


## Putting the First People First: The Case of the Southern African Bushmen

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### Abstract

Despite it being widely recognised that the Bushmen of southern Africa have the oldest DNA in the world, and that they are the first peoples of the region, their voices are often the last to be heard in matters pertaining to their continued existence. They have faced centuries of ethnocide, dispossession and marginalisation, a situation perpetuated under the new democratic governments of southern Africa. Besides oversimplified and outright inaccurate portrayals of the Bushmen as ‘primitive man’ throughout the period of colonisation, they have more recently been romanticised in idyllic portrayals in tourism marketing. While this has resulted in many deciding to distance themselves from their culture, others who at first eagerly embraced tourism, have been put on show like “animals in a zoo” for tourists to view the ‘exotic and primitive indigenous people of Africa’. This has contributed to a trivialisation and commodification of their culture, with only few success stories. This study traces the history of the Bushmen both in terms of their invidious position in southern Africa and in tourism. It examines two juxtaposing examples of Bushmen tourism ventures and argues that by embracing both the traditional and modern, such ventures can succeed.

**Keywords:** Bushmen, tourism; !Khwatla; commodification; indigenous peoples

### Introduction

The Bushmen, or San, are the first peoples of southern Africa but their perceived physical, cultural, and linguistic alterity resulted in them having to endure centuries of ethnocide, dispossession and marginalisation. Although there are variations in the use of the terms ‘Bushman’ and ‘San’, the former will be used in this article as several Bushman communities in southern Africa have expressed their preference for being called ‘Bushman’ (Ellis, 2015). From the earliest encounters with European travellers, the Bushmen of southern Africa have been regarded with complete disdain, as even “lesser” than the Khoikhoi because of their lack of herds of livestock and preference to live a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle (Christian Express, 1900; Legassick, 2016; Penn, 2005). They have been disparagingly referred to as “savages”; “untameable”; “barbarously ferocious”; “vermin”; “the lowest of the low”; “primitive”; and “sub-human” “deserving only to be hunted down and exterminated” (Legassick, 2016: 125). Their unique and diverse languages, once spoken by many, are either extinct or fast disappearing, with some regarded as critically endangered. Colonialism and apartheid also contributed to loss of land, culture and traditions. Many were assimilated or acculturated while others abandoned their culture because of the consequences of identifying with it (Fihlani, 2017; Koot & Büscher, 2019; McDonald, 2015; Schenck, 2009; Yellen, 1985).

In the 1870s Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd documented the language, traditions and stories of the Xam in an effort to preserve their cultural heritage and in the process produced 12 000 pages of notes (Penn, 2005; South African Museum of Rock Art, 2004). It would take almost a century for further efforts to be made to preserve the language and culture of all Bushmen. Since the 1950s there have been renewed efforts to document, preserve and revive

their culture and languages (Barnard, 2007). Since the 1990s the Bushmen, recognising the value of their cultural heritage, entered the tourism industry with several cultural and eco-tourism ventures. Despite the prevailing popularity and fascination with the Bushman myth, these have not all succeeded. For example, several of the #Khomani San never quite came to fruition (Tan, 2022). However, the !Khwatla San Heritage Centre in South Africa has since its inception in 2004 been regarded by some as a success. This study, using books, journal, newspaper and online articles, juxtaposes Bushmen tourism ventures and argues that by embracing both the traditional and modern, these ventures can succeed.

### Literature review

The Bushmen are the most over-researched people in the world. A search on the Taylor & Francis database using the term Bushman, delivers 7 781 results, with over 190 of these articles being published in the last year alone (Taylor & Francis, 2023). The earliest known writings on the Bushmen date back to the mid-1600s (Finlay & Barnabas, 2012) and from that time these writings have influenced the Bushmen's representation. According to historian Martin Legassick (2016), several shifts in the Bushman discourse occurred from the 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards. They went from “inveterate stock-thieves, vermin deserving only to be hunted down and exterminated” to “stand in the dock of public display, condemned as inferior by science”. They then came to be seen as “the quintessential ‘primitive’, our savage ancestor” in the late 1800s, and from the early to mid-1900s onward they have been represented as “a ‘harmless people’ ... for whose way of life one is supposed to feel a vague nostalgia” (Legassick, 2016: 125). Robinson (2003: 774), although referring specifically to the Bushman pavilion at the 1936 Empire Exhibition, posits that “the powerful discourses and scientific authority of anthropology and ethnography” played a substantial role in the construction of perceptions regarding the Bushmen. From the late 1990s, the discourse has shifted to that of southern Africa's “First Peoples” and in South Africa, for example, the country's new motto and coat of arms incorporated Bushmen language and imagery (Gordon, 1992; Hitchcock, 2002; Stephenson, 2012; Wilmsen, 2007).

