



Difference, Identity, and Access to Official Discourses

Hai||om, "Bushman," and a Recent Namibian Ethnography

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Abstract. – Anthropology in southern Africa is conducted under a political climate charged with land and resource claims. Focusing on a recent ethnography of Namibian Hai||om, I explore the implications both of asserting the difference of the anthropological "other" in these circumstances, and of choices made regarding what constitutes the identity of "the other." I celebrate publication of this monograph in a context in which anthropology increasingly is marginalised. However, I also question affirmation of a Hai||om identity which may be problematic in relation to constructed ideas of indigeneity and "Bushman-ness," and the invoking of these in official discourses concerning land and institutional resources. [*Namibia, Hai||om, Khoe, "Bushman," immediate returns, public service anthropology, identity, official discourses*]

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Introduction

It is both an exciting and depressing time to be involved in anthropological research in Namibia. Exciting, because independence, gained only in 1990, has provided the liberal research environment necessary for a revisionist anthropology to begin to displace the negative stereotyping produced by colonial, missionary, and apartheid-influenced ethnographic writings. Depressing, because at the moment when anthropology might fulfil

a potential to create public space for frequently unheard voices and perspectives, it is accorded less and less significance, as either a discipline in the education sector, or as a profession in staffing profiles (also see Gordon 2000). As Dr. Mafune, Head of the Dept. of Sociology at the University of Namibia (UNAM), expressed in his closing remarks at the recent (May 2000) Anthropological Association of Southern Africa annual conference hosted at UNAM, both the Department and the University expressed reservations about hosting the meeting based on doubts concerning the relevance of anthropology within Namibia today. It is heartening, therefore, to witness the publication of Thomas Widlok's monograph "Living on Manggetti: "Bushman" Autonomy and Namibian Independence" (1999), devoted to recent ethnographic research of one of Namibia's most little-researched and misrepresented people, the Hai||om (although at £48 a copy one wonders how accessible it will be to most Namibians). This article focuses on Widlok's ethnography, which hereafter is referred to by page number only.

Reading Widlok's monograph has raised a number of issues for myself as an anthropologist similarly working in Namibia with people, in this case Damara, whose history also is one of marginalisation in multiple contexts. As with Hai||om,¹ they

1 Spellings of this ethnic term vary including Hai||om, Hei||om, Hei||um, Heikom, and Heikum. In this article I use Widlok's spelling (Hai||om), except when discussing documents which use alternative spellings.

shoulder the effects of a continuing situation of gross inequality in the distribution of land and of access to productive opportunities. Fieldwork cannot help but be conducted under a political climate charged with land and resource claims. What I wish to explore here are the implications both of asserting the *difference* of the anthropological "other" in these circumstances and of the choices we make as anthropologists regarding what it is that we affirm as constituting the *identity* of "the other." In the 1980s and 1990s anthropology increasingly has incorporated the principle that structural relations of power and inequality, conferring spatial and temporal distance between ethnographer and subject (ethnographee?), are essential precursors to the ways in which social and economic differences are constructed: authorising dominant and domineering knowledges (or discourses) of "the other" (e.g., Said 1978), and making possible the transformation by which "[t]he Other's empirical presence [in fieldwork] turns into his [sic] theoretical absence [in ethnographic writing]" (Fabian 1983: xi). Given structural inequalities between the "doers" of anthropology and their (our) subjects, as well as the role played by dominant discourses in systematising "new" thinking and research, it has become impossible to avoid the observation that anthropological constructions and affirmations of difference have played their own part in supporting wider relations of paternalism, discrimination, and violence.

This scenario has a particular resonance for people variously labelled "Bushman," "San" and/or "hunter-gatherers" who, more than most, have been subject to the exoticising tendencies of anthropologists. In social anthropology today, we inhabit an era of "San"/"Bushman" ethnography in which the assumptions built into these categorisations, and the created ethnographic boundaries with which they are associated, are challenged.² Nevertheless, Widlok's ethnography of Hai||om "Bushman" seems to both structure a rather bounded Hai||om ethnic category and eschew a political economy approach to understanding how the difference of "Bushman" is both constructed and maintained, and allows "Bushman" to remain marginalised vis-à-vis wider society.

With this context in mind I focus here on two broad themes dominating Widlok's ethnography. First, his identification of Hai||om "difference" as manifest in an internal "culture" of "immediate returns," explicable with reference to its appropriate-

ness for "prior conditions." Second, his affirmation of Hai||om as "Bushmen" or "San" and the implications of this identity for ethnographic relationships with other Namibian "groups," as well as for a contemporary situation whereby identity directly influences access to official discourses regarding claims to land and institutional resources.

Enduring Foragers or Created Underclass? "Culture" and Contingency in Explanations of Hai||om Social Practice

When working with a southern African "Khoisan" people, it is impossible to avoid becoming embroiled in the heated and occasionally vitriolic "Kalahari Debate"; the big question being whether it is culture or class which bestows their "hunter-gatherer lifestyle." Anthropologists of a more "evolutionary ecology" or "hard" structuralist orientation explain social practice and livelihood procurement activities among "hunter-gatherers" in terms of their "adaptive significance" (e.g., Lee 1979; Tanaka 1980; Bieseke 1993). Those drawing more on political economy and historical contingency protest that today's "foragers" are the product of marginalisation from more formalised economic and political institutions and from more consistently productive environments (e.g., Wilmsen 1989; Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000).

Widlok's intention is to avoid this dichotomy by employing a "post-revisionist" and "practice-oriented ethnography" (7 f.). He fully acknowledges that "Bushmen" throughout Namibia have experienced a devastating history of dispossession under the various formal administrations of this century. Chapter 1, for example, documents the ways in which official survey statistics, under both apartheid and post-independence administrations, have acted to minimise "Bushmen" by including them in inappropriate regional groupings in which they are always in an extreme minority. Such statistics thus continue the tradition perfected under apartheid when the Odendaal Commission of 1964 advised the expansion of existing "Native Reserves" and the establishment of new "homelands" which in many cases, and certainly with regard to the Hai||om, were based on little or no recognition of current or historical patterns of land use. Survey statistics are further complicated by "identity-switching" among Hai||om (and other Namibians), particularly those who live as labourers on commercial farmland. For example, data recorders for the 1981 national census classified approximately 1500 people as Hai||om in Outjo District, but in the

2 E.g., Wilmsen 1989; Taylor 1999, in prepn.; Suzman 2000a, 2000b; Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000.

