

# Animal Studies, Decoloniality and San Rock Art and Myth

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## Summary

Animals occupy an ambivalent position in relation both to Western capitalist modernity and to decoloniality, one of modernity's most vehement opponents. Paradoxically, animals are equally central to and yet marginalised by these discourses, both of which are thoroughly anthropocentric. Racist discourses thrive on "animalising" groups of people, which can only work if the status of nonhuman animals is diminished. Modern agribusiness values nonhuman animals merely as resources. The meat industry profits from killing hundreds of millions of animals daily and is one of the main drivers of climate change and environmental destruction. In its relentless pursuit of profit, Western capitalist modernity destroys not only indigenous cultures but also the environments that sustain them, including indigenous fauna and flora. Ngũgĩ argues that Africans prior to colonialism had rich oral literary traditions, often centred on animals, which colonialism dismembered. This article explores the animal figure central to traditional San rock art and myth to see if this can form an imaginative basis for regaining respect for nonhuman animals. Until nonhuman animal lives are respected the attitudes that fuel both racism and environmental destruction will persist.

## Introduction

The topic of animals may seem, at first sight, rather marginal in the discourse of decoloniality. After all, the story of colonialism, decolonisation and neo-colonialism, and the theoretical reflections on this story, namely decoloniality and postcolonial studies, seem to be very anthropocentric (human-centred) concerns. However, I argue in this article that the figure and reality of animals are, in fact, central to human concerns, and point to a more extensive narrative of oppression than many decolonial and postcolonial scholars sometimes appear to recognise. Using Wendy Woodward's *The Animal Gaze* (2008), which explores the animal gaze in southern African literature, and Kai Horsthemke's *Animals and African Ethics* (2015), which takes a philosophical approach, I adopt an animal studies approach to investigate the figure of the animal as it is discussed in key decolonial and postcolonial texts, Frantz Fanon's *Black Skins, White Masks* (2008 [1952]), Ngũgĩ wa Tióng'o's *Decolonising the Mind* (1986) and Achille Mbembe's *Critique of Black*

*Reason* (2017). Using these texts, which critique the depiction of Blacks as animals, and southern African San<sup>1</sup> myth and folklore, which promise a more positive portrayal of human-animal relations, I explore how animals are used to represent humans and humans to represent animals. While Woodward proffers shamanism as an African epistemology that bridges the animal-human divide, Horsthemke is less confident about the possibility of deriving respect for animals from traditional African belief systems and ethics, as are several of the contributors to a recent collection of essays entitled *Africa and Her Animals* (Ebert and Roba 2018). Drawing on the work of David Lewis-Williams, David Pearce and Sam Challis, I explore in this article some San myths in detail to see how far they offer a respectful understanding of animals, one that avoids anthropocentrism and the instrumentalisation of animals.

## Decoloniality and Postcolonialism

Like decoloniality, postcolonial studies has traditionally been human-centred. Even a relatively recent work such as Neil Lazarus's *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011) writes about the peasantry "as having always been treated like animals" (142) without questioning the assumptions behind this phrase. However, this blind-spot has been partly redressed in works such as Elizabeth DeLoughrey and George Handley's *Postcolonial Ecologies* (2011) and Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin's *Postcolonial Ecocriticism* (2010), which point out how the subjugation of colonised peoples was accompanied by the destruction of the local fauna and flora. Philosophers like Peter Singer (2002[1975]) and writers like J.M. Coetzee (1999) highlight the plight of animals by comparing their treatment in modern agriculture and "scientific" research with the treatment of Jews during the Holocaust, of slaves in North America and of colonised peoples during colonialism. Claire Kim (2015) problematises such comparisons in relation to the social struggles of North American minorities, arguing that the use of such analogies should be done with more sensitivity than animal rights activists often appear to demonstrate. Minority groups tend to see the attempts of animal rights activists to intervene on the behalf of animals as kind of ethical imperialism. Horsthemke (2015; Ebert & Roba 2018) explores similar issues in an African context but is more critical of cultural defences of animal use and abuse. It would be a mistake to underestimate the extent of abuse and exploitation suffered by animals across

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1. The terms "San" and "Bushmen" have been used pejoratively in the past. However, I use these terms purely descriptively to name the groups of hunter-gatherer peoples indigenous to southern Africa. Although the groups speak mutually unintelligible languages, they possess very similar belief systems (Mguni 2015: 51; Lewis-Williams 2015: 60).

the planet.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the environmental effects of intensive and industrial animal farming are a major cause of climate change, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, species extinction, infectious disease propagation and the pollution of land, air and water (UNONewsroom 2006).

