They were not at all keen on communication with 'the supernatural'. On the contrary, supernatural beings had much the same function in their religion as sorcerers and witches in other religions:²⁵³ they served as the scapegoats on whom all misfortune could be blamed. As the unpredictable senders of evil, God and the deceased were for them the enemies. The Nharo perceived //Gauwa as 'brooding and vindictive', and as unpredictably lashing out at people. They both revered and renounced, feared and mocked, admired and despised him.²⁵⁴ The only form of communication the Ju/'hoansi maintained with these supernaturals was that of a ritual of confrontation and war, and that involved them in a relationship of hostility and aggression with the supernatural.²⁵⁵ A major function of the curing dances, therefore, was the cultivation of 'enemy images' (Dutch: *vijandsbeelden*) of the spirit world for the sake of preserving harmony, health and life within the band,²⁵⁶ and in order to ban dissent, disease and death from it. To no avail, because the *n/um kxau* always lost the war against death.

If this interpretation of the curing dances as war with God is overly dramatic, one may opt for Silberbauer's cybernetic analysis of the trance dances and regard them as a ritual mechanism of steady state regulation. Their aim was, and is, then to counter the perturbation of the equilibrium of San social and cosmological system – conceived as a set of partly closed, partly open, interactive relations – and restore the 'normal' conditions of life by redressing the deviation from the steady state introduced into it by external agents, the supernaturals.²⁵⁷

[54] (4) Finally, the last remarkable trait of the Ju/'hoansi and other and earlier San societies, was their cultivation of trance memories, trance analysis, and trance pedagogic. These enabled earlier San societies to record their trance experiences in their rock art. In those paintings they have left us with a unique and precious documentation which scholars of religions need to study carefully, in co-operation with archaeologists and palaeontologists, in order to incorporate more firmly this longest of human-kind's religious history and iconography into the general history of religions, than has been done so far.

In Conclusion

It is likely that this present analysis suffers from a measure of selective reading and presentation. If that is so, it is due in part to the ethnographies presented by Marshall

²⁵³ Lee 1968: 51-52

²⁵⁴ Guenther 1986: 247-248

²⁵⁵ On rituals of confrontation, cf. Platvoet 1995a, 1995b

²⁵⁶ Cf. Silberbauer (1981: 59-60) who also stresses this point.

²⁵⁷ Silberbauer 1981: 114-123, esp. 118-119; cf. also above note 159. On the assumptions underlying his general systems theory approach, cf. Silberbauer 1981: 30-31.

and the Harvard anthropologists, on which it is primarily based. These scholars may have presented the foraging San they researched as more isolated, egalitarian, sharing and purely nomadic than they actually were. Indeed Wilmsen has argued strongly against their view, and I have to admit that I find some of his arguments persuasive. It must be said, however, that his 'facts' and arguments seem also not to be entirely impartial in view of the fact that his data selection respects mainly those 'which are most susceptible to outside influences - those related to production and trade', in addition to his theoretical analysis being inspired by a Marxist stance that seems to function as an *idée dominante*, especially in the polemical parts of his book.²⁵⁸ A similar measure of one-sidedness may also affect the Lewis-Williams *cum suis* interpretation of San rock paintings, as *Contested Images* would seem to suggest.

For my part, I have suggested that the Ju'hoansi regarded God as part of the 'unholy trinity' of God, the demi-god, and the dead. I may have thereby suggested a more rigorous, clear-cut and uniform antagonism between the Ju'hoansi, and other San, believers and 'God' than perhaps actually obtained in San religions, because in these religions we are hampered by the fact that the believers did, and do, not articulate their beliefs. Guenther qualified the cognitive part of the religion of the Nharo *veld* Bushmen as 'amorphous', 'incoherent' and 'a confusing tangle', and also as 'imaginative', 'ludic' and 'surrealistic'.²⁵⁹ These qualities seem to me to apply the beliefs of San foragers generally. [55] They, and non-articulation, prevented contradictory contents of specific beliefs from colliding at the cognitive level. Nor could they cause dissonance, because specific belief notions were only 'remembered', *i.e.*, consciously present in their minds, at the time when a particular situation in ordinary life required their dramatisation in ritual behaviour. Outside such occasions, the belief notions remained stored in a latent memory submerged below the level of consciousness, and inaccessible to articulation and systematic reflection.

In addition, there was also, of course, a large measure of diversity in belief between individuals and localities, precisely because San religions, in line with preliterate religions generally, although to differing degrees, were 'multifarious, inchoate and amorphous'. They contained 'a confusing tangle of ideas and beliefs, marked by contradictions, inconsistencies, vagueness and lack of culture-wide standardization'.²⁶⁰ As a result, 'consistency, [as] an epistemological quality, [was] conspicuously absent'.²⁶¹ The lack of articulation allows, at least in principle, that contradictory analyses, such as here presented, each have their own (limited) theoretical, or at least heuristic, value.