1991 census these "Hai||om" apparently identified themselves as Damara. Similarly, in Ngandjera around 800 people were classified in 1981 as Hai||om but "became" Owambo in the 1991 census (Suzman 2000a).

However, Widlok also seems intent on establishing that there is something enduringly and culturally *different* about Hai||om "Bushmen." In this he winds up producing a rather classic structuralist ethnography: a somewhat hermetically sealed mapping out of the architecture of Hai||om social forms and their cultural coherence (also see Henrichsen 2000). While rewarding in its empirical detail, Widlok's interpretations provoke unease in the light of contemporary political economy and the ways in which representations of difference have contributed to current inequalities.

Widlok's thesis is that Hai||om social practice acts internally to reinforce foraging behaviours focusing on "immediate returns," while detracting from their ability to appropriate the "delayed return" activities of their neighbours, whether livestock husbandry, crop cultivation, or waged employment. Thus on p.29 he states his case in clear contradistinction to Elphick's argument that "San" hunter-gatherers were basically cattleless Khoekhoe, i.e. with little to distinguish them culturally, such that "a hunter-gatherer could easily become a Khoekhoe pastoralist since it was not necessary for him 'to drop his own culture, only that he adds to it' (Elphick 1985: 42)." Widlok considers the "individual autonomy" of the Hai||om, made possible by "structural instability" and "cultural diversity," to be adaptive and culturally enduring instead of indicating cultural breakdown in contexts of external pressure (12). As he states: "Interaction between the Hai||om and non-foragers has not turned their 'simple,' 'egalitarian' social system into a 'complex,' 'hierarchical' system of delayed economic returns and accumulated wealth" (62). For example, he argues that, although Hai||om have interacted with outsiders (Owambo and Europeans) in ways which have increased their reliance on the products of "delayed return" economic activities, they retain a social organisation and practice which is oriented towards the "immediate return," i.e., immediate consumption of the products of economic activities. In other words, "the overall logic" of Hai||om and other "hunter-gatherer" economies is considered to be "focused on accessing resources rather than on capitalizing on them" (104). Theirs is an "extended access economy" (105) involving social parameters which originate "from their hunter-gatherer background" and which "remain

effective as the Hai||om increasingly include other forms of subsistence" (105). Thus there are continuities in a wide range of activities such that the Hai||om, as "former hunter-gatherers now forage on agropastoralist economies and on the State without changing their internal social organization drastically and without necessarily adopting new social institutions" (107) – it is the *consumption* not the *production* of food items that is on people's minds.

In other words, Widlok's argument seems to be that it is their *style of doing things* which makes Hai||om culturally distinct and which differentiates them from their agropastoralist neighbours (primarily Ndonga Owambo) (61). Given that it is an anthropology text which aims to elucidate a Hai||om "style of doing things" as a means of accessing Hai||om identity and "culture," it relies to a perhaps surprising extent on an economising framework to explain observed activities, *aka*, that elaborated by James Woodburn (1982). Social practice guiding just about all activities thus is explained in terms of enabling the retention of access to opportunities for immediate consumption; and it is the adaptiveness of this strategy to prior conditions which is considered to explain its enduring nature. This in turn explains why Hai||om are relatively unsuccessful in alternative "delayed return" pursuits which focus on accumulation and investment and require fewer pressures towards egalitarian social relations.

The monograph explores a number of aspects of Hai||om life to support the central argument that flexibility in Hai||om social practice paradoxically confers enduring cultural identity and adaptability. Widlok begins with Hai||om formulations of difference and identity followed by a lengthy analysis of subsistence practice (discussed further below). The remainder of the book delineates several spheres of social life in support of his thesis. First, material culture; observing, for example, that flexibility and diversity in settlement layout facilitates flexible social configurations, including visiting, sharing and joining a *||gâus* (i.e., a "household" or "those sharing a hearth") as "the principal unit of Hai||om aggregation" (135). Second, an elaboration of the flexibility of classificatory kinship; whereby naming allows the extension of cooperative alliances through manipulating genealogical links, including interethnic links via the possibilities for conversion and correlation between Hai||om *gai |onte* (lit. "big/great names," i.e., surnames passed on by cross-descent) and Owambo *epata* or clan names. And finally, an analysis of ritual dimensions of Hai||om social existence, including the "medi-

cine trance dance," viewed by Widlok as "an important ethnic marker" (234) which clearly and culturally demarcates Hai||om from neighbouring groups.³

While applauding the detail of Widlok's ethnography and the wealth of empirical material incorporated in the monograph, I feel some discomfort at the unavoidable parallels between his arguments and the evolutionary ideas of scholars from around a century ago. These have been reiterated in various forms since, usually in ways which act to further prevent "Bushmen" from participating as "full citizens" in wider discourses. Since the 19th century, "Bushmen" have been "explained" as coming prior to "humans" on the evolutionary scale, due to various assertions of their difference, manifest as "primitiveness." In relation to Widlok's thesis, it was considered that "[t]he inclination of the moment is decisive with him" (Ratzel 1897: 267), i.e., that they display no "drive to create something beyond everyday needs, to secure or permanently to improve systematically the conditions of existence, even the most primitive ones like the procurement of food" and thereby "lack entirely the precondition of any cultural development" (Schultze 1914: 290). Such assertions reappear in different guises throughout this century, usually justifying further exclusion of "Bushmen" from opportunities to participate economically and politically as "citizens" at least equal to "blacks" as classified under the South African administration's schemata of colour. The Afrikaner anthropologist Schoeman, who headed a government Commission for the Preservation of the Bushmen in the late 1940s and early 1950s, for example, argued that "[t]he Bushmen seem to lack something . . . some inner or spiritual ability" which would enable them to "adapt themselves to a new way of life" (Schoeman n.d.). Similarly, Coertze (1963: 47) in an introductory university text to *Volkekunde* (ethnology) argued that the Bushmen typify an "[e]xaggerated conservatism" which meant that "despite close contact with

whites on the one hand and Bantu on the other, they became neither Bantuized nor westernized." Apparently they were "intrinsically incapable of adapting to changed living circumstances, . . . not simply because they were conservative, but because they had an inherent incapability of meeting new challenges" (all quotes cit. in Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 44, 63, 160, 164). Again, Passarge in the early 1900s lays the blame for "Bushmen" inequality relative to Bantu-speakers firmly with the oppressed, stating that "[t]heir inability to accept cultural imperatives, to rise to the cultural level of their suppressors is their own fault" (1997 [1907]: 128).⁴

