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Anguished Laments A Critical Discourse Analysis of Education, Representation, and Development of the San of Botswana

Jennifer Hays¹

Abstract: This article examines a text from a daily newspaper in Botswana about the situation of the San, the indigenous peoples of southern Africa, in the formal education system. Like indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, most San are experiencing drastic social change and extreme poverty as they struggle to adapt to settlement, modern life and a cash economy. The education system plays an important—and paradoxical—role in their difficulties. In this article I explore the relevance of discourse analysis and ethnography to understanding and addressing such problems of development and formal education. Discourse analysis is often conducted largely as a textual analysis of items such as news reports, interview transcripts, popular literature, or advertising. Recently several authors have suggested that anthropologists are well positioned to enrich textual analysis by combining it with the local grounding of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. Following these suggestions, this article integrates a textual analysis of the attached text with recent critiques of development discourse (including the role of academics in this discourse), my own fieldwork in Botswana, and other local sources. In doing so, I examine how social hierarchies are perpetuated in part through a variety of seemingly straightforward texts, and how, through combining an analysis of such texts with local fieldwork, we might better understand the cultural foundations of power and resistance.

*"San's Lament: San school children made an anguished cry for respect at a meeting held to let them voice their grievances"*²

Tebogo Mogale

Excerpts from Article in *The Botswana Gazette*, December 16, 1998

Teachers despise us, say San school children

SAN school children have blamed teachers in the Gantsi area, among others, for the high truancy and drop out rate in schools.

Verbal abuse by teachers (a), according to the students, result in many deciding to go back to herding stock in farms, in the case of boys, and gathering wild foods, in the case of girls.

In an open forum organized by the Remote Area Development Program and the Dutch Development Organization

students who are still at school and those who have dropped out were invited to talk about the problems that result in their leaving school early.

. . . The students said they are as proud of their race as any other people in the country "but we are just unfortunate because we are far from national resources."

Other problems they cited are lack of care, encouragement and love from their parents (b). The students said if a child chooses to leave school she/he is never questioned, even if it may be for drinking beer. They also complained of discrimination from other tribes such as the Bakgalagadi (c). Impatient teachers who are far from home and modern amenities take out their frustration on them, they alleged.

They said that during sports if a pupil is sick s/he is just forced to run anyway "because the teachers say we are used to running after wild animals." Bad attitudes on the part of other students, (d) especially those who are already ahead; fear of failing, (e) especially by older pupils who are in the same class as younger children; indulging in love affairs (f) and beer drinking (g) were also cited as some of the problems encountered by San children. Another crucial factor they named is the removal of girl children from school for marriage (h). This had sometimes resulted in children committing suicide.

Other problems mentioned were peer pressure (i) and beer drinking. The children also complained of generalised insults from other tribal groups. "They call us *Matshuba naga* (bush burners), which is not true." The students also said they do not want to be called *Matenyanteng* (remote area dwellers), saying this name implies that they are in another world. "These people should come up with a better name than *Matenyanteng*."

The Senior RADP assistant, Mr. Jan Xhari, who is also a San encouraged students to report the incidents to his office and also to move to the new settlements. "We are undergoing development and should be patient."

. . . He reminded the students that their development programme was once referred to as the Bushman Development programme and now they have moved a step forward and are grouped under the Remote Area Dwellers Programme. "One day we will just be referred to as the San."

. . . One of the government drivers said, "these people do not want to speak Setswana when it is appropriate to do so."

I. Introduction

Thinking of development in terms of discourse makes it possible to maintain the focus on domination...and at the same time to explore more fruitfully the conditions of possibility and the most pervasive effects of development (Escobar 1995:6).

In *Encountering Development*, the anthropologist Arturo Escobar discusses development as a discourse that "results in concrete practices of thinking and acting through which the Third World is produced" (1995:11). In his criticism of the ways in which Western academics and politicians have constructed the Third World, Escobar calls for a close examination by anthropologists of the ways that their discipline has been implicated in this discourse of inequality. He also suggests that we pay more attention to the strategies with which people resist the definitions and structures imposed upon them and struggle to "resignify and transform their reality" (17).

Drawing upon the work of Michel Foucault, Escobar suggests that we approach development as "the creation of a domain of thought and action" by analyzing:

the characteristics and interrelations of the three axes that define [development]: the forms of knowledge that refer to it and through which it comes into being and is elaborated into objects, concepts, theories, and the like; the system of power that regulates its practice; and the forms of subjectivity fostered by this discourse, those through which people come to recognize themselves as developed or underdeveloped (1995:10).

