

AMIT ZORAN

Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel

The ostrich eggshell beads craft of the Ju/'hoansi: A reflection on modern craft theories

Abstract

Western (modern) discourse often reviews craft in the light of industrialism and mass manufacturing, associating it with symbolic qualities that arise from the modern economy. This discourse highlights the dichotomy between machine-centred and human-centred production. Yet, some of these popular craft theories fall short when considered outside this context. For example, some foraging societies prioritize investment in social ties over material storage, offering additional perspectives on our study of craft. In this article, I present the case of the ostrich eggshell beads craft of the Ju/'hoansi, former hunter-gatherers from Southern Africa, which exemplify the plasticity of their practice in adapting to varying economic conditions. Using three case studies, I discuss different ways in which the Ju/'hoansi have commoditized and used their craft heritage as a comparatively stable economic foundation in a reality where some (modern) craft values, such as creative engagement, risk and unpredictability, can be found everywhere in their day-to-day lives.

Introduction

The Ju/'hoansi are a group of the San (the 'Bushmen' of southern Africa) with an estimated population of 100,000, who live in South Africa, Namibia and Botswana, and speak a Khoisan language (using tongue-click sounds, represented in writing by combinations of !, |, and ≠).¹ Probably more than other San groups, many Ju/'hoansi maintained a nomadic way of life until the second half of the twentieth century, hunting and gathering in the sparsely populated central Kalahari Desert (Figure 1) and having relatively limited interactions with other social groups (Bieseke and Hitchcock 2013), especially compared to neighbouring people.² During the twentieth century, due to severe hunting restrictions on their historical land, many Ju/'hoansi lost their lands to farmers and became farm workers. Others settled in townships with few or no alternative sources of income, education or ways to preserve their cultural heritage.

Despite rapid changes in the Ju/'hoansi way of life, many individuals still practice traditional forms of Ju/'hoan making, such as the ostrich eggshell beads (OESB) craft. While the origin of the OESB craft is unclear and the know-how of the craft almost disappeared during the second half of the twentieth century, the Ju/'hoansi still see it as an organic part of their traditional material culture. Recently, it has returned from the edge of extinction due to new commoditization trends and varying levels of cultural flexibility that have redefined its place in contemporary Ju/'hoansi life (Hitchcock 2012; Republic of Botswana 1994).

In the line of other debates on the hybridity of craft (Graburn 1976; Kouhia and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen 2017), the case of the Ju/'hoansi OESB practice invites re-examination of some common craft theories. In contrast to many discussions from Marx (1844) to Pye (1978) and Sennett (2009) that compare contemporary craft to its own pre-industrialized roots, emerging debates highlight craft as a hybrid platform that represents humanistic values going beyond production per se (Adamson 2013).

David Pye's *Workmanship of Risk* (1978) shows a production-oriented perspective as it highlights the uncertainty of the craft process, which calls for a high level of dexterity and care from the maker. While this perspective justifies pre-industrial societies' transitions to automation as they seek economic security, it also explains the motivation of modern crafters, who are looking for freedom and engagement: by practicing uncertainty in their creative process, modern craftspersons bring a high level of real-time attention, dexterity and care to a practice unrestricted by the predictable and alienated qualities of industrial production. Furthermore, Richard Sennett in *The Craftsmen* reinforces this observation, defining craft as the 'skill of doing things well' for their own sake (2009: 8) – a precious (almost idealistic) pursuit in modern life.

Yet, while craft in industrialized societies may fulfil social needs for unpredictable, nonstructural and intimate material practice, craft in foraging societies can reflect other values (Ingold 2011; Morphy and Perkins 2009), rooted in egalitarian cultural traces and the special social role of craft in cultures with very few material possessions. Within the nomadic life of foragers, craft can be a

1. In contrast to the representations for the tongue clicks, the punctuation in Ju/'hoansi indicates the separation between the two parts of the word.
2. Here, I by no means claim that the Ju/'hoansi were isolated from the external world; this is subject to a long-lasting debate in anthropology, known as *The Kalahari Debate* (Grauer 2007; Kurtz 1994 and Lee 2012). However, I believe it is safe to assume that the Ju/'hoansi had relatively limited interaction with other social groups compared to external trades and social networks.

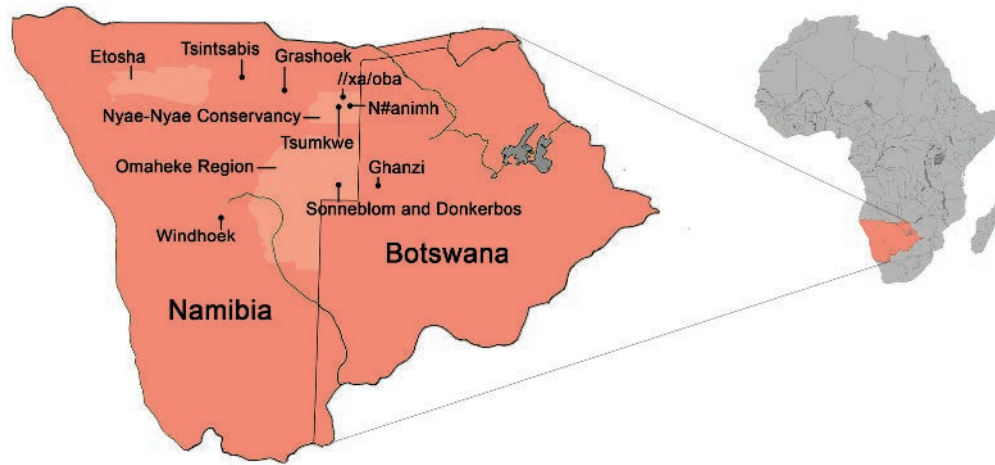


Figure 1: The Kalahari area and the locations mentioned in this article.

