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San Bushman Human–Lion Transformation and the "Credulity of Others"

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Abstract: Lion transformation, among San-Bushmen, is arguably the most dramatic and spectacular instance of animal transformation. Transformation is a central component of San curing and initiation ritual and of certain San hunting practices. Moreover, it is a recurrent theme in San mythology, art and cosmology, all of them domains of San expressive and symbolic culture that are pervaded by ontological mutability (manifested most strikingly in the therianthropes of San myth and art). Lion transformation is a phenomenon that has received much mention in the ethnographic literature on Khoisan ritual and belief, through information that is based not on first-hand but second- or third-hand ethnographic and ethno-historical information. In the paper, I describe my own eye-witness account of what San people deemed a lion transformation by a trance dancer, which I observed in my early field work among Ghanzi (Botswana) Naro and = Au//eisi San in the 1970s. This is followed by my own musings on the actuality or reality of lion transformation, from both my own perspective and from what I understand to be the indigenous perspective. In terms of the latter, lion transformation—and animal transformation in general—is a plausible proposition. Indigenous doubt and scepticism, deriving from a rarely if ever fully conclusive witnessing of such transformations, are assuaged in a number of epistemological, cosmological and phenomenological ways. These are not available to a Western cultural outsider with a Cartesian mindset, nor to a Westernized—and perhaps also Christianized—insider, whose cosmos has become "disenchanted" through historical–colonial and contemporary–acculturational influences.

Keywords: San Bushman studies; shamanic transformation; relational ontology; San (and hunter-gatherer) cosmology; alternate styles of rationality; indigenous perspective; cross-cultural translation

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1. Introduction

> "We know about Bushmen who turn into lions. Their ears change shape and they grow lion's fur. Their hands become identical to a lion's paws and they roar mightily. However, you can still recognize the person if you look carefully at the lion's face."
>
> Motaope, Ju/hoan healer ([1], p. 81)

> "When we [healers] shake very hard, it's like slipping out of our skin so that we can become something else. As all strong healers know, it's not physically being the other animal. It's becoming the feeling of the other animal . . ."
>
> G/aq'oKaqece, Ju/'hoan healer ([2], p. 153)

> "When I turn into a lion, I can feel my lion hair growing and my lion-teeth forming. I'm inside that lion, no longer a person. Others to whom I appear see me just as another lion."
>
> TshaoMatze, Ju/'hoan trance dancer ([3], p. 24)

> "These great healers went hunting as lions, searching for people to kill. Then someone would shoot an arrow or throw a spear into these healers who were

> prowling around as lions. When these great healers tried to change back into their own human skins, they usually died. When a healer changes into a lion, only other healers can still see him. To ordinary people he is invisible."
>
> Wa Na, Ju/'hoan healer ([4], p. 227)

Accounts about lion transformation in recent and not so recent ethnographies about Kalahari San are replete with equivocation (to which this paper will add its own two cents). As one might expect, given their bred-in-the-mind rationalist scepticism and Cartesian dualism, in particular, as regards the topic at hand, about the human–animal divide, anthropologists cannot quite get a handle on shape-shifting (unless one is into Dungeons and Dragons and enjoys video fantasy games). Notwithstanding our discipline's renewed commitment to cultural relativism and the indigenous perspective, in the context specifically of a "revisited" New Animism, whose ontological turn makes some of us—archaeologists included [5–8]—more receptive to the notion of a human turning into a lion, I still find it difficult to get my head around it (a task I have set for myself in a recent book project [9,10]). Unlike others ([11], p. 13, [12], p. 263, [13], p. 48 [14], pp. 30–47), I deem this experience on the part of a shaman (there is some debate amongst Khoisan researchers about the applicability of the term and category of "shaman"—a term derived from circumpolar hunting peoples—to the San Bushman healer ([15], p. 7, [16], pp. 60–62). Most of them, qua "lumpers", have opted in favour of the term because of the presence and importance in the San instance of altered states of consciousness, outer-body travel and animal transformation). Something other than a hallucination—primarily because it can occur to a person outside the hallucination-prone altered states context of trance healing (such as hunting, as seen below)—and certainly not an "insane delusion" or "a form of mental, even "monomaniacal derangement" as did the Old Animists ([17], pp. 30–31, [18], p. 126), I nevertheless find it difficult to situate human–animal transformation within a familiar ontological, epistemological and phenomenological space. In the episteme familiar to me, you are either human or you are animal, notwithstanding Darwin's findings that we are actually both phylogenetically. While a widely accepted premise in Western cosmology, it is a kinship, however, that is too remote in time and the human being's being as *Homo sapiens* to allow for on-the-spot human–animal metamorphosis (unless the experience is hallucinatory, oneiric or delusional, and the sense of it mytho-magical or metaphorical).

