

The state as a whiteman, the whiteman as a /'hun: personhood, recognition, and the politics of knowability in the Kalahari

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The article is dedicated to the loving memory of !A|xuni.

The Ju|'hoansi of east central Namibia sometimes refer to the state as a whiteman and to the whiteman as a /'hun (steenbok). In this article, I contextualize these naming practices by tracing the history of colonial encounters on the fringes of the Western Kalahari through a small-scale animist perspective. I then discuss what this means for the concept of 'recognition', which I treat as a two-way intersubjective process of making oneself un/knowable to others. I argue that the Ju|'hoansi have engaged in parallel processes of mis/recognition vis-à-vis their colonial Others. By failing to enter into reciprocal relations with the Ju|'hoansi, the whiteman and the state have remained outside of the Ju|'hoansi's social universe and have thus compromised their own personhood.

Rethinking colonial encounters from an animist perspective in the Kalahari

One windy early afternoon in November 2018, I was sitting in the company of four young Ju|'hoan men in the shadow of a small brick house in the resettlement farm of Skoonheid in east central Namibia.¹ The men were passing a hand-rolled cigarette as Kxao² – a tall, slim man in his mid-twenties – was recounting a recent successful hunting trip. One night, Kxao had dreamt that two fat warthogs were standing in a particular spot by a Boer farm's fence. The young man believed that the dream was sent to him by Jesus, who had taken pity on him because of his poor luck of late. The next morning, Kxao approached a friend he goes hunting with and, after discussing their chances, they convinced one another that they should go. The two men took their metal spears and ventured in the direction of the spot Kxao had seen in his dream, followed by two hunting dogs. After walking for some hours, they stopped to rest; then, just as they were lighting a cigarette, the dogs sensed something and alarmed the two hunters. The men followed the dogs to the spot Kxao had seen in his dream and there they were:

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two warthogs were waiting for them by the fence. With the help of the dogs, the hunters managed to kill one of the animals, thus confirming Kxao's conviction that Jesus was taking care of him during a difficult period in his life.

All of us had heard this story from Kxao before. Yet, in the characteristically lively manner in which many Ju|'hoansi recount past experiences, the young man was describing in detail the pace at which he had walked, the places he had passed, and the things he had seen, heard, and sensed. The remaining men, all relatives, attentively followed his gestures and expressions, occasionally interrupting with clarifying questions or comments on the dramatized story that was unfolding in front of them. Suddenly, we were startled by the arrival of a white *bakkie*³ amidst a cloud of fine sand and dust. The vehicle parked on the clearing under a big tree that served as a communal meeting point, some 50 metres away from us, and two well-dressed government officials from the Ministry of Land Reform stepped out of it. In minutes, a small crowd gathered around them, with everyone talking and trying to get the attention of the important men. As we were looking in the direction of the small crowd, trying to discern the purpose of the unexpected visit, Kxao received the cigarette from one of his friends, took a long, deep inhale and, with a dismissive gesture, said: 'Look at these Ju|'hoansi! The whiteman (*/hun*) has come and they have started to complain about each other.' The remaining young men agreed (*e-he*) and, not before long, they were back to their story.

/Hun is a Ju|'hoan word meaning 'steenbok': a small antelope species not much valued by the Ju|'hoansi for its meat or wit. It has also come to mean 'whiteman': a species not particularly smart or useful from a Ju|'hoan perspective either, yet a species that has grown to dominate the lived experience of everyone in the region. In the above episode, as well as in a few other similar episodes which I have witnessed over the past fourteen years carrying out ethnographic work among the Ju|'hoansi, my companions referred to the black government officials as a whiteman.

My aim with this article is to theorize the ethnography of the Ju|'hoansi's colonial encounters on the fringes of the western Kalahari in east central Namibia. In my analysis, I make use of several themes that have emerged in the literature on (post-)foragers and their encounters with colonial/state systems. I consider the Ju|'hoansi's relationship to the surrounding physical, social, and political environment and its personified subjects through a small-scale animist perspective. I then discuss the political dimensions of this ontological position through the concept of recognition.

Engaging with the state from a small-scale perspective

Globally, the colonial whiteman has taken different shapes and meanings: from an aspiring symbol of progress and development (Jacka 2007), to an immoral and repulsive Other (Basso 1988; Nyamnjoh and Page 2002), and anything in-between (Bashkow 2000; 2006). In uncertain environments rife with social and environmental degradation, the whiteman has embodied malevolent spirits and monsters (Bubandt 2019; Glaskin 2018). And in some contexts, he has personified the state (Clark 1997). Following Anderson (1991), Clark writes that the Huli of the Highlands of Papua New Guinea 'imagine' the state as a 'big man', who is morally bound by kinship and egalitarian relations with his followers. Corruption and greed turn the state into a 'white man' (1997: 80-2). For Clark, the Huli's imagining the state is a step towards imagining the nation, and their own place in it.

Zooming in on the Namibian context, based on ethnographic work with Himba, Herero, and Owambo people in the northern part of the country, Friedman (2011) adds to the literature on state-related imagination by situating citizens and state in a dialectical relationship upheld by the process of imagining each other through the prism of paternalism. Citizens on the northern margins of the Namibian state, Friedman asserts, relate to the state through the recursive imagining of kinship-derived metaphors, with all the obligations and drawbacks that arise from this.

As Strauss observes, the talk of 'imaginaries' has dominated the social science field to the extent that it has become 'culture or cultural knowledge in new clothes' (2006: 322). Yet social or political imagination is often theorized on a grand and often abstract level in a manner that disregards the relevance of size or the type of social or political organization and the ontological rationale behind it. For Taylor, for example, social imaginaries are large-scale structures, which extend 'beyond the immediate background' rooted in practice (2002: 107, cited in Strauss 2006: 333). In similar terms, Anderson (1991) asserts that modern nations rest on their members' ability to imagine themselves as part of a community, which, despite being limited, is still beyond an individual's reach.

