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## AFRICAN HUNTER-GATHERERS: SURVIVAL, HISTORY, AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

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**ABSTRACT** Given the continent's ongoing crises, African hunter-gatherers have been remarkably successful at surviving difficult times. They have faced war in Namibia, Angola, and the Congo, genocide in Rwanda, and economic difficulties almost everywhere else. Through the last three decades San, Pygmy, Hadza, Okiek, Mikea, and other foragers have sought to maintain coherent societies and systems of meaning and identity in the face of great odds, at times aided by sympathetic outsiders. This paper will explore the challenges they have faced and their responses, while attempting to situate these diverse peoples within the broader historical and political currents of the Twentieth century.

**Key Words:** History; Bushmen; San; Pygmies; Forager-farmer relations; Khoisan, Identity politics; Indigenism

### INTRODUCTION

When exploring Africa's considerable precolonial achievements one rarely focusses on the hunter-gatherers. Yet it was they who had sole dominion over the continent for millennia before the advent of agriculture, the Bantu expansion, and the rise of the great kingdoms of the savannah and Sudan. Africa is the cradle of humankind, and ninety percent of human history—in Africa and elsewhere—is the history of hunting and gathering. The legacy of Africa's hunter-gatherers can be found in the magnificent rock art of the Sahara and the southern part of the continent, the widespread remains of ancient sites, and it is more subtly inscribed in the clicks sounds found in Zulu and Xhosa spoken by millions of contemporary South Africans. The hunter-gatherer presence in Africa is woven into the fabric of life as well in myths, stories, place names, and in the cultural imagination of the continent's peoples, both black and white.

Africa today is a continent of city folk, traders, wage workers, farmers, and herders. Yet even in the 1990s over 400,000 of Africa's people would identify themselves as foragers or former foragers. Two hunter-gatherer groups—the Bushmen and the Pygmies—represent classic cases in the ethnographic canon (Murdock,

1958). In addition, there are a number of other groups like the Hadza, the Okiek and the Boni, that are less known but of equal interest.

The archaeology of Africa's hunter-gatherer peoples provides some of the earliest traces of human presence anywhere in the world. Hilary Deacon at the Klasies River Mouth site in the eastern Cape has reported fully human remains dating 90,000- 120,000 BP (Deacon, 1992).

Our purpose here, however, is not to go into the deeper archaeological time-depths. The focus will be on the contemporary hunter-gatherers of Africa, their contributions to African civilization, and their attempts to preserve or rediscover their political and cultural identities in a continent besieged by crisis. During the last few millennia the encounter between resident hunter-gatherers and incoming farmers and herders has formed one of the key themes in African history and oral traditions (Kopytoff, 1987; Smith, 1992). The nature of this interface –between foragers and others - has become an area of lively debate in anthropology and archaeology (Clark & Brandt, 1984; Schire, 1984; Wilmsen, 1989). The prevailing view that African hunter-gatherers had been relatively autonomous societies until recently has required revision. The appearance of farming and herding in parts of southern Africa, for example, has been steadily pushed back, to the early first millennium A.D. Some analysts have taken the earlier dates as evidence that hunters were everywhere dominated for centuries by powerful Iron Age overlords (Wilmsen, 1989; Wilmsen & Debow, 1990). Others have argued for the persistence of relative independence of at least some foragers up to the present (Solway & Lee, 1990; Lee & Guenther, 1991; 1993; 1995).

It is difficult to generalize across the continent. In fact, hunter-gatherers in Africa today are strikingly diverse socially, ethnically, and economically. They range from forest foragers and part-time foragers living symbiotically close to agricultural villagers (such as the various groups of Pygmies), to relatively independent communities only recently incorporated into regional and international economies and politics (like the Hadza and some Bushmen).

Despite a diversity of origins and present circumstances, a few general points can be made. In some ways African foragers display the characteristics common to other societies in their regions, speaking local languages and adopting local customs. In other important ways they have maintained distinct identities. Most of the hunter-gatherers exhibit a pattern of flexible and relatively egalitarian band organization common to hunter-gatherers elsewhere. In their internal sociopolitical organization they tended to be far less rigid and hierarchical than the norm of their agricultural and pastoral neighbors (Woodburn, 1979).

Their flexibility and mobility worked both to their advantage and disadvantage. In the event of war or famine, they had the desert or the rainforest to fall back on as survival strategies. They had the power to survive outside the "system." On the other hand, their lack of hierarchy meant that when outsiders presented sufficient political or military force, the foragers could not easily resist and sooner or later came to be dominated by others (Woodburn, 1988).

A third characteristic common to all African hunters and gatherers is in the area of land tenure. In most of Africa land has been held communally, with little overall tendency for the consolidation of land rights in the hands of a few. Instead, varied

rights over land with multiple forms of control and access existed. In important ways these forms of tenure have preserved a space for foragers to maintain access to traditional resources. However, recent land reform efforts of many governments have led to dispossession of foragers and their neighbors, for example, in Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, and South Africa (Hitchcock, 1993; Miller, 1993; Veber et al., 1993).

The status of forager groups in several countries has declined so seriously that a number of them have sought assistance from development agencies, church groups, or philanthropies. Others have become environmental activists, protesting against ill- advised development projects such as the ranching, mining, and irrigation schemes initiated by governments and international donor agencies (Durning, 1989; 1992; Miller, 1993). Still others have initiated their own self-help efforts, as can be seen in the case of the Ju/'hoansi of northeastern Namibia and their Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (Biesele, 1992; Hitchcock, 1992; Lee, 1993).

With the rise of Green politics and the growing interest in the plight of indigenous peoples, hunter-gatherer populations in Africa have become an important political focal point in recent years (Burger, 1990; Miller, 1993; Veber et al., 1993). A number of advocacy groups exist for supporting African hunters and gatherers in their struggles to find their place (Hitchcock, 1993; Hitchcock & Holm, 1995). Concern about their survival has also expanded as a result of the rising numbers of reports of violations of their civil, political, and socioeconomic rights (Gurr, 1993; Hitchcock, 1994). Largely unnoted, for example, in the media coverage of the 1994 Rwanda tragedy, was the fact that as many as three-quarters of Rwanda's 30,000 Batwa Pygmies were killed during the genocidal actions between April and July, 1994 (New York Times, August 25, 1994).