These “powerful discourses” still influence the (re)presentation and perceptions of the Bushmen today, not only socio-politically, but in the tourism industry as well. Hüncke and Koot (2012: 672) argue that the dominant image of the San in the tourism industry is “still that of unspoiled, pristine genuine, untouched and traditional Bushmen cultures and people living close to nature”. However, Robins (2000: 63) cautions against merely accepting that these representations are produced and enforced by “the West”. He argues that recently this imagery has also been “manufactured, reshaped and re-articulated ‘from below’” (Robins, 2000: 63). The Bushmen have therefore shifted from so-called passive victims of the colonial lens to taking control of their representation to actively shape people's perception of themselves through their bottom-up appropriation of the Bushman myth. Although the prevailing image of the San as the ‘last hunter-gatherers’ also resulted in the success of the land claims of the #Khomani San of South Africa in 1995 and 2002 (Robins, 2000: 63), their continual use of it can be to their detriment.

Tradition and authenticity are key selling points for Bushman tourism ventures, especially in the case of the #Khomani. However, intra-community conflict, caused by the ‘traditional’ versus ‘western/modern’ debate, among the #Khomani is well-documented. Thlodhlana, et al. (2011) argue that this is compounded by the absence of post-restitution support that the South African government should have provided. In another article, Robins (2001: 841-842) argues that NGOs' ‘double vision’ – their “dual mandate to promote the ‘cultural survival’ of indigenous peoples *and* to socialise them into being virtuous modern citizens within a global civil society” – only serves to worsen the already existing socio-cultural

differences, thereby deepening the divide. The #Xhomi community is to this day finding it difficult to navigate what Sahlins (1999) termed ‘indigenous modernities’ – the integration of modern technologies and industries (such as tourism) with traditional cultures and ways of life. This then leads to the question of will not only the #Xhomi, but all San of southern Africa ever be able to find the middle way in the ‘traditional’ versus ‘western’ debate and embrace Sahlins’ indigenous modernity?

### **Colonial encounters**

Since the landing of employees of the Dutch East-India Company (DEIC) at the Cape in 1652, the Bushmen have persisted in resisting encroachment on their territory. Their resistance became fiercer in the eighteenth century as Dutch migrant farmers (trekboers) moved further into the interior, dispossessing them of their hunting grounds and depleting wildlife resources. Resistance techniques led to the formation of commandos which retaliated in the most brutal manner (Adhikari, 2010: 33-39; Penn, 2013: 185). Tylden (1945: 34) argued that “the first commando rode out in 1715 to punish a raiding party of Bushmen”, however, the commando system had been active since 1672 and had since that time retaliated against the Bushmen (Laband, 2020: 60).

According to Adhikari (2010: 19) during the 1700s the “total extinction [of the Bushmen was] confidently hoped for ... under Dutch colonial rule”. From the 1710s the Cape government “permitted” farming beyond the southwestern Cape, facilitating the infiltration and dispossession of Bushman hunting grounds. The further these Dutch trekboers moved into the interior, the more the Bushman resisted their incursion and “halted colonial advance into the interior and in places even rolled it back as farmers abandoned outlying farms” (Adhikari, 2010: 26). Bushman resistance was mainly carried out through guerrilla attacks – they raided, and sometimes killed, livestock; destroyed crops; attacked farmsteads by setting fire to them; and poisoned waterholes. Brutal and exterminatory acts continued to be carried out by the commandos. More often than not entire bands of Bushmen were killed and, in some instances, women and children were taken captive to “augment the farmer’s labour supply” (Adhikari, 2010: 34). Adhikari (2010: 34) specifically notes that Bushman children “were prized because they were more easily controlled and assimilated into the trekboer economy as menial labourers” and as such, “the bartering and gifting of [Bushman children] was a common practice on the frontier”. By the mid to late 1700s, the trekboers and the Bushmen were at perpetual war. Brutality towards the Bushmen, and a determination to rid the land of them, resulted in the 1777 sanctioning of the “eradication of [Bushman] wherever and whenever they were encountered” (Adhikari, 2010: 34). It would take almost two decades for the Cape government to attempt to put a stop to the massacres by offering monetary rewards for every Bushman captured on commando. However, this resulted in the hunting of Bushmen to earn a profit (Adhikari, 2010).