As I will elaborate below, kinship-based relatedness between the Namibian state and its citizens from the margins, as described by Friedman (2011), does not hold up to scrutiny from a Ju|'hoan perspective. Furthermore, and more crucial for my argument here, the Ju|'hoansi's reference to the state as a whiteman is not an act of imagination, as suggested by Clark (1997) for the Huli. By this I do not mean that the Ju|'hoansi cannot imagine the Namibian state and their role as citizens in it. They can; however, their 'ontological priority' (Jackson 1998) lies elsewhere. As Bird-David (2017a; 2017b) poignantly remarks, most of the scholarship with tiny-scale societies has been carried out from a scale-blind perspective, which has resulted in such societies being creatively cast as naturally belonging to larger social and political units, such as nations or ethnic groups. Yet, as Bird-David (2017a) reminds us, the forager world is a world of relatives. From a forager perspective, an individual's social universe seldom exceeds the active relations with other human and nonhuman persons with whom one engages on a personal day-to-day-level. In other words, forager societies are predicated upon 'knowability', and not upon imagination. I will return to this point shortly.

The ontological turn and the Kalahari

The field of San studies has undergone a dramatic development over the course of the past six decades. Research has expanded from 'counting calories' and 'defining categories' (Guenther 2007: 371) to exploring San groups' dependency on and resistance to colonial and state systems (Lee 2005; Suzman 2000; Widlok 1999), as well as various groups' engagement with local and global sociopolitical movements (Bieseke & Hitchcock 2011; Saugestad 2001). Yet, as Guenther (2017) remarks, the 'ontological turn' (Descola 2013; Viveiros de Castro 2014) that has pervaded forager scholarship of late has remained underexplored with regard to southern African (post-)foragers, despite existing ethnographic and archaeological data that point to its utility in this context (see Bieseke 1993; Dowson 2007; Guenther 2015; 2019).

The 'ontological turn' in anthropology emerged as a critique of the old animist model which, in simple terms, depicted animist societies as attributing spirit-like properties to phenomena from the natural world. Rooted in a more processual understanding of interspecies engagement (Ingold 2000), scholars writing within the new animist

paradigm have acknowledged the pluralism of ontological perspectives and forms of intimacy, care, predation, and reciprocity that various human and other-than-human persons partake in (Bird-David 1999; Descola 2013; 2014; Viveiros de Castro 2014). Despite the seemingly infinite capacity of animals, spirits, phenomena, and objects to act as intersubjective persons vis-à-vis one another, authors have also acknowledged that while some entities are animate, others are not (see Descola 2013; Ingold 2000; Willerslev 2007). Pedersen, for example, explains this rupture by comparing the sociality of personhood to Swiss cheese. Nested within the social are multiple asocial holes occupied by non-persons 'that have no mutual animistic relations, because they do not share any common social ground' (Pedersen 2001: 415-16). Expanding on the notion of a 'common social ground', Pedersen continues:

If people cannot perceive themselves potentially being in the shoes of others, if people cannot imagine themselves as Others (whether human or nonhuman) and Others as themselves, then the very basis for animism is likely to break down because its ontological principle depends on an unbounded potential for identification (2001: 416).

What allows different persons to get into each other's shoes? The potential for (and existential danger of) corporeal transformations (Viveiros de Castro 1998; Willerslev 2007), the capacity to extend kinship (Bird-David 2017a), or to extend the self through practices of food sharing (Widlok 2019) and interspecies sharing of space, respect, and affection (Bird-David 1992) are common characteristics of this phenomenon. A unifying thread of these intimations is that they are predicated upon active participation, which is experiential in nature and which leads to intimate first-hand knowability between human and nonhuman persons that share a common sociality (Ingold 2000).

Despite the new animist model's welcomed departure from relativism, and its positive impact of taking others' worlds seriously (Viveiros de Castro 2011; Willerslev 2007), it has also drawn critique. Most notably, Erazo and Jarrett (2017) have argued that emphasis on ontological alterity risks homogenizing indigenous populations and reiterates the primitive-modern divide. Furthermore, for the most part, ontologists have disregarded the impact of sociopolitical context and historical change, which has marked contemporary animist societies globally (Erazo & Jarrett 2017; see also Kohn 2015; Pedersen 2001). Animist societies are also political societies and as such they have engaged with their (precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial) political environments through the same ontological lens with which they have approached any other encounter in the multiple environments in which their lives unfold. Colonization and encapsulation in states, as well as incorporation into the global economy, has engendered the animist experience on a global scale. Therefore, we should be concerned with turning animist thinking towards the field of colonial and state encounters on both theoretical and empirical levels. This article is an attempt to do just that.

Animist relationality as political agency

For the purposes of bridging animist ontology and the political, I use the concept of 'recognition'. The concept provides a useful framework for the analysis of social and political encounters in diverse contexts characterized by structural injustice and inequality. This speaks to the Ju|'hoansi's historical sociopolitical marginalization and the reluctance of the state to recognize them on their own terms, as I will elaborate below. Furthermore, with its emphasis on self-actualization that can only be achieved

intersubjectively (Taylor 1992), the concept presupposes a dialectical understanding of the individual or the group, which fits with the relational nature of the animist ontology. A useful working definition of 'recognition' that serves the purposes of my argument comes from Povinelli's reading of Kojève (1980), who states that 'the desire for recognition is what differentiates human and non-human animals'. This desire is predicated upon the existence of a 'double emptiness': that is, social subjects not only desire others; they desire to be seen and known by others; 'to be the object of another's desire' (Povinelli 2012). From this standpoint, recognition is an intersubjective act in which competing powers participate in parallel processes of making themselves (un)knowable and (un)desirable to one another. In a Hegelian sense, recognition (*Anerkennung*) differentiates between spirit (*Geist*) and nature (Williams 1997). In a Cartesian framework, this differentiation is understood as one between humans and animals/objects. From an animist perspective, however, this distinction opens up possibilities for the exploration of social personhood, not necessarily from a dualist perspective (persons versus non-persons) but from a processual perspective with emphasis on intersubjective engagement and persons' active role in granting personhood to or withholding personhood from others. For the Ju|'hoansi, I argue, recognition not only constitutes a 'vital human need' (Taylor 1992: 26); it also demarcates the boundaries of personhood itself.

