



The interrelatedness between the Nama Khoikhoi supreme being and celestial objects



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The assumption among Europeans that the Khoikhoi indigenous people of southern Africa had little to no religious beliefs is evident throughout historical documents. However, if the Khoikhoi were regarded as having any religious beliefs, it was assumed that the moon or sun were objects of worship in the society. Contrary to this incorrect interpretation, this article uncovers the interrelatedness between these two celestial objects and the Supreme Being of the Khoikhoi, Tsüi-|goab, through systematic inquiry. This systematic inquiry seeks to: (1) investigate the interrelatedness between the Supreme Being and the celestial objects, (2) clarify the origins of the assumptions made and (3) explain coherently why and how these assumptions were perpetuated.

Contribution: The authors argue that premature conclusions made by outsiders led to there being no need for investigating the religious beliefs of the Khoikhoi society because it was assumed there were none or that they were superficially bound and/or limited to celestial bodies.

Keywords: Khoikhoi religious belief system; assumptions; TSÛI-|GOAB; celestial objects; interrelatedness.

Introduction

Premature conclusions made by Europeans who were able to read, write and distribute their ideologies concerning the Khoikhoi¹ of southern Africa negatively impacted how the Khoikhoi were viewed by outsiders. This article investigates two premature conclusions, namely (1) that the Khoikhoi lacked religious awareness and (2) that celestial objects were the focus of worship. In addition, the article looks into three components, namely the Khoikhoi Supreme Being, the moon, and the sun. Through highlighting the interrelatedness between these religious components, it is determined that the Khoikhoi possessed religious beliefs which opposes theories that the Khoikhoi possessed little to no religious beliefs or worshipped celestial objects. The investigation of this interrelatedness showcases that the moon and sun ought to be regarded as personifications of the Supreme Being. Consequently, this article illustrates that: (1) the Europeans failed to recognise religious beliefs and the relation between said religious elements because of initial assumptions and premature conclusions; (2) the moon and sun were not objects of worship within the Khoikhoi society; and (3) nor do the Khoikhoi lack religious beliefs beyond the scope of the moon and sun.

European assumptions regarding the Khoikhoi religious belief system

The Khoikhoi were subjected to many stereotypes, prejudices and assumptions when they were encountered by the Dutch. Wessels (2012:188) discusses the assumptions made by Europeans with emphasis on the Dutch colonists, travellers and Christian missionaries concerning religious awareness among the Khoikhoi society. Wessels concludes that the Europeans assumed that these indigenous individuals lacked a religious belief system, which subsequently included a Supreme Being.²

1. For the sake of clarification, it is important to mention that even though the southern Africa Khoikhoi group, the Nama, will be the focus of this article, references to other Khoikhoi groups will be made when and if necessary. This is because of the fact that religious belief elements among the Khoikhoi and San groups transcend ethnic boundaries. The Nama focus group of the Khoikhoi is regarded as a 'powerful subtribe of the Khoikhoi society' (Hartmann 2022:15). This term is derived from *Namaqua*, a term attributed to Khoikhoi groups located mainly in and around Namibia and Namaqualand (Hartmann 2022:25, 56).

2. The term Supreme Being, God and *Tsüi-|goab* are used interchangeably in this article.

Note: Special Collection: Interreligious Dialogue, sub-edited by Jaco Beyers (University of Pretoria, South Africa).

These assumptions made by outsiders³ resulted in derogatory labels which were placed on the Khoikhoi society. Such labels included that the Khoikhoi were too unintellectual to possess their own religious belief system. It is also highlighted by Hofmeyr and Pillay (eds. 1994:xix) that the Khoisan⁴ were thought of being without religion because the Europeans perceived a lack of 'temples or formal places of worship'. The following statement by Hofmeyr and Pillay (eds. 1994) provides a counter statement:

While there is an absence of doctrine and clearly formulated creeds in the Western sense, this does not negate the presence of clear religious beliefs and tenet among pre-colonial southern African people. (p. xv)

Additionally, these assumptions led to a lack of research which meant that the little information that was available to outsiders were either prejudiced, nonfactual or misconstrued. Although Schapera (1965:374) regards the available information as inadequate, he does concede that more information and research came to be produced later but argues that there were never any systematic inquiries. For that reason, the religious beliefs of these indigenous people were misunderstood by outsiders, especially Christian missionaries, according to Parratt (2004:5–6). Because of these assumptions, the religious beliefs of the Khoikhoi were misrepresented in historical documents such as missionary diaries, colonial Dutch journals or the journals of travellers. The following statement by Sparrman and Richmond (1785) serves as an example concerning the assumptions made of the San and Khoikhoi's religious beliefs:

Yet that, as both *Boshiesmen*⁵ and *Hottentots*⁶ have the firmest belief in the powers of magic, they seem consequently by this to acknowledge some evil being of great might and power; but they by no means on this account worship him, or indeed any other [*Supreme Being or God*]. (p. 207)

As a result of conclusions drawn prematurely, the need to investigate the religious beliefs of the Khoikhoi seemed unnecessary because it was believed to be of little significance. One could make the argument that some individuals saw little value in investigating what seemed to be a dead end in terms of research. Another possible reason for the lack of investigation could be that the need for investigating the religious beliefs would be an unnecessary time consumption seeing as many Christian missionaries wanted to remove or lessen indigenous religious elements, culture and traditions to make way for the Christian religion (Hiebert, Shaw & Tienou1999:19). This can be seen through the categorisation by missionaries of Khoikhoi beliefs as evil or that the

3.The term 'outsiders' will be used interchangeably with 'Europeans' within the scope of this article. This is with the aim to place emphasis on the fact that the Europeans are foreigners in the country of the indigenous San and Khoikhoi. This means that they had no knowledge of the country, or its inhabitants, yet possessed much power in relation to the portrayal thereof.

4.This term refers to both the Khoikhoi and San groups that unified because of the influence and effects of Dutch colonialism (Boezak 2017:261–262; Elbourne 1992:26).

5.This is considered a derogatory term for the San hunter-gatherers in contemporary studies.

6.This is considered a derogatory term for the Khoikhoi pastoralists in contemporary studies.

Khoikhoi needed a meaningful religion such as Christianity (Boezak 2017:269).

It is accorded that each source has its own perspective and agenda, considering the context of the author, and that inaccurate information could and is present within the documents investigated. However, after careful systematic inquiry, a general scope of what the Khoikhoi celestial cosmology might have looked like regarding the Supreme Being, the moon and sun can be derived.

Hartmann (2022:34) explains that travellers and missionaries to southern Africa, especially of the 17th century, were the ones who controlled the narrative and the portrayal of the San and Khoikhoi. This is because the San and Khoikhoi did not have (1) the resources to either be aware of or read what was being propagated about them or (2) the authority or means to change what was being written about them. This resulted in outsiders having the ability to control the way individuals viewed and regarded the San and Khoikhoi through their writings that were sent back to their homeland. In essence, if one traveller regarded the San and Khoikhoi as being without religious notions, and other travellers did not do their own inquiries, it was taken at face value and maintained in other writings. This resulted in a snowball effect of nonfactual information being spread and cemented across the world.

This combination of assumptions, derogatory labels and lack of in-depth research resulted in the Khoikhoi being designated as moon worshippers,⁷ as one of many examples. Fuelling this inaccurate narrative was the lack of counter arguments⁸ by or in favour of the Khoikhoi possessing a notion of God or a religious belief system. The theory that the Khoikhoi were moon worshippers prevailed and was cemented in the minds of outsiders. The section 'The moon and sun as visible representations' discusses this incorrect label elaborately.

This article discusses an introduction on the religious assumptions of the moon next, followed by that of the sun and the Supreme Being, and finally the interrelatedness between these three elements.

The religious assumptions of the moon

Before the interrelatedness between the moon, sun and *Tsüi-!|goab* can be discussed, it is important to first situate the relevance of the moon within the Khoikhoi religious belief system. This section elucidates why the moon was categorised as being an object of worship for the Khoikhoi

7.The term moon worshippers being attributed to the Khoikhoi can be found in Vogel (1704:67–68), Hahn (1881:42) and Schapera (1965:398) among others.

8.It is important to emphasise that even though there is not a great deal of counter-narratives, there are some exceptions. One exception is Theophilus Hahn. Hahn's work is regarded highly among scholars because of his upbringing among the Nama Khoikhoi and the work of his father as a missionary in Great Namaqualand (Hartmann 2022:25).

society by outsiders in southern Africa. The moon is termed *||Khāb*⁹ (Barnard 1988:226), and it is believed that prior to the occupation of the San and Khoikhoi, the moon and sun lived on earth (Schapera 1965:375–376).

