

# Bushmen in the Tourist Imaginary



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By

Roie Thomas

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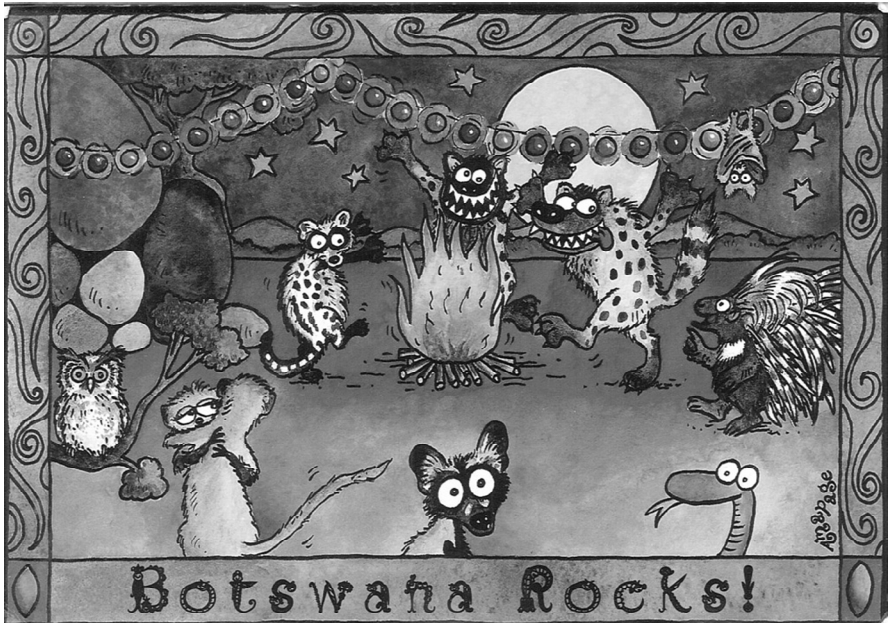
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My family has always supported my adventures with somewhat bemused interest and several moments of trepidation. Thanks, dear ones, and sorry but there's more Near-Death-by-Hippo, and hitching rides in 'backies' on the drawing board. And here's to wondrous adventures of our own, Duncan.

This book is for my daughters, Megan and Robyn, who just care.

0-1: "Full Moon Party", tourist postcard.



Marginalising of ethnic minorities in relation to animals within tourism is common in Botswana and other countries. As San spokesman Roy Sesana claims: '[i]n Botswana a Mosarwa is nothing. All Government cares for is its animals and tourists' (October 29, 1997, *The Voice*: 2). It calls up Salazar's (2009) observation that *The Lion King* (1994) 'undoubtedly the most influential animation made about (East Africa), does not feature any Maasai' (57). Survival International (2005) cites 'expert' ecological witness for the Botswana government in the 2006 San case in the High Court against forced evictions from the CKGR as saying 'she wants them all out of any protected area in order to favour the animal inhabitants' (cited in Mowforth and Munt, 2009: 166).

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## IMAGE CREDITS

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## FOREWORD

This study draws on postcolonial and post-tourism theories to explore tourism representations of the San (commonly known outside Africa as Bushmen); predominantly those who traditionally occupied the Central Kalahari region of Botswana. This book deploys images, articles and captions from tourist publications, tourist blogs, an academic documentary, the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy* (1980), literary texts such as selected works of Laurens van der Post, and Alexander McCall Smith's (1998 –) No.1 Ladies' Detective Agency series as well as a series of artistic self-representations. These texts demonstrate tangible evidence of the role of representation in disenfranchisement and an increasing autonomy in the case of the San. Obviously a direct causal link between representation and disempowerment, and its opposite dynamic: self-representation and empowerment, cannot be proven (that is, measured) substantively but the two correlations are, I assert, sufficiently axiomatic.

The data qualitatively analysed in Chapters Three and Four are tourism texts comprising representations of the San, created without their authorisation. Data are accessed interpretively through public-domain representations that show the capacity of tourist texts to perpetuate or challenge the position of the Indigenous people in this context. The texts deconstructed in this book depict the San of the Central Kalahari region of Botswana in a variety of ways, designed either for tourist consumption specifically, with the imagery and rhetoric directly addressing them, or for commercial distribution, where tourists have been enticed to Botswana via incidental representations within such texts. Incorporated within the analysis of some texts are comments from recently posted tourist 'blogs, substantiating the fact that the rhetoric and imagery of the representations have, generally, precisely the effect upon tourists they were designed to have.

Following the analysis of non San-authorised representations, San self-representations for tourist consumption are shown (Chapter Five) as relatively recent exemplars of a burgeoning self-determination and, in fact, resistance to the Tswana hegemony operating in Botswana.