## AFRICAN HUNTER-GATHERERS AS DISCOURSE

Writing about hunter-gatherers today has to deal with a century of discourses; some rooted in European and African notions of "difference" and race, others springing from European ideas of "natural man" and all of these are closely bound up in complex discourses that accompanied European colonialism and Imperialism (Wolf, 1982). These ideologically saturated discourses formed an implicit background of unstated assumptions, predispositions and prejudices. Nineteenth century European settlers in the main regarded the hunter-gatherers with thinly veiled contempt, as incorrigible bandits speaking scarcely intelligible tongues (see for example Parsons, 1988). The South African Bushmen along with the "Hottentots" were positioned on the bottom rung on the scala natura of humanity, serving as a text for ruminations on who may or may not be part of the human family (Moodie, 1976; Thompson, 1985; Gordon, 1992). A more nuanced view of the hunter-gatherers was expressed by their agricultural and pastoral neighbours, who while according them an inferior social position, nevertheless regarded them with a mixture of paternalism and condescension, fear and respect (Grinker, 1990; 1994). Farmers frequently married across these ethnic boundaries, and in some cases even founded dynasties as the results of these unions (Nela-Williams, 1991).

European attitudes in this century have undergone an almost complete reversal; witness the idealization of the Bushmen as the embodiment of noble virtues in the writing of Laurens Van der Post (1958, 1961) and in the films of Jamie Uys (e.g. *The Gods Must be Crazy*). Conservationists, Indigenous Rights advocates and ethnographers have written about the hunter-gatherers in largely positive ways (Burger, 1990; Durning, 1992; Kent, 1997; Anderson & Grove, 1987; Barrett & Arrcese, 1995; Brown & Wyckoff-Baird, 1992). The European public continues to see in the Bushmen and Pygmies, images of the good and simple life lived close to nature. Among African peasant neighbours of the hunters attitudes have not changed radically, although among elites "racial" attitudes have hardened in some cases, as can be seen for example, in the negative views of the Basarwa among Botswana's political class (Mogwe, 1992; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993) and the tragic fate of the Twa in Rwanda.

In the 1990s and 2000s, the hunting and gathering peoples of Africa face a number of serious problems: conflict with neighbours over a shrinking land base, pressures to subordinate themselves to state policies that limit their mobility and freedom of action particularly in the area of conflict with wildlife management policies (e.g. Kiss, 1990; Wells & Brandon, 1992; West & Brechin, 1990), and strong pressures to assimilate to the cultural practices of their neighbours (Hitchcock, 1993; 1995; Veber et al., 1993; Kent, 1997).

After a brief survey of African hunter-gatherers, we will explore in more detail how themes of hunter-gatherer pasts are woven into contemporary political consciousness, particularly in post-Apartheid South Africa and its neighbours.

## AFRICAN HUNTER-GATHERERS: NATIONS WITHIN NATIONS

The historical status of African hunters and gatherers is a subject of ongoing discussion among archaeologists and anthropologists (Clark & Brandt, 1984; Schrire, 1984; Wilmsen, 1989; Lee, 1992; Barnard, 1992a, b). At least some contemporary foragers are linked by archaeology, rock art, and oral traditions to ancient hunter-gatherers (Dowson, 1992). Others may represent more recent readaptations to hunting and gathering. At times of civil strife and rapid change hunter-gatherer groups may have functioned as refuges from war and famine.

African foragers group themselves into three regional supercategories in central, east, and southern Africa: the 200,000 Pygmies of central Africa, the 100,000 east African hunter-gatherers from a variety of locales, and the approximately 100,000 Bushmen/San of the semi-arid savannas of southern Africa. One might also add the Mikea forest foragers of Madagascar (Kelly et. al., 1999). The Pygmy groups reside in the rainforest regions of ten countries: Cameroon, Central African Republic, Republic of Congo, Democratic Republic of Congo (former Zaire), Gabon, Guinea, Rwanda, Uganda, Zambia, and perhaps Angola (Cavalli-Sforza, 1986; Bailey & DeVore, 1989). Non-Pygmy hunter-gatherers are found in six East African countries: Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Somalia, and Ethiopia (Stiles, 1981; Blackburn, 1982; in press; Kratz, 1994). While Bushmen currently reside in six countries of southern Africa: Angola, Botswana, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe (Hitchcock, 1996).

## I. Central Africa

The Pygmies, considered the classic “forest peoples” in the writings of the late Colin Turnbull (1961, 1965, 1983), have made their home in the tropical rainforest, one of the world’s most challenging environments (Bailey, 1991; Bailey & DeVore, 1989; Cavalli-Sforza, 1986; Harako, 1981). Until recently archaeologists assumed that the Pygmies were the “original” inhabitants of the rainforest where they had lived for millennia as hunters and gatherers before the arrival of agricultural peoples. But current opinion varies on whether humans indeed can live exclusively by foraging the wild products of the rainforest, or whether some form of symbiosis with farmers is a necessary part of the Pygmies’ adaptation (Bailey et al., 1989; Bahuchet et al., 1991). Whatever the answer, Pygmies identify closely with the forest; they live partially but not exclusively on the wild products of the rainforest ecosystem; and they make the forest the center of their intellectual and spiritual life. Japanese scholars have made distinguished contributions to documenting this way of life (eg. Harako, 1988; Ichikawa, 1991).

All Pygmy populations relate in complex ways to non-Pygmy village peoples for whom they work or exchange goods and services (Turnbull, 1965; 1983; Hewlett, 1997). These diverse interactions range from relative autonomy with occasional contact, to long-term hereditary servitude. Today some Pygmies do live self-sufficiently, but not strictly on the forest itself; rather they subsist on a combination of wage labor, barter, food production, and wild resource exploitation (Hewlett, 1993; 1997; Grinker, 1994). Colin Turnbull’s thoughtful studies of the Mbuti pygmies made this group famous to thousands of readers. Turnbull noted how diffident the Mbuti were towards outsiders when residing in the villages, and how their demeanor changed and their personalities blossomed when they entered the forest for a period of extended foraging. The non-Pygmy villagers feared the forest and rarely entered it, while the Mbuti regarded it with great affection as the source of their well-being, and celebrated it in their myths and ceremonials (Turnbull, 1961; 1965; 1983).