The assumption that the Khoikhoi worshipped the moon was based on the perception that when the moon was visible, the men would (Schapera 1965):

[P]lace themselves together in a circle and blow on a hollow pipe or similar instrument, whereupon the women begin to clap their hands, and dance around the men, continually crying out that the last moon had protected them and their cattle well, and they hoped the same from this new moon. (p. 375)

Alcock (2014:118) also mentions that the Khoikhoi women clapped and sang during new or full moon festivities while sitting in a circle. Furthermore, when the new or full moon appeared, Khoikhoi children were raised to the moon. This dancing that is described under the moon is the riel dance that according to Schapera (1965:375) is practised among the Nama. Alcock (2014:119) refers to these religious dances as */gein*. Barnard (1988:220) believes that the Khoikhoi's festivities during the new moon are the community's way of conducting their prayer through dance, that is, showing their thankfulness for protection. Dapper, Rhijne and Grevenbroek (1933) describe this dancing as follows:

For if the moon is seen again they crowd together, making merry the whole night, dancing, jumping, and singing; clasping their hands together, and also murmuring some words. (p. 77)

This dancing and singing led to various outsiders drawing premature conclusions on what was taking place and what the motives were behind this dancing and singing. Both Schapera (1965:398) and Hahn (1881:42) argued that the Khoikhoi worshipped the moon. Hahn (1881:42) suggests that the moon ought to be considered a deity within the Khoikhoi religious belief system. Vogel (1704) regarding the Khoikhoi as moon worshippers, records that:

Of God and His nature they know very little or nothing, although one can observe that they have some worship of the moon. At new moon they come together and make noise the whole night, dancing in a circle, and while dancing they clasp their hands together. Sometimes they are seen in dark caves, where they offer some prayers, which, however, a European does not understand. While doing this they have a very curious behaviour, they turn their eyes towards the sky and one makes to the other a cross on the forehead. And this is, perhaps, a kind of religious worship. (pp. 67–68)

Deduced from the above quotation, it is evident that Vogel regards the Khoikhoi as (1) having no sense of God and (2) being worshippers of the moon. Firstly, if this statement ought to be placed within a general framework, then Vogel needs to be understood against the background of being exposed to predominantly biased information concerning the Khoikhoi. Furthermore, if this statement ought to be placed within a Christian framework, Vogel needs to be understood as

9. Like all other terms, variations of this term exist in different Khoikhoi dialects. For example, Hahn (1881:40) writes this term as *||Khāb* and Schapera (1965:376) as *||Khab*.

referencing the Christian God. In light of his context and perspective, however, it must be contested if this statement applies to any god or supreme being, which is doubtful taken his context and perspective, then it needs to be contested. Secondly, Vogel continues by stating that a kind of moon worship is present among the Khoikhoi. The terminology used, that is, worship, is inaccurate, which could have been established if more in-depth research had taken place. At the end of this statement, Vogel states that this ought to be seen as a religious worship, perhaps, which is agreed upon based on the premise that it is directed at the Supreme Being, *Tsūi-||goab*.

Hahn (1881:42) also proposed that the moon 'promises men immortality'. Nissen (1990:20), more recently, highlighted that the moon fulfilled the role of immortality in the Khoikhoi religious belief system. The section 'Impact of immortality narratives concerning the moon' discusses the narratives associated with the moon regarding immortality as well as their impact on the notion that the Khoikhoi regarded the moon as an object of worship.

Impact of immortality narratives concerning the moon

The immortality narratives tell of the moon instructing either an insect or hare to convey to the human beings that just as the moon dies, and rises again, similarly, they will also have immortality (Alexander 1838:129; Hahn 1881:52; Mbiti 1970:102; Scheub 2000:246). Musselman (2002:68) uses the phrase 'endless cycles of death and rebirth' when referring to the narratives of the moon. In the case of the insect being instructed, the hare convinces the insect to let him convey the message (Bleek 1864:69–72). However, this is miscommunicated by the hare, intentionally or unintentionally. The hare tells the humans that they will die just as he will. The moon is very angry with the hare and strikes him on the nose (Mbiti 1970:102; Scheub 2000:246). The moon is therefore considered to be the cause of the hare having a cleft lip owed to the moon's anger of the message that was incorrectly conveyed (Musselman 2002:68,72). The hare then retaliates and scratches the moon, which is regarded as the dark areas on the surface of the moon. These narratives can be found in Alexander (1838:129), Hahn (1881:52), Mbiti (1970:102) and Scheub (2000:246) to list merely a few. Musselman (2002:70) maintains that there cannot be a certainty that the stories of the hare and moon were intended to be literal 'metaphysical claims about the universe, or instead were told as fables to children (and anthropologists) – or both'. Musselman (2002) emphasising the important role that the moon plays in the Khoikhoi society states the following:

Even if Khoisan [*San and Khoikhoi*] did not literally worship the moon, even if they only considered the moon and stars as cosmologically significant actors at the beginning of time for the purposes of children's stories – even if we must remain wary of the earliest narrative recordings of these beliefs – we still can feel some security in the conclusion that the celestial environment staged many southern Africans' hopes for their future. And even if the Khoisan's various Moon and Hare stories made no straightforward metaphysical claims about origins, the very telling and re-telling of the story gave the sky a kind of significance. (p. 71)

The argument put forth by Hahn and Nissen needs to be interrogated. Hahn most probably heard the narratives associated with the moon and therefore concluded that the moon promised humans immortality and regarded the moon as a Supreme Being based on this characteristic. However, this is not the case. If the narratives, wherein the moon promises immortality, were to be taken up in a literal sense, it would be *Tsüi-||goab* promising humans immortality through the moon.

The religious assumptions of the sun

This section elucidates why the sun was so closely associated with *Tsüi-||goab* by outsiders in southern Africa as well as provides explanations for this phenomenon. The term used for the sun was *sores* by the general Khoikhoi groups according to Dapper et al. (1933:207) and Schapera (1965:414), and more specifically by the Nama Khoikhoi according to Alcock (2014:49).

The interrelatedness between the sun and *Tsüi-||goab* can be seen in the confusion regarding the terminology of the term. The etymology of the term *Tsüi-||goab* has been the topic of debate for many years. The most common theory was that this term translates as 'sore knee' (Barnard 1988:225). This was coupled with a Nama myth concerning *Tsüi-||goab* and his rival *||Gaub*. However, this translation is repudiated by Hartmann (2022:97–101). Hartmann (2022:97–101), drawing from Hahn, explains that the terminology of *Tsüi-||goab* is as follows: *||goa* meaning 'to approach (approaching day)', *||goab* meaning 'the morning' or 'daybreak', *||goara* meaning 'the dawn', *tsü* meaning 'wounded' or 'hurt', *Tsü-tsü* meaning 'making a wound' and *tsu* meaning 'red' referring to a new or fresh wound. Therefore, it is concluded that the terminology of *Tsüi-||goab* refers to the 'red morning, the dawn, the red daybreak [the approaching red morning/dawn]' (Hartmann 2022:97–101). The possible confusion regarding the term stems from the connotation of a knee with the term *||goab* and *tsü* for being wounded, thus, a wounded or injured knee. This translation is accompanied by the mythical narrative which includes the knee of *Tsüi-||goab* being injured by his rival *||Gaub*.

In support of the terminology associated with the rising of the sun (*||goab*; *||goara*), the Supreme Being is regarded as being associated with the east. This is because Khoikhoi were seen praying to the easterly direction among the bushes at dawn (Elbourne 1992:14; Hahn 1881:123). This created some confusion as to whether the sun was the object of worship. Elbourne (1992:14) also highlights that the east was a characteristic of the worship of *Tsüi-||goab*. It is significant to mention that in addition to *Tsüi-||goab*, *Heitsi-eibib* is also associated with the easterly direction. It is then no surprise that Barnard (1988:226) coins it a 'sacred direction'. *Heitsi-eibib* is an ancestral figure in the Khoikhoi religious belief system who possesses much of the same positive characteristics as *Tsüi-||goab* (Hartmann 2022:10,108).

The religious assumptions of the supreme being

This section discusses the religious assumptions of the Supreme Being, *Tsüi-||goab*, as a separate entity from the two celestial objects. The term *Tsüi-||goab* being associated with the Supreme Being of the Khoikhoi society is supported by numerous scholars. These scholars include Asante and Mazama (2009:320), Barnard (1988:225), Elbourne (1992:12), Hahn (1881:1, 23, 38, 125), Mbambo (2000:113) and Scheub (2000:245).