Postcolonial theory is the framework underpinning the analysis of representations of the Botswana San produced for tourist consumption. Postcolonial analysis will be informed and supported by a post-tourism paradigm, that is, a critique of cultural tourism's traditionally exploitative

and paternalistic assumptions and practices as well as the awareness of the 'blurring between fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, education and entertainment' that characterises the tourism domain (Sherlock, 2001: 282). This book analyses tourism industry representations of the San people of Botswana predominantly using David Spurr's categories of colonial (and neo-colonial) thought and practice identified in *The Rhetoric of Empire* (1993).

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BCC	Botswana Council of Churches
BCP	Botswana Congress Party
BDP	Botswana Democratic Party
BNF	Botswana National Front
BOCODOL	Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning
BOCONGO	Botswana Council of Non-Governmental Organisations
CASAS	Centre for the Advanced Studies of Africa Society
CKGR	Central Kalahari Game Reserve
FPK	First People of the Kalahari
IPACC	Indigenous Peoples of Africa Coordinating Committee
IWGIA	International Work Group for Indigenous Affairs
KDT	Kuru Development Trust
KFO	Kuru Family of Organisations
KPF	Kalahari Peoples Fund
OSISA	Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa
RADs	Remote Area Dwellers
RADP	Remote Area Dweller Program
SRC	San Research Centre
SYCB	San Youth Capacity Building Project
SI	Survival International
SWAPO	South West African People's Organization
UB	University of Botswana
WIMSA	Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa



# INTRODUCTION

## Where I stand

I've always felt some discomfiture about my position in the world, believing myself undeserving of the relative privilege into which I was born. Awareness of injustice, particularly as regards representation, first occurred when in early primary school I noted Australian Aborigines described not critically, but *matter-of-factly* as “savages” in my Social Studies book, circa 1975. But until I was training to be a teacher of English to speakers of other languages, the articulation of my own position of advantage had not really occurred to me consciously. I justified my studies and work in this area with rhetoric along the lines of increasing opportunities for those in the developing world; of the acquisition of the English tongue opening proverbial doors for those caught on the ever-recurring cycle of marginalisation. Wherever I have been in the world a sense of imbalance is confirmed and my resolve galvanised.

But resolve to do what? To *be* what? The position of even the most well-intentioned traveller and researcher among disenfranchised or dispossessed peoples is a complicated one, fraught with paradox and unavoidable hypocrisies. Alex Gillespie (2007) writes disparagingly about that which he labels a “posttraveler paradigm”, psychologically understandable in terms of self-reflection that is loaded with dilemma and contradiction, and this is a group into which, I admit, I could be classified. “Posttourists” are determined not to naively conform to the tourist stereotype or, if they do, parody their own subscription to the cliché. Guide writers know this and the discourse helps to position such sojourners as “travelers who scorn all things ‘touristy’”. Their semantics deliberately flatter the traveller as one who ruggedly sets off into “least visited” and “isolated” and “most remote regions” (19). Based on their challenging notion of the “hegemony of travel”, Mowforth and Munt (2003) call up our obligation to ask “what vision of the world [we] are pursuing and the degree to which such visions are imposed from the First World onto the Third World” (127).

Despite this, I am drawn to Graburn's (1989) characterisation of tourism as a secular equivalent of the pilgrimage; a bridge to a collective consciousness, a step closer to the ideal than Arjun Appadurai's (2006)

“human faculty for long distance empathy” (41). As Stronza (2001) paraphrases Graburn: “[t]he totems in the modern ritual of tourism appear on the pages of guidebooks, on websites and on the surfaces of our souvenirs. Through the collective reverence of these totems, tourists are able to strengthen their connection to each other as well as to a larger society” (266). And I’m counting on Robert Dessaix to absolve me, along with many others. He claims that part of what makes us human is the preconceived notions we have about a place or a people, that we all “travel with baggage” (1998, 190) and contends that Edward Said overgeneralises in his scathing assessment of travellers’ “projection of inauthentic images of ‘the Other’”. Dessaix interprets, for example, the desire of those in search of biblical sites as wishing “to have authentic images of our own roots projected onto our consciousness ... our own beginnings. Knowledge of antiquity, yes, but something closer to wisdom” (192). He forgivingly constructs travel as being, at least for some, undertaken in the spirit of a common humanity: “[we] travel to be hungry, not to consume ... we’re resistant to the notion that ‘the Other’ must always be an adversary ... I recommend a little less Foucault and a little more foreign travel” (210).

## Context

The San peoples of the Central Kalahari region of Botswana are represented in my work in their prolonged struggle for systemic recognition, let alone autonomy. Embarrassingly, my interest was ignited by a popular film, one that remains the sole reference point for many in the developed world with regard to the San.

As a first-year teacher I took my Year Ten students from a tiny country town two hundred kilometres to the state capital to watch the film *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, having told them it was hilarious and wonderful. The first ten minutes of this film play like a 1960s newsreel, with a mellifluous British voice-over and “facts” about the Bushmen given in neat info-bites, juxtaposed with scenes of frenetically crazy life in Johannesburg, about which the Bushmen are blissfully unaware. My recalcitrant fifteen year-olds sat there grumbling—“she’s brought us all this way for a *documentary*?” But then, of course, the Coke bottle falls from the sky and the fun begins.