In order to define the term “decoloniality” I refer to Ndlovu-Gatsheni’s (2015) essay in which he distinguishes decoloniality from postcolonialism and links coloniality to modernity. Ndlovu-Gatsheni claims that decoloniality is a new theoretical approach with a long history. It includes any act of resistance by colonised people to Western colonialism and imperialism as well as reflections on this resistance. His analysis focusses on the 500 years of European-North American colonialism and imperialism. Ndlovu-Gatsheni distinguishes between colonialism and coloniality, the latter being the continued relations of dependence and subjection since the post-colonial period. He emphasizes that decoloniality is not to be identified with the historical moment of decolonisation, not least because Western domination continues in neocolonial forms. Decoloniality opposes itself to the West and to modernity, equating these with coloniality, which, like decoloniality, is not a specific event in history but continuing relations of Western domination. Ndlovu-Gatsheni opposes decoloniality to Euro-North American-centrism, “the Euro-America-centric, Christian-centric, patriarchal, capitalist, heteronormative, racially hierarchized, and modern world system that came into being in the 15th century” (489). He quotes Césaire who describes coloniality as “a disruptive, ‘decivilizing’, dehumanizing, exploitative, racist, violent, brutal, covetous, and ‘thingfying’ system” (Césaire quoted in Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2015: 486). Ndlovu-Gatsheni comments that “The decoloniality expressed in [his] essay is essentially a repudiation of European fundamental LIE: colonization = civilization” (2015: 492).<sup>3</sup> He identifies modernity with coloniality and rejects postcolonialism, at least to the extent to which it has been influenced by poststructuralism, which he believes is Eurocentric. He chooses, instead, a non-Eurocentric-North American tradition consisting of African scholars, including Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o and Steve Biko and, more recently, the

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2. Indeed, the sheer scale of the killing of animals for food beggars the imagination. In the preface to the second edition of *The Case for Animal Rights* (2004), Tom Regan writes that in 2001 “Forty-eight billion animals are slaughtered annually for food throughout the world. That’s more than one hundred and thirty million every day” (xv). The statistics today must be even more disturbing. The logistics required for this global slaughter is on a scale that dwarfs the Holocaust, although it uses similar industrial methods as those used in the mass murder of Jews.
  3. However, the whole of human prehistory involves colonisation – humans left Africa and colonised the rest of the planet – and empire-building has been the main theme of history since the advent of civilisation.

South American decolonial scholars, Ramon Grosfoguel and Nelson Maldonado-Torres.

Like Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Lazarus distances himself from poststructuralism in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011). Indeed, both scholars appear to prefer a Marxist approach. However, the consequence is that they are committed to a resolutely anthropocentric theoretical framework apparently indifferent to animal exploitation and suffering. In this article, I argue that concern for humans need not detract from concern for animals, and vice versa. While Kim (2015: 7) blames neoliberal capitalism for the abuse of animals, I argue that the anthropocentrism at the heart of most human cultures is also responsible. Below, I consider traditional San shamanism, rock art, myth and folklore as possibly providing a basis for a more respectful attitude toward animals. Firstly, however, I explore some Black scholars' treatment of the idea of the animal particularly as it has been used to justify colonialism and racism.

## Humans as Animals

Achille Mbembe, a postcolonial rather than a decolonial scholar, frequently refers to animals and animality in relation to colonialism and racism throughout his recent publication, *Critique of Black Reason* (2017). He argues that Africa and Blackness were considered beyond the pale of civilization and the Black Man “a sign in excess of all other signs and therefore fundamentally unrepresentable” (11), the ultimate “other”. The hidden assumption here is that the animal is the ultimate “other”. Concerning the Black Man, Mbembe sums up Hegel's views that Blacks are perpetually involved in “dismembering and destroying themselves like animals – a kind of humanity staggering through life, confusing becoming-human and becoming-animal” (12). He writes that for Europeans generally, as a result of imperialism, “For several centuries the concept of race – which we know referred initially to the animal sphere – served to name non-European human groups” and “The notion of race made it possible to represent non-European human groups as trapped in a lesser form of being” (17). He claims that in the twenty-first century, “Alongside anti-Semitic racism, the colonial model of comparing humans to animals” (21) has re-emerged as a mutated form of racism, reinforced by genomics. In a discussion that illuminates the title of his book and reveals the centrality of the animal, Mbembe writes that:

The name [“Black Reason”] raises a question that has to do, first of all, with the relationship of what we call ‘man’ with animals, and therefore the relationship of reason to instinct. The expression ‘Black Reason’ refers to a collection of deliberations concerning the distinction between the impulse of the animal and the *ratio* of man, the Black Man being living proof of the impossibility of such a separation.