Tsüi-||goab forms part of the three main entities in the Khoikhoi religious belief system. The other two entities include the evil Being, *||Gaub*, and the ancestral hero, *Heitsi-eibib*¹⁰. In addition to the concepts of these three main entities, Barnard (1988:217, 225) includes #Gama- #Gorib,¹¹ the religious notions concerning the dead, spirits,¹² myths and rituals among the Nama Khoikhoi in the 19th century. Therefore, if it is accepted that mythological elements transcend ethnic boundaries, it can be concluded that all Khoikhoi groups possessed religious beliefs.

Hahn (1881:62, 122), during his time in southern Africa, asserts that the Khoikhoi possessed a deep devotion towards *Tsüi-||goab*. This devotion towards and the reciprocation from *Tsüi-||goab* took place in a collective frame of reference. This collective frame of influence is on the communal worship and engagement rather than on an individualistic level. The collective worship of *Tsüi-||goab* included animal sacrifices that were killed by Nama priests (Barnard 1988:226). Moreover, this worship took place at certain times of the year. The aim of such worship was to obtain favour from *Tsüi-||goab*, even though they were never sure of obtaining it. Carstens (1975:80) sheds light on this by explaining that the Khoikhoi had a fear that *Tsüi-||goab* might bring misfortune. Carstens (1975:82) illustrates that both good and bad fortune are attributed to *Tsüi-||goab*, along with his protection offered to the community. Both *Tsüi-||goab* and *||Gaub* are portrayed as male figures by Barnard (1988:221) and Carstens (1975:81). When *Tsüi-||goab* is addressed, the Nama refer to him as *ao*, meaning 'father' (Barnard 1988:226). Hahn (1881) reports the following prayer which illustrates this fatherly figure terminology:

Thou, O *Tsüi ||goa* ! Thou Father of the Fathers, All Father!
Thou our Father!

Let stream, let rain – the thunder cloud! Let please live (our) flocks!

Let us (also) live, please! I am so very weak indeed!

From thirst! From hunger! That I may eat field fruits! (pp. 58–59)

Tsüi-||goab, as the Supreme Being, is a creator God that sustains creation. *Tsüi-||goab* sends rain to the earth to

¹⁰For further information concerning these Beings, see Barnard (1988:225), Bengtson (1975:18), Hahn (1881:64), Mbambo (2000:113–114), Nissen (1990:13) and Scheub (2000:66).

¹¹#Gama- #Gorib is the rival of *Heitsi-eibib* (Barnard 1988:225).

¹²A distinction is present among the spirits and ancestors (Barnard 1988:224). This distinction classifies the spirits as being evil and the ancestors as being good.

ensure that crops grow and flourish (Barnard 1988:224–225; Carstens 1975:80; Mbiti 1970:35,77). Carstens (1975:80) regards *Tsüi-|goab* as the ‘High or Celestial God of the Khoikhoi’. The nourishment and protection of the Khoikhoi society by *Tsüi-|goab* possibly led to the attributes of the Supreme Being being regarded as good, as well as being a life-giver to the Khoikhoi (Barnard 1988:221; Mbiti 1970:35,77). An important element, illustrating the communal aspect of the Khoikhoi as a whole, is that *Tsüi-|goab* is regarded as the ‘creator and protector of the community’ (eds. Hofmeyr & Pillay 1994:xviii). This active role shows that *Tsüi-|goab* has a presence both in the sky and on earth (Barnard 1988:224). The following statement by Carstens (1975) sheds light on the role that *Tsüi-|goab* played in the Khoikhoi society:

Collective good fortune and successful social protection on the other hand were of a different order, and a sign that *Tsüi-|goab* was as active on earth as he was in his celestial abode. (p. 82)

Furthermore, *Tsüi-|goab* is also known as being a wealthy God who is in possession of cattle and sheep. Usually, the possession of cattle and sheep is synonymous to being the provider. *Tsüi-|goab* can even foresee the future. Barnard (1988:225) adds that *Tsüi-|goab* is omnipresent and can die and resurrect at various times. If all *Tsüi-|goab*'s attributes are considered, it comes as no shock that he is revered as a great hero and warrior among the Khoikhoi. Carstens (1975) writes the following regarding *Tsüi-|goab*:

He [*Tsüi-|goab*] was a creator since he is believed to have made the rocks and stones from which the first Khoikhoi came; he was omnipresent, extremely wise, and said also to have once been a notable warrior of great physical strength, as well as a powerful magician. (p. 80)

In conclusion, these known attributes of *Tsüi-|goab* show that the Khoikhoi did not lack religious beliefs concerning a Supreme Being, nor merely had a vague idea at best concerning one.