When the British occupied the Cape for the first time in 1795, they made concerted efforts to put a stop to the violence. In 1798, a proclamation was issued that detailed the gifting of livestock and tobacco, mainly to “civilize and conciliate” the Bushmen; the appointment of captains amongst the Bushmen “so that the British government could be confident it was negotiating with responsible leaders”; and that no commandos may ride out against the Bushmen except when done so in self-defence (Penn, 2013: 187). Although the intention with this policy was clearly to convince the Bushmen to abandon their traditional hunter-gatherer way of life and become pastoralists, it was far less brutal than that of the Dutch government. The governor further ordered that a large tract of land be given to the Bushmen on which they could learn to become pastoralists – present-day Bushmanland. This policy was relatively

effective in putting an end to the violence between the colonists and the Bushmen but was short lived as the British had to concede the Cape to the Netherlands in 1803 (Penn, 2013).

When the British returned to the Cape in 1805, the colonists and the Bushmen were once more at war. However, the British were “far less sympathetic” toward the Bushmen upon their return (Penn, 2013: 190). By 1808 the gift-giving system was rescinded as “it encouraged the [Bushman] to lose their fear of the colonists”; missionary activity, specifically by the London Missionary Society (LMS), was encouraged to ‘civilise’ the Bushmen; and the commando system was reinstated (Penn, 2013: 190). An 1823 Commission of Inquiry, its 1826 report and several proclamations and acts did little to end the continued slaughter of Bushman bands, exploitative trade and enslavement of Bushman children and the resultant hostile resistance. According to Penn (2013: 197), the “skilful infiltration” of frontier farmers into Bushman territory “contributed greatly to the absorption of [Bushman] into the colonial labour force in the early 1820s”. As the colonial boundaries and control over outlying areas were extended and solidified, more and more Bushmen were absorbed into colonial society, while others were driven to inhospitable areas in the interior such as the far northern Cape (Penn, 2005: 268-287). As will be shown in the next section, during the twentieth century violent assimilation techniques were eventually abandoned for supposedly more intermittent benevolent attempts at ‘rescuing’ what was perceived to be a dying race. There were, however, instances of acts of violence carried out against the Bushmen well into the next century.

In a 1911 *Rand Daily Mail* article titled ‘Exciting hunt for a Bushman’, the author reports that “farmers were forced in self-defence to make up commandoes and hunt these half-human, wholly wild people, with many habits of the baboon-folk”. General Jan Smuts, in a 1934 public lecture for the South African Association for the Advancement in Sciences, described the Bushmen as “mentally stunted by nature”, “a mere human fossil, verging on extinction”, “[occupying] the lowest scale in human existence”, and as having gone “backwards” (*Rand Daily Mail*, 1934: 13). In South Africa, the last permit to hunt a Bushman in South Africa was issued in 1927 (Rotary Africa, 2018), and in South West Africa (Namibia) the last permit was issued by the South African government in 1936 (Minorities at Risk, 2004).

### **Preservation of a ‘dying race’**

The highly problematic and perverse notion of a Bushman reserve emerged in the early 1900s. It was claimed that these reserves would serve as a ‘safe haven’ in which the San could practice their traditions and live a hunter-gatherer lifestyle without the interference of the outside world. However, in reality, these reserves would serve two purposes: to solve the ‘Bushman problem’ and what can essentially be called a human zoo – an enclosed area in which the Bushmen could be observed and studied by anthropologists, ethnographers and scientists alike (Schenck, 2008: 33-34; 64).

#### *Namibia*

The notion of a Bushman reserve appears to have first emerged in 1908 when the Austrian anthropologist, Professor Felix von Luschan suggested that a reserve be created for the Bushmen in German South West Africa (Namibia) “in the interest of science” (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000: 60). It was, however, “felt that it would be better to domesticate Bushmen” as “they could be tamed into becoming useful workers through a gradual process” (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000: 61). In 1911, the notion was raised again by the German South West Africa Farmer’s Association, calling for the removal of all Bushmen to a reserve. Nothing came of these calls. It was argued that the land that was to be used for this reserve could be better used for farming (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000). It was only in 1935 that

the issue was raised again when the head of the Rhenish Mission Society argued that two Bushman reserves be created. It was argued that:

“...their language alone justifies the preservation of this primitive race. You have reserves for game, you have reserves for the Hereros, the Ovambos, and the Okavangos, but you have no reserves for Bushmen, yet historically and scientifically Bushmen are entitled to far greater consideration than any other of our native tribes. The difficulty today is, however, that his lands are gradually being taken from him ... he has been prohibited from trapping or shooting in parts which he regarded as his own for generations” (Gordon & Sholto-Douglas, 2000: 147).

