Practical Magic: Shapeshifting as Survival Tactic
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Abstract

This article argues for a decolonising, democratic engagement with environmental knowledges formed outside the academy in the Global South. Drawing upon Bruno Latour's claim that our contemporary environmental precarity was first trialled upon colonised peoples, I argue that historically remote – and even conceptually obscure – African popular knowledges should be treated as forms of theory in their own right. Sigmund Freud's teleological account of animism – inspired by Edward Burnett Tylor – saw animism as an evolutionary stage in the development of universal reason. Refusing Freud's and Tylor's perspectives, I argue instead that indigenous animism presages the imminent crisis in global food security. In this sense, animism is an early stage in the teleology of environmental precarity. Retranslating an indigenous song, 'The Broken String', from the nineteenth century Southern African Bleek-Lloyd archive, I show that the */Xam* language engineered animist techniques and linguistic protocols for securing food and water. Specifically, */Xam* was a template for transmutation – a language that instructed polyvalent conversions between species and lifespans. These versatile changes were geared towards the community's survival of catastrophic environmental change. Faced with their own colonial disposability, the */Xam* opted to metamorphose and live on. Accordingly, the indigene's 'magical' metamorphoses were straightforward strategic gambles with life and death amid scant survival options. As forerunners of our own global moment, the */Xam* prompt us to identify 'animistically' with our object-world. I argue that */Xam*'s shapeshifting poetics might lead us to derive replenishing registers of address for our world. Furthermore, institutionalising new protocols of embodiment, as the */Xam* once did, might help us to order the urgent task of replenishing our planet, by allowing environmental political interest and global species' behaviours to iterate themselves through us.

Keywords: African knowledges, food security, animism, therianthropy, */Xam*, Dia!kwain, 'The Broken String', Wilhelm Bleek, Lucy Lloyd, Bruno Latour

Food insecurity is one of the global challenges of our moment. As the human population increases, it overburdens agricultural capacity. The industrial infrastructure required to support our species increasingly drives catastrophic climate change, turns atmospheres into 'greenhouses', deforests landscapes and monopolises finite arable land, toxifies the food chain, extinguishes wild species, and pollutes fisheries and water-courses. Where academic research rises to such global challenges, it undoubtedly has a large and important contribution to make, not least in the Global South where the impacts of global predicaments are most keenly felt. However, even as progressive research addresses these challenges through instruments such as the Sustainable Development Goals, there remain vast asymmetries in global knowledge production and research funding, and in the vested economic interests that academic research informs. For this reason, the assumptions underpinning the Global North's discourses of sustainable development are increasingly subject to critique in the Global South. Specifically, thinkers such as Elísio Macamo view the Sustainable Development Goals as part of an 'infantilisation machine of our countries'.[1] In interview, Macamo argues that the Sustainable Development Goals are operated by the political interests of the Global North, where 'international bureaucrats are not only committed to good ethical ends, but also act in the interest of the political economy that guarantees their social reproduction'('The SDGs', unpaginated). It is this same political economy – I contend – that drives ecological crisis and the asymmetries in global 'development'. Macamo claims that 'from a structural point of view, the problems we have correspond to the way the world works'('The SDGs', unpaginated). When it comes to the research base underpinning

development initiatives, Robtel Neajai Pailey has argued convincingly that 'Western whiteness remains a signifier of expertise, whether real or perceived', and that concomitantly 'development constructs the Southern "other" as having problems and needs rather than capacities to choose, make decisions or devise solutions'.[2] Avoiding constructing the Global South according to such a model of deficits, Samia Chasi insists that decolonising research 'can be used as a tool to address the imbalanced nature of North-South partnerships'.[3] Decolonising research, I would add, also requires us to engage democratically with knowledges formed outside the academy. This democratic move involves treating popular knowledges from the Global South as forms of theory in themselves. In other words, even languages once spoken by the destitute – even languages possibly dead for a century and a half – should be treated with intellectual respect and theoretical equivalence. Expressed bluntly, good ideas can come from anywhere.

There is a strong historical basis for such an approach. Bruno Latour has argued recently that we inhabit a new ecological universality of 'finding oneself *deprived of ground*'.[4] Latour elaborates that currently, 'all forms of belonging are undergoing metamorphosis – belonging to the globe, to the world, to the provinces, to particular plots of ground, to the world market, to lands or to traditions' (p16). But while this 'deprivation of ground' can be taken as shorthand for the generalised contemporary environmental crisis with which I began, Latour also insightfully points to its gradual emergence over the last four centuries. He goes so far as to suggest that the deprivation of ground was first trialled upon conquered, colonised, and later 'developing' peoples:

> It is a question of attachment, of lifestyle, that's being pulled out from under us, a question of land, of property, giving way beneath us, and this uneasiness gnaws at everyone equally, the former colonisers and the formerly colonised alike. [. . .]. What is certain is that all find themselves facing a universal lack of shareable space and inhabitable land.
>
> But where does this panic come from? From the same deep feeling of injustice felt by those who found themselves deprived of their land at the time of the conquests, then during colonisation, and finally during the era of 'development:' a power from elsewhere comes from elsewhere to deprive you of your land and you have no purchase on that power (p9).

If Latour's analysis is extended to the horizons of global development, then even the much-vaunted Sustainable Development Goals may be exacerbating the long history of 'finding oneself *deprived of ground*'. Moreover, Latour allows us to think of specific historical and provincial instances of crisis as forerunners of our current and more generalised global predicament. That is to say, the tragic, temporally remote, and often conceptually obscure responses of the colonised may be approached anew as precedents that shed light upon the now-more-systematic experience of ecological deprivation – for the very reason that the colonised experienced the 'deprivation of ground' first and in less systematic form.

Accordingly, this article moots the contemporary relevance of historical African knowledges. Specifically, I posit that a supposedly extinct nineteenth century indigenous language, */Xam*, engineered animist responses in order to survive catastrophe – the 'deprivation of ground' via land theft, genocide, drought and famine. I argue further that imminent food and water insecurity in our own time likewise need to be conceptualised animistically as part of our broader survival strategy. Thus, historical African animism – a form of cultural theory in its own right – may inform, decolonise and democratise contemporary responses to sustainable environmental policy and food security.

Animist responses to food insecurity have long been treated as epistemologically disqualified forms of African expertise that reside in the margins of food insecurity's long history. I take as my case study

the expertise of a colonised Southern African community – the */Xam* – who experienced successive waves of food precarity. The */Xam's* historical predicament – a combination of genocide, land theft, drought and famine from the seventeenth century to the nineteenth century – is important today, because it anticipated and even modelled in advance some of our contemporary global difficulties; especially imminent food and water insecurity. These people lived and died through conditions that resemble our own emergent planetary futures, and their story contributes shapeshifting survival strategies to our contemporary moment.

That said, indigeneity is tricky conceptual terrain. Accordingly, I offer a few ground-clearing moves. I deliberately avoid the habitual sentimental idealisation of the indigenous. Specifically, I refuse the notion that indigenous communities are (perennially and unchangingly) what we all were once upon a time. Instead, I work with the assumption that nineteenth century Southern African indigenous communities were subject to early crisis that is now becoming more generally systematic under global capitalism. As Latour points out, precarity has become a universal subject-position, but it was first piloted upon the colonised. The precarious experience of such historical indigenous communities is more like the vanguard of our future than a relic of our remote past. In sum, we might say that these communities once were what we are all quite possibly about to become. If certain historical communities form a precedent for our own time, then one propositional basic is the equivalence of terms, despite any asymmetries of historical reference. I work with the understanding that historical indigenous communities were above all *modern* and *complex* communities whose own animist lexis, and grammar of starvation, registered the pressures of sudden and catastrophic environmental change. Indigenous complexity is not primordial mystique. On the contrary, indigenous complexity arises historically as expertise about colonial violence and its processes of crisis and dramatic, overwhelming change. Moreover, I demonstrate that in response to crisis, the indigene invents 'magical' responses – animism and shapeshifting – as survival techniques. In my chosen example from the nineteenth century Northern Cape, genocide and starvation need to be survived. When one is busy surviving, magic achieves practical outcomes that extraordinary life circumstances might not otherwise afford. Animism and shapeshifting are thus a form of theory and of practical expertise; the 'practical magic' of my title. Expressed differently, the */Xam*'s animist understandings are all about how to eat (again) when prohibited from accessing their former hunting grounds and water sources.

In what follows, I embrace indigenous complexity in several acts of linguistic translation. I translate a highly unstable indigenous archive – now 150 years old – viewing it as a communally-engineered response to food insecurity and imprisonment. My eventual textual focus is on a single line from a */Xam* song, 'The Broken String'. I use the line's linguistic flexibility to read purposefully for a strategic animist response to food insecurity. In my translation, orthographic variability licences semantic polysemy and fluid interpretation. What the archive will not finally confirm re-presents itself as metamorphic possibility in my reading. Fluid interpretation, in turn, allows me to moot that the */Xam* language itself shifted shape in its mutable possibilities. In short, by inhabiting the shapeshifting, animist lexis and grammar of a supposedly extinct language (*/Xam*), I demonstrate that the indigene engineered protocols of speech to secure scant nutrition in the last extremities of famine. 'The Broken String' therefore functions as a tactic for a people whose place in the world is becoming uninhabitable. Faced with the existential question, 'How do you deal with your own disposability?' they answer: 'By making ourselves metamorphic and therefore non-disposable'.

My methodology deliberately risks entering into representational violence. Inhabiting a violent colonial archive, I could not do otherwise. While I respect the rigour with which the Bleek-Lloyd archive was produced, its own coercive settler-colonial parameters are inescapable – notwithstanding the considerable, earnest labour of Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd and the thoroughly respectable, committed efforts of a succession of */Xam* collaborators.[5] My project is to read the colonial archive against the grain, breaking its settled orthodoxies and flouting, where necessary, its derived linguistic rules.[6] I am working broadly within a flexible and always-already compromised

deconstructive method:

> The movements of deconstruction do not destroy structures from the outside. They are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in a certain way, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it. Operating necessarily from the inside, borrowing all the strategic and economic resources of subversion from the old structure, borrowing them structurally, that is to say without being able to isolate their elements and atoms, the enterprise of deconstruction always in a certain way falls prey to its own work.[7]

In plain terms, since my reading relies upon a violent colonial archive, it has to inhabit the very same structures that it seeks to displace. Notwithstanding this bind, my reading seeks to exploit the colonial archive's failures of systematisation so as to champion interpretive flexibility. If this is a conceptual gamble, I at least proceed with the unimpeachable certainty of the */Xam*'s well-known material history of episodic starvation. In emphasising a semiotics of food scarcity, I seek to dislodge or at least interrupt some of the archive's pre-existing representational violence. My aim is neither to violate, nor redeem, but to 'reanimate' without ontological or epistemological guarantees.