relatively secure and structural practice, serving as a device to strengthen identity, communication and social bonds. Thus to study craft in its widest context, I believe that it is useful to extend our perspective to different social structures, including lessons learned from the anthropology of art. I use three craft case studies of the Ju/'hoansi to consider the limitations of some of our craft theories when applied to foragers with varying egalitarian customs.

Approach

Between 2011 and 2014, I made three visits to Southern Africa, spending a total of eight weeks documenting and interviewing makers in diverse Kalahari communities, and collecting information about Ju/'hoansi craft practices. Using local Ju/'hoansi translators, I spent a few days in each community, presenting myself as a researcher and a designer who wished to document and share with others the Ju/'hoansi's craft and tradition. Usually, in each community, I conducted several pre-prepared interviews with local makers only after spending at least a few hours in the field. All of the communities I visited are involved in some form of professional craft making, and permission for interviews and documentation (including photography and video) was granted before any documentation. As all the makers I met make a living from selling craft, I bought around two artefacts from each interviewer after completing the interview to complete my documentation and to pay for the participants' time.

After my first visit, I decided to focus on OESB jewellery as it reveals varying phases of craftsmanship in transition, roughly sorted into three examples of contemporary practice³: the conservative approach of the Nyae Nyae region, commodifying the image of traditional identity as branded by the curios market; the dependence on external agents in Sonneblom and Donkerbos, where local craftspersons serve more as production labour than designers; and the liberated design process of Grashoek,⁴ where local makers show a relatively high amount of creative design ownership compared to the former examples. While these approaches coexist, each shows a different side of the present Ju/'hoansi craft practice, inviting a re-examination of values associated with modern craft discourse and its place in shaping social identity. Unlike the production of goods in traditional agricultural economies, the Ju/'hoansi culture, which still cherishes egalitarian values (even if does not fully rely on them), undertakes uncertainty and risk, while investing in social ties rather than material storage. Thus, I seek to demonstrate that some of our modern craft theories fall short when applied to current Ju/'hoansi craft practices.

The revision of an Egalitarian craft

Ju/'hoansi culture incorporates mixed forms of hierarchical and egalitarian social structure. Today, many Ju/'hoansi groups show strong traces of egalitarian social culture (Biesele and Hitchcock 2013), which (as I show later) have a significant influence on the social role of craft within Ju/'hoansi communities.

3. These three examples can be evaluated as a subset of Graburn's (1976) outline of the different directions taken by indigenous artists: Extinction; Traditional, Functional, Assimilated, and Commercial Fine Arts; Souvenirs; and Reintegrated and Popular Arts.
4. A recent work by Kouhia and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen (2017) argues that tradition is rendered in Finnish craft through three strategies: preservation, application and transformation. However, as the craft of these former hunter-gatherers differs from the Finnish example, this article relies on different terms and classification.

5. While commissioned work and customer-specific practices are common in modern western design process, abstract design discourse is also widely present in professional practice and design education as the ability to discuss design and aesthetic, irrespective of knowing the customer, is crucial for mass production. However, the least is widely neglected from Ju/'hoansi craft practice but required for the mass-produced practice.
6. For another example, see Moore (2008) on the notion of craft authenticity and ethnicity in Alaskan native art.

Woodburn defined *egalitarian* societies as societies where 'individuals have no real authority over each other [...] societies in which there is the closest approximation to equality known in any human societies [...] equalities of power, equalities of wealth and equalities of prestige or rank are...genuinely realized' (1982: 431–32). While this definition has aged somewhat since 1982, and each of these societies differs from the others, many hunter-gatherers did live in immediate-return economies, and had almost no division of labour beyond some division by gender. Every woman and man mastered the common activities, and complex social mechanisms prevented hierarchies from impinging on the basic concepts of equality and sharing. Thus, traditional egalitarian society significantly differs from capitalism and its complex division of labour and hierarchical social structure.

Nevertheless, many craft scholars, from Marx (1844) to Pye (1978) and Sennett (2009), position the industrial revolution – a pivoting point in the rise of capitalism – as the basic axis for the discussion on modern craft. Yet foragers' symbolic culture, daily practice and social structure diverge from the concepts that unified both sides (pre- and post-industrial production) of this discourse. For example, design products intended for anonymous customers⁵ (whether mass produced or individually crafted) call for abstract notions of aesthetics that rely on design guidelines, a foreign concept for the Ju/'hoansi. Furthermore, while individualism is widely extant within the Ju/'hoansi culture (Biesele 1996), it can be symbolized by signs foreign to western consumers. In traditional Ju/'hoansi craft individual creative variations may be subtle and modest (Wiessner 1997), and may not be recognized by foreign consumers, who thus unintentionally group all makers under a single creative style.