(30)

He later points out (73) that Blacks were considered a different species, barely human, by some Europeans, connected to the biological rather than to civilisation. Mbembe quotes De Tocqueville: “the European is to the men of other races what man himself is to the animals” (82) and shows how some writers believed that “Because they had not liberated themselves from animal needs, Blacks did not see either giving or receiving death as a form of violence. One animal can always eat another” (85). This attitude theoretically denied Blacks the capacities for full language, reason, autonomy and history, thus reducing them to an animal state.

Mentioning both Césaire and Fanon, Mbembe writes, referring to the massacre of indigenous people by colonists, that:

the archaic gesture (to kill, pillage, brainwash) constituted the *accursed share* of the colony and originated in the principle of sacrifice. The colonizer insists on “seeing the other man as *an animal*, accustoms to treating him like an animal, and tends objectively to transform *himself* into an animal”.

(106)

Therefore, colonialism brutalises both the coloniser and the colonised. He goes on to argue that the “colonial potentate [...] invents the colonized [...] Then it crushes this inessential invention, making it sometimes a thing, sometimes an animal, sometimes a human being in perpetual becoming” (108).

In *Black skin, white masks* (2008), Fanon writes that “The Negro symbolizes the biological” (128) and “To suffer from a phobia of Negroes is to be afraid of the biological. For the Negro is only biological. The Negroes are animals” (127). Fanon links the oppression and demonisation of both Blacks and Jews, showing how they represent Evil to White men in a Manichean scheme (139). He discusses Jews and Blacks as scapegoats (141), quoting Baruk: “Release from hate complexes will be accomplished only if mankind learns to renounce the scapegoat complex” (141, 150). This reiterates Mbembe’s critique of the idea of sacrifice quoted above. Mbembe and Fanon clearly show the centrality of the figure of the animal and animality in the formation of racist attitudes and implicitly criticise the human-animal analogy.

However, while Fanon and Mbembe powerfully criticise racist attitudes that treat other humans as animals, they do not appear to question the underlying prejudice against animal being. The injustice in treating humans as ‘animals’ is clear, but it ignores the question of the unjust treatment of other animals. It also appears to reinforce a strong distinction between humans and other animals, precisely the type of distinction that makes racism, xenophobic violence and genocide based on animality possible in the first place, as Lara Buxbaum (2017) has shown in relation to three works of South African fiction. Thirteen years ago, Njabulo Ndebele wrote a feature in the *Mail&Guardian* (September 1 to 7, 2006: 8-9) entitled “Let’s declare 2007 ‘The year of the dog’” in which he criticises particular politicians’ use of

animal terms to denigrate their opponents and to incite violence against them. Specifically, he was referring to writers and academics like himself and to journalists who had been threatened to be beaten like dogs for criticising the government. He writes, “Perhaps if we stop brutalising the dog, if we stop brutalising ourselves whenever we invoke the cruel image of the dog we have created, we may recover our own humanity, which we have lost along the way of our history” (2006: 8). This point can be generalised: the animalisation of humans is a strategy of dominance and abuse that will persist until we reform our attitudes to other animals. Do animal fables offer such an opportunity?

## Animals as Humans

Ngũgĩ points out in *Decolonising the Mind* (1983) that African communities have rich oral cultures, which colonial powers attempted to dismember in the course of their conquest of Africa. These oral traditions mostly involved animal fables:

The stories, with mostly animals as the main characters, were all told in Gĩkũyũ. Hare, being small, weak but full of innovative wit and cunning, was our hero. We identified with him as he struggled against the brutes of prey like lion, leopard, hyena. His victories were our victories and we learnt that the apparently weak can outwit the strong [...] These twin struggles, against nature and other animals, reflected real-life struggles in the human world.

(11)

Reflecting on the Br'er Rabbit stories, the form this kind of tale took on the slave plantations of North America, Fanon points out that the figure of Br'er Rabbit represents the Negro outwitting his White masters. He questions “the theory ... that these stories are not reactions to the conditions imposed on the Negro in the United States but are simply *survivals of Africa*” (134). However, the Br'er Rabbit tales may well have come with the slaves from Africa, at least in some form, as such types of tale seem to be widespread in traditional African and aboriginal societies.