²⁵⁸ In addition, cf. *supra* notes 59, 64, 67-69, 73, and Barnard 1992: 297-298

²⁵⁹ Cf. above note 77

²⁶⁰ Guenther 1986: 216. He lists a set of factors which fostered this 'confusing tangle' of beliefs among the *veld* and farm Nharo (and, in my opinion, among foraging and sedentary San generally). They are the 'ludic, imaginative qualities of Nharo cognition and belief', 'a complex, "shreds-and-patches" organisation of old and new, own and derived, ideas and practices within a multi-ethnic acculturative setting', the absence of ritual specialists in traditional culture, the lack of formal religious education, and the isolation of individuals and groups due to mobility.

²⁶¹ Guenther 1986: 246

It thus remains a plausible possibility that Ju/'hoan traditional foraging believers were simultaneously dualist and non-dualist in their views of the moral quality of God's behaviour towards them. In the context of their conversations with Western anthropologists about their worldview, they may have presented him in one context as the remote founder of a fundamentally good order, opposed to, and by, the trickster to whom they may have attributed the introduction of disorder and dissent into it; in another context, *e.g.*, that of their riotous stories about (the nearby) 'long ago', they may have portrayed him as the fumbling fool and as identical with the trickster; and in the context of their ritual battle against dissent, disease and death, as identical with not only the trickster but also with the deceased. This means that the present analysis is valid for especially the third, and also for the second contexts, but not for the first.

I suggest, nonetheless, that it may have validity for the first context as well, and for two, somewhat contradictory reasons. One is that the [56] anthropologists referred to here seemed to favour a dualist interpretation of San foraging religions either because as Christians they held a dualist worldview themselves, or because as secular Westerners they presumed it in the traditional religions of Africa, dualist religion being consonant with the general Western model of the creator-type religion as found elsewhere in Africa and beyond. I suspect that this Western dualist model was a major influence in the construction of San ethnography and that San foraging religions may have been much less dualist at the time of their research than Western anthropologists have led us to believe.

The second reason, partly contradictory and partly complementary to the first one, is that these anthropologists researched San foraging religions at a time when San religions had for decades been exposed to explicitly dualist religions, Bantu as well as white, and that therefore dualist views were markedly on the increase among San foraging believers at the time when Western anthropologists investigated them.²⁶² The hypothesis then should be that San foraging believers had been more 'at war with God' as the source of evil in the past than in recent decades because of an increase of dualist views among them. *E.g.*, the increase of stress and deprivation – which the Nharo call *sheta*, from the English 'shit' – caused farm Bushmen religion to be cognitively restructured towards much greater coherence, simplification, standardisation, and, I would suggest, dualisation; it also caused witchcraft belief to become an integral part of farm Bushmen religion.²⁶³ The comparative study of the religions of foraging San and sedentary Bushmen, especially as undertaken by Guenther in respect of the Nharo, and perhaps also that by Barnard in respect of the Khoisan generally, will enable us to test this hypothesis by exploring the historical processes of change in greater depth and detail.

²⁶². Cf. Guenther 1979 (and above note 77) for his contrasting analyses of *veld* and farm Nharo religions; and Lee 1983: 113-118 for the gradual incorporation of Bantu witchcraft beliefs into Ju/'hoan traditional foraging religion and society, and other major transformations in the ritual field by the popularity of new ritual dances (cf. above notes 97 and 206), and, in the field of organisation, by the emergence of male and female professional healers.

²⁶³ Guenther 1976: 125-129; 1986: 50, 286-287

It is the privilege, and the lot - as both fortune and fate -, of modern scholarship in religions to proceed by analysis, *i.e.*, by dissolving complex historical reality into aspects and/or manageable portions of data. Moreover, both that and the subsequent interpretation of the separate parts are, and must needs be, guided by (pre-conceived) theory, or at least an – often latent – [57] theoretical hunch. The outcome, therefore, is always tainted by theory and is never the unadulterated, purely objective representation of the full and complex historical ‘reality’ which historical science strives to create. The outcome, therefore, must always be tested, and contested, in a clash of data and theories in order to determine the precise influence which a particular theory, and its often extra-scientific inspiration and moorings, exert on the representation. Because theory is a necessary but also a highly ambiguous instrument, which not only may be instrumental in the production of ‘objective’, testable knowledge, but also (and often simultaneously) reduces its ‘objectivity’, the modern science of religions also needs to function as ‘a democratic community of organised scepticism’²⁶⁴ in the interests of further purifying the fruits of the research of single scholars by their peers’ critical discussion of them. This analysis of the ‘war’ between traditional Ju/’hoan believers and their God is offered in the spirit of that ethos.

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²⁶⁴ Köbben 1974: 88

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