Customarily, the Ju/'hoansi embody personal values into artefacts, using them to support social connections (Hitchcock 2012). In the past, individuals made OESB jewellery mainly for personal use or as part of ritual *hxaro* gift exchanges, initiating a reciprocal cycle of gift rituals focused around OESB (and hunting tools). That these rituals supported social bonds is a familiar argument from Mauss's (1925) discussion of gifts. Through *hxaro* networks, artefacts changed hands, serving as a channel of communication between communities. Today, this reciprocal OESB practice incorporates many delayed-return and consumer-economic values, presenting diverse forms of economic and cultural exchange between makers, designers, buyers and customers. These relationships shape the complex social identity of each of the participating agents in the OESB production and trading network (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009), operating as a tool for crafting an image of group ethnicity.⁶

While traces of the *hxaro* custom are part of the Ju/'hoansi culture, many local makers also produce OESB artefacts professionally and for personal profit. Unlike the intimate cycle of traditional *hxaro* exchanges, professional craftsmanship requires a sense of ownership over the skill and practice necessary to create these artefacts. But the very idea of owning a *craft practice* depends on personal profit, challenging important notions of equality and sharing in the Ju/'hoansi traditional lifestyle. In the past, Ju/'hoansi hunters could not hide their quarry; they shared meat with members of the community (Lee 2012). By contrast, cash money (profit) is easier to conceal and keep for personal use; hence case-based professional craft activities complicate traditional egalitarian social structures.



Figure 2: Today, colourful glass beads are more popular for local use.

During the 1960s, as a result of colonialism, apartheid, newly modern African states and other economic forces, the Ju/'hoansi experienced a shift in their social structure, exacerbated by new diseases and alcoholism. The cultural exchange between Ju/'hoansi and other social groups accelerated. The traditional economy, which relied mainly on food sharing and social equality, confronted other forms of bargaining. Since the 1960s, competition and hierarchy have become more prominent in Ju/'hoansi culture. Many of their traditional practices have been revised, while others have accumulated new meaning as potential sources of income. As foraging declined and political realities changed, ostrich eggshell became an expensive resource. In Botswana, the government applied severe restrictions on the OESB craft, limiting the ability of traditional San makers to profit from the craft (Hitchcock 2012; Republic of Botswana 1994). In addition, heavy, monochromatic OESB could not equal the appeal of the colourful new plastic and glass beads introduced to the Kalahari through global trade (Figure 2).

Yet in the last 50 years, traditional Ju/'hoansi craft has earned a niche in the Southern African curios market, where goods produced by local craftspersons are sold to tourists and craft collectors. Like craft trends in other parts of Africa and worldwide (Grimes and Lynne 2000), where commoditization of cultural artefacts sustains traditional practices through international trade, the western demand for the culture of the *other* (Graburn 1976; Barbash and Taylor 1993; Ranger 2012) has opened new economic possibilities for hunter-gatherers. In Namibia and Botswana, a few Ju/'hoansi villages welcome visitors and demonstrate traditional practices, such as lighting fires with a stick, gathering bush food and dancing and singing in traditional clothing (Figure 3). The craft skills of these former hunter-gatherers also garner income from the African tourist-curios market, where makers produce and sell OESB jewellery side by side with traditional bows and arrows (Figure 4).

It is the eyes: Beauty in the eyes of Ju/'hoansi

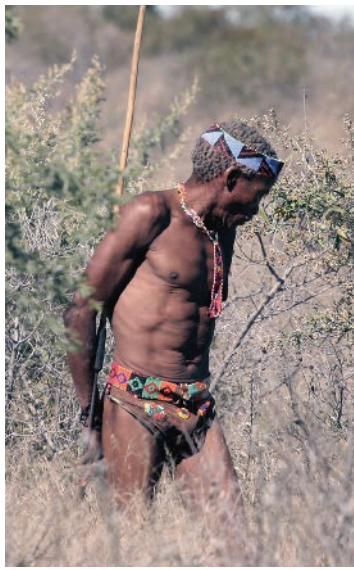
The traditional symbolic system of the Ju/'hoansi is hard to document. Forms of spiritual authority are loose, and cultural myths mix with personal interpretation and beliefs (Marshall 2004). In most cases meaning is embedded in action and experience (Biesele 1996), serving dynamic needs in the rapidly changing lives of nomads (Lee 2012). Thus, Ju/'hoansi culture tends to emphasize immediate applications. The present-day Ju/'hoan economy is hybrid, showing mixed forms of delayed-return bargaining and immediate-return values and world-views (Jacobs and Zoran 2015), as exemplified in the following observation.

In a visit to a small tourist enterprise in //xa/oba (a village in north-east Namibia), I noticed that Beh and !amace, a married couple, wore ostrich eggshell headbands, each with a different pattern, but a similar style.

'Who made these pieces of jewelry?' I asked !amace, who speaks English and translated my questions.



A



C



B



D

Figure 3: Traditional San activities as sources of income: (A–B) dancing and singing; (C) gathering food; (D) making fire.



A



B

Figure 4: Two examples of traditionally designed OESB jewellery for the tourist market.

‘Beh made them,’ he answered.

‘Why did she design a different pattern for each of you?’ I asked.

‘It is the eyes [...] we have different eyes,’ Beh replied.

So I wondered, ‘What would you design for my eyes?’