I am not suggesting that Widlok intends to perpetuate such negative discourses. Indeed, assumptions of *instinctive* way-finding in "the bush" conferring greater "animality" among "Bushmen" have been critiqued elsewhere by Widlok (1997). But in reading his monograph it is impossible *not* to see the similarities between his explanatory frame and the conclusions drawn by authors observing and writing under very different academic and political climates. The important issue is that Hai||om lack of engagement with "delayed return activities," i.e., framed by Widlok as the resilience of their "hunter-gatherer" social practice, also can be almost entirely interpreted as due to systematic and progressive exclusion from land and from access to formal decision-making and economic structures. Thus, current circumstances of the Hai||om are inseparable from economic and political factors which led to their dispossession of land, particularly due to rapid and massive settlement by Europeans in the early 1900s once the railway line to Tsumeb, Otavi, and Grootfontein had been completed. They are similarly due to a reduction in huntable large game and in their access to such through the enforcement of Game Laws and the proclamation of Game Reserves, including Gamie Reserve No. 2 or what is now Etosha National Park, i.e., encompassing large tracts of Hai||om "territory" (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 54 f.). At the same time, the expansion of commoditised social relations into the frontier occupied by "Bushmen" required their services as labourers: the violence employed to ensure this relied on a multilayered dehumanising discourse of the Bushmen as foragers, as concerned only with immediate returns, and as inferior in this to all other "races" (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 233).

3 I particularly enjoyed chapter 8 which focuses on Hai||om medicine trance dances. However, many of the components of trance dancing described by Widlok (and others) I would suggest are universally possible experiences, albeit moulded by "cultural practice" – not to mention the influence of political economy in sanctioning particular experiences of "the body" (*our* bodies). Could it be that the fetishising of "altered states" of body and consciousness in observations by anthropologists (and others) of the trance dances of "the anthropological other" might say more about the predominantly verbal-rational-intellect emphasis of their own societies ("I think therefore I am") than about the "inherent difference" of those they observe?

4 I am grateful to Michael Taylor for drawing my attention to this quote.

What is significant about these marginalising processes is that they have been intrinsically linked to *external* constructions of Hai||om or “Bushman” difference and identity which this monograph may be interpreted as supporting instead of challenging. Thus, while there may indeed be a case for the “cultural independence” of “Bushmen,” I would argue that it does not necessarily require some sort of “foraging identity” to enforce the continuation of foraging behaviours under conditions different to an idealised environment prior to external contact – it simply requires limited access to alternatives. As with impoverished people the world over, Hai||om utilise the by-products or “rubbish” from other enterprises in creative ways as replacement or “new” elements of material culture (127). In this regard I recall from travelling in Bangladesh in 1989 the disturbing image of landless and desperately poor Bangladeshis “foraging” alongside vultures on Dhaka’s heaving and smouldering rubbish tip. It would surely be odd to find anyone arguing that it was some sort of “foraging identity” which kept those people poor and limited to such behaviours. In other words, and as Rohde (1997: 383) asks, are these behaviours symptomatic of “cultural preference,” as in some sort of “endemic predisposition based on inferences of ‘cultural choice,’ perpetuated and reproduced through . . . inertia”? Or are they “the logical outcome of continuing material constraint”?

Further, Widlok’s model is an evolutionary one in that it requires the notion of stable prior conditions against which one can interpret the “adaptiveness” of Hai||om social practice. He states, for example, that “Today there are no Khoekhoe pastoralists in the Hai||om settlement area, apart from Damara, with mostly small livestock – and they have only recently settled there, at least in the †Akhoe research area [due to State-led resettlement initiatives]. Thus, in the remembered past, switching between identities defined by subsistence practices has not been part of the Hai||om experience as a group” (29 f.).⁵ But given the dynamic history of the region, which, as outlined below, demonstrates that Hai||om were productively involved with regional precolonial political and

economic alliances and activities, it is difficult to know what such “prior conditions” might have been, or whether imaginings of such are particularly useful.

For example, Hai||om have long been active participants in regional trade networks. Thus the earliest reports of the Hai||om by missionaries, travellers and traders (back to the mid 1850s) refer to their use of copper and salt as items of trade (30–31, 79), particularly with Owambo (also see Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 25–32). Although frequently interpreted as “tribute,” it seems that this trade took place on an equal footing and that Hai||om were well-regarded and respected by Owambo. As the Reverend Hugo Hahn noted on encountering mining “Bushmen,” and revealing his own preconceptions about these “hunting and gathering” people, “We met two Bushmen today who were taking copper ore from Otjorukaku to Ondonga on their own account where they would sell it for corn, tobacco, and calabashes. *This I never expected from Bushmen*” (1985: 1034 cit. in Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 26, emphasis added). A flavour of their former regional standing is indicated by the observation that until the latter part of the 19th century they were able to refuse access by outsiders to the mine itself (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 26). Similarly, during the last century “Bushmen,” presumably including the Hai||om, actively exploited opportunities for commercial gain via hunting for European markets for which they cooperated with European hunters (62, 65), using firearms instead of the “traditional” bow and arrow since at least the 1850s (64) (also Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 36–40). As Widlok himself argues (67), current circumstances of exclusion from the commercial exploitation of animal wildlife, as well as their restricted access to commercial farming areas and to relatives who may be residing there, contribute to their impoverished state today.