All contemporary Pygmy populations speak Bantu and Sudanic languages related to those of their farming neighbors, or else they can communicate with their neighbors through *lingua francas* such as Lingala, or KiNgwina (Cavalli-Sforza, 1986; Grinker, 1994). While the Pygmy hunters still obtain a significant portion of their subsistence from wild foods, the bulk of the diet today is obtained from domestic sources. They receive payments in kind for the work done for villagers, as well as tending their own gardens, and sale of forest products.

In the case of the Dzange-Sangha forest special reserve in the Central African Republic (CAR), BaAka Pygmy communities are being assisted in economic development and conservation promotion by an interdisciplinary team composed of ecologists, social scientists, and health and rural development workers. This project, which is sponsored in part by the World Wide Fund for Nature-USA and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), supports self-help activities and assists in the establishment of both formal and informal village associations. Some of the BaAka are working as tourist guides while others are selling goods that

they obtain from the forest on the commercial market. Health workers are involved in doing immunizations and first aid and practicing preventative medicine (Kretsinger, 1993). Conservation efforts are promoted through limiting the numbers of trees extracted in timbering activities, setting upper limits in the numbers of tourists visiting the area, and enforcing game laws. It is interesting to compare the BaAka in the Dzanga-Sangha Dense Forest Reserve with those involved in other kinds of rural development projects for Pygmy populations in central Africa. The Baka Pygmies in Cameroon have been affected by a number of sedentarization programs that include the establishment of permanent village settlements and agricultural projects since the 1960s (Hewlett, 1993). The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Government of Cameroon (GOC) established a program aimed at enhancing the living conditions of marginalized groups in 1975. Some of the funding from this program was utilized to conduct studies of the Baka and Bakola Pygmies. The Cameroon government also coordinated the activities of various non-government French and Dutch volunteer and missionary organizations. Impacts of the programs included agricultural training, literacy, and raising health and nutritional status (Hewlett, 1993). Similar kinds of efforts have been undertaken among a number of other former foragers in central and eastern Africa (Ndagala, 1988; 1993; Hitchcock, 1993; Kaare, 1994).

## II. East Africa

Sizable numbers of hunter-gatherers still exist in and near the Rift Valley (Okiek and Hadza), along the East African Coast (the Dahalo as well as Degere and Wata), and around the Juba and Tana rivers near the Kenya-Somali border (the Boni, Kiliil [Aweer], and Eyle). The Sandawe are a former hunter-gatherer group in the vicinity of Arusha Tanzania (Newman, 1970). The Okiek (Dorobo) of Kenya and Tanzania occupy forested areas in or adjacent to the Rift Valley of central Kenya south to northern Tanzania (van Zwanenberg, 1976; Blackburn, 1982; Kratz, 1994). Today the majority of Okiek have taken up farming, livestock production, and wage labor; they also participate extensively in exchanges and entrepreneurial activities of various kinds (e.g. bee-keeping, manufacturing).

Because the Okiek were not recognized officially by either colonial or post-colonial governments, they frequently were denied land or resource access rights. Eviction from their traditional areas was common often because their land was gazetted for game reserves; and destruction of their forest habitat has followed as a result of agricultural expansion or overgrazing (Blackburn, 1982).

Like the Bushmen, the Hadza are click-speaking peoples who differ significantly from their neighbors both linguistically and socioeconomically. Made famous by the long-term studies of James Woodburn and others, the 1,000 Hadza of the region around Lake Eyasi in northern Tanzania are foragers who despite interactions with their neighbors, have maintained a fierce independence, owning few livestock, not cultivating crops, and remaining in remote areas (Woodburn, 1964; 1970; Blurton Jones et al., 1989, n.d.; O'Connell et al., 1988a, b, 1990). At various times the government of Tanzania has made attempts to contact the Hadza and settle them,

usually with disastrous results; the Hadza then returned to the life in the bush (McDowell, 1981a, b; Ndagala, 1988). The Hadza have also been affected by the expansion of herders and farmers into their area, the imposition of wildlife laws, and the expanding tourism and contract farming industries (Ndagala, 1993; Kaare, 1994; Blurton Jones et al., n.d.).

A major comparative question for future research is why the Hadza have repeatedly deserted the settlements, while other African foragers like the Bushmen and Ogiek, have involved themselves quite extensively and voluntarily in economic and other interactions with their herder neighbors.

There are several different hunter-gatherer groups in southern Somalia, including the Kili (Aweer) and the Eyle (Stiles, 1981). Both groups were affected by the traumas of recent Somali history, including famine, militarization, civil war, and relief operations. The Somali hunter-gatherers underscore the fact people may become foragers both out of choice and necessity. In some cases, individuals turn to foraging because their domestic subsistence base was destroyed. In others, people chose to be foragers to avoid being caught in the crossfire of feuding subclans.

### III. Southern Africa

The hunting and gathering San/Bushmen share physical traits and linguistic affinities with the pastoral Khoi (Schapera, 1930; Elphick, 1977; Nurse & Jenkins, 1977). Together they form the Khoisan cultural/linguistic grouping (Lee & DeVore, 1976; Barnard, 1992a). Known to millions as leather-clad foragers, the San peoples of southern Africa, numbering close to 100,000, display the same range of social conditions as other African hunter-gatherers. Representations of their history show a similar range (Lee, 1979, 1993; Lee & DeVore, 1976; Wilmsen, 1989; Gordon, 1992). To some South African whites the Bushmen have assumed iconic status, cast in the role of "Urmenschen" in a vision of pristine Africa, while in Botswana, elite Africans see the "Basarwa" as quite the opposite: a social problem, a feckless underclass standing in the way of progress (It is striking how closely these contemporary African elite views mirrors those of white settlers of the last century).