Beh laughed, probably embarrassed, before drawing a third pattern in the sand. Ju//hoansi aesthetics is a tool to enable intimate communication. Designing for an unknown consumer is challenging as aesthetics are rarely discussed outside their social or environmental context. Wiessner (1997), in her research on the Ju//hoansi’s glass beads, proposed that style preferences express identity within the community. They are symbolic devices that allow individuals to position themselves socially. Yet, the reality of OESB *hxaro* exchange has changed in the last few generations. The Ju//hoansi use glass and plastic for personal jewellery, while most of the OESB craft is commoditized as part of the African curios market.

In a sense, modern Ju//hoansi share values with makers, craftspersons and designers from other cultures, challenging the classical image of isolated foragers. Yet, many of the traditional symbolic mechanisms do exist in professional practice, maintaining a complex relationship between the Ju//hoansi’s hunter-gatherer heritage and modern reality. To better understand the Ju//hoansi’s symbolism, as represented by contemporary OESB jewellery, and what forms of professional craftsmanship evolved from their current economic condition, I turn now to detailing three representative practices – cultural conservation, dependency and resilience – before relating unifying insights that emerge from these practices. Unless otherwise noted, the quantitative information presented in the following sections was collected during my fieldwork in Namibia in 2013 through interviews with representatives from the various agencies active in the OESB market.

Case study 1: Cultural conservation

Nyae Nyae Conservancy in north-east Namibia holds 36 villages in 11,200 square kilometres. Approximately 2000 Ju//hoansi live here in traditional kinship communities (Biesele and Hitchcock 2013). Through long struggle and with external help, they have preserved some hunting privileges on their historical land, making Nyae Nyae Conservancy the largest territory in which former hunter-gatherers have relative freedom and some traditional rights.

The large community and preservation of land rights in Nyae Nyae has decelerated cultural change. The people here still practice many traditional rituals; in addition to the healing dance and the *hxaro* exchange, Nyae Nyae is one of very few territories in Southern Africa where men can still hunt. However, the conservancy is not big enough for the Ju//hoansi to rely on hunting alone, and efforts to introduce farming led to limited success.

Craft production and tourism contribute towards the income of some villages, although few are fully devoted to the production of traditional crafts such as OESB jewellery and hunting tools. Overall, 250 people in Nyae Nyae are involved in professional craft practices, with each receiving approximately \$270 annually. Agents from the Nyae Nyae Conservancy management at Windhoek collect the products, integrate them into the curios market and connect the communities to the global craft market. Nevertheless, the local practice is still a social activity; almost all members of the community master traditional skills, working together in the village while talking, gossiping and joking.

In Nyae Nyae Conservancy, makers master traditional designs using simple patterns and beads about five millimetres in diameter. Necklaces, headbands and bracelets can include one or multiple strings in a variety of combinations. Beads may be cooked to darken the colour, and OESB patterns usually include beads in shades ranging from white to brown and black.

Contemporary makers in Nyae Nyae tend to separate work that they produce for internal use from OESB products for sale. While the modern works, made from colourful glass and plastic beads, show a variety of design styles, the traditional jewellery for sale is more conservative, serving as a safe ground for future income. Makers in Nyae Nyae carefully separate the *risky*, novel work with glass and plastic beads from the relatively secure OESB market, which recalls Pye's discourse on craft as a workmanship of risk (1978). Yet stylistic differences are still evident in the traditional works. Details such as symmetry, consistency of shape, colour saturation, pattern complexity and the use of wooden elements play major roles in the designs, communicating some personal aspects of the makers' style.

Due to foraging restrictions and the decline of ostrich populations in the Kalahari, modern Ju/'hoansi makers do not have easy access to eggshells. Thus, a few non-profit organizations and craft distributors supply eggshells sourced by South African farms. Otherwise, the contemporary making process relies on many of the same manual techniques that have been used for centuries (Figure 5). After receiving the eggshells, the makers break them into small fragments and then drill holes in the centre of each piece using a long wooden stick with a metal nail instead of the traditional antelope horn. (In a few places, drilling machines have replaced the manual technique.) Finally, the beads are put on a long string and sanded together using a stone or sandpaper if available.

In the Nyae Nyae Conservancy, a few non-profit agencies are involved in education and training to improve the quality of production. While makers preserve full autonomy over their designs, the OESB work often repeats the traditional patterns that western customers prefer, lacking the diversity and experimentation found in the makers' personal jewellery. Today, forms preferred by the outsider will constitute durable sustainable elements in the local style. Thus, although contemporary OESB manufacture superficially resembles traditional traces (see Figure 4), the social context of the craft



Figure 5: Traditional OESB: breaking shells into small fragments (right) before drilling holes with a metal nail (left).



Figure 6: An artist from N#animh while carving.



A



B



C



D

Figure 7: Wood carving from various locations in the Kalahari: (A) Sonneblom and Donkerbos, (B) Tsumkwe, (C) N#animh, (D) Tsintsabis.

and its product has changed significantly. The commoditization of the traditional practice, its delayed-return imbursement system and the need to produce beads in large quantities are values that conflict with the egalitarian aspects of Ju/'hoansi culture. As the delayed-return system is not fully rooted in the local world-view, it makes it difficult to develop the creative trust needed for design ownership. Some level of security is needed for master craftspersons to take creative risks (as will be exemplified in the third case study), such as trusting their skills and having an aesthetic intuition about how the work may be received. However, many local makers depend on the preservation of traditional aesthetics and external agents to sell their work, and do not encourage design ownership and creativity.