My argument is simple. The colonial Others' inability (or unwillingness) to establish a common social ground with the Ju|'hoansi, their lack of desire to know and be known by the Ju|'hoansi, as well as the asymmetric nature of the relationship, have pushed the Ju|'hoansi to constitute the colonial whiteman and the state beyond the boundaries (or – to use Pedersen's [2001] metaphor – in the holes) of their social universe. As I hope to convince the reader with the remainder of this article, the Ju|'hoansi referring to the state as a whiteman, and to the whiteman as a /'hun, is, in cosmological terms, an act of depersonification, and, in political terms, an act of misrecognition.

The exploration of the political valency of animist relationality can expand anthropological thinking about the meeting between colonial and animist (inter)subjects by constituting the latter as contemporary political agents who make sense of and act upon the encroaching world from their ontological perspective. Ultimately, this line of thinking should make space for discussions about historical and social change and political engagement within the field of ontological anthropology both in the Kalahari and beyond.

In what follows, I outline the historical trajectory of white and state paternalism from colonial to post-independence times with sociohistorical material detailing the Ju|'hoansi's land dispossession, subjugation, and incorporation into the colonial and democratic state. Afterwards, I explore the Ju|'hoansi's relational ontology and the personhood of the steenbok within it. Finally, I discuss what this ontological position means for their ongoing engagement with the encompassing state.

The whiteman as the state

White settlement and land dispossession

Prior to white settlement, the fringes of the western Kalahari were home to scattered Khoisan and Bantu groups. Though there is little evidence about the nature of the interactions between different groups, records suggest various forms of co-operation and competition depending on a number of dynamic environmental and social factors (Gewald 1999; Guenther 1999; Lindholm 2006; Suzman 1995; 2000). White settlement,

starting with German encroachment at the end of nineteenth century, marked the beginning of the most dramatic reshaping of the region's sociopolitical, ethnic, and physical landscape in recent history. White settlement intensified after Namibia fell under the mandate of South Africa after the First World War. Between 1920 and 1930, impoverished farmers from South Africa established hundreds of cattle farms in the western Kalahari (Van Rooyen & Reiner 1995). By the 1950s, the main groups shaping the contemporary Omaheke's heterogeneous ethnic profile (Afrikaner, Damara, San, and Herero) were already in place (Sylvain 1999).⁴

Apartheid racial segregation was enforced through various measures, the legacy of which continues to organize hierarchies of power and oppression in post-apartheid Namibia. Land dispossession has had some of the most lasting negative impacts. Starting in 1914, the colonial administration set aside portions of land for 'native reserves' (later 'communal areas') for the major pastoralist Bantu groups in east central Namibia: the Herero/Mbanderu and the Tswana. Already under German rule, the colonial administration drew a line between 'Eingeborenen' (Bantu natives) and 'Buschleute' (Bushmen) and adopted policies and coercion measures based on this distinction (Gordon & Sholto Douglas 2000: 52). Under the land allocation policy, no land was set aside for any of the nomadic San groups inhabiting the region. This was partially guided by the thinking that the San had access to land above the police zone in northern Namibia and that the creation of more 'Bushman reserves' would attract stock thieves, lead to overhunting, or impede the 'Bushmen's' development through labour (Gordon 2009: 43). In the Omaheke, the policy resulted in the Ju|'hoansi's estrangement on either white farms or Bantu native reserves, where men became bonded manual labourers. The remaining Ju|'hoansi were pushed into the unoccupied corridors between the farms and the native reserves. As early as 1920, the 'Masters and Servants Proclamation' allowed white farmers to track and capture workers who left their workplace without permission. By the 1970s, the 'free' corridors between white farms and communal areas were declared state property, thus prohibiting any 'illegal' occupation. With this, the Ju|'hoansi lost access to some of the last tracts of land where they could freely pursue traditional subsistence without encroaching on others' land and risking persecution (Suzman 2000).

Baasskap as a form of 'farm government'

The institution that dominated the everyday lives of the Ju|'hoansi, however, was not the colonial government. Instead, it was *baasskap*. Defined as 'unabashed white racial dominance' (Miller 2016: xv), in the western Kalahari, *baasskap* took the form of the male farm owner's paternalistic control over his female and minor dependants and workers. Farm owners rationalized *baasskap* as having their workers' long-term interests in mind, which their dependants could not comprehend themselves. In practical terms, the institution included practices for the moral betterment of and care towards the governed, as well as various forms of coercion, 'ranging from withholding specific liberal freedoms to physical violence' (Gibbon, Daviron & Barral 2014: 172). As powerful as it appears, the institution took time to develop and replace the looser interdependence which secured certain socioeconomic benefits for both parties in the early years of white settlement in the inhospitable region (Guenther 2014; Russell & Russell 1979). Russell and Russell (1979) describe the early relationships between Boer and 'Bushmen' on the Botswanan side of the border as characterized by a certain 'knowing' that had grown out of people's close physical proximity and coexistence in

the harsh Kalahari environment. This type of knowing, however, must not be mistaken for the intersubjective animist knowing discussed at the beginning of the article. If anything, this knowing occurred across a 'rigidly defined, racially cast, social boundary', which the Boer strived to maintain from the start (Guenther 2014: 150).