His analysis of development discourse provides a useful approach to thinking about problems with development on a global level. As the opening quote expresses, Escobar is also concerned with finding alternatives to the system which he criticizes, and he discusses the role that discourse analysis can play in this. As he himself points out, however, his geographically and historically broad approach is not designed for the suggestion of alternatives; in fact, he argues, to propose global alternatives would be to follow the same model of thought that he critiques. He argues that a search for alternatives must begin with local "ethnographies of the circulation of discourses and practices of modernity and development" (1995:223) and calls upon anthropologists to undertake this task.

Norman Fairclough (1992, 1995) provides a more fully articulated three-dimensional framework for discourse analysis that is roughly equivalent to Escobar's three axes. The three perspectives of Fairclough's framework are: the *text*, "the written or spoken language produced in a discursive event"; *discourse practice*, "the production, distribution and consumption of a text" and its interpretation; and *social practice*, the acting out of relations of power and domination which exist in the larger social sphere (1995:135). This approach is, in many ways, well suited for the kind of local analysis that Escobar advocates, and in this article, I follow Fairclough's analytical framework for textual analysis.

I would like to note some important differences between our data and approaches, however. I draw primarily upon Fairclough's 1995 book

Critical Discourse Analysis, which analyzes various discourses from Britain. The people taking part in the formation of the texts that Fairclough examines are usually drawing upon a shared linguistic history and a long tradition of certain forms of media. In Botswana, on the other hand, the journalistic style imitates that of England and has a relatively short tradition, and the language of much of the media is English, which is not the mother tongue of most of the producers or consumers of the text.³ In this article I point out areas where our analyses must take different approaches.

Before continuing, I wish to clarify my use of the word *discourse*. It is difficult to find a general definition, for the term is used to convey a variety of meanings from different disciplinary perspectives, and with varying implications. For example, as Fairclough (1992) points out, in the field of linguistics, the word *discourse* can be used: (1) to refer to extended samples of spoken dialogue, in contrast with written texts; (2) to refer to samples of either spoken or written language, with an emphasis on *interaction* between speaker and addressee (or writer and reader); or (3) to indicate different types of language as they are used in different social situations. In social theory and analysis, the term *discourse* often refers to different ways of structuring areas of knowledge and social practice. The understanding then is that discourses not only reflect or represent social realities, they also are an important part of both the construction of, and the challenges made to, the dominant order.

Fairclough draws together language analysis and social theory to examine how everyday linguistic usage plays into hegemonic struggles. Seeing language used as a social practice, he argues, allows us to get at the ways in which language is both socially shaped, and socially constitutive. We can approach the mutually supportive relationship between texts and social practice through an *interdiscursive* (or *intertextual*) analysis, which focuses upon the question of "which discursive practices are being drawn upon and in what combinations" (1995:189). Escobar also emphasizes this role of discourse, describing it as "the process through which social reality comes into being...the articulation of knowledge and power..."(1995:39). Understood in this way, discourse analysis becomes a locus of hegemonic struggle. By exposing hidden layers of meaning, then, we can pose a challenge to the existing hegemonic order.

Discourse analysis is often conducted largely as a textual analysis of items such as news reports, interview transcripts, popular literature, or advertising (e.g. Fairclough 1995). Pnina Motzafi-Haller (1998), Escobar (1995), and others have pointed out that anthropologists are well positioned to enrich textual analysis by combining it with the local grounding of long-term ethnographic fieldwork. There are many ways to approach such a task. Motzafi-Haller (1998), for example, looks at four "local moments" in Botswana and proceeds outward from each, tracing the multiple discourses through which individuals construct and understand the world around them. This kind of analysis, she argues, forces us to confront the "multiplicity of

discourses" with which people construct their everyday lives (1998:527). In doing so, she argues, we are also able to explore more deeply the cultural formations of power.

In this article, I examine a text from a daily newspaper in Botswana about the situation of the San in the formal education system. I integrate Escobar's critique of development discourse (including the role of academics), Fairclough's three-tiered analytical framework for integrating textual and social analysis, and Motzafi-Haller's emphasis on local events and the specific historical and social contexts in which they take place. My goal is to illustrate the ways that social hierarchies are perpetuated and contested through a multitude of mundane and seemingly straightforward texts, and to explore the relevance of discourse analysis and ethnography to understanding and addressing problems surrounding development and formal education. This analysis should be considered a preliminary one, and throughout this article I try to point to areas where additional research is needed to draw more definite conclusions.

II. Background

The attached text from *The Botswana Gazette*⁴ reports on an open forum in Ghanzi (in the west of Botswana) that was organized to allow San children to voice their complaints about the formal schools in that area. As I discuss below, there are many ways to understand the complex difficulties the San face in the formal education system. The primary problem identified in this particular text is that San children are dropping out of school.

