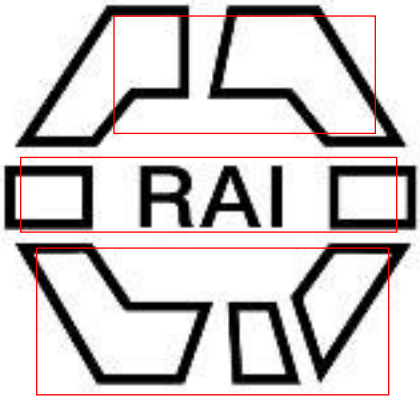

Khoisan wind: hunting and healing

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In this paper I draw on my findings and those of historical and recent Khoisan ethnography to attempt to explain how these southern African 'Khoi' and San peoples relate to wind and how the environmental phenomenon has informed their epistemology and ontology. I begin by fleshing out the knowledge and experience of wind among these past and recent hunter-gatherers and, pointing to continuity in wind relationships and the ideas that stem from them, I go on to demonstrate how wind weaves into Khoisan understandings of the body and illness. Despite extensive interest in Bushman healing, anthropologists have overwhelmingly concentrated on the 'trance' healing dance. My findings suggest this partiality has obscured the wider healing context in which the dance operates. Exploring the wider context, including massage, 'medicinal cuts', and witchcraft, reveals that the 'potency' conceived as central to the healing dance is, in certain contexts, equivalent to overlapping ideas of wind, arrows, and smell. Examination of the ethnography reveals that a number of the associations I make between wind and potency have been partially recognized in specific Khoisan contexts but, because comparative studies of Khoisan are difficult and unpopular, these similarities have gone largely unnoticed.

Wind sits at the heart of a nexus of ideas and practice among the southern African 'Khoi'[1] and San peoples. Understandings of wind tie into notions of potency – linked to identity and 'smell essence', spirits, dead people, illness, and contagion. Moving wind is offered by some Khoisan as a rationale for medical treatments, including massage, 'medicinal cuts', and the wearing of powerful animal- or plant-based necklaces and bracelets. Sharing wind essence ties people and animals together across time and space.

Because of persistent 'Western' interest in Khoisan since the seventeenth century, the material available for this discussion of wind is both rich and diverse. Little of the material I draw upon has previously been explicitly associated with notions of wind, despite the clear currency and contiguity of wind ideas across this diverse group of historical and contemporary peoples. The reasons for this, what appears to be essentially a fragmentation of Western understanding, seem to lie equally in the partiality of the ethnographic enterprise and the particularly flexible and slippery nature of Khoisan ideas.

Wind in its many guises is an invisible gift attributed to 'God' – as envisaged by Christianized Khoisan. The gift is not identical but specific. Each living entity has its

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own wind or smell which is a personalized expression of the breathing divinity and self evident in the act of respiration. Different winds define a particular sort of life, or person, which reveals itself to Khoisan in a 'phenomenology of encounter'. There is continuity between the wind that blows and the wind that people breathe and the winds that move between people, certain animals, and possibly some plants. Wind, often equally conceived as smell, can move between phenomena, embedding itself in the perceiver. The smell is a living connection between one organism and another, enabling one essentially to become the other.

My analysis lays out a Khoisan way of thinking that is drawn from their survival strategies and day-to-day knowledge of the environment and feeds into their ideas of cosmology, health, and the body. I additionally highlight how anthropology has fragmented Khoisan ideas, firstly, by biasing inquiry towards Western categories of interest, and, secondly, by concentrating on cultural microcosms which have disassociated particular Khoisan ideas from their wider Khoisan cultural context. What becomes apparent is the difficulty associated with linguistic representation of Khoisan ideas and how the combination of Khoisan linguistic and ideational flexibility, together with inconsistent anthropological representations, can influence the visibility of coherent Khoisan understandings. Whilst I fully recognize a need to be specific in analysis of separate Khoisan linguistic groups, I nevertheless believe the evidence points very strongly towards a consistent pattern of like thought and behaviour.

What I present is a series of associations, themes, and ideas drawn from historical and recent accounts of Khoisan alongside data and interpretations arising from eight months of fieldwork undertaken in Namibia in 2001 (Low 2004). During the fieldwork I recorded one hundred semi-structured interviews focusing on matters of healing. The interviews were supplemented by informal conversations and participant observation.

Following an outline of how Khoisan encounter wind and what it means to them at a personal level, I proceed to explore how the wind that blows becomes internalized, subsequently manifesting as the motive force behind individuals and 'personalities' in nature. It is in its personal manifestation that wind most equates with smell, and when conceptualized in this manner it becomes a powerful agent of transformation.

I begin this discussion of wind by working from macrocosmic to microcosmic associations – from the wind that blows in the trees to the wind that moves in the body. Whilst this dichotomy serves as a fluid entry point to the discussion, it also reflects an essential Khoisan recognition, acknowledged and articulated at a conversational level, that there are different winds – the ones that blow and the one that gives life. As discussion progresses I hope to illustrate how this juxtaposition dissolves in contexts of personal and group ways of knowing, thinking, and talking.

The following personal accounts of wind are revealing of its wider significance amongst Khoisan. They help illustrate the day-to-day knowledge of wind that informs behaviour and Khoisan concepts of life.

A Damara family from Puros in the northwestern Kaokoveld related how wind affects the growth of food plants and how the action of different winds thereby determines their food collection strategies.[2]

> When winter wind [*sao*: winter, *≠oab*: wind] blows it makes the *xori* fruit come out. It makes it grow and ripen because he blows and pulls the *//hao* plant off [clears the ground of everything so trees can grow]. The east wind [*ai ≠oab*] does not bring anything. He burns the plants, he blows too much and burns the plants. The west wind [*huri ≠oab*] blows and cleans the fruit outside [takes the skin off] and the winter wind makes them ripe – the wild food – and we go out and collect some fruit.

In an informal round-up of the day's work, my translator and friend Suro Ganuses, a Damara woman from Sesfontein, summarized what the wind, *≠oab*, meant to her.[3] Suro talked of relationships between wind, sickness, and animal behaviour.

> The north wind [*ao ≠oab*][4] brings flies, colds, and coughs. The west wind brings biting flies to Khowarib [a nearby settlement]. The west wind brings out snakes, scorpions, and a many-legged khaki-coloured spider-like creature, an *≠harare*. It is hairy with a body about four centimetres long and it sucks the testicles of men. Wind [*≠oab*] is bad for women and young boys up to about the age of 2.

Suro knows of an 18-year-old boy who a short time ago was cycling home to Sesfontein from the coast when he was killed by the east wind. The east wind is a summer wind and is very hot. Whilst the boy cycled, Suro was taking part in a healing dance, an *arus*. A healer at the centre of the dance smelled that something bad was happening far away. The healer knew, after having heard of the death of the boy, that this death lay behind the smell in the dance.[5]

Like Suro's account of the dying cyclist, another Damara woman believed also that the drum at an *arus* that I witnessed was 'not good'. She recognized after the dance that the wind must have been carrying bad news and preventing the drumming from working. The phenomenon of wind carrying news is part of wider Khoisan belief of wind as a transmitter of information, whether specifically concerning people and hunting or more generally.