Hai||om also played a significant and independent role in regional politics. For example, they sheltered the Ndonga king Shikongo from competitors prior to the establishment of protective alliances between the Ndonga Owambo and Nama commando units (64) and, as Gordon and Sholto Douglas (2000: 27) argue, “Bushmen” in the area behaved much as mercenaries by capitalising on regional politics. Their “magical skills” also rendered them significant in a number of specialist occupations for Owambo sacred kings (Galton 1890: 131, 142 cit. in Widlok 234). Prolonged and mutually beneficial associations with the Owambo is indicated by oral testimony in the assertion

5 There appears to be some confusion regarding the term †Akhoe. Suzman (pers. comm.) reports that the term seems to be used in a pejorative way, translated loosely to mean beggars, slaves, or “general useless folk.” Some people use it as an adjective, i.e., *sida ge †akhoe Hai||om* – “we are weak/poor Hai||om.” It seems that it is rare for people to use †Akhoe as an autonym. Indeed, Widlok does state that it was only Hai||om in his Mangetti study area who used the term as an autonym synonymously with Hai||om (17).

that they were “[l]ike children of one woman” (65), a statement which draws attention to today’s impoverished status of the Hai||om relative to their Owambo neighbours. Hai||om reports from the turn of the century that they successfully fought off initial advances by Herero pastoralists into their land (31; Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 29) also suggest a people rather sophisticated in historical defense of what they considered to be theirs. Later they resisted Boer settlement in the Grootfontein area and were increasingly involved in rebellious acts against their poor treatment by both the state and settlers: in 1916–1917 the extent of stock theft in Grootfontein District by “Bushmen” thought to be primarily Hai||om was so great that “a number of farmers were forced to abandon their farms” (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 41, 51–53, 71, 90). In a context of severe drought and the enclosure of “their” land “Bushmen” also attacked and looted groups of migrant workers, instilling such fear into the northern labour force that the administration was concerned about effects on the labour supply (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 58). The above imply that since the earliest historical records Hai||om (and other “Bushmen”) were seizing and capitalising on opportunities, and resisting incursions and injustices – activities which might be interpreted as indicating an openness to change in circumstances where the balance of power was not stacked so high against them.

The recent history for Hai||om territory also increased dependence on the trappings of the state, although this is an aspect little dealt with in Widlok’s monograph. In the fifteen years prior to independence the area was a primary focus for South African Defence Force (SADF) activities against the guerrilla warfare mounted against the apartheid South African administration by the primarily Owambo South West African People’s Organisation (SWAPO) in the northern reaches of the country. During this period the area was home to two large SADF bases and the Hai||om as a group came to rely heavily on SADF incomes and infrastructure. Indeed, Tsintsabis, the biggest San settlement outside Caprivi Region and one of the sites where Widlok conducted fieldwork with Hai||om, was a military and police base prior to independence and sometimes home of the infamous Koevoet (lit. “crowbar”) special-unit of the SADF, renowned for its brutal methods of attack (Suzman, pers. comm.). It would be unusual if the psychological effects of probable intimidation under these circumstances, combined with growing needs for items accompanying these extensions of the state,

did not conspire to further undermine attempts at independence and self-determination by Hai||om.

Further, Widlok’s field material seems contradictory to his argument that due to internal cultural reasons Hai||om do not engage in “delayed return” activities. Take, for example, the case of one of his primary woman informants, !Gamekhas, who, in a long day’s work gathered enough mangetti nuts (the fruit of female *Schinziophyton rautanenii* trees) to live on for roughly 53 days. As Widlok (99) describes, she had no intention of living “exclusively on mangetti nuts for almost two months. Instead she made a special effort to collect a large quantity of nuts in a short period with the prospect of getting a lift to an Owambo farm to the north where she intended to exchange the nuts for millet, watermelons, and other items . . .” Widlok considers this as “postponed use” (107) and therefore not to be confused with “delayed returns.” But since both require planning for returns in the future, I wonder at any qualitative difference between the two. Again, with regard to resource-harvesting, although Widlok does not describe harvesting practice I would be surprised if it was not characterised by a number of constraints practised by harvesters which, although not identified as “rules” in a formalised sense, might be framed in relation to ideas concerning future productivity. This seems to be the case among similarly Khoe-speaking Damara or ≠Nū Khoen (Sullivan 1999, 2000).

Widlok also describes the way that Hai||om buy goods from the local shop “on the book” (pp. 123–125) as a form of “advance return,” i.e., to support his argument that Hai||om are interested in immediate returns and continuous access to resources, as opposed to delayed returns and resource accumulation. However, because the worker effectively begins work in debt to the shop (he requires provisions before he receives his first wage), and because his employer frequently takes over the task of purchasing goods for him, he rarely even sees the cash which he earns on pay-day. The shop owner or employee end up controlling what the Hai||om worker can or cannot spend his wages on while he winds up with little independence over his income and few possibilities for ever breaking the cycle of continuous cash debt. For example, on the commercial farm of ||Khausis a few workers have bank accounts but these are managed by the (white) farm owner (172). The assumption that “Bushmen” were unable to appreciate the value of cash was one way of ensuring cheap labour and of justifying the perpetuation of extreme servitude and poverty both under colonialism and apartheid

(e.g., Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 138) and today (Thoma 1998: 2). Indeed, most Namibians, both in and out of town, rely on credit in order to maintain livelihoods, and wrapping-up farm labourers in debt remains a common means of keeping farm workers subservient throughout Namibia (Suzman 2000b). It is surprising, therefore, that an inability to grasp the meaning of cash is asserted as a feature of "Bushmen difference" in Widlok's ethnography: as well as supporting discriminatory ideas of "Bushman-ness," it amounts to reifying nationwide circumstances as a cultural peculiarity.

