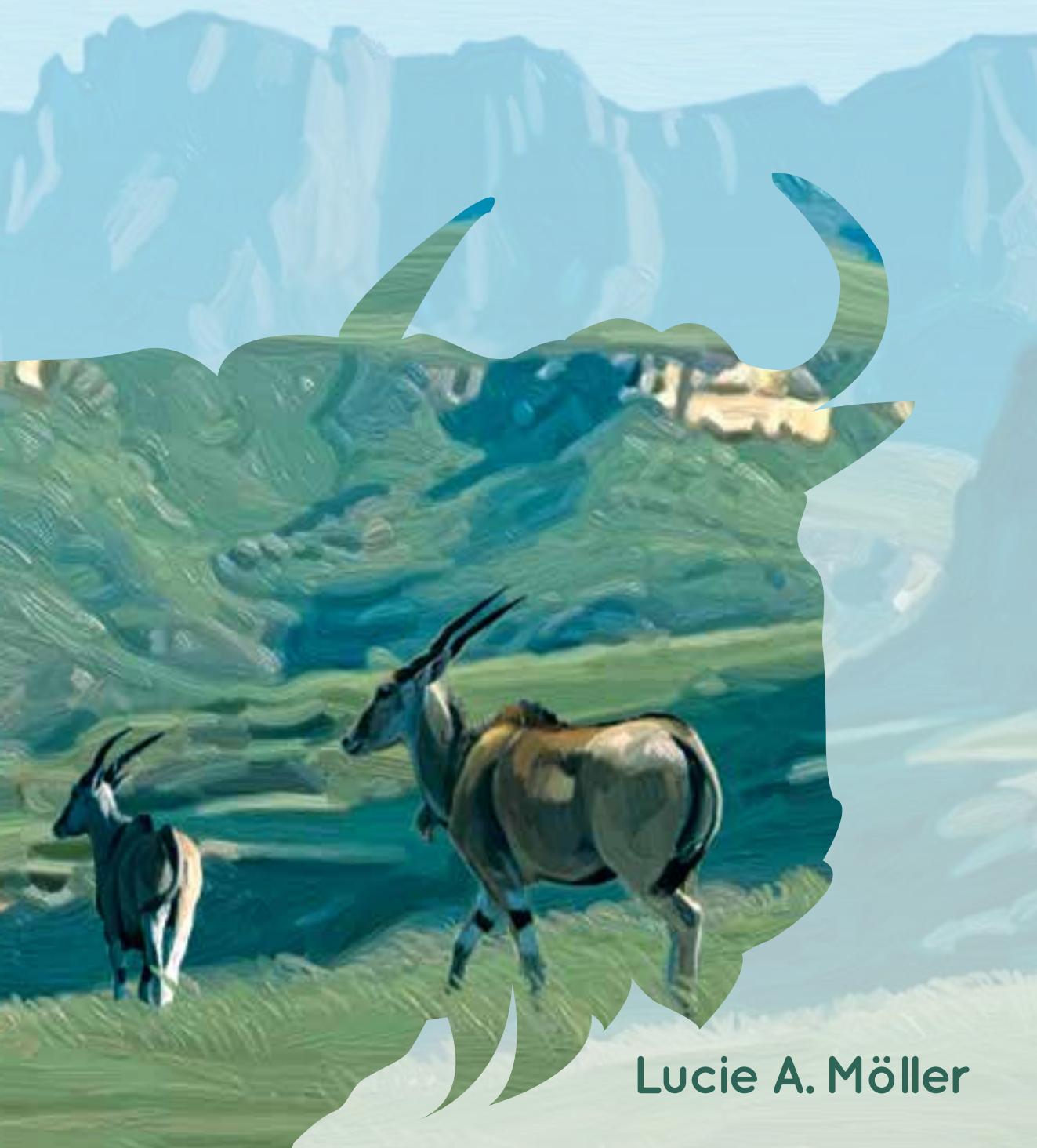


# *Of the same breath*

INDIGENOUS ANIMAL  
AND PLACE NAMES



Lucie A. Möller

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SUN PRESS



*Of the same breath – Indigenous animal and place names*

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# ABBREVIATIONS

ANUK: Aus Namaland und Kalahari

DACST: Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology

DGSM: Director-General (Directorate) of Surveys and Mapping

EC: Eastern Cape Province

LAT: Latitude

LONG: Longitude

MP: Mpumalanga

NC: Northern Cape

NP: Northern Province (now Limpopo)