A Hai//om/Damara man in Tstintsabis, just east of Etosha, replied to my question 'What can you tell me about the wind?' with:

> It is a thing of the God. There is the west to north wind, *//khabasi*, that is not good for hunting. He is the wind from everywhere. The north to south wind, *≠ga ≠oa*, is the best wind for hunting because he just blows straight to one side. The wind from the east, */hû!hub≠oab*, is not good. When he is blowing you are at the side of the wind, it is on your belt, you *//nâi* [*//nâi*, to put on (belt) (Haacke & Eiseb 1999: 90)] the wind so the animal gets your smell.[6]

Ju/'hoansi Bushmen related that there are two types of wind: *mà*, 'the soft one', and *da*, the bad one that twists strongly and penetrates you. Such twisting winds or whirlwinds, also referred to as *//Gauwa ≠a*, or *//Gauwa* smell, after the name of the Ju/'hoansi's chief divinity, are a relatively common feature of the Kalahari.

These various perspectives indicate a particular way of relating to environmental wind. They also demonstrate strong resemblances to nineteenth-century /Xam Bushmen comments on wind. Similar to the smell-wind revealing the death of the cyclist, a /Xam man observed: 'For the wind cries for us, that we may know that another friend is dying'. An alternative /Xam comment draws attention to the relationship between wind, people, and animals: 'Things which walk about hear the wind as it sweeps past our hut. Then the beasts of prey seem to know where we are, for they hear the wind calling to them' (D.F. Bleek 1932: 330-1). Elsewhere again a /Xam Bushman reported: '[A] story is like the wind, it comes from a far-off quarter and we feel it' (Guenther 1999: 139).

Out of her folklore studies, Biesele has presented convincing arguments for continuities between historical Cape /Xam and recent Bushmen by pointing to parallels in their respective hunter-gatherer or recent hunter-gatherer lifestyles which have informed a shared 'imaginative substrate' (1993: 13). Lewis-Williams and Dowson have

further emphasized the healing dance as a key arena of continuity that draws on a persistent 'subcontinental cognitive set' (1994: 220). Khoisan relationships with wind, healing, and hunting engage with essential elements of this cognitive set. The archival /Xam material corresponds to findings amongst recent Bushmen and allows the fleshing out of broad patterns of Khoisan thought and behaviour with a significant historical dimension. Collectively the evidence indicates persistent patterns of Khoisan relationships with wind. Khoisan know that wind affects the behaviour of animals and the growth of plants. They also know wind can be dangerous both in association with the storms it brings and through its ability to penetrate people, in a physical and 'potent' sense related to personal smell. To Khoisan as current inhabitants of rural Africa who maintain proximity with the environment and wild animals, wind holds real consequences for their survival, as it has done for Bushmen in the past.

The potency of wind lies in the effects it produces, by which its existence is known. It is equally defined by its ability to connect all that exists in it. For Khoisan, the implications of these two qualities are crucial. Fundamentally, wind is tied to the phenomenon of life. A Hai//om woman, Erika Gubes, stated, 'When the wind blows the people say it is the God who is breathing'.[7] Mirroring or reproducing Christian and other beliefs, the wind or breath of God enters people and animals and gives them life. In wind, God bestows and unites life and removes the footprints of the departed from the dust.

One of my assistants, Frederick //Awaseb, a Hai//om man, gave his account of wind:

> There is a special wind blown by the God [Eloba]. We breathe it in and out from that *//hom*[?], the pipe we eat and swallow food with and the big intestine. If the wind cries inside you die. When lying down you are about to die. The wind is special because you cannot see it. It blows for our life, it is the God who is breathing, even the sun and the moon work with the wind, even the clouds also, they move also with the wind and the rain comes with the wind. Now there is no rain wind but at rain time you see the wind change and it can blow sunrise to sunset and everybody knows it is the time of the rain. The two bad winds *//khabisi ≠oas*, *≠nabi ≠oas*, bring sickness but the *sore ≠gâs ≠oab* does not.[8]

Frederick's comments point to the subtle layering of conceptions of wind. In different contexts wind becomes differentiated into special God-given and life-giving wind or wind of a particular nature or identity with particular consequences, such as rain.

The idea of breathing in a life-giving, God-derived wind overlaps with notions of soul. A number of Nama women explained to me that when we breathe in and out we are breathing in and out */om*, soul. It is the wind that works with the heart. In Khoekhoegowab (mainly Nama, Damara, Hai//om) the same word, */om*, is used for breath and soul.

The wind that God gives people and animals is a specific gift of life. The gift is a personal wind that underlies an organism's form and action and constitutes its potency. The gift of life is visible in the breathing, standing, and participation of people and animals in a shared environment. Standing as a synonym for life is a particularly significant idiom amongst the Khoisan.

Lévy-Bruhl provides a helpful way of conceptualizing Khoisan ideas of personal wind. Following Cushing's work on Zuni Indians, he highlighted a link made by 'primitive' peoples between what something does and its form. The form of something both gives it its power and restricts its power (Lévy-Bruhl 1985: 38). The form defines the potency in strength and nature. An elephant is big and strong; it therefore does big and strong things. A bird flies because it has feathers and wings. In human terms personal potency relates to the form of someone – the stock of what they are and what they can do. In a sense, their form is their wind and it is moveable.

In certain contexts the idea of wind/soul/potency runs to plants, but this usage is rare. Smell is more commonly the way plant properties are conceptualized. It is, for instance, the smell of a plant that removes sickness from a body, whereas in treatments that involve human healing or animal medicine, wind or smell tend to be used to describe the active principle.

Wind, environmental awareness, and tracking

A comment from the /Xam Bushmen reiterates the very real role that wind played and plays amongst Khoisan: '[T]he crying of the wind tells the beasts of prey where to find people; and when it blows strongly they can approach the dwelling unheard' (Lloyd 1889: 203). When listened to, or smelled, wind tells Khoisan where animals are. It also tells animals where Khoisan are. The direction of wind must be known if a hunter is to avoid alerting his prey to his presence. Wind connects the hunter with the prey like a thread leading from one body to another. The relationship is a deeper one founded in a wider co-evolution. Wind or smells and pheromones draw and repulse organisms to their mutual ends. When the wind of an animal or plant enters a Khoisan body there is a unity between the two phenomena. Wind smells lock participants into a web of relationships. The essence of one organism connects with another. The consequences can be powerful. The hunter links to the prey; the wind potency of the healer cures the sick; the wind of the sick person transmits his or her illness.

Many animals, and particularly ones of consequence to Khoisan, including predatory lions, hyenas, and strong-smelling aardwolves, clearly spray or rub powerful scent over their respective territories. These markers serve as an anchor of encounter and influence between the animal and the Khoisan who smell them and watch them rubbing and spraying. The scent marker binds the one who encounters them into a powerful relationship of consequence, in a similar bind as that existing between the tracker, the track, and the animal. Potency is both a bound quality of the potential consequences of connection and the formal essence that lies behind that connection. Khoisan use certain animal remedies, particularly from strong-'smelling' animals or animals, which bring significant consequences, because their strong smell carries the essence, wind, or potency of the animal. A person with the medicine becomes potentized and takes on the wind of the source, thus both absorbing the power of the source and serving as a means of protection against it.

