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NGOs, 'Bushmen' and Double Vision: The ≠ khomani San Land Claim and the Cultural Politics of 'Community' and 'Development' in the Kalahari*

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This article focuses on the ambiguities and contradictions of donor and NGO development discourses in relation to local constructions of 'community', cultural authenticity and San identity. It deals specifically with the cultural politics of the successful 1999 ≠ khomani San land claim in the Northern Cape Province of South Africa. The study investigates local responses to state, NGO and donor discourses on indigenous identity and 'cultural survival'. It shows how strategic narratives of community solidarity, social cohesion and cultural continuity, were produced by claimants and their lawyers during this process. In the post-settlement period, however, social fragmentation and intra-community conflict between 'traditionalists' and 'western bushmen' became increasingly evident. These conflicts drew attention to the difficulties of creating community solidarity and viable livelihood strategies in a province characterised by massive unemployment and rural poverty. The paper suggests that these divisions were also a product of the contradictory objectives of NGOs and donors to provide support for traditional leadership, San language and 'cultural survival', and to inculcate modern/western ideas and democratic practices. Furthermore, despite the thoroughly hybridised character of contemporary San identity, knowledge and practices, San traditionalists appeared to stabilise 'bushman' identity by recourse to notions of a 'detrified Other' – the 'western bushmen' living in their midst. It is evident, however, that the 'traditionalist' versus 'western bushman' dichotomy is itself at the heart of donor and NGO development agendas. Consequently, the donor double vision of the San – as both 'First Peoples' and modern citizens-in-the-making – contributed to these intra-community divisions and conflict.

Introduction

During the ≠ khomani San land claim process of the mid-1990s the San claimants appeared in the media as a highly cohesive and consensual community with a common cultural

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heritage and continuity. Media representations of the San land claim process comprised a series of stereotypical images of timeless and primordialist San 'tribes' reclaiming their ancestral land. Deputy President Thabo Mbeki's speech on 22 March 1999 at the Human Rights Day celebration of the signing of the historic land restitution agreement was optimistic that the return of the land to the ≠ khomani San would heal the wounds of the past. Mbeki spoke of the dreams of a return from exile for the ≠ khomani San claimants, who had been scattered across the Northern Cape, living in rural ghettos and in poverty in communal areas and on white farms:

We shall mend the broken strings of the distant past so that our dreams can take root. For the stories of the Khoe and the San have told us that this dream is too big for one person to hold. It is a dream that must be dreamed collectively, by all the people. It is by that acting together, by that dreaming together, by mending the broken strings that tore us apart in the past, that we shall produce a better life for you who have been the worst victims of oppression.¹

Subsequent to the successful resolution of the land claim in 1999, these optimistic 'bushman' images and narratives were replaced by front-page *Cape Times* reports of conflict, homicide, suicide, alcohol abuse, AIDS, and social fragmentation at the new San settlements adjacent to the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park, Northern Cape Province.² Reports also focused on allegations of financial mismanagement by the ≠ khomani San Communal Property Association and divisive leadership struggles.³ A striking aspect of these conflicts was the emergence of intra-community tensions between the self-designated 'traditionalists' and the 'western' bushmen at the new settlement area. This divide drew on markers of cultural authenticity that included genealogies, language, 'bush knowledge', bodily appearance, clothing and so on. These tensions, only a year after the land signing ceremony, raised a number of troubling questions. Why had what was widely perceived to be a cohesive and 'harmonious' San community so quickly come to be seen as a deeply fractured group of individuals struggling to constitute themselves as a community? Was the notion of San community and solidarity a strategic fiction fashioned by the San and their NGO allies during the land claims process? What happened in the post-settlement phase to unleash processes that undermined this prior appearance of solidarity? In other words, how could one explain the dramatic shift from media celebrations of a pristine and consensual hunter-gatherer culture in March 1999, to the more sober, and at times quite grim, journalistic descriptions of the Kalahari San settlement a year later. Finally, why did local constructions of a 'great divide' between 'traditional' and 'western' bushmen emerge when they did?

In attempting to answer these questions I became increasingly interested in the roles of NGOs in local political processes, in mediating representations of the San, and in brokering global discourses on 'civil society', 'cultural survival' and indigenous people's rights. Fieldwork encounters in the Kalahari San settlement in 1999 drew my attention to the effects of these donor and NGO discourses on local constructions of 'community', cultural authenticity and identity in the Kalahari. It appeared that, despite these local constructions of a 'Great Divide' between 'traditionalists' and 'western bushmen', none of the Kalahari San fitted the mould of indigenous people untouched by modernity, neither were they modern citizens completely moulded by discourses of western democracy and liberal individualism. Instead, San identities, local knowledge and everyday practices were com-

1 Statement of then Deputy President Thabo Mbeki, on behalf of the African National Congress, on the occasion of the adoption by the Constitutional Assembly of the Republic of South Africa Constitutional Bill, Cape Town, 8 May 1996 (see A. Hadland and J. Ratao, *The Life and Times of Thabo Mbeki* (Rivonia, 1999), p. 154).

2 *Cape Times*, 5 May 2000.

3 *Cape Times*, 5 May 2000.

posed of hybrid discourses. This begged the question as to how this 'Great Divide' had emerged.

This line of inquiry raised further questions concerning the impact of the contradictory objectives of NGOs and donors to provide support for traditional leadership, San language and 'cultural survival', and to inculcate modern/western ideas and practices of democratic decision-making, proceduralism and accountability. It began to appear as if the 'traditionalist' versus 'western bushman' dichotomy in the Kalahari was itself partly a result of this contradiction and ambiguity at the heart of donor and NGO development agendas. Could these donor double visions of the San – as both 'First Peoples' and citizens-in-the-making – be a catalyst for these intra-community divisions? The article investigates how these global discourses on indigeneity and democracy are brokered by an NGO, the South African San Institute, and reappropriated and reconfigured 'from below' by San communities. It draws attention to the ambiguities and contradictions embedded within these development discourses on San tradition and civic citizenship, and examines how this contributed towards intra-community divisions and leadership struggles within a hyper-marginalised ≠ khomani San community. These leadership struggles and divisions also draw attention to the problematic ways in which notions of San tradition and 'First People' status can be deployed as strategies of exclusion that promote intra-community division. It appeared that, despite the thoroughly hybridised character of contemporary San identity, knowledge and practices, San traditionalists sought to stabilise bushman identity through recourse to notions of a 'detrified Other', the 'western bushmen' living in their midst.

These socially divisive processes draw attention to the problematic colonial legacy of the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. Within this dichotomous framework, modernity continues to be associated with progress, development, 'the West', science and technology, high standards of living, rationality and order, while tradition is associated with stasis, stagnation, underdevelopment, poverty, superstition and disorder. Although the divisions and conflicts referred to above seemed to be shaped by these binary conceptual grids, the everyday practices and experiences of the San did not fit the neat dichotomy of 'modern' and 'traditional'. In other words, their knowledge and practices could not be reduced to the modern, western and scientific, nor could they be simply deduced on the basis of indigenous knowledge alone. The hybridised conditions of everyday life in the Kalahari include 'local' knowledge, practices and identities as well as San access to 'exogenous' cyber-technologies, fax machines, cellular phones and international indigenous peoples' conferences and conventions in Europe and North America. This hybridity draws attention to the existence of what some scholars refer to as indigenous modernities⁴ that implode traditional versus modern dichotomies. This paper aims to bring these theoretical debates to a growing literature on San histories and identities in southern Africa,⁵ and on

4 A. Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham, London, 1998); E. A. Povinelli, 'Settler Modernity and the Quest for Indigenous Tradition', *Public Culture*, 11, 1 (1999), pp. 19–48; E. A. Povinelli, 'Consuming Geist: Popontology and the Spirit of Capital in Indigenous Australia', *Public Culture*, 11, 1 (1999), pp. 501–528; M. Sahlins, 'What is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28 (1999), pp. i–xxiii.