Again, on p. 110 Widlok describes how an informant, Jacob, "when desperate for some tobacco offered to exchange his bow and arrows for a packet of tobacco although, in our view, the bow and arrow were much more valuable." This is used as an example of Hai||om emphasis on immediate consumption and of concern regarding facilitating access to resources rather than on individual accumulation and investment for delayed returns. But anyone who has experienced a craving for tobacco or any other addictive or pleasurable substance will know that "having it in the future" is absolutely no substitute for "having it now." Being able to exchange tobacco for a bow and arrow in fact might be considered a good deal given that the materials required for constructing the latter are readily and cheaply (or freely) available to the individual; that these days bows and arrows are infrequently required for hunting; and that the only substantial investment required for producing such items is time, which, given minimal employment opportunities, is one thing that the Hai||om have rather a lot of.

Finally, and importantly, Hai||om evicted from Etosha national park had larger herds of livestock than the displaced and landless Hai||om with whom Widlok worked in the 1990s (118–119). This suggests that it's *not* some sort of internal social characteristic which prohibits engagement in delayed return activities such as herding but rather access to land and sufficient day-to-day economic security to allow investment and accumulation.

Regarding Widlok's focus on difference, I feel that the distinction between the "structural instability" and flexibility of "hunter-gatherer" social practice and the posited "socio-cultural continuity" seemingly manifest among pastoralists and agropastoralists (12, 260) is something of a false dichotomy. People inhabiting unpredictably varying drylands, whether they herd, farm, forage, seek wage-employment or, more realistically, endeavour to combine more than one of the above, also build on the same elements of "instability" or

"diversity" in the practice of exploiting their environmental and socio-political circumstances. In other words, they are opportunistic; they maintain knowledges and access to diverse food-producing and other technologies – including gathering "wild" products and in times not only driven by need; and they establish and enhance wide social networks with kin relations at the core (for a general overview see Mortimore 1998). The significant difference surely is that Bantu agropastoralists in southern Africa, and more recently European colonists, have managed to harness power over productive resources (land, natural resources, and livestock) – and that the political circumstances of the recent past as well as the present have acted to enhance this distribution of power. Further, that this has been supported by ill-informed and prejudicial stereotypes of others; images which are held by those in power and used to maintain their power. These dimensions are iterated by Hai||om themselves in their contextualised stories of "hoe-snatching" and "cattle-theft" which they state left them bereft of the resources and technologies appropriated by neighbouring ethnic groups (46–51). As Gordon and Sholto Douglas (2000: 19) argue, "hunting and pastoralism (and even agriculture ...) are flexible production strategies: there is no lineal trajectory from the one to the other. Nor ... are they mutually incompatible ... The distinction between foragers and pastoralists is a political one. Fluidity, competition and movement were the dominant characteristics of [all] these communities." Without wishing to fall prey to the wider excesses of environmental determinism, in this dimension at least Widlok's thesis, and the general patterns which it seems to support, could have been well-informed by some of the recent thinking regarding ecology and land use of drylands, which supports the general significance and appropriateness of maintaining "instability," flexibility and diversity in land and resource use practice and the social relations guiding these (e.g., Behnke et al. 1993).

Hai||om As "Bushmen"? and Access to Official Discourses

This brings me to my next observation. While anthropologists conventionally may be anxious to "explain" the people with whom they work through rather self-contained ethnographic texts, I wonder at the continuing potential for constructing misleading, even fictional, groupings and identities via this process. As Gordon (2000: 2)

asserts, "[t]o label someone as belonging to a specific ethnic group is not just to give that person a distinctive identity, but also to make a value judgement about that person and to indicate how that person is expected to behave." Above, I raised some questions regarding interpretations of Widlok's ethnographic material as affirmations of an internal "Bushman" culture and identity. Here I focus on the implications of ethnographic material from other Namibians for assertions of Hai||om as "Bushman," and of the relationships a Hai||om "Bushman" identity has to official discourses and institutions employing concepts of indigeneity and "San-ness."

As Widlok rightly points out (260), structuralist anthropology, with its emphasis on classification and categorisation, has undermined the legitimacy of both research with the Hai||om and of their own valid cultural and hybrid subsistence status, in favour of "true Bushmen" represented, for example, by the "Kalahari !Kung" of Lee's classic work (e.g., 1979). His assertions of producing a "post-revisionist" and "practice-oriented ethnography" notwithstanding, however, he seems intent on asserting Hai||om as "culturally foragers" and as part of a "Bushman nation" (263). Thus, although he focuses on Hai||om interactions with their agropastoralist neighbours, the emphasis of Hai||om identity in Widlok's ethnography is the "fact" that they "share many strategies with other groups identified as 'Bushman'" (250). As with the issues raised above regarding interpretations of Widlok's ethnographic material, I feel that his corroboration of the "Bushman"/"San" identity of Hai||om perhaps has been achieved through occluding links and parallels with other Namibians which are more legitimate, in both ethnographic and "public service anthropology" terms. Here, my reading of Widlok's text has been strongly influenced by my own communications with Damara people in northwest Namibia as well as my readings of other Namibian ethnography and historiography (primarily Lau 1987, 1995; Fuller 1993; Rohde 1993, 1997; Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000).

Ethnographically and linguistically, Hai||om appear anomalous in the categories "Bushman" and/or "San." They are Khoe-speakers and belong to Khoekhoegowab, i.e., the language spoken with regional and dialectical differences by Nama and Damara as well as Hai||om, with Hai||om being closer to Damara forms than Nama.⁶ In this linguistic respect, and as Barnard (1992: 51)

states, if "San" has any meaning at all, it refers to those who are "non-Khoe" speakers. Confusing the issue, however, the term "San" in its historical uses apparently was an economic *class* designation signalling impoverishment and referring to "what later became known as the Nama-speaking Heikom, and not the Kung Bushmen" (Gordon and Sholto Douglas 2000: 17), i.e., Hai||om were known as "Khoi" and *not* "Bushman" in the sense of their being "culturally-foragers" or "San-speakers." I realise that Widlok explicitly is trying to counter negative identifications of Hai||om as those *without* "markers" of Khoi culture in favour of those *with* "markers" of "Bushman" culture (29). But I am suggesting that linguistically, ethnographically, and historically the "evidence" for this stance is untenable.