The San⁵ are generally considered to be the indigenous⁶ people of Botswana and are often depicted, in both academic and popular literature, as nomadic hunter-gatherer peoples⁷. There are problems with this generalized understanding of San history and culture, some of which I touch on in Section III of this article. In any case, today very few (if any) San subsist solely through hunting and gathering; the majority have settled over the past fifty years as they have steadily lost access to almost all of their natural resources.

Like indigenous peoples in many parts of the world, most San are experiencing drastic social change and extreme poverty as they struggle to adapt to settlement, modern life and a cash economy. These difficulties clash starkly with the international image of Botswana, a country often described as Africa's model of developmental and economic "success" (Holm 1994). For many in Botswana, the aggressive development strategies pursued over recent years appear to be working, and there is little critical questioning of the model. In general, the attitude towards the San and their desire to retain their land and cultural practices is one of frustration and disdain, a sentiment that the following (1996) quote by Festus G. Mogae, Botswana's current president (then vice-president) serves to illustrate well:

How can you have a Stone Age creature continue to exist in

the age of computers? If the Bushmen want to survive, they must change, or otherwise, like the dodo, they will perish (Daley 1996:3).

Furthermore, in southern Africa, the institutionalized racism of apartheid South Africa and Southwest Africa (now Namibia) is a very recent memory. Botswana shares borders on three sides with these formerly apartheid countries and is thus particularly sensitive to the potential misuse of ethnic categories. In this political climate, the government of Botswana has been understandably reluctant to single out any one ethnic group as needing special attention. Ironically, this reaction to an unjust political system has in some cases resulted in a lack of attention to problems that are specific to the San. One place where this approach has had particularly harmful effects is in the education system.

The role of education

Education plays a paradoxical role in the struggles of the San for self-determination, as it does for other indigenous peoples around the world. Although the local specifics vary, indigenous peoples share certain characteristic experiences in formal education systems (see, for example: Christie 1987; Aikman 1995; Stairs 1996; Lipka 1998). These similarities include: (1) separation of children from their families while they attend schools (often boarding schools far from their communities); (2) where they are taught foreign systems of knowledge; (3) in a language or language variety other than their own; (4) by teachers from cultures that are different from, and dominant to, their own and (5) who use instruction and disciplinary styles that do not match (or even directly contradict) those of the students' home life. Probably as a result of some combination of the above factors and others, indigenous peoples also share an additional characteristic: (6) overall poor performance in formal education systems, accompanied by high dropout rates.

Also like other indigenous peoples, one of the biggest problems many San confront today is lack of access to decision-making processes that directly affect them. They find their land increasingly encroached upon, their resources diminishing, and are faced with the necessity of participation in a cash economy and modern institutions, but often are without the cultural background and experience to deal with them effectively. In order to gain control over their own development processes, the San need to have access to skills such as literacy and numeracy in the Western sense, fluency in the dominant language(s), and an understanding of the national, regional, and global economic and political systems in which they must now participate. Currently, in most parts of Botswana the government schools are the only places where the San have access to the language and literacy skills they need to enter the national and international discourses in which they could gain greater control over their future, and many San thus see participation in the

education system as crucial to their survival.

In practice, however, the barriers to their participation and success in the formal education system are great, and the experience of schooling often leads to disappointment. San students are characterized by a high dropout and failure rate, even in comparison to other minority populations. Simultaneously, the limited participation that they do have in schools often requires long periods of separation from parents and communities. This separation has exacerbated generation gaps and contributed to a breakdown in traditional forms of knowledge transmission. In many areas, parents express a sense of increasing loss of control over their children. The experience of San children in the education system of Botswana has thus largely been one of marginalization and failure on the one hand, and alienation from families and communities on the other.

Partially as a result of these dynamics, very few San individuals have been able to enter into the discourse of national and international politics as equals. The San as a group have also had little voice in the national media. The attached newspaper text might seem at first to be a vehicle for their voices; however it is important to also keep in mind that the San have had very little opportunity to write their *own* news articles, about themselves. While students are quoted in this text, the story is not written *by* a San, or even *for* the San.

Location

The forum described in the *Botswana Gazette* article took place in Ghanzi, an area that could be considered the center of San activism in Botswana. Local development and activist groups include the San organization First Peoples of the Kalahari (FPK) and the Botswana branch of the working group for Indigenous Minorities of Southern Africa (WIMSA). The non-government organization (NGO) Kuru Development Trust, located in the nearby village D'kar, has been an important presence in this area and has been involved with educational issues since 1990. These three organizations play a major role in the empowerment of San peoples regionally.