The oral traditions underwent modification as a result of colonialism. Indeed, the animal fables were often disguised allegories of resistance to colonialism. In southern Africa, amongst San (foraging) and Khoisan (herding) peoples, there are similar tales of the jackal outwitting the lion, the jackal representing the aboriginals and the lion the White master (Wittenberg 2014: 605). The San themselves were considered animals (vermin) to be exterminated but could only be defeated by eliminating the wild animals upon which they subsisted. Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders note that a “little documented frontier of conflict was that between the white settlers and the San (Bushmen), who fought their rearguard action ... between 1770-1800, driving the frontier Boers to exasperation by their raids ... until the

Boers occupied their hunting grounds and shot out their game” (2000: 130). Modifying their own tales, the San who survived colonial genocide borrowed from the Khoisan the figure of the jackal to describe their experiences of indenture or enslavement by Dutch farmers. In these animal fables, animals tend to represent humans rather than the animals themselves. It therefore represents an appropriation of animal nature, or ideas of animals, for human purposes, an incorporation of animals in human dramas, without necessarily respecting animals in themselves. Nonetheless, there may be at least some residual form of respect for animality in these tales, which also suggest, however unconsciously, a kinship between humans and other animals. In what follows, I explore San myths that are relatively untouched by colonialism as a possible example of decolonised knowledge that can restore respect for other animals. Dan Wylie (2017: 37-41), however, critically reviews research on the animals in San rock art and myth aimed at restoring respect for nature and questions “whether resort to ‘indigenous knowledges’ such as the Bushman’s can actually be efficacious” (38).

Wendy Woodward (2008) argues that “Shamanism depends on an entirely egalitarian relationship between the shaman and aspects of nature, particularly animals” (2008: 4) and that “Shamanistic practice constitutes the most profound engagement possible between human and non-human animals” (2008: 54). For her (2008: 54-55), shamanism, which involves becoming-animal, is a world view that can help bridge the divide between humans and animals. Her understanding of becoming-animal is informed by the work of Deleuze and Guattari, and she treats this idea more positively than Mbembe (as quoted above) apparently does. The argument that indigenous belief systems are more respectful to animals than Western epistemologies is also implicit in the collection of essays edited by Woodward and Susan McHugh, *Indigenous Creatures, Native Knowledges and the Arts* (2017). However, Kai Horsthemke (2015: 84) argues that traditional beliefs are not exempt from critical scrutiny and is more doubtful than Woodward that indigenous knowledge systems provide a basis of respect for animals. He writes that “the notion of ‘African knowledge(s)’ is not obviously plausible and cannot be taken for granted, as Woodward does” (2011: 84). He explores the cultural basis of African attitudes to animals and finds African myths resolutely human-centred and instrumentalist in relation to nature. However, his brief Chapter 3 “African Creation Myths and the Hierarchy of Beings” (2015: 37-43) cannot do justice to the diversity of African myths – it includes only a very brief analysis of just one San myth about the moon and the hare – and in this article I explore in greater detail the myths (and rock art) of southern African San.

In my exploration of San rock art, myths and fables, I draw on the work of David Lewis-Williams, David Pearce and Sam Challis, in order to see what it reveals about San attitudes to animals. These scholars approach San rock art and myth through the concepts of shamanism, the trance dance and altered

states of consciousness. They share the view that the rock art is better explained by the ritual of the trance dance than by San myths. Using their work, I explore in more detail the concepts of shamanism and becoming-animal so important to Woodward. The French archaeologist Renaud Ego (2018: 102) explicitly raises the question whether the rock paintings of human figures represent mythological figures or real people in shamanistic ritual, although he leaves the question open. Andrew Paterson (2018) proposes in a recent article a mythical explanation of elephant-human therianthrope figures from the Cederberg in explicit opposition to the dominant shamanistic theory, prompting a critical response from Lewis-Williams (2019). However, the debate whether myth or ritual is the key to the rock art is not the central concern of this article, which focusses, instead, on San attitudes to animals as evident in both stories and rock paintings. San rock art and myth may present a particularly promising case of respect for animals in non-Western epistemologies.