The changing nomenclature over the last thirty years reflects some of these issues. In the late 1960s, the term Bushmen, considered perjorative, was replaced in scholarly circles by the seemingly more neutral indigenous term "San," introduced by Monica Wilson and Leonard Thompson in their *Oxford History of South Africa* (Wilson & Thompson, 1968). But the term "San" was not without its detractors. Meaning "aborigines or settlers proper" in the Khoi language (Hahn 1881), it also had the connotation of "worthless vagabond." Recently when a group of literate "San" (Namibian Ju/'hoansi) were asked to comment on the terms San and Bushmen, they initially preferred the latter; Bushman, though perjorative, could be reinvested with a more dignified meaning (Bieseke, 1992; Hitchcock, 1996). However in 1997 the same group opted for the term San, and in solidarity, scholars have followed suit. At a Bushmen Research Conference held in Gaborone, Botswana, in August, 1995, it was noted that the various groups in Botswana are today referring



to themselves collectively as Basarwa, the Setswana term for Bushmen. The late John Hardbatt, one of the members of the Bushman advocacy group Kgeikani Kweni (First People of the Kalahari) suggested the use of the term N/oakwe.

In the past San occupied most of the subcontinent south of the Zambezi River; archaeologically their presence is attested to in the hundreds of rock painting and engraving sites associated with Later Stone Age tool assemblages, a legacy of world-historic proportions (Lewis-Williams, 1981; Dowson, 1992). At the Klasie's River Mouth, site of the earliest known appearance of modern human beings, Hilary Deacon has argued further that this population were lineal ancestors of the modern Khoisan.

With the entrance of domestic sheep and pottery, and later iron and cattle, as early as the first century A.D. the character of southern Africa populations began to change (Nurse & Jenkins, 1977). But even during the last two millennia the San have been the exclusive occupants of significant portions of southern Africa, living as autonomous hunter-gatherers in parts of the Kalahari and Namib Deserts (Solway & Lee, 1990). For much of this period there is evidence of trade relations between the San peoples and their non-San neighbours (Phillipson, 1985; Wilmsen, 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow, 1990). To the southwest they interacted with the closely related Khoi (Hottentot) pastoralists from whom they differentiated linguistically sometime before the first millennium A.D.; in fact well over half of all the San today speak Khoi languages (Silberbauer, 1981; Tanaka, 1989). In the east and southeast they coexisted, intermarried, and were eventually assimilated to powerful Bantu-speaking chiefdoms which now form the bulk of South Africa's population; the standard explanation for the numerous click sounds found in modern Zulu, Swazi, and Xhosa is the linguistic influence of click speakers, assumed to be female, intermarrying with Bantu-speakers and passing on the clicks to their offspring.

San peoples played a major role in the colonial history of South Africa. They met the early explorers at the Cape, guided them into the interior and later fought tenaciously to preserve their land in the face of European expansion (Wright, 1971; Marks, 1972; Elphick, 1977; Ross, 1993). Their art, myth, and folklore became part of the South African historical and literary canon, in the works of such writers as W.H.I. Bleek and Lucy Lloyd (1911), Eugene Marais (1957), J.M. Stow, George McCall Theal, and Laurens van der Post. And today Bushman themes provide a seemingly inexhaustable source of inspiration for South African artists, poets and writers like Pippa Skotnes. How these rich sources of the literary and artistic imagination refract and are refracted by the contemporary social conditions of Bushman/San peoples is an important question. When the Bushmen had been hounded almost to extinction in South Africa proper, it was believed, at the turn of the century, that they were a "dying race." However, in the Kalahari Desert thousands of San remained, speaking many different dialects, and existing in a wide variety of socio-economic situations (Schapera, 1930; Bieseles et al., 1989).

Namibia has over 38,000 Bushmen including the Hai//om and Ju/'hoansi, who today are found on white farms, in urban areas, in former government-sponsored settlements such as the famous Tjum!kui located in Bushmanland, and in small communities where people make their living through a mixture of foraging, herding, and rural industries (Marshall, 1976; Marshall & Ritchie, 1984; Bieseles, 1992;

Gordon, 1992; Hitchcock, 1992; 1996; Suzman, 1995; 1999; Sylvain, 1999). Living mainly on land once their own but now occupied by other peoples, white and black, Namibian San are in a disadvantageous position in the modern state of Namibia. Fortunately a new organization, the Workgroup for Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa (WIMSA) has been effective in bringing San and Khoi people together to lobby for land and civil rights (WIMSA, 1997; 1998).

The !Kung San populations in Angola and Namibia were heavily affected by the long wars waged by the Portuguese and South Africans against African liberation movements (Lee, 1993; Marshall & Ritchie, 1984; Biesele et al., 1989). As well, a number of San in Namibia, Zimbabwe, and Botswana were dispossessed as a result of the establishment of game reserves and national parks (Gordon, 1992; Hitchcock, 1987; 1993; 1995). Ranching, agriculture, dams, and road projects have also had significant impacts on the well-being of Bushmen populations (Wily, 1979; 1994; Gordon, 1992; Hitchcock, 1995; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993). However in some cases individual San have entered the national economies of southern African states as marginally successful food producers and wage workers (Biesele et al., 1989; Hitchcock, 1996). Others remain dependent on the state for support via welfare payments and drought relief (Mogwe, 1992; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993).

The Republic of Botswana is unusual in Africa in that it has had a program aimed directly at assisting its indigenous hunting-gathering minority, the Bushmen or, as they are known in Botswana, the Basarwa (Wily, 1979; 1982; Lee, 1979, 1993; Guenther, 1986; Hitchcock, 1987; 1996; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993). In spite of the government's Remote Area Development Program, the socioeconomic status of the 50,000 Bushmen and other rural people has declined considerably in recent years. Regarded by other Africans as ethnically distinct, their current class position is compounded by disabilities of race and ethnicity. Thus the internal politics of the Botswana Basarwa have come to resemble very much a politics of the oppressed (Hitchcock and Holm, 1993; 1995).