The San’s lifestyle is depicted in the film as one of Garden-of-Eden tranquility, although the landscape is somewhat more arid than the Genesis idyll. Some years after that first viewing, I saw an episode of the Foreign Correspondent television program (Australian Broadcasting Corporation 2002) and was shocked and mortified. The people no longer lived in desert



serenity. According to the report, the San had been driven out of the Kalahari by the Botswana government in the interests of diamond mining, big-game hunting and high-end tourism. The San's ancient skills of hunting and gathering, of finding water in an apparently waterless land had been all but lost. The family groups remaining in the remote area were, claimed the report, dependent on government handouts, many were alcoholic, apparently rudderless.

Meanwhile, tourist ephemera in-country extols the lifestyle of the Bushmen esoterically, producing imagery that suggests they are still living as they did for millennia, omitting any mention of their modern realities and perpetuating a lie about their ongoing relationship with lands to which they no longer have unfettered access.

Recently I was invited to stay in a small township created by the Botswana government outside the British-designated Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) to accommodate the evictees from the Kalahari. Such villages make up a "gulag of special settlements" (Good, 2008: 183) that tourists rarely see, from which San elders are trucked to luxury safari lodges within the CKGR, made to don their traditional garb, to take tourists on survival treks, and trucked back at the end of the day, lending truth to Scott's (1990) observation that "while the dominant ideology does not entirely exclude the interests of subordinate groups, it operates to conceal or misrepresent aspects of social relations that, if apprehended directly, would be damaging to the interests of dominant elites" (71-72).

My mission with this investigation became one of exposing the mismatch between representation and reality, between myth and truth. I freely admit to the fact that while I critique unfavourably the common tourist exoticisation of certain Indigenous communities, my entire investigation into representation of the San is born of a captivation with this group that amounts to the same sensibility. Therein lies responsibility, acknowledging that I too am essentially a tourist and must be constantly self-reflective.

### **Significance of the work**

This work analyses representations of the San predominantly of the Kalahari region of Botswana. My study explores the motives and techniques of the tourist industry operating in that country and the effects that depiction and rhetoric have upon tourists as well as upon the San peoples themselves. It also investigates the role of San self-representation within the quest for autonomy and recognition outside externally constructed and exploitative paradigms.

According to Nyathi (2006) the San are a people characterised by some common experiences of exclusion, including being forced to occupy a servile niche, lacking in necessities, being denied the right to recognition and partnership in the development process, subject to long-entrenched prejudice from the mainstream. But, of course, as with most colonial and neo-colonial dynamics there is whitewash and hypocrisy within the dominant discourse, as Forllore (2004) cites an historical attitude of the Bangwato, the ruling tribe of Botswana's Central District who intermingled with the San: "[t]he Basarwa (San of Botswana) are Basarwa during the day but not at night" (*Mmegi*, July 2 2004). However, there is a groundswell of San resistance to social and political exclusion and a burgeoning optimism reflected in, among other domains, self-representation, providing the impetus for this work.

The semantics and semiotics of the tourist industry wax poetic about the precarious existence of the modern descendants of ancient peoples, their cottage industries and quaint customs. Tourism rhetoric suggests that we are just in time to see such people in their antediluvian state before progress swallows them up, never again to be seen in their traditional dress or performing their rituals. So, unwittingly, we often become voyeurs, accessories after the fact of ongoing systemic displacement, consoling our unease with the thought that although these people are undoubtedly disenfranchised, they have the eminently more valuable "social capital" (extended family, sense of community, environmental connectedness and heightened spirituality) that we lack; they are in tune with a more profound reality, easily living without Western trappings. In short, we swallow the hyper-reality, so shrewdly constructed by government and industry that keeps us at a remove from lived realities. Artist and writer Esther Parada (1996) is—as am I—interested in the disconnect between official narratives and hidden realities. Parada acknowledges, though, that as humans, it can take us some time to become aware, recalling her time in the Peace Corps in Bolivia in the 1960s, where she prided herself initially on her "egalitarian ethos and respect for indigenous (sic) cultures":

I even exhibited my prints accompanied by poignant phrases translated from Quechua poetry ... a visual equivalent of what Professor David Spurr calls 'the rhetoric of empire' ... It was only many years later, influenced by the writings of Roland Barthes ... that I began to question the liberal humanism that had so moved me in *The Family of Man*<sup>1</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Family of Man* photographic exhibition toured the world for 8 years from 1955 under the auspices of the Museum of Modern Art, representing many cultures and categorised into universally pertinent themes, such as family, love and death.