The idiom of connection that lies behind wind is particularly evident in relation to the tracking of animals. To my fanciful question, loosely informed by Wilhelm Bleek and Laurens van der Post, of whether or not he knew where animals are without seeing them, a Ju/'hoansi (!Kung) man, Cwi Cucga, answered with the pragmatic comment, 'If I see the footprints I know where they are. You can also use the wind. You cannot go with it, you must turn and start at the end, come through the wind so the animal cannot smell you'.[9] As Cwi's comment suggests, there is a very real sense in which wind is a scent thread. Khoisan tap onto the scent threads that riddle the natural environment and many are very aware of the role that scent plays in survival.

Tom Brown, an American tracker mentored in his youth by an old Apache scout, is highly informative concerning apposite ways of thinking about threads and tracking. The parallels between his Apache-inspired thinking and Khoisan thinking are striking. Brown relates that:

> The first track is the end of a string. At the far end, a being is moving; a mystery dropping a hint about itself every so many feet, telling you more about itself until you can almost see it, even before you come to it. The mystery reveals itself slowly, track by track ... Further on, it will tell you the intimate details of its life and work, until you know the maker of the track like a lifelong friend (1979: 1).

By standing in the path of a track or within the smell of an animal one is joined to that animal. The odour communicates the qualities of the source (Classen 1993: 98) and engages the smeller within the realm of the scent-provider. Through tracking one can know where an animal is, where it sleeps, where it hides, and when it drinks. It is possible to tell what it reacts to and what it ignores, its likes and dislikes, and its interactions with other animals (Brown 1999: 8). Knowing an animal's smell is a part of this knowing of an animal. It is not trite to remember that smells operate amongst people as they do amongst animals. Smells serve as a means of recognition, alerting the receiver to possible threats; they mark territory, attract and repulse. Smells reveal the presence of water and help identify good and bad food. The identification and mapping of a smell in relation to a Khoisan person sits within a constant process of natural awareness. Smells have very real consequences and they constantly feed into Khoisan perceptions.

Tom Brown's Apache mentor did not distinguish between tracking and awareness. Ingold observes that learning in aboriginal contexts is not a transmission of knowledge but an education of attention (2000: 167). As aboriginal peoples extend their awareness, they follow roots of connection and learn links that they perceive between environmental phenomena. Brown talks of the skilled tracker unfolding the tracks and becoming profoundly intimate with the creature at the end of the path. Some !Xõ Bushmen trackers describe how they feel the presence of particular animals before they see them. When a burning sensation develops in their central forehead, just above the eyes, they know their quarry is just ahead of them. The feeling is sometimes accompanied by perspiration under the arms (Liebenberg 2001: 93). The historic /Xam similarly described what Wilhelm Bleek translated as 'presentiments'.

> They feel in their bodies that certain events are going to happen. There is a kind of beating of the flesh, which tells them things. Those who are stupid, do not understand these teachings; they disobey them, and get into trouble, – such as being killed by a lion, etc. – The beatings tell those who understand (1876: 17).

Khoisan ideas have developed from listening to a revealing world. In persistent Khoisan ways of thinking, wind, as mover of scent and potency, tracks through the air that binds together the person with the experiential evidence and events of life. Tracking is intimately tied to how Khoisan think about wind. Like wind, tracks connect with the invisible source.

The notion of threads of connection inherent in tracking and smell plays into the invisible world of the Khoisan shaman. A Ju/'hoansi healer, Kxao ≠oma, described *tsso*, a floating yellow and green string or rope that he sees in the healing dance. The string goes to many places. Khoisan follow it to the dead people.[10] Cwi Cucga sometimes followed the string or rode on the back of animals to the village of the dead people.[11] A Hai//om healer, Gaarugu //Khumob (1904-87), told Ilsa Schatz that when he was lying as if dead on the ground in a trance-like state, his 'soul' would go up to the god, //Gamab, on a long string (Schatz, pers. comm., 3 September 2001). Lebzelter reported that the !Kung god /Nawa similarly moved between heaven and earth on a string

(Lebzelter 1934: 49). /Xam Bushmen spoke of ringing strings that vibrated inside them and connected them to the physical and cosmological world. The shaman would hear the string when calling forth the mythical 'rainbull'. The strings snapped at death and the ringing ceased (D.F. Bleek 1936: 134).

Internalizing wind

Khoisan simultaneously hold multiple understandings of wind. Different aspects of wind are conceptualized depending on the context. There is the wind that blows – it is both a normal and everyday wind but at the same time it is special as God's life-giving breath. Whirlwinds are special because they hold dead people who can cause harm. Winds of healers, animals, strangers, and people in dangerous or liminal states can also cause harm. There is wind that enters people with food, particularly fizzy drinks. At the same time, winds are known by their effects, which give them a form or identity – a rainwind or a hot person-killing wind. Ingold observed that in aboriginal cultures causality is personal, not mechanical or biological, and wind is thought of as being like a person (2000: 48). To the Khoisan, wind is like a person or an animal, and as such can be talked to and negotiated with. But regardless of the differences between these various winds, they all have the potential to enter people.

How wind enters the body varies in relation both to the sort of wind and to personal and group perspectives. Most of those whom I encountered said that life-wind entered through the nose and mouth. Many included the ears and some the sexual orifices and the follicles of body hair. Very few seemed to distinguish a trachea from the oesophagus. The life-giving wind, they would say, enters where the food goes down and runs to the stomach. As will be seen, wind in the stomach is a commonly mentioned problem.

In an uneven cognitive step many Khoisan believe that the heart is the principal holder of life-giving wind. In this capacity the heart is home of the soul – the wind gift from God that bestows personality. How the wind gets to the heart as opposed to the stomach is not clear. The heart is believed to activate the lungs and cause them to breathe. The lungs hold wind, but less than does the heart. To address serious illness Khoisan healers travel to God, who is thought in such instances to have stolen the sick person's heart and hence their life-wind and soul. They plead with God for its return. If the heart is given back to the victim, via the shaman, he or she will survive. If not, he or she will die. The idea of the heart moving and causing sickness has a wider context in Khoisan concepts of disease. Many illnesses are attributed to moving organs, although it is only the heart that is envisaged as being taken outside the body.

Similarly to my findings, Guenther observed that amongst Nharo the key organs of the body, the lungs, liver, kidneys and heart, are all 'kept alive and integrated by soul, (≠*i*) ... The heart is the central organ of the body and holds the strongest concentration of ≠*i*' . He elaborated that breath, ≠*a*, which also means wind, is closely linked with ≠*i* and believed by some Nharo to be the embodiment of soul, which is otherwise an immaterial substance (1986: 234, 241).

As noted earlier, the Ju/'hoansi think of whirlwinds as //*Guawa* ≠*a*, which has been translated as //*Gauwa* smell, although Marshall added that ≠*a* 'is not an ordinary odour, which one can actually smell' (1962: 239). '//Gauwa walks in the whirlwind and his smell is in it and death is in it. If a wind passes over the person, the ≠a goes into him, and he will get sick and die' (Marshall 1976: 42). Snyman lists Ju/'hoansi (Žu/h'õasi) regional dialect variations that include both *mà* ≠*'à*, meaning 'wind' or 'wind with smell in it', and ≠*'a*, meaning 'any wind' (1997: appendix 1).