With the consolidation of farm production, reliance on the cash economy, and increased need for dependable farm labour, the Boer on the Namibian (then South West African) side of the border reinforced their dominance by turning their farms into total institutions, not without the support of the colonial administration (Suzman 2000: 32). The *oubase*⁵ of these 'farm government[s]' had full control over their dependants and attempted to regulate every aspect of their workers' lives: from naming practices to gender roles, social organization, beliefs, and freedom of movement (Sylvain 2001: 728). Just as the bushveld needed to be tamed and turned into profitable land, so its inhabitants had to be brought under control, civilized, and made proper use of (Suzman 2000).

The state as a whiteman

Independence and land reform

At the time of Namibian independence from South Africa in 1990, 52 per cent of the land suited for farming was under freehold title (white commercial farms). The government embarked on a massive democratization process, most notably through comprehensive land and educational reforms (Government of the Republic of Namibia 1991). The principles that underpinned the land reform included expansion of the (black) communal areas, purchase of farms for allocation to communal area farmers, settlement of small-scale farmers on previous commercial farmland, and land acquisition based on a 'willing buyer, willing seller' principle (Ministry of Lands, Resettlement and Rehabilitation 1997; 2001).

In the Omaheke, the uncertainty of the early years after independence resulted in some farmers selling off their land and leaving the country. Many others dismissed or diminished the number of their workers. With no land to go to, many Ju|'hoan generational farmworkers set up squatter camps along the roads (Suzman 2000). As a result of these disruptions, the Ju|'hoansi became the largest beneficiary group for land resettlement under the land redistribution reform in the Omaheke. The programme included resettlement of landless people on government-owned land and training in various farming and production activities with the objective of turning them into independent small-scale subsistence farmers and producers. More than thirty years after independence, this goal has not been achieved and the majority of beneficiaries in the Omaheke are largely unemployed, unable to subsist on small-scale farming alone, and heavily dependent on the government for their survival (see Ninkova 2017).

Life as post-foragers

Scoonheid resettlement farm, where Kxao resides with his extended family, is one of the earliest and biggest resettlement projects in the Omaheke with about 280 inhabitants. In it, the Ju|'hoansi are the largest group, followed by a Damara community and several Owambo, Kavango, and Herero households (Dirkx & Alweendo 2012). Life in the settlement is characterized by tension and minimal co-operation between the Ju|'hoan and the Damara communities, and between the unrelated extended Ju|'hoan families. By contrast, relations between members of extended Ju|'hoan families in and beyond Scoonheid are marked by complex sharing and exchange support networks, facilitated

by intricate visiting patterns. An individual's social, economic, and psychological day-to-day well-being is, therefore, mostly determined by the size, resourcefulness, and viability of their kin network.

Over the years, several initiatives have attempted to introduce cattle in Skoonheid. However, overgrazing, drought, lack of veterinary help, and general lack of long-term commitment keep compromising the endeavour. The settlement has an irrigation garden and a seasonal plot. While individual households occasionally manage to procure little produce from them, drought, conflicts between community members, lack of equipment, and failure of existing equipment can sometimes ruin a full season of labour. The land base in and around the settlement is inadequately small and easily depleted. The gathering of *veldkos*,⁶ while readily practised by many (mostly women), is not sustainable in itself. Hunting is prohibited by law. Though some Ju'hoan men do hunt, the amount of wildlife in the area is reportedly limited and the practice puts them at risk of prosecution both by the government and by farmers, on whose land they often trespass. The most reliable access to cash comes from state welfare in the form of older people's pensions and child and orphans' aid. Residents of the settlement are not cut from the commercial farming block either and many families have kinfolk working on farms. Reports on farm labour after independence have indicated that while conditions have improved for the better, farm jobs have also become scarcer and more unreliable (Dieckmann *et al.* 2014; Sylvain 2001). With manual labour being the only secure salary source, many in Skoonheid aspire to get jobs on white farms. However, those who succeed are few. After a long period of living in Skoonheid, Kxao's father, an industrious man in his late forties, managed to find a 'good' farm job in 2017, only to lose it a year after because of conflicts with other workers. He has since found another similar job; however, reportedly the conditions were not as good, and he was receiving a lower wage than his Bantu co-workers. Kxao, on the other hand, similarly to other young men in the settlement, has struggled to find a permanent farm placement. Neither was he certain if he wanted one in the first place. With a completed grade 7, he has been sporadically hired for a month or two to erect a fence, clear the bush, dance in front of tourists, or perform some other unskilled labour, only to be easily dismissed if he misbehaved or when the task was completed. He rationalized his involvement with hunting as an alternative for securing food and some cash by selling meat: 'I was just sitting here, and I thought to myself: "Let me try and do something with my life".'

The literature on the nomadic Ju'hoansi describes them as 'fiercely egalitarian' (Lee 1979: 24), and while egalitarianism has been challenged by events that have disrupted Ju'hoan life over the past century, including land loss, dependency on the regional economy, and increasing unequal access to resources, the Ju'hoansi living in Skoonheid continue to conform to egalitarian principles in many aspects of their lives. Vocal community members who speak for others or make decisions on behalf of others quickly turn unpopular. Boasting (not only in terms of material goods, but also in terms of good fortune) is also socially ostracized (see Ninkova 2017). When Kxao describes his hunting experiences, he often stresses the importance of staying humble prior to the hunt itself and working in close co-operation with the remaining hunters. When recounting the details of the warthog hunt described at the beginning, he explained that when they had seen the animals, the two men were walking in a line, one after the other with their spear heads pointing backwards for faster use.⁷ Had the first hunter missed the animal, the second should have suppressed his desire for killing the animal

himself and should have passed his spear to the first hunter in order to increase the party's collective chance of success. In this case, the warthog was speared by Kxao and divided equally between the two men. When asked what he had done with his part, Kxao reported that he had given away most of it to relatives and he had sold some of it. He also shared some of it with people who had insisted they get meat despite his initial reluctance to share with them. Their positive thoughts would bring him good luck in future hunting trips, he hoped.