5 There is a vast literature on San communities in Namibia and Botswana that addresses similar issues to the South African situation. Examples of this extensive literature include Richard Lee, *The Kung San* (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1979); Richard Lee, *The Dobe !Kung* (New York, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1983); Edwin Wilmsen, *Land Filled with Flies: A Political Economy of the Kalahari* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1989); Robert Gordon, *The Bushman Myth and the Making of a Namibian Underclass* (Boulder, Westview Press, 1992); Robert Hitchcock, 'Patterns of Sedentism Among the Basarwa of Eastern Botswana', in Leacock and Lee (eds.), *Politics and History in Band Societies*; Robert Hitchcock, 'Socioeconomic Change Among the Basarwa in Botswana: An Ethnohistorical Analysis', *Ethnohistory*, 34, 3 (1987), pp. 219–255. This paper, however, will be restricted to the case of a specific San community in the Northern Cape Province in South Africa.

anthropological studies of indigenous people, NGOs and 'civic society' in Africa.⁶ It also aims to contribute towards studies of the cultural politics of land restitution in South Africa after apartheid.⁷

The cultural politics of 'indigenous' identity discussed in this paper only became publicly visible in South Africa in the 1990s. Unlike the situation of indigenous groups, such as the Pan-Mayan Movement in Guatemala, where about 60 per cent of the population are said to have an indigenous background, San and Nama 'ethnic revitalisation' has been confined to relatively small numbers of people, mostly from the Northern Cape Province.⁸ The South African San Institute (SASI) was established in the early 1990s as the first, and only, NGO in South Africa dealing with indigenous issues. SASI was established by a human rights lawyer, Roger Chennels, who, in the late 1980s, became involved in attempts to negotiate improved labour conditions for San farm workers at the Kagga Kamma 'bushman' tourist village at Ceres, a few hundred kilometres from Cape Town.⁹ Chennels soon realised that the ≠khomani San community was in a strong position to succeed in a land claim. Since the San had been forcibly removed from the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park (KGNP), as a direct result of racial legislation implemented after the 1913 cut-off date, their claim would be taken seriously by the Commission for Land Rights and Restitution. The preparations for the land claim initiated a process of San cultural 'revitalisation' that was later to be spearheaded by SASI.

During the 1980s, anti-apartheid activists and rural NGOs had focused on populist class-based forms of political mobilisation and popular land struggles rather than 'cultural' struggles.¹⁰ These NGOs were often affiliated with the United Democratic Front (UDF) and formed part of a broad Left coalition of trade unions and civic organisations. Intellectuals in the popular Left tended to be dismissive of 'cultural' struggles and ethnic mobilisation

Footnote 5 *continued*

The following references draw attention to a burgeoning literature on Khoi and San issues in South Africa: E. Boonzaier, 'Rediscovering the Nama: a Case Study of Controlled Identity Politics in the North-West Cape', paper presented in the Department of Social Anthropology, University of Cape Town, June 1992; E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp, 'Ethnic Identity and Performance: Lessons from Namaqualand', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, 20, 3 (1994), pp. 405–415; C. Rassool, 'Cultural Performance and Fictions in Identity: the Case of the Khoisan of the Southern Kalahari, 1936–1937', in Y. Dladla (ed.), *Voices, Values and Identities Symposium* (South African National Parks, Pretoria, 1999); C. Rassool and P. Hayes, 'Gendered Science, Gendered Spectacle: /Khanako's South Africa, 1936', Interdisciplinary Conference on Gender and Colonialism, 1997, to be published as 'Science and the Spectacle: /Khanako's South Africa 1936–37', in W. Woodward, G. Minkley and P. Hayes (eds), *Deep Histories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Rodopi, forthcoming); S. Robins, 'Transgressing the Borderlands of Tradition and Modernity: "Coloured" Identity, Cultural Hybridity and Land Struggles in Namaqualand, 1980–94', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 15, 2 (January 1997), pp. 23–44; J. Sharp, 'Rural Development Schemes and the Struggle against Impoverishment in the Namaqualand Reserves', Paper presented to the Second Carnegie Conference on Poverty and Development in South Africa, University of Cape Town, 1977; J. Sharp, 'Land Claims in the Komaggas Reserve', *Review of African Political Economy*, 61 (1994), pp. 403–414; J. Sharp and S. Douglas, 'Prisoners of their Reputation? The Veterans of the "Bushman" Battalions in South Africa', in P. Skotnes (ed.), *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1996); H. White, *In the Tradition of the Forefathers: Bushman Traditionality at Kagga Kamma* (Cape Town, University of Cape Town Press, 1995).

6 E. Garland, 'Developing Bushmen: Building Civil(ized) Society in the Kalahari and Beyond', in J. L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff (eds), *Civil Society and the Political Imagination in Africa: Critical Perspectives* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1999).

7 D. James, 'Hill of Thorns: Custom, Knowledge and the Reclaiming of a Lost Land in the New South Africa', *Development and Change*, 31 (2000), pp. 629–649; D. James, "'After Years in the Wilderness": The Discourse of Land Claims in the New South Africa', *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 27, 3 (2000), pp. 142–161; S. Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', *Kronos: Journal of Cape History*, 26 (2000), pp. 56–75.

8 The concept of 'ethnic revitalization' appeared in Anthony Wallace's 'Revitalization Movements', *American Anthropologist*, 58 (1956), pp. 264–281.

9 White, *In the Tradition of the Forefathers*.

10 See K. Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics: Pan Maya Activism in Guatemala* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University of Press, 1998).

strategies, which were regarded as playing into the hands of apartheid 'divide and rule' policies. From the perspective of many Left intellectuals in the universities,¹¹ labour unions, and political organisations such as the Unity Movement, the South African Communist Party (SACP), Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) and the African National Congress (ANC), ethnicity and 'tribalism'¹² constituted forms of 'false consciousness' promoted and abetted by Pretoria's architects of the 'homelands' and 'Separate Development' policies. The end of apartheid, along with the retreat of socialism and class-based mass mobilisation, meant that there was virtually no opposition from the Left, or from the state for that matter, to the 'cultural' struggles of San people in South Africa. In fact, ethnicity and race had come to replace class as the keywords of the new official political discourse. There was no significant state opposition to SASI's intimate involvement with international donors, NGOs and indigenous organisations that actively promoted self-determination and cultural rights for indigenous peoples. It was within this dramatically changed political landscape that 'indigenous' Nama, San and Griqua ethnic revitalisation movements took place.

The 1990s ushered in new intellectual and political challenges to Left-leaning anthropologists who subscribed to Marxist arguments about the primacy of class. The rise of post-structuralist and post-colonial theory, cultural studies and 'the literary turn', strengthened Marxist and post-Marxist arguments concerning 'the relative autonomy of culture' (and identity). This challenged notions of the base/superstructure dichotomy and the idea that ethnicity could be reduced to 'false consciousness', or the mere superstructural reflection of the underlying material base. However, as Shula Marks correctly points out, not all South African Marxists subscribed to a crude vulgar materialism during the apartheid era.¹³ Many historians and anthropologists, for example, drew on the work of Raymond Williams, E. P. Thompson, Maurice Godelier and Shula Mark's own work to interrogate class essentialism and material reductionism.

It was within the distinctly 'post-Marxist' intellectual milieu of the 1990s that a number of South African anthropologists began to write about the 'new' Khoi and San ethnicities. This interest in 'new ethnicities' and the 'politics of difference' raised a number of ethical and political conundrums concerning the appropriate roles of anthropologists. Although anthropologists were tempted to deconstruct all essentialist claims to Khoi and San cultural continuity and authenticity, or interpret them as 'staged ethnicities' self-consciously choreographed in order to gain access to material resources, it soon became apparent that such deconstructivist strategies were too instrumentalist, rationalist and reductionist, as well as being unlikely to serve the interests of these marginalised communities.¹⁴ These were similar dilemmas to those facing anthropologists working with indigenous peoples and ethnic revitalisation movements elsewhere in the world.

Kay Warren encountered similar problems while working with Pan-Mayan cultural nationalists in Guatemala.¹⁵ Whereas Warren felt obliged, as a savvy North American anthropologist, to deconstruct essentialist Pan-Mayan claims of cultural continuity to pre-Columbian cultural ideas and practices, the Mayan activist intellectuals that she worked with wanted her to assist them in doing research in order to strengthen these claims. Rather than simply deconstructing the Pan-Mayan project, Warren recognised the political

11 See B. Magubane, 'The Xhosa in Town Revisited: Urban Social Anthropology – A Failure in Method and Theory', *American Anthropologist*, 75 (1973), pp. 1701–1714; A. Mafeje, 'Ideology of Tribalism', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 4, 2 (1971); E. Boonzaier and J. S. Sharp (eds), *South African Keywords: the Uses and Abuses of Political Concepts* (Cape Town, David Philip Press, 1988).

12 Mafeje, 'Ideology of Tribalism'.

13 Personal communication.

14 Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', pp. 56–75.