Establishing relationships between different Khoisan languages is a difficult task, in part owing to the inconsistency of Western orthography and the variation in pronunciation and flexibility of ideas that seem characteristic of being Khoisan. Somewhere in the ≠*a* and ≠*i* complex of ideas lies the relationship of external wind to notions of internal wind, potency, and smell. Guenther has observed that different people have different ≠*i* which enables them to do things specific to their ≠*i* (1986: 242). This resonates with Lévy-Bruhl's ideas of 'form' and buttresses my link between form and personal wind or potency.

The Nharo association of thought, feeling, or soul with breath and wind was mirrored in beliefs current amongst all the Khoisan groups that I encountered. They linked personal thoughts and motivation, or soul, with their personal God-given wind, which is self-evident in respiration or life. Continuities were further envisaged between personal God-given wind and 'God's breath', or climatic winds.

Snyman established a link between wind and smell amongst Ju/'hoansi. This adds to the complex of ideas in a Ju/'hoan context, but is again applicable across the Khoisan. Smell accordingly also sometimes correlates to form, personal wind, or potency. In view of the relative homogeneity of this complex of ideas, and Nharo being a dialect of Khoe, it also seems quite possible that ≠*ai*, meaning 'to think' amongst other Khoe speakers (Nama, Damara, Hai//om; Haacke & Eiseb 1999: 261), echoes the meaning inherent in Nharo ≠*i*. Furthermore, despite the linguistic distance between nineteenth-century /Xam and recent Khoisan, Wilhelm Bleek's listing of /Xam ≠*i*, as 'to think' (1911: 154), might hint at where a historical ideational continuity might lie, although, in view of the lack of wider evidence, such a conclusion must remain circumspect.

Guenther's interpretation of Nharo beliefs supports my findings concerning the notion of God wind manifesting in people as their mental and physical motivating force. He observes that amongst the Nharo, thought comes originally from the god N!eri, but, once in the body, it 'loses its metaphysical and eschatological aspects and becomes the quintessential substance of the body ... ≠i is the force in man that causes a person to think, wish and act' (1986: 242).

With the immanence of wind in the body, wind or soul motivation becomes tied to physical mechanisms of motivation or action. Many Khoisan recognize a role for blood as something that keeps the body alive and moving. Very often wind is tied to this understanding as something combined with blood or something that runs in blood vessels that enables physical movement (very few Khoisan whom I encountered differentiated between veins and arteries). The idea of bodily movement is accordingly tied to movement of wind. No Khoisan I encountered revealed an indigenous concept equivalent to nerves. A few Khoisan envisaged that the wind moved in the tendons of the body and strong-looking tendons were thought to derive their strength from the wind that filled them. There does not seem to be a clear idea of illness originating from wind stagnating, sticking, or being depleted, but sickness was attributed to the inappropriate moving of the 'wind' of certain organs and what was termed 'sticking pains'.

The complex of ideas surrounding wind, including the gift of life, soul, breath, and personality or individual characteristics, stretches further than being located centrally in the heart and peripherally in the blood. The smell, wind, and breath of someone is held in an essential form in personal smell and sweat, including the 'dirtiness' scraped off a person's skin. Personal wind is also frequently thought to be held in urine and menstrual blood and sometimes in other bodily excretions and secretions. These

physical holders of personal wind become vehicles of personal influence beyond the human body. Encounters with wind in these manifestations play a profound role in Khoisan culture.

It is the personal wind of an organism or phenomenon that is envisaged as a powerful force potentially for good or bad depending on the susceptibility and disposition of the recipient. For certain age ranges and genders particular foods are deemed to be sickness-causing because of their potency or smell. They are, accordingly, treated as 'tabooed'. Lee was bewildered that !Kung did not eat zebra because they 'smelled bad', *//'o /'xau* (Lee 1979: 233). This makes sense when one thinks in terms of bad potency, or potency that these people considered too strong for themselves. Namibian Khoe speakers term food taboos *sōxa*. The chest meat of the eland is, for example, deemed *sōxa* for children. If they eat it, the meat is believed to induce coughing sicknesses. The postpositional *xa* of *sōxa* means 'from' or 'rich in' and 'full of' (Haacke & Eiseb 1999: 47; Hahn 1881: 132). It could well be significant that in Khoe, *sō.b* means 'lung' (Haacke & Eiseb 1999: 203), the prime organ of wind alongside the heart. The meaning of *sōxa* could therefore be construed as 'full of the organ of wind' and essentially full of the wind or essence of the organism. The archival legacy of the Bleeks and Lloyd holds many examples of /Xam beliefs concerning food taboos (e.g. Lloyd 1889: 23), although, without further evidence, why foods were forbidden remains obscure.

Possessing the wind of animals and rain

The Khoisan relationship between personal vehicles of smell, well-being, and their wider environment is well illustrated by consideration of snakes. Snakes hold an important position in Khoisan life both conceptually and pragmatically. The python, cobra and the mamba seem of particular cosmological and epistemological importance. Amongst both 'Khoi' and San there is a tradition of 'poison doctors'. Such doctors have been recorded since Campbell in the early nineteenth century (Schapera 1930: 217) and the phenomenon seems to have persisted continuously into the present. Poison doctors are people who take increasing amounts of snake or scorpion venom mixed with other substances such as urine until such time that the animals will not harm them. The poison can be swallowed or rubbed into incisions cut specifically on the recipient. Importantly, whilst this taking of poison confers immunity, it would be muddle-headed to think of this process in terms of immunization in a scientific 'Western' framework. Protection of Khoisan comes from affinity with the snake; with its smell and its wind.

Laidler, a Cape doctor with ethnographic interests, observed that snakes run away from the smell of 'Hottentot' poison doctors. This smell is held in both sweat and spittle (Laidler 1923(?): 180-1). The Austrian ethnographer Lebzelter (1934: 47) reported that !Kung Bushmen who are not 'poison doctors' can help prevent snake-bite by making cuts on the lower thighs into which they rub grated bits of 'bisob' root. The snakes smell the plant and remain hidden. Laidler has more to say of snakes. At the spot where a snake lives, a cement-like slimy patch develops that can be used as a remedy against all poisonous bites (Laidler 1923(?): 181). Laidler notes that in 1835 Alexander mentioned a great snake he had seen which, when curled up, was as large as a cart-wheel. 'Its presence in the grass was known by its smell, which was offensive to cattle'. If the smell of the great snake was wafted by the wind it could kill a person unless they immediately vomited. The smell of men always made the snake cross (Laidler 1923(?): 127). One of Wilhelm Bleek's informants related similar details:

> An ignorant man having gone to dig up shs-iss, is discovered speechless and motionless, sitting among serpents, by the hole where he had been digging. By a skilful application of sho-iod, the snakes are driven away, taking with them the scent which had injured the man, but leaving the other scent with the plant in the hole. The man is ... restored to speech and motion (1876: 18).