2. "Their Ears Change Shape and They Grow Fur" vs. "It's Not Physically Being the Other Animal"

Anthropologists who write about this phenomenon describe it either as something actual or real—transformation into a real-life lion, fangs and claws, mane and tail—or as something virtual and unreal—a "spirit lion" or "lion of God" visible only to shamans. Both of these opposing perspectives may be presented by the same ethnographer, underscoring the above-mentioned equivocation and confusion. Thus, we read in Richard Katz's classic monograph on Ju/'hoansi trance healing that when a shaman travels at night "in the form of lions of god" (an aspect, to Katz, of the "concrete reality of healing"), such a lion is to the Ju/'hoansi a "real lion, different from normal lions, but no less real" ([4], p. 115). The epigraphs at the opening of the paper, all snippets of comments by Ju/'hoan healers to ethnographers, contain the same sort of equivocation. One of the two Ju/'hoan shamans Bradford Keeney interviewed, Motaope, described the experience of transformation as utterly real—anatomically, even aurally ("they roar mightily"). The other, G/aq'o Kaqece, stresses that it is not a case of "physically being the other animal" but, instead, of "becoming the feeling of the other animal", ratcheting down the experiential and ontological aspects of transformation, from "being" to "becoming", the former bodily, the latter mentally. The Ju/'hoan shaman's Tshao Matze's description to Richard Katz and Megan Biesele of his own experience of lion transformation is indicative of deep immersion, ontologically, into the animal, both its "interiority" and "exteriority" (using Descola's terminology); indeed, he is seen as such—"just another lion"—by other people who lay eyes on him. The last aspect of realism of such a leonine shaman is dismissed by Katz's other informants, the

woman healer Wa Na, who states categorically that "only other healers can still see him. To ordinary people he is invisible".

The ethnographers' equivocation and confusion are a reflection thus not only of their culture-bound epistemology but also of their San informants' own view on the matter. This, as I found among my Naro informants in the 1960s through 1990s, spans the spectrum from dismissal of the notion of human–animal transformation, through doubt, to acceptance. Notions on the left of the spectrum—dismissal—in large part derive from the impact of acculturation, through schools and mission churches, and its "disenchanting" effect on San belief and cosmology ([10], pp. 69–104). Those on the right—acceptance—are linked to an intrinsic epistemological and phenomenological quality of San cosmology, ontological ambiguity, which renders humans both same as and other than animals (and vice versa), a feature I have recently traced through such domains of San culture as myth, art, ritual, play and hunting ([10], see also [19]). Ontological ambiguity is evident in the cited passages, such as Motaope's comment, which suggests that the transformation from human to lion may not have been quite as radical as it is described at the outset: for all his lion's ears and paws, fur and roar, the "tranceformed" shaman's human personage is still recognizable, in the lion's face. And even though, according to her assertion, the transformed shaman-lion is "invisible to ordinary people", Wa Na begins her narrative on human–lion transformation with an account of how these were-beings "go prowling around as lions", on the hunt "for people to kill". The latter defend themselves against these predators, perceived as actual lions, and turn tables on them, throwing their spears at them, which may eventually kill them, after their change back to humans.