I am interested most in how the */Xam* tried to survive a genocidal onslaught with inventive and often spontaneous response. Therefore, my analysis allows itself the freedom to break rules, emphasising linguistic potential and reach, instead of narrow anthropological or linguistic orthodoxies. First, language survives in unstable form where */Xam* communities may not. Second, dynamic polysemy is more freely expressive than incarcerated anthropological informants. In other words, the */Xam* language expresses far more than its best interpreters might feel able to in their own (imprisoned) moment. Third, it makes no sense to use retroactive anthropological models for a community whose very social structures were already rent by genocide and starvation. For these reasons, I refuse an anthropological model of */Xam* shapeshifting. Instead, dynamic polysemy is the */Xam*'s *theorised* response to their own disappearance as a society. Looked at closely, the */Xam*'s 'arcane mythologies' become commonplace. At root, */Xam* was a language designed to ensure the survival of its starving speakers.

At once spoken and silent, bodily and environmental, referential and digressive, human and animal, */Xam* speech was straightforwardly geared towards two fundamental goals: food security and water security. Thus, */Xam* speech engineered a shapeshifting lexis and a grammar of starvation that were purposed towards survival. In reaching this conclusion, I revise far wider contemporary cultural discourses, by insisting that seemingly obscure indigenous belief is practical knowledge that is contemporary with both its own *modern* moment and with ours. I distil the historical lessons that a supposedly extinct people and their complex shapeshifting language offer for food insecurity in our own time. They prompt us to re-engineer our own dailyness by identifying waywardly (in a word, 'animistically') with our object-world. They encourage us to invent reparative registers of address for our global habitat and to be motivated by our environmental unconscious.[8] They challenge us to institutionalise new protocols of embodiment in which environmental political interest and global species' behaviours iterate themselves through us and thereby order the urgent task of replenishing our planet. The */Xam's* moment, in other words, animates our own. Deprived of their ground, they instruct our response to the ongoing deprivation of ours.

History: What Environmental Conditions Produce a Shapeshifting Language?

My argument for the *modern* and *complex* character of indigenous animism is directly at odds with early anthropological and psychoanalytic thinking. Edward Burnett Tylor publishes on animism in 1871, mere months after late 1870, when Wilhelm Bleek begins compiling the */Xam* animist archive in

Mowbray, Cape Town.[9] In turn, Sigmund Freud inherits from his own reading of Tylor a misguided idea of animism as an early teleological stage in the journey from religious belief to universal scientific reason. For Freud, animism amounts to 'the doctrine of souls'.[10] By this, Freud means that animism attributes authorship to presences who reside in a world of objects and who make the world's mysterious workings happen. For the animist, he suggests, the presences imbuing objects have powers of cognition and volition. If object-presences think and exhibit will, then their clandestine purpose is at work in what the animist does not understand of the world. Since clandestine purpose renders the unknown transparent, this enables Freud to claim that 'animism is a system of thought' (*Totem and Taboo*, p77). Animism, in Freud's understanding, is a universal system of explanation for things that seem to only make sense to themselves. The animist wonders 'Why does the rain happen?' and derives an answer via a purpose set out in cosmological narrative. Thus, Freud's idea of animist rationales is that they justify the world's occult processes while evolving humanity awaits a coalescence of religious authority (as in monotheism) and later, fully-fledged scientific explanation following the triumph of progressive Reason. I offer three illustrative, staged examples of Freud's flawed teleology. For the animist, rain may result from, let us say, a sky snake that has its own clandestine purpose in the cosmos. For the monotheist, rain may result from an angry God intent on flooding Noah's world and those disobedient folk who flout his word. For the scientist, rain results when water vapour cools, condenses and falls. Thus, Freud, following Tylor's anthropological lead, situates 'primitive' belief in a developmental progression from animism, through religion, to science. This progression sets in place a schema in which the European Enlightenment and scientific rationality trump predominantly black societies and their associated systems of thought. The asymmetrical understandings of 'development' and the disqualification of African knowledges with which I began to derive directly from this persistent Eurocentric schema.

For this reason, my emphasis on the */Xam* language as theoretical expertise offers a direct riposte to Freud and Tylor. Instead, I view */Xam* as exemplifying what Tim Ingold terms 'animacy:'

> Animacy, then, is not a property of persons imaginatively projected onto the things with which they perceive themselves to be surrounded. Rather – and this is my second point – it is the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence. [11]

Ingold's understanding of continual and reciprocal co-genesis perfectly encapsulates how */Xam* works. In */Xam's* emphasis on the metamorphic co-genesis and re-genesis of the being-world, it performs animacy in its very statement. Expressed differently, */Xam* states and reinstates the animacy of the being-world. It brings (back) to life what it names, and its names and sounds order its worldly relations; especially relations to land, water and life-presences. Moreover, if we take Ingold at his word, animacy would require us to consider the */Xam's* remote historical world as bringing-into-being our own and abiding with us still.

Accordingly, I want to pioneer an unsentimental mechanics of */Xam's* animacy by insisting on its *modern* and *complex* character, and its contemporary relevance to imminent global food insecurity. If animism is 'a system of thought' as Freud claims, then one way of moving far beyond his influential teleological assumptions is to ask what historical conditions organise animism's systemic drives. My approach, therefore, is to construe */Xam* animacy as theory and technique. Freud allows for this possibility when he muses that the 'practical need for controlling the world around [indigenous peoples] must have played its part [in the formation of animist belief]' (*Totem and Taboo*, p78). Of all of Freud's assertions, this is the most helpful. If we treat animism not as less-evolved belief, but instead as expertise in the theory and technique of animacy, then animism can be understood as addressing practical worldly difficulties via the reciprocal performance of co-genesis, including */Xam's*

co-genesis of our own present. The practice of shapeshifting is a prime mechanism of co-genesis. Shapeshifting is the */Xam* technique demonstrating what Ingold calls 'the dynamic, transformative potential of the entire field of relations within which beings of all kinds, more or less person-like or thing-like, continually and reciprocally bring one another into existence' (*Being Alive*, p68). This technique was not only ritualistic. */Xam* shapeshifting was also linguistic – embedded within human (and animal and sidereal!) speech itself.

One of the primary difficulties faced by the nineteenth century */Xam* was their dehumanisation by Cape Dutch *trekboers*. This dehumanisation made the genocide of */Xam* bands legally permissible, and it made the *trekboer* theft of their land justifiable. All that was required to hunt down */Xam* people legally was a magistrate's permit. In practice, not all *trekboers* bothered with legal niceties, not least because the human status of their quarry was dubious. Specifically, in eighteenth century Cape Dutch parlance, the 'Bushman' was an honorary primate. Edward Burnett Tylor's anthropological study of animism, *Primitive Culture* (1871), is exactly contemporary with Bleek and Lloyd's research and references the same simian-human equivalence:

> It is to rude forest-men that the Malays habitually give the name of orang-utan, i.e., 'man of the woods'. But in Borneo this term is applied to the miyas ape, whence we have learnt to call this creature the orang-utan, and the Malays themselves are known to give the name in one and the same district to both the savage and the ape. This term 'man of the woods' extends far beyond Hindu and Malay limits. [. . .] The name of the Bosjesman, so amusingly mispronounced by Englishmen, as though it were some outlandish native word, is merely the Dutch equivalent for Bush-man, 'man of the woods or bush' (*Primitive Culture*, p361).

However, Tylor avers that the name 'Bosjesman' is more recent and derives (less credibly) from his 'nest-like shelter in a bush' (pp381-382, n.6). It is clear that Tylor follows a Dutch colonial category mistake, in which the Bosjesman is a corruption of '*Boschmanneker*' (the Dutch, possibly translated, name for the Orang-Utan in colonial South-East Asia). The ape named in Malay and Indonesian for its human qualities (Orang-Utan, 'the person of the forest') is translated into humans named by Dutch colonials for their ape-like creaturely qualities ('the *Boschmanneker*'). Moreover, the 'Bushman' was often not considered a man or woman, but a '*schepsel*' (properly speaking, a 'creation', 'a made thing', or 'creature').[12] In international circuits of translation, Dutch colonial and Malaccan anthropomorphism ('Orang-Utan') reroutes half a world away into Cape Dutch colonial animism (the 'made thing' or 'creature' or even 'object of godly creation', the *Boschmanneker*). Subject to overwhelming violence and insidious, discontinuous relays of power, the */Xam* could do nothing other than become that 'made thing', that *schepsel*, that creature, that *Bosjeman*, that *Boschmanneker*. In other words, human-animal shapeshifting by the */Xam* was already prefigured in the dehumanising colonial overdetermination of their life outcomes.

Against this background, the Bleek-Lloyd archive of the */Xam* could be considered a patient effort at rehumanisation. The archive was assembled in late nineteenth century Mowbray, Cape Town by Wilhelm Bleek and his sister-in-law Lucy Lloyd (with later contributions by Bleek's daughter, Dorothea Bleek). The archival data were gathered from a handful of incarcerated Northern Cape */Xam* informants. This archive remains the primary historical source of */Xam* folklore and story, leaving aside the archive of rock art on the land itself. Much of what we think we know of the 'Bushmen' as a subcontinental aggregate of first peoples derives from Bleek's and Lloyd's late nineteenth century and early twentieth century research. The collection exists to this day in the Archives and Manuscripts Department of the University of Cape Town's Library. It spans 12,000 pages over 138 notebooks,[13] encompasses */Xam* story, song, cultural explanation, mythology and cosmology, personal histories, drawings, the transcription and translation of the */Xam* language, interpretations of rock art. This

colonial archive is the closest thing to a non-speculative record that any researcher might access if they were to ask what pre-colonial Bushman communities might have thought and understood, and how they might have lived. Dorothea Bleek's 1957 dictionary – the culmination of her father's and aunt's patient dialogue, translation and transcription – remains the most comprehensive record of */Xam* language and understanding.[14]

Unsurprisingly, these archives are flawed. Andrew Bank's history of the Bleek-Lloyd archive shows that Wilhelm Bleek was a capable philologist whose studies of African languages had a continental scope. And yet, Bleek's fluency in Cape Dutch (his interlanguage for communicating with a series of informants who lived in his household) was severely limited.[15] We have in Wilhelm Bleek a man who believed in a hierarchy of languages (with the 'Bushman' language, */Xam*, near the bottom of the heap), a man who was armed with a universal alphabet (pp19, 21), a man who sought the primary origins of language in deep philological contemplation (p20), but a man who was arguably less competent in the Cape Dutch *lingua franca* than the */Xam* informants who resided in his own household – including A!kunta, //Kabbo, ≠ Kasin, and Dia!kwain. Universal man, it transpires, is a lesser linguist. Bleek sought to understand evolutionary human origins through the comparative study of languages, but in fact relied substantially on extra-linguistic modes of communication with his */Xam* collaborators. As Dorothea Bleek's sister later recalled for her, Wilhelm Bleek's learning of */Xam* language, myth, lore and history frequently required the researcher or his informants to mime, gesture, perform or act out words (pp9, 168). Lucy Lloyd, Bleek's sister-in-law, used children's picture books and illustrated colonial travel narratives in her dialogue with /A!kunta (pp87-95). These examples of 'cultural retrieval' are remarkable for being improvised, performative, mediated and transitory, not universally descriptive. Contained within the production of Wilhelm Bleek's research is a split scene, in which what is relayed by the informant speaks both to the stored consciousness of */Xam* language and culture, but also to the immediate moment of performance. We do not find Tylor's (and Freud's) pre-modern primitives here, miming to overcome their inarticulacy. Instead, I would argue, we find a disoriented academic 'expert' confronted by canny indigenous co-producers of knowledge who retain in the body and its postures the indigene's guarded sovereignty of the known, alongside the linguistic store of their own experiential circumstance. To seek deep meaning in this archive may well be a fool's errand. Its cultural cache may well be designed by its originators to deflect or mislead the inquirer. Condemned to talk, the */Xam* occasionally circumlocute.[16]