The potency that poison doctors grant themselves through application of snake or scorpion venom sits within a context of a widespread belief that animals, plants, and people are born or *given* specific but transferable characteristics; essentially their 'life-wind' linked to their form. Although the poison doctor undergoes a procedure to become resistant to poison, there is a strong sense in which this process remains a divine gift of a specific animal quality. Amongst historical and recent Khoisan the role of the shaman, healer, or medicine person is perceived as being a bestowal of, possession of, and, in the sense of *sōxa*, being full of a particular potency, received as a gift. Hewitt notes that amongst the /Xam there were rainmakers, medicine-men and -women, and 'those with a magical influence over certain animals'. He observes that 'rainmakers were said to "possess" rain and game "magicians" to "possess" certain animals' (Hewitt 1986: 287), such as a mantis man possessing a mantis (Lloyd 1889: 22). Hewitt interprets this 'possession' not as control 'but ownership of powers capable of influencing these things' (1986: 287). Both 'Khoi' and San have historically and recently had people who possess or 'work with' rain, animals, and other phenomena. The Bleek archive clearly pointed to people 'possessing' rain and similarly wind, *!khwe*. Schapera concluded from this material that certain /Xam magicians had power over wind and were protected by it (1930: 180). The same applies to possession of the wind of any animal or entity.

Katz observed that Ju/'hoansi healers who are very learned are said to be 'masters or owners of num' (meaning *n/um*, healing potency) (1982: 41). In a real sense they possess potency. Katz, Biesele, and St Denis point to the Ju/'hoan word *kxao* when used in post-positionals as meaning 'ownership' allied to a concept of stewardship, as in the case of *!gukxao*, meaning literally 'owner of water' and having a meaning of a person who cares for a water resource (1997: 16). They add that 'this concept of ownership extends to many commodities and activities in Ju/'hoan life that benefit from stewardship ... healers are stewards and masters'. The Ju/'hoan post-positional *kxoa* seems to overlap ideationally with the Khoe post-positional *xa*, in the sense of being full of potency.

A notable example of Khoisan possessing a phenomenon, or rather the wind of an animal, is the ability of some Khoisan to change into the animal they possess. The phenomenon has been reported since Grevenbroek in 1695 (Schapera 1933: 213). In recent contexts Bushmen have told of changing into lions (e.g. Katz 1982: 227) and leopards (Guenther 1992: 86). The /Xam also changed into jackals and little birds (Lloyd 1889: 22). Amongst /Xam, lions were even noted for turning into other animals, including humans (Lloyd 1889: 206-7). Such fluidity speaks much of the way Khoisan envisage a world of interrelationship where 'all objects are considered to have a measure of similarity' (Silberbauer 1981: 132). The notion of possession and movement of form and qualities between organisms is an expression of how wind moves through and anchors within a body. The /Xam envisaged an essential wind gift that characterized their living form. At death it fluidly left their body to re-engage with the cosmos: 'The wind does thus when we die, our wind blows; for we who are human beings, we possess wind; we make clouds, when we die' (W.H.I. Bleek 1911: 426).

One of the most ethnographically visible examples of possessing, owning, or working with a type of wind can be found amongst the Damara around Sesfontein, where there exists what are known as */nanu aob*, or rainmen. Rainmen are envisaged as possessing what a Damara translator termed the 'rain, spirit, wind thing'. Her difficulty over this translation points to a lack of direct fit with Euro-American concepts. Rainmen typically receive the rainwind or rainspirit by being struck by lightning. Being born with the caul intact or being the child of a rainperson can also bestow the gift. A rainman has something of the rain inside them and hence they can communicate with rain and storms and to this extent control them. If a storm approaches a rainman they will turn to it and say something along the lines of, 'I am one of you, do not harm me'.

Amongst Khoisan whom I encountered, phenomena of poison 'immunity', transformational abilities, or talking to rain all sat within a far wider context of potency movement and anchoring. A host of different attributes or potencies were either given to healers, like the rainwind as a gift at birth, or variously bestowed through an event or deliberately transferred from one healer to another in a ritual. A range of internalized winds or attributes were conceived of as dormant entities which lodged in particular places within a person and awoke under particular circumstances. Similarly to other African peoples, amongst Khoisan these attributes were sometimes referred to as 'spirit helpers' and often thought to be animals such as elephants or certain birds.

Khoisan healers sometimes expressed their strength in terms of how many such entities or talents they were thought to possess. The Damara and some Hai//om refer to these entities as *gaib(s)* or */gais*. One Damara rainman reported possessing thirteen *gais*, including *gais* that enabled him to dance and heal. One healer suggested twenty-one *gais* was the maximum a healer could possess, although such figures proved highly variable. *Gais* are believed to live in particular key areas of the body, including the chest, solar plexus, and the temples and centre of the forehead.

During a healing ceremony I was given the *gais*, or wind, of the mamba, and told afterwards that if I come across a mamba when walking in the bush I must not be afraid but must look at it and say, 'I am one of you, I have the mamba', and with this the snake will let me pass. This way of possessing a *gais* is intimately related to the manner in which a poison doctor possesses resistance to snake-bite. He is one of the snakes and therefore snakes will not harm him. There is much to suggest that this sort of relationship is what lay behind /Xam Bushmen with 'power over' rain or particular animals. By having or owning the wind of an entity, wind binds the source and the host in an intimate relationship. The receiver has the potency of the giver and can negotiate with them, be they snake, lion, or storm, should they need to.

The *gais* within healers communicate as either voices, pictures, or feelings that come to them whilst asleep or awake. Healers describe active *gais* as having 'woken up'. They equate this to the entity standing. At the heart of many Khoisan ideas seems to lie a fundamental juxtaposition between the dead, sleeping, and horizontal and the alive, breathing, standing, and rising. Hahn observed that in Khoikhoi the root *//o*, meaning to die, is related to *//o.b*, illness and disease, and *//om*, to sleep (1881: 127). In Khoisan thought this seems contrasted to what is expressed in Khoe as *Suris*, the sun, and a derivative *sai*, to boil (Hahn 1881: 141). Boiling is tied to life rising, grass growing after the rain, and plants ripening. Laidler similarly noted Nama associations between the sun rising and well-being, growth, and strength, and the sun setting and tiredness, failing strength, and death (1923(?): 135, 152). A strong standing eland is full of wind; the death rattle is the cold, dry, horizontal expiration of life.

The *gais* phenomenon seems closely tied to the widely known concept of Bushmen healers working with a healing substance, termed *n/um* amongst Ju'hoansi and *tsso* amongst Nharo. The substance is said to rest dormant in regions of the abdomen, often thought near the spine and termed variously *//gabas* or *//gebesi* in Ju/'hoansi. The 'healing energy' is sometimes conceived by Bushmen as arrows and the *//gabas* as the home of arrows. At a healing dance Bushmen healers dance until the energy wakes up, grows hot, like a boiling sensation, and moves up their body. Lee noted that *n/um* is symbolically related to *n!um*, which refers to boiling water, ripening plants, and, in a joking manner, the ripening of young maidens (1967: 33). Depending on the context and the aim of the ritual, either *n/um*, its equivalent, or ethereal arrows are said to be moved between healers, patients, divinities, dead people, or 'lay' people for mainly good but also bad intention. The invisible *n/um* and the ethereal arrows share in wind's elusive but effective nature. Boiling and ripening echo the generative properties of wind. There is a collective sense in which each idea feeds and supports the other.