15 Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics*, pp. 69–85.

imperatives of critically engaging with these tactics of strategic essentialism in order to further 'Mayan' struggles for language and cultural rights and the increased visibility of indigenous people in Guatemalan public life. This approach was also deemed necessary in order to draw attention to the pervasiveness of deeply embedded forms of *Ladino* racism, and the fact that 'Mayans' constituted a hyper-marginalised subaltern group within a monocultural and monolingual *Ladino*-dominated nation-state. Warren also had to contend with Left critics of Pan-Mayan cultural nationalism who claimed that the movement comprised an elite group of intellectuals who were dodging the 'real' political issues and therefore not representing the impoverished masses. Instead of engaging with the popular Left's class-based political mobilisation, they were seen to be involved in 'cultural' struggles and essentialist constructions of Mayan identity that contributed to 'Orientalist' conceptions of exotic 'Indians'.¹⁶ Both the Left and Right in Guatemala were also profoundly sceptical and suspicious of the political objectives of Pan-Mayan cultural nationalism, which were seen to encourage 'ethnic separatism' that would ultimately undermine Guatemala's precarious state of national unity and encourage 'Balkanisation'. As an anthropologist studying Pan-Mayan public intellectuals, Warren was deeply enmeshed in these complicated webs of political and intellectual argumentation.

Kay Warren's strategic engagement with the troubling questions raised in public debates in Guatemala resonate with some of the dilemmas of anthropologists working with 'indigenous' communities in South Africa. Although the situations of the San and Pan-Mayan intellectuals differ from each other in many respects, they are intimately connected through co-participation in international forums and conferences on indigenous peoples. They also participate in common donor circuits and academic and NGO networks. However, unlike the Mayan case, the hyper-marginalised San do not yet have their own university-trained linguists and public intellectuals who are able to engage on equal terms in public debate with their critics. Unlike the Pan-Mayan intellectuals, the San have also not encountered critics from the Left and Right who argue that ethnic mobilisation constitutes a threat to national unity and the integrity of the nation-state, and neither is the ANC and 'the Left' openly critical of San cultural revitalisation for not addressing the 'real' material concerns of poverty and access to land. Despite these significant differences, it is worthwhile drawing on the comparative dimensions of indigenous movements. The following discussion of the micro-politics of cultural authenticity draws attention to problems faced by indigenous groups whether they are in Guatemala or South Africa. It also draws attention to issues relating to the strengths and weaknesses of arguments for or against strategic essentialism (see Robins, 2000).¹⁷

The Politics of Authenticity: The 'Real Thing' or Just 'Faking It'

On 1 July 1999, only a few months after the signing of the land agreement, Roger Friedman and Benny Gool reported in the *Cape Times* that 'fake bushmen' were being employed at the internationally renowned 'bushman' tourist village at Kagga Kamma Nature Reserve. In an article entitled, 'Fake San on Show: The Great Bushman Tourist Scam', Friedman accused the Kagga Kamma management of 'passing off non-bushmen as the "genuine article" for the gratification of tourists'.¹⁸ What also emerged from the article was a deepening schism between 'western' and 'traditional' bushmen at the new San resettlement adjacent to the KGNP. I too had heard NGO workers and community members refer to the

16 Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics*, pp. 41–45, 201.

17 Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity'.

18 *Cape Times*, 1 July 1999.

growing 'western'/'traditional' bushmen divide during my visits to the Kalahari in early 1999.

The 'Great bushman tourist scam' uncovered by Friedman and Gool took place only a few months after the successful conclusion of the land claim. Following the hand-over ceremony, the ≠khomani San had decided to leave Kagga Kamma and settle at Welkom, a small settlement adjacent to the Park. After a decade of involvement in bushman tourism at Kagga Kamma they planned to establish their own tourism initiatives at their newly acquired farms. In response to the departure of the 'bushmen', the Kagga Kamma management had brought in a number of new 'bushmen' who, according to Friedman and Gool, were in reality 'coloureds' from neighbouring farms. Isak Kruiper, the ex-leader of the Kagga Kamma group and traditional head of the ≠khomani San, told the *Cape Times* that it was 'very hurtful that the owner of Kagga Kamma is continuing to display "bushmen" [even though] they are not there Kagga Kamma must close down or be honest with tourists and tell them that the people are coloured.'¹⁹ While the Kagga Kamma tour guide had initially told the *Cape Times* reporter that they had '100% pure bushmen', the owner, Heinrich de Waal, later conceded that he had offered employment to coloured farm workers, some of whom were married to 'bushmen'. According to de Waal, although it was not ethical to tell people they were 'bushmen', 'there is no such thing as a "100% bushmen"'. He justified the employment of coloured people on the grounds that the Kruiper family had left Kagga Kamma and they urgently needed to keep the bushman business running. Friedman also solicited the views of members of SASI in his quest to get to the bottom of the Kagga Kamma scandal. SASI's director accused the Kagga Kamma management of violating fair trade agreements in their use of 'fake bushmen', and Chennels stated that Kagga Kamma's use of 'pretend bushmen' was insulting to both the San and the public. However, during my numerous conversations and interviews with Chennels it became clear that he recognised the difficulties and inconsistencies that surfaced when attempting to define the exact boundaries of the ≠khomani community. In fact, he pointed out that even the term '≠khomani San' was being questioned in the light of recent linguistic and historical research.

This concern with bushman authenticity is, of course, an age-old preoccupation that goes back to the first arrival of Europeans on African soil. The problem of classifying 'bushmen' created considerable anxiety amongst European travellers, scholars and administrators. Attempts to resolve this problem generally took the form of scientific inquiry into whether these people were 'pure products', 'fakes' or hybrids. Language, genealogies, bodily features and livelihood strategies have gone into such classificatory exercises. However, the cultural hybridity of 'bushmen' has posed enormous problems for those seeking neat and unambiguous classifications. One of the responses to such classificatory quagmires has been the anxious repetition of bushman stereotypes. Such stereotypes continue to frame images of 'bushmen' in popular culture, museum dioramas and tourist spectacles at Kagga Kamma and the San settlement near KGNP.

The colonial stereotype of the pure and pristine bushman hunter and gatherer has also been embraced and articulated 'from below'. The Kruiper clan, for example, appear to have strategically deployed bushman stereotypes in order to draw a clear line between themselves as 'traditionalists' and the 'westernised' 'bushmen' in their midst.²⁰ This representational strategy feeds international donor conceptions of 'bushman' authenticity and it is likely to continue to influence San struggles over access to scarce resources such as land, traditional leadership offices and donor funding. It is also being used as claimants are being called

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

upon to define the exact boundaries of the beneficiary community at their new settlement area.

Whereas donors, fly-by-night consultants and development tourists may view the ≠ khomani San as the 'pure product', as pristine hunter gatherers, NGO fieldworkers and consultants such as Roger Chennels and Nigel Crawhall²¹ of SASI have a far more nuanced and complex understanding of this community. Chennels' direct interactions with the San over a period of more than a decade has allowed him to recognise the ambiguities, hybridities and contradictions of San identities and local constructions of tradition and community. Although, as their lawyer, he recognised that the land claim process required coherent and consistent narratives of cultural continuity and belonging,²² Chennels and the San now have to grapple with the problem of competing claims regarding who is ≠ khomani San and who is not. These are pragmatic questions that will determine who may or may not join the ≠ khomani San Communal Property Association (CPA) and gain access to land and state resources. Chennels expects the boundaries of the ≠ khomani San community to remain unstable and contested, and openly acknowledges the fraught nature and fragility of current attempts at creating a sense of community.²³ He also recognises the troubling implications of these problems for the development of viable livelihood strategies at the new San settlements. Chennels' intermediary position as a cultural broker between the San claimant community and the donors becomes apparent when he points to the difficulty of explaining this complexity to funders. Whereas donors expect to find 'real bushmen' when they visit the Kalahari, Chennels is aware that many San claimants have in the past seen themselves as 'coloureds' (*kleurlinge*) rather than the descendants of San hunter-gatherers:

[They are now] landowners with 40,000 hectares of farming land, and 25,000 hectares of game reserve. They'll have to train people to do the tracking and all those things to fill that space. But probably the most major challenge is trying to make the myth that we've actually created in order to win the land claim now become a reality. It is the myth that there is a community of ≠ khomani San. At the moment there is no such thing. Its a group of relations who are in the Northern Cape diaspora, and Dawid Kruiper is their symbolic leader... Many of them know that he is responsible, that's why he's got his leadership position... He stepped into a gap where there was no one before, and no one is fighting for that space. He has created the title, the traditional leader of the ≠ khomani, and no one else challenges him... SASI's job is to actually help make their lives more meaningful, and there's a need for it. We have to try and find a way of helping the ≠ khomani understand what it means to be ≠ khomani. Do they give jobs only to ≠ khomani people? Do they have affirmative action for ≠ khomani in a ≠ khomani homeland? Do they call it a homeland, a cultural homeland? How will they perceive themselves, as a tribe or a people? I think SASI's role is very much about culture and development, around the cultural imperative of actually creating a community. Because there's a landowner, a legal entity, which has not yet really been filled, it's a potential entity at this moment. So that is quite a difficult thing to tell the funders, to explain that some of the people who come to the meetings and to the elections have not actually seen a San themselves. They are actually curious. They know their grandparents spoke this language or were of San, so they have this potential affinity. They're almost like members coming to a club not quite sure whether to join. They're only going to join the club if we make it meaningful for them to join, in a way that does not threaten their 'civilized' status. That I find is the real challenge.