The interrelatedness between these elements

As a departure point, it is significant to state that the Supreme Being of the Khoikhoi is positioned within a complex religious belief system and has various attributes associated with him including the interrelatedness with the moon and sun. Barnard (1988:224) regards these religious notions as being a ‘highly structured system of beliefs about the deities and the interrelation between them’. This not only means that *Tsüi-|goab* is one of the many religious beliefs of the Khoikhoi, but also that interrelatedness between religious elements is present. This interrelatedness is discussed here in reference to *Tsüi-|goab*, the moon and sun.

Within the diverse Khoikhoi religious belief system, natural elements are personified by the Supreme Being (Hahn 1881:127; Parrinder 1982:69). These natural elements include

rain, wind, clouds, thunderstorms,¹³ and in reference to the crux of this article, the moon and sun. These elements are seen as the personification of *Tsüi-|goab*. For example, the personification of a natural element is seen through the belief that *Tsüi-|goab* is a rain God. This is supported by Asante and Mazama (2009:320), Bengtson (1975:19), Elbourne (1992:13), Hahn (1881:61), Mbambo (2000:113), Mbiti (1970:58), Parrinder (1982:77), Schapera (1965:382, 385, 396–397) and Scheub (2000:245). The difficulty to connect the Supreme Being, the moon and the sun stems from researchers not recognising that elements within the religious belief system of the Khoikhoi are related to each other. In contrast to the San religious belief system, which emphasises the relationship between the deity and humanity, the Khoikhoi religious belief system emphasises the relationship between deity and deity (Barnard 1988:224).

Moon festivities and spiritual associations

The dancing and singing that took place under the full moon (discussed under ‘The religious assumptions of the moon’) are regarded by Dederling (1997:44) as having spiritual associations. Dederling (1989:53) states that various missionary reports note that dances with spiritual associations were held during the full moon; however, this does not infer that the Khoikhoi were moon worshippers. Nissen (1990:13) regards this dancing and singing under the full moon as part of the ‘Khoi religious expression’, and therefore ought to be regarded as an expression of their devotion to *Tsüi-|goab*, not the moon.

Mbambo (2000:114) refers to this dancing as ritual dances and celebrations in that the moon and its visibility was also celebrated at certain times. Additionally, Schapera (1965:375) highlights that the dancing associated with the moon indicates that it is more than just a social festivity. When outsiders encountered, what would be called ‘mysterious rituals’, it resulted in misinformed labels being attached (Smith et al., 2000:28). These ‘mysterious rituals’ were, however, merely the Khoikhoi dancing and singing under the new or full moon and was the way the Khoikhoi invoked *Tsüi-|goab* through the moon. Sparrman and Richmond (1785:212) argue that the Khoikhoi merely make good use of the night light and coolness of the moon to dance and sing. Therefore, this singing and dancing had spiritual associations.

Supporting the argument that the moon and sun is associated with the Supreme Being is the belief of the Nharo people of Botswana. The Supreme Being *N!adiba* can be translated as ‘sky’. In this instance, the Supreme Being is associated with the sky, where the moon and sun are situated (Barnard 1988:221). Barnard (1988:221) tells of a Nharo medicine man

13. Schapera (1965:167) explains the centrality of rain and thunderstorms with regards to girls when he states that ‘when rain is accompanied by lightning, girls who are out in the open become killed by the lightning and are converted into stars, while those who are taken away by the rain become beautiful water-flowers, which will not allow themselves to be plucked and disappear when approached. Such flowers must be let alone. Hence the rule that young unmarried women and girls must hide themselves from the rain’.

who regarded the Supreme Being as 'God the Sky' and that this God is the 'father of the Moon and the Sun'.

The eclipse of the moon and sun

It is now apparent that the sighting of the moon was of great importance to the Khoikhoi community, and the eclipsing of the moon and the sun carried weight in their religious belief system. Musselman (2002:68–69) highlights the importance of the heavens being observed in order to uphold annual events and avoid any possible dangers from celestial beings. Such dangers will now be discussed in relevance to the eclipsing of the moon and sun.