Many if not most of the Bushmen of Botswana are seeking at least a certain degree of cultural and political autonomy. They would like land of their own and, as they put it, "to be left alone so that we can live the way we wish." As one Kua man put it, "We are different from the Tswana majority, and we have the right to be different." The Botswana government, on the other hand, is pursuing a policy of assimilation ("villagization") (Wily, 1979; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993). Government policy in the words of one official is to "absorb all of 'these people' into the body politic of the nation of Botswana."

One government official told a review committee in 1990 that "There should be no 'Bushman Problem' since we are doing everything possible to make sure that they have sufficient economic opportunities" (Hitchcock, 1996). The problem is that the kinds of strategies that are being attempted have had relatively little effect in terms of increasing decision-making power and political rights among Bushmen groups (Hitchcock & Holm, 1993; Wily, 1994). Self-determination has not been achieved by the Bushmen of Botswana, as indeed is the case for virtually all former foragers in Africa. Some former foraging groups have engaged in armed struggles against the states in which they resided, as was the case, for example, with the Tyua Bushmen in Zimbabwe (Hitchcock, 1995). While conflicts

between indigenous groups and the state are by no means rare in Africa (Clay, 1993; Gurr, 1993; Gurr & Harff, 1994; Neitschmann, 1994), most former foraging groups have tended to shy away from outright rebellion and war. Bushmen generally have sought non-violent means of opposing state and international agency policies (Hitchcock, 1996). These peaceful means have sometimes achieved significant results, as was the case in 1990-91 when River Bushmen joined other ethnic groups in the Okavango Delta region of northwestern Botswana to oppose the establishment of the Southern Okavango Integrated Water Development Project, a project which they contended would have negative effects on their livelihoods. In most cases, however, Bushmen in Botswana generally have little say about the kinds of development activities that affect them. Decisions are often made by outsiders, including the central government, district councils, land boards, companies, cattle owners, and even members of the Remote Area Development Program (RADP), the institution established by the government of Botswana in 1974 ostensibly to meet the needs of Bushmen and other remote area groups (Wily, 1979; Hitchcock & Holm, 1993).

Some Basarwa have called for the rights to make their own decisions about development while others have requested land of their own (Wily, 1979; 1994; Mogwe, 1992; Hitchcock, 1996). Bushmen want the right of political participation and the opportunity to have a say in matters relating to their own internal and local affairs, including information, education, culture, religion, health, social services, access to local resources, and pursuit of their own types of economic activities.

## KHOISAN MARGINALITY: HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

### I. Khoisan Historical Studies

The current disadvantaged status of Basarwa people in Botswana raises important issues of history. Were the Bushmen always subordinated to more powerful outsiders, or is their present plight a recent phenomenon, preceded by a longer history of autonomous foraging? Before that question can be addressed we have to consider a prior one, of the relationship between historic "Khoi" pastoralists and "San" hunter-gatherers. Were they even separate peoples or were the San in the Cape merely impoverished Khoi, who had lost their cattle and sheep? And similarly could San people adopt cattle husbandry and immediately "raise" themselves up? Richard Elphick (1977) made this argument of the fluidity and interchangeability between Khoi and San in the Cape area, and it has been influential (Schrire, 1984). Whatever the situation in the Cape (and the archaeological evidence is complex), there were certainly many Bushmen groups outside the Cape without a history of herding in their past (Smith, 1992).

But the major issue here is whether the San were autonomous societies pre-colonially or dominated for a millennium by powerful outsiders. In other words, do those San now seeking to throw off the shackles of ethnic discrimination have to overcome a legacy of a century of domination or is there a far deeper history of oppression stretching deep into the past? This historical issue is part of what has

become known in the last decade as the Kalahari Debate (Barnard, 1992b; Lee, 1992). Over some thirty years I have documented the hunting and gathering way of life of the Dobe Ju/'hoansi, a people who, though by no means isolated, lived largely independently on their wild food resources into the 1960s. The archaeological expression of this autonomy has been documented by John Yellen and Alison Brooks (Yellen & Brooks 1990; see also Yellen, 1977).

Edwin Wilmsen (1988a, b, 1989) disagreed, and put forward the argument that the Ju/'hoansi status as hunter-gatherers was an illusion. Instead he portrayed them as devolved pastoralists, long dominated pre-colonially by regional African centers of power. The impact of merchant capital, he argued, was early and devastating, further transforming the Ju/'hoansi, who having lost their cattle became hunter-gatherers only in the 1890s (Wilmsen, 1989; Wilmsen & Denbow, 1990).

As Solway and Lee (1990) and Lee and Guenther (1991; 1993; 1995) have argued, there are some major problems with this "revisionist" thesis, especially when it attempts to universalize the subordination of the San. First, the archaeological evidence for contact between Iron-Age and Stone Age peoples is good, but much weaker when one tries to show domination of Later Stone Age by Iron Age peoples. Current research, combining archaeology and oral history attests that coexistence might be a better word (Smith & Lee, 1997). Second, the revisionists have tended to underestimate the sheer diversity of historical circumstances of the Khoisan peoples in the pre-colonial period. There were wretched San peoples in the 19th century living in abject poverty; there were also independent cattle-holding San peoples, and a number of very successful San groups who lived by the hunt and who maintained a proud independence (Kent, 1997).

Nela-Williams (1991) among others, has written of the relations between the 18th and 19th century Ovambo kingdoms of northern Namibia and the Bushmen, who they called the "Khwankala," describing the relation as equitable and friendly. They traded on the basis of equality, not as masters and servants. In at least two kingdoms, traditions have it that the royal line was founded by marriages between Ovambo men and hunter-gatherer women.

The German geographer Siegfried Passarge (1907) wrote in detail of the "Buschmannreich" of the Ghanzi San who from the 1840s to 70s, lived exclusively by hunting and gathering, and who under their paramount leader, "the mighty Dukurri," kept all comers at bay and jealously guarded their turf.

In South Africa itself there is John Wright's famous study of "Bushman Raiders of the Drakensberg" (1971) showing how resilient the San people had been in the face of increasing pressure by both European and other African forces on the Natal frontier from the 1840s to 70s. And Shula Marks' classic paper "Khoisan Resistance to the Dutch" (1972) documented the military resistance by the San peoples to Boer expansion.