There is a world of difference between philology and mime, between a dictionary and a charade, between the European researcher's studied transcriptions and the */Xam* convict's temporary extravagances of free movement: Bleek obtained his principal informants from the Breakwater Prison in Cape Town. Dorothea Bleek, his daughter, confirmed this:

> [The] surroundings of the prison were by no means helpful in persuading these people to talk. He asked whether it might be possible to allow some of the Bushmen to work for our family, so that he could interview them in the peace of our own home at Mowbray [. . .] What he wanted to hear was their language . . .[17]

Dorothea Bleek's distinction between the jail and the 'peace of our own home at Mowbray' is unsound. First of all, it conveniences the researcher, but not necessarily his indigenous subjects. Secondly, Wilhelm Bleek wanted more than language from these subjects. Scientifically speaking, he found other ways of making them talk. Bleek commissioned anthropometric photographs, some of which display */Xam* subjects in states of undress, posed as scientific specimens gauging height and proportion, or staged as artistic copies of European 'odalisque' portraiture.[18] In conversation, Bleek broached uncomfortable sexual topics and scenarios – in Latin no less – to the extreme discomfort and embarrassment of the */Xam* (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp225-226). One has to

notice multiple framings at work here: linguistic research, the domestication of the indigenous, photographic acquisition, pseudo-scientific anthropometry, aestheticisation, sexual intrusion. The */Xam* collaborators were captive specimens and Bleek took liberties.

In the Northern Cape, the */Xam* were the remnants of a century and a half of genocide before their own lifetimes. By Louis Anthing's estimate, only 500 survivors remained in Bushmanland by 1860.[19] Bleek's informants travelled south from the Northern Cape to Cape Town as part of a punitive judicial transport. They were sentenced in Victoria West circuit court, 'kept in stocks, made to push wheelbarrows full of rocks to build roads, and then marched to Wellington before taken on a train to Cape Town' (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp78, 153). The march from Victoria West to Wellington was a distance of 302 miles on foot. Contained in the moment of */Xam* performance for Wilhelm Bleek are lifetimes of trauma, and occasionally a congenial smile or two of distrust.[20]

The Bleek-Lloyd archive records the moment of its own founding institutional violence, before we even begin to speculate about any deep cultural history, much less the putative first language of humankind. The archive contains a negotiation of power and space in the Northern Cape, insofar as it evidences the long past of genocide and the immediate present of brutal conflict between the */Xam* and the *trekboers*. For instance, between 10 July and 14 July 1866, Bleek transcribed Adam Kleinhardt's words in the following way: 'the Bushmen eat the cattle of the Boers, the Boers take the children of the Bushmen, calf, one calf, two calves, many calves'.[21] Alongside Bleek's elementary literacy and numeracy – the basic rehearsal of counting and the transcription of single and plural conjugations – we find Kleinhardt's fully developed testimony of another settler calculus; the equation of */Xam* children's and Boer creatures' lives in the circuitry of abduction or trade.[22] Note how the cattle are 'calves', Kleinhardt's other name perhaps for a child-who-is-no-more-than-a-beast. Kleinhardt refers to his own experience of conflict between the 'flat Bushmen' and the Boers who increasingly occupied */Xam* lands in the areas near Kenhardt, Achtersveld, the Bitterpits, the Strandberg. Stock theft (for survival following the depletion of game) or retributive violence led many of the */Xam* who Bleek encountered to be transported over 400 miles south to Breakwater Prison.

The latent carceral context of research emerges through the Bleek-Lloyd archive in unanticipated ways. There is strong evidence that the informants' folkloric performances are marked by the violence that they experienced in the judicial process or at the hands of Boer commandoes. For people whose communal identity took on the character of the environment (identifying as 'flat Bushmen', 'grass Bushmen' or 'mountain Bushmen'), a hostile presence looms on the horizons. As Andrew Bank has highlighted, ≠Kasin told of how moon punished hare while as silent 'as a magistrate who had given sentence' and //Kabbo described a lunar rainbow as an 'advancing party' surrounding the moon (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp189, 221). The silence of the magistrate in the first example implies the inhumanity of the judicial process. Magisterial silence ends both special pleading and further legal appeal. The second example's imagery of warfare in the mythology of the moon suggests, as Bank infers, that even folklore's ancient provenance is marked traumatically by *trekboer* commandoes' immediately contemporary brutalising acts.

While Bleek sought the origins of language by acquiring */Xam* words and grammar, informants such as /A!kunta and //Kabbo smuggled other testimony into the record, as when they, separately and respectively, addressed Bleek as 'magistrate' (pp87, 158, 161). This mode of address recalls /A!kunta's and //Kabbo's own recent trials and imprisonment for stock theft. The teenaged /A!kunta in particular would have had difficulty distinguishing between the punitive legal justice system and Bleek's 'domestic' residence. As notional members of the household, both //Kabbo and /A!kunta were 'kept under guard in a room with a grated window for the first five months' by a 'former prison warder' (p81), despite the teenaged /A!kunta being 'at first so weakly we feared

consumption for him'(p79) and the aged //Kabbo being 'too feeble to attempt an escape' (p9). Wilhelm Bleek's domestic household was arguably a prison in parallel, at least in the initial phases of his research. /A!kunta's and //Kabbo's peculiar appellation for Bleek, 'Magistrate', dramatically recasts the scene of research in terms of its unacknowledged carceral operations.

However, although both /A!kunta and //Kabbo referred to Bleek as 'Magistrate' in a way that shaded the boundaries between domestic and carceral experience, I want to argue that there is a different valence at work in each man's iteration of the title 'Magistrate'. In Bleek and Lloyd's published selection from the archive, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, //Kabbo offers two accounts of his imprisonment for stock theft in the Northern Cape. In the first account, he attributes to the Northern Cape Magistrate ownership of the highly prized mutton eaten in prison. As //Kabbo's account cleverly smuggles into the archive, there is a 'delicious' irony in being convicted for killing Boer sheep to survive starvation, only to be given the 'Magistrate's' sheep as prison food upon conviction. The ironic similarity in outcome for the */Xam* stock thief – rewarded with the very thing for which he has been punished – is offered to us in //Kabbo's story as the constant, overwhelming and uneven application of *trekboer* power and violence. The sympathetic magistrate feeds //Kabbo and the other prisoners with the very same thing that they are prohibited from hunting-to-eat. This inconsistency in the law perfectly demonstrates the conditions for */Xam* creatureliness. Eric Santner elaborates that 'creaturely life is an index of an ongoing and passionate subjection [. . .] to an agency, a master's [or magistrate's?] discourse, that has been attenuated and dispersed across a field of relays and points of contact that no longer cohere, even in fantasy, as a consistent 'other' of possible address and redress'.[23] The /Xam are exactly the inconsistent other of the magistrate's address in his *ex officio* capacity as the dispenser of law. The magistrate sustains */Xam* lives with prohibited livestock, while retaining the institutional and legal power to issue permits for the legal hunting of their human kind. The magistrate is both actual sustainer and potential murderer. But there is also a gentle hint in //Kabbo's account about the Magistrate's hospitality and accommodation. Even though //Kabbo tells us that prison is a 'house of shit', he introduces intriguing subtleties into his account:

> We were in the jail. We put our legs into the stocks. The Korannas [Hottentots or *Khoi*, or even possibly (formerly */Xam*) servants of *trekboers*] came to us, when our legs were in the stocks; ( ) we were stretched out (?) in the stocks. The Korannas came to put their legs into the stocks; they slept, while their legs were in the stocks. They were in the house of ordure (?). While we were eating the Magistrate's sheep, the Korannas came to eat it.[24]

There is a notable alleviation of these prison conditions signalled in the quality of the prison food – the Magistrate's sheep or mutton. This slight mitigation of settler atrocity is reinforced by a further small act of kindness that //Kabbo associates with the Magistrate. On the 83-mile march between Victoria West and Beaufort West: 'We got tobacco from the Magistrate; we smoked, going along, with sheeps' bones' (p293). In this passage, //Kabbo the smoker savours an ovine tobacco pipe gleaned from the Magistrate's mutton. In //Kabbo's second account, the alleviatory effect of the Magistrate's hospitality is further embellished: 'The people boiled sheep's flesh, while our legs were in the stocks. The Magistrate came to take our legs out of the stocks, because he wished that we might sit comfortably, that we might eat; for, it was his sheep that we were eating' (p297). In //Kabbo's two accounts of the prison transport, the Magistrate emerges as a figure of mild kindnesses amid the whimsies of prison brutality.

By extension, I would argue that //Kabbo's title of 'Magistrate' for Bleek implies a degree of alleviation within the carceral, and a wishful gustatory optimism, that /A!kunta's salutation did not. An understanding of the archive as principally experiential, politically situational and performative allows us to contemplate the subtle multivalence of individual responses to Bleek's research. Subtle multivalence tells us that /A!kunta and //Kabbo were no generalisable anthropological types. They

were their own men. Indeed, //Kabbo wished a further mild kindness of that other 'Magistrate', Wilhelm Bleek. He desired that Bleek would send him a gun after //Kabbo had returned home to the Northern Cape:

> While he [Bleek] thinks, that I have not forgotten; that my body may be quiet, as it was when I was with him; while I feel that I may shoot, feeding myself. For, starvation was that on account of which I was bound,– starvation's food,– ( ) when I starving turned back from following the sheep. Therefore, I lived with him, that I may get a gun from him; that I might possess it. That I might myself shoot, feeding myself, while I do not eat my companions' food. For, I eat my (own) game (*Specimens of Bushman Folklore,* p317).