Michele Fero (n.d.) also calls upon activists and researchers who represent the subaltern, those who claim to uphold the best interests of such groups, to be aware of their position of relative advantage and to use images and language responsibly in the process, preferably by way of reflexive consultation:

Western representations (in writing and in the media) still work to maintain certain assumptions and power relationships. We need to re-examine elements from the past because they shape our present and future. We need to be more critical of the dominant discourses and practices we continue to create, in our institutions and within our discipline (6–7).

The obscenity of the “tourist gaze” (Urry 2002) brings to mind the way I baulked, appalled, at the favela tours organised by the backpackers’ hostel in which I once stayed in Rio de Janeiro, but this so-called “slum tourism” is becoming increasingly popular and there are some valid arguments in favour of it. Writer, activist and filmmaker Susan Sontag (1977) contends that photography (here included as a manifest extension of the tourist gaze’s inherent power imbalance) is essentially an act of theft: “[t]o photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed” (4) and wryly dehumanises all photographees as “things”. She notes the common ignorance of our own insensitivities which naturally encompasses tourism: “[g]azing on other people’s reality with curiosity, with detachment, with professionalism, the ubiquitous photographer operates as if that activity transcends class interests, as if its perspective is universal” (55).

San self-representation for tourism consumption in Botswana is incrementally offering alternatives to the deceptive iterations of representation, away from the monolithic and primeval to a more comprehensive and honest drawing of San realities that is garnering support from an increasingly aware clientele. Michael Taylor (2000) makes reference to San self-representation in some contemporary contexts which are inextricably bound with the San *drawing their identity as hunter-gatherer*. He believes the Kalahari Debate, which is an anthropological issue centred around the question of the San’s custodianship of the Kalahari (whether they lived as relatively isolated, autonomous bands before contact with Europeans, or whether they had been servile to the Bantu since those groups migrated south over one thousand years ago) “ignores the crucial issue of how *Basarwa represent themselves*, which is at times, in terms of a hunting and gathering past” (19). Taylor’s research concentrates on the San in Botswana’s Okavango Delta area, a people benefitting directly from the ethno-tourism market, so that although the category “hunter-gatherer” is still legitimate in small

pockets around southern Africa where land rights apply, it should not be used to define a “reified” culture:

[t]he salience of hunting and gathering is more as a *symbol* that carries meaning to both San and their neighbours in the contemporary political economy of southern Africa, especially considering contemporary experiences of dispossession and alienation from land and wildlife ... primordialism thus paradoxically surfaces in the ways that Basarwa represent themselves in terms of their own past (19).

My research concentrates on the former residents of the CKGR predominantly and goes beyond such a limited drawing of the San to a broad, nuanced and integrated approach to self-representation.

In a spirit of disclosure, I admit that I had originally intended to suggest, in the form of a recommendation at the conclusion of my work, that the San, living as they do within geographically and culturally fragmented language groups across southern Africa, might benefit from a model of self-determination well known in the global arena: that of the Zapatistas of south-east Mexico. The Zapatistas, named for the revolutionary hero Emiliano Zapata, comprise many language groups of Maya Indians who have seen the possibilities of autonomy from the Mexican government’s land appropriation agenda and now have a powerful international outreach and representation at The United Nations (Couch 2004, 120). Many influential individuals and organisations support the Zapatistas’ self-generated and -represented cause, making the government nervous in the process (Ibid.). I believed that if the San were to name themselves comparably in solidarity, so that all San groups operated under a common name unaffiliated with language or geography within Botswana but reflective of a common struggle for systemic recognition, this would be a start.

I was subsequently alerted to the inherent hubris of positioning myself to make any recommendation in such a paternalistic “I know what’s good for you” vein. Michael Sacks and Marika Lindholm (2002), in a series of interviews on the subject of privilege, concluded that their respondents had (like myself) a “deeply-felt concern for social inequality and the plight of the oppressed but ... that this reflected a *philosophical* stance on social problems—one not based on personal experience” (cited in Levine-Rasky ed. 2002, 135). At the heart of this was a naïve belief in “unbridled agency”, a blithe unawareness of the social structures in place that inhibit agency. Underlying this, Sacks and Lindholm assert, is *identity* which, for many non-dominant groups is constructed in direct response to a lack of agency. John Gaventa’s (1980) theory of power relations holds that the

dominant elite has capitalised on the historical powerlessness of subordinate groups, which naturally facilitates “further power to invest in the development of dominant images, legitimations or beliefs about [their] power through control, for instance, of the media or other socialization institutions” (22). In fact, Alice Mogwe of Ditshwanelo, the Botswana Centre for Human Rights, and researcher Sidsel Saugestad have documented the negotiation of an acceptable “ethnic” label engaging the San but according to Edwin Wilsman (2002) this has been unsuccessful because, in part, “pronounced language differences hamper selection of an inclusively recognizable term, but also, I suspect, because local allegiances often have a greater appeal than does a pan-Sarwa image” (837).