## II. Khoisan History I: Oral Histories In Nyae Nyae

Lee's current research in collaboration with Prof. Andrew Smith of the University of Cape Town in Namibia illustrates some of these themes and the importance of working with local people on projects that are relevant to their own goals. In 1994 they initiated a joint project in oral history, archaeology, and cultural resource management. The goal was to evaluate the claim of the "revisionists" that the Nyae Nyae-Dobe area had been dominated for centuries by powerful outsiders. Both Smith and Lee were interested in the colonial encounter, the timing and nature of the European presence in the area. These questions could be pursued both archaeologically and through the collection of oral histories. The third and equally important component was to get members of a local Ju/'hoan stake-holder group, the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative (NNFC) involved, to develop expertise within the community on the history and pre-history of the area, that could be put to use in finding and preserving other sites as part of the national heritage of Namibia. Eventually this knowledge could be deployed in ecological and cultural tourism projects and in curriculum development, teaching local history in the Namibian school system.

They approached the Nyae Nyae Development Foundation of Namibia (NNDFN) and the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative to work on an excavation at the Cho/ana site in the Kaudom Game Reserve, in the northern part of what used to be Eastern Bushmanland but is now called Eastern Otjozondjupa, Namibia. Cho/ana had been a well-known center of Ju/'hoan occupation prior to the gazettement of the Game reserve in 1975, and was known historically as an entrepôt where people came together for the purposes of trade both precolonially and in the 20th century.

Field work was conducted in May, 1995 and in June-July 1997 with a crews of Ju/'hoansi seconded by the Farmers Coop, and six elders, acknowledged to be reliable sources on oral history. Work was divided between excavating a Later Stone Age site yielding thousands of stone flakes and bone fragments, and conducting oral history interviews. Questions were focussed on five subject areas:

1. The history and significance of the Ju/'hoan occupation of the Cho/ana site.
2. The nature and extent of the traditional exchange networks of which Cho/ana was a key node.
3. The ethnography of the region as seen through the eyes of the Ju/'hoansi: the nature and extent of their historical contacts and current relations with over twenty of the surrounding ethnic groups in northern Namibia and Botswana.
4. Ju/'hoan views of their current and past regional subdivisions and how this affected contact, intermarriage and exchange.
5. Ju/'hoan views of their own history, their pre-colonial culture and economy, and their own accounts of the colonial encounter.

When all the research findings were assessed, there was no evidence either in the oral traditions or in the archeological record of the presence of domesticates or of non-Ju/hoan people resident in the area prior to the latter part of the 19th century. This provided corroboration of the Ju/'hoansi's own strongly held views that their ancestors were independent hunter-gatherers, not pastoralists, and that they were not dominated by outsiders. So in at least one key area, the claims of the revisionists for the universal subordination of hunters by farmers are shown to be false.

The interviews provided a valuable adjunct to the archaeological work, providing a social context in which the material could be interpreted. Occasionally there were striking tie-ins, attesting to the accuracy of the oral histories. For example, the elders described a kind of white glass bead as one of the earliest of the European trade goods obtained through intermediaries to the north. A few days later precisely such a bead was found in a sealed level in association with an Later Stone Age industry. This and a piece of bottle glass showing signs of LSA retouching gave a further indication of the involvement of the Cho/ana Ju/'hoansi in trade with their neighbours and the persistence of LSA stone-working techniques into the colonial contact period (Smith & Lee, 1997).

Another positive result was the training component of the project. One of the young men /Ui Keyter /Oma, showed a real aptitude for archaeology; a technical traineeship was arranged for him with the National Museum in Windhoek under the direction of Dr. John Kinahan. /Ui is the first person of Ju/'hoan background to study archaeology in a professional setting. In 1995 he accompanied a Southampton University student team under the direction of Dr. Thomas Dowson, on a study tour of Namibian rock art sites. /Ui completed a two-year tenure at the Namibian National Museum with support from the Kalahari Peoples Fund and is qualified for a career in conservation and cultural resource management.

### III. Khoisan Histories II: Schmidtsdrift and Kagga Kamma

Though San peoples have continued to flourish elsewhere, by the turn of the 20th century it was believed that the Bushman peoples inside South Africa were virtually extinct. However in South Africa today the Bushmen are making something of a comeback, though in a distinctly postmodern way. Two examples should be mentioned.

After the United Nations-brokered peace process and the independence of Namibia in 1989, South Africa was faced with the problem of what to do with the thousands of Bushman soldiers and dependents who had been recruited into the South Africa Defense Force (SADF) from the 1970s forward to fight in the Namibian-Angolan border war. While some were repatriated to their respective territories, many elected to travel south with the departing South African forces. Until recently some 4,000 former soldiers and their families resided at Schmidtsdrift, an army base near Kimberly (Uys, 1994; Steyen, 1994). Even under the Apartheid regime their status was ambiguous, but with the coming to power of the Mandela government in 1994, their status became even more problematic. Having fought

against the allies of the present government, their continued presence in post-apartheid South Africa, is an unpleasant reminder of the evils of Apartheid, and because of their cultural and linguistic distinctiveness neither the Black nor the White communities have been willing to absorb them. They remained housed on the Schmidtsdrift base in a temporary military bivouac until 1999. In that year the base was returned to its legal owners, the Tswana and Griqua under the post-Apartheid Land Restoration Act, while the San ex-soldiers and their families were dispersed to smaller settlements in the Northern Cape.