The ambiguity inherent in these sorts of caveats and contradictions about lion transformation may, for some San, translate into doubt about the entire phenomenon. In the course of my field work among Naro San in the Ghanzi District of western Botswana in the 1960s and 70s, I talked to some San individuals—"ordinary people" as well as some trance dancers—who were altogether dismissive of lion transformations. The matter was something they either did not believe existed or deemed possible, or would attribute, as an in-group's boundary-maintaining mechanism, to outside groups, as something—lion transformation—"*other* people do" (the Naro attribute the skill of leonine transformation to the = Au//eisi, as part of the general stereotype of fierceness and vindictiveness ([15], p. 18). The linguistically related G/wi hold the same = Au//eisi stereotype, especially its aspect of turning themselves into lions and preying on people ([20], p. 320), whereas the linguistically distinct !Kõ vis à vis, whom the Naro are the San out-group, attribute the same stereotype to the Naro ([21], p. 28). The San, in turn, collectively appear to be wont to stereotype their Black neighbours, again collectively, in terms of the same leonine stereotype ([22], p. 733, [23], pp. 13–15) themselves into lions and preying on people ([20], p. 320), whereas the linguistically distinct !Kõ vis à vis, whom the Naro are the San out-group, attribute the same stereotype to the Naro ([21], p. 28). The San, in turn, collectively appear to be wont to stereotype their Black neighbours, again collectively, in terms of the same leonine stereotype ([22], p. 733, [23], pp. 13–15).). On the other side of the plausibility spectrum of human–lion transformation, I talked to starry-eyed were-lion believers, awed by their mystical–magical powers, as well as fearful as these were usually put to malevolent ends, by lion-shamans who "stalk the desert in search for human prey" ([24], p. 46; see also [25]). Their malfeasance usually followed lines of Tswana patterns of sorcery, features of which have entered the ritual tool kit and arcane knowledge of some San trance dancers [26].

Most of the San informants I talked to about lion transformation were more guarded, however, neither fully dismissive nor fully accepting, but acknowledging the possibility of such a thing happening, albeit very rarely (and, as some would qualify further, among other San groups, as "it's not something we Naro people do; it's a = Au//ei thing"). A number based their information on second- or third-hand information, reported to them in urban-legend fashion, as coming from a credible source, a friend of a cousin or a cousin of a friend and such like, but never actually witnessed. Such information, transmitted through gossip and family memorates and traced to an "absolutely reliable", identifiable

person, holds sufficient authority to be deemed possible in San intellectual culture, given its situatedness in an animistic, "connective" cosmology (a point to which I will return again).

As I have suggested elsewhere ([19], p. 6) most, if not all, of the ethnographic information by anthropologists on this feature of San ritual and belief also appears not to be first-hand. It seems that descriptions of lion transformation in the anthropological literature all pretty well seem to fall into the second- or third-hand category, based, as they are, on accounts—vivid and dramatic ones as exemplified by the Ju/'hoan snippets provided above—related to the ethnographer by San informants, who either have had the experience themselves (trance dancers) or who have witnessed the same, or had heard it described to them by others. Even Bradford Keeney, who claims to have undergone lion transformation—as a "visionary" experience (Keeney offers no description of his own experience, other than referring to it as a "visionary occurrence", and noting that "there are different means for making this transformation" ([2], p. 151, foot note))—bases his descriptions on accounts from "numerous Bushmen he has known who turned into lions" ([2], p. 151).

3. A Lion Transformation Observed

In my own field work at D'Kar village in the Ghanzi District of western Botswana, I heard half a dozen such second- and third-hand accounts from people about lion transformations—including one first-hand transformation account, by an = Au//ei trance dancer, albeit not into a lion, as his wife "doesn't want him to do so dangerous a thing", but into a non-poisonous snake (called *n!am di tsoro* in Naro)! There was only one occasion on which I actually witnessed what people who were present at the event and with whom I talked about it afterwards considered a lion transformation. It occurred at a trance dance on 30 May 1974, in the evening around a dance fire, less than half an hour into the trance dance ritual. The dancer, a man with the (fictional) name Sebetwane, was in his mid-forties. He was dark-skinned, his father having been Kgalagadi (his mother was ≠ Au//ei). The performance as a whole was relatively brief—a little under an hour—and its climactic conclusion abruptly ended the trance dance, which had been scheduled to last for several hours. My account of this event, drawn verbatim from my field journal, is provided in the Appendix A of this paper.