The Ju|'hoansi's egalitarianism is also accompanied by an equally fierce sense of autonomy. Social harmony is explained as a situation in which 'no one tells you what to do', and both adults and children try to avoid being dictated to at all costs. In the words of a young man: 'Happiness is when no one is forcing you to do things you don't want to do, and when you are not having conversations that might lead to arguments.'

A sense of being colonized

The visible and invisible presence of the Namibian state in Skoonheid is overwhelming and life in the settlement unfolds under its scrutinizing gaze. Since Skoonheid was acquired from a Boer farmer (from where it has also inherited its name), the farmer's house still stands erect at the centre of the settlement and is used by the Ministry of Land Reform (MLR) as its headquarters. The settlement has an MLR-appointed manager, who oversees the working of the farm. The Ministry of Gender Equality and Child Welfare runs a kindergarten project. Furthermore, the Ministry of Education visits to promote various education and literacy programmes, and the Office of the Prime Minister runs a drought relief food programme. The state works with several local and international NGOs which run training workshops or provide medical care and other assistance on a sporadic basis. The closest clinic and police facilities are some 20-5 kilometres away; however, the police make random visits to the settlement in order to control the production and consumption of alcohol, or when called to settle violent confrontations. The Ju|'hoansi compete with (and often lose to) Damara members for participation in committees that manage different activities such as irrigation, preschool education, and so on. The organization of the resettlement project leaves little room for the Ju|'hoansi to voice their concerns, let alone determine the direction of their development.

Since the 1990s, southern African San groups have established grassroot civil organizations and claimed indigenous status collectively and separately (see Bieseke & Hitchcock 2011; Maruyama 2018; Saugestad 2001). In line with its post-apartheid nation-building ideology, the Namibian state does not recognize the San as an indigenous people in the international meaning of the term and instead refers to them as 'marginalized communities'. In various settings, Ju|'hoansi have referred to their current situation as 'colonialism'. For example, shortly after Skoonheid's establishment in 1994, the outer waterholes were taken over by Herero pastoralists with cattle. The Skoonheid community has repeatedly asked the government to address the issue through various channels. The government has largely dismissed these demands as unfounded (see, e.g., Desert Research Foundation of Namibia 2009). In 2013, an active community member answered my inquiry about the situation with the Herero cattle herders in the following manner: 'We live in independent Namibia but the conditions of the Ju|'hoansi have not changed. Everyone who looks at our situation will tell you that we are still colonized'. At a more recent workshop for the improvement of the conditions of resettlement farms, Chief Langman, the head of the Traditional Authority for the Omaheke Ju|'hoansi, who

also resides in Skoonheid, publicly addressed the use of the term ‘marginalized’ by saying:

I have swallowed enough of these glowing coals, and want to get rid of what is in my heart because it burns me. Stop using this term ... We still believe we are the rightful inhabitants of this country. If they [other tribes] think we are from another country, send us back (Xoagub 2019).

The sense of being colonized is most often articulated as ‘being under’, ‘being ordered what to do’, or ‘not being seen as humans’, and occurs in casual or formal encounters the Ju|’hoansi have with the state and its institutions in and out of Skoonheid. In Skoonheid, the Ju|’hoansi’s sense of autonomy is severely curbed by the experience of being constantly managed and publicly chastised when not meeting the state’s objectives or when refusing to co-operate with others. Community members withdrawing from communal activities or decision-making for uncertain periods is a common occurrence, which the state interprets as laziness, unwillingness on the Ju|’hoansi’s part to co-operate, or lack of understanding of the benefits of development.

The whiteman as a /’hun

Development, Jesus, and other spirits

The Ju|’hoansi in Skoonheid, particularly the younger generation, often use the term ‘development’ in reference to the changes that have occurred in their lives over the past several decades. Development, however, is not directly linked to the state and its dealings in the settlement. It is more directly associated with tangible changes in people’s livelihoods, such as ‘living in houses’, ‘water taps’, and ‘electricity.’ Development, particularly in the form of electric light, has diminished the power of some malevolent spirits, mostly those abiding in the bush or associated with certain wild plants or animals:

Man: The aardvark has its own special powers. When you are walking back from the bush with aardvark meat, you should always walk with things [trees, other natural formations] on your left side. If you walk with things on your right side, you will only make circles in the bush, and you will not find your way home. When you are at home with the meat, you shouldn’t say bad things about it because it will not taste nice, and because the spirit chaser (*Iho !xoe*) of the aardvark will come after you.

VN: Has anyone you know been chased by an aardvark spirit chaser?

Man: Now that we have development, such things don’t happen that often (conversation with a Ju|’hoan man, Skoonheid, August 2013)

VN: Tell me more about the aardvark.

Kxao: I don’t want to talk about it.

VN: Why not?

Kxao: Because I am afraid of it.

VN: Isn’t it dangerous only when you are careless or disrespectful towards it?

Kxao: Yes, but sometimes it doesn’t even want to hear its name.

VN: Tell me about its hands again.

Kxao: Its hands look like human hands. And we should never make fun of them. This makes its spirit angry and it can be very dangerous.

VN: Is it dangerous for me as well?

Kxao: I don’t know. But for me it is dangerous (conversation with Kxao, Skoonheid, November 2018).