Despite this, it was only in 1971 that a so-called Bushman reserve, known as Bushmanland, was created and was administered through the then Department of Nature Conservation (Suzman, 2001). Bushmanland was by far the smallest ‘native reserve’ and only covered a fraction of their ancient homeland. The Bushmen were described as a nomadic people who therefore do not ‘own’ or permanently occupy any land, as such, “control over their land was ceded to people who had only the loosest historical claims to that land” (Suzman, 2001: 51). A mere five years after the creation of Bushmanland, and sporadically throughout the decade to follow, there were talks that West and later East Bushmanland be declared a game reserve. However, the presence of the South African Defence Force and its militarisation of the Bushmen, resulting in the 36 Bushman Battalion (active until 1990), many Bushmen abandoning the area, and the establishment of a local Farmers Union, prevented the declaration of the planned game reserve (Suzman, 2001).

Today, the Bushmen living in Bushmanland (now known as the Tsumkwe District) appear to fare far better than those in other areas of Namibia. This can largely be ascribed to changes in legislation allowing communal area residents “to benefit directly from local wildlife and tourism” which resulted in the establishment in 1998 of the Naye Naye Conservancy in East Bushmanland (Suzman, 2001: 66). Naye Naye, which is community owned and supported by the Naye Naye Development Foundation (NPDF) and various other NGOs, has been largely successful. The community runs several tourism ventures such as living museums and craft shops but generate most of their income from trophy hunting (Namibian Association of CBNRM Support Organisations, 2012).

### *Botswana*

Colonial officials in the then Colony and British Protectorate of Bechuanaland (1885-1889) had no intentions of creating a Bushman reserve. The Bushmen of Botswana, sometimes referred to as Basarwa, like the Bushmen of Namibia and South Africa, have a long history of displacement and marginalisation. It is important to note that the Bushmen of Botswana have expressed their discontent at being called Basarwa, a Tswana term for those who do not raise cattle. They argue that it is a pejorative, derogatory and demeaning term and that they prefer to be called Bushmen as it more closely relates to the Khwe tribal naming system (Qare, 2004). Many of them were displaced by the expansion of Tswana tribal areas, while others were taken on as serfs. These serfs would herd cattle and hunt, providing skins and hides to their ‘masters’ as tribute (Hermans, 1977). In the mid to late 1800s the last Bushman stronghold in the then Colony of Bechuanaland, the Ghanzi district, was divided into large cattle ranches for a handful of white settlers. This resulted in local Bushman bands having to become so-called “farm Bushmen” – they became cattle herders and “over and above the rations [they] received in return for domestic and farm labour, they were allowed ... to hunt and gather on the farms” (Hermans, 1977: 56). The displacement and marginalisation of the Botswana Bushmen continued throughout the colonial period (Kelso, 1993), despite several colonial inquiries into the treatment of Bechuanaland’s indigenous population (Sanders, 1989). In 1936, at the time

when anthropologists and ethnographers were lobbying for the creation of Bushman reserves in South West Africa and South Africa, the Resident Commissioner in Bechuanaland disparagingly said that he:

“...can conceive no useful object in the world spending money and energy in preserving a decadent and dying race, which is perfectly useless from any point of view, merely to enable a few theorists to carry out anthropological investigations and make money by writing misleading books which lead nowhere” (Hermans, 1977: 66).

It would take three decades for an area to be demarcated for the Botswana Bushmen. From 1958 to 1965, Australian anthropologist George Silberbauer served as the Bushman Survey Officer and studied the Bushmen (Basarwa) living in the area that is today known as the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) (Bailey, 1983: 92). In 1960 he recommended to the Protectorate’s government that a reserve be established in the area. According to Silberbauer, he had two reasons for this recommendation: first, to protect the Bushmen and their culture; and second, to protect the area’s fauna and flora from decimation by cattle ranchers (Silberbauer, 2012). However, in contrast to the motivation provided for the proposed reserves in Namibia and South Africa, Silberbauer (2012: 2) made it clear that “there was not, and should never be the intention to preserve the Bushmen of the Reserve as museum curiosities”. In February 1961 the largest game reserve in the world, the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR), was proclaimed (Ramsay, 1989).