The eclipse of the moon is regarded as a bad omen among the Khoikhoi (Musselman 2002:68; Schapera 1965:376). Musselman (2002:68) bases this on the belief that sickness is expected from an eclipse of the moon from among the Great Namaqua.¹⁴ However, this eclipse includes both the moon and sun, yet again emphasising interrelatedness. This can be seen through hunters returning immediately from their expedition because of the eclipse (Schapera 1965:376). The disappearing of the moon causes anxiety among the Khoikhoi because they link the moon with their God, and when they do not see the moon, they feel as if their God has left them. This anxiety among the Khoikhoi illustrates that the moon is a visible manifestation and personification of *Tsüi-||goab*. Hahn (1881:131) confirms this anxiety after witnessing Khoikhoi individuals crying as if they were in pain when the moon was not visible. Alcock (2014:118) concludes that the moon was welcomed with 'great joy' by the Khoikhoi based on the festivities during the new moon described by Dapper et al. (1933:77). The researcher argues that this was because the same feelings and devotion that were associated with *Tsüi-||goab* were associated with the moon. Therefore, the joy expressed by the Khoikhoi ought to be attributed to *Tsüi-||goab*. In the same manner, the eclipse of the sun is also regarded as a bad omen. Hunters, as in the case of the moon, would return home from a hunting expedition upon the eclipse of the sun (Schapera 1965:376). Additionally, the eclipse of the sun was also associated with being able to lead to sickness or even death.

The moon and sun as visible representations

As mentioned previously, outsiders regarded the Khoikhoi as being moon worshippers. Nevertheless, this is only an interpretation based on face value. Ziegenbalg and Plütschau (1868:63) explain that when the Khoikhoi were asked if they were worshippers of the moon, they only stated that they worshipped a Great Chief. This Great Chief is in reference to *Tsüi-||goab*. Hahn (1881:60–61) records an interaction that took place between himself and an old *||Habobe-Nama* that referred to *Tsüi-||goab* as a powerful Khoikhoi chief. Seeing as *Tsüi-||goab* is regarded as the first Khoikhoi from which all the Khoikhoi tribes come from, it can be concluded that *Tsüi-||goab* is the chief of the Khoikhoi. This illustrates that the

Khoikhoi regarded the moon as a visible representation of *Tsüi-||goab*. Kolbe (1731) building on the relation between the station of a chief and the moon by Boeving, states the following:

As the Chief of a Hottentot Nation presides over the Captains of the Kraals, so the Hottentots call the Supreme Being the Great and Supreme Captain. I am fully satisfied, from a thousand enquiries I made among the Hottentots, and from a thousand declarations they made to my self, that they believe a Supreme Being, the Creator of Heaven and Earth, and of everything in time; the Arbiter of the World, through whole Omnipotence all things live and move and have their Being. And that He is endow'd with unsearchable Attributes and Perfections. The Hottentots call him Gounja, or Gounja Ticquoa; that is, the God of all Gods; and say He is a Good Man, who does no Body any Hurt; and from whom None need be apprehensive of any; and that he dwells far above the Moon. (pp. 93–94)

Barnard (1988:220) mentions that the moon should be regarded as a visible manifestation of their God. Nissen (1990:21) also maintains that the moon does not carry the same weight as *Tsüi-||goab* in the Khoikhoi religious belief system. Musselman (2002:70–71) states that more recent scholars of the Khoikhoi agree that a physical manifestation of the Supreme Being is situated in the heavens, earth and rain. This physical manifestation includes the moon and sun, through which veneration or association is with *Tsüi-||goab*. Barnard (1988:220) argues that 'In fact, the Moon is not the Khoekhoe God himself; nor in this case is he regarded as a separate deity. He is the visible manifestation of God'. The confusion regarding the moon and Supreme Being is explained by Carstens (1975) in the following statement:

Both the literature and the oral tradition, however, provide additional data and show that there is some confusion regarding the so-called divinity of the moon and association of the moon with the worship of *Tsui //Goab*, a personified God. Hence the alternative interpretation offered here is that sacrifices were performed to the deity during certain phases of the moon. Moreover, it is not only the moon that is associated in this manner with the deity. For example, it has been noted 'that a religious dance was held at the first rising of the Pleiades after sunset, when prayers are offered to *Tsui //Goab* for rain'. Further, there do not appear to have been any sacrifices offered to the moon itself nor are there reports of priests officiating at any moon worshipping ceremony. (p. 79)