The development of the OESB market allows traditional craft to coexist with modern lifestyles. Still, as a traditionally female practice, it does not satisfy the same conditions for men who were previously hunters. In Nyae Nyae, a few villages produce hunting equipment, but the market is smaller than the one for OESB. Men are becoming more involved with OESB in some craft centres, but there are also seeds of new creative directions. For example, a carving practice has arisen over the span of two generations (Figure 6). In Tsumkwe and N#animh, approximately five carvers use simple knives and 'colour' the surface of the wood with a hot metal rod. Their portfolios include animal shapes made in soft woods, with tortoises being the most popular (Figure 7).

Case study 2: Cultural dependency

The egalitarian structure of hunter-gatherer society does not encourage entrepreneurship or ownership, which is one of the reasons why many traditional communities fail to develop stable incomes from craft or farming. The problem was even greater in the Omaheke region of central-east Namibia. The traditional craft knowledge here is almost extinct, and its communities are far from Namibia's tourist attractions. Thus, the success of the region's local craft initiative depends on external agents.

European farmers penetrated the Omaheke region in the first half of the twentieth century, pushing the San from their traditional hunting territories and recruiting them (often by force) as cheap labour. The cultural rituals here have been neglected for several generations, and only a few San elders are familiar with the traditional ways.

Since Namibia gained its independence in 1990, there have been several projects devoted to resettling local communities on their historical land, while restricting their hunting.

Sonneblom and Donkerbos are Ju/'hoansi villages near Botswana. Both villages are part of a project started in 1995 to provide former foragers with infrastructure and livestock and hopefully enable them to become self-sufficient (Driks 2014). They each have a solar water pump, a few chickens and cows, and a small corn plantation. Around twenty makers here work on traditional crafts,

supporting 34 per cent of the households in this 200-person community, which had an income of approximately \$10,000 in 2012. The work produced in Sonneblom and Donkerbos comprises nearly half of the San craft market in the Omaheke region.

Based in Windhoek, OMBA Arts Trust⁷ is a non-profit organization that aims to support job creation and alleviate regional poverty by developing the craft sector. Almost all of the craft production from Sonneblom and Donkerbos is distributed through OMBA and sold at Namibia Craft Centre in Windhoek. The trust's role in the production of traditional crafts here is higher than external involvement in other villages. The trust is responsible for reintroducing traditional OESB practice and training local makers. Moreover, the trust employs professional designers who contribute designs from Windhoek based on built-up marketing experience. Local makers choose their own designs, but they rely heavily on OMBA's recommendations (for an example, see Figure 8A). The trust supplies the eggshells, and encourages creativity by arranging design competitions and sharing royalties on individual makers' designs.

The activities introduced by OMBA are developing a strong market for products from Sonneblom and Donkerbos. Unlike other locations, here I noticed some structural division of labour in the production of OESB. In addition to having their own carving practice (an idea first advocated by the trust, which did not suggest the designs), men here produce OESB to be used as currency – for example, to pay for healing services.

!aisi had a chance to learn hunting from his father, before the family moved to a commercial farm. He worked as a mechanic for most of his life. Soon after I arrived at his house, !aisi showed me a machine that he built himself from spare automotive parts. It is an automatic drill press that 'spits' out beads after drilling holes in their centres, helping in the most demanding part of the manual bead-making practice.

!aisi is proud of his work. He demonstrated the machine several times, comparing the personal satisfaction that he receives from this machine to the feeling after a successful hunt. His neighbour /i!ae, however, uses an electric hand drill that he bought with the savings from a sale of his work. Living only a five-minute walk from !aisi's house, /i!ae is famous for his alternative designs, using double-hole beads (Figure 8B) and sometimes beads that are not round. He uses wire-cutters to shape the ostrich eggshell into non-traditional forms, and integrates them into his designs in a unique way. He is the only maker here who prefers not to distribute his work through the OMBA Arts Trust. Instead he chooses to travel in search for buyers, although he rarely finds them. Both !aisi and /i!ae demonstrate that the seeds of independent, risky forms of creative engagement can flourish in the landscape of cultural dependency, where conservative design boundaries are less restricted. In a way, this resembles the carving activity in Nyae-Nyae, which, unlike the OESB craft there, shows diverse and refreshing forms of artistic innovation. Moreover, these examples demonstrate reciprocal creative practice as local-maker responses to external interventions or local design distress. A few



A



B

Figure 8: Two bead-work items from Sonneblom and Donkerbos.

individuals lead the way into this new creative territory, shaping their identities within the overarching group cultural ethnicity.

With various levels of design risk-taking and creative ownership, hybrids of contemporary and traditional Ju//hoansi designs are common in many marketing enterprises in the Kalahari. As we have seen, OMBA takes an active part in proposing designs and new materials in Sonneblom and Donkerbos. External OMBA agents (Ju//hoansi people from Windhoek usually do not have direct contact with buyers) visit the community once every few weeks, collecting the produced jewellery and ordering new designs. These designs preserve some stylistic qualities of traditional OESB forms as seen in other places, while integrating other materials and stylistic ornaments. Similar external influences are present in the Ghanzi region of Botswana, where San communities face severe disruptions to their traditional lifestyles and land rights. In some places, outside organizations limit their involvement to quality assurance and distribution, but dependency and conservancy underlie the most common forms of OESB today, with sporadic islands of local, individual resilience. A small community in Grashoek has successfully explored an alternative path, with a communal shift in the identity of their craft.