Since Botswana’s independence in 1966, the Bushmen in the CKGR’s future has been in question. However, it was only from the 1980s that they faced real threats of removal when the government allowed surveying for diamonds in the Reserve. When the removals started in the late 1990s, the Botswanan government claimed it was because the Bushmen’s “presence threatened the pristine environment and tourism potential” in the CKGR, and the remote location of the communities made it difficult to successfully implement development programmes (Good, 2003: 16). The then Minister for Minerals, Energy and Water Affairs only admitted in the year 2000 that diamond prospecting was taking place within the Reserve, only to deny these allegations again in 2002, yet from 1997 to early 2003 over 1 000 San had been removed. Despite Botswana’s High Court ruling in 2006 that the Bushmen had been illegally (forcibly) removed, the government maintains that the removals were voluntary, that they are “better off” in the resettlement communities outside the Reserve and continued with removal attempts (Good, 2003; NBC News, 2006; Survival International 2006; The New Humanitarian, 2002).

### *South Africa*

In South Africa, big game hunter Donald Bain put a group of Bushmen on display at the 1936 Empire Exhibition as part of his petition for a Bushman reserve in South Africa (Gordon, 1995: 28-49). It was said to be the second most popular and profitable display at the Exhibition (Gordon, 1995; Robinson, 2003). This, however, did little to nothing to put a stop to the removal of San from the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (KGP), proclaimed in 1931. In 1937, Bain and a group of 55 Bushmen marched to Parliament in Cape Town to further protest their dispossession (Gordon, 1995: 29). They succeeded as the Minister of Native Affairs and then acting Prime Minister, General Jan Smuts, said that they would be allowed to hunt in the KGP. The National Parks Board (NPB) however, being independent from government, still maintained their stance that the San would not be allowed to hunt in the KGP as it was “useless to spend money on protecting game for these people to exterminate and sell the skins to smugglers” (Gordon, 1995: 30). The NPB further argued that should the San be allowed to settle in the KGP, it would lead to the game becoming “‘wild’ again, making it more difficult for visitors to view” (Gordon, 1995: 30).

Almost two decades later, under the apartheid political dispensation, the Bushmen were again put on display like animals in a zoo. At the 1952 Jan van Riebeeck Tercentenary Festival, “under the supervision of South-West Africa’s chief game warden P. J. Schoeman, they crafted bows and arrows under the gaze of thousands of onlookers” (Rassool & Witz, 1993: 454). This was once again one of the most popular displays (Verbuyst, 2021). Robinson (2003: 774), however, notes that “some of the displayed people were reported to comment that the white people staring at them seemed like curious wild animals, or baboons”. *The Guardian* even published a cartoon that “reversed the gaze” on the Bushmen.



Figure 1: Cartoon in *The Guardian*, 27 March 1952  
Source: Witz (2003: 213)

In 1960 the infamous Bushman diorama at the South African Museum in Cape Town opened to the public. Consisting of thirteen cast figures placed against a carefully painted Karoo landscape, the diorama was a major drawcard for the museum and remained a key attraction throughout the four decades it was on display (Davison, 2018: 81-97; News24, 2001; Skotness, 2002: 253-274; Verbuyst, 2021: 90). It was so synonymous with tourism in Cape Town during the 1970s, that postcards with individual casts from the diorama were produced (Coombes, 2003: 221-222). The casts were made by James Drury in 1907, “to preserve for posterity what was believed to be a discreet and disappearing racial type” (Skotness, 2002: 256). The Museum produced additional casts for a travelling exhibition that was put on display in seven countries across Europe, thereby perpetuating stereotypes of the Bushmen. According to Davison (2018: 87) this exhibition