The researcher thinks. The 'Bushman' remembers. Among both Magistrates, //Kabbo's body is 'quiet' (satiated, not hungry). The first magistrate feeds him mutton. From the second 'Magistrate', Bleek, //Kabbo wishes a gun to avoid the necessity of killing and eating sheep ('starvation's food'). By implication therefore, //Kabbo wishes for a gun so as to avoid imprisonment, to avoid further encounters with the Magistrates. I would go further and claim that //Kabbo's desire for a gun unwrites all of the cosy assumptions about */Xam* primordial hunting. In nineteenth-century colonial context, //Kabbo's is an expedient and contemporary desire, designed to avoid the law or possibly, if necessary, to violate it more powerfully (he was a member of organised stock thieves called the Tooren gang).[25] Avoiding sheep, //Kabbo avoids the Magistrate who is among them. However, while there is the idea that hunting with a gun would lead to greater kill efficiencies, //Kabbo already knows of and remarks upon the scarcity of game (*trekboer* sheep are 'starvation's food'). Within the wider constraining logic of game extinction and */Xam* starvation, his guiding principle was arguably no longer simply finding a primordial animal quarry. Perhaps //Kabbo had already set his sights on an alternative and much nearer *trekboer* quarry, with the exception of the 'Magistrate' by virtue of his psychic placement among sheep-who-will-not-be-killed. If it is plausible that //Kabbo's secret wish is to do political violence, it is also possible that his outlook contains reciprocal mercies, small kindnesses of exemption for the Magistrates. An imprisoned */Xam* individual, //Kabbo unexpectedly forgives colonial functionaries who feed him. This is a moment in which //Kabbo asserts his humanity via an unforced ethics of nutrition. To choose in an unobliged way amid conditions of coercion is also to exercise unanticipated freedom.

We need to think further about the double-scene, the bifurcated vision, suggested by //Kabbo's constructions of the Magistrate. His stories of recent imprisonment and transport (given in May and June, 1871) are inseparable from his later performance of deep cultural story (given in October 1871). Indeed, Lucy Lloyd records that //Kabbo related the */Xam* story of where the dead go directly to the daily dimensions of his carceral world in Cape Town:

> *JT* [Jantjie Tooren or //Kabbo] tells me that dead Bushmen, dead korhaans, gemsboks, ostriches etc. all keep ein [one] path (the things that Bushmen have shot, as also the Bushmen that other men have shot). People that die from illness too, they all go to one great hole – (nett so as a huis [just this way like a house]), a hole as large as between Table Mountain, Breakwater-Kalk Bay and the opposite mountains at Mowbray. And Boers too – his mother's mother told this and his mother and he heard it told, he says. This is a Bushman's path, the First Bushmen path (*Bushmen in the Victorian World*, p169).

If this is deep folkloric myth, what are Boer commando shootings of 'Bushmen' doing in this scene?[26] Likewise, why is the hole 'just this way' like the Bleek house, and why does the hole take

on the dimensions of //Kabbo's immediate reality in Cape Town and its locales (Devil's Peak, Mowbray, Breakwater Prison, Table Mountain, Kalk Bay where the Bleeks holidayed with their informants)?[27] In my view, we see the marking of */Xam* popular 'deep memory' with the immediate genocidal violence of British and *trekboer* territorial expansion, and possibly too with the illness caused by the conditions of imprisonment in Cape Town. (We remember //Kabbo's feebleness and that A!kunta became too ill for labour in Breakwater Prison). I would go further and point out that the 'great hole' to which the dead all go has the precise limits and dimensions of //Kabbo's carceral world. It is possible to read //Kabbo's testimony as saying that he is in fact among the dead while impounded with the Bleeks. One must also notice the one path that the dead walk. If it is thought about in terms of the immediacy of settler-colonial space, then this must be the road of prison-transport from home to Cape Town. This might, logically, tell us that //Kabbo fears that death will ensue from following the road that he has marched south to his immediate present. Going a step further (into the ever-present immediacy of death, not the mythical fancies of primal story), one must wonder whether any hole of death ever existed culturally prior to //Kabbo's incarceration. In other words, deep story, genealogical culture, is already retroactively marked by recent trauma. In the staggered sequence of trauma, we might even infer that 'People that die from illness [. . .] And Boers too', asserts the continuity of death's one road through the sequence of //Kabbo's telling. //Kabbo's mother's mother (Ttorrowo) and mother (!Kwi-an) – from whom //Kabbo learnt the story – are already dead when this story is related in the Bleek household (*Bushmen in the Victorian World*, pp136, 138). What does it mean that in the grandmother's telling, Boers walk 'the First Bushmen path' too? //Kabbo listens and speaks as if the women now dead are telling, which is in one reading the same as saying that //Kabbo speaks as if already communing with the dead. While the origin, 'the First Bushmen path', is characterised by belatedness – while it has its firstness deferred until after the supplementary action of settler-colonial history has happened ('Boers too') – there is also a stunning politically sovereign claim. The 'First Bushmen Path' is seventeenth century exile from the Western Cape, eighteenth century genocide and the nineteenth century return via prison-transport, remapping settler-colonial space. The path that all follow to death (including Boers) is the First Bushmen path. Another way of saying this is that the road from Cape Town to the Northern Cape, or the Northern Cape to Cape Town, was the */Xam's* path first, before it was anyone else's. For Boers, for Capetonians, to walk on the First Bushmen path (as they do every day) is to die. Even while acknowledging urban settler and frontier *trekboer* presence and impacts, //Kabbo claims the priority of 'Bushmen' in this territory of life and death. //Kabbo's story is densely contextualised, astutely demarcated, and thoroughly and strategically improvised. To ignore the story's politics of immediacy, to seek the ancient while ignoring the contemporaneous mechanisms of its iteration, is to miss the point entirely. The primal indigenous symbol (the 'great hole' of death) is never independent of the ceaseless play of historical and spatial contingency (Breakwater prison, Devil's Peak, Kalk Bay holidays). The First Bushmen path explains newly foreign, settled space, remapping it along the way. In fact, the primal symbol of death, a large hole spanning at least 17 miles of suburb (the distance from Mowbray to Kalk Bay in Cape Town), spanning settlement and mountain and almost bisecting the Cape Peninsula, is a very precise, quantifiable and material archetype of disappearance and absence. When //Kabbo overlays Cape Town with a 'great hole' of death, one surely must consider a political wish at work (his other wish, of course, is for a gun). Against the known history of *trekboer* genocide,[28] what might it mean that settlement is subtended by an abyss? The ground in this fantasy opens up, as if to swallow settled space and all who inhabit it. This hole destabilises colonised space and Imperial knowledge. It is no route to the deep past. The 'great hole' of death is a route to a common, mutually-assured destination. The 'great hole' of death is nothing other than a (retaliatory) Latourian *deprivation of ground*. //Kabbo maps a path we will all travel, but 'Bushmen' first. Superimposed upon settlement, the hole ushers all around into death (the Bleek cottage and 'Boers too'). As I argue in the conclusion, the 'great hole' of death enfolds us too; latter-day onlookers upon //Kabbo's scene of testimony.

Textuality: How Does a Shapeshifting Language Work?

I have posited that */Xam* informants superimposed contemporary political and environmental circumstance onto the deep cultural trove of indigenous long memory. I now want to further test this idea of a double-vision in our reading of the */Xam* archive by turning to the reception of one of Bleek's informants as a 'poet'. There is a difference between history and poetry, between testimony and literature. Of all of the translations in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, Dia!kwain's song, 'The Broken String', is easily the most famous.[29] It was first re-presented as poetry by Lucy Lloyd, and has more latterly been adapted by two noted South African poets, Stephen Watson and Antjie Krog, among others.[30] These re-presentations beg questions of white twentieth and twenty-first century repossession of */Xam* intellectual property, and they also risk unearthing and re-fossilising the */Xam* archive as something 'timelessly' romantic, something endlessly recycled and repackaged for sentimental 'literary' readers.

'The Broken String' is a highly mediated, unstable text. Dia!kwain reported hearing the song from his father, who was himself a child during the salient events it recounts. It is also a song recalled, performed, translated and transcribed in the restrictive carceral setting of the Bleek household. The song possibly bears the syntax of the Cape Dutch (proto-Afrikaans) interlanguage between Dia!kwain and Lloyd (*The Stars Say,* p10). This imperfect and culturally improvised interlanguage is subsequently 'made literary' by its latter-day acclamation as authentic First People's poetry. The translation survives better than the original. Few of the song's many poetic translators trouble the Muse's slumbers with */Xam*.[31] Additionally, Bleek and Lloyd's */Xam* orthography was inconsistent, making Lloyd's original translation available for a re-reading.

Dia!kwain's father, Xaa-ttin, sang 'The Broken String' as a lament after Dia!kwain's paternal grandfather's (//Xugen-ddi's) friend died. //Xugen-ddi's deceased friend was a rainmaker called !Nuin-!kuiten, 'who died from the effects of a shot he had received when going about, by night, in the form of a lion' (*Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p236). !Nuin-!kuiten was a magician who could shift shape into animal form. Therianthropic (human-animal) shapeshifting was !Nuin-!kuiten's initial transformation. One night, !Nuin-!kuiten went out as a lion and a Boer farmer fatally shot him when !Nuin-!kuiten took an ox for food. Dying was !Nuin-!kuiten's second transformation. While he was alive, !Nuin-!kuiten had wanted Xaa-ttin to learn his knowledge and songs.[32] I quote Lloyd's English translation of 'The Broken String' in full:

'The Broken String'

People were those who
Broke for me the string.
Therefore,
The place ( ) became like this to me,
On account of it,
Because the string was that which broke for me.
Therefore,
The place does not feel to me,
As the place used to feel to me,
On account of it.
For,
The place feels as if it stood open before me,
( ) Because the string has broken for me.
Therefore,
The place does not feel pleasant to me,
On account of it.[33]

I shall offer a surface reading of the translated text first, before pioneering a wholly new reading of the */Xam* original performed in Mowbray. The lament places us within a family lineage of song, prompted by the murder of a family friend, !Nuin-!kuiten. The song describes a changed relationship to place. For Xaa-ttin, the sky no longer makes the ringing sound that it used to make when !Nuin-!kuiten was alive. The sky has changed because !Nuin-!kuiten was a rainmaker who had not yet transmitted all of his intergenerational rainmaking knowledge to Xaa-ttin. Xaa-ttin laments not only the loss of a teacher, but also his own rain-making inadequacy. Xaa-ttin cannot now make the sky sound as !Nuin-!kuiten once did. Thunder and approaching rainfall, in other words, are no longer heard. There is environmental danger: the way the weather works has changed because this rainmaking sorcerer who could conjure vitally necessary meteorological events has been killed. There is a continuum between the */Xam* individual and his environmental consequence. The place feels as if it stands open because the departed man has left an abyss between the community and the rain-giving cosmos. I am reading in line with Sam Durrant's and Ryan Topper's salutary insight: 'A postcolonial approach to trauma studies must begin by apprehending the cosmological damage wreaked by colonial modernity, which implicates not only humans, but entire systems of relations amidst the cosmos'.[34] No doubt, */Xam* has a word for this primal dehiscence. Its other name is trauma.