The lion transformation component of the dance unfolded over the last half hour of the performance, when the dancer's deportment changed from pre-trance play mode, in a decidedly erotic, as well as scatological idiom, to almost full-trance transformation mode, into what people held to be into a lion. Its first indication of transformation was the dancer's scowling and evident anger, conveyed at first through grimacing, licking of his mouth and contorting his head and neck. It escalated with the dancer lunging at the spectators, snarling and, at one time, on all fours. The accosted spectators were some of the women and children, sitting near the fire and dance circle. He grabbed one of the children, a boy toddler, by the arm, picking him up roughly; to wiggle the terrified child laterally on his shoulders and hold him against his chest, almost dropping the toddler throughout these agitated histrionics. People's reactions appeared to be shock, deep unease and fear that, in one of the spectators I talked to afterwards, bordered on terror—all the more so when the dancer, near the end of his transformative performance, incorporated into it a standard element of Kgalagadi and Tswana sorcery—tossing sand, in a frenzied, culturally stereotyped gesture that included directionally shaking his arm and hand, toward some intended victim (I have elsewhere [26] described the component of witchcraft and sorcery within Ghanzi San trance dancers' repertoire of ritual healing techniques and ideas and examined the ways in which this cultural borrowing was integrated within their body of magi-co-religious practice).

4. A Lion Transformation Explained (Away?)

For all of its intensity and histrionics and the danger and dread it evoked in the attendants at the dance, its leonine transformation aspect seemed—to me, a cultural outsider—rather subdued and somewhat contrived and, for all of its dread and drama, somewhat

anti-climactic. The reason may be that the ritual performance did not contain full trance, thereby reducing its duration and intensity. Furthermore, it contained other choreographic and ritual elements—erotic and scatological play as well as Kgalagadi sorcery—which all diluted and distracted from dance's central feature, the dancer's transformation into a lion.

Apart from these factors that contributed toward reducing the emotional impact—and the cultural integrity—of the human–animal transformation I witnessed, my own culturally conditioned and stubborn, hard to bracket out scepticism about the "reality" of the observed human–animal transformation—into an actual lion, rather than one imagined—muted this impact. The credibility regarding its reality was also underscored by what to me was a lack of "realism" of its performance, which "was not produced with any superlative art". I am here borrowing language from the explorer and ethnographer Knud Rasmussen when he observed a shamanic animal transformation in another animal—a bear—in another part of the world—Canada's eastern Arctic in the 1920s, by an Iglulik shaman. A *Qua* sceptical cultural outsider—"I could distinguish all through the peculiar lisps of the shaman acting ventriloquist"—Rasmussen's opinion on the matter was that for this shamanic performance to be believed and persist within Iglulik ritual and symbolic culture, the key requirement was "the credulity of others" ([27], pp. 39–40). The latter—"astonishing credulity"—Rasmussen finds himself "repeatedly obliged to note" other aspects of Iglulik shamanism, especially messages shamans communicate and attendants at their "séances" receive and accept about the spirit world ([27], p. 43).

So, then, is human–lion transformation "for real"? Is it merely shaman showmanship, as Rasmussen suspected the bear transformation he observed to have been, dependent for its credibility in the shaman on the credulity of spectators? Is it, like, "the extraction trick" wide-spread in shamanic healing, yet another status-authenticating, "deceptive curing practice" on the part of the shaman "to give the appearance of impressive powers", as per the anthropologist William Buckner's recent take on the matter ([28], p.95)? Another "trick that would astonish the audience" ([29], p. 55)?