NPNC: National Place Names Committee

NW: North West Province

PLAC: Database Place Names of Southern Africa

PLNM: Place Names Manual and Database

RZA: Reizen in Zuid-Afrika

SAGNC: South African Geographical Names Council

S-G: Surveyor-General (also used as SG-SWA)

SWA: South West Africa (now Namibia)

USBGN: United States Board on Geographic Names

UNGEGN: United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names

USGAZ: United States Gazetteer of Southern Africa

VRS: Van Riebeeck Society

VRV: Van Riebeeck Vereeniging

WC: Western Cape

---

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**Dr Lucie A Möller**

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# INTRODUCTION

Some of the hunter-gatherer Bushmen (San)<sup>1</sup> place names demonstrate the use of various basic naming devices, such as onomatopoeia (names or words created by sound imitation, here meant as imitation of animal and bird sounds), as well as imagery and description referring to physical characteristics or habits of these creatures. Onomatopoeia, description and imagery thus constitute the primary manifestations of onymic (name) formation, and are believed to have impacted on the evolutionary processes of language development and the act of naming. Where naming motives and patterns are concerned, a shift from common nouns (appellatives) to proper names can be observed, showing many animal names being included in names allocated to features of the landscape.

Successive migration into the sub-continent of southern Africa<sup>2</sup> and habitation of the region by Khoikhoi, Bantu and European peoples, as well as subsequent physical, social and linguistic contact, resulted in the assimilation and acculturation of these speakers and the changes to their proper names. This is illustrated inter alia in the many place names deriving from naming elements employed inter-linguistically in the users' naming activities, as well as the diversity of languages spoken in the southern African region. This acculturation influenced the interwoven tapestry of naming, i.e. displaying animal and place names in the many different voices from which they originated and the shared heritage they formed.

As the title of the book suggests, this study investigates place names that incorporate the often forgotten, and sometimes fossilised, remnants of indigenous animal names, focusing on the traces of Bushman and Khoikhoi sound-imitative (onomatopoeic), descriptive and metaphoric elements. It also focuses on some comparable names in the Bantu languages, and refers to the scientific zoological and ornithological terminology in which these names have been retained.

The overt theme is thus the presentation of indigenous animal names from various languages and how they appear in southern African toponyms or place names. While exploring the animal names, initially only in the Bushman and Khoikhoi languages, an underlying notion or sub-text emerged from the interlayered language interactions that took place as names developed and changed through time, and how they were transferred from one language to another, whether by adoption, adaptation,

hybridisation, translation or some other linguistic processes. It was soon realised that the cross-linguistic transfer of name elements or components into the common heritage of southern African place names, was much more complex in its interlinked reference systems, both in content and in the context of language contact.

In the search for the origins and etymologies of names, the narratives and legendarisations of the speakers became evident in the explanations provided, and often had to be considered within the pre-historic and pre-literate setting of cultural rituals such as the mimicking of animals in song and dance, folklore (storytelling, folktales), myths, phrases and other forms of expression. This was explored within an approach of onomastic, specifically paleo-toponymic studies. In other words, this study of names as found in ancient language layers, recognises the oral transfers and recorded words for animals, and those referring to land features, topographic entities, and so forth. It is also the study of names in often deeply embedded or underlying sub-structures of earlier Bushman forms of names, as recorded in the earliest transcripts of the incoming explorers. For example, the name for a type of 'jackal' as *!gaushi* in the place name Cossey; the cheetah as *t'gwassou*, *choassouw* and *χoasao-b* in Gosacha and Quassadi (qv).

What motivated this research was a fascination with the names and the namers who had bestowed them. The inspiration came from the sudden recognition that there was more to the 'unexplainable' place names, the names of 'unknown origin', and that the ancient words of the Bushman languages could hold the key to many of these opaque names. The hope and expectation with this study is, that in these names, one may find a re-sounding, a resonance of earlier, ancient voices to be listened to anew in name studies.

The intention with the book was that these names be recognised and restored, that it may be dedicated to all speakers of disappearing voices. It is not meant only for the serious linguists or onomasticians, but for all who have a genuine interest in the cultural legacy of names bestowed by these earliest namers. From this linguistic (cultural) level of names, one may find a reconnection to the natural world of the namers and the animals that they knew intimately well, and named as such. Along with this, a connection was sought to the animals, as presented in the animal names – to draw this 'breath of voices' through to the place names where they still echo within the many voices of the namers, and the animals themselves, and where so many of them have already vanished from our continent or are in the process of becoming extinct.