The work of Kuru in the Ghanzi district has included a mother-tongue preschool program since 1983, and in 1995 Willemien leRoux (leRoux 1995) conducted a survey of the effects of preschool on San children's performance in the government schools, for which she interviewed many local parents, students, and teachers. In this part of Botswana, then, the situation of San children in the government schools has received more attention and critique than in most other parts of the country, and people there are thus more sensitized to educational issues. Also in this area the San have sent their children to government schools for nearly three decades—much longer than in many other parts of Botswana—and San people in the Ghanzi district express more dissatisfaction with the schools than those in other places.⁸

International development organizations, especially Dutch and Norwegian, are also very active in this area, and they have conducted a great

amount of anthropological research. The intensity of international and national attention on the San in this particular locality makes it difficult to separate out the multiple "texts" which are being articulated in this report, as the discourses of these various actors have filtered into the discourses of the San themselves. Although the newspaper article is presented as a neutral report of the San children's complaints, the voices of many are interwoven in the newspaper text. These include the journalist, anthropologists, local development organizations and activist groups, international aid agencies, the Botswana government and the Batswana,⁹ and of course, the San themselves. I will address the implications of this multi-vocality in the following section.

III. Textual Analysis

Let us now turn to the text of the *Botswana Gazette* article. The textual features I focus on here include: the wording and phrasing choices of the journalist and editors; the organization of the text; and, finally, the names that are used to describe the people in the story, including the names that they use for themselves. I also refer to my own preliminary fieldwork¹⁰ and other local sources to add texture to the analysis.

As I noted earlier, an analysis of features such as word choices, phrasing, style and organization used in the attached text must thus be more cautious than a similar argument made by a native English speaker about news articles in her home country. Some Batswana speak English as a first language, but the vast majority learns it at school as a second language. Although many Batswana (including the journalist Mogale) are fluent in English, we cannot assume to share the same intuitive sense of the language. In addition, we must consider the relative shortness of the journalistic tradition in Botswana. Despite these inherent limitations, it is useful to point to a few examples of terms and phrasing choices that carry with them (and serve to reinforce) certain assumptions and biases about modernity, urbanity, development, and education, and about the San themselves.

Wording

We can begin with the title, which appears in large type on the front page of the *Botswana Gazette*: "San's Lament." The subject of the story is the school children, but the headline refers to the "San," thus generalizing the plight of the school children to the entire group (I discuss the term *San* itself below). The choice of the word *lament* is interesting, indicating an expression of sorrow or regret, a mourning for something lost. It does not imply a protest, a demand for change. There is a similar word choice in the subtitle: "San school children made an anguished cry for respect." Although the cry is "for respect" (a demand is expressed), the adjective *anguished* here again does not imply agency, but a suffering of extreme pain or abuse. Both

lament and *anguish* are words we generally apply to people who are victims, not to people who are actively and articulately negotiating their rights¹¹. Although these terms were likely chosen for their emotional content (and thus their "headline appeal" for their literate, mostly urban audience), one effect they have is to render the school children passive in the process of articulating their complaints.

This expression of passivity is repeated in other ways in the text. For example, under the headline, we see that this meeting was "*held to let them voice their grievances.*" They did not hold the meeting themselves; it was held for them. They *were permitted* by someone else to speak; the implication is that they do not have the authority by themselves to voice their opinions. Then, towards the end of the text, the journalist reports a response to the claims given by one of the RADP officers, Mr. Xhari (who is also identified as a San). He suggests that to overcome their problems the students should move to the new settlements, adding that they are "*undergoing development and should be patient.*" Development is thus not something which the San have an active role in, but something which is happening *to* them. By encouraging them to move to the settlements, he is actively promoting the government policy of assimilation, and the fact that this suggestion is presented as coming directly from the mouth of a San man helps to underscore the "common-sense" nature of his remarks.

Organization of text

The text begins with a summary of what the author has chosen as the main point: that San school children blame their teachers for their own lack of participation in the school system. The setting is described, and the San children are quoted. The students' quotes, however, are attributed to an anonymous group rather than to individuals.¹² It is likely that the journalist, Mogale, simply was not able to get the names of all of the individual students. One effect of this plural anonymity, however, is to create the impression that all of the San schoolchildren, regardless of age, gender, linguistic group, and individual and family background, have the same experiences and opinions. This discursive practice draws upon a long tradition in academic writing and in the national and international media of essentializing this group, the indigenous peoples of southern Africa (see section on *names*, below).