While raising questions of this sort, especially in a tone of cynicism-tinged scepticism about an indigenous cultural practice by a cultural outsider who studies the same, might be seen as an affront to some of the core analytical and ideological tenets of their discipline, of objectivity, cultural relativism and respect for the indigenous perspective and inclusion of its voices, the reason I allow myself to do so is because, as seen above, the latter, the indigenous voices, themselves include such questions, along with scepticism and cynicism. My conversations with San people (including trance dancers) included mentions of this or that San trance dancer who faked the trance experience—including its ear-piercing *kow-he-dile*, "death shriek" and collapse. Doubts were also expressed about the genuineness, if not even possibility, of the other two mystical components of the shamanic performance, transformation—"the lion experience"—and extra-body travel. People distinguished between—and dancers performed—"small dances" and "big dances" or between "play dances" as opposed to "death dances", the former for entertainment and money (oftentimes for tourists), the latter for curing and in the spirit of sharing and collective well-being and transcendence. I have described these in detail elsewhere, in an examination of the contemporary trance dance among "post-foraging" Nharo and ≠ Au//ei San people, in its "disenchanting" acculturative context of Western education, Christianization, commoditization and rationalization ([30]; see also [3], pp. 80–81, 85–89).

Having worked primarily amongst acculturated "farm Bushmen" in my own field work, I lack the data to comment on whether or not, and to what extent, shamanic practice among the Kalahari San people I stayed amongst and had conversations with contained the same voices of doubt and scepticism about their practitioners. Lewis-Williams has recently suggested that to some extent this might have been the case among/Xam of the north-western, whose shamans—the *!giten*—were more differentiated in terms of their ritual skills and specializations than their Kalahari counterparts as well as more elevated socially, with "power, privileges and position unavailable to anyone else", all of it deriving from their access to and transmission of ritual knowledge ([16], p. 205). (The arcane skills of

some of the /Xam shamans included the power to transform into lions. This was described by /Xam story tellers to their interlocutors Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, in the 1870s, with reference to specific historical figures they themselves knew in their childhood or were told about from a parent or grandparent ([31], pp. 202–5, 267–72, 279–83; see also [32], p. 19). Some of the accounts about these nineteenth- and eighteenth-century/Xam shamans were strikingly similar in some details to what I observed in the Kalahari. These included such actions as growing neck hair when in the process of trans-formation, walking about at night on their "magical expeditions", and avoiding people on their "magical expeditions" lest they mistake them for real lions and kill or injure them (with injuries retained when shape-shifting back into their human form in the morning). Folklorist Manuél de Prada Samper also found these notions in the folktales he collected amongst modern descendants of the /Xam in the Northern Cape ([33], texts 8 and 43)), In order "to convince people that their 'symbolic labour' could create conditions in which ordinary people's daily labour could be successful" ([16], p. 205), /Xam shamans also vied with each other and failures—say at rainmaking—would be "challenged" by the people as, indeed, they "could attract people's wrath if their rainmaking failed" ([16], p. 189). All this created a social climate for invidious comparison amongst the shamans themselves and amongst the people "who were not always appreciative of his [the shaman's] efforts" (ibid.), all of it conducive to scepticism about the competence, genuineness, and legitimacy of certain shamans.

Turning again to the Eastern Arctic Inuit, the scepticism expressed by their ethnographer, Rasmussen, about their shamanic séances was evidently also shared by Inuit shamans, "Real shamans"; one of them told Rasmussen: do not

> "jump about the floor and lisp all sorts of absurdities and lies in their so-called spirit language . . . to impress the ignorant. . . . It always appeared to me that they attached more weight to tricks that would astonish the audience. . . . These shamans never seemed trustworthy to me. . . . Real shamans do not need it."
>
> ([29], pp. 54–55; cited in [34], p. 106)