### **Southern African Rock Art and Myth<sup>4</sup>**

Unlike the prehistoric cave art of France and Spain, which contains very few images of humans (Lewis-Williams 2002: 277), human figures are frequent in San rock art, usually depicted as hunting or dancing. Some of the human figures have animal features, however, particularly antelope heads and hooves. These half-animal, half-human figures are called therianthropes (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 166). Antelope are the most frequently depicted animal in the rock art – particularly the eland in the art of the Drakensberg. However, the fact that wildebeest are almost never depicted, despite being a frequently hunted antelope, suggests that the images do not concern depictions of everyday life in the San communities, contrary to representational assumptions (Lewis-Williams 2003: 51). This also appears to cast in doubt theories of hunting magic. Bees and honeycombs are also often depicted, and sometimes fish, turtles and eels make a surprising appearance (Lewis-Williams 2002: 148). Predators are very rarely depicted. Besides occasional turtles and snakes, reptiles are absent, and insects other than bees, rare. Siyakha Mguni (2015), however, makes a persuasive case for the presence of termites and termitaria in San rock art North of the Limpopo (in Zimbabwe). Birds are sometimes depicted, often in conjunction with therianthropes (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 172). A strange animal that has no natural correlate has been identified in some paintings (Lewis-Williams 2003: 64, 72-75). In the semi-desert areas of Namibia where there

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4. This section is a reworking of a paper delivered at the Animals-Humans conference at Mansfield College, Oxford, 2014, hosted by Inter-Disciplinary.Net.



are no rock shelters and rock painting is therefore impossible, the art takes the form of petroglyphs, carvings of images on stones, often abstract patterns rather than animals, or combinations thereof (Lewis-William 2002: 151).

There are serious difficulties linking the San rock art to recorded San myths, since the rock art does not appear to depict any recognizable myths or even narratives (Lewis-Williams 2012: 241; 2015: 149-172). In terms of myth, this paper focusses on an article written by William Orpen in the late nineteenth century (Orpen 1919: 139-156), in which he recorded a number of San myths narrated by the San tracker Qing, and two stories recorded by Wilhelm Bleek, the nineteenth-century German ethnologist, and analysed by Lewis-Williams – “The Mantis, the Eland and the Meerkats” and “A Visit to the Lion’s House” (Lewis-Williams 1997: 195-216). The myths involve a much wider range of animals than the images depicted in the cave paintings and often centre on /Kaggen, the San Creator god and trickster-deity, whose name can be translated as “Mantis”. The mantis is, however, only one of the forms that he assumes, others being the hare, the eland and the eagle (Lewis-Williams 1997: 201). Nor is /Kaggen seen as a transcendent and omnipotent god but is often himself outwitted by enemies or reprimanded by relatives. The myths include snakes, striped mice, long-nosed mice (shrews), baboons, bees, eland, wildebeest, zebra, and various types of predator: lions, ichneumons (mongooses), meerkats (suricates), eagles, and others. The animals in these myths tend to behave like humans and can often speak, with the exception of the eland. /Kaggen’s own family is a strange collection of animals. /Kaggen, the Mantis, is married to Dassie (hyrax) and they have an adopted child, Porcupine, who has married /Kwammang-a, the species of whom is unidentified (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 114). Eland can also be considered a child of /Kaggen, since the eland is the Mantis god’s special and favoured creation (Lewis-Williams 1997: 201-202). /Kaggen’s affines, his extended family through his son-in-law/Kwammang-a, are lions and meerkats, all predators (pawed animals). Like the rock art, the San myths resist interpretation according to Western preconceptions, since they violate Western notions of time, space and causality and involve apparently bizarre mixtures of mundane and surrealistic events: the Mantis descending into waterholes and ascending into the sky, a tree flying through the air, dead characters (or animals) being restored to life, and so on (Lewis-Williams 1997: 197-218). On a more mundane level, though, the animals in the myths are not often portrayed naturalistically but usually appear to be personified and often represent human family relations.