21 Nigel Crawhall, a socio-linguist, has been instrumental in identifying the few remaining ≠ khomani San-speakers in the Northern Cape Province. Along with the anthropologist and filmmaker Hugh Brody, Crawhall is currently involved in the audio-visual documentation of the language and life histories of these San speakers. Crawhall and Brody believe that these language projects, oral histories and accounts of San cultural practices are invaluable local resources that can translate into social capital. They can also function as inter-generational sources of cultural transmission and thereby contribute towards social cohesion and community solidarity.

22 For a discussion on land claims and indigenous identities see Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', pp. 56–75.

23 Personal communication.

Whereas the original claimant community comprised 350 adults, the current numbers of the ≠ khomani San community are estimated to be close to 1,000 adults spread over the Mier area in the Northern Cape, Botswana and Namibia.²⁴ With the growing awareness of the development and income-generation possibilities of the R15 million land claim settlement, it is to be expected that the numbers could increase further. It is as yet unclear what rules of inclusion and exclusion will be used to define rights to membership and access to ≠ khomani San resources. Ultimately, it will be up to the ≠ khomani San leadership to come up with the criteria for membership of the CPA. In addition, the CPA will have to develop the capacity to make decisions concerning natural resource management and so on. During 1999, however, it became clear that there were tensions between the decision-making procedures stipulated in the CPA Constitution and the *ad hoc* decisions of the traditional leadership, for instance Dawid Kruiper's decision to shoot a few springbok on one of the farms.

Subsequent to the land-signing ceremony, tensions intensified between the 'traditionalists' under Dawid Kruiper and the so-called western 'bushmen' under the CPA leader Petrus Vaalbooi.²⁵ The traditionalists called for the severance of ties with their 'westernised' relatives.²⁶ They even went as far as calling for the division of the San land claim area into two sections: the westernised stock farmers of the Vaalbooi group could have the farms outside the Park, and the 'traditionalist' Kruiper clan would take the 25,000 hectares inside the Park.²⁷ The following section discusses how this divide was itself largely a product of the dual mandate of donors and NGOs that wished both to preserve San tradition *and* to inculcate Western ideas about 'civil society' and democratic accountability.

The Politics of Tradition and Leadership in the Kalahari

The divergent leadership styles of the key players at KGNP heightened the divide between the 'traditionalists' and the 'westerners'. Petrus Vaalbooi, the former chairperson of the ≠ khomani San CPA, is an eloquent and savvy political player. He cuts an impressive figure in national and international indigenous peoples' conference circles. Vaalbooi is just as comfortable making polite conversation with President Thabo Mbeki or negotiating with the Ministers of Constitutional Development and Land Affairs, as he is occupying the centre stage at UN indigenous peoples' forums in Geneva. Vaalbooi's political style contrasts dramatically with the more low profile and parochial traditional leader, Dawid Kruiper. Moreover, whereas Vaalbooi is a comfortable and competent participant in party political manoeuvres and development and bureaucratic discourse, Kruiper is not able to engage as productively in these power plays. In addition, while Vaalbooi has commercial livestock interests, Kruiper is perceived to be only concerned with 'the bush', cultural tourism and hunting and gathering.

The responses of various San 'insiders' and 'outsiders', including donors, NGOs and academics, to these diametrically opposed leadership practices and lifestyle orientations has contributed towards exacerbating the divide. The involvement of 'Khoisan' activists in the question of traditional leadership has also reinforced these lines of division. The tension between the decision-making processes of the CPA and traditional leadership is unlikely to be easily resolved. This ambiguity, I suggest, lies at the heart of NGOs' dual mandate: to

24 Roger Chennels, personal communication, 1999.

25 *Cape Times*, 16 September 1999.

26 *Ibid.*

27 *Ibid.*

promote the 'cultural survival' of indigenous peoples *and* to socialise them into becoming virtuous modern citizens within a global civil society.

The traditionalist leadership have drawn on dress and language as powerful signs of authenticity and belonging in the Kalahari. For instance, the Kruiper 'traditionalists' attempted to banish 'bushmen' from entering the Witdraai settlement unless they wore the traditional skins or *!xai*. The handful of elderly San-speakers at Witdraai have also become the embodiment of authentic San identity, and they are regularly appropriated by competing groupings in divisive power struggles and public displays of authenticity. The three San-speaking Swartkop sisters, /Abaka Rooi, Keis Brow and /Una Rooi, for example, are often appropriated by various members of the ≠khomani community as embodied signs and custodians of San tradition. These particular processes of cultural appropriation are also made possible by SASI's concentration on San language projects.

This focus on language has led to a situation whereby Afrikaans-speaking, western-dressed livestock farmers, such as Petrus Vaalbooi and his brother, have come to be seen as 'westernised bushmen', the 'impure product'. Dawid Kruiper has also become a victim of this process since he only speaks Nama and Afrikaans. Fluency in a San language, along with 'bush knowledge' and a history of employment and residence in the Park, has become a crucial marker of San identity. It has also had a powerful influence on local community politics. Whereas Kruiper's legitimacy as a traditional leader owed much to his claim that he was raised in the Park and learnt 'bush knowledge' from his late father, Regopstaan Kruiper, this narrative was challenged by some San-speaking elders who claimed that the Nama and Afrikaans-speaking Kruiper was in Botswana at the time of the forced removals. These badges of authenticity and legitimacy continue to haunt San leaders and divide the community.

For San leaders like the Afrikaans-speaking Petrus Vaalbooi, who do not have direct access to these cultural markers, alternative legitimising strategies have to be deployed. Vaalbooi's rise to prominence as the first ≠khomani San CPA Chairperson was largely a result of his ability to engage with development and bureaucratic discourses. Vaalbooi's strength as a leader was also due to his ability as a translator and mediator of local San issues to broader national and international audiences. It is precisely these Western-style discursive competencies that are recognised and rewarded by NGOs and donors committed to promoting the values and democratic practices of 'civil society'. At the same time, Vaalbooi's local legitimacy was built upon the fact that he is the son of the 97 year old Elsie Vaalbooi, one of a dozen known ≠khomani San-speakers in South Africa. However, Vaalbooi's Achilles' heel was his inability to speak Nama or San, as well as his refusal to wear loincloths. In other words, the Afrikaans-speaking western-dressed Vaalbooi did not conform to popular notions of cultural authenticity embodied in the image of the primordial bushman.