5. Animal Transformation in a Connective Cosmos

As I have recently suggested [9,10] the reason—in the San context—"real shamans do not need it" is rooted in San cosmology, specifically its central component of ontological mutability. As I show there, one of its manifestations, transformation, is a central component of San curing and initiation ritual and of certain San hunting practices and a pervasive theme in San mythology, art and cosmology, which are both shot through with ontological mutability (manifested most strikingly in the therianthropes of San myth and art, which include human–lion as well as lion–human transformations). All this creates a world view of inter-connectedness—which the South African archaeologist Sven Ouzman [35] and poet-novelist Antje Krog refer to as a "connective cosmos" and an "interconnected world view" ([36], p. 184, quoted in [37], p. 187), respectively, and see as the defining characteristics of Khoisan symbolic culture (tracing the complex, mutually interactive and "not always predictable" strands of connectivity of all its domains in the context of a /Xam transformation myth, David Lewis-Williams ([38], p. 41) has recently substituted "entangled" for "connective" as the defining adjective for the San cosmos. Entanglement captures—even more than inter-connectedness—what I have elsewhere referred to as "tolerance for ambiguity" and what I see as the defining quality of San society, ethos and cosmology, at a social–structural and conceptual level ([10], pp. 226–37), and phenomenologically, in the way being—especially being-in-the-world—is experienced, vis à vis the non-human animate and inanimate features of the dwelled-in landscape [10]). In a connective cosmos—"a boundary-less universe whose entangled people and animals move across time and space" ([39], p. 351)—ontological boundaries between species are fluid and porous and beings and states are not set each in their respective molds but interact with and flow into each other.

Such a cosmology provides the ideological, epistemological and phenomenological underpinnings for a belief in human–animal transformation, which becomes, for people

subscribing to this cosmology, a plausible proposition (for a consideration of this point, in the context of northern European mythology and cosmology—an "animist cosmovision"—and its shamanic roots and undercurrents and focused on the bear and its therianthropic, humanimalian features, see Frank ([40], p. 114). This is one of a number of writings on this topic by the same scholar). It also allows for doubt as this proposition is by no means unequivocal: humans are both the same as and other than animals; as noted by Eduardo Kohn in the context of the Runa, an Amazonian hunting people, "a constant tension . . . exists between ontological blurring and maintaining difference". This presents an intellectual and existential challenge for the Runa: "to find ways to maintain, this tension without being pulled to either extreme" ([41], p. 12). One of these extremes –which Philip Descola refers to as the "angst peculiar to animism" ([42], p. 286)—is carnivory given its conceptual and phenomenological equivalence in this sort of humanimalian cosmology, with cannibalism ([10], pp. 28–38). For the San, one of these ways is for humans situationally to focus fully on the animal's ontological alterity and bracket out the component of identity, for instance, when hunting, killing and butchering an animal and cooking and eating its flesh, when its comestible-animal-otherness is at the forefront of people's minds, as a *bon à manger* rather than *à penser* [43].

Transformation is believed to be an arcane power and skill of some shamans—not all of them, as some of them have never acquired it, nor ever wanted to, and others are considered either unskilled or inexperienced. Yet, others—including children—just play at transformation when miming a trance dance, at times in the early phase of its performance by adults. And, for both of them—children and adults—transformation is experienced, at varying levels of intensity, in the many animal mimicry dances that make up most of San recreational pastimes ([9], pp. 203–22). For pubescent girls, amongst most of the Kalahari San groups, one of the most intense and memorable experience is her spiritual transformation into an eland, at menarche, while sitting in her seclusion hut and surrounded by old people whose own eland transformation is expressed, and at some level experienced, through a dance that mimics the actions of eland courtship behaviour ([9], pp. 179–870). Transformation, into eland and other antelope species, is a prominent feature also of San male initiation rites ([9], pp. 187–96). Hunters may experience a strong somatic connection with the prey animal, especially at the moment at which they kill the animal, after a protracted stalk that may include "running down" the animal and, as a result of the intense physical exertion and total exhaustion, intensify the experience of "sympathetic" connectedness to the animal ([9], pp. 222–42, see also [19] and [12]).