Although, as discussed above, the San are rendered passive in their representation and in their development processes, they are not excused from being responsible for the multiple social problems of their communities, including the apparent failure of San children to consistently attend school. The primary reason given is a complaint against the teachers, but in the sixth paragraph, Mogale begins to list the problems that were cited by the students other than abuse by teachers (a), including:

- b. lack of care, encouragement and love from their parents,
- c. discrimination from other tribes (noted twice)

- d. bad attitudes on the part of other students
- e. fear of failing
- f. indulging in love affairs
- g. drinking (referred to three times)
- h. removal of girl children from school for marriage
- i. peer pressure

All but one of these (c) places the blame on the students themselves (d, e, f, g, i), their parents (b) and/or cultural practices (h).

This listing of a whole host of problems in an news story about the San and education reflects the national discourse surrounding this topic; any discussion of the San and problems with school must include a recitation of a litany of "problems". Some of the most common references are to alcohol, pregnancy, and an inability to get along with other ethnic groups. The claim that San parents do not care about or understand the value of education (as expressed in (b) above)—and thus are in large part responsible for the lack of their children's participation—is frequently heard from teachers, administrators, and government officials in Botswana (leRoux 1995; personal field notes).

In contrast, I have never spoken with a San parent who said that it was *not* important for their children to go to school. The following account of a Ju/'hoan¹³ father from the village of Dobe provides an example of the way that discourse feeds into social practice:

When asked why parents do not go to PTA meetings, D said that the school sends notes home with their children the day before the meeting. (Assuming there is someone to read the note) they have to organize the donkeys and start off before dawn the following morning to travel the 20 kilometers from the village to the school in Xangwa. D said that he had done this once and arrived to be told he was too late, the meeting just finished, and that he should just turn around and go back home. He never went again (personal field notes 1999).

Far from "not caring," this father made a tremendous effort merely to get to the school. However, the sentiment that San parents do not understand the importance of schooling is repeated so often among teachers and other school officials in Botswana that it has become a sort of "common-sense" assumption. In this light the teachers probably saw his tardiness as evidence that he did not care about the meeting. The fact that in the *Botswana Gazette* article this sentiment is described as coming from San students themselves helps to illustrate how this complex cycle can take place, and also the difficulty of sorting out the various voices in the text.

Wedge in between this list of problems is another reference to the teachers' attitudes towards San students, only here it is qualified: "*impatient*

teachers *who are far away from home and modern amenities* take out their *frustration* on them [the students]." The teachers are impatient and frustrated, and these emotions are justified, because the teachers are living in hard conditions. Most teachers in rural areas do not choose to go there, but are assigned to such areas on two-year posts. In most cases, their spouse and children (if they have them) do not go with them. Although they are given higher pay, such positions are usually seen as undesirable. Among teachers posted in remote areas, it is commonly accepted that the San are "the most difficult tribe¹⁴ in Botswana" (personal field notes 1998, 1999). While no teachers are directly quoted in the text, their perspective seems to be conveyed in the presentation of the San's problems at the school, and also in the sympathetic portrayal of their own difficulties.

Interestingly, a discussion of *linguistic* differences only rarely makes it into this discourse about the problems that San children have in school, even though most San children have a mother tongue other than Setswana (the language in which they start school). The only reference to language in this text is the comment by the bus driver in the very last paragraph; "these people do not want to speak Setswana when it is appropriate to do so." At the very least this quote provides a coincidental metaphor for the role of language in the discourse. Language is noted (almost as an afterthought) as the one sure sign of the failure of the San to assimilate fully into the schools, development processes, and culture of Botswana.

Names

The issues of agency and self-determination can also be explored through the various names employed in the newspaper article to talk about the San. A very important and complicated issue for the indigenous people of Botswana is the names used to refer to them as a regional group, both by themselves and by outsiders. It is only recently that a consciousness of being part of a larger grouping or organization—and thus the need to refer to themselves as such—has begun to emerge; historically the peoples now classified by these broad terms called themselves by their group names, such as *Ncoakhoe*, *Ju' hoansi*, and *!Xu* (among others). All of the general terms in use today, including *San*, *Bushman* and *Basarwa*¹⁵ are foreign terms from European, Bantu, or Khoi languages, and have derogatory origins¹⁶.

The issue of representation is especially poignant for the San, whose cultures, subsistence patterns, physical features, and languages, among other characteristics, have been examined and described by Westerners for centuries. The San themselves have had very little control over their representation in the international media, academic journals, and, more recently, the national press of Botswana. Today, with the dramatic increase in availability of various forms of communication and transportation, both globally and in Botswana, the San are in greater contact than ever before with other populations. The need for self-representation is thus taking on a much greater urgency as the San struggle to find their voice in national and

international arenas.