An extreme form of this social distancing of privilege potentially “allows the financially secure to blame the poor and a larger ‘culture of poverty’” (Sacks and Lindholm: 136) and while I know I am categorically not guilty of this position, the potential for agency and self-mobilisation may be more difficult than I—perhaps glibly—supposed, in my suggestion that another self-determination template could be overlaid onto the San context, whose “disparate social structure has made it exceedingly difficult for them to organise pressure groups to defend their rights and land as other groups have done” (Firestone and Karlin, eds. 2010, 64). I applied, in my guileless way, a form of cultural imperialism whereby the “norm” is defined as the universal experience of the privileged; the assumption that other groups should aspire to be—and behave—more like us or, I once thought, in the San’s case, like the similarly Indigenous *but more politically assertive* Zapatistas whose militancy I understand and applaud as a multiply privileged person with the capacity to combat oppression through available channels if needs be. Paul Gilroy (2005) alerts researchers to the challenge of producing “a worldly vision that is not simply one more imperialistic particularism dressed up in seductive universal garb” (4).

Furthermore, in my naïve ideal to see the San collectivise, if only in name, some (unconscious) dismissal of pluralities was evident. Edward Said (1987) accuses Marx of such a practice, where deployment of overarching labels made it easier to illustrate a theory but at the inevitable expense of “existential human identities” (155). In fact, in the case of the Botswana San, a monolithic “one size fits all” approach, according to Ditshwanelo, the Botswana Centre for Human Rights, lies at the heart of the San’s distrust of government policy. Their “distinct varied ethno-linguistic and cultural communities ... dispersed all over the national territory of Botswana” is overlooked (Chebanne 2006, 140). Beverley, Oviedo and Aronna (1995) celebrate the natural hybridity of societies,

advocating a new social order founded on social projects, not on any postmodernist rejection of absolutism. This ideal can only occur with an acknowledgement that most depictions of the subaltern are constructions created for vested interest. Their positioning in society is equally a device, maintaining the power dynamic, a claim endorsed by Berkhofer (1978) who claims that the idea and image of, for example, the American Indian is essentially a white designation and stereotype.

Foucault's interpretation of Heidegger's theory of language encapsulates the central enterprise of this work insofar as "[d]iscourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (cited in Spurr 1993, 184). The structuring of any discourse—in this case the colonial and, by extension, global/corporate—is characterised by patterns, thus by limitations and therefore, claims David Spurr "creates the possibility for alternative ways of speaking" (185). Spurr chronicles resistance at various levels, some very low-level, as with "mimicry and mockery of authority" (186), a privilege of the secret understandings between members of a colonised people, and some more overt and effective, such as stealing from a government herd as the San are chronicled as having done with settler cattle in the Kalahari in the colonial era. Edward Said (1993) notes that: "[s]logans, pamphlets, newspapers, folktales, heroes, epic poetry, novels and drama are all means by which national cultures can be reasserted and the effects of colonization resisted" (260). The subaltern, notes, Escobar (1995) "do in fact speak, even if the audibility of their voices in the circles where 'the West' is reflected upon and theorized is tenuous at best" (23). With optimism and respect, this work celebrates the burgeoning voice and potential of the traditionally subaltern San in modern Botswana and investigates forms of self-representation beyond the traditional hunter-gatherer paradigm (such as Taylor researched) to encompass images of the San as contributing members of their twenty-first century society.

## **Structure of the book**

Chapter One first establishes my ideological positioning within the work; the reasons for my interest in the San as regards the ways they are represented in tourism rhetoric and imagery. In Chapter One I also acknowledge my recognition of the somewhat precarious position of the non-Indigenous Western/Northern researcher undertaking research into Indigenous issues. It provides a background to Botswana and the San's socio-political standing in the country pre-colonisation, during the British

protectorate and since independence in 1966. As well as discussing the complex issue of nomenclature, this chapter also defines Indigeneity in terms of the First Peoples identification, and characterises self-determination as I posit its potential for the Kalahari San.

Chapter Two provides a review of the literature pertaining to the San. In anthropological and historical terms it is the case that the San have been comprehensively researched, and in more recent times, the struggle against corporate land appropriation and the San's consequent dispossession has also been thoroughly documented. This review identifies the literature encircling my enterprise here, demonstrating the place left open for a postcolonial analysis of tourism text as a neo-colonialist construct with destructive potential where it is generated about the San without their authorisation, yet with constructive, self-determining possibilities where produced by the San themselves. Chapter Two also offers a methodology and a very brief review of generalist (that is, not pertaining to the San) colonial and postcolonial literature to further elucidate the tropes identified by David Spurr, so as to ensure they are adequately defined and illustrated ahead of their direct application to tourism texts representing the San in Chapters Three, Four and Five.