One of the easiest available *veldkos* to the Ju|’hoansi of Skoonheid is the marama bean (*Tylosema esculentum*). The plant is found in and around the settlement, and people mostly use its nuts (*dshin*), although its tubers (*n//hin*) are also edible. Some also let it grow in their communal garden plots despite it being considered a weed by the governmental and NGO workers who facilitate the farming trainings. Reportedly, one

must treat the nuts and tubers with care, not handle them roughly, throw them around, or leave them to rot, because the plant's spirit might come after those who mishandle it. However, the fear of spirits associated with plants is smaller than the fear of animal spirits. This might be partly related to the fact that meat is a much scarcer and more valued resource than *veldkos* and people are less inclined to risk their relationship with animals and their associated spirits than with plants.

Young people have reported that with electricity in the settlement, bad spirits do not appear in dreams as often as they had heard from elders that they have appeared in the past. Christianity and Jesus have also diminished the power of some spirits, particularly those associated with the dead. //*Gangwasi* are spirits of the deceased, who, driven by jealousy for the living, may cause sickness and – in some cases – death. Children are particularly vulnerable, and as a precaution, they are usually excluded from attending funerals, especially of other children. People have reported that the //*gangwasis*' power has considerably diminished now that they have Jesus.

In the Omaheke, there have not been any big or particularly successful Christianization missions with respect to the Ju|'hoansi. The influence of the Catholic, Lutheran, and Dutch Reformed churches has remained minimal, and the Ju|'hoansi's exposure to Christianity has mostly occurred on white farms (Suzman 2000). In more recent years, black evangelical churches have dominated the religious space in the region, and affiliation to different evangelical churches has increased the fractures in the larger Skoonheid community. Many Ju|'hoansi have a practical approach to 'Jesus', whom they conflate with 'God', and who is mostly understood as a benevolent entity that gives or withholds luck. Skoonheid men who engage in hunting hold beliefs that comfortably mix Jesus with 'old-times' beliefs. For example, before a hunting trip, hunters would pray to Jesus for luck, but they would also observe traditional practices that aim to enhance one's luck, such as abstinence from sexual intercourse, distance from menstrual and sexual fluids and breastmilk, or the smearing of fat on different parts of the body. Since Kxao attributed his warthog hunting success to Jesus, he recalled that afterwards he thanked Jesus 'silently in my heart.'

People also believe that Jesus would not let them struggle for long periods (both physically and emotionally), and those who have encountered difficulties in their lives often expected Jesus to intervene and turn their fate for the better. Kxao loved walking great distances on foot, and everything he found on the ground, from coins to matchboxes, was greatly appreciated and interpreted as Jesus' love for him. Other men and women reported similar stories of surprise encounters on the road or in the bush as mostly intended by Jesus to make them feel good. Therefore, despite being exposed to Christianity and in spite of losing 'traditional' practices and knowledge (most notably healing trance dancing), the Omaheke Ju|'hoansi's world is still inhabited by a number of other-than-human persons that interact with humans and that impact people's lives.

Hunted animals as persons

The most comprehensive ethnographic records of the Ju|'hoansi's cosmology come from northwestern Botswana and northeastern Namibia (Biesele 1993; Katz 1982; Lee 2013; Marshall 1976). Among other themes, Biesele's (1993) work on story-telling introduces us to the First Order, when the ontological boundaries between humans, animals, spirits, and objects were not yet fixed. Different persons occupied a morally fluid space and often transgressed taboos and social norms, thus forming a social continuum and extending kin and other relations to one another. In the Omaheke,

the Ju|'hoansi's oral repertoire is characterized by these same themes, and stories often include a mischievous trickster figure and/or a number of human and other-than-human persons that shift shapes and act upon the surrounding world and its creatures (see also Suzman 2000). In the western Kalahari, personhood is a complex and ambiguous phenomenon which extends to some other-than-human species and not to others. It can be characterized by the presence of different attributes, some of which may include gender, human-like culture, or perception of self, as well as the ability to transform from one species into another, or to establish various types of relations across different persons' species.

In order to contextualize the status of the steenbok's personhood, here I will focus on the personhood of hunted animals. An important group of personified hunted animals have *!nao*. Biesele defines *!nao* as 'a complex of ideas relating i) men, the great animals they hunt, and the weather, and ii) women, the children they bear, and the weather' (1993: 106). In the Omaheke, it is predominantly people from Kxao's parents' and grandparents' generation who have expressed opinions about *!nao*. Kxao has reported that all he knows about *!nao* comes from hearsay and he has not experienced or witnessed it personally. Other young men and women have related similar views, and some have never heard of it. *!Nao* reportedly occurs both in humans and in big hunted animals. Since the hunting of big animals is almost completely absent in the Omaheke, most people associate *!nao* with the weather conditions at the time of a person's birth or death. Good, warm weather is perceived as evidence of good *!nao*, whereas windy or cold weather is associated with a negative manifestation of *!nao*. People cannot commit to conclusions about its origin or exact purpose, other than that it serves to 'inform people', and that 'it is good to know', or 'it is important to know', this information about a person. Similar to other reports (see Biesele 1993; Marshall 1957), people in the Omaheke use their *!nao* to influence the weather. During a long dry period in 2013, a young woman reported that her aunt burnt human hair, animal skin, salt, and bones to bring rain. When I asked her if she had the same abilities, she answered that she could only bring wind and cold weather because 'I was born like this'.