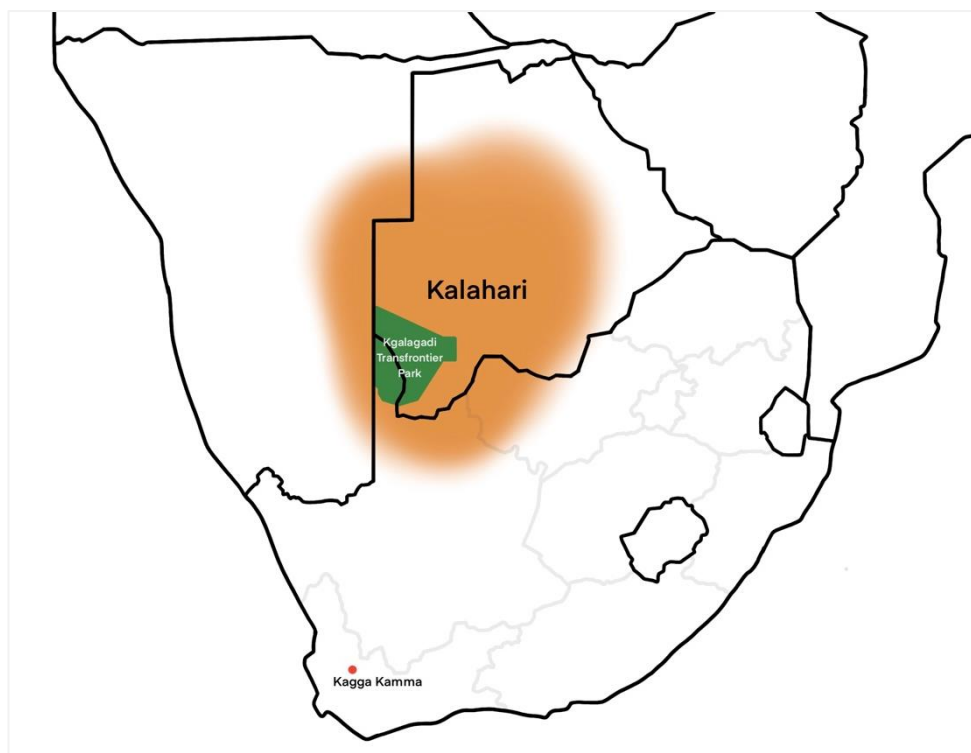
“...repeated the selective visual narrative of the diorama and echoed earlier politically motivated exhibitions of living Bushmen at the [1936 and 1952 exhibitions] where they were presented as primitive people, close to extinction, and in need of state protection, while the colonial history of their decimation was omitted.”

Despite criticisms throughout its many years on display, the diorama was only decommissioned in 2001. While some argued that it was a “grave mistake” to remove the display, others applauded the move as they felt that it perpetuated racial stereotyping,

misrepresentation of the Bushmen and that it treated them like natural history specimens (Coombes, 2003: 206-222; News24, 2001; Smith, 2017).

### South African Bushmen in tourism

In 1991, a group of about 40 Bushmen, “thought to be the last surviving San”, were taken to the Kagga Kamma game reserve (Lee & Hitchcock, 2001: 270). Prior to this, they had been expelled from their ancestral lands in the 1970s which resulted in them having to work on surrounding farms and pose for photos with tourists at the gates of the KGP. Their plight received some attention in the media which then led to the owner of Kagga Kamma taking them to the game reserve (Lee & Hitchcock, 2001). Heralded by some as the ‘homecoming of the Bushmen’ and the rescuing of a suffering community, it was far from it. Although they were provided with housing and the promise of earning a living, which they could not do in the remote Kalahari village from which they had come, they were in many ways exploited. Under the guise of ‘cultural preservation’, they interacted with tourists according to “a carefully orchestrated performance” in their reconstructed ‘traditional’ village (White, 1993).



Map 1: Kagga Kamma and the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park

Kagga Kamma, described by some as a “Bushman theme park”, was internationally renowned for offering tourists a rare chance to interact with ‘true Bushmen’, a people and culture on the verge of extinction. In many ways, it was essentially a “human zoo” in which the Bushmen were put on display to satisfy tourists’ needs to view and interact with the indigenous ‘other’ (Sehume, 2012: 101; Tomaselli, 2012: 112). A 1996 *New York Times* article, titled ‘Endangered Bushmen find refuge in a game park’, details one of these carefully orchestrated performances. According to the author, Suzanne Daley (1996: 4), after breakfast a tourist asked when they would be able to see the Bushman children. A few minutes later, five children were brought to the patch of grass opposite the dining hall windows and the diners pulled their chairs closer to watch them play. Daley (1996: 4) argues that “in a country that has treated them savagely for



centuries, being in what feels very much like a zoo may seem like a step up”. It should be noted that while they recognised the (few) benefits they gained from the arrangement, they were by no means content with their situation. They received little to no remuneration for their performances and crafts sold, were tightly restricted in what they could hunt despite promises made when they were first taken to the reserve, and as a result, were in debt to the farm shop where they bought canned foods in the absence of game meat (Daley, 1996; Lee & Hitchcock, 2001; White, 1993). Even after their successful land claim and return to their ancestral homeland, their circumstances did not improve much.