While NGOs and donors tended to valorise these signs of authentic San culture – language and bodily vernacular – they also valued individuals like Vaalbooi who were able to master development and governance discourses, and who appeared to be willing to embrace the virtues of 'civil society'. The ambiguities of this 'dual mandate' – of promoting San cultural survival *and* the values and virtues of 'civil society' such as democratic decision-making and accountability – seemed to invoke a repetition of stereotypes about 'pure' and 'detrified' 'bushmen' that has contributed towards the re-inscription of an artificial divide between 'traditionalist' and 'western' 'bushmen'.²⁸

28 Similar processes of intra-community tension emerged in the violent conflicts between 'traditionalist' hostel dwellers and militant township residents (the comrades or *amaqabane*) during the apartheid era. See S. Robins, 'Bodies out of Place: Crossroads and Landscapes of Exclusion', in Hylton Juden (ed), *Blank: Interrogating*

Hybrid Discourses and Indigenous Modernities in the Kalahari

Despite considerable evidence of the hybrid character of both NGOs discourses and the everyday practices and identities of the San themselves, advocates of modernisation and traditionalism seem to share a common discomfort with the idea of 'the hybrid'. In other words, modernisers and traditionalists alike seem to believe in the necessity for pure categories and identities. However, the attempts to constitute a purified San tradition in the Kalahari created problems for 'traditionalists' who found themselves unable to fit completely their own criteria and conceptions of authentic and pure San tradition. After all, most of them are Afrikaans and Nama-speaking former farm workers or National Parks employees with extremely tenuous ties to a hunter-gatherer existence. However, the more porous and precarious these claims on authentic San identity and tradition, the more intense the struggles to eradicate the influence of 'exogenous' forces of modernity can become. Even the most fervent San traditionalists were deeply implicated in the discursive webs of modernity. This situation, it would seem, is largely a product of historical encounters with 'the West', including colonialism, Christianity, capitalist wage labour, the state, donors, NGOs, academics, journalists, white farmers, tourists and so on. These imbrications in the discursive webs of modernity are especially evident in San encounters with donors and NGOs. Here, traditionalist discourses and solidarities based on kinship ties, ethnic affiliation and narratives of cultural continuity come face to face with the 'civilising mission' of donors and NGOs whose aim is to promote liberal discourses of civil society, accountability, democracy, and Western-style individualism. Despite the efforts of outsiders, and the San themselves, to create the myth of the 'pure bushman', there is no escape from the hybrid condition that characterises the everyday social realities of the San.

It is perhaps paradoxical that the survival of San hunter and gatherer traditions has required that the 'traditionalists' expend considerable energy gaining access to 'exogenous' modern means of production, such as cultural tourism, wage labour, and government and donor grants. As Marshall Sahlins notes, the survival of indigenous peoples, such as hunter-gatherers, is often not a result of their isolation: rather, their subsistence is dependent on modern means of production, transportation and communication – rifles, snowmachines, motorised vessels and, at least in North America, CB radios and all-terrain vehicles – which they buy using money they have acquired from a variety of sources, including public transfer payments, resource royalties, wage labour and commercial fishing.²⁹ Sahlins' comments suggest that these peoples need to engage with modern means of production but that this does not mean that they are simply swallowed up by the homogenising forces of modernity and globalisation. Instead, many of these groups adapt and recast their dependencies on modern means of production in order to reconstitute and reproduce their own cultural ideas and practices. Similarly, by participating in NGO and donor-driven projects, indigenous groups, such as the Kalahari San, are drawing on the modern institutions and resources of a global civil society to reconstitute themselves as a 'traditional community'. Indeed, it is precisely by invoking this dichotomy that traditionalists are able to ground an extremely unstable and hybrid San identity.

Ethnographic examples of the integration of industrial technologies in indigenous

Footnote 28 *continued*

Architecture After Apartheid (Rotterdam, NAI, 1998), pp. 457–470. Elsewhere, I have written about development discourses that elide cultural hybridities in the name of modernisation and commercialisation. See S. Robins, 'Breaking Out of the Straitjacket of Tradition: the Politics and Rhetoric of "Development" in Zimbabwe', *World Development*, 26, 9 (1998), pp. 1–18, and S. Robins, 'Transgressing the Borderlands of Tradition and Modernity: "Coloured" Identity, Cultural Hybridity and Land Struggles in Namaqualand, 1980–94', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 15, 2 (January 1997), pp. 23–44.

29 M. Sahlins, 'What is Anthropological Enlightenment? Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 28 (1999), pp. i–xxiii, 140.

sociologies and cosmologies are what Sahlins and others refer to as indigenous modernities. However, the pervasiveness of a 'western' dichotomy of tradition and modernity continues to obscure the reality of what Sahlins also refers to as the indigenisation of modernity. Instead of recognising this hybridisation, 'western' binary thinking contributes towards the persistent reassertion of an artificial divide between tradition and modernity. As will become evident in the following section, the construction of a dichotomy between San traditionalists and 'western bushmen' in the Kalahari was, it would appear, itself partly a response to the contradictory demands of donors and NGOs for the San simultaneously to constitute themselves both as Late Stone Age survivors *and* modern citizens of the nation state.

Mixed Messages and Crossed Lines? Land, 'Cultural Survival' and the 'Civilising Mission' of NGOs

Elsewhere I have written about the ways in which the land claims process has contributed to post-apartheid reclamations of Nama and San cultural identity.³⁰ Land claims in the Northern Cape, as elsewhere in the country, have become a catalyst for processes of ethnogenesis³¹ that reproduce apartheid-like ethnic categories and essentialist discourses. These ethnic categories and tribal discourses, however, are not simply imposed 'from above' by the state, donors or NGOs, but are also reinvented and reappropriated by land claimants themselves.³² In the following I analyse NGOs as 'third parties', as inter-hierarchical brokers or mediators of state and donor discourses and agendas, as well as local community interests. Examining the ambiguous and intermediary structural and discursive location of SASI, and its involvement in the San land claim, can throw light on the complex and contradictory nature of the cultural politics of land, 'community', 'development' and identity amongst the ≠ khomani San people. It can also reveal the impact at the local level of the mixed messages of donor and NGO programmes.

Given that donors and NGOs tend to view indigenous peoples as both 'First People' and modern citizens-in-the-making, it is not surprising that SASI sought to develop ways of combining charismatic and patriarchal styles of 'traditional leadership' with the establishment of the ≠ khomani San CPA, along with a Constitution and executive committee to ensure democratic procedures of accountability and decision making. However, it soon became apparent that there was tension between the followers of 'western bushmen' under the then CPA chairperson, Petrus Vaalbooi, and San traditionalists under Dawid Kruiper.

Whereas during the land claim process the San were portrayed in the media as pristine 'First People', after the settlement they increasingly came to be seen as part of a broader category of hyper-marginalised 'coloured' rural poor that needed to be drawn into the 'civilising process' through development and institutional capacity-building programmes. It was also during the post-settlement phase that rural development NGOs such as Farm Africa began to move into the Kalahari in order to assist the San to develop organisational capacity to deal with the more mundane administrative and development matters relating to land-use and livestock management. In other words, while SASI's decision to concentrate on 'First People' status may have made strategic sense during the land claims process, this

30 Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', pp. 56–75; Robins, 'Transgressing the Borderlands of Tradition and Modernity', pp. 23–44.

31 See J. Sharp, 'Ethnogenesis and Ethnic Mobilization: A Comparative Perspective on a South African Dilemma', in E. N. Wilmsen and P. McAllister (eds.), *The Politics of Difference: Ethnic Premises in a World of Power* (Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1996).

32 See Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', pp. 56–75.

emphasis was perceived to be inadequate during the post-settlement phase. The following discussion seeks to locate these developments within the context of the changing roles and influences of donors and NGOs.

In recent years, NGOs have come to be seen by policy makers, development practitioners, donors, politicians and social scientists as conduits for the dissemination of the ideas and practices of 'civil society'.³³ This identification of NGOs as custodians of the democratic virtues of civil society has, however, been brought into question by the observation that, given the limited financial resources available, NGOs are becoming more dependent on the whims and fancies of international donors, state aid agencies and corporate patrons. Nonetheless, NGOs continue to be lauded for promoting democratisation and the expansion of the core values of 'civil society'. Scholars of international relations have even examined the impact of NGO coalitions and networks on international politics and their role in the formation of a post-Cold War international civil society.³⁴ A key question to emerge in these debates has been the shifting relationship between globally connected NGOs and the nation state.

NGOs have come to be seen as the most effective brokers and mediators of global discourses of Western liberal democracy and modernisation in the Third World. William Fisher notes that NGOs have also been identified by advocates of neoliberalism as effective institutions for transferring training and skills that 'assist individuals and communities to compete in markets, to provide welfare services to those who are marginalized by the market, and to contribute to democratization and the growth of a robust civil society, all of which are considered critical to the success of neoliberal economic policies'.³⁵ It would appear from all this interest in NGOs that they are indeed 'the new panacea' for the promotion of Third World democracy, civil society and 'development'.

SASI is directly involved in mediating the development discourses of international NGOs and donor agencies, governments and human rights organisations. The San NGO participates in a complex field of regional and international indigenous peoples rights organisations, NGOs and donor bodies. Many of these agencies have invested in images of the San as pristine hunter-gatherers while at the same time actively promoting the 'civilising mission' of Western liberal civil society. SASI is often caught in the complicated webs of international funding circuits that force it to engage with these mixed messages and ambiguously defined projects. It also has to attempt to connect these trans-local ideas and practices to national and local sites and contexts.