The eland, the kudu, and the gemsbok are the most often-cited *!nao* animals in the Omaheke. When describing the hunting of these antelope species, hunters also report of tapping sensations they may feel with the back of their necks and upper bodies as a way of knowing about the hunted animal: how big it is, whether it has horns and how big they are, in which direction it is moving, and so on. Another role of these tapping sensations is to alert hunters to the presence of predators in the bush. The phenomenon is also extended to the 'developed' world, where it is described as a sensation of upcoming danger, including danger coming from other people. One man compared it to 'the feeling you have when someone is observing you – you know with the back of your body even when you are not able to see them'. Tappings are a pan-San phenomenon related to the somatic manifestations of animal physiological characteristics, moods, and intentions (Guenther 2019), which have been variously described as shivers or tickles (Suzman 2017), sensations in different parts of the body accompanied by increased heartbeat (Keeney & Keeney 2015), or premonitions that alert a hunter about the characteristics of an approaching animal (Bleek & Lloyd 1911). When hunting a *!nao* animal, the hunter may further enter a state in which he establishes a 'sympathetic identification' with the animal and the hunter's actions can impact the behaviour of the prey (Biesele 1993: 90). The somatic experiencing of animals constitutes an important aspect of the knowing of animals as persons – a

phenomenon Guenther has referred to as ‘a partial or incremental ontological merging of hunter and antelope’ (2015: 297) and has linked to another crucial aspect of animist cosmology: that of bodily metamorphosis (Guenther 2017; 2019).

Biesele (1993) establishes a connection between *Inao* and the *kxani* and //xui relationship between people and animals. She translates the two verbs as a ‘lucky’ or ‘unlucky’ relationship between people and animals, which influence a hunter’s success in the bush and the impact on the weather at the time of an animal’s death (Biesele 1993: 106-7). In the Omaheke, the terms used to describe this relationship are *kxanu* and //oe, and people translate them as ‘love’ and ‘lack of love’ or ‘fit’ and ‘does not fit’, respectively. For example, if a hunter is *kxanu*-ed by the eland, this will be considered a lucky animal for the hunter and he will generally be successful when hunting it. By contrast, as one man reported: ‘If an animal //oe-s you, you cannot even see it in the bush.’

This relationship, however, extends beyond the relationship between humans and animals, and includes spirits, food, places, people, and other ‘things’ people come in contact with. Most of these relationships are innate and people learn about them through experience. For example, if the spirit associated with the aardvark //oe-s a particular hunter and he disrespects the killed animal, the spirit’s retribution will be harsher compared to a hunter *kxanu*-ed by this particular spirit. With regard to places, it usually refers to the general weather, an individual’s sense of direction, and a ‘feeling’ about the place. With people, it refers to compatibility between personalities. However, people have downplayed its importance and have reported that such differences can be mitigated over time. As for objects, one of the most peculiar examples I came across was when an elderly woman asked me to buy Vaseline for her and requested any other colour but pink because she //oe-d it.

Within this animated environment where humans, animals, plants, spirits, and ‘things’ cross each other’s paths regularly and engage in multiple relations, the steenbok belongs to a group of strangely inanimate species. These insignificant species are regarded as undesirable food sources; they do not have *Inao* and people do not know if they could or do indeed *kxanu* or //oe them. Once when I was driving on a narrow sandy road in the bush, a steenbok jumped right next to my car’s left bumper. I did not stop the car as the sand was too deep and I was afraid that the tyres would sink, so I kept driving at a high speed. Trapped between the car and the thick vegetation on its left, the little antelope kept running alongside the car for several hundred metres before an opening appeared and it jumped from sight. When I told the story to one of the old hunters in Skoonheid, he laughed and said that he was not surprised at all, as the steenbok was an animal that would do such a stupid thing. Before this event, I had had another antelope episode on the road. That time, a big kudu bull jumped onto the road and froze a mere metre away from the car. I stopped the engine, and we spent several seconds (which felt like hours) staring into each other’s eyes before it disappeared as suddenly as it had appeared. When I told the story in Skoonheid, people agreed that the kudu *kxanu*-ed me. When I reminded the old hunter to whom I was relating my experience with the steenbok of my kudu encounter and their interpretation of it, he remarked that there was nothing similar between the two events, and while it was important for me to know that I was on good terms with the kudu, this kind of information was irrelevant in regard to the steenbok. In a world of many significant others, the steenbok does not seem to merit much respect or recognition.

Apart from the fact that it could not engage in intersubjective relations with people, as a food source, the steenbok is also undervalued and often described as not having

much meat, or as not having any fat, which people like to eat. When asked why white people are referred to as /'hun, most Ju|'hoansi would not engage with an explanation and some would say that the old people who had coined the term knew why they had done so or that they must have had a reason to do it. Other groups are also given alternative names, which people explain as a way of avoiding angering others by using their self-ascribed names. Thus, the Damara are referred to as *G!audaama*, the Herero as *Tamah*, the Tswana as *‡Abe*, and the Owambo as */Abi*. The associations between these names and the 'original' meanings of the words are more difficult to establish, however. *‡Abe*, for example, also stands for 'panties' or 'loincloth', whereas *tamah* is the word for the 'tsamma melon' – a plant species which the Ju|'hoansi still use as a food source and as a prop in dances and games. However, while people would often point out the steenbok–whiteman connection when asked about the meaning of the word /'hun, the Herero-melon association, for example, is not as easily established, and even when I point it out to people, some would not always agree with my interpretation.

The Ju|'hoan word for 'state' or 'country' is *n!ore*, which was originally used to denote the traditional territory over which a band held stewardship rights (Biesele & Hitchcock 2011). The *n!ore* system was completely broken by the loss of land in the Omaheke, and the people who remember their families' 'traditional' *n!oresi* (pl.) are few. For some, *n!ore* is the place where they were born or have spent most of their lives – usually a white farm. Many in Skoonheid consider the resettlement farm as their *n!ore*. Thus, presently the word *n!ore* denotes a delineated piece of land with which an individual has had some personal connection (see also Suzman 2000). The Ju|'hoan term for 'government official' is *‡xanu kxao* (lit. 'owner/master of book/document'). The Namibian state as a political institution is more closely associated with the government officials with whom people interact regularly than with the territory itself or with the notion of common citizenship that they share with other fellow Namibians. When the Ju|'hoansi refer to government officials as /'hun, they comment on the unequal relation between themselves and the state, and on the perceived ruthlessness, greediness, and stinginess of the state, which they commonly associate with white people. By naming the whiteman a steenbok, the Ju|'hoansi have employed their animist logic to relegate the colonial whiteman to the sphere of nonpersons with whom they cannot establish a common social ground.