These instances and intensities of ontological transformation place this experiential process on a phenomenological gradient from actual to virtual, ritual to recreational, liminal to ludic. They provide epistemic and experiential underpinnings for a belief in human-to-animal transformation—and vice versa, the theme of much of San myth and lore ([9], pp. 49–90)—and are able to accommodate such doubts as people may entertain about shamming shamans. Indeed, the latter may themselves, their own shamming notwithstanding, hold fast to the notion of "the real shaman" and *his*—as opposed to *their*—ability to enter, through trance, an altered state of consciousness, and, through transformation, an alternate state of being.

6. Conclusions—Human–Lion Transformation in a "Disconnective" Cosmology

In my conversations with San people, in the 1960s and 1970s, I found the San notion of human–lion transformation as a plausible proposition withstand even the growing and spreading element of doubt amongst some of today's San, derived from people's exposure to, and acceptance, by some, of an alternate "disconnective" cosmology, through techno-economic, health, educational, social and political practices mediated by state or NGO bureaucrats or volunteers along western lines, or through Christian missionaries or evangelists. The scepticism arising from these outside-derived doubts did not, I found, obviate "what if questions", "yes but" or, "maybe so" statements about if and how actual—as opposed to imagined and virtual—human–lion transformation is or can be. Such ques-

tions and statements are legitimate and pressing to people whose cosmology is connective and, with respect to its ontology component, allows for the notion of human–animal connectedness and transformation.

I do not know whether or not the San of Ghanzi—or anywhere else—still see and think about the world and *umwelt*—in particular its animals—in this way now, over half a century after I had these conversations with them. They were conversations set largely in the epistemological and phenomenological framework of a connective cosmology closely tied to hunting–gathering lifeways. These are gone, and the worldview underlying the lifeways that have displaced them, especially wage labour for adults and school attendance for children, is one of disconnectedness.

The social and existential context of this world view is one of poverty, unemployment, marginalization, discrimination and disease. The response of many San people over the last three to four decades has been resistance and assertion, of their political rights and their cultural identity. These activities have given rise to initiatives that rehabilitate and revitalize San ideational culture, through "cultural heritage projects" such as collecting, transcribing and archiving local oral histories and languages as well as ritual trance dances, "traditional" recreational dances and songs, myths and lore. Some of these projects are very active and prolific (as well as, in some instances, "high tech": digitizing San myths and oral history narratives—or even converting the same into VR (virtual reality) games—and placing them on the worldwide web [44,45] and engage San people from communities from all over southern Africa [46].

One of them was undertaken by two NGO development workers—Willemien and Alison White—in the late 1990s as a collaborative project, with San interviewers from eight different San language who collected over two hundred stories and memorates, myths and tales from eighteen San story tellers from various San communities in southern Africa [47]. Published in a remarkable book titled *Voices of the San* in 2004, these narratives cover the full gambit of the cosmology and mythology, customs and ways of San traditional culture and, in the process of telling, recording and transcribing the same, both recall and to some extent restore salient features of the people's traditional lifeways and world view.

Included in that recall is the connective, animist notion of human–animal connectedness. I close this paper with one of its most explicit expressions, a memorate by the Ju/'hoan storyteller Tci!xo Tsaa from G!hoce village in Botswana, about his late father ([47], p. 133):

Things that I know about that were done by the healers is that they could turn themselves into lions when we did not have meat to eat. My father was a healer. During the night someone would turn and go hunting, and when he saw a kudu, he would kill it and return home during the same night. When he returned home, he would again change himself into a person, or he would enter his body. The following morning, he would then tell the people to go in that direction. He did not tell them his secret, about what he had done. While you were walking, he would say that he saw something there last night, but he was not sure if it was true. When we got there, we would find the kudu that he had killed. It was then skinned with great happiness.

The healer was never seen doing that; even if you were with him, you could not see him changing himself, you only saw the body lying there. When you picked him up, his body just collapsed, and you would have to leave him there, knowing he had changed himself and gone somewhere. People were not supposed to bother his body when he had changed into something else.

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and partially translated by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, is available from the University of Cape Town as an open-access document. See http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za.