Wind feeds not only into ideas of moving powerful arrows but also into the unseeable moving power of witchcraft, which, like wind, is known by its effects. Although witchcraft is not typically associated with Bushmen, contexts have been recorded since the /Xam in which potency or ethereal arrows have been deliberately directed at others for ill effect (e.g. Vedder 1966 [1938]: 88). Whilst such accounts may be attributed to acculturative influence, there is a broad context of shooting potency to kill or freeze game, including, for example, the springbok and dassie (Lewis-Williams 1986: 249), or, amongst the Damara, of a stare of a person inadvertently transferring harmful wind, or bad thoughts, *≠ais*, to another person, and having the effect of clogging their throat. Drawing on similar understanding, some Damara also believe a dog's stare may terminate a pregnancy (Low 2004: 237). As the alive and divine have wind that can deliberately or otherwise harm Khoisan, so too do the dead. The wind or smell of dead people, known as *//gauwasi* amongst Ju/'hoansi, is often thought a cause of sickness.

The notion of the smell or essence of dead people blowing into and lodging within others has strong parallels with ideas of spirit possession. Anthropologists have typically not associated the Khoisan with possession beliefs, although the idea has some currency (Barnard 1979: 72). When one contextualizes the notion of dead people entering a body and operating within it within the concepts of *gais* and spirit helpers, the spirit possession beliefs of other Africans do not seem essentially different from those encountered amongst the Bushmen. The difference seems to be more a matter of degree and cultural emphasis than a distinct difference of belief structures.

Anthropologists and archaeologists of Bushmen have long acknowledged the important role of 'potency' in Bushman contexts of hunting and healing. But to date potency has not been tied to ideas of wind. Marshall observed that the word *gaoxa* was used by !Kung both for the omnipotence of the great God 'which he was so mysteriously able to create for himself', and 'the special potent "spiritual" medicine which the great God puts into the medicine men, the curing power' (1962: 227). *Gaoxa* seems to reflect a wider Khoisan belief in the power of life and the power that feeds through as a gift to the medicine-men. This power speaks of the wind of life. The breath of God becomes immanent in people and abundant or of a particularly powerful nature in healers.

Medicinal cuts

Different forms of wind enter the body in different ways. Besides the anatomical routes, which primarily concern the entry of 'breathing wind' or illness-causing winds, potent

winds have their own means of entry. Winds that bring potency to healers may enter via a lightning strike into the body, by hereditary means or birth circumstances, by eating smelly and *sōxa* food, and by specific rituals of 'putting in' *gais*. As we considered with poison doctors, potency can, like *gais*, also be deliberately transferred. Many Khoisan still treat sickness by introducing potency medicines into the patient. Similarly, potency medicine is used to give certain attributes to people. Better hunting skill is one of the most common instances when potency is used in this manner.

Potency may be given to someone by rubbing the potent source into a small cut or series of cuts in the body. The potent source is usually a part of a potent animal. Often this is the skin or hoof of a kudu or eland. Making 'medicinal cuts' in this manner to transfer wind properties should not be confused with bleeding. Bleeding is a common health-related practice amongst Khoisan, and is linked to notions of 'dirty blood' needing to be expelled (Low 2004: 218).

To improve hunting skills a Ju/'hoansi healer, /Kunta Bo, related, similarly to other Khoisan, that one must take small slithers of an animal's para-spinal muscle and bicep tendon, burn them until black, mix them with fat, and rub the mixture into three small cuts on the bow-drawstring-pulling arm.[12] One cut is about an inch proximal to the elbow on the bicep tendon, another about two inches in line with the first cut, towards the shoulder, and a third on the central lateral border of the shoulder, in the deltoid muscle. /Kunta Bo elaborated that the bicep tendon of the animal is used 'to make the bow arm good' and the para-spinal muscle because, 'if the animal stands up you see him. If you come near he will not feel you coming'. It would seem that what is inserted is some of the bicep muscle that is responsible for the running legs of the animal, which makes it both strong and evasive, as well as the back muscle, which allows it to stand up and makes it easier to hunt. The hunter thereby takes in those abilities of the animal, conceptualized in terms of its winds or particular potencies.

There is some variation in the position of the cuts used to improve hunting skills, as there is in medicinal cuts. Another Ju/'hoansi man, Boo Sakambanda, used the hair of animals, particularly the kudu or eland, taken from the area where the neck meets the shoulders. He burned the hairs, powdered them, and mixed them with powder from the root of a *≠nuar* plant and a *≠nae ≠nay* tree. The mixture was then rubbed into cuts on the wrist and elbow.[13]

Medicinal cuts into which substances are inserted are made for many reasons, including a 'traditional' idea of children's sicknesses, leg pain, back ache, and abdominal problems. A key example of a cut made for health reasons concerns the use of variously kudu skin or eland skin or horn being rubbed into cuts made in the pectoral muscle, just above each nipple of a child, to 'make them strong'. Parents try to ensure that their children are protected from other strong, dangerous playmates who already have been treated in this manner by carrying out the procedure on their own children. I encountered this phenomenon amongst Nama, Damara, and Hai//om. As an alternative to cutting, a child may wear a piece of the animal skin, either as a necklace or tied diagonally from shoulder to waist. This latter way of wearing the skin is termed *//hobe* amongst the Damara and Nama. One Nharo Bushman suggested they used eland skin in a similar manner for similar reasons. That one 'strong' child could make another ill whilst playing with them was attributed to the wind of the kudu or eland being too strong for the unprotected child. The wind is thought to pass between the children. The medicinal cut or wearing of the animal part bestows protective wind.

The broad idea of wind of one entity entering into another and sharing its essence, power, or identity transforms slightly in the context of plant extracts being introduced into medicinal cuts. As noted, these are said by some Khoisan to work because of the smell of the plant entering and working inside the body. A suitable plant will go to the site of sickness because it smells it, or alternatively the smell of the plant takes out the sickness. This identifying and locating sickness by smell is an idea that runs throughout Khoisan healing practices. Lebzelter noted that Bushmen treated a poison dart wound by applying a glowing piece of wood to the body. He observed that Bushmen believed the poison would 'smell' the warmth and gather around the heated area. The poison could then be released from the body by cutting at the heated area where the poison had accumulated (Lebzelter 1934: 47). Ju/'hoansi Kunta Bo, like other Khoisan healers, knows who is sick around the healing fire because he smells them. He stated that 'you cannot ask them anything, you must just go up to them and heal them'. He knows two sickness smells, one like blood and one that 'is not good, like a rotten thing'.