'The Broken String' is a multilayered song. Its repetitions are reassuring, invoking simplicity in the absence of cultural expertise. I want to disturb such casual comforts by holding the palimpsestic richness of 'The Broken String' in tension with its inexhaustible potential for translation. It is by no means certain that Lloyd's translations were accurate, nor indeed that they can account for the explosive, stunning multivalence of */Xam* words. Within the horizons of my illiteracy in */Xam* (but supposedly no native speakers survive in any case), I want to inspect, forensically, a single, eponymous line from the song in order to gauge its imaginative and explanatory reach:

> '*Ô !nūïn̈ ã ddǫä !kwā kā*'. (*/Xam* transcription)[35]
>
> 'Because the string was that which broke for me'. (Lloyd translation)[36]

Let us complicate Lloyd's translation. Admittedly, '*!nuin*', is a 'sinew, ligament, bowstring, thread'[37] or 'thong'.[38] Dorothea Bleek's dictionary somewhat complicates Lucy Lloyd's translation by rendering '*!nūïn̈*' as '*!nũi*', and offers the additional synonyms of '*!noe*' and '*!nwi*' (*Bushman Dictionary,* p484). However, neither of these two latter synonyms appear in their proper alphabetical places in the dictionary (pp484, 480, 488). Such orthographical inconsistencies will presently become opportune for my argument. In a wider sense, '*!nuin*' possibly refers to the string of a mouth bow or '*goura*', whose music was used to make rain (*Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p323). '!Nuin-!kuiten' is, literally, a 'string speaking'. I derive this translation from Dorothea Bleek, who gives '*kuitƏn*' as the singular of 'to say' and gives '*kui*' and '*ku:i*' as 'to say, think', with an example after this latter entry giving '*kuitƏn*' as 'speaking' (*Bushman Dictionary*, pp104, 105). There is a complication with the former entry, as it is not marked by 'SI', Dorothea Bleek's shorthand for the /Xam language. Notwithstanding this complication, the latter entry validates my reading. Astoundingly, so few translators pause to notice the straightforward point that '*!nuin*' in this line is Dia!kwain's or Xaa-ttin's signature game with the name of '*!Nūïn̈* [*kuitƏn*]'.[39] The 'string speaking' would have been !Nuin-!kuiten's habitual transformation. What is in this name, !Nuin-!kuiten? The man was named for what he did, for his vocational soundings. Man and string are one and the same in an animist view. !Nuin's name is a string of knowledge that can no longer be passed down. The string broke for Xaa-ttin because he will now not receive the knowledge from !Nuin of how to sound thunder inside his own body and make it approach.

Moreover, there is the intriguing connection that '*!nuĭŋ*' is a 'kaross, skin cloak' (*Bushman*

Dictionary, p484). Multiple alternative spellings include, but are not limited to, '*!noeiŋ', '!noeŋ', '!noiŋ', !nuïń*', '*!nwiŋ', '!nǫeǐń*', '*!noëń*', '*!noïŋ*' (pp 480, 481, 484, 488). In turn, '*||khu:itƏn v'.* and '*||khu:itƏn n'.* collectively give us 'the building a screen of bushes to watch for [ostriches or porcupines; game]' – a 'hunting blind' or 'hide' (pp 484, 578). The verb *||khuitƏn* 'is to lie in wait for' (p591). Since !Nuin could transform himself into a lion, we might speculate as to whether he went about stalking sheep cloaked in the disguise of a lion-skin kaross as camouflage. If so, !Nuin's cover was blown when the *trekboer* took aim at his lion-form. In this sense, the practical magic of !Nuin's cloaking-as-a-lion may also be that which broke for the speaker.

At this point, I opt to front up a key objection to my analysis and to the sequences of translation that follow. Homophones are tricky terrain upon which to base my speculative argument, given that */Xam* is organised around very different clicks (labial, palato-alveolar, lateral, among others). While orthographic inconsistencies to some extent mitigate the difficulty (homophones with very different clicks are occasionally to be found against Dorothea Bleek's dictionary entries), the substantial objection to my argument remains – that it enters into representational violence. That said, the colonial archive upon which my argument has to rely, a century and a half after the fact, is already a representationally violent archive. Representational violence is thus utterly inescapable.

Given that !Nuin's name is cited in the eponymous line of the song, we need to ask whether a comparable signature game extends to his lion-form. Taking this argument further, '*kā*' in Lloyd's original translation means 'for me'. But '*kā*' is possibly also a near homophone for the nineteenth century Northern Cape */Xam* and twentieth century Kalahari *Ju|hoansi* word '*//kha*' ('lion').[40] There are no guarantees built into my reading. */Xam* is supposedly not spoken any longer. Helpfully for my argument, there are 'no definitive spellings' for the */Xam* words that Lloyd transcribed (*Myth and Meaning*, p187). Indeed, Dorothea Bleek renders the */Xam* for 'lion' as both '*||khã:*' and as '*||khã:§*'.[41] Leaving guarantees aside and entering into an avenue of thought without safeguards, I postulate an alternative to Lloyd's transcription and translation:

> '*Ô !nūiṅ* [*-kuitƏn*] *ã ddǫä !kwā ||khã:*' (*/Xam* transcription – my emendation)
>
> 'Because !Nuin [-!kuiten] was that which was broken [was mortally wounded] as a lion'. (free translation)

I have offered an original, free translation here, founded upon a violent transcription that proves, after all, not to be that far-fetched. Dia!kwain himself indicated that one should never name the lion ('*||khã:*') lest he hunt you down in revenge (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp244-246). At stake in naming the lion is who eats who. By possible implication, naming oneself ('*kā*', 'for me'), one covertly names the lion ('*||khã:*') via a clandestine homophone. My free translation, therefore, is obliged to a form of */Xam* feeling, to a */Xam* feeling of (leonine) form. To read !Nuin-!kuiten in his animal form as a lion ('*||khã:*') is to argue for a double signature-game. Both the man and his lion-form are possibly present in the line.

Moving on, in Lloyd's original transcription, '*!kwā kā*' is 'broke for me', but in my view '*!kwā kā*' is also possibly a possessive form, 'of [*ka*] the rain'.[42] This interpretation of '*!khwa: ka*' as possessively 'the rain's' is insightfully confirmed by Lewis-Williams (*Myth and Meaning*, p189). My interpretation is further borne out in the archive by /Han≠kasso's allusion to '*khoa-ka* [rain's] *!gixa* [sorcerer]' and by Dia!kwain's repeated use of the word '*!khwā*' for 'rain' in his story of the thunderstorm.

We might transform our line, shifting shape along with the */Xam* we approach. In other words, we might synthesise our two translations ('*!khwa:*', rain) and (('*||khã:*', lion). I am fully persuaded by –

and I am reading in complete agreement with – Lewis-Williams' scholarly claims that */Xam* songs embed complexes of interpretation or whole fields of cultural understanding. Lewis-Williams argues compellingly that 'Complex allusions are often triggered by single words – nuggets – that can easily pass unnoticed by a Westerner who adopts a 'philosophical' approach to San myths' (p195). Leading on from this, we know that an oral culture must invest multiply in words and their possible valences, simply because that is how cultural memory may be accommodated efficiently in the absence of writing.

A song, in other words, is less a passing amusement than it is a storehouse of history, genealogy and understanding. Treating 'The Broken String' with this level of historical gravity, we may parse a further translation:

> '*Ô !nūiň* [*-kuitƏn*] *ã ddǫä !khwa: ||khã:*' (*/Xam* transcription, my emendation)
>
> 'Because !Nuin[-!kuiten] was that which is the rain lion'. (my translation)

There is no way of resolving these alternatives, although they are true to Dia!kwain's wider account. I would argue that they all co-exist in a perpetual present within the scene of song. It is obvious enough that neither translation, nor orthographic transcription, will settle.

Nonetheless, despite numerous interpretive possibilities, we are moving towards a larger gathering of sense. Lewis-Williams provides further, stunning evidence that will allow us to entertain a complex, multiform translation:

> There is another intriguing connection between !Nuin-/kuiten and rain. In a tale about a girl at puberty we learn that the girl, taken up by the whirlwind, is transformed into a large snake. The name of this snake is given as //Kheten. But it has another name too: !Nuin, an additional link between the man and rain. When the transformation takes place, 'the folk who possessed their noses [*/nu*]' [sorcerers] sang: 'Ye are now those who behold that that maiden, she now yonder ascends the sky, the rain is now the one who takes her away; she becomes a snake' (L.V.13.5020-21) [. . .] */Nu* could also mean a spirit and a dead shaman (*Myth and Meaning*, p188).

Lewis-Williams musters crucial evidence here, but his findings fall just short of their most radical possible inference. !Nuin is both a man and a lion, and a maiden-turned-snake by the whirlwind that makes rain. Let us rephrase that in a spirit of playfulness to demonstrate the extraordinary levels of linguistic co-implication at work in */Xam*. !Nuin is both a man (suggestively, '*!kuitƏn*') and a lion ('*||khã§*', '*||khã:*', and '*||khã:§*') (*Bushman Dictionary*, pp450, 734, 402, 572, 732). !Nuin is also a maiden or child ('*|ka*', '*|kwã*', '*!khwã*' or '*!kwã*')[43] turned snake ('*!kha*', '*!nũ:iŋ*', '*!nũiň*', '*xe:tƏn*', '*||khēten*')[44] by the whirlwind that is the agency of the rain ('*!khwā*', '!*khoa*', '*!kwa:*', and '*!khwa:*').[45]

!Nuin is both a man who lived and a spirit-presence, a sorcerer who died ('*ˉ|nu',* '*|nu:*').[46] Dorothea Bleek gives '*ˉ|nu*' the definitions 'dead, departed spirit', while Lucy Lloyd's notebook gives 'the people who hold their noses' with '(the sorcerors)' inserted between the lines. Thus, the maiden-turned-snake ('*!nũiň*') possibly, at a push, subsumes, remoulds and rehouses this departed presence ('*ˉ|nu*'). !Nuin-!kuiten, a man-lion now dead, is succeeded by !Nuin or //Kheten, a maiden who lives on as a sky snake. !Nuin-!kuiten is sublimated ('*ˉ|nu*') – negated only to be preserved at a higher level[47] – as !Nuin or //Kheten. In */Xam*, !Nuin ('*!nūiň*') the rain lion ('*!khwa: ||khã:*') is succeeded by !Nuin ('*!nũiň*') the rain (''*!khwa:*') snake's ('*!kha*') higher rain-making power, or

even the rain (‘*!khwa:*’) child’s (‘|*ka*’,) power.

Hence, a new, deeply layered series of free translations emerges:

> ‘*Ô !nūiň* [*-kuitƏn*] *ã ddǫä !khwã !kha*’
> ‘Because !Nuin [the man] was that which is the rain snake [‘*!khwa: !kha*’]’
>
> AND
>
> ‘*Ô !nūiň* [*-kuitƏn*] *ã ddǫä !khwa: |ka*’
> ‘Because !Nuin [the man] was that which is the rain child [‘*!khwa: |ka*’]’
>
> AND
>
> ‘*Ô !nũiň* [||*khēten*] *ã ddǫä !khwa: ||khã:*’ (my transcription)
>
> ‘Because !Nuin [rain snake] is that which was the rain lion [*!khwa: ||khã:*]’

This chain of translations reveals the line’s multiform character. Man becomes lion becomes spirit-presence becomes snake who was maiden. Rain continues to fall. Only the magic of its making has changed. This new magic preserves its genealogy by accommodating the spirit of the old. The thing who made the rain (string-man-lion !Nuin-!kuiten) changes into something made by the rain (whirlwind-maiden-snake !Nuin [‘*!nũiň*’] or //Kheten [‘||*khēten*’]). Dorothea Bleek gives us a helpful parenthetical explanation in her dictionary definition about ‘departed’ or ‘invisible’ sorcerers: ‘(the sorcerers have already died, but their magic continues to go about)’ (*Bushman Dictionary*, p350). This enduring magic, going about in sky-snake form, is !Nuin-!kuiten’s penultimate transformation.