Case study 3: Cultural resilience

The Living Museum of the Ju//hoansi-San in Grashoek, in north-east Namibia, receives visitors 365 days a year. Positioned only a few hours' drive from Etosha National Park, the main tourist destination in Namibia, this small community of 75 people attracts more visitors than any other Ju//hoansi settlement. In 2011, 2653 tourists visited the traditional village here, resulting in \$85,000 of income shared with the community, and an additional \$45,000 from traditional craft production, paid directly to individual makers.

Since its establishment by the Living Culture Foundation Namibia (LCFN) in 2004, the community's main source of income has been the preservation and performance of its traditional culture. Forbidden from hunting, the Ju//hoansi people in Grashoek rely on tourism, singing and dancing, leading bush walks and producing craft objects from traditional materials. The non-profit LCFN provides basic craft training and supplies certain modern materials for quality assurance – such as durable nylon strings – but does not interfere with the local designs.

In addition to traditional hunting equipment, the bush-store at Grashoek sells a particularly unusual form of jewellery. Since ostrich eggshell resources are limited, local makers have made extensive use of other organic materials for their work, such as hand-carved wooden beads, dried berries and seeds. Although these materials are also used in other places, the level of refinement and complexity of the designs from Grashoek is significantly higher than that of any other Ju//hoansi community that I have seen. Some design details are found only here; the most distinct is a complex



A



B

Figure 9: The unique beadwork of Grashoek, with its wood, seeds and OESB pendant structures.

matrix pendant that integrates varying materials into a unified structure (Figure 9) and that can be applied to jewellery and to small handbags and wallets.

The unique crafts of Grashoek have likely emerged in part due to the geographic, economic and social conditions of the community. The community is relatively isolated from the conservative designs of families living in Nyae Nyae. While Grashoek suffers from even more limited access to OESB than other communities, the demand for performance of their traditional lifestyle encourages local makers to preserve the identifying marks of OESB in their contemporary work. The community's extensive interaction with international visitors also contributes towards its unique form of cultural resilience, which has created a special design style, one that is different from traditional OESB work but nonetheless emerged locally and independent of outside guidance.

The complexity of these works changes constantly. In two different visits in 2012 and 2014, I noticed a shift in design style, moving towards a preference for smaller seeds and displaying a higher level of pattern complexity in the pendants. When I attempted to trace the origin of the hybrid matrix pendants, several makers pointed to one or two elderly women who inspired the whole making community. It seems that the community in Grashoek is experiencing creative prosperity and a movement towards design innovation as makers here take greater risks in choosing raw materials, designs and applications than they do in other craft centres.

Craft practice in Grashoek resembles the traditional setting: jewellery is made mostly by women, while men work on hunting equipment or make wooden beads, in addition to performing hunting and dance for visitors. Style is shared more than the work of making specific artefacts, either in the modern village or in the traditional grass huts of the open-air museum. Outside the museum, makers wear both glass and plastic beads and OESB. These crafts, which they manage and sell independently, uniquely demonstrate the authentic and modern resilience of their traditional heritage.

Yet, while the organic designs of Grashoek are popular in the local bush-store (a few branches with hundreds of artefacts presented under a large tree), early attempts to distribute them to galleries did not work well. One possible explanation for this is that customers who reject the appeal of jewellery made from dried berries and seeds, when presented in a modern gallery (where they expect to find work that reflects western aesthetics), may more easily recognize the technical refinement and complexity of the same work when seen in the bush.

The conditions for sustaining any traditional craft that has survived historical changes are elusive. Whether they include a conservative approach to traditional designs, a dependence on external distributors and designers, or a resilient craft culture supported by tourist traffic, many Ju/'hoansi communities lack these preliminary conditions.

Nevertheless, the examples presented here illustrate different approaches to a universal challenge. In their transition from an egalitarian culture to professional craftsmanship, Ju/'hoansi makers show remarkable flexibility. Even as the Ju/'hoansi face huge social and economical challenges, the

plasticity of their material practice has eased the transition to a modern economy, allowing different generations to contribute vital skills from their shared heritage. While the examples presented in this article document the Ju/'hoansi quest for sustainable income, they also demonstrate strong attempts to preserve heritage and culture as forms of economic and symbolic stability. Yet, when considering the commoditization of Ju/'hoansi craft, the forms and values that will be preserved are those aligned with external demand, which resonate with outsiders' images and expectations of local designs.

The nature and art of workmanship

What risk does craft hold for hunters? In cultures with very little hierarchical authority or material security, individuals trust their social bonds and foraging skills for survival. Food is never guaranteed, and life requires high environmental engagement. Both hunting and gathering require participants to devote their senses and physical abilities to the task at hand. The day-to-day subsistence activities of most hunter-gatherers are not suited to automation, while life is never pre-defined and is continually *at risk*. Thus, many fundamental activities of foragers demonstrate qualities that for Marx, Pye and Sennett define craft. These scholars compare craft to industrial, alienated and predictable production, and yet their discourse simply misses the possibility that for hunter-gatherers, craft *contradicts* risk and instability. Craftsmanship is a pursuit in which relative repetition is possible and a future income can be (roughly) predicted. In addition, in contrast to the high level of engagement required by hunting, craft need not consume all of the maker's attention, and is less demanding than hunting or gathering.