Chapters Three and Four analyse the aforementioned tourist texts: literary—and visual—texts respectively against the first eleven of Spurr's twelve tropes of colonial belief and action. Theoretical tourism literature—or post-tourism critique—is subsumed within these chapters to broaden the analysis of tourism texts. Review of some non-academic (literary) texts is included among reviews of scholarly critiques, since they, like the tourism texts that constitute the data set, are popular representations of the worldviews that for so long underscored the inequalities of colonialism and that still justify neo-colonialist dynamics, necessitating postcolonialist analysis.

In Chapter Five, Resistance, the twelfth and final trope of Spurr's "continuum" is set apart from the other eleven tropes so that efforts at self-determination of the Kalahari San, specifically as regards self-representation, can be analysed against elements of that category. As with the previous chapters, various tools of semiotic analysis are in play and I also call upon James C. Scott's "arts" of resistance (1990) relevant to the creation of rhetoric and imagery describing and promoting the subaltern group within a dominant socio-political frame that seeks to undermine, deny or exploit that group. Resistance as a trope is deployed to analyse self-representations as exemplars of a growing spirit of San self-determination in the face of Tswana hegemony in modern Botswana. It is important to state here that the coverage is limited to covert forms of

resistance—that which James Scott (1990) calls the “hidden transcript”—in light of evidence cited in Chapter 1 of Botswana’s hostility towards more confrontational resistances.

This isolating of textual examples of Resistance from the previous eleven tropes is done in a spirit of admiration and hope for the future implied by San self-representations which require, as Scott eloquently describes such an enterprise, “an experimental spirit and a capacity to test and exploit all the loopholes, ambiguities, silences, and lapses available to them ... It is impossible to overestimate the subtlety of this manipulation” (1990. 138–39).

Marginalising of ethnic minorities in relation to animals within tourism is common in Botswana and other countries. As San spokesman Roy Sesana claims: “[i]n Botswana a Mosarwa is nothing. All Government cares for is its animals and tourists” (*The Voice* 29 October 1997, 2). It calls up Salazar’s (2009) observation that *The Lion King* (1994) “undoubtedly the most influential animation made about (East Africa), does not feature any Maasai” (57). Survival International (2005) cites an “expert” ecological witness for the Botswana government in the 2006 San case in the High Court against forced evictions from the CKGR as saying “she wants them all out of any protected area in order to favour the animal inhabitants” (cited in Mowforth and Munt 2009, 166).



## CHAPTER ONE

### “SING NO ELEGIES YET”

*You who having spoken for yourself before ageless gods  
Are master of all speech and rock, herb or beast hear you  
Directly in the howling wind; and having stood your ground  
In the battle of bloods in the veins of man  
You will staunch still the premature flow of elegies  
Commemorating your demise.*

—P.W.Mwikisa, “Sing No Elegies Yet for the Basarwa!”

The Botswana San is, I concede, just one Indigenous group struggling for social and political autonomy in the wake of global projects of appropriation and negation. As well, I acknowledge the audacity of non-San people such as myself articulating San issues. This second-hand research does not, as Nthomang (2006) points out, “transform their marginality in society” (104), hence my identification of research and representation of the San *by—and for*—the San as nothing less than a resistance imperative. This humble recognition appears to be endorsed by University of Botswana academic and poet P.W. Mwikisa’s acknowledgement, made directly to the San, that “an impetuous presumption, perhaps, bids me speak for you”<sup>1</sup> (cited in Nthomang 2006, 103).

Further, I fervently did not wish, in revealing the deceptive nature of tourism industry representations of the San, to suggest that despite the San’s marginalisation in modern Botswana they have no capacity for self-determination. Agency is growing, increasingly from within San communities, and outside the auspices and agendas (admittedly, often well-meaning) of NGOs and other non-San capacity-building organisations. San

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<sup>1</sup> I am intrigued as to why Mwikisa chose the nomenclature ‘Basarwa’ for his poem’s title, since, although it is not offensive *per se*, this is the Setswana name for the San; one not generally endorsed by the San themselves in Botswana. In light of Mwikisa’s body of work on San issues, I can only assume he is using the term pointedly, as an indictment of the fact that the San are defined socially, politically, geographically and representationally by the dominant Tswana.

self-representation for tourism consumption plays a significant role in this enterprise.

### **The San's social and economic position in modern Botswana**

The Republic of Botswana has a justified international reputation as the most peaceful nation in Africa; once dubbed the “African miracle” (Samatar 1999, 217) for its exemplary economic growth in an era of “Afro-pessimism” (Mogalakwe 2003, 85). But a deliberately designed nationalist image, with its inclusive rhetoric has, to an extent, contributed to the disadvantage of minority groups through its assimilationist model, typical of the colonial project and its legacy in post-colonial systems. The Batswana (or Tswana), the dominant ethnic group of Botswana, have a prominent place in society; minority languages like those of the San are subject to language genocide in favour of the principal tongue, Setswana (Kiema 2010).