So how do the Kalahari San make sense of these ambiguous messages and discourses produced by the state, donors, 'cultural survival' organisations, and South African and international NGOs? Recent studies of NGOs by William Fisher,³⁶ Elizabeth Garland³⁷ and Steve Sampson,³⁸ as well as the emergence of a growing anthropological literature on the discourses of the 'development industry',³⁹ have raised important questions concerning the

33 W. Fisher, 'DOING GOOD: The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 26 (1997), pp. 439–464.

34 *Ibid.*

35 *Ibid.*, p. 444.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 439–464.

37 Garland, 'Developing Bushmen'.

38 S. Sampson, 'The Social Life of Projects: Imposing Civil Society to Albania', in C. Hann and E. Dunn (eds), *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models* (London and New York, Routledge, 1996).

39 See, for example, A. Escobar, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World* (Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1995); G. Esteva, 'Development', in W. Sachs (ed.), *The Development Dictionary: A Guide to Knowledge and Power* (London, Zed Books, 1992); F. Cooper and R. Packard (eds), *International Development and the Social Sciences: Essays on the History and Politics of Knowledge* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, University of California Press, 1997); J. Crush, *Power of Development* (London, Routledge, 1995); A. Gupta, *Postcolonial Developments: Agriculture in the Making of Modern India* (Durham, London, 1998).

discursive construction of development ‘problems’, ‘solutions’ and ‘target populations’. James Ferguson’s *Anti-Politics Machine*, for instance, draws attention to the problematic ways in which development discourses produce homogenous target populations, such as ‘less developed countries’, ‘the Third World’, female-headed households, and ‘traditional farmers’.⁴⁰ The San too have been constructed as a ‘target population’ by a range of social actors and institutions, including the state, donors and NGOs. Whereas Geneva-based donors, the United Nations Working Group on Indigenous Populations (UNWGIP) and NGOs may conceive of the San as a uniform and homogenous ‘target category’ of pristine hunter gatherers, the closer one gets to the ground the more unstable, messy and differentiated this category begins to appear.

The view ‘from below’ can be equally confusing. For example, whereas close-up observations of the Kalahari San might seem to suggest that they are totally captured within the everyday ‘Western’ *habitus* of liberal development workers, teachers, missionaries, New Agers, and government bureaucrats, this intimate exposure to the ‘civilising mission’ does not necessarily mean that they seamlessly reproduce Western liberal political ideals and practices.⁴¹ In other words, the San ‘target population’ is a ‘moving target’, unable and unwilling to live up to either ‘western’ fantasies of the bushmen as Late Stone Age survivors, or developmentalist visions of the San as normalised, disciplined and ‘civilised’ modern subjects ready to be recruited into an increasingly global civil society.

Elsewhere, I have discussed various possible explanations for the tenacity of popular perceptions of the ≠khomani San as ‘First People’, as the living embodiments of Late Stone Age hunter-gatherers.⁴² It is by now hardly news to note that these tenacious primordialist fantasies emanate from a variety of sources including anthropologists, filmmakers, museum curators, donors, NGOs, journalists, tourists and so on. The following section investigates the specific ways in which such notions are reproduced, challenged and reconfigured in the context of the ≠khomani San land claim. This will involve an analysis of the disjunctures, ambiguities and contradictions embedded in discourses on indigenous peoples that are disseminated by bodies such as the UNWGIP and international donors. It will also involve an analysis of how these global discourses are understood and reconfigured by the ≠khomani San community and by SASI, given the prevailing socio-economic and political realities in San settlements adjacent to the KGNP.

Citizens and Bushmen: Discourses on Indigenous Identity

In South Africa there are a number of groups currently claiming ‘indigenous’ status in terms of the internationally recognised UNWGIP use of the term. These include the Nama (Khoi or Khoekhoe), San, Griqua and !Korrana.⁴³ The San, Nama and Griqua were classified as ‘coloured’ in terms of the 1955 race classification legislation introduced by the Nationalist Government that came to power in 1948.⁴⁴ This legislation was accompanied by vigorous

40 J. Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: ‘Development’, Depoliticization and Bureaucratic State Power in Lesotho* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1990).

41 See Garland, ‘Developing Bushmen’.

42 See Robins, ‘Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing “Bushman” History and Identity’, pp. 56–75.

43 Nama is the only surviving Khoe language in South Africa. There are approximately five to ten thousand Nama-speaking people in the Northern Cape, mostly concentrated in the northern Namaqualand area along the Orange River.

44 There are some 3,600,000 South Africans who identify themselves as ‘coloured’ (*Statistics South Africa* (1998), section 2.5). The category of coloured disguises the cultural heterogeneity of people many of whom have European, African, Khoe, San, Indian, Indonesian, Malay and slave backgrounds. The majority of so-called coloureds do not identify themselves as indigenous Khoe or San. However, the gains made by a growing indigenous rights movement could encourage many of these people to reclaim and recognise African, San and Khoe ancestry, which has tended to be suppressed in favour of a stress on their European and Christian background.

state-led assimilation policies. For example, Nama children were forced to use Afrikaans in school, and an Afrikaans, Christian, coloured identity was imposed upon the Nama through the institutions of church and state. Many people with San, Nama and Griqua ancestry also opted to identify with this 'coloured' identity due to the negative connotations and racist discrimination associated with the terms 'hottentot' and 'boesman' under colonialism and apartheid. As a result, the San and Nama languages and culture have almost disappeared. Whereas Nama is still spoken in the Northern Cape Province in northern parts of Namaqualand such as Richtersveld, it has virtually vanished in the more missionised southern Namaqualand settlements such as Leliefontein.⁴⁵ Unlike Nama, 'coloureds' and black Africans, San people were not given their own 'Reserves' as it was assumed that they were 'extinct' or thoroughly assimilated into the 'coloured' population. This also contributed to the particularly marginalised character of San identity. This marginalisation is evident in the fact that there are only approximately a dozen identified ≠khomani San speakers throughout South Africa.

The response of the ANC government to the dramatic reclamations of Nama, San and Griqua identity that began the early 1990s, has been one of caution and ambivalence. The government remains wary of an indigenous rights movement that could become a vehicle for exclusivist ethnic politics. This distrust of ethnic politics comes out of a historical legacy of apartheid and rightwing Afrikaner nationalism, as well as the bloody clashes between the Inkatha Freedom Party and ANC supporters in Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng. It would also appear that the ANC, as an unambiguously modernist organisation, is concerned that an accommodation of communitarianism could end up contradicting the underlying principles of liberal democracy. From a more pragmatic position, the enormous logistical difficulties experienced in attempting to process the thousands of land claims already submitted to the Land Claim Court may have contributed towards the government's reluctance to encourage indigenous groups to agitate for aboriginal land titles along the lines of Australian and New Zealand land law.

The term 'indigenous' in South Africa has come to mean something completely different to its use by international donors, the United Nations and various indigenous peoples' forums and activist groups. There is as yet no accepted South African definition of the term, even though it appears twice in the Constitution (Articles 6 and 26). The Constitution's use of the term in fact derives from the common South African use of the word 'indigenous' to refer to the languages and legal customs of the African majority of Bantu-language speakers.⁴⁶ In South Africa, like other parts of southern Africa, the term 'indigenous' is used to distinguish the black African majority from the European settlers and Asian minorities.

Khoi and San advocates and activists are critical of the government's failure to adopt international indigenous rights legal frameworks. For instance, SASI linguist and development consultant Nigel Crawhall believes the South African government's rights-based paradigm 'ignores the inability of marginalized indigenous communities to effectively hold the state accountable for implementation of its rights'.⁴⁷ It is with this in mind that Crawhall continues to call for the specific recognition of 'Indigenous Africans', in line with international definitions.

The common use of the term 'indigenous' in South Africa is very different to UNWGP's use of the term to refer to non-dominant groups of people of aboriginal descent

45 Robins, 'Transgressing the Borderlands of Tradition and Modernity', pp. 23-44.

46 76.7 per cent of South Africans are considered to be African (i.e. of Bantu-language speaking origin). Whites of European descent comprise 10.9 per cent, Coloureds 8.9 per cent and Indians 2.6 per cent. *Statistics South Africa* (1998).