### *Land restitution*

In 1995, with the assistance of human rights lawyer Roger Chennels and the South African San Institute (SASI), the San at Kagga Kamma filed a claim for their ancestral land from which they had been removed throughout the 1930s to 1950s. The first phase of the claim was successfully completed in 1999 and the second in 2002. Upon completion of the first phase, the #Khomani San left Kagga Kamma to settle on their newly acquired land adjacent to what was to become the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park (declared in 1999) (Hughes, 2005: 30). During the land claim, the celebration of their “success and return”, and their first few months of resettlement, they were portrayed in the media as “a highly cohesive and consensual community with a common cultural heritage and continuity” (Robins, 2001: 833-834). They were far from this idealised image. According to Chennels (2002) “they were no longer a functioning or definite community” and “had to a large degree become assimilated in or dominated by the local pastoralist groups, and their ancient cultural practices were sporadically maintained in isolated groups”.

The dysfunctional nature of the #Khomani community is well documented. Many, including those who worked closely with the community to secure the land claim, attribute it to the then Department of Land Affairs’ (DLA) insistence that the claim be opened to all San of the Northern Cape province (Koot & Büscher, 2019; Schenck, 2008; Thondhlana, Shackleton & Muchapondwa, 2011). This resulted in individuals from far off towns such as Kimberley, Kuruman and other remote villages also lodging claims to the land, with some admitting that although they had previously identified as coloured, they now identified as ‘Bushmen’ because of the obvious benefits linked to this previously “unwanted identity”. The original claimants voiced their dissatisfaction, arguing that ‘fake’ Bushmen laid claim to land that does not belong to them. Of the 1 024 South Kalahari Bushmen claimants, only 218 reside on the six farms returned to them (Koot & Büscher, 2019: 9). Along with the dissatisfaction that outsiders could also claim land, the divide between the so called ‘traditionalists’ and ‘Westerners’ added to inter-community conflict. The so-called traditionalists mainly consisted of the Kruiper family, with the late Dawid Kruiper being the most outspoken about his dissatisfaction with and perhaps even dislike of those perceived to be Westerners. The Westerners are those who opted to live in nearby towns instead of on the farms provided and wanted to use the land for grazing (Finlay, 2009). Beyond the internal conflict, the community’s problems were compounded by a lack of post-restitution support. The land was handed back without any guidance or assistance in management practices, resulting in “self-help [becoming] the order of the day” (Schenck, 2008: 97-98). Corruption, allegations of nepotism, infrastructure decay, R1.5 million in game disappearing, overgrazing of lands and occupation of farmhouses without paying rent was reported by many and became the order of the day (Schenck, 2008). Their aspirations to start eco-tourism ventures also quickly dissipated.

### *Troubling tourism?*

The !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park Agreement stipulates the establishment of a ‘co-operation lodge’ which would generate an income for the communities (both #Khomani and Mier) to “contribute to the alleviation of poverty in the region” (!Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park Agreement, 2002: 195). The DLA allocated R6.5 million to the construction of the co-operation lodge known as !Xaus Lodge. It was, however, poorly constructed and had numerous design flaws that had to be addressed. !Xaus Lodge was neglected for five years as it was “written off by the Mier and #Khomani owners” and “the funders and state had lost interest” (Dyll-Myklebust & Finlay, 2012: 124). The project was revived in January 2007 when an external funder, Transfrontier Parks Destinations (TFPD), signed a 20-year contract with the !Ae!Hai Kalahari Heritage Park Joint Management Board (JMB). The newly upgraded luxury lodge was opened in July that same year. Most employees are locals, with the #Khomani working as guides and in the production of crafts, and the Mier people in hospitality as they generally have a higher level of education and experience in working in the accommodation sector (Dyll-Myklebust & Finlay, 2012: 125; Experience the Northern Cape, n.d.). It was only in 2013 when more external funders again stepped in to assist, that the #Khomani were able to expand their eco-tourism offering. Fifty German and three South African Rotary Clubs, the Rotary Foundation, and the German Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development provided a total of R7.3 million in funding for the ‘#Khomani San – Living in Peace project’. The project was “designed to give the #Khomani San a chance to live in peace, freedom, dignity and economic independence while retaining their traditional identity” (Rotary Africa, 2018: 24).

While it is clear that the #Khomani were the benefactors of numerous NGOs and foreign governments’ development and aid programmes, there is no tangible evidence that this aid did anything to change their circumstances. Almost a decade later the #Khomani community is still not living in peace, unemployment and alcohol abuse are the order of the day, and many of their tourism initiatives so enthusiastically started never quite came to fruition (Tan, 2022). Dirk Pienaar, tourism officer for the #Khomani Communal Property Association (CPA), emphasises that “this is a hybrid community ... and it’s quite a gap to bridge between the very traditional and very formal [Western / modern] community members” (Tan, 2022).