The approach was to work from a multidisciplinary and interlinguistic context, recognising the multi-layered and multi-lingual content of some names, often discovering new comparable elements, synonymous words, and equivalent name pairs or cognates. It became obvious that this kind of onomastic study, together with a scientific approach to both the natural world of animals, their characteristics, behaviour and habitats, required the same comparative approach, because most of the recordings were done from a perspective of uninitiated observers, or visitors to a newly discovered country. This was a land of wondrous animals and plants; a region inhabited by a previously unknown people, all living within this context of a highly divergent group of namers, and with whose negotiated collaboration in pronouncing, explaining and translating the names, the descriptions of these animals and their names could be understood.



Marching women, Ekuta cave, Erongo Mountains, Namibia [A. Viereck]

The subject matter of this book is varied, complicated and not without its challenges. It grew from some forty years of research on names, and a previous article or two, into a theme so divergent and challenging, that it became an all-encompassing, enriching experience. It necessitated opening up to many unexplored avenues of onomastic study, to that of zoology and other scientific fields of study; folk-etymological adaptations, earlier folklorist explanations and unusual points of view. A crucial discovery was in the detailed recordings in sources of how the early Bushman and Khoikhoi names for animals demonstrated their prowess of observation, the way the ‘first namers’ perceived certain animals and their ‘sounds’, which, in turn, provided new insights into the animals and their behaviour.

On an onomastic level, the essential notion, thus, was that onomatopoeia is a basic way in which words, particularly the names of animal and birds, are formed by imitation of the actual sounds made by those animals and birds, i.e. their ‘voices’. This was one of the naming devices, along with imagery and description, identified as underlying the forming of some names and lexical items that were conventionalised into words of a language, and possibly, also contributed to the origin of languages. The aim was to demonstrate the origins of some of these words, expressions and names, as captured in place names that point to many language threads in their various forms, and that these represent a shared, common heritage in the plethora of names from the Bushman, Khoikhoi and other indigenous languages, including Afrikaans. Within this context, an understanding was gained of the intricacies of the naming motives and formatives (i.e. from mere sounds to language utterances with agreed upon ‘meaning’) that were used in the naming processes, and of the value of the findings as a contribution to our understanding of these namers and the names they allocated. The evidence of these naming activities of the ‘first namers’ was found in abundance in the animal and place names of this region that spanned the whole of southern Africa.

On a linguistic level, a broader sub-theme emerged and developed into the notion that the language contact situations contributed to the relatedness of names in some African languages. Apart from the shared onomatopoeic and other naming triggers that existed among the languages, there were many adopted or borrowed ‘loan words’ that were adapted and translated into the receiver languages of the newcomers. These linguistic processes are explained in the Glossary and discussed in Chapter One with examples throughout the book. This chapter also deals with the onomastic and linguistic theoretical background, including a discussion of the language groups and language aspects involved in naming.

In the other chapters the animals are introduced with the many names bestowed on them by the Bushmen, the Khoikhoi and the newcomers from the north, the Bantu, and still later the Europeans, who recorded many of these names. The decision to assign certain animals to chapters and sections in the present book and to categorise animals together that do not belong to the same order, class or family, was based on linguistic grounds more than on taxa. Animals are sometimes grouped together as a species, family or tribe, but sometimes not strictly so. In other words, not necessarily by scientific zoological standards, but based on linguistic and / or onomastic considerations, according to how they were perceived (*cf.* Chapter one, par.1.5.2). The overall consideration here was usually the common name, often

in translated form, that had an underlying imagery or similarity, or pointed to some comparable behaviour pattern which may have prompted the common name. For instance, the swine-like, the horse family, the wildebeests, hyenas or wolves, bats as 'mouse-like' creatures, and others.