47 N. Crawhall, *Needs Assessment Study: Indigenous Peoples in South Africa*, Report prepared for International Labour Organization and the South African San Institute (Cape Town, SASI, 1999).

and with distinct territorial and cultural identities. The ANC government's apparent reluctance to take on board this UN definition is a consequence of its belief that the majority of 'black Africans' and 'coloureds' are indigenous South Africans.⁴⁸ For instance, when asked by a journalist whether the successful resolution of the ≠khomani San land claim represented the government's intention to recognise Khoi and San as 'First People', former Minister of Land Affairs, Derek Hanekom, flatly refuted this assumption. He claimed that virtually all black South Africans had suffered under colonialism and apartheid and it would not make sense to separate out and privilege the experiences of one group on the basis of claims to autochthonous, aboriginal status. As Hanekom pointed out, the land claims cut-off date is, in any case, 1913, which rules out claims to aboriginal land rights. From the ANC's perspective, redress has to address the needs of all South African citizens disadvantaged by racial legislation.

San and Khoisan activists believe, however, that the Constitution ought to recognise the very specific conditions of marginalisation of the San and Nama in South Africa. They argue that this exceptionality is evident in the observation that there are only about a dozen known ≠khomani San-speakers left in South Africa. This alone, they argue, makes the San one of the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in South Africa. The ANC, like other African governments, disagrees, and has refused to accept United Nations' declarations on indigenous peoples.

The ANC is clearly unwilling to encourage openly an indigenous peoples' discourse that would rub against the grain of the tenets and principle of liberal democracy. Since it was founded in 1913, the ANC has embraced a Western-style liberal democratic model that cannot easily accommodate communitarian political institutions and practices, such as traditional leadership. However, given the concessions granted to African traditional leaders in the recent past, including the establishment of a House of Traditional Leaders, the government is regularly reminded by Khoi and San activists that it has already set a precedent. In fact, chiefs are about to be given more powers in terms of land rights in communal areas. This perhaps explains why, despite a reluctance to ratify international conventions on indigenous rights, the ANC government has nonetheless taken seriously the dire predicament of the ≠khomani and !Xu/Khwe San.⁴⁹ Apart from the provision of land, the government has also initiated a process aimed at addressing the specific needs and cultural rights of San, Nama and Griqua communities, although it remains to be seen whether this will bear fruit.

Rights, Culture and NGO Priorities: The Question of Strategic Essentialism

Rather than chasing after constitutionally enshrined rights for indigenous people, SASI's lawyer, Roger Chennels, is more concerned with the enormous challenges of creating viable local community structures and livelihood strategies. It is here, at the more mundane and immediate level of everyday life, of poverty, conflict and social fragmentation, that Chennels locates the San agenda. However, it is not only these material realities that need to be addressed. Chennels and Crawhall believe that tapping into San local knowledge and the historical narratives of elders could be a valuable source of social capital in the quest to forge a collective sense of belonging, psychological well-being and social cohesion, as well as facilitating the development of viable livelihood strategies. In other words, there need not be an artificial dichotomy between the more materialist rural development

48 The term 'black' is often used to refer specifically to black Africans who speak Bantu languages. It is also used more broadly to refer to Indians, Coloureds, Khoi, San and Africans, i.e. 'non-white'. The term black, like that of African and coloured, is a highly unstable and contested term.

49 There are about 4,500 former Angolan Khwe and !Xu San now living near Kimberly.

strategies of NGOs such as Farm Africa, and SASI's cultural projects aimed at stimulating social capital formation through inter-generational knowledge transfer. However, it remains to be seen to what degree these indigenous knowledge and cultural practices can be used as a basis for 'cultural survival' and economic sustainability for present and future generations of San.

Given the strong interest of international donors in the 'cultural survival' of vanishing cultures and languages, it could be argued that it still makes strategic sense for San communities, and SASI, to stress the importance of their hunter-gatherer lifestyle, indigenous knowledge and San cultural continuity. The deployment of these strategies to gain donor funding may also contribute towards reconstituting kinship and other activities that contribute towards the remaking of San conceptions of human existence. However, endorsing primordialist notions of the San as hunter-gatherers could also contribute towards the devaluation and marginalisation of alternative livelihood strategies and social practices that do not conform to this stereotypical 'bushman image'. For instance, San livestock farmers are often perceived to be less authentically San by donors even though, for many ≠khomani San, goats and sheep have been, and continue to be, the most viable livelihood strategy in the arid Kalahari region. While livestock production is in fact taking place on the newly acquired farms, it has contributed towards growing tensions between so-called 'traditionalists' who claim to prefer the hunter gatherer/cultural tourism option, and livestock farmers who are referred to as the 'western bushmen'. As was mentioned earlier, the media, academics, NGOs and donors are not entirely innocent in these processes.

Anthropologists and historians have devoted enormous time and resources towards proving or disproving 'bushman authenticity'. This obsessive pre-occupation with cultural authenticity is not, of course, limited to scholars. For example, when Donald Bain wanted to establish a Bushman Reserve in South Africa in the 1930s, he encountered strong opposition from white farmers who, fearing shortages of farm labour, claimed that the Reserve was unnecessary as there were no 'real bushmen' left. In recent years, 'bushman' tourism and the ≠khomani San land claim have once again triggered academic and popular interest in the perennial question of 'bushmen' authenticity. More than 50 years after Bain's aborted attempt at salvaging 'bushman' culture through the establishment of a Reserve, the issue of 'bushmen' authenticity remains as loaded as ever. It would appear that the 'bushmen' have once again become the lightning rod for academic and media discourses on cultural difference and authenticity. It is as if they have come to represent the last repository of absolute alterity, as a mythic, primordial Other. Ironically, they have also become intellectual fodder for countless academic projects aimed at debunking 'bushman myths' and primordialist essentialism. Elsewhere, I have written about the political and ethnic dilemmas facing South African anthropologists and historians when called upon to provide research to support essentialist conceptions of San cultural continuity in order to buttress land claims and projects of 'ethnic revitalization'.⁵⁰

The perceived uniqueness of the Kalahari San and their land claim has attracted enormous media, donor and NGO interest. It also captivated President Mbeki and the former Minister of Lands, Derek Hanekom, whose personal involvement in the claim played a particularly significant role in ensuring its success. Popular images of primordial bushmen not only fuel media and scholarly interest, but also shape government, NGO and donor perceptions and development strategies and priorities. For instance, San development projects are known to receive generous funding from international donor organisations for

50 Robins, 'Land Struggles and the Politics and Ethics of Representing "Bushman" History and Identity', pp. 56–75. See also Warren, *Indigenous Movements and their Critics*.

whom the Kalahari bushmen represent the last of the surviving Late Stone Age hunter gatherers. Similarly, it could be argued that the R15 million San land claim 'jumped the queue' precisely because the San are perceived to be such a valuable political and tourist commodity by the state, NGOs, donors and the media. President Mbeki's African Renaissance, South Africa's quest for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council, and the race for votes in the Northern Cape probably all played a significant role in the ANC government's last minute rush to address San land and language rights in the run up to the 1999 general elections. Although political opportunism alone cannot account for the whole story, it would appear that the San were indeed political pawns in the 1999 elections. This does not imply, however, that they were passive victims of the machinations of powerful political elites; after all, they managed to win back their land and continue to secure access to state resources. Neither are they passive victims of the representations, political agendas and development discourses of powerful outsiders.

The representations of 'bushmen' as 'First People' that are reproduced daily at South African museum dioramas and San tourist villages continue to ignore the devastating consequences of San genocide, land and cultural dispossession and contemporary rural poverty and social fragmentation. However, drawing attention to this devastating San past and present does not necessarily appeal to tourists who want to see the Kruiper clan dressed in loincloths and carrying bows and arrows. Neither does it necessarily appeal to donors looking for 'First People'. The Kruiper clan recognises that these 'traditional' bushman images are invaluable cultural and economic resources in their quest for a future that is more than mere 'cultural survival'. They are creative and self-conscious producers of the cultural commodities that fuel a fledgling tourist and donor-driven economy. These developments are not merely instrumental manipulations of culture and identity in order to gain access to material resources. They are also cultural practices aimed at the recuperation of social memory and identity similar to other cultural reclamations taking place throughout post-apartheid South Africa.