Ju/'hoansi craft serves as both a pragmatic economic practice and a personal and social channel for symbolic expression. The modern economic practices of OESB show tight connections between the social and economic arrangements of these communities, considering varying approaches to authority and ownership. While communities in Nyae Nyae preserve traditional designs as part of a wider effort to sustain their heritage, the young communities in Sonneblom and Donkerbos accept external guidance, but show a high level of individual technical innovation. The people in Grashoek, meanwhile, preserve some aspects of traditional making practice while demonstrating innovation as a group, like the carvers in Nyae Nyae. These are responses to a technical impasse (lack of ostrich eggshells or the decline of hunting) in a community that still benefits from traditional ways of life.

The level of stylistic diversity in traditional practice is strongly coupled with the cultural and economic identity of the community itself. Local variations in design are instantiations of individual identity within communities, where personal style is an expressive quality for individuals. Adamson (2013), in *The Invention of Craft*, discusses the modern roles of craft, debating the concept that varying means of craft-work manifest values *different* from scientific work or modern production paradigms. Hence, as noted in Wiessner's (1997) work on Ju/'hoansi's glass beads, 'Ju/'hoansi compose their own

response and identities in a rapidly changing world' through style. Thus, future craft study can enrich our pre- and post-Marxist discourse on the forces that shape material and symbolic practice. Stressing Ingold's view that 'making is a practice of weaving, in which practitioners bind their own pathways or lines of becoming into the texture of material flows comprising the lifeworld' (2010: 1), I suggest that craft, as the historical material carrier of symbolic meaning, can first of all serve as a device for expressing identity. This identity is twofold, arising from the makers' desire both to survive by fulfilling their material needs and to subjectively position themselves within their communities.

If the external demands, and the material and symbolic conditions, allow, these fundamental qualities will contribute towards preservation, adaptation and creative practice. If they do not contribute to survival, the traditional practice may be rejected and replaced with means that better maintain equilibrium, either in the form of a revised traditional practice or an entirely new labour. This dynamic characteristic of craft supports the transformations in the community's livelihood and environmental conditions: the tension between local and traditional versus external forces demands that makers construct new forms of style and symbolism, and tolerating new social structures. This is, of course, a part of a broader phenomenon that posits *ethnicity* in a wide global economic context, where both the producers and the consumers of ethnic values play an active role in reshaping modern ethnicity and identity (Comaroff 2009). Yet, balance between material needs and subjective expression helps maintain craftsmanship as an active, useful and timely device for people in a changing world, while also making it a structure for stability and security.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank all the makers I met during my visits to the Kalahari, and my translators: Besa Abuse from Omaheke region; #hasa from Tsintsabis; and N!aici Kayese from Tsumkwe. Thanks to M. Biesele and Kalahari Peoples Fund; P. Wellhauser from Nharo! Direct Trade African Art & Products; K. le Roux from OMBa trust; M. Heinrich and M. Mulukoshi from Nyae Nyae Conservancy; S. Durrschmidt from The Living Culture Foundation; Ghanzi Craft; P. Wiessner; C. Evers; J. Ito, T. Rucham, E. Cook, J. Jacobs, A. Aksamija, T. El Or, N. Bird-David, H. Paxson, A. Steingart, S. Roosth, D. Mellis, and all the anonymous reviewers who help in improving this work.

References

- Adamson, Glenn (2013), *The Invention of Craft*, London: Bloomsbury Academic/V&A Publishing.
- Barbash, Ilisa and Taylor, Lucien (1993), *In and Out of Africa*, USA: Berkeley Media LLC.
- Biesele, Megan (1996), *Women Like Meat: The Folklore and Foraging Ideology of the Kalahari Ju/'Hoan*, Johannesburg: Wits University Press.

- Biesele, Megan and Hitchcock, Robert K. (2013), *The Ju/'Hoan San of Nyae Nyae and Namibian Independence: Development, Democracy, and Indigenous Voices in Southern Africa*, New York: Berghahn Books.
- Comaroff, John L. and Comaroff, Jean (2009), *Ethnicity, Inc.*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Driks, Erik and Thiem, Maarit (2014), 'Omaheke region', in U. Dieckmann, M. Thiem, E. Driks and J. Hays (eds), *Scraping the Pot: San in Namibia Two Decades after Independence*, Windhoek: Land, Environment and Development Project of the Legal Assistance Centre and Desert Research Foundation of Namibia, pp. 39–92.
- Graburn, Nelson H. H. (1976), 'Introduction: Arts of the Fourth World', in *Ethnic and Tourist Arts: Cultural Expressions from the Fourth World*, in Nelson H. H. Graburn (ed.), Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 33–28.
- Grauer, Victor A. (2007), 'New perspectives on the Kalahari debate: A tale of two "genomes"', *Before Farming*, 2, pp. 1–14.
- Greenhalg, Paul (2010), 'The history of craft', in G. Lees-Maffei and R. Houze (eds), *The Design History Reader*, London: Berg Publishers, pp. 329–35.
- Grimes, Kimberly and Lynne, Milgram B. (2000), *Artisans and Cooperatives: Developing Alternate Trade for the Global Economy*, Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Hitchcock, Robert K. (2012), 'Ostrich eggshell jewelry manufacturing and use of ostriches among San and Bakgalagadi in the Kalahari Desert of Botswana', *Botswana Notes and Records*, 44, pp. 93–105.
- Ingold, Tim (2010), 'The textility of making', *Cambridge Journal of Economics*, 34:1, pp. 91–102.
- (2011), *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill*, Abingdon: Routledge.
- Jacobs, Jennifer and Zoran, Amit (2015), 'Hybrid practice in the Kalahari: Design collaboration through digital tools and hunter gatherer craft', *The 33rd International Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI '15)*, Association for Computing Machinery, Seoul, 18–23 April.
- Kouhia, Anna and Seitamaa-Hakkarainen, Pirita (2017), 'Towards design hybridity: Negotiating traditions through contemporary craft making in Finland', *Craft Research*, 8:2, pp. 169–92.
- Kurtz, Donald V. (1994), 'Winnowing the "Great Kalahari Debate": its impact on hunter-gatherer studies: A review of current literature', *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, 17:1, pp. 67–80.
- Lee, Richard (2012), *The dobe Ju/'hoansi*, 4th ed., Boston: Cengage Learning.
- Marshall, Lorna J. (1976), *The !Kung of Nyae Nyae*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