Shapeshifting as Theory and Practice of Survival

We need to consider the possibility that the */Xam* were not enthralled to primal symbols or archetypes. Instead, I postulate that the */Xam* language is composed of what I can only call therionyms. Therionyms, in my definition, are words that change the human or animal form of the thing that they name. For example, ‘!Nuin’ is a string-man-whirlwind-snake-maiden. Therionyms morph to account in narrative for the survival of the dead in changed form. Therionyms console and consolidate. The mechanism of */Xam* cultural survival in play is ingenious – the trauma of a family friend’s murder by a Boer simply fuels a higher, transformative magic at the level of expressive sense. The higher magic in therionyms is mapped out in environmental consequence – how the rain happens has changed, but in this crucial turn the rain will continue to fall and to sustain life. The everyday has been re-engineered. Practical magic has happened.

We might draw more challenging conclusions. First, at its very basis, */Xam* naming incorporates an idea of shapeshifting, or conceptual morphologies. */Xam* expression allows for therianthropic human-animal conversion or the transmutation of forms in order to offer an ongoing reason for environmental happenings. Second, */Xam* words are animistic because they are things invested with a play of co-constitutive ontological forms that act upon worldly happenings. Man becomes lion, causing rain, or a girl who once became a snake by being carried off by a whirlwind causes rain. If we examined the matrix of possible relations that I have hinted at in */Xam* dynamic polysemy and orthographic confusion, an entire cosmos might be rebuilt, although I suspect that we are all a little too late upon the scene. Human and environment are comprehended as mutually-informing, because */Xam* itself is attuned to utility of engineering their likeness. Read as a template of transmutation, */Xam* is a language that lives on in its versatile changes. Implicit in its statement is its perpetual

animation of the lifeworld that it names. If that formulation is true, then we need to ask how much of the work of changing from a lion ('||*khã:*') into a man ('*kā*', – 'for me'), or from a string-man ('*!Nūiň*') into a snake ('*Nũiň*') via a moving phonemic presence ('ˉ|*nu*'), is accomplished by sorcery and how much is accomplished by therionymic art. To phrase this another way, 'The Broken String's' genealogy of rain-making (passed on from !Nuin-!kuiten to Xaa-ttin to Dia!kwain and then diverted to !Nuin or //Kheten) may simply be embedded within the function of story. In still other words, indigenous memory itself may proceed from the versatile shapeshifting possibilities of */Xam* expression. In terms, the entire story of !Nuin-kuiten may issue from remembered atrocity, or it may simply issue from the contingencies of */Xam*'s dynamic polysemy. Put differently, */Xam* historical experience and animist life-theory may sediment on the basis of what linguistic complexity permits. In other words, once again, both cultural memory and bodily experience flow not just from direct events in the world but also from the indirect relations between similar sounding words. For example, we might believe that a sorcerer really could transform into a lion by donning its hide as a kaross, or that a maiden truly was lifted by a whirlwind into the sky and became a snake. Alternately, we may simply be looking at a much deeper set of */Xam* understandings about the relations between near homophones: '*!nuǐŋ*', '*!nūiň*', '*nũiň*', '*!noeiŋ',* '*!noeŋ',* '*!noiŋ',* '*!nwiŋ',* '*!nǫeǐń*', '*!noëń*', '*!noïŋ',* '*!nũi*', '*!noe*' and '*!nwi*'. These may be !Nuin-!kuiten's final transformations, so far as anyone these days can tell . . .

The adaptability of indigenous practice refuses such finality. */Xam* is not only what is (or once was) spoken. The */Xam* had a hidden inner language, a deeply empathic language of presentiments. //Kabbo relates:

> The Bushmen's letters are in their bodies. They (the letters) speak, they move, they make their (the Bushmen's) bodies move. They (the Bushmen) order others to be silent; a man is altogether still, when he feels that (…) his body is tapping (inside). A dream [//kabbowaken] speaks falsely, it is a thing which deceives. The presentiment is that which speaks the truth; it is that by which the Bushman gets (or perceives meat), when it has tapped (*Bushman Folklore*, pp330-331).

Universal alphabets ('letters') fail before feelings. //Kabbo hints strongly at the insensitivities of Bleek's philological research. While Lucy Lloyd transcribes her letters, //Kabbo [*//kabbowaken*] finds a way of telling her that he is speaking falsely (*Bushman Dictionary*, pp 549, 712). His true speech is contained within as something felt, a tapping that requires sovereign silence to hear, a tapping that moves the body. (What might have been discovered had Lucy Lloyd listened to profound silence instead of committing so tenaciously to her letters? What deep empathies might we career academics, here and now, learn from abandoning the professional will to write?). It is the */Xam*'s secret sense, this silent speaking, this hidden language, this empathic environmentalism, by which approaching meat is perceived. In fact, //Kabbo claims 'we feel a sensation in our ( ) eyes, on account of the black marks around the eyes of the springbok' (*Bushman Folklore*, p335). */Xam* presentiment here means the bodily experience of 'tapping', of people or game approaching, of feeling others' wounds.

!Nuin (-!kuiten's) name carries within itself the silent suffix or the latent pseudonym of hidden language: of both saying and not-saying-but-feeling-empathically ('*kuitƏn*'). When we sing '!Nuin', we also silently sing 'speaking;' or '*kuitƏn*'. In the line that Dia!kwain sings, speaking is implicit, but hidden in his signature game: '*Ô !nūiň* ('~~*kuitƏn*~~') *ã ddǫä !kwā kā*'. (Lloyd's transcription, my emendation). As we have seen, !Nuin is also literally a string that no longer speaks ('~~*kuitƏn*~~'). The attentive reader will notice that there are two levels of silence – one which speaks (silently) and one that no longer does. Even as string-sound abates, the body and its empathies tap on in song. There is the idea of silent speech or hidden language built into the line's

omission of an implied term. Dia!kwain framed the breaking of the string in this way: 'Now that "the string is broken," the former ringing sound in the sky is no longer heard by the singer, as it had been in the magician's lifetime' (*Bushman Folklore*, p237). We need to understand the singer's 'hearing' as being bodily too, and not simply auditory. This ringing sound is something felt in the body as rain approaches, a presentiment. There is a hidden language within */Xam* and it is felt. Speaking in */Xam* ('*kuitƏn*') is subtended by the radically empathic nature of the unspoken presentiment ('~~*kuitƏn*~~'). In short, what is not said also endures as something felt within */Xam* statement. This is !Nuin-!kuiten's untold transformation.

This idea of presentiment, of registers of sound, feeling and expressive silence, is radically extended in the character of */Xam* speech itself. In a truly remarkable passage, Bleek records that */Xam* contained certain protocols of pronunciation that made its speaker take on the character and the anatomical, vocal movements of what he or she described:

> A most curious feature of Bushman folklore is formed by the speeches of various animals, recited in modes of pronouncing Bushman, said to be peculiar to the animals in whose mouths they are placed. It is a remarkable attempt to imitate the shape or position of the mouth of the kind of animal to be represented. Among the Bushman sounds which are hereby affected, and often entirely commuted, are principally the clicks. These are either converted into consonants, as into labials (in the language of the Tortoise), or into palatals and compound dentals and sibilants (as in the language of the Ichneumoun), or into clicks otherwise unheard in Bushman (as far as our present experience goes),– as in the language of the Jackal, who is introduced as making use of a strange labial click, which bears to the ordinary labial click ʘ, a relation in sound similar to that which the palatal click ǂ bears to the cerebral click !. Again, the Moon – and it seems also the Hare and the Anteater,– substitute a most unpronounceable click in place of all others, excepting the lip click. (B XV. 1468 rev., L II.–37.3356 and 3357). Another animal, the Blue Crane, differs in its speech from the ordinary Bushman, mainly by the insertion of a tt at the end of the first syllable of almost every word.[48]

What we have here is the idea that */Xam* speech altered to take on the anatomical characteristics (mouth, jaw, wings, beak or bill) or astronomical characteristics of the animal, bird, insect or celestial body being described. Put simply, */Xam* speech is not always human speech. Sometimes it is speech uttered as an animal (this is not the same as saying 'like an animal'). Sometimes it is even speech uttered as an astronomical body. Expressed radically, animals and the cosmos, too, may speak unconsciously in */Xam*. This is not a language confined to a single speaker, nor even to a single life-presence. The language enters orthodoxies of co-habitation with its lifeworld, taking its observant speaker into behaviours and relations beyond human expression and species self-interest.

I would advance the further pioneering insight that the animals chosen for such special protocols are predominantly foods of last resort. If one is starving, the easiest prey to catch is one that is either dead or that does not move fast. Why the anteater? Because the starving */Xam* ate ant larvae ('bushman rice') as a food of last resort. //Kabbo's aunt !Kwara dropped dead next to an anthill when her frail energies finally gave out.[49] The anteater's special protocols of speech are reminders to the starving that a slow-moving nutritional boon may sometimes be discovered nesting in anthills. Why the tortoise? The tortoise cannot escape quickly. Why the jackal? The jackal, if followed, may lead to carrion, an immobile food source. Why the Blue Crane? The Blue Crane nests near water sources. In times of drought, she is a route to stationary eggs and water during nesting season. Why the ichneumon? The ichneumon wasp lays her eggs in insect larvae. If she is followed, nutritious grubs may be found

hidden in wood or underground, or even, in very fortunate circumstances, surrounded by plentiful honey in beehives. The ichneumon represents a last desperate gamble for protein and sugar-rich nutrition. If one is about to die, wise ancestral forms of saying remind one to behold the ichneumon. I break with orthodoxy in reading the ichneumon as a wasp instead of the Egyptian Mongoose, *Herpestes Ichneumon*, as Dorothea Bleek does (*Bushman Dictionary*, p384). Lewis-Williams corrects Wilhelm Bleek, who identifies *Herpestes Ichneumon* as the meerkat.[50] As Lewis-Williams points out, the Egyptian Mongoose is not found in the arid regions of the Northern Cape. Oddly, Wilhelm Bleek refers separately to suricats in the archive. Whichever species is intended, it is featured as watching over honey in myth.[51]

Leaving our shapeshifting ichneumon in an unsettled state, we may derive a more important insight. It is as if */Xam* built into its protocols for pronunciation a mnemonic guide or map to foods of last resort for */Xam* bands who were, every so often, simply too famished by game depletion and drought to hunt, to move very far or fast, or even to think clear-headedly.