I was consistently struck in Widlok's ethnography by similarities between the "indicators" of cultural identity affirmed by his informants and my own communications with Khoe-speaking Damara people in the northwest of Namibia, who are asserted by some as among the oldest inhabitants of the territory now known as Namibia (e.g., Lau 1987: 4). Damara who I have spoken to regarding this point distinguish themselves from "Bushman," although they were similarly constructed as "hunter-gatherers" by colonial and apartheid ethnographers.⁷ In fact, Haacke et al. (1997: 130) report that in interviews with Hai||om regarding self-perception they received consistent assertions that Hai||om are "one" with ≠Aodama (i.e., Damara of the Outjo/Kamanjab/Etoshia area) and rejections that they are "Saan".⁸ Elsewhere, Hai||om have requested that they are recognised as "an ethnic group distinct from the other San people" (*New Era* 1993: 2), and Suzman (pers. comm.) has recent (2000) video material of Hai||om explaining that their association with "Bushman" is totally spurious.

A few examples drawn from the Hai||om "cultural indicators" detailed in Widlok's ethnography may serve to stress the point that Hai||om share much of cultural significance with other Khoe-speakers as opposed to those who have been categorised linguistically and/or culturally as "San." Starting with kinship and ideas of relatedness, Widlok describes Hai||om kin reckoning as classificatory, employing a number of typical features. A key component is "The tendency to

⁷ See Lau 1995; Fuller 1993; Rohde 1997; Sullivan 2000.

⁸ Although the authors point out "that it was not clear whether association with the Saan was played down by the Hai||om because of considerations of status."

⁶ E.g., Haacke et al. 1997: 139; Haacke and Eiseb 1999.

construe kinship relations as shared mutually by a number of people rather than as ego-centred." This enables the integration "as classificatory genealogical relatives all persons whom one may encounter, and not only close relatives" (187). Widlok asserts that the resulting "flexibility in kinship matters is of a distinctly non-authoritarian hunter-gatherer type" (188). "[T]he cooperative construction of Hai||om relationship terms" thus "is for the purpose of knowing one's relatives, in contradistinction to an ascription of the terms for the purpose of controlling those relatives." (188) Hai||om kinship serves particularly as "a communicative aid for establishing common ground," (188), such that it is the "social deixis" – the relational and transactional instances in which kinship terms are involved – which shapes the social outcome of kinship reckoning (189–191). In this, Widlok affirms Ingold's (1990: 130) concept of "relatedness" among Kalahari "San," by which the potential for network expansion is embodied by a kinship frame "constituted by relations of incorporation rather than exclusion, by virtue of which others are 'drawn in' and not 'parcelled out'."

Flexibility in kin reckoning, however, is by no means exclusive to, or only "adaptive" for, those variously labelled as "Bushmen," "San" or "hunter-gatherers." Fuller (1993: 120), for example, points out for Khoe-speaking Damara and Nama that parallelism in same sex siblings of parents and in same sex cousins, a high incidence of fostering and adoption, and flexible definitions of those constituting family or *nikhoen*, provides a superbly enabling framework "for the expansion and contraction of the network of relatives with whom one maintains reciprocal obligations" (also see Gordon 1972: 77 f.). The people with whom Fuller worked currently and historically were herders, primarily of small-stock, and traders, who also practise horticulture and engage opportunistically in the formal and informal economies for cash income, as well as gathering "wild" resources when available. In other particulars of kin reckoning there are parallels between Hai||om and Damara which do not exist between Hai||om and "Bushmen" or "San." As Haacke et al. (1997: 131) affirm, both Hai||om and Damara conventionally name their daughters after their father's family and their sons after their mother's family – a practice which does not seem to be apparent among Jul'hoan ("San").

As Widlok asserts for Hai||om, many features of Nama/Damara kinship are linked to the exigencies of an uncertain environment: thus, "[t]he intimate

connection between kin and the social imperatives of economic survival leads to an imprecision in the definitions of who and who is not kin because the imperatives of economic survival are themselves constantly changing ... A wide net of kin increases the area over which one could utilize resources thus counterbalancing the periodic localized droughts that occur" (Fuller 1993: 114, 128). But flexibility as a key component of kin reckoning similarly has been documented as crucial for predominantly pastoralist groups elsewhere. As Lancaster and Lancaster (1986) describe for Rwala Bedouin, the key to negotiation over resource access is kinship: in particular, a conception of kin relationships as reciprocal networks which are continually modified or reorganized on the strength of new interactions between individuals.

Regarding ideas of who constitutes and has access to the immediate "household" as the basic unit of sharing, again there are a number of parallels. For Damara, those who share access to a hearth are similarly termed a *||gâus* (pl. = *||gâuti*). As Widlok describes, these are physically manifested as "clusters of huts, often forming a circle, that belong together in the sense of a hearth group with close kin ties" (136), and which supports as members any number of individuals who are not present at any particular time (Sullivan 1996, forthcoming). Nama kinship arrangements share these aspects (Hoernlé 1985; Fuller 1993: 114–120; Cowlishaw, pers. comm.). From a number of "case situations" on pages 138–139 Widlok elaborates the significance of the *||gâus* as the unit of "obligatory sharing among all its members." As he asserts, "sharing is the most powerful tool for defining the boundaries of a *||gâus*," such that "[c]oresidents expect a share, and denying this share is concomitant with denying that one belongs together" (141). Again, this defines *||gâuti* among Damara and Nama (see references above). Reading the case situations, however, I was further struck by the similarities between them and expectations that perhaps characterise all "social groupings," namely those of reciprocity as a characteristic of social membership. For example, if I visit friends and/or relatives I would expect some sort of hospitality and vice versa, and might even request items, material or otherwise, in the knowledge that the potential exists for them to ask the same from me should occasion arise in the future. I make this point as a means of questioning affirmations of "difference" when we could be delineating avenues for communication and understanding based on what may be common, albeit culturally "filtered," human experiences.