Another example of the tragic consequences of Apartheid and its aftermath for the San people is the Kagga Kamma Bushman group, near Ceres north of Cape Town. The Kagga Kamma people were thought to be the last surviving San group in South Africa proper. They lived in the extreme northwestern Cape adjacent to the Kalahari- Gemsbok Game Reserve where for a generation they combined foraging and odd jobs with posing for tourist photographs at the Park gates (Botha & Steyn, 1995). In the 1980s Apartheid legislation forced them to abandon the Park and they took up an even more precarious existence as squatters and casual farm laborers on White farms. Their tragic plight received some media coverage and in the early 1990s when an entrepreneur collected them and brought them to Kagga Kamma where they became the centerpiece of a Bushman "theme park" far from their traditional area (White, 1993; 1995). Their life today consists of dressing in "traditional" clothing and presenting themselves before a daily stream of tourists. They make and sell crafts and perform dances for which they receive modest wages and rations. Hylton White has written a thoughtful and sensitive study of the Kagga Kamma people, reflecting upon the the sad history of the people, the white South African public's appetite for "authentic Africa, " and how the two came together in the incongruous circumstances of Kagga Kamma (White, 1993; 1995). Happily the same post-Apartheid Land Act that displaced the Schmidtsdrift San, worked in favour of the Kagga Kamma people. In late 1998, President Thabo Mbeki himself travelled to the north west Cape to hand over to the Kagga Kamma group title to two farms near their original lands adjacent to the Game Reserve.

The Bushmen in South Africa have not been content to simply sit and wait for government assistance or tourist handouts. Instead, they have formed advocacy organizations aimed at gaining land and resource rights and funding for development purposes. One of these organizations is the !Xuu and Khwe Trust, an organization based at Schmidtsdrift. Over half of the trust board is made up of Bushmen drawn from the Schmidtsdrift population. Some of the trust's activities includes advocacy efforts; the trust also sponsors community development projects, some of them under the !Xuu and Khwe Cultural Project which includes a craft-makers cooperative, an arts project, an art center and a living museum. Some of the local hunters at Schmidtsdrift serve in a problem animal control (PAC) unit with the Department of Nature Conservation. The !Xuu and Khwe Trust is but one of a number of Bushman advocacy organizations now operating in southern Africa (Hitchcock & Holm, 1995). The Trust was instrumental in obtaining the alternative land for the !Xuu and Khwe Bushmen displaced when the land was returned to the Tswana and Griqua.

#### IV. Khoisan Histories III: Neo-Khoisan Identities

What are the broader class and ethnic politics affecting Khoisan peoples in post-Apartheid South Africa? The Khoisan Studies Conference in Munich Germany in July 1994 bringing together the usual assortment of linguists, historians and anthropologists was jarred when Prof. Henry Bredekamp, an historian from the University of the Western Cape (a former “Coloured” university), rose to address the meeting, with deep conviction, in the following terms:

This meeting has a great deal of significance for me because I am a Khoisan person. There are millions of South Africans like me who trace their ancestry back to the Khoi and the San peoples. These are our histories our languages you are discussing. Under Apartheid we lost much of our culture. Now we want to work closely with you in recovering our past and our traditions.

Bredekamp’s intervention energized the meeting and before it dispersed, it was agreed to hold the next Khoisan Studies meeting in Cape Town. Bredekamp’s remarks heralded a new lease on life for the field of Khoisan Studies and for the study of African hunter-gatherers; an entire new constituency was awakening to the importance of recording the traditions and ways of life of the small cultures of Africa, against the day when they might be rediscovered.

On the cultural front there have been signs that a Khoisan renaissance of a sort is already underway. In April 1996 the artist and art historian Pippa Skotnes opened the controversial “Miscast: Negotiating the presence of the Bushmen,” an exhibit at the National Gallery in Cape Town, covering the horrors of genocide against the 19th century Bushmen (Skotnes, 1996). A parallel exhibit at the South African Museum brought together for the first time examples of Bushman rock art in museum collections, with the work of contemporary Bushman artists from Schmidtsdrift, the Kuru artist group in Botswana, and other artists. At the opening of “Miscast” a remarkable forum was held bringing together leaders of Bushman groups from Namibia and Botswana with representatives of a half a dozen Khoisan/Coloured political groupings within South Africa that had sprung up since 1994; groups with names like the “Khoisan Representative Council,” the Griqua National Conference, and SASI - the South African San Institute, as well as WIMSA mentioned earlier.

Kiewiet /Angn!ao, Chairman of the Nyae Nyae Farmers Cooperative of Namibia, the group working with John Marshall and Megan Biesele, gave the keynote address. He spoke eloquently (in Ju/’hoansi with simultaneous translation) of the aspirations of his people to make their way in the world while preserving their culture and values. According to eyewitness accounts members of the capacity, largely urban, audience were visibly moved, some to tears. One blond, blue-eyed Afrikaner member of the audience told the meeting that “we have all been impoverished by the ignorance and denial of the Khoisan,” while another, also white, arose to publically acknowledge her long-suppressed Khoisan heritage, an announcement followed by more tears from audience members.

In July 1997 the long awaited conference on “Khoisan Identities and Cultural Heritage” convened in Cape Town. Unlike previous conferences on Khoisan issues



here the academics and policy-makers were outnumbered by members of the existing Khoisan communities and many representatives of the Cape Town “non-white” intelligentsia. Present were Griquas from the eastern Cape, Damaras from central Namibia, Basarwa students from the University of Botswana, as well as representatives of a dozen remote Kalahari communities brought together by WIMSA based in Windhoek.

The opening ceremonies (conducted largely in Afrikaans) featured a succession of choirs from Griqua, Nama, and other Khoisan congregations from around the Cape Province. Then eleven members of “coloured” communities in the western Cape were introduced to a packed audience as the present chiefs of eleven of the original Khoi clans encountered by Van Riebeeck at the Cape in the 1650s. What was remarkable was that most of these “clans” had been virtually wiped out by the early eighteenth century. Their appearance in imaginative regalia, based loosely on seventeenth and eighteenth century accounts, and accompanied by impassioned speeches about “reclaiming our heritage” was enthusiastically received by a partisan audience. Culture heroes were celebrated, like the seventeenth century Khoi chief Atsumoto, the “King of Robben Island” who had become the island’s first political prisoner when he was exiled there after an abortive 1640s altercation. And poetry written for the occasion was recited, such as this offering from the Plakkekamp (Squatters’ Camp) Poetry Collective:

“Khoisan, rise from the vast valleys of Africa,  
Khoisan, this was once in your hand,  
This could be, once more, your promised land.”