Based on the above quotation, this 'giver of rain' and 'good fortune' is because of the worship of *Tsüi-||goab* through the visible manifestation of the moon. The similarities between the attributes of *Tsüi-||goab* and the moon can possibly add to the confusion. These attributes include being able to change shape or disappear (Hahn 1881:131). Barnard (1988:226) argues that the moon, *Heitsi-eibib*, and *Tsüi-||goab* are interchangeable in Khoikhoi mythology. However, this article has shown that this is on the contrary. Barnard (1988:224) refers to the Supreme Being as High God, but not the ancestral hero, and this already exposes contradiction. Musselman (2002:70) concedes that the consideration of the moon as a god is drenched in controversy and explains that the 17th-century colonists claimed that the 'Hottentots' were worshipping the moon. Barnard (1988:220) opines that the moon is not the God

¹⁴This term refers to the Nama; however, it is important to clarify that there are various variants of this term such as Naman or Namaqua (Hartmann 2022:56). However, this term, ultimately, refers to the same group of people.

of the Khoikhoi in any way and that the moon should not be categorised as a separate deity within the Khoikhoi religious belief system. Sparrman and Richmond (1785:xxv) support the argument that the moon is not worshipped by the Khoikhoi. Barnard (1988:220) claims that the idea of moon-worship is 'largely a fantasy of European ethnographers'.

When referring to the moon, Bengtson (1975:16) states that the moon is invoked. It is of vital importance to underscore that the role of the moon in the religious belief system of the Khoikhoi was misunderstood. This is because the moon is merely regarded as being a visible manifestation of God, seeing as the Creator made it, they feel close to the Creator through it.

Dapper et al. (1933:207) argue that the Khoikhoi had a high regard for the sun which was seen as a provider of all good things and that the moon was despised by the Khoikhoi. However, Nissen (1990:24) disagrees with this conclusion and counter-argues that the Khoikhoi had a closer relationship with the moon than the sun. Nissen (1990:24) believes that this confusion is most probably derived from the narratives of immortality (as discussed under the section 'Impact of immortality narratives concerning the moon').

Conclusion

This article uncovered religious associations and their interrelatedness between *Tsüi-|goab*, the moon and sun within the framework of the Khoikhoi religious belief system through systematic inquiry.

The research indicated that the origin of the premature assumptions made by the Europeans regarding the Khoikhoi was a culmination of various factors. These factors include the Khoikhoi being regarded as being too unintellectual to possess a religious belief system, the Khoikhoi religious belief system being misunderstood and the beliefs they do seem to possess being categorised as evil, and religious beliefs being associated with celestial objects. Other factors included Dutch prejudice, ideologies, Khoikhoi stereotypes and derogatory labels, and the intent to remove any element of Khoikhoi culture, religious elements or traditions to make way for the Christian religion. Furthermore, the little and inadequate information available being prejudiced and nonfactual, as well as the context and agendas of each person play a contributing role.

The moon was regarded as an object of worship based on the festivities of the Khoikhoi society when the new or full moon would appear. However, outsiders failed to uncover the meaning behind the veneration of the moon. The association between the moon and the Supreme Being is because of their similar characteristics which include both being recognised as protectors of the community and cattle, the ability to die and resurrect various times, attributed to the same devotion because, in essence, both refer to only the Supreme Being and the moon being the visible representation of *Tsüi-|goab*. The close association between the sun and

the Supreme Being is owed to the confusion regarding the terminology of *Tsüi-|goab* and Khoikhoi individuals praying at dawn towards the easterly direction.

The investigation of this interrelatedness illustrated that the moon and sun ought to be regarded as personifications of the Supreme Being. Interrelatedness between the moon, sun and *Tsüi-|goab* can be seen through the eclipse of both the moon and sun being regarded as a bad omen because their God left them, all three elements being able to inflict sickness or death (the moon and sun through eclipse), all three elements being associated with the sacred direction of the east, prayers being directed towards or through all three elements, *Tsüi-|goab* being regarded as the father of the moon and sun, and all three elements having a presence in the sky. A Nharo medicine man, according to Barnard (1988:222), expresses that the entities in the religious belief system are in 'kinship relations to each other'.¹⁵

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Authors' contributions

I.H. conceptualised, investigated and wrote the original draft. M.S. assisted with the conceptualisation, developed the methodology, and supervised, reviewed and edited the draft. Both authors reviewed and edited the final draft.

Ethical considerations

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Data availability

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15. Musselman (2002:68), in reference to Tswana reports of Smith, argues that celestial and human affairs were intertwined with each other, making it a cosmology of humans, spirits and material objects being interdependent on one another. The researchers argue that interdependence between the Khoikhoi and the moon resulted in the same cosmology.

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