The President's pronouncement: “all Batswana are indigenous to the country” (cited in Good 2008, 109) supporting this stance is articulated in his assimilationist public statements dismissing the uniqueness of minorities: “[t]he government's development programmes and assistance schemes do not draw any distinctions among the country's citizens” (cited in Saugestad 2001, 52). Edwin Wilsman (2002) asserts that this has rendered many “partitive ethnicity-based development efforts” in Botswana ineffectual since

genuine democratic ideology enshrined in the constitution and strengthened by the shadow of apartheid militates against special ‘culturally exclusive’ solutions to social problems such as rural poverty but also, significantly for San, because an attitude persists that these people retain atavistic traits from the distant past (839).

Khama's “official transcript” (Scott, 1990) epitomises Joe Galbo's observation that “[m]inorities quickly become a problem in a modern global context because they challenge national narratives of social cohesion and homogeneity” (2006:1). Substituting “naturalism” here for Botswana's official transcript of nationalism, Paul Willis' assertion that “one of the most important general functions of ideology is the way in which it turns uncertain and fragile cultural resolutions and outcomes into a pervasive naturalism” (162) is pertinent to Botswana, as is Frantz Fanon's (1968) observation about a national bourgeoisie which “turns its back more and more on the interior and on the real fact of its undeveloped

country, and tends to look toward the former mother country and the foreign capitalists (Belgium, China and Australia, among others) who count on its obliging compliance” (cited in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1995, 157).

As such, as Abdi Ismail Samatar points out, Botswana’s postcolonial economic development is really “a class project” (1999: 5), with the state (characterised by the dominant Batswana) “relatively independent from civil society as its institutions are insulated from the “undesirable” societal influences” (Mogalakwe: 87). Zibani Maundeni (2004) asserts that the San, constituting four percent of the population “are the most ethnically discriminated” of Botswana’s poor who fall under the Poverty Datum Line. They are effectively, according to Good (2008) “a landless, cattleless proletariat” (107).

At present, those San who are not employed by the tourist industry are to be found manning the cattle posts of affluent Batswana. Kenneth Good (2008) asserts that this dynamic of San dependence upon owners of ranches and cattle-posts was a form of “voluntary slavery” where the San were “forced into a new serfdom” (107). As Kiema (2010) endorses: “[t]hey looked after cattle for little or no pay. They worked under appalling conditions. No one cared how much they were paid. There were no labour laws to protect the interests of people who were now working on what was once their tribal territories” (79). This is endorsed by tourism researchers in Indigneous contexts such as Heather Zeppel (2006) who notes traditional San culture as being, after wildlife, strongly promoted for tourism in Botswana while the population of between 47,000 and 48,000 San “lived in poverty with limited economic opportunities” from the impact on their communities of tourism (172).

### **History as it affects the present for the Botswana San**

The San were predominantly hunter-gatherers, although to limit them to this pursuit alone is erroneous: the San are described in popular and academic literature as “nomadic” and this has led to the same kind of justification for appropriation of Aboriginal land practised in colonial Australia (Gaita, 1999: 76). However, “San oral testimonies ... revealed that they ... lived in well-defined territories belonging to different bands and clans who guarded and protected their natural resources” (Le Roux and White, 2004: 16) Le Roux and White go on to acknowledge that “[i]n the traditional territory system, San bands knew the landmarks of their areas and respected those of their neighbours, and would not dream of entering others’ lands for hunting and gathering without consulting the

owner first” (168). The San being completely nomadic is a flawed concept, as Kuela Kiema, (2010) a (Kua) San author and scholar asserts:

Migrations of Kua people would take place only within their territories. If a Bantu or a white man walks around his field, no one called him a ‘nomadic person’. Yet we moved within our lands, within our marked tribal territories, and they called us nomads. This concept of nomadic has been used to deprive us of our territories that duly belong to us (23–24).

The notion of Bushmen as possessions is entrenched in the Tswana mindset. Sandy Gall (2001) recounts the story of the delegation sent to Bechuanaland by the London Missionary Society in 1935 to investigate reports of Bushman enslavement by the Bamangwato, the most prominent of the eight Tswana tribes. The chief, Tshekedi Khama, assured the missionaries that Bushmen would receive the same rights and freedoms as the Bamangwato, including a voice in the body politic and some land ownership. Yet Seretse Khama, heir to Tshekedi and father of the current President, owned Bushman slaves at least until his accession to the Presidency of Botswana at Independence in 1966. John Hardbatt, founder of the First People of the Kalahari (FPK), endorses Ketsitlile’s observations about San identity, asserting that “many among the elite today still consider [the San] no more than serfs since they ‘inherited’ them from their forebears” (cited in Gall, 2001: 188). At the state level this is difficult to overturn since, as Mogalakwe (2003) points out, “the Botswana Democratic Party class project took off relatively easily because of the absence of organised or mobilised social groups whose interests contradicted those of the dominant class” (86).