As the research progressed, it became clear that spelling and writing variations occurred because the writers came from differing mother-tongue backgrounds – the Portuguese, Dutch, French, English, German, and so forth. However, it was accepted that the initial recordings of animal names from the Bushman or Khoikhoi languages were as close to the verbal utterances as could be achieved, keeping in mind the writers' competence to graphically represent sounds and phonemes, although no standardised system had been developed for the click sounds, tonal aspects, and so forth, and how these should be transferred into the translated versions. It all depended on their skills to render the sounds of the animal names in writing, and to translate these words and names from an oral context, i.e. from the mouths of the interviewees through an interpreter to a translator, and then into written words for a language without a written form.

These names could be verified through comparison with cognate words, once they could be recognised in some of the oldest recorded place names, especially those accompanied by explanations provided by the speakers themselves, or those in translated form. The earliest recordings of words, metaphoric expressions and translated names provided the means by which they could be retraced. These were found to be the most reliable, since they were the closest to the real pronunciations, and had been correctly represented in writing; indicating actual sounds (onomatopoeia), or sound-initiated differentiations (as with clicks), and other expressions of meanings. All this could be achieved by the recorders, at a time when these animal and place names only existed in a few of the spoken languages left, and for which no writing nor orthographies had, as yet, been developed. It was also necessary to ensure that the earliest explanations provided as semantic backgrounds were, in fact, true, that the translated interpretations during interviews were correct, and that they could be verified against recorded words and names in lists and dictionaries compiled by newcomers who had writing skills.

To ignore these oldest renderings of the names would imply disregarding the first contacts the namers had with literate listeners, and at a time when the people still spoke these languages. Over time, much has been legendarised to such an extent that the real meaning of the original names no longer shine through. Since these

words and names have been changed and modernised according to the orthographic renderings of modern languages, as standardised today, many components in place names are almost totally unrecognisable and some have become devoid of meaning.

Of the remaining languages that have not become extinct, not many are spoken anymore, so that even the few Taa, Kx'a, and !Kwi (such as the !Kung, !Xun or !Xóõ and Ju/'hoansi) speakers (as recently researched by Snyman (1974), Traill (1996), Boden (2011) and many others as presented in published works and on the Internet, for example, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taa\\_language/](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Taa_language/)), have become intermingled to such an extent that few speak the 'old' languages or remember much of these languages, their expressions, and names, as recorded in the previous four to five hundred years.

In addition to linguistic analyses and etymologies, this research has unearthed significant and meaningful data, including some of the oldest recordings of animal names retained in zoological taxa today, criteria for onomastic research based on the origins of these names as interpreted from original languages in first hand recordings, reports on observations as made by the earliest namers of the named animals and information on the animals' behaviour patterns. A hitherto unsuspected layer of Bushman influence on animal and place names has been revealed, based on onomatopoeic, metaphoric, descriptive and other onymic motives and processes. It is hoped that a new appreciation of the namers and their names, will be brought about, as these are affirmed to be original and reliable designations.

These names were recorded and documented with dedication, thereby revealing the subtleties and expressiveness of the languages. The lexical items as recorded, and the interpretations of these words and names, also place names, were derived from the explanations as they were provided to the incoming foreign recorders. The indigenous people reported to these scribes, their own concepts of their origins, their natural world, the entities and objects of their daily life – all as part of an oral transmission that retained its fluidity of expression, even in the difficult situation of translating it to the writers. They were providing a glimpse into their natural habitat and that of the animals; an insight into their interdependence with the fauna and flora in it; how this formed a conceptualisation of their cosmic world in which everything had a name. It also demonstrated their lexical prowess, the retracing of their own existence, history and heritage in an oral manner (Von Wielligh as discussed in Van Vuuren 2016:1-86).

This oral history already reflected the cultural milieu of a divergent, intermingled and acculturated group of peoples by the time the first foreigners arrived. Their accounts of why and how the allocation of these names came about, retold in their own 'voices' within myths and legends as well as in place names, demonstrate a complex phonemic system with clicks and sound clusters, unheard of before by the foreigners. These narrations of their own 'name giving', recorded by various writers and collectively published by Dorothea Bleek (1929, 1956), and as recalled in Bushman folklore and orality, depicting many animal forms even as images of therianthropic beings in their rock art (*cf.* W Bleek and Lucy Lloyd 1857, 1911, 1932; D Bleek 1936, 1940; Deacon and Deacon 1999:174; Van Vuuren 2016:25-27, 127), is what calls for recognition and appreciation of their cultural contribution, and for the continued restoration and preservation of their animal and place names.