In healing dance scenarios, once Khoi and San healers have focused on a sick person, they often try to remove the sickness by rubbing their head on the spot, stroking the area, or 'snoring', 'sniffing', 'sucking', or 'snorting' the sickness up and out. The nuances of the procedure vary amongst different groups. Damara rainmen whom I encountered sucked up a sickness and snorted it out into a fire, where it was destroyed. These healers danced to waken the rain- or windspirit within them. If it became too strong for one healer, he or she might collapse or release the build-up by blowing the windspirit into the ears of another healer. Bushmen healers similarly sucked out illness with their mouths. Dorothea Bleek recorded that Bushmen healers, *t/o k?au*, from central Angola extracted evil by smelling and snoring (1928: 124). In the 1770s Gordon reported that he encountered a Bushman snorting out an evil spirit or devil from her son that looked like a cobra (1988: 216). The /Xam healers 'snored' sick people with their noses and claimed to snore out illness-causing entities, including miniature lions, butterflies, and sticks (D.F. Bleek 1935: 3, 5). Often this was accompanied by a bleeding nose. In these episodes of moving sickness, the disease-causing entity is conceptually given the insubstantial quality of wind, which can settle, become dormant, move, and be moved.

Sometimes healing amongst Khoisan involves an invisible and voluntary and involuntary exchange of arrows between the healer and the afflicted. Many Khoisan believe that sickness is caused by arrows fired by a divinity into people. These invisible arrows again share wind's invisible quality for moving potency. Unlike wind transfer, arrows suggest a precision in their direction. A Hai//om medicine-man told Ilsa Schatz that he sneazed out //Gamab's harmful arrows when he treated people (Schatz, pers. comm., 3 September 2001). Some Khoi massagers reported that their patients sometimes involuntarily 'arrow' them, or similarly that the wind of the patient will go into them. Both the arrows and the wind must be expelled from a healer's body. The invisible arrows shot between healers, other people, animals, and divinities are intimately related to notions of moving wind, smell, and potency.

In the same manner that medicinal cuts introduce healing potency of animals or plants into Khoisan bodies, the personal vehicles of Khoisan potency are also part of the arsenal of Khoisan healing. Anthropologists have long observed that Khoisan shamans rub sweat on one another or on patients during healing rituals. Guenther interprets this sweat as therapeutically efficacious because it is an exudation of *n/um* (1999: 184).

Another way of thinking about this entails recognizing that sweat, like the smell often intrinsic to it, carries a person's essence or potency. Similarly, in certain healing contexts patients are smeared with the healer's skin scrapings or dirtiness, termed */urib* amongst Khoe speakers, or it will be rubbed into medicinal cuts, or they might be instructed to wear an article of clothing imbued with the healer's dirtiness. Dirtiness, like sweat, transfers potency. The link with potency runs further still to the use of urine and spittle. Treatments involving urine have been observed amongst Khoisan since the late seventeenth century (Schapera 1933: 243) and spittle since the early eighteenth century (Kolben 1731 [1719]: 305). Like these other body fluids, blood is also exchanged between people and people and animals to transfer healing potency. It was recent practice amongst Sesfontein Damara to treat children's sicknesses by administering a drink of a spoonful of blood from a dog's ear. Some Damara treat gonorrhoea by inserting goat blood into medicinal cuts or rubbing the body with a mixture of goat and monitor lizard blood.

In contrast to the beneficial purpose of medicinal cuts, the idea of poisons and *sōxa* foods indicates the way in which potency can be not only a healing substance but also a harmful substance. The dangers of menstruation are a clear example wherein personal wind is specifically envisaged as being harmful. The dangers of menses have been recorded since Kolben (1731 [1719]: 147). Sleeping with menstruating women or even being near them can induce sickness because of their strong-smelling wind. According to Salphina Janjies, a Damara woman in Swakopmund, normal menstruation, *//khâ/aesen* (*/ khâ*, moon, month sickness) is termed *≠au !gâ*, or slow, not smelly, menses. Strong, smelly menses that makes a person feel 'drunk' is termed *//ho!gâ*. It is the strong menses that can make a child or adult sick. A woman, or her smell, will *nā* the men, meaning to 'bite' them.

That there is a distinction between normal and strong and smelly menses suggests that why a menstruating woman is dangerous might be more related to the extent of her pain and sickness or smell than simply her state of menstruation. The fact that strong-smelling men are also known to make others sick reinforces the role that the actual smell seems to play. Less clearly, in other contexts it does not seem to be the smell that is the important factor but a more abstract wind-smell. /Kunta Bo related that if one's partner dies and is buried, a Bushman must cut themselves and put in the plant *!Gube* mixed with water and wash themselves so that the smell of their dead partner will not make others sick. Additionally, he reported that smelling a woman who gives birth to a child that imminently dies, or is dead, could induce neck pain, *pa deh*. Ju/'hoansi Debe Dam explained that it is the smell that goes on the wind and into the neck that is the problem.

More abstractly still, the Khoisan, like neighbouring Bantu speakers, believe that if a bird passes overhead, or particularly casts its shadow on the head of an infant, the shadow or the smell of the bird, travelling on the wind, may enter the child or person and cause illness. In children this is typically associated with the sinking or sticking of the anterior fontanel of the skull.

In addition to these arenas of negative wind and smell influence, there is a related concept that simply being exposed to unfamiliar winds of people can cause sickness. Salphina Janjies suggested that the increased mobility of people and subsequent exposure to so many different people's winds lay behind increases in disease statistics in recent Namibia. Her observation relates to the anthropological identification of smell as a marker of identity and reinforcer of 'otherness'.

Wind and moving organs

There is a widespread awareness amongst Khoisan of problems that arise from a more general wind entering the body, wherein specific organs become afflicted and consequently move. Amongst Bushmen the belief of organ movement seems mainly limited to heart movement, whilst many Khoi would also include the liver, gall bladder, uterus, placenta, intestines, testicles, and the *!arab*. The *!arab* seems to equate to the aortic artery palpable through the abdomen. Certain organs, particularly the *!arab* and the heart, are often referred to as 'standing'. Standing is a way of expressing organ over-excitement or physical prominence. Khoekhoe women relate that if the uterus moves into the intestines the uterus will stand up. Massaging must be used to correctly relocate moving and standing organs to their proper positions. The standing idea seems connected to similar notions recorded by Dorothea Bleek amongst later nineteenth-century Cape /Xam Bushmen. A /Xam healer reported that when she took illness-causing entities out of a sick person's body into her own it agitated her arteries. She had to return home for a massage to make her arteries 'lie down' (D.F. Bleek cited by Hewitt 1986: 294).

Some Khoi believe that if wind enters the body and meets the uterus it can 'turn the face' of a woman and make the tendons hard. Healers will massage the 'spastic' tissue and muscle to restore mobility. Breathing too much or consuming certain foods, especially fizzy drinks, may give the stomach too much wind. Many Damara women exercise judicious wearing of headscarves and substantial undergarments to prevent the ingress of wind whilst riding in cars. Women are particularly vulnerable to wind shortly after giving birth. If they are exposed to a cold wind and they are not sufficiently wrapped up they may develop *//khas ≠oab*, placenta wind. There is a variable understanding that either the placenta or the wind of the placenta then moves into the head and renders the woman mad. The treatment entails placing the warm lid of a cooking pot on the woman's head. The warmth drives the placenta back to its normal position. In a list of 'traditional' sicknesses an elderly Nama woman included *≠oa ≠gaa* literally, 'wind put in' or 'going mad'.