If the Western notions of representational art, art-for-art-sake and hunting magic are set aside as possible explanations of the San rock art and myth, how can one explain them and determine what the animals in the art could have meant to the San? Lewis-Williams argues that the art and myths cannot be understood without consideration of ethnography and the original context in which they were made – insofar as we can reconstitute those conditions

(Lewis-Williams 2002: 102-103, 180-181). Central to his argument is his claim that San art and myth should be understood in relation to San shamanism and a three-tiered cosmology, which, he argues, is hard-wired into the human brain (Lewis-Williams 2002: 126-130). Before going on to explain the details of Lewis-Williams's theory of San rock art and myth, it should be noted that Lewis-Williams is uncomfortable with the term "art" and all its Western preconceptions and prefers the term "image-making" (Lewis-Williams 2002: 126-130). He also contends that current Western archaeology's emphasis on rationality and intellect as keys to understanding human development in prehistoric cultures cannot do justice to the complexity of prehistoric rock art, which includes strong irrational and emotional currents, including trance states (Lewis-Williams 2002: 111). This point is corroborated by the anthropologist Mathias Guenther (2017), who argues that southern African anthropologists tend to over-emphasise the rational and pragmatic aspects of traditional San cultures and underestimate what he calls their supererogatory (supernatural) elements. He proposes New Animism, a theoretical approach well-established in South America, as a corrective. Lewis-Williams claims that at least some aspects of some rock art are illuminated by shamanistic trance dance and altered states of consciousness.

Drawing on laboratory-based neuropsychological research, Lewis-Williams describes a spectrum of consciousness with alert states on the left and autistic states on the right (Lewis-Williams 2002: 125; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 31-33). Depicted as a line, the spectrum starts on the extreme left with awake, problem-solving consciousness, moves through day-dreaming, and then bifurcates halfway into two types of altered states of consciousness, the descending line representing the normal trajectory, the ascending, an intensified trajectory. The normal trajectory involves hypnagogic, dreaming and unconscious states, respectively. The intensified trajectory represents the three stages experienced by people in trance or drug-induced states: entoptic phenomena, construal and hallucinations. In the first stage, people experience entoptic phenomena, geometric designs of various types that are the product of the human neuropsychological system (Lewis-Williams 2002: 126-130). These include patterns of dots, wavy or jagged lines and nested images, amongst others. In the second stage, these entoptic phenomena are construed as objects and animals particular to the culture of the trancer. Between the second and third stages is an experience called the vortex, an experience of a tunnel often with a light at its end, sometimes with patterns or objects in its wall. In the final stage, the person experiences full blown hallucinations, including sometimes the sensation of becoming-animal.

How can this neuropsychological model illuminate the meaning of animals to the San as depicted in their rock art and myths? Lewis-Williams argues that these altered states of consciousness form the neurological basis of the three-tiered cosmos of the San: the tier of everyday life and the two supernatural tiers (Lewis-Williams 1996: 124-125; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2005: 52-

53). The horizontal plane of everyday experience is accessible to everyone. Only shamans, however, have access to the vertical plane through trans-cosmological travel, both subterranean and aerial. Similar cosmologies can be seen in most prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies throughout the world (Lewis-Williams 2002: 130-131). According to Lewis-Williams, the San shamans attempted to enter the supernatural realm through altered states of consciousness and to depict these states in their rock art and their myth. They did so in order to access the supernatural potency of the spirit world for purposes of healing, fending off enemies, assisting in the hunt and bringing rain. The animals they painted are not so much natural animals – no matter how realistically depicted in the artwork – as they are spirit animals. The realm of the myths also appears to be a timeless spiritual, or supernatural, realm, sometimes called the primal time or the First Order of Existence and involving the creation of the world and the first people, who are often portrayed as animals (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 164-166, Guenther 2017: 10-11). Concerning the primal time, Forssman and Gutteridge write that:

Most Bushmen believe in two orders of existence. During the First Order of Existence, animals were still people. There were no social rules or obligations. The trickster roamed the chaotic world and could assume any guise he wished, depending on his agenda. His actions, as well as the First Order of Existence, are related in many Bushmen folktales. This primal time intrudes into the present through such stories but also through the transformation of humans into animals while in the spirit world and at certain stages during coming of age rites.

(2012: 117-118)

Lewis-Williams argues that this knowledge of San cosmology and the role of the shaman and the trance dance help to clarify some of the more enigmatic aspects of both the rock art and the myths. These facts about shamanism are the building blocks of the myths and the rock art, a type of deep structure (Lewis-Williams 2010: 3-4), or what he (2015) more recently calls “nuggets”. Looking more closely, then, at the rock paintings and petroglyphs, one can see various aspects of the trance dance depicted, often using synecdoche, with details suggesting more complete contexts. This explains the frequent depictions of dancing people in the paintings – men dressed in shamanistic accoutrements dancing while women clap hands (Lewis-Williams 2002:140-141). The hunting scenes depicted on the cave walls thus represent forays into the spirit world to gain control of supernatural potency rather than natural hunts. Entoptic images can be found in many of the paintings and on the petroglyphs, indicating the first stage of trance. Often these entoptic images are incorporated into the bodies of objects, animals and people, indicating the second stage of the trance. The eland is depicted so often not because it was the most hunted antelope but because it was considered to possess more