Recognition of the 'first people' as namers, contributes to the appreciation of their place names, and becomes a focus to analyse and illustrate the interconnected tapestry of animal names in the different local indigenous languages. It shows how, when other languages came into the region, some of the animal and place names were altered, but at the same time, incorporated in another linguistic context, thus providing us with clues to the oldest preserved comparative names, albeit often only in translated forms. Recovering this Bushman and Khoikhoi nomenclature from almost forgotten designations for both animals and places, may hopefully lead to the restitution of these names to the cultural heritage of the originators, and with it, a form of restoration of the historic, linguistic and onomastic heritage of these peoples. This may aspire to what is stated in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996:5), namely that the languages such as the Bushman, Khoikhoi, Nama and other indigenous minority languages, should be recognised, restored, respected and preserved.

Recognising the historicity of the Bushman and Khoikhoi oral sources indicates how these have inspired many authors in southern Africa over the years, to delve into the possible origins and meanings of, *inter alia*, the languages, the place names, folklore, the myths and legends and other aspects of their cultural life.

The written sources of the Bleeks and Lucy Lloyd, captured as digital archive (<http://lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/researchers.html>), are the most comprehensive on the Bushman and Koranna life-style, folklore, lexicon and languages, apart from studies by Meinhof (1929, 1930), Westphal (1962, 1963), Maingard (1964),

Engelbrecht (1936), Traill (1978, 1996) and many others. Dorothea Bleek, for instance, interviewed different Bushman groups herself and lectured for 15 years on the Bushman languages. She compiled two dictionaries on the various languages and dialects, and provided the most detailed and extensive word lists – classification of some 30 languages and dialects with an indication of the speakers and their areal distribution. Though other sources have also provided a wealth of documented information on these aspects of languages, words, names and place-names, no other scholars have matched her contribution.

On another level, the focus on animal behaviour patterns, habitat and distribution as recorded by zoologists and other scientists, added a new dimension and appreciation of the animals themselves. In this respect, a renewed interest was kindled by the studies done on mammal behaviour by world-renowned scientist, Richard Despard Estes (2012), and other sources, such as the Roberts (1954), Skead (1987) and Walker (1996) books on animals that contained indigenous names for these animals (enabling comparisons of animal names between languages), to observations and recordings on the documented former wide distribution of these animals in southern Africa before the decimation of these life forms and the silencing of their voices began.

The idea of preservation of an early vocabulary (found both in animal and place names) and of the local, indigenous cultures as a shared heritage, together with the rapidly disappearing biodiversity of the planet, may have been motivating thoughts here. This relates in a very real sense to what Edward O. Wilson expressed in his *Foreword* to the book by Estes (2012:xi), *The Behaviour Guide to African Mammals*: “If you know an animal’s behaviour well, you know its essence. ... To monitor the daily routines and life cycles of selected mammals is to engage the African wilderness intimately, to savor millions of years of evolution and the last stronghold of the ecosystem in which humanity itself originated – as a mammal species... The greater the number of resident people and visitors who understand the African environment at the level of animal behaviour, the more likely is the environment to be saved. ... To know a subject well, esthetically as well as actually, is to assign it greater value. Like art and historical associations devoted to the preservation of culture, groups of naturalists act to protect this equally precious and far more ancient part of humanity’s heritage”.

This viewpoint is endorsed by the author of the present book, and may have crystallised in the focus, here, on the origins of names from different indigenous languages, and

the similarities of such names, as found in the various contexts of the southern African continent, i.e. on the cultural and linguistic levels of the study area.

The recording of these names in reports and other archivalia, and with it the conveying of historical facts on fauna and flora and their natural habitats, indicating how they were before, and the testimonials about the last animal shot, or sightings of the presumed last specimens of certain animals, was not only a warning of an imminent decline, but was becoming an irreversible reality (cf. Roberts 1954; Skead 1987; Walker 1996; Branch 1998; Estes 2012).

The behavioural patterns, including vocalisations of these animals, were felt to be on some instinctive level, intertwined with and reflected in the song and dancing rituals and naming actions of the 'first peoples' as ancestral namers. These 'naming' actions, including the first recognisable naming elements or onymic formatives in the later recorded words, myths, folklore and place names, were possibly initially expressed as sound imitations, as argued by Westphal (1962:30, referring to Roman Stopa 1935): "The uniqueness of the clicks in the languages of the world and the apparent primitivity of the non-Bantu peoples who spoke click languages led several linguistic theoreticians to suppose that clicks were fundamental and original human noises and that they were perhaps basic to all languages of the world." In the present study, these actions are recognised as possibly some of the first human sounds utilised to imitate the vocalisations and other aspects of non-human, i.e. animal behaviour patterns, as reflected in their names and in place names.