More broadly than immediate family and hearth-groupings (*nikhoen* or *||gâuti*), Damara share with Hai||om the interrelated concepts of *!haos*, i.e., lineage- and territory-based exogamous group (42), and of *!hus*, i.e., land area with which a *!haos* is associated (81–85; also see Sullivan 1999). Widlok has previously referred to these as “land-and-people groupings” such that “[t]he boundaries of a *!hus* relate to the (traditional) exogamous group which in anthropological terms may be called a ‘band cluster,’” and “landscapes are classified not only on the basis of topography but also with regard to the groups of people associated with them” (Widlok 1997: 321, 323). Damara frame such areas of land as *sida !hus* or “our land” and orient land use activities and settlement patterns towards the *!hus* with which their ancestry is associated, even where history has dispossessed them of legal access to these areas (Sullivan 1999). Given these common experiences and framings of relationships between people and areas of land, I wonder if the concept of *!hus* could be fruitfully developed as common currency in land claim debates from which Damara are not excluded (as currently they are in some fora, discussed below), in the same way as the term *n!ore* (i.e., the area of land held by a Ju||hoan camp) has become in debates regarding “San” claims to land.

In ritual, Damara and Hai||om also share ideas and practice. These include, for example, the identification of items as taboo or *soxa* (chapter 7), the “traditional” role of the “medicine man” and the healing qualities of the medicine trance dance (chapter 8). Today, it may be that only vestiges of these remain among some Damara – although tourism is contributing to the reconstruction of ritual activities, as in the performing of healing dances as part of the “traditional village” Anmire at Kowareb, southern Kunene Region.⁹ This decline, however, does not in and of itself justify disregard for what may be considered cultural or “interethnic” affinities in the anthropological structuring of the identity of the “group” participating in research.

The above examples beg the question as to why Hai||om are so emphatically “tagged” as “San” or as “Bushmen” in Widlok’s ethnography and beyond. Here I wish to explore relationships between cultural and ethnographic categories and access to

current official discourses regarding claims to land. This is as a means of thinking through the further implications of anthropological affirmations of particular identities and signifiers of difference.

My understanding is as follows. Hai||om have been consistently marginalised over the last one hundred or so years due, at least in part, to their constructed status as primitive “hunter-gatherers.” Some Hai||om have been particularly assertive in their requests for the return of ancestral land, as evidenced by a highly publicised demonstration which blocked the entrances to Etosha National Park in 1996 (Du Pisani 1998: 6; Thoma 1998: 3; Felton 2000: 10). These dynamics have coincided with increasing international concern regarding the rights, and particularly the land rights, of “indigenous minorities” throughout the world. In southern Africa, this concern is embodied in the organisation WIMSA (Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa), whose activities are focused particularly on land claims and on facilitating negotiations between represented groups and official authorities (Arnold and Gaeses 1998: 3).

But in southern Africa, “indigenous minority” has become synonymous with “San” or “Bushman.” Thus WIMSA describes itself *not* as the organisation representing all indigenous minorities, but “as the organisation representing the interests of all San in Southern Africa” (WIMSA 2000; also Thoma 1998), i.e., it is about “Bushman empowerment” (Gordon 2000: 10). In this, WIMSA has accomplished a remarkable job in facilitating communications between “San” groups and in enabling “San” to attend international workshops, and thereby establish links with other “indigenous minorities” (e.g., Brörmann 1999: 22). The Hai||om Development Trust II registered as a member of WIMSA in May 1998 (Brörmann 1999: 22). Unsurprisingly, the Hai||om, as one of the largest “San” groups in Namibia,¹⁰ have substantial standing as part of WIMSA. Conversely, as one of the largest Namibian groups represented by WIMSA, the Hai||om perhaps are rather important for the advocacy aims of the organisation.

It does not take an enormous stretch of the imagination to see that being constructed as “San,” i.e. as “culturally foragers” akin to other southern

9 Some of these memories and practices of Damara ritual and healing will be explored more thoroughly in Sullivan and Ganuses (in prepn.), drawing on oral testimony collated over the last two to three years.

10 Felton (2000: 9) reports that Hai||om comprise “one third of Namibia’s San population.” This may be a substantial overestimate, however, with a recent intensive “fact-finding” mission placing the Hai||om at a maximum of 5,000 out of 30,000 Namibian San, with considerably more !Kung and Kxoe speakers than Hai||om (Suzman 2000a).

African "Bushmen", would promote the standing of Hai||om in WIMSA-assisted land and development claims, as well as in other arenas (e.g. tourism) in which the appropriation of a perhaps romanticised "Bushman" identity can facilitate access to income.¹¹ Suzman (pers. comm.) in fact reports that some Ju|'hoan (San) of north-east Namibia consider Hai||om as "imposters" who are after their "indigenous credibility." Regarding the malleability of identity, Felton (2000: 15) similarly affirms for "San" that "[p]lainly, identity will receive positive stimuli from any initiatives that advance development".

In this respect Hai||om and Damara do not only share ethnographically identified "cultural markers" and language. They also share parallel histories of dispossession and marginalisation as well as the imposition of negative identity stereotypes with which these processes were associated. Currently, however, Damara people are not represented by WIMSA, even though many of them, and some *!haoti* in particular, have experienced the same and continuing marginalising processes as Hai||om (and others). It is the affirmation of these shared experiences which I feel might contribute to a more broadly beneficial debate regarding claims for land and livelihood options among impoverished Namibians (which Widlok clearly is concerned about, e.g., 24) and which I wish to summarise here.