When Khoisan massage, they do so not only to attempt to relocate organs but also to examine the hardness of tendons. This is related to too much wind and functional stiffness. Some Khoisan expressed an explicit desire to move the blood around the body away from 'dry' points. This indicates the possibility of the idea of sticking wind, although this was not an expression that I encountered. After many Khoisan massage, they crack their knuckles, which they say ensures that a patient's sickness 'goes out and stays out'. This joint-popping fits into a wider context of massage procedures that channel the patient's sickness out from the massage practitioner and seem to relate to movement of wind.

When the Damara and Nama massage, it is customary to release loud long belches – referred to as *!gai*. This is envisaged as the sickness wind of the patient being released through the practitioner. Some Khoekhoe will also pop their cheek with their finger, which is referred to by the verb *abu*. This helps relocate a dislocated organ. Similarly, some Khwe massagers draw their hands off a patient's body and click their fingers to release the sickness. The idea of the healer pulling wind sickness out and expelling it through him- or herself has parallels amongst other Bushmen healers who pull arrows of sickness and release them through the top of the skull or their cervico-dorsal junction, or by flicking out their arms.

Conclusion

The Khoisan are known for the particularly inchoate nature of their ideas. There is, however, an identifiably consistent set of ideas linked to wind that operate at the heart

of their worldview. Like many other peoples, they merge notions of wind, breath, and smell. The Khoisan face of the wind phenomenon is, however, distinctive in regard to their concepts of potency and movement of potency. Working from linguistic principles, Silberbauer suggested that *G/wi* Bushmen do not make the structural distinction human versus non-human and animate versus inanimate. He indeed went further to say that all objects are considered to have a measure of similarity (Silberbauer 1981: 132). This perspective, which seems pertinent to the thinking of Khoisan broadly, operates alongside an education of awareness that has historically alerted Khoisan to what is special and meaningful in different forms of organic and inorganic life that they encounter. There is a link between the sort of idea proposed by Lévy-Bruhl concerning animal forms dictating their identity and power and Khoisan ideas of potency, wind, and smell. A phenomenon is known for what is special about it, and that speciality, be it 'windness' or 'lionness', and so on, is held in both secretions and excretions of an organism or the effect it can have on the world around it. The power of the phenomenon to influence the world around it is conceived as potency. In Khoisan idiom, active potency is conceived as being 'awoken' and 'standing', as opposed to dormant and lying.

Wind, smell, and, to a lesser extent, arrows and shadow are the means through which Khoisan envisage potency, or the ability of one thing to affect another in a particular manner, moving between phenomena. That all phenomena share a measure of similarity gives licence to potency to enter, merge with, and transform the recipient. Wind, or potency, is a gift of life that lodges in the body. A Hai//om healer once told me that each person must 'dance their own dance'. The abilities different people hold are conceived by Khoisan as gifts, lodged in the body and reflected in the body. The first gift is the gift of life-wind. A person's wind develops as they participate in a world of winds and smells and their own wind reaches out to ripple the world beyond them. Healers can control wind to transform themselves. They can follow the tracks of wind and smell through the physical and spiritual world and pull and push wind through themselves and into others to restore the gift of life.

My research began with an attempt to identify and explain healing strategies. Perhaps not surprisingly, it soon became apparent that although medicine was a useful entry point and category of inquiry, the edges of what constituted healing as opposed to other life-enhancing strategies were distinctly hazy. Similarly, the explanations behind medical practice were tied not to intimate knowledge of metabolic function and recognizably 'medical' means of interaction but to observations, actions, explanations, and rituals played out in the far wider field of Khoisan life. For the Khoisan issues of health are intimately related to issues of potency. Potency is a word long applied to the healing 'energy' circulated at trance healing dances and to the power thought inherent in certain animals or other phenomena, particularly rain. Potency is shared and exchanged during healing dances. The dances involve significant proportions of communities and sometimes people from different groups. This movement of potency has been envisaged as an egalitarian binding together of people who need one another to survive.

Wind is not something readily talked about by Khoisan. They do not have a clear conception of wind as a binding or connecting force but then neither do they of potency. Potency is a theoretical abstraction for diverse substances and events attributed with power in the lives of Khoisan. An underlying role for wind does, however, come out in many explanations of powerful actions and events, including those that involve potency. Wind provides a Khoisan way of explaining invisible action

at a distance. Depending on the event, different qualities of wind are drawn upon in different explanations: its ability to chill, overheat, howl, and smell, and to bring and carry things, including rain and illness. At times wind is dance potency. There is a sense in which people working together are bound together in moving air and, furthermore, that wind is deliberately shared in actions of mutual support. At other times again, wind is diminutized climatic wind or God-breath, 'the same but different'; at other times still, its meaning and role overlap with arrows, shadows, and personal smell essence. The multivalent sensual quality of wind and its boundary-crossing powerful nature give it a 'good to think with' status among the more and less inchoate ideas of these recent hunter-gatherers.

NOTES

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[1] I use the artificial construct 'Khoi' to refer to Nama and Damara, as opposed to 'Khoe', which as a linguistic category includes certain San peoples as well.

[2] Interview: Elizabeth Tauros, recorded Sesfontein, 19 July 2001.

[3] Noted Sesfontein, 6 June 2001.

[4] Haacke and Eiseb (1999: 166) list this as the east wind.

[5] Noted Sesfontein, 6 June 2001.

[6] Jan Serengboom, recorded Tsintsabis, 1 August 2001.

[7] Recorded Tsumeb, 6 August 2001.

[8] Recorded Tsintsabis, 3 August 2001. Dom(mi) is the usual Khoekhoegowab word for throat.

[9] Recorded //aru (Xaru), 23 August 2001.

[10] Recorded //aru, 21 August 2001.

[11] Recorded //aru, 23 August 2001.

[12] Recorded Tsumkwe, 26 August 2001.

[13] Recorded Tsumkwe, 28 August 2001.

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Le vent chez les Khoisan : chasse et guérison

Résumé

Dans son article, l'auteur exploite ses observations et celle de l'ethnographie du passé et du présent des Khoisan pour essayer d'expliquer la relation au vent des peuples « Khoi » et San d'Afrique australe et la manière dont ce phénomène environnemental a informé leur épistémologie et leur ontologie. Il commence par décortiquer les connaissances et l'expérience du vent parmi ces groupes au passé lointain et récent de chasseurs-cueilleurs. Ensuite, en démontrant la continuité dans les relations au vent et les idées qui en sont issues, il montre comment le vent s'entremêle dans la compréhension du corps et de la maladie des Khoisan. Alors qu'ils se sont largement intéressés à la guérison chez les Bushmen, les anthropologues se sont surtout concentrés sur la danse de guérison par la « transe ». Les observations de l'auteur suggèrent que cette partialité a occulté le contexte plus large de la guérison dans lequel s'exécute cette danse. L'exploration de ce contexte élargi, et notamment des massages, des « incisions médicinales » et de la sorcellerie, révèle que le « pouvoir » conçu comme l'élément central de la danse de guérison équivaut, dans certains contextes, à des idées interpénétrées de vent, de flèches et d'odeurs. L'examen de l'ethnographie révèle que plusieurs des associations établies entre le vent et le pouvoir ont été partiellement appréhendées dans le contexte spécifique des Khoisan, mais que ces similitudes sont largement passées inaperçues à cause de la difficulté et de la nature confidentielle des études comparatives des Khoisan.

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