Other characteristic features of the animal, such as appearance, colour, spotted or striped, large or small, were often conceptualised as 'pictures' and presented as images in their rock art, but often also depicted in various descriptive ways. In naming, it is illustrated by the powerful imagery, the visualisation and metaphoric capabilities of these namers, for example, the cheetah seen as the 'painted runner', the rhino as the 'near-sighted-one', the elephant as the 'trampler'.



Rock-painting in the Jatow cave, Erongo, Namibia [A. Viereck]

In bringing together some of these ancient references to animals with the modern scientific interpretations of their behaviour, their names and the place names in which these animal names appeared as components, the oldest sources often proved most reliable. Many of these names were rediscovered in consulting the Bleek and Lloyd archives (<http://www.lloydbleekcollection.cs.uct.ac.za/researchers.html>), the Dorothea Bleek dictionaries, the Roberts book on *Mammals of South Africa* (1954), where numerous indigenous names from the Bantu languages were recorded, with CJ Skead's work on the *Historical incidence of the larger mammals of the Western and Northern Cape Vol 1* and the *Eastern Cape, Transkei and Ciskei Vol II* (1980, 1988, 2011), and GS Nienaber's *Hottentots* (1963), in which Afrikaans animal names were recorded alongside some of the oldest recordings of these names from the Old Cape dialects, Griqua, Koranna and Nama.

A link was sought between the animal names, as found in historically recorded texts with the name components, as retraced in place names, and as they appear in written contexts today. It was evidently not easy to establish exactly how the process of naming (onymic formation) developed within a complex multilingual situation, where acculturation of the namers and trans-language exchange processes of borrowing, adaptation and translation (possibly with a good measure of code-switching between speakers, cf. the *hlonipa* custom), had occurred over many hundreds or thousands of years with other language groups entering the area. As



Van Vuuren (2016:59) mentions: “That acculturation took place between Khoi, Bushmen and Nguni (such as the Zulu, Xhosa and Swazi) cultures is by now well established ... Thus a reading of traditional cultures, customs and beliefs within a comparative framework across linguistic divides is richly rewarding”.

Acculturation between these early San, Khoikhoi and Bantu speakers may have led to many animal and place names with comparable vowel and other phonemic similarities, revealing close language contact between the early namers. The aim was to determine how similar naming elements or formatives, when compared to equivalents in other languages, often indicated derivations of, or borrowed, or cognate forms. Another goal was to verify the etymologies of the names according to established onomastic methods. Some examples of these methods are using the ‘sound-meaning’ method, comparing topographic cluster formations, geographical and linguistic affirmation of the entity named, its name in various languages, its phonological form (pronunciation according to the IPA), and to the various orthographic representations often confusingly different, especially in the case of less transparent, opaque components.

In this study on animal names, it emerged that there were many fossilised words not found elsewhere in the vocabularies as recorded in the standard works on the Khoikhoi languages, that these were actually from Bushman and could, in some cases, be recognised as pure sound imitations or metaphors; also that these may have been misinterpreted by ‘later comers’. These words and names are a shared heritage, because these animal and place names are inter-linguistically linked, reflecting heliographically on and into each language in which they occur, or have been borrowed and adapted from. They were often translated from and into languages that came into contact, adapted both phonologically and grammatically and re-interpreted on a folk-etymological level. These names have been adjusted and preserved through the processes of borrowing and translation over many years, yet their origins from a keen observation of nature, from storytelling, characters as spiritual and mythical beings, continue to fascinate scholars. A quote from Van Vuuren( 2016:165-166) may illustrate this, where she comments on the technique of the ‘*dwaalstories*’ (cf. Eugene Nielen Marais’ *Dwaalstories*, 1927), that are described as “stories that originated in the animal tales of the San, where each animal spoke his own language... and that were translated into Afrikaans... the stories have no clear narrative threads and little meaning, except for the word sounds, but they stimulate the imagination ...”.