As the San gain organizational strength and try to find their voice in national and global politics, whose discourse are they going to use to talk about themselves? On the one hand, they want and need to represent themselves and their interests. On the other, it is frequently the "knowledge" of Western social scientists which is accepted in many discourse arenas as somehow more valid, or at least necessary to legitimize the voices of the San themselves.

Anthropologists' words have long been taken as the "authority" on San. One place that the influence of anthropologists is particularly clear is in the use of the term *San* throughout this text. Although anthropologists today are questioning their use of—or just not using—the term *San* in their work (Biesele 1995; Hudelson 1993; Motzafi-Haller 1994; Taylor 1998), the academic prestige associated with the term still permeates much of the discourse. In *Community Owned Development*, Braam leRoux notes that:

The words "San" and "Bushman" are unknown to the people themselves, who prefer to be called by their own group names, for example Ncoakhoe for the Naro. At a recent meeting of WIMSA, however, representatives from various groups agreed to accept the anthropological term "San" as an interim umbrella name (leRoux, B. 1998:1).

The San have long been the recipients of intense anthropological focus (see, for example, Hudelson, 1995). In recent years, there has been criticism of the way in which anthropological portrayals of the San have inadvertently led to an increase in discrimination against them by the Botswana government (Wilmsen 1989; Hitchcock and Holm 1993). With this in mind, the fact that anthropologists' definitions of, and labels for, a people are so widely accepted calls for responsibility and careful consideration of the ways in which we choose to present our work.

In the newspaper text, we see the term *San* used seven times. It is used as an adjective or noun assigned to them by the journalist, "San school children" as in the first sentence. Here, the use of *San* (traditional in newspapers in Botswana) may reflect the academic usage of the term *San*, which, although historically not used by indigenous groups to refer to themselves, is thought by many non-San to be the most "correct" term. The term also appears as a noun in the quotes attributed to the students, and to the RADP officer, who is himself a San, and who says "one day we will just be referred to as the San." He thus cites "San" as the ideal, real name for his people (as opposed to Bushman or Remote Area Dweller [RAD]). One that is clear from this statement is the power of *naming*; Mr. Xhali cites the changes in the names used to refer to his people as a sort of progress. Interestingly the name he chooses to promote is not the name of his own group, but the anthropological term.

Nowhere in this text is the name *Ncoakhwe* (which the majority of the San people in this area use to refer to themselves) or the name of any other group mentioned. While this omission could be attributed to a simple oversight on the part of Mogale, it has deeper implications in terms of discursive and social practices. In the national and international political discourses, and in the media, there seems to be a need for a term to refer to the larger grouping of people, the "indigenous peoples" of Southern Africa. Despite the fact that this grouping (whether it is labeled Bushman, Basarwa, or San) is based on the descriptions of people by outsiders, and has, until recently, had no real social significance for the "San" peoples themselves, it has come to be seen as a necessary, and objective, category.

Les Field describes this sort of essentialism as "the entrenched anthropological predilection...for describing the ethnic identification of a particular group of people in terms of a set of essences" (1999:194). Although, he notes, anthropologists today have largely abandoned this approach in favor of social constructionism, essentialism "retains its firmest grip and perhaps makes its last stand in the realm of anthropology's approach to indigenous peoples" (*ibid.*). While criticism of such essentialism is deserved, there is also a good argument to be made for the necessity of such overarching categories—and thus names for them—to empower and make louder the voices of the many groups of people who have had similar historical experiences. These shared encounters—with colonialism, development, and education—are relevant similarities, and the struggle to cope with them, or to resist them, is one which many feel would be most effective as a larger group, or a regional network. One way we could look at this category, then, is as a statement about the numbers of people necessary for a group of people to have a voice in national, regional, and international politics.

Whichever view one takes, however, it is important not to lose sight of the fact that these categories and names are embedded within a discourse in which the participating parties are not on equal grounds. Edwin Wilmsen notes that:

Primitive, savage, hunter-gatherer, forager, Bushman, Basarwa, San; the names have changed, their predicates and the premises from which these are drawn retain their negation of historically constructed objects. An analytical discourse that unquestioningly accepted these homogenizing categories, appropriate only to the needs of its own moment, has left us nothing but a stereotype of its subject (Wilmsen 1989:32).