### **!Khwa ttu: Embassy of the San**

At the time of completion of the first #Khomani and Mier land claim, what would also become another San tourism venture was founded because of calls made by SASI and the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA) to regulate the amount of tourists that came into contact with the San, as well as to provide them with tourism education and training (Stahelin, 2006). In 1999, Swiss anthropologist Irene Stahelin purchased the farm *Grootwater* about 60km north of Cape Town to establish a San educational centre. The farm was renamed !Khwa ttu at the 2002 WIMSA General Assembly. The name, a |Xun term, means water or water pans and invokes the life-giving force of culture. The choice of a |Xun term is also an ode to a language and a people driven to extinction in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. !Khwa ttu was opened to the public in October 2005 as a cultural and recreational centre. The original vision for the centre was to be a historical and heritage centre that would tell the story of the San from their earliest encounters with Europeans to the present day. However, due to undisclosed setbacks, !Khwa ttu was instead launched with an extensive photographic exhibition and several temporary exhibitions (Stahelin, 2006).

It was only in 2018 that the vision was realised with the launch of the !Khwa ttu San Heritage Centre (Low, 2021). Also known as the ‘Embassy of the San’, the Centre comprises of four buildings: the old farmhouse; old milking and sheep-shearing sheds; and a new addition, a building known as ‘Way of the San’. Also on the premises are three cottages and a luxury

tented camp, all of which can accommodate up to 16 guests (!Khwa ttu, 2023). The farmhouse houses the restaurant and curio shop, the milking shed the First People exhibition, and the sheep-shearing shed the Encounters Exhibition. According to the Centre's director, Dr Chris Low (2021: 117), the 'Way of the San' building

“...takes visitors through 24 hours of an idealised day in the Kalahari. Inside the building lies a God-given, healthy, natural environment that provides everything the San need to live well. There is water, food, fire and shelter, plus tools, clothing and medicines.”

Every year since its founding in 1999 the Centre hosts fifteen to twenty interns from across southern Africa. Dr Low notes however that due to logistical challenges, most San at !Khwa ttu will be from South Africa, Namibia and Botswana (Low, 2021: 18). Instead of just focusing on education and training in tourism, such as the Cape Town San crafts centre proposed by WIMSA in 1998, the Centre also provides education and training in life skills, literacy, computer operations, entrepreneurship and San cultural heritage at its ||Kabbo Academy. Along with the courses taken at the Academy, interns gain practical experience by working in the curio shop, restaurant, accommodation services, and conducting guided tours. This enables Bushman descendants and those identifying as Bushman to enter the working world or become entrepreneurs and build sustainable livelihoods, as well as to return home and teach their communities about their cultural heritage (Low, 2021; Staehelin, 2006).

Furthermore, it is “!Khwa ttu's mission to be a place where the San can themselves ask questions and come to terms with what has been said and written about them”, as such, the Centre is a “research-free zone” – the only research conducted at the Centre is that which is done by the San themselves (Staehelin, 2006: 166). The Centre, in collaboration with the Ubuntu Foundation, also has outreach initiatives through which it supports San basic and higher education and assisting San communities in the creation of their own digital heritage archival platforms (Low, 2021).

## Conclusion

Unless the #Khomani community becomes more accepting of the co-existence of multiple identities, i.e., ‘traditional’ and ‘Western’, the internal divide will forever stand in the way of not only successful tourism ventures, but also the improvement of the social, political and economic circumstances in the area. !Khwa ttu not being linked to one specific community and or language group therefore has a better opportunity of improving the livelihoods of those involved. As stated by Khwa ttu's general manager, “[the Centre's] interventions signal a growing transition from lived culture to culture as a source of [sustainable] economic livelihood” (Palmer, 2016). At !Khwa ttu, the San and their descendants are not forced and do not feel obligated to prove that they are ‘authentic Bushmen’ by traipsing around in traditional wear and emphasising physical features heralded for centuries as the hallmarks of authenticity. Instead, they are enabled and empowered to showcase their cultural hybridity – that they are a people with an incredibly unique, rare, and truly indigenous southern African culture and language, of which they are proud, but that they are also citizens of a modern world, able to contribute to South Africa's lively and diverse cultural tourism offering.

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