When analysing the colloquial, local usage of animal names in some languages or literary texts recorded from the oral traditions of the Bushman and Khoikhoi, and from reports of the acculturation that happened with incoming peoples in these contact situations, as well as in studies on the orality of the local people of an area, it became obvious that where these animals were observed and named, their names featured in place names too. Where local knowledge contained in the colloquial names was documented, it allowed us to gain new insights into the indigenous customs, beliefs, myths, legends and naming activities, reflecting their history and depicting their social and cultural heritage.

In Bleek's *Comparative Vocabularies of Bushman Languages* (1929: *Introduction*, 1-4, 8, 10), she elaborated on the Bushmens' ability of story telling, of communicating with much gesticulation, pointing, imitation, also sound mimicking (onomatopoeia). The intricacies of their vocabulary and ability of self-expression were equally highlighted throughout her works in the collection of Bushman folklore and mythology; words, phrases and songs, the explanations of dance and other rituals, religious, astronomical and other concepts.

Van Vuuren (2016:32-33) further noted that the transfer of complex thought and knowledge about plants, insects and other animals was already evident in the storytelling and mythology of the San as recorded by the Bleeks, Lucy Lloyd and G.R von Wielligh. It was a necessary skill to acquire for a 'primitive' society living so close to nature. In being able to gather information and sustenance from it, they were enabling themselves to survive in an otherwise 'hostile' environment. It required of small family groups, even if comprised of only a few individuals, that this knowledge be transmitted to ensure the 'wholeness' of a stable and strong societal base, within a social context where elders were the 'teachers', re-enacting within the orality of their culture the myths, stories of how animals behaved, even 'spoke in their own language'. In this manner they were teaching the younger generation about their environment, the customs and beliefs, of the natural life and dangers around them. In other words, all the knowledge necessary for survival. It is in this natural environment, and in the circle of a close familial and cohesive social milieu that the words and names for animals, plants and all other entities, also abstract concepts, were created or evolved from various experiences within this setting. Van Vuuren quotes Barnard (2012:7; 146-148): "The intimate, intricate knowledge is turned into myths of origin while at the same time relaying precise information about the behaviour of insects and animals, an astounding feat".

Although this ability of the indigenous peoples had been recorded from the earliest reports of travellers to the southern African continent, and has been extensively researched and disclosed in some reports on languages, intra- and inter-linguistic contact situations (as in the works of the Bleeks, Lucy Lloyd, Traill, Boden, Skotnes, and G.R von Wielligh as indicated by Van Vuuren, 2016); their intricate inter-relatedness to nature as highlighted in numerous anthropological and other scientific works (see Bibliography) was only gradually researched by name scholars. The full impact of the inter-linguistic contact within the Bushman and Khoikhoi languages and their contribution to the naming of animals and places, however, remained mainly unexplored in onomastics.

Acknowledging and illustrating the extent to which these speakers had already experienced the loss of their disappearing languages, and that of the land and the natural world around them; of all that they had depicted in their 'pictures' (rock paintings), described and named in myths, legends and stories, the fauna and flora, the features of their environment such as the surrounding plains, mountains and rivers, and their dependence on the animals in a shared landscape, became a palette for this study. Their language and cultural heritage is still encapsulated in their oral traditions, in their naming and in the authentication of their place names as recorded, and that is, where the *spoor* of evidence may still be traced.

This research brought an awareness of their intrinsic role and contribution of a cultural and spiritual legacy of names, something that not only reminds us of the transience of life in all its forms, but fills us with awe to this day. The fragility of human and non-human existence is captured in their art and these names. Their explanations of animal names and interpretations of their behaviour, were often presented with humor, often with great respect and reverence for the animals. And perhaps *that* is the wonder of their continued 'absent presence' (Van Vuuren 2016:iii), that with their naming activities and within their names, specifically place names, just as in their rock art, this legacy of their cultural and spiritual life lives on, has, in fact, been immortalised.