Towards the end of the text, there is an interesting quote attributed to the San students: "these people should come up with a better name than *Matenyanateng*."¹⁷ The criticism here is *not* that outsiders are choosing the terms used to refer to the students and their families, but that these outsiders

have not chosen an *appropriate* name. Along with *Matshuba naga*,¹⁸ *Matenyanteng* is rejected by the San students in the text, who cite these references as insults and question their veracity. These terms are not inherently insulting, but are references to cultural practices and residence patterns that differ from the accepted ideals of Batswana culture. Similarly with the complaint that the teachers tell students that they are "used to running after wild animals" as a way to make them participate in sports, we see that the focus of the complaint is not that the student is forced to run while sick, but that the teacher justifies it with a reference to a subsistence practice which is today looked down upon, and is thus "belittling and insulting". Rather than noting that cultural practices such as subsistence hunting are unfairly denigrated, they express the opinion that they do not like to be associated with this culture. The students' objection to these terms is not an objection to a negative portrayal of their culture or their history, but rather a rejection of the validity of the terms itself; in effect, a rejection of the culture and history it implies.

The request for a "better name than *Matenyanteng*," could be interpreted as a request for the prestige groups to define them as something less like the "essentialized" version of the San. Interestingly, however, although the students reject the term, they express the opinion that they *are* "far from national resources," and that this remoteness is their main problem (which would seem to justify their label as "remote dwellers"). Here, rather than questioning the perspective from which one is "remote", they adopt the urban bias of the term in their own discourse about their economic problems. In doing so they also define "resources" as things that exist elsewhere (probably referring to things like electricity, water, and wage jobs). This definition does not question their present lack of access to those things that formerly were their primary resources (such as land, game and water) or that could be resources (such as control over local tourism).

One interpretation of the students' rejection of these terms for themselves and characterizations of their culture is that it both reflects and becomes a part of the national and international discourse on development. In this discourse, the culture, history, and subsistence patterns of the San students are assumed to be backwards and undesirable, and the primary goal is assimilation and modernization. This national discourse, in turn, reflects in many ways the development discourse that was prevalent in the West in the 1950s, in which "economic progress" was portrayed as an ideal that required certain sacrifices, as described in a statement from the United Nations Department of Social and Economic Affairs: "Ancient philosophies have to be scrapped; old social institutions have to disintegrate; bonds of caste, creed and race have to burst..." (quoted in Escobar 1995:3).

Western discourses such as these have combined with local discourses and social hierarchies in specific ways to produce certain assumptions about development, education and lifestyle, which come to be seen as "common sense" and are thus rarely questioned.

IV. Conclusion

The subaltern do in fact speak, even if the audibility of their voices in the circles where 'the West' is reflected upon and theorized is tenuous at best... (Escobar 1995:23).

So where are the voices of the San in this text? Like Escobar, Fairclough, and Motzafi-Haller, I am concerned with the ways in which hegemony is both reinforced and *contested* in public discourse. I do not wish to argue that their voice is the equivalent of that of the ventriloquist's dummy, that they are merely 'spoken through' by the various dominant cultures with whom they are in contact, that they have nothing real to say for themselves. There was a meeting, and clearly the San children were there, voicing their opinions. But there are several layers in between us and them. There is the journalist, and the editors of the newspaper, for whom she wrote the story. There are the Dutch development workers who organized the meeting, and the teachers, some of whom were almost certainly also there. There was probably at least one translation, from Setswana to English. We do not know, in fact, how well this piece reflects the words and perspectives of the students.

In this sense, this text serves to uphold the existing structures where the San are largely denied the right to determine their own futures or to control of their own representation. The San *are* agents in their own lives and circumstances; they *are* making strategic decisions about how to confront the drastic social changes that they face. However, the *Botswana Gazette* article provides a glimpse into two of the major obstacles to full agency for San today. The first is a lack of access to the information they need to make their own, informed political, economic, and social decisions, as individuals and as groups. The second is lack of an entry into the discourse which defines them as backwards, undeveloped, uneducated—problematic.

The above analysis is far from exhaustive; there are many more angles and issues that may be addressed. Here I have primarily focused on a textual analysis. A more extensive examination would entail a closer look at the production and consumption of news articles in Botswana, and the readership of the *Botswana Gazette* in particular. Other national discourses could be addressed, such as those surrounding development projects and education policy, and their implementation at the local level. Discourses of other institutions, such as museums or the tourist industry, are also relevant. Most important, however, is the necessity of a more penetrating analysis of what the San themselves are saying about these issues and the ways that they are also, through discourse, both affirming and contesting the existing hegemony.

Although limited, the present analysis puts me, as the author of this article, in an interesting position. I have depicted as largely "passive" the group of people whom I am calling *San*, whom I have defined according to an essential set of characteristics. Is it possible to circumvent this representational paradox? There is no easy way out of the inequality inherent in our relationship as Western academics (or as Westerners in general) to the people like the San, whom we have essentialized for so long. Following Escobar, Fairclough, Motzafi-Haller and others, however, I am viewing such hegemonies as largely constructed and upheld through discourse. It is then through an analysis of discourse that we can begin to challenge them.