For example, under the early 1970s establishment of "homelands" or Bantustans, and the earlier delineation of "Native Reserves," all Namibian "groups" in southern and central Namibia experienced the loss of large areas of land to which they could lay historical and ancestral claim. For some groups this involved the removal of all the land to which they traced their ancestry. Clearly, this was the case for Hai||om. Particular groups (*!haoti*) of Damara, however, share these experiences. |Khomani Damara of the valleys and mountains of the |Khomas Hochland, †Aodaman of Outjo/Kamanjab/Etoshā area, |Gaiodaman of Otjiwarongo area, !Oe‡gan of Usakos/Omaruru/Erongo Mountains area and |Gowanin of Hoachanas/west Gobabis area, for example, all lost their access to land, at least in part because of its delineation as commercial farmland under colonial and apartheid rule. Like land-dispossessed Hai||om and "San" (cf. Suzman 1995), many remained in their ancestral areas as impoverished and "generational" farm labourers and domestics, or left to be

absorbed into the labour system which serviced urban areas and industry. The establishment of the Damaraland "homeland," located in today's southern Kunene and northern Erongo Regions, completely bypassed these and other Damara territories. While viewing the expanded "homeland" as an opportunity to become established as independent farmers, Damara from these areas who settled in the "homeland" identify themselves as displaced from their ancestral lands which they remember and *know* as theirs (Sullivan 1996). Like Hai||om (34 f.), Damara also have been dispossessed of land in the "national interest" of wildlife conservation, and have similarly engaged in protest efforts to reclaim land rights in conservation areas, and suffered government refusal to consider restitution of such land rights. For example, in the 1950s Damara were ruthlessly evicted from what became Daan Viljoen Game Reserve (known as !Ao-||aexas to its former Damara inhabitants), established for the benefit of Windhoek's white inhabitants; and were relocated several hundred kilometres away to the farm Sores-Sores on the Ugab (!U‡gab) River; a less productive and very remote area where many of the promises by government officials for assistance in establishing themselves as self-sufficient farmers remained unmet.

Finally, both Hai||om and Damara, as well as others, experience problems due to the current situation whereby the post-independence constitution enables Namibian citizens to move to wherever they choose on communal land. Although the constitution contains the proviso that the customary rights of others be observed, problems arise because no procedures or resources exist to monitor the process, with the result that some groups experience marginalisation in the face of incoming herders who frequently are more wealthy in terms of livestock-holdings. This is apart from the fact that definitions of "customary rights" are extremely problematic, given that many Namibians no longer have any access to what might be considered their ancestral or "customary" territories. Thus Damara as well as Hai||om (37) and other "Bushmen" grapple with a situation whereby they are continually having to accommodate themselves to circumstances in which the access of "more assertive newcomers" (Felton 2000: 13) to "their" land is enhanced (also Brörmann 1999: 14; Sullivan in press).¹²

¹¹ See, for example, †Oma and Thoma 1998; Garland and Gordon 1999.

¹² This also works in reverse: e.g. Suzman (1995: 55) describes how "... if Ju|'hoansi or Damaras move stock to the former Hereroland East reserve, it is unlikely that the stock will remain long in their hands, as in terms of Herero tenure

Concluding Remarks

Lest I be misinterpreted, let me assert my stance clearly. Anthropology's colonial past notwithstanding, following Gordon (2000), and in affirmation of the anthropologist's close experience of "the other" through fieldwork, I identify anthropology as potentially powerful in advocacy and public service in consultation with impoverished peoples. At the same time, and while admiring those dealing with the complexities of facilitation and implementation in the fields of environment, development and human rights, I also affirm the potential for anthropology to situate and critique the identity categories frequently employed by institutions, donor programmes and development professionals. That said, however, extreme reflexivity and deconstruction regarding the (hopefully) dynamic view(s) of the anthropologist also clearly need to be part and parcel of the "doing" of anthropology, given that identities, differences, and categories sanctioned in anthropological writings also can play into the hands of particular institutional and official discourses. The whole nexus is complicated further by whatever impacts we as individuals (and as people in interrelationships with those studied) have on the issues, people, and places, etc. we think and write about; not to mention the impacts they have on us and our own constructed individual identities.

To invoke a cliché, for anthropology "in the New Millennium" the "other" are spatially and temporally dispersed, being individuals and institutions, as well as their interrelationships, from local to global contexts. People who become the actors of anthropological researches are of multiple and changing identities, interlinked and interpenetrated in ways which, in terms of anthropology's structuralist past, perhaps are unintuitive. As Rohde writes of inhabitants of Okombahe in the south of the former Damaraland "homeland," people "portray themselves, their families and neighbours as inhabitants of a world imbued with a rich confusion of disparate cultural influences. The seemingly fragmentary and dislocated artefacts of global processes – the trappings of colonialism, the world economy, the mass media – are naturalised and appropriated within a specifically localised and historically contingent environment. Visit any village or town in Damaraland and you will see

and hear an ongoing global culture, in styles of dress, in body language, in the sounds blaring from battery-driven tape-recorders and radios" (1998: 192). So much for internal cultural coherence and local identities separate from broader influences, particularly given recent technologies of mass communication (as apparent in "San" requests for better telecommunications access as a means of being better informed generally and for maintaining closer links between themselves and with other "indigenous minorities" worldwide, e.g., Tjombe 1998; Brörmann 1999).

At the book launch for Widlok's monograph at the Anthropological Association of Southern Africa conference in May 2000, the historian Jan-Bart Gewald made the observation that "we are all people and should talk to one another as people," a possibility which one could say is formalised in anthropology. Widlok clearly has talked to Hai||om as people. At the same time, however, he affirms Hai||om *difference* in a way which has particular implications for contemporary issues and debate. Widlok's ethnography is excellent in its detail, its accessible writing style, its structure, and the overall coherence of the story he tells. But, it also constructs a Hai||om identity which is perhaps problematic (and irresponsible?) in relation to past and contemporary discourses of indigeneity, "Bushmanness," and claims to land. In this the monograph raises issues for social anthropology as a whole: with regard to the discipline's potential for affirming and constructing particular identities, and to its ability to inform the official discourses via which power in a world of unequal relations is mediated and maintained.

First, I would like to acknowledge Tom Widlok whose monograph I enjoyed and was stimulated by, and whose commitment I admire: I have not intended any offence with this article. I would also like to thank James Fairhead, Rob Gordon, Willi Haacke, Dag Henrichsen, James Suzman, and Mike Taylor for support and helpful comments – the views I express, as well as any errors of judgement, are my own. The paper was written as part of a Post doctoral Research Fellowship from the British Academy, and I gratefully acknowledge their support.

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politics, they will have nowhere to graze and in many cases such stock will be stolen – a thing easily done given the relative powerlessness of marginalised groups in the area."

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