Family on the move, Jatow caves, Erongo, Namibia [A. Viereck]

# PART ONE

## Naming





# CHAPTER ONE

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## Language threads in naming

### 1.1 Background to the vocabulary of animal names

The earliest inhabitants of southern Africa, of whose languages we have any written record, are the Bushmen (San) and the Khoikhoi. These autochthonous peoples, and possibly their predecessors, gave common names to many wild animals and birds by observing them closely and naming them according to their appearance, colouring, behaviour and vocalisations. Their distinctive characteristics, especially the sounds emitted by them, were often emulated by the early speakers in the names they gave them. The animal names were then, over time, allocated to places which they recognised by the occurrence of these animals and birds. The result was a vocabulary of common nouns, rich in sound-associative and descriptive elements, drawn from a variety of Bushman and Old Cape Khoikhoi languages and dialects; its diversity further highlighted in its application to toponyms in which its adoption, adaptation and translation by speakers of other languages becomes apparent (Pettman 1931:13-17; Raper *et al* 2014:ix-xviii, xxii). The place names, therefore, already highly diverse in origin, illustrate a socio-cultural and linguistic heritage interlocked in the coinage and usage of these common names in southern Africa.

The aim of this research was to rediscover traces of Bushman and Khoikhoi onomatopoeic, descriptive and metaphoric naming motives and patterns in southern African animal names, as relating to typical animal behaviour. Furthermore, the aim is also to link some of these common names to toponyms and names in other African languages, thereby highlighting the interlinguistic contact that occurred over many thousands of years (Werner 1925:117-129).

The research entailed finding cognate Bushman and Khoikhoi words for components in toponyms that initially seemed opaque or semantically bleached, but were found to apparently refer to names of animals, birds, reptiles and insects, in their root elements. In this way, they were linked to the oldest recordings of such words and names. Analysis

of these toponyms indicated that some elements or components may have been formed by sound-associative, descriptive or metaphoric processes, and, as indicated in the fieldwork and findings from research done by various researchers over many years, were explained as onomatopoeic or descriptive references to certain animals and birds. The relevance of the zoological and topographic information included in the explanations had to be ascertained, also that these names had indeed been coined by the Stone Age hunter-gatherers as ‘first namers’, the Khoikhoi herders and later Iron Age agro-pastoralists, as gleaned from the sources on the Bushman, Khoikhoi and Bantu languages.

### 1.1.1 *Early naming motives and formatives*

In southern Africa some place names, when initially analysed in their structural and etymological or ‘semantic’ origins, seem to display certain sound-associative or onomatopoeic components reminiscent of animal vocalisations, or are descriptions of sounds and behavioural patterns that may be recognised in the common names referring to these animals. More directly, some emulated, imitated or mimicked animal behaviour, e.g. the vocalisations and other behavioural traits of animals, can be reconciled with the descriptive elements pointing to these characteristics, even to some metaphoric associations in the names of animals, as found in toponyms. These elements have been recorded and documented from the earliest travels to and into Africa, i.e. by the Portuguese, French, Dutch and English seafarers, by the explorers and missionaries, soldiers and administrators. The toponyms created from such common noun references to the fauna therefore abound in the region.

Rediscovering sound-associative naming patterns in ancient name forms for both animals and birds in Bushman, Khoikhoi and Bantu languages, has shed some light on this type of nomenclature, as well as on many of the toponyms that were previously regarded as unknown, problematic to explain as to origin and meaning, or would require a “thorough knowledge of the native languages” (Botha 1926:29-30). In some cases, the indigenous words in toponyms can be traced back to the original Bushman cognate words or common names of animals used on a wider scale within the Khoi-San and Bantu languages spoken in southern Africa.

Bushman influence on place names in other languages may be traced and demonstrated by employing the comparative ‘sound-meaning’ method (Heine & Honken 2010:11), by comparing such place-name elements with possible Bushman



*The vast empty spaces of South Africa and Namibia are suffused with codes to the past. To the casual traveller, the -laagtes and -leegtes flash and roll past our windows, unexplained and undiscovered, but to the informed, these ancient names unfurl a history as old as man himself. This is Simon Schama's "topography of cultural identity", which started with the San, and continues to this day. Lucie Möller's glorious exploration of these animal origins stands proud, with the work of Bleek, as a reminder and tribute to voices now silent. – Dave Pepler*

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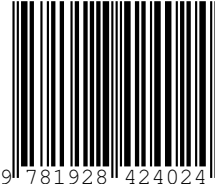
*Of the Same Breath* opens the door to a better understanding of why and how the animals and places of southern Africa have been given the names they have today. The vast reaches of the information provided in this book have been drawn together to create a veritable cornucopia of answers to the old question of how names originated. In this linguistically thought-provoking book, readers will be guided through the origins of animal names and toponyms, from the coastline of South Africa to the northern border of Namibia, and from the mighty elephant to the humble grasshopper.

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