Conclusion

The organization of labour in southern Africa has been described in terms of belonging and personhood, with workers seeking and receiving a sense of social belonging through quasi-kinship relations under the paternalistic institutions governing their lives (Ferguson 2013). Along similar lines, Friedman (2011) has argued that marginal communities derive a sense of belonging to the Namibian state through their dependency on the (imagined) paternalistic state. This model, while justifiable from a top-down perspective, makes little sense from a Ju|'hoan standpoint. The Ju|'hoansi are embedded in many fields of relations. However, it is the reciprocal and not the unidirectional relations that demarcate their social universe. Reciprocal relations require constant management and investment and the Ju|'hoansi play an active role in their maintenance. The Ju|'hoansi's encounters with various colonial others, on the other hand, are predicated upon an inherently unequal relation which precludes the possibility for any equal engagement. For a Ju|'hoan individual, reciprocal others usually include members of their extended family (including namesake kin), close friends with

whom they have established support networks, spirits, certain animal species, and other significant objects or phenomena. The state and its representatives, white farmers and most members of other Bantu and Khoisan groups, some wild and most domesticated animal species, and 'foreign' or unattainable objects, while important in many respects, remain outside of the Ju|'hoansi's sphere of influence. People either cannot assess their placement in their social world or firmly reject their social personhood. Therefore, while the Ju|'hoansi refer to the state as a whiteman, this practice does not constitute an act of personification. The whiteman, from a Ju|'hoan perspective, is not necessarily a person. Referring to the whiteman as a /'hun, and to the state as a whiteman, is in fact an act of depersonification.

The Namibian state and, before it, the colonial state and white farmers have historically treated the Ju|'hoansi as inferior social and, in some instances, inferior human subjects either unsuited for or undeserving of equal treatment and recognition. The mechanisms through which they have implemented this have differed over time, but the driving ideologies and the end results have been similar: the Ju|'hoansi have been systemically othered and relegated to the fringes of society. Yet through my analysis, I have attempted to show that the Ju|'hoansi have not remained passive participants in these disruptive processes. Instead, all along, they have engaged in parallel politics of (mis)recognition. By failing to engage with the Ju|'hoansi on an equal footing, the colonial forces in the western Kalahari have compromised their own humanity. This is reminiscent of Bubandt's observation that from certain ontological vantage points, the colonial others may in fact represent the 'the ultimate figure[s] of animality' (2019: 224).

Anthropological accounts of small-scale animist societies often offer analyses of animist interspecies relationality prior to or 'untouched' by sociopolitical change. For all their personal autonomy and active engagement with the surrounding environment, animists' agency seems to disappear in the face of dramatic social and political disruptions. My aim with this article has been to suggest the opposite. Discussions of sociopolitical change and animist thought can and should be done in conjunction. This may open ontological anthropology not only to a new range of explorations of inter- and multispecies relations, but also to a more seamless understanding of institutional and human relationality in the precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial world.

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NOTES

¹ The Ju|'hoansi are a group of (former) hunter-gatherers, speaking a Northern Khoisan language belonging to the Ju language family. Currently, Ju|'hoan communities reside in east central and northeastern Namibia and west central and northwestern Botswana. Together with the other (former) hunter-gatherer groups of southern Africa, they are collectively known as San. The term 'Ju|'hoansi' designates the people, and the language, whereas the term 'Ju|'hoan' is an adjective (as in 'a Ju|'hoan man'). Estimates differ but Biesele & Hitchcock (2011) report about 11,000 Ju|'hoansi living in Namibia and Botswana today.

² Not a real name.

³ Pick-up car, from Afrikaans.

⁴ Besides Ju|'hoansi, the other main San groups in the Omaheke are !Xoon and Naro. Dieckmann, Thiem, Dirx & Hays (2014) also mention a small number of 'N|oha families in the southern part of the region. The Herero are a pastoralist Bantu group. The Damara are a pastoralist Khoe people whose current socioeconomic situation is similar to that of the San.

⁵ Plural for 'oubaas', the male farm owner (lit. 'big boss'), from Afrikaans.

⁶ Edible bush plants, from Afrikaans.

⁷ If a spear is pointed forward, it may also alert wild animals of the hunter's presence in the bush.

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L'État en tant qu'homme blanc, l'homme blanc en tant que //hun : identité, reconnaissance et politique de la connaissance dans le Kalahari

Résumé

Le ju|'hoan du centre-est de la Namibie parle parfois de l'État comme d'un homme blanc et de l'homme blanc comme d'un //hun (steenbok). L'autrice contextualise ces pratiques d'appellation en retraçant l'histoire des rencontres coloniales de cette micro-société animiste aux frontières du Kalahari occidental. Elle discute ensuite de la définition du concept de « reconnaissance », processus intersubjectif bilatéral consistant à se faire connaître des autres ou non. Elle défend l'idée que les ju|'hoan ont entrepris des processus parallèles de mé/reconnaissance vis-à-vis de leurs Tiers colonisés. En ne parvenant pas à établir

des relations réciproques avec les ju|'hoan, l'homme blanc et l'État sont restés en dehors de l'univers social ju|'hoan et ont ainsi compromis leur propre identité.

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