In addition, it is through using our greater access to certain discourses—such as those of academia, development, or the media—to find ways to help people like the San to have *their* voices heard that our work can be of the most use to them. In order for this to occur we need to conduct more local ethnographies to learn what people like the San themselves are saying about education, development and other issues, as individuals and as communities, and how they might enter more fully into the discourses of their own development.

Notes

¹ This article was originally written for a Critical Discourse Analysis class taught by James Collins at the University at Albany, SUNY during the Spring semester of 1999, and I would like to thank him for his direction and advice in formulating the argument presented here. I would also like to acknowledge the feedback I received from John Metzler, Tim Carmichael and Ghislaine Lydon at Michigan State University, and from Paul Kaczmarczyk. This paper has benefited substantially from the suggestions of all of these individuals.

² The following are excerpts from "San's Lament," *The Botswana Gazette* (December 16, 1998).

³ As I do not have enough material to adequately analyze the production processes of Botswana's newspapers, or the development of their own journalistic tradition, in this article, I will not be addressing these issues of post-colonial European influence in the media. These are important omissions, which I hope to follow up in the future.

⁴ A popular daily newspaper that is widely read in Botswana, produced in the capital, Gaborone.

⁵ It was difficult to decide the best term to use in this article. For example, the people who in the Botswana Gazette article are called *San*, call themselves *Ncoakhwe*, and I could also have used this name for them. Although more correct in some ways, this would have been problematic in other ways, for not everyone in this part of Botswana who might be called *San* is *Ncoakhwe*.

In many places the term *Ncoakhwe* would have led to confusion about exactly whom I was referring to. In the end, I decided to use *San* primarily for clarity's sake. I do wish to acknowledge that there are problems with this name and category, however. These issues of naming are discussed in more depth in Section III.

⁶ The definition "indigenous" is problematic in Africa. Following Colchester (1993), as I use it the word implies: "people with strong ties to their lands, who have been in their region since before colonisation, [are] now dominated by other peoples from whom their cultures were markedly different and who identify themselves as 'indigenous'." This was the meaning agreed upon at the 1994 conference on Indigenous Peoples in Africa (Veber and Waehele 1994).

⁷ As Wilmsen (1990), Motzafi-Haller (1998) and others have pointed out, the definition of a society as "hunter-gatherer" implies a limited view of the history, social contact and cultural flexibility of the people described. Although we should be consciously questioning such essentializations, it is possible also to identify certain characteristics that are shared by most of the people we are including in the category "San." My generalizations should be understood in this light.

⁸ There is no one explanation for this discontent, but it is likely that over time parents and students have become pessimistic as they have seen that their expectations have not been realized.

⁹ *Batswana* is the Setswana term for the people who make up the majority of Botswana's citizens; although historically it refers to a specific group of people, today many use it to mean simply a "citizen of Botswana".

¹⁰ Conducted from February through April 1998, and in January 1999.

¹¹ I would like to point out that not all English speakers will agree on the sentiments evoked by these particular words; for this reason such analyses are particularly open to criticism. However I suggest that such word choices be viewed in a larger context and considered as playing a part - if only a small one - in perpetuating the assumptions on which cultural biases are often based.

¹² Note that the one San in the text who is referred to by name is Mr. Khari, the Senior RADP assistant who advocates the settlement and development for San communities.

¹³ The *Ju'hoansi* are a San group who reside primarily in northwest Botswana and northeast Namibia. *Ju'hoan* is the form used when describing an individual who belongs to this group.

¹⁴ Although the term "ethnic group" is generally preferred in academic discourse, "tribe" is commonly used in Botswana, to mean roughly the same thing.

¹⁵ *Bushman* and *Basarwa* are alternative terms to *San* commonly used in Namibia and Botswana, respectively. These terms are understood by many as pejorative; however in both countries they are used by some people to refer to themselves. As Megan Bieseke reports about 1991 *Ju'hoan* community meeting in Namibia, there are varying opinions about the appropriateness of

the term *Bushman*. However, she notes about the term *San* that "many people at the meeting had heard of it, but knew it has a pejorative connotation in Nama, the language from which it comes. No one advocated its use..." (Biesele 1993, author's note). This is another example of the complications involved in deciding which term is the best to use in academic writing.

¹⁶ It is commonly thought that the term *San* comes from the word for "vagabond" that khoikhoi used to refer to foragers when the Dutch landed at the Cape.

¹⁷ "One who lives in the remote areas"

¹⁸ "Burner of the veld." The San in many areas used to burn the land to promote new growth, in order to attract game; this practice, although no longer done, is generally misunderstood by the Batswana and often referred to disparagingly.

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