The problem with such strategic essentialism, as Gayatri Spivak points out, is that it can end up obscuring intra-community differences along class, age or gender lines. These 'ethnic' strategies of mobilisation also tend to ignore and degrade cultural hybridities in the name of 'pure essences' and cultural continuity, thereby encouraging the kinds of tensions between 'pure' and 'westernised' bushmen that emerged in the Kalahari. Moreover, such an approach could render the San increasingly dependent on powerful donors and create obstacles for San communities seeking to develop independent and effective local community and leadership structures. It is also likely to alienate the ≠khomani San from their 'coloured' and Nama-speaking neighbours in Northern Cape. Growing divisions and tensions have in fact occurred between the claimant community and their communal farmer neighbours in the Mier area. This culminated in legal contestation of the San claim by Mier residents. The matter was eventually resolved through a negotiated settlement whereby Mier communal farmers also received state land and resources as compensation for land dispossession under apartheid. Nonetheless, instead of encouraging strategic ties with their neighbours, a donor focus on San exceptionalism and 'First People' status could end up isolating and alienating this claimant community from potential human resources and political allies in the neighbouring communal areas and rural towns. In other words, an 'ethnic separatist strategy' that was perceived to be strategic during the San land claim process, and which was supported by NGOs and donors, could contribute towards erecting an artificial barrier between the ≠khomani San and neighbouring 'coloured' and 'baster' communities, even though many of the San claimants come from these neighbouring areas and have close kinship ties with people living there. In other words, a narrowly defined donor focus on 'indigenous' San could create problematic socio-spatial and political

divisions and inequalities amongst these culturally hybrid and impoverished rural people of the Northern Cape Province.

'Ethnic separatist' strategies also fail to recognise the potential for San participation in broad class-based social movements and development initiatives involving 'coloured', black African and Nama communal farmers, farm workers, the unemployed and other marginalised groups in the Northern Cape region. However, given the fact that this political mobilisation is not taking place, it probably makes strategic sense for the ≠khomani San, with the help of SASI, to continue to concentrate on taking care of their own needs and concerns. Although this approach could confine the San to an 'ethnic cage', there is nothing to prevent the San from participating in broader social movements and developmental agendas in the future. In the absence of such social movements, however, SASI is unlikely to decide to work with non-San communities as this could jeopardise its ability to tap into Northern donor circuits earmarked specifically for 'indigenous' people. It could also spread the organisation's limited resources too thinly. Restricting their work to San issues also makes sense given SASI's identification of the San as a hyper-marginalised community with very specific social and cultural needs and predicaments.

SASI could find itself in a situation where it is unable entirely to dismiss international donor desires for authentic 'First People', and yet unable to ignore the ambiguities, contradictions and messy social realities they meet in their everyday encounters in the Kalahari. This messiness is further complicated by NGO attempts to reconcile traditional leadership, values and practices, with the need to establish democratic and accountable decision-making institutions. Chennels' comments on the difficulty of explaining this complexity to funders remains a troubling one. Meanwhile, recent developments in the Kalahari suggest that donors are uncertain whether they should fund 'cultural survival' NGOs or more mainstream rural development NGOs. Some of the major donors have, in fact, recently provided significant support for rural development programmes at the Kalahari San settlement as a way of countering a perception, rightly or wrongly, that in the past the bulk of San donor resources went to cultural survival projects. This represents a significant shift towards providing donor support for more conventional rural development programmes aimed at developing livelihood strategies and natural resource management institutional capacity.

The following letter to the *Sunday Independent*, entitled 'Create lasting economic strategy for Nyae-Nyae', is a highly polemical attack on San 'cultural survival' projects in Namibia. The writer, who claims to have spent fifteen years at Nyae-Nyae, lambasts outsiders for promoting their own self-interested conceptions of 'bushman' culture.⁵¹ The letter was written in response to a prior article entitled 'Alcohol makes a desert of Namibians' hopes':⁵²

The people of Nyae-Nyae have their own culture just as all other people in Namibia have their own culture. This has nothing to do with the ability to keep animals and grow vegetables. The people of Bushmanland are perfectly capable of keeping cattle and growing vegetables. It might not be 'in their tradition', but neither was warfare nor alcohol. For 15 years I have witnessed NGOs, governments, trophy hunters, racketeers, conservationists, film makers, intellectuals and quasi-intellectuals and priests telling the people of Nyae-Nyae how they should preserve their 'culture' and run their lives. Culture and tradition can only survive if the people want it to. Paternalism from outsiders just won't do the trick. If anyone was really concerned about the wellbeing of the 'bushmen' of Nyae-Nyae, they would have created an economic environment diverse enough for the people to be able to feed themselves. This has not happened and never will as long as outsiders with their own agendas try to rule the roost.

51 *Sunday Independent*, 17 October 1999.

52 *Sunday Independent*, 5 September 1999.

The letter is an outright attack on what the author perceives to be the outside imposition of San culture survival projects that do not adequately address San poverty and so create viable livelihood options. There is a danger, however, that such blanket criticisms could be used to justify the imposition of rural development projects that fail to address adequately the specificities of the social and cultural aspects of everyday life in San communities. In other words, it could end up ignoring the valuable local knowledge and social capital that SASI development consultants such as Nigel Crawhall and Roger Chennels believe is essential for any attempt to reconstitute this highly fractured San community. It could also end up failing to recognise the ways in which representations of San tradition and culture are fashioned 'from below' by the San themselves. While the appropriation of essentialist notions of San cultural identity can contribute to the kinds of conflicts between 'traditionalist' and 'western' bushmen that occurred in the Kalahari, it can also contribute towards reconstituting the social fabric of community and revitalising local conceptions of San culture and identity. Similarly, although San cultural politics could lead to forms of 'ethnic separatism' and isolationism that undermine social and economic ties with non-San neighbours in adjacent communal areas and rural towns, this is not inevitable: San cultural politics does not have any pre-ordained script or teleology.

To break out of the ethnic mould of apartheid history, South African NGOs, and the San themselves, may have to walk a fine line between negotiating the primordialist desires and fantasies of funders, and the need to gain access to development resources to empower poverty-stricken San communities. They will also need to negotiate the ambiguous and contradictory dual mandate of donors that seek to promote San 'cultural survival' while simultaneously inculcating the values and virtues of 'civil society' and liberal individualism, development and democracy. This could be a hard road to walk.

Conclusions

This article has focused on donors, NGOs and the San claimant community in its investigation of how the apparently contradictory agendas of San 'cultural survival' and the promotion of the values and practices of 'civil society' have shaped the ≠khomani San, both during and after the land claim. It is clear that the cultural politics of San identity, community and tradition is a highly complicated and shifting discursive field, and that the San are simultaneously enmeshed in donor and NGO projects of cultural recuperation and the 'civilising mission' of liberal democracy. It would also appear that, despite considerable evidence of the hybrid character of San local knowledge and everyday practices, the dual mandate of donors and NGOs has contributed towards reproducing a 'great divide' between 'traditionalists' and 'western bushmen'. It has been argued, however, that this divide is not simply imposed 'from above' by NGOs and donors, but is also very much a product of local constructions of bushman identity and community.

San cultural revivalism is taking place within the context of a new politics of indigenous identity and cultural rights that is currently unfolding in South Africa. The stakes are being raised through tough competition over access to donor and state resources, including struggles for access to government salaries within a proposed Indigenous Council (*Inheemse Raad*), a 'KhoiSan' equivalent of the existing House of Traditional Leaders. These recent developments have exacerbated leadership struggles and social divisions amongst the Kalahari San. Such conflicts over traditional leadership and identity could also end up deflecting attention from the more mundane and material livelihood needs of these hyper-marginalised rural communities.

The ≠khomani San land claim unfolded within this complicated post-apartheid political landscape. The gains made by ≠khomani San and other 'indigenous' groups in

recent years would not have been possible during the apartheid era. There are a number of reasons for this, including the fact that San, Nama and Griqua were categorised as 'coloured'. The 'authentic San' were deemed 'extinct', and the Nama (Khoe) and Griqua were seen by the Apartheid State as part of an assimilated and hybrid 'coloured' population living in the 'Coloured Reserves' of the Northern Cape. It is only in the post-apartheid period that people with San, Nama and Griqua ancestry have been able publicly to assert themselves as indigenous peoples with specific land, cultural and language rights. Despite refraining from entrenching indigenous rights in the constitution, the ANC government has, in fact, addressed many of these claims through land restitution, by providing resources to promote Nama and San languages, and by addressing the question of traditional leadership. This political environment has enabled SASI and the San to make successful claims to land and cultural rights. While these claims have resulted in significant gains for this marginalised San community, a stress on primordial notions of San tradition and 'First People' status has also had unintended consequences in terms of generating conflict between 'traditional' and 'western' 'bushmen', as well as running against the grain of the donor and NGO 'civilising mission' and its civic culture of liberal individualism. This article has attempted to examine the ambiguities and contradictions of these donor-driven double visions and local struggles over land, tradition and identity.

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