potency than most other animals on account of its large quantity of fat (Lewis-Williams 2003: 44). Sometimes the eland is depicted with its hind legs crossed and with its nose bleeding, characteristic of a dying eland. Many of the human figures and the therianthropes are also depicted as bleeding from the nose, some with hooves crossed. This can be explained by the fact that shamans would often bleed from the nose when entering trance states. The blood of the eland was also one of the ingredients of the paint, on account of its potency (Lewis-Williams 2003: 50). The therianthrope figures represent shamans entering into the final stage of trance, when they experience becoming-animal. The San described the shamans as dying as they entered the deepest stages of the trance: to enter the spirit world one had to die to the natural world (Lewis-Williams 2003: 35). It involved a radical loss of sense of self. In one image on a panel in the Game Pass, Kamberg, in the Drakensberg, a therianthrope shaman is shown holding the tail of a dying eland – both of them with hooves crossed (Lewis-Williams 2003: 36-37). Lines of potency radiate from the eland. Shamans would become a spirit animal in the supernatural world in order to harness its potency. Different shamans were associated with different animals as they specialised in different functions: healing, bringing rain, assisting in the hunt, and fending off evil spirits.

The surface of the rock was also not merely a panel to be painted upon, as Westerners may conceive it, but was considered to be a portal to the subterranean spirit world, a “veil” separating the immanent supernatural realm from the everyday world (Lewis-Williams 2002: 148-149; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 97, 179-180). The rock shelters in which the rock art was made were thus spiritual places. Indeed, in some of the images in San rock art the animals are shown entering or exiting the rock face, especially through cracks.

Bees and honeycomb are often depicted in the rock art since, as with the eland and fat, bees and honey were considered especially potent. Honey and fat were considered an anomalous but highly desired food, since they could be consumed both in solid and liquid form (Lewis-Williams 1997: 201). The presence of bees, especially painted on the images of shaman bodies, could also represent another fact about the altered states of consciousness involved in the trance dance, since the dance involved not only visual hallucinations but also tactile, somatic and auditory ones (Lewis-Williams 2002: 153-154). Therefore, the bees could both depict the prickling sensations experienced on the skin and the humming sounds the trancers heard.

The fish, turtles and eels represent, perhaps by way of metonymy, the sensation of being underwater that some shamans experienced when in trance, including sensations of muted hearing and restricted breathing, amongst others (Lewis-Williams 2002: 148; Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 122-123). Shamans were understood to travel to the supernatural realm through waterholes, as they were imagined passing through the rock faces upon which the paintings were made. The birds represent the sensation of flying

experienced by shamans. Achieving these altered states of consciousness was not easy, especially since the San tended to do so using the trance dance rather than hallucinogenic substances. Incessant rhythmic dancing and clapping resulted in dehydration and hyperventilation, which induced the altered states (Lewis-Williams 2002: 140-141). The transformation would begin with a painful boiling sensation building up in the shaman's stomach or base of the spine, until it burst in the brain as the shaman entered the altered state. Images of shamans bending forward at the waist with arms outstretched behind are sometimes depicted. The outstretched arms would sometimes resemble birds' wings. In some San communities, the shamans are depicted as men morphing into birds, specifically the swift or swallow, since these birds were associated with rain (Lewis-Williams & Challis 2012: 82-84).

In one famous painting, shamans are shown capturing a rain animal to lead across the country, eventually to kill it so that its blood or milk can fall as rain over as wide an area as possible (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 137-140; Lewis-Williams 2004: 64-67). The rain animal is, in fact, the rain that moves across the landscape, the separate showers of which can easily be imagined to be legs of some great creature. Rain shamans were especially respected as a result of their rain making powers. Rain caused vegetation to grow, upon which the antelope could feed and become fat (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 154).

Turning to the myths, the shamanistic explanation helps to explain the more bizarre events, whereas kinship relations provide a framework within which conflict occurs, requiring resolution by a shaman (Lewis-Williams 1996: 134). Lewis-Williams mentions Levi-Strauss, who argued that the myths often depicted irresolvable contradictions in hunter-gatherer society (1997: 211). This is especially true of San communities, which were often restricted to semi-desert areas where resources were scarce, resulting in tension within the extended family, especially concerning the sharing of meat, the subject of several of the myths. Just as the rock art should not be seen as representational, but rather part of San ritual, so should the myths be seen as performances linked to ritual – particularly that of the trance dance, during which tensions could be defused – not written in stone, but fluid and flexible, changing according to context.