While the Khoi contribution to the conference was highly visible, by contrast the San presence made less of an impact; and the contrast between the two constituencies is important to note. Not having the educational opportunities or the sense of their own histories enjoyed by the Khoi delegates, the San people from Botswana and Namibia gave less polished presentations. Their subject matter was not focussed on heritage and identity, but about land, hunting and grazing rights and the ongoing discrimination they experience at the hands of their fellow citizens. By the end of the conference it was clear that there were two quite different kinds of stake-holders represented. One group, largely San with some Khoi, had claims to cultural legitimacy that were impeccable, but whose political leverage and media savvy were weak. The other, largely Khoi (and Neo-Khoi) had political and media clout, but, by reason of land and language loss, had claims to legitimacy that were far more tenuous (Lee in press).

Each of these constituencies has in effect, what the other lacks. However hopes that the two will combine their strengths and make common cause may be premature at this point, given the vast differences in the historical experiences between, say, Khoi/Coloured communities in the post-Apartheid northern Cape, and San peoples scattered though northern Namibia and Botswana, who became integrated into the regional political economy far more recently.

However within their respective constituencies there is much that can be done. In the Coloured community there are exciting possibilities for collecting the oral traditions of the old people. Constituting the living history of the nation is an

extremely well-established branch of research for example in Aboriginal Australia, but barely begun in the Khoisan areas of South Africa. There is a need for scholars to walk over the land with rural elders, for studies of place names; accounts of sacred sites, battles, and other historical events need to be memorialized. Studies are needed of Khoi and San words that have remained in the language; their meanings and significance; and there is still much to be mined from existing archival sources such as the Bleek and Lloyd collection (1911; cf. Deacon & Dowson eds., 1996). Initiatives in this direction have already been taken in Botswana by the Basarwa Research Committee (BRC), a group of faculty and students (including some who are themselves Basarwa) at the University of Botswana. The BRC, aided by overseas support from Norway and elsewhere, has been instrumental in placing Basarwa human rights and land issues squarely on the national agenda.

In South Africa Thabo Mbeki's presence at the hand-over ceremony for the Kagga Kamma Land Case indicates the degree to which Khoisan issues have been foregrounded on the South African political/cultural agenda. The ANC government recently formed a ministerial committee to study the "Bushman problem" and to make recommendations. Chaired by the woman who replaced Winnie Mandela as Minister of Culture, it consists of bureaucrats and academics reviewing the various land claims pending. One of its early accomplishments has been finding the solution to the problem of the Schmidtsdrift soldiers. This ministerial committee flies academic "experts" as well as local level leaders to Pretoria for major meetings. Cynics may say that all this is a political game that the government is playing to capture the Khoisan agenda and woo the Coloured vote. To this I would answer: more power to them! Would it be preferable to see the Khoisan agenda captured by the National Party and the Far-Right KWB and turned into the kind of Right-Wing nativism that now dominates the politics of the Zulu-based Inkatha Freedom Party?

## PROBLEMS FOR FURTHER STUDY

The emergence of the Khoisan Renaissance based on a hidden history, hitherto suppressed by colonial discourse and apartheid ideology, suggests a number of new directions for anthropologists. An expanded anthropology, by celebrating the birth of new ethnicities and not just mourning the passing of the old, embraces new possibilities for research on the politics of identity. The African cases offer parallels to what is happening in other parts of the world (cf. Schrire & Gordon, 1985; Durning, 1992; Lee, 1992; Hitchcock, 1993; 1994).

In the First World nations discussed by Nicolas Peterson in his CHAGS keynote address, perhaps the most significant development of the last two decades has been indigenous peoples speaking to us in their own voices. In Canada the Innu, the Lubicon, the Teme-Augama and others (as shown in Richardson, 1989) speak to the Canadian public through the medium of plays, novels and pop music as well as via press conferences. Groups like Yothu Yindi from Arnhem Land and Kashtin from the Labrador Innu, and Susan Aglukark, the Inuit pop star have had enormous appeal through their music. Similar processes of cultural revitalization are

at work among the Ainu of Japan. Increasingly indigenous peoples are making political alliances with environmentalists, feminists, youth groups, and peoples of color (Burger, 1990; Durning, 1992; Hitchcock, 1993; 1994). Clearly the cultural renaissance underway in a number of indigenous communities has generated considerable interest in 'traditional' ethos and world-view, governance, subsistence, arts, crafts, ethno-botany, and healing; for these and other spheres of knowledge, the elders and anthropological texts are the main sources of information. If it is happening in Australia, Canada and Japan, why not in Africa?

Although the conditions elsewhere in Africa are quite different, in South Africa itself, similar alliances could be forged between former foragers and activists. Urban educated people – such as the students at the University of the Western Cape steeped in the traditions of the Black Consciousness movement (Biko, 1978; 1979; Pityana et. al., 1992 – and who feel a sense of kinship with their Khoisan roots could connect and make field trips to living representatives of that tradition, such as the Ju/'hoansi of Namibia and Botswana. Urban students from the Cape Town area may seek them out to find a sense of *communitas* with others of similar cultural background, but the northern Ju/'hoansi need the skills and strengths of the Cape Town students – in literacy, technical and business skills – at least as much as the Capetonians needed them.

## CONCLUSION

The hunter-gatherers of Africa are numerically small but in terms of African history and civilization they loom large. In the 1990s and 2000s most contemporary foragers are struggling to retain distinct identities while interacting extensively with non-foraging neighbors. In relation to bureaucratic states they may be found serving in the armed forces or victims of the same armed forces; they may be the beneficiaries of welfare programs or ignored by them (Veber et al., 1993; Hitchcock, 1993; Miller, 1993).

Where sheer survival is not an issue, encapsulated and marginalized peoples can turn their attention to the re-establishment of their historical roots. Recovering history is now a world-wide social movement among encapsulated peoples, not only in South Africa, but in Canada, and Australia, New Zealand, Russia, and elsewhere (Burger, 1990; Durning, 1992). And it is not just an issue for one people or one nation: Cultural diversity old and new represented by the hunting and gathering peoples of Africa is part of the heritage of all humanity. It is important that members of these societies themselves be drawn into the task of valorizing and preserving their own cultural heritage. Ultimately it is they who will carry forward this work.

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