/Xam, we might observe, is not only therionymic, but also 'theriosonic' – its sounds change the form of the speaker into an animal in the act of sound-making. Sounding as the ichneumon requires one to become ichneumon. A stunning inversion occurs. The */Xam* sign assumes the behaviour or character of what it describes. Its speaker embodies the dispositions of the referent. This spiral of attribution leads to imponderables. Who or what ultimately speaks in 'The Broken String?' Do lions ever really die? Can the subaltern roar? Taking this further, what environmental protocols of speech, and what silent presentiments, are activated in the performance of 'The Broken String'? Some transformations are inexpressible. The story that we think we receive, the lament of a man murdered, is likely the most basic record of */Xam*'s astounding practical magic.

The moon and the hare are key exceptions to the trend that I have identified. The moon cannot be caught or consumed by any conventional means. The hare – unlike the tortoise – embodies pace. They are not slow-moving or static prey. Instead, moon and hare are placeholders for how to come alive again after death. There are key reassurances offered by the special protocols of speech reserved for the moon and the hare. Moon is the only immortal thing: 'with the exception of the Moon [. . .] all other things mortal are said to die outright, and not to come to life again' ('Second Report', p14). Waxing and waning, the immortal moon loses parts of her body monthly and is later wholly restored. The story with which Moon consoles distraught baby Hare is that she will make his dead mother will come to life again.[52] As we have seen, the jackal's is the only lip click that the special click reserved for the moon cannot commute. My best intuition for this exception is that moon has no domain over the jackal. If she were to revivify carrion, Moon would deny not only Jackal, but also his straggling */Xam* followers, a vital meal. Both Moon and Hare hold potentials in reserve beyond starvation's last resort. Both are, we might say, principles (and principal representatives) of re-animation. If a farmer killed !Nuin the lion going about at night in 'The Broken String', perhaps Moon may yet revive him as !Nuin the snake.

Practical magic is not mystificatory. Food's material scarcity shifts our shapes. Inhabiting the animal-form compensates for the hallucinatory ideations of hunger. Incarnating the ichneumon is viable embodied behaviour when all human sense gives out in the last extremity of famine. Therianthropy reverses the instincts of digestion and submits the butchered anatomy of the kill to dynamic recombination. Knowing creatures intimately enough to share practices of habit is a technology of survival. In a precarious, hunting and foraging community, food security is a prime consideration. Presentiment, therionyms and theriophones introduce a slight accuracy of measure into the unforeseeability of food risk. Bank's history provides ample evidence that a politics of sustenance arbitrated in */Xam* relationships. ≠Kasin, seriously wounded by a leopard he hunted for food in desperation – and in pain and tears – was scolded by his wife and his own mother for not returning from the hunt with springbok meat for the children (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p218). Two of //Kabbo's uncles, a great-uncle and a great aunt died of hunger (p133). //Kabbo's wife,

!Kwabba-an, left her first husband when he forbade her to share springbok he had killed with visitors to their home, while he gorged on it (p110). //Kabbo's uncle, Tswarri-ttan, was murdered by a passerby when he refused to share a springbok he had hunted: 'An unwillingness to share meat amongst one's community was an intensely unsocial act'(pp131-132). If food was one of the deepest bases of sociability among a people who regularly knew starvation, we see now why //Kabbo remarked upon the Magistrate providing mutton to prisoners.

Generations of researchers, interpreters and poets have rhapsodised Dia!kwain's 'The Broken String' as a poetic lament. Such simplistic and sentimental postulates do not hold in a language and in a consciousness in which everything incarnates endlessly. !Nuin-!kuiten is wounded as a lion and dies as a man. While we arrest our attention on that moment, !Nuin (the sky snake) steps in to replace the rain-sorcering lion and become the supreme rain sorceress.[53] We move from singular lament for deceased individual to plural communal survival, but why do we switch genders in that movement? One intuitive answer is that the death of a man who brings rain, and therefore game, portends the death of male hunters in a moment of imminent starvation. Men, travelling ever further to find scant and rapid quarry, enter into a logic of increasing investment and diminishing reward. They expend their energy and stores of body fat in search of food. On a material law of averages, men are the first to starve and die. Women, foraging sedentary food-forms closer to home, are more likely to retain stores of body fat. On a material law of averages, women are the last to starve. The gender transition from !Nuin-!kuiten to !Nuin (//Kheten) is about gearing a whole people to survive cataclysmic famine in remnants and, despite every political and environmental setback, to be reborn again and again.[54] This may be !Nuin's most triumphant transformation.

I have made a case for animism and shapeshifting as survival strategies in the contexts of genocide, land theft, game extinction, starvation and enslavement. How then might we account for shapeshifting, presentiment, therionyms, theriophones and animism as logical responses to settler power? The following translational grammar, in the manner of Freud,[55] sets out the cultural logics of biopolitical determination and inventiveness in */Xam* therianthropic conversion and animist attribution:

> *Naming*: We are people named by our places (grass, flats, mountains). A lion killed //χuobbeten by the water. We call that place by her name. These days, new people are taking our place . . .
> *Materiality*: I am human and starving. Hunger makes me hallucinate that I am the animal I want to eat.
> *Predictive inference*: I am starving. If I enact the animal that I hallucinate I am, then perhaps I may be a step closer to eating the thing I behave. Becoming the animal inaugurates its arrival.
> *Camouflage*: I am animal. If I behave like the animal I value, perhaps it will not notice that I am a human hunting and I will eat again.
> *Cloaking*: I am human but also a denigrated creature (a *Bosjeman* or *schepsel*) who is becoming extinct. If I become the animal that my enemies do not value, such as a lion, perhaps I will escape their dehumanising notice and live on.
> *Silent speaking or presentiment*: My body is speaking (I am hungry). My body is speaking (I iterate the rain that is coming). My body is speaking (I express the game that is near).
> *Theriophones*: We are starving and dying. One last chance remains – a protocol of saying that will remind us where to eat when no thought or energy remains.
> *Language*: My body has a vocabulary (silent speaking). Words contain multiple forms (therionyms). If words can incarnate new forms, so too may the body (theriophones).
> *Replenishment*: He (!Nuin) is dying. If we change him into another animal and

> gender form, we can continue to eat. If he lives on as her (maiden) and it (snake), perhaps nothing has ever died (*Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp130-131).

This translational grammar finally demonstrates two unsentimental syntheses. First, we can think animism and therianthropy (human-animal shapeshifting) not as exotic, remote belief, but as habitual material practice and as routine political method. Second, natural environment and political habitat may act and speak at the level of animist culture. We are a long way here from Freud's account of the primitive's overvaluation of thoughts, wishes and mental acts: 'things', he asserts 'become less important than the ideas of things' (*Totem and Taboo*, p85). The difficulty that */Xam* shapeshifting brings to such claims is that the 'things' in their world are being progressively disappeared during *trekboer* incursions: game, children, water, land, friends and family. In fact, the straightforward plight of the starving is that they hold many more ideas than things to eat. The */Xam*, if my translational grammar holds even vaguely true, are compensating for the loss of things in inventive linguistic feats of equivalence, replacement and sublimation. They are not primitives devaluing the world with animist thought. They are modern men and women replenishing it, repopulating it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I offer two challenges to the contemporary reader. First, ask yourself how hungry you would have to be to barter your child for a meal, to eat ant larvae and carrion, or to attack a leopard.[56] Second, if you were regularly that hungry, what strategies would you be forced to invent in order to eat again? I offer a few final, and highly provisional, thoughts.

To speak, falteringly and inaccurately, with */Xam* is to encounter secret animations, but without access to all of their hidden languages and silent soundings. Those inner languages are not ethnic, 'primitive', sentimental or mystical. They are processual and habituated. When the rain falls, it must be followed because sweet, green shoots will spring and game may soon arrive to graze (*Myth and Meaning*, p189). Predators (like leopards) are edible too. The simple problem is that they bite back when provoked. We take on new forms for the things we hunt in acts of morphological empathy. (Similarly, in inhabiting and critiquing the Bleek-Lloyd archive, my argument has necessarily taken on the character of impatient philology.) Therianthropic conversion camouflages our action and instructs the kill. By eating, we live on to follow the rain. Creaturely performance guides that obligation. Our inner sounds flow from living on.

This article has demonstrated how a shapeshifting language works in response to a known history of starvation. What might at first seem like remote, exotic, and 'magical' metamorphoses are in fact straightforward strategic gambles with life and death amid scant survival options. We have indulged in an obscure project (parsing multiform translations and orthographic discrepancies in a nineteenth century language that no one supposedly speaks these days). But it is my hope that the dynamic results of my argument, and even its magical thinking in places, may have a practical use. We need to reflect again on //Kabbo's genocidal fantasy. We need to notice that its genocidal dimensions are proportionally equivalent to what industrialised humanity has inflicted upon itself in the intervening 150 years. Our planet has itself become a 'great hole' of death, driven by the insistent and systematic *deprivation of ground* that Latour identifies.

The */Xam* point towards our possible future. They faced an extinction event in which several species around them disappeared, threatening human survival with devastating food and water insecurity. As a species among others, we are currently experiencing a similar extinction event, but on a global order of magnitude. I have argued throughout this article that the */Xam* are exemplary modern and complex subjects. More to the point, they are forerunners of our own predicament, an historical first wave of our own imminent environmental precarity. The material conditions of scarcity that faced the */Xam* are

now visible on our own, global horizons. They were deprived of their ground just as surely as we in turn are being deprived of ours. We too increasingly face food and water insecurity. Solutions based upon the 'human' will not succeed. Firstly, the long history of cleaving of the human from the natural world has contributed to our imminent environmental catastrophe. Secondly, built into any human solution is the inerasable motivation of devastating species self-interest. We act in our own interest all of the time. We act as if we are a species apart. We can no longer afford the luxuries of such self-centred insularity, not least because we are so utterly dependent upon other life forms on our planet, and so completely reliant upon seemingly 'inert' land, water and mineral resources. This is where a spirited animist world might come to our assistance.

Despite all of the flaws in the Bleek-Lloyd archive's assembled testimony of convict-informants, we mild-mannered Magistrates should give these men (sic) and their practical magic a second hearing. The */Xam* knew intimately what it was not to be human. They knew what it was to be a creature or a *schepsel* or a *Boschmanneker*, unwittingly incarnating a South-East Asian primate that they had never seen. They knew the possibilities of metamorphosing into other life-presences. Our own future may obtain in similarly wayward identifications, in similar logics of global co-constitution. Identifying waywardly would allow us to re-engineer our own dailyness and to value our object-world because of the beings residing in it – not least !Nuin's abiding presence bodying forth in extreme weather events (such as hurricanes, tornadoes or whirlwinds, drought and rising waters).

Ingold's animacy is helpful here, not just in thinking about the mutual and reciprocal co-shaping of being-worlds, but also in thinking about their transhistorical moments of co-making. What happened to the */Xam* and others like them set in place our own worldly conditions. If we follow their example consciously, we might allow them to shape the future that they strove for but perhaps did not live to see (just as we might not live to see our own). A shapeshifting poetics, like */Xam* therionyms, might lead us to derive replenishing registers of address for our world. Presentiment or empathic feeling for the not-yet-visible might allow us to be motivated by our environmental unconscious. Institutionalising new protocols of embodiment in which environmental political interest and global species' behaviours iterate themselves through us, like */Xam* theriophones, might help us to order the urgent task of replenishing our planet.