Lewis-Williams argues that just as the rock face in the caves functions as a portal to the spirit realm, so does the water hole function in the myths. He develops his three-tiered cosmology so that the waterhole is located at the intersection of the horizontal (natural) axis and the vertical (supernatural) axis (1996: 125). Just as the sky is accessed in the rock art through the rock face itself, so the sky is accessed in the myths through plunging into the water hole. The two extremes of the vertical axis thus represent the sky and the subterranean spirit worlds, which are vaguely connected, although the lower realm is more closely associated with the dead, and the upper with the Creator god (1996: 126). The extremes of the horizontal axis are the camp, associated

with safety and the trance dance, and the hunting ground, associated with danger and unpredictability (1996: 125). According to Lewis-Williams, the Mantis's immediate family belongs to the camp, each member of which being an animal associated with fat and honey (1997: 201). The Mantis's affines, on the other hand, are all predators and belong to the hunting ground. In several of the myths, the Mantis faces conflict, particularly concerning the sharing of meat, and, in the apparently bizarre episodes of the story, performs a trance dance, which includes plunging into the water hole and flying through the air (representing altered states of consciousness), in order to put things right. Besides representing the Mantis's affines, lions also represent another aspect of shamanism. San shamans were understood to take the form of lions to protect their people; hostile shamans were also seen as marauding lions (Lewis-Williams & Pearce 2004: 119).

Animals in San prehistoric rock art and myth were not so much representations of natural animals in everyday life as spirit animals in the supernatural realms of a three-tiered cosmos, the potency of which shamans tried to access during the trance dance through altered states of consciousness. They represented not just danger and food but also supernatural potency. Certain animals such as eland and bees, associated with fat and honey, were understood to be especially potent, and for that reason were more often depicted in rock art and myth. Central to some of the paintings and myths is the trance dance during which shamans assume animal forms in order to enter the spirit world and access its potency. The Mantis god /Kaggen was himself the original and greatest shaman, directly involved in daily life and able to assume various animal forms. The spirit world itself was immanent rather than transcendent and manifested itself in everyday life. Perhaps the potency of the spirit world can be seen as a more general animating (or animal) force in the San cosmos, a metaphysical energy suffusing the entire universe, involving everything in an endless cycle of life and death.

## **Conclusion**

Lewis-Williams's discussion of shamanism and becoming-animal would appear to endorse, in general terms, Woodward's opinions, although Lewis-Williams does not make use of Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, his theory shows that becoming-animal may have been instrumentalist despite its spirituality, as shamans became those animals whose potency they sought for various purposes. Therefore, animals, even spirit animals, were seen by shamans as means to their ends rather than respected as beings in their own right. Furthermore, the animals in San myths tended to be personified and were used to illustrate family dynamics and human relationships. Nonetheless, the powerful presence of animals in both San rock art and myth surely does point to the centrality of (wild) animals in San societies, although these animals

were as likely to be spirit animals as natural ones. Furthermore, animals were indispensable parts of a tightly integrated and thoroughly animistic world view, where animality reigned supreme not only in individual forms but as a universal animating force. In addition, the idea of a primal time suggests that humans and animals have a common origin and that we are essentially one.

However, the very art in which the San depicted animals – the rock paintings, the myths and the trance dance – show a separation of humans from other animals, since no other animals display a comparable capacity for symbolic thought and image-making as do humans. Paradoxically, the art, which in its content suggests a commonality of humans and animals, in its very existence shows their separateness. Nonetheless, in a world experiencing anthropogenic climate change and the mass extinction of species largely as a result of an intensive animal-based agriculture, where animals are exploited and abused on a colossal scale, San rock art and myth may help us imaginatively to regain our lost respect for animals. However, this will entail ending our unsustainable consumption of animals; nor can we return to hunter-gathering. Nonetheless, both modernity and decoloniality can learn from San belief systems to reconceive animals and to realise that the human story is not the whole story. As long as humans perceive themselves as superior to other animals both racism and the destruction of the environment will persist.

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ANIMAL STUDIES, DECOLONIALITY AND SAN ROCK ART AND MYTH

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