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Appendix A

A Lion Transformation.

D'Kar, 30 May 1974, early evening (field notes, unedited).

It took him [Sebetwane] about 1 h to get ready—he made the rattles, changed into his dance costume (shorts and a singlet). Throughout the preparations he danced in short spurts, always with women around whom he danced beguilingly and with more or less subtle eroticism; both African [Black] and Bushman women. There are two women in the village (one a Herero and one Kgalagadi) who can sing his song. They were joined by four others—M T, S and two other Bushmen women two of the BU women slightly drunk)—who stood upright, in a line, clapping and singing a refrain.

Then he began dancing, in a preliminary and warming-up fashion and in the process he took the *doeks* [head-kerchiefs] off the heads of all the women, both those that sang for him and spectators. The de-*doek*'ed women covered their heads again with caps or rags. He hung the *doek*-like trophies—from his belt so that he looked as if he wore a skirt (note: both the erotic and sex reversal elements of this trait).

Then he began dancing: it was effective and skilful, captivating to watch. He danced vigorously, with precise and skilful steps and marvellous coordination—arms held down stiffly, hands stretched out parallel to the ground, moving back and forth, in scissor motion. While dancing he sang his refrain, loudly and harshly. His dance was erotic and scatological—erotic in that he would dance with women in the song circle for brief spells—around them like a snake around prey and with pelvic thrusts (including kissing one woman on the mouth) and scatological, in one amusing act (which, I think, was intended just to amuse spectators): he danced in a kneeling and squatting position. He held his hands under his buttocks and picked up a piece of cardboard from the ground and held it against his buttocks. Then to his nose and, with a grimace of disgust, he threw it away. Everyone roared with laughter.

His grimacing was another highly effective aspect of his dance: he screwed up his face—to look surprised, sneaky, sexually aroused or otherwise interested (including licking his mouth with his tongue) and angry. All this grimacing was accompanied by contortions of his head and neck. The angry emotion seemed to become increasingly predominant and at its height he shouted and screamed and charged at some of the spectators, especially the women and children. The latter ran away screaming and laughing; the former stood their ground and half laughingly and half annoyed slapping him or pushing him away.

The children became really afraid after he had caught one of them—a small boy (maybe 2 ½ years old), whom he grabbed, tried to carry on his shoulders, dropped and just caught by the arm, picked up again and held to his chest and dropped again. The poor child was screaming in terror and the mother tried to take him away from Sebetwane; he, however, grabbed the child again and threw him in the air and caught him and tried to hold the squirming child to him while dancing; lost his grip and dropped the terrorized child from his shoulders onto the ground. Everyone was shocked and I rushed forward to intervene but J [a middle-aged Herero man] carried the boy and rushed away some fifty yards, out of S's reach, who now seemed in some kind of wild, vicious pre-trance.

Kennedy [my field assistant and interpreter] became quite apprehensive at this point and wanted us to leave. I stayed and saw S dancing more and more wildly, charging at spectators to glare at them and sing at them, and snarling at people, crouched, at times, on his fours. The child was now back with his mother who, strangely, quietly sat on the ground beside the singing women holding the child and comforting it. The poor boy kept looking at S, with big, fearful eyes, especially whenever S came near him. However, he had lost interest in the child.

Another act, which made Kennedy apprehensive and other people serious, was when he picked up some sand and threw it in one direction and then went to the spot where he had thrown it to scoop it all up in his hand. This was *moloi* [Tswana sorcery], I was told. Then he motioned J to come and sit on the ground and his dancing was now focused on J, who stared at him continuously.

During the dance there was a drunk Bushman (whom I do not know, the one in the blue overalls and green hat) who insisted on dancing, alongside S, until he was vehemently dragged away by J and given a warning that must have been severe and intimidating as he walked away sullenly and stood at one spot, about 3 yards from where Sebetwane danced, motionless, staring at S.

The dance lasted about one hour and everyone seemed relieved when it was over as, had he gone on, one wouldn't know what other violent or destructive things to expect.

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