The story of “El Negro” is a case in point of government whitewashing of San realities. Stolen from the grave soon after death, a San man’s body was embalmed and exhibited in the Banyoles Museum in Spain in 1916, referred to in that context as “El Negro”. Caitlin Davies (2003) writes of this man, also known as Africa’s “unknown soldier” who died circa 1830 and had been, according to his large commemorative plaque “carried to Europe in Death”. In the 1990s it was agreed that the body be repatriated to southern Africa and in 2000 the man’s remains received a state burial in Gaborone, with the hope of luring tourists to Botswana. Leslie Nthoi (2001, cited in Good 2002) asserts that the fact that no San representatives were present at the re-burial was a travesty and a violation of even Tswana burial practices. Davies is concerned that the man’s burial site has become a “sort of sideshow”, simply another feature on tourists’ itineraries, as well as an object of academic interest. But Kenneth Good (2002) sees the broader, more insidious nature of the event,

asserting the “glaring contrast between the furore over the repatriation of El Negro with the continuing neglect and subordination of some 100,000 of his San and other Remote descendants” (52).

Good is convinced that the exhibition that is “El Negro’s” resting place constitutes propaganda, designed to serve as a convenient distraction of international attention away from the resettlements out of the CKGR; a public relations opportunity for the government to feign respect for the San in response to negative reports to the contrary. More specifically, Good aligns the “El Negro” revelry and associated publicity with the threat to Debswana of Botswana diamonds being internationally classified “conflict diamonds” due to the eviction of over 4000 San. Good does acknowledge the possibility, however, that at least for some people, “one Unknown Bushman, like an Unknown Soldier, [might highlight] the plight of all the rest” (54).

The reputation of Botswana internationally has effectively whitewashed the marginalisation of the San and other minorities over decades, but their removal from the CKGR for commercial purposes and to deny them rights to land and resources has not gone unnoticed. These actions have certainly tarnished the national brand, although not to the extent that the decision to evict has been overturned or a proportion of land/mineral rights offered. London’s *Sunday Telegraph* of 11 August 2002 accuses the Botswana administration, of “ethnically cleansing [the San] in ways that would cause outrage if Botswana were not so prosperous, stable and pro-Western” (cited in Taylor 2003, 277). Stephen Corry of Survival International, apparently with great faith in human integrity, believes that the eviction and associated policies will inevitably affect Botswana economically to the point where the government will have no alternative but to capitulate to the demands of San activists and those advocating on their behalf:

The truth is that Botswana’s government wants it both ways. ... it has yet to realize that what those foreigners think will eventually affect what they buy and where they choose to take their holidays. The government may be able to order the Basarwa to be evicted but it cannot order Americans to buy its diamonds (cited in *Mmegi/The Reporter*, Gaborone, 21–27 June 2001).

The High Court hearings of the San case against the Government of Botswana were described by Survival International as surreal (2005, cited in Mowforth and Munt, 2009).

## High Court ruling and its aftermath

Although the San won a celebrated High Court battle to win back traditional hunting rights in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) in 2006 (Saugestad 2010, 2) cattle owners and large-scale farmers often ignore this and brutally threaten the San who exercise this right. An evaluation of the diamond deposit in Gope was completed in 1996 and the following year “[a]pparently coincidentally, the first enforced evictions started in May the following year. One Bushman community, Xade ... which was already equipped with a school, clinic, airstrip and borehole for water, was completely removed” (Survival International 2006, 2). This was justified by the Minister of Local Government, Lands and Housing in *The Botswana Gazette* of 20 December 1995 with the explanation that essential services for the San could only be provided outside the CKGR since such facilities would “not be compatible with maintaining the pristine environment of the game reserve”. Another minister added that tourism could become the biggest contributor to the nation’s economy if game reserves were more attractive to tourists and wildlife was conserved (cited in Good 2002, 53). This suggests that the tangible realities of the San’s lives, as well as their ancestral ties to the land are, respectively, an embarrassment to the perceived aesthetic and credulous sensitivities of tourists which must be accommodated by that industry, and a potential threat to the development agendas of government and corporations. There are well-documented cases within Botswana itself that wells have been filled with sand or concreted over so that the San cannot access water if they return to the CKGR for hunting purposes (Survival International 2001, 2).

John Hardbatttle of the FPK was outspoken at the 52<sup>nd</sup> session of the United Nations Commission on Human Rights about the relocation of the San. Sandy Gall (2001) cites Hardbatttle as saying: “[t]housands ... have been herded into settlements to make room for a thriving cattle industry [rendering us] beggars in our own country ... Why is it today that the lion is to be given rights and we the San are not given any?” (194). Samora Gaborone (1998) draws a correlation between John Hardbatttle’s sudden death and the speeding up of the resettlement campaign.<sup>2</sup> Former employee of the Botswana government, the American ecologist Kathleen Alexander “said that [the San] had to evolve, claiming that ‘culture’ had

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<sup>2</sup> Samora Gaborone was an advisor to the residents of the CKGR and FPK. He presented a statement at the University of Botswana in 1998, directed to then Vice President Ian Khama.