To the extent that a lesson can drawn from our precarious */Xam* companions on the First Bushmen path to the great hole of death, I have tried to turn a few shapeshifting translations towards our own contemporary environmental predicament. */Xam* animism, hidden language and shapeshifting are simply attuned to the finer calculations of survival in straitened circumstances. So too are the dream of a gun, a hole the size of the white world and a temporary reprieve for those who share their sheep. Such violent dreams, such abysmal vistas, will prove increasingly likely for global humanity unless, listening with baby hare to Moon, we take a moment to realise that every final sentence may yet be commuted.

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[1] Elísio Macamo and Nuno Andrade Ferreira, 'The SDGs are Part of an Infantilization Machine of Our Countries', *Island Express*, 924, 14 August 2019, unpaginated. (Hereafter 'The SDGs').
[2] Robtel Neajai Pailey, 'De-centring the "White Gaze" of Development' *Development and Change*, 51(3), 2019, pp729–745, pp731, 739.
[3] Samia Chasi, 'Decolonisation – A chance to reimagine North-South partnerships', *University World News Africa Edition*, https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20200826111105105, 27 August 2020, unpaginated.
[4] Bruno Latour, *Down to Earth: Politics in the New Climate Regime*, Cambridge, Polity 2018, p. v, see also p6. (Hereafter *Down to Earth*).
[5] I am most grateful to Menan du Plessis for her generous, robust and incisive critiques of my thinking in this piece.
[6] For reading against the grain, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *In Other Worlds: Essays in Cultural Politics*, New York, Methuen, 1987, p211.
[7] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (trans.), Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997, p24.
[8] I pioneer the idea of an 'environmental unconscious' in Brendon Nicholls, 'An Environmental Unconscious? Nigerian Oil Politics, Autonomous Partial Objects, and Ken Saro-Wiwa's *Sozaboy*', *Research in African Literatures*, 48, 4, 2018, pp56-77.
[9] See Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art, and Custom*, Volume 1, London, John Murray, 1920 (1871). (Hereafter *Primitive Culture*).
[10] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo: Some Points of Agreement Between the Mental Lives of Primitives and Neurotics*, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Volume XIII, James Strachey (trans. and ed.), Hogarth, London, 1991 (1914), pp1-163, p75. (Hereafter *Totem and Taboo*).
[11] Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, London, Routledge, 2008, p68. (Hereafter, *Being Alive*).
[12] Mohamed Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide: The Extermination of the Cape San Peoples*, Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 2010, p. 53. (Hereafter *South African Genocide*).
[13] Antjie Krog, *The Stars Say 'Tsau',* Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2004, p9. (Hereafter *The Stars Say*).
[14] Menan du Plessis, the noted South African writer and academic, is currently working on a systematic project to update what we know of the */Xam* language, and 27 or so other languages collected in Dorothea Bleek's dictionary.
[15] Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World: The Remarkable Story of the Bleek-Lloyd Collection of Bushman Folklore*, Cape Town, Double Storey, 2006, pp24, 87. (Hereafter *Bushmen in a Victorian World).*
[16] Witness Bleek's frustration at //Kabbo's 'apparently interminable' story of 'Mantis and the Moon'. //Kabbo, of course, would have been perfectly aware that the longer he talked, the less prison-time he faced. Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp155-156.
[17] Otto H. Spohr, *The First Special Librarian in South Africa: W. H. I. Bleek at the South African Library*, Cape Town, South African Library, 1968, pp59-60.
[18] Christopher Webster, 'The Portrait Cabinet of Dr Bleek: Anthropometric Photographs by Early Cape Photographers', *Critical Arts*, no. 14, 1, 2000, pp11-12.
[19] Mohamed Adhikari, *Southern African Genocide*, p75. If Anthing's statistic is true, this would

mean that the Bleek cottage accommodated perhaps one per cent of the entire remaining */Xam* population in the 1870s, and Breakwater Prison two per cent.
[20] My phrasing is indebted to Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, London, Zed Books, 1999, p1.
[21] Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p36. I follow Bank in seeing the references to children as Kleinhardt's 'addition'. I part company with Bank by viewing 'take' as referring additionally to the abduction or purchase of child labour, not only killing.
[22] For the barter of children by starving */Xam*, see Mohamed Adhikari, *South African Genocide*, p70.
[23] Eric Santner, *On Creaturely Life: Rilke, Benjamin, Sebald*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2006, p22.
[24] Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore: Collected by the Late W. H. I. Bleek and L. C. Lloyd, Edited by the Latter and with an Introduction by George McCall Theal, D. Lit., LL.D., etc.*, London, George Allen and Company, reprinted by Cornell University Library Digital Collections, 1911, p291. (Hereafter *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*).
[25] Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p151.
[26] Similarly, notice Dia!kwain's story of the thunderstorm, which he likened to the 'wind of the cannonball'. In Mowbray, Dia!kwain would have heard the Noon Gun fired every day on Cape Town's Signal Hill. The Northern Cape thunderstorm carries metaphoric traces of his speakerly present in the Western Cape. See Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, pp324-325.
[27] For this detail, see Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p169.
[28] For the Boer slaughter of //Kabbo's aunt Ttanno-Kauken, her daughter /Xamme-an, and four of her children, along with the abduction of a surviving child, Kka-//kein, see Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p148.
[29] See David Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning: San-Bushman Folklore in Global Context*, London, Routledge, 2015, p183 (Hereafter *Myth and Meaning*).
[30] See Stephen Watson, *Return of the Moon: Versions from the /Xam*, Cape Town, Carrefour Press, 1991 and Antjie Krog, *The Stars Say 'Tsau',* Cape Town, Kwela Books, 2004.
[31] The notable exception would be Stephen Watson.
[32] For facsimile copies of the primary account given by Dia!kwain in Lucy Lloyd's notebooks, see David Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning*, pp12-32.
[33] Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p237.
[34] Sam Durrant and Ryan Topper, 'Cosmological Trauma in Postcolonial Literature', *The Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (eds), London, Routledge, 2020, p187.
[35] Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p236. In many translations that follow, I consult Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, New Haven, Connecticut, American Oriental Society, 1956. (Hereafter *Bushman Dictionary*).
[36] Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, p237. My translations of */Xam* retain discrepant orthographies and translations – by Bleek and Lloyd, by Dorothea Bleek, by Lewis Williams – alongside one another. For proper nouns relating to formerly living persons, I have not italicised and I have used the orthography offered by the texts I quote.
[37] Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, p484.
[38] See Lloyd's deletions in the manuscript facsimile and Lewis-Williams' commentary in David Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning*, pp 27, 29, 31, 190-191.
[39] David Lewis-Williams is the notable exception to this trend.
[40] Compare Lewis-Williams' facsimile of Lloyd's notebook with his own account of the Kalahari San in David Lewis-Williams, *Myth and Meaning*, pp19, 187. For the approximate extent to which my reading flouts Bleek's careful parsing of */Xam*, see, Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, pp. 144-154, but note his own possible disclaimer: 'There are still other words which an untrained European ear could hardly distinguish from the above', p149.

[41] Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, pp572, 732. For the second entry, I have had to approximate the final diacritic, which is a vertical spiral containing two loops in Dorothea Bleek's original.
[42] Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Bushman Folklore*, pp. 322-323. See also Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, pp. 427, 431, 457, 747, which variously give 'rain' as '*!khoa:*', '*!kwa:*', and '*!khwa:*'.
[43] Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, pp. 295, 431, 458.
[44] Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, pp. 423, 484, 755-756. For '*!nũĭŋ̃*', Lucy Lloyd, 'The Girl who was taken up by the Agency of the Angry Rain and Became a Great Snake', *Book BC_151_A2_1_062*, Bleek-Lloyd Collection, University of Cape Town Library, p. 5021 marginalia, online, page Image A2_1_62_05021.JPG, http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/books/BC_151_A2_1_062/A2_1_62_05021.html (Hereafter, 'The Girl'). For '||*khēten*', see Lucy Lloyd, 'The Girl', *Book BC_151_A2_1_062*, Bleek-Lloyd Collection, University of Cape Town Library, p. 5019 marginalia, online, page Image A2_1_62_05019.JPG, http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/books/BC_151_A2_1_062/A2_1_62_05019.html.
[45] See Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, pp. 322-323 and Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, pp. 427, 431, 457, 747.
[46] Dorothea Bleek, *A Bushman Dictionary*, p. 350, Lucy Lloyd, 'The Girl', *Book BC_151_A2_1_062*, Bleek-Lloyd Collection, University of Cape Town Library, p. 5020, online, page Image A2_1_62_05020.JPG, http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/books/BC_151_A2_1_062/A2_1_62_05020.html.
[47] See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Translator's Preface', in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998, p xi.
[48] Wilhelm Bleek, 'Second Report Concerning Bushman Researches, by W. H. I. Bleek, Ph.D., Curator of Grey Library, Foreign Member of the Royal Bavarian Academy of Sciences, &c. Presented to Both Houses of Parliament By Command of His Excellency the Governor', A Brief Account of Bushman Folk-Lore and Other Texts, London, Trübner & Co., 1875, p6. (Hereafter 'Second Report').
[49] Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p133.
[50] For the controversy over the species Wilhelm Bleek and Dorothea Bleek identify, see David Lewis-Williams, *Cosmos in Stone: Interpreting Religion and Society through Rock Art*, Walnut Creek, California, Altamira Press, 2002, p93 n. 1.
[51] For the story of ichneumon discovering what mantis did with the honey, see David Lewis-Williams (ed.), *Stories that Float from Afar: Ancestral Folklore of the San of Southern Africa*, Cape Town, David Phillip, 2002, pp145-152.
[52] For one version of the story, see Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd, *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*, pp56-65. See also Wilhelm Bleek, 'Second Report', p9.
[53] The survival of the deceased !Nuin-!kuiten as a sky snake is comparable to Harry Garuba's account of the survival of the hanged Sango, who has transformed into a god. See Harry Garuba, 'Explorations in Animist Materialism: Notes on Reading/Writing African Literature, Culture and Society,' *Public Culture*, 15, 2, Spring 2003, pp261-285, p262.
[54] For Wilhelm Bleek's possibly simplistic claim that the */Xam* were 'sidereal worshippers', see Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, p189.
[55] See Sigmund Freud, '"A Child Is Being Beaten:" A Contribution to the Origin of Sexual Perversions', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. Vol. XVII, James Strachey (trans. and ed.), London, Vintage, 2001 (1919), pp177-204. See also Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's comparable semiosis in 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*, Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (eds), Hemel Hempstead, Harvester Wheatsheaf, p92.
[56] Jacob Nijn is pictured by Bleek, his head scarred by a leopard. Nijn 'was hunting the leopard on account of hunger'. Andrew Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World*, pp117-118.