- (2004), *Nyae Nyae !Kung Beliefs and Rites*, Peabody Museum Monographs No. 8, Cambridge: Peabody Museum Press.
- Marx, Karl ([1844] 1988), *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844 and the Communist Manifesto*, Rpt., Amherst: Prometheus Books.
- Mauss, Marcel ([1925] 2011), *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, Rpt., Eastford, CT: Martino Fine Books.
- Moore, Emily (2008), 'The silver hand: Authenticating the Alaska native art, craft and body', *The Journal of Modern Craft*, 1:2, pp. 197–219.
- Morphy, Howard and Perkins, Morgan (2009), *The Anthropology of Art: A Reader*, Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons.
- Pye, David (1978), *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ranger, Terence (2012), 'The invention of tradition in colonial Africa', in E. Hobsbawm and T. Ranger (eds), *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Canto Classics, pp. 211–62.
- Republic of Botswana (1994), 'Ostrich management plan policy', Government Paper No. 1 of 1994, Gaborone: Government Printer.
- Risatti, Howard (2007), *A Theory of Craft: Function and Aesthetic Expression*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Sennett, Richard (2008), *The Craftsman*, New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Wiessner, Polly (1997), 'Seeking guidelines through an evolutionary approach: Style revisited among the !Kung San (Ju/'hoansi) of the 1990s', *Archeological Papers of the American Anthropological Association*, 7:1, pp. 157–76.
- Woodburn, James (1982), 'Egalitarian societies', *Man*, 17:3, pp. 431–51.

Suggested citation


Zoran, A. (2018), 'The ostrich eggshell beads craft of the Ju/'hoansi: A reflection on modern craft theories', *Craft Research*, 9:2, pp. 229–53, doi: 10.1386/crre.9.2.229_1

Contributor details

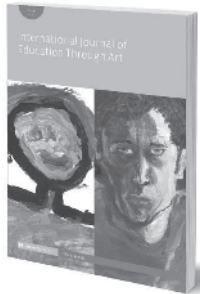
Dr Amit Zoran is a senior lecturer in The School of Computer Science and Engineering, at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, and a research affiliate at the MIT Media Lab. He researches contemporary and traditional design practices, their social roles and their technical affordances.

Contact: Office A530, Rothberg Family Buildings, The Edmond J. Safra Campus, 91904 Jerusalem, Israel.

E-mail: Zoran@cs.huji.ac.il

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8791-4213>

Amit Zoran has asserted his right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as the author of this work in the format that was submitted to Intellect Ltd.



International Journal of Education Through Art

ISSN 1743-5234 | Online ISSN 2040-090X | 3 issues per volume | Volume 7, 2011

Aims and Scope

The *International Journal of Education through Art* is an English language journal that promotes relationships between art and education. The term 'art education' should be taken to include art, craft and design education. Each issue, published three times a year within a single volume, consists of peer-reviewed articles mainly in the form of research reports and critical essays, but may also include exhibition reviews and image-text features. Particular emphasis is placed on articles that:

- Critically reflect on the relationship between education and art
- Propose original ways of rethinking the status of education and art education
- Address the role of teaching and learning in either formal or informal educational contexts and along side issues of age, gender and social background
- Adopt an open and inventive interpretation of research-based analysis
- Promote and experiment with visual/textual forms of representing art education activities, issues and research

Call for Papers

Articles should not normally exceed 6000 words in length. In addition to illustrated articles we are happy to receive proposals for creative image/text features that document, evaluate or reflect on learning activities, events and outcomes. Please refer to the full guidelines before submitting an article or feature.

Editor

Rita Irwin
The University of
British Columbia
ijetaed1@gmail.com

Reviews Editor

Nicholas Houghton
n.houghton@arts.ac.uk

Editorial Assistant

Teresa Eça
editor2@insea.org



Intellect is an independent academic publisher of books and journals, to view our catalogue or order our titles visit www.intellectbooks.com or E-mail: orders@intellectbooks.com. Intellect, The Mill, Parnall Road, Fishponds, Bristol, UK, BS16 3JG. Tel: +44 (0) 117 9589910