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**‘Being San’ in Platfontein: Poverty, Landscape, Development
and Cultural Heritage**

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Abstract

As people are relocated, dispossessed of land, or experience the altered landscapes of modernity, so their way of life, values, beliefs and understandings are transformed. For the !Kun and Khwe people living on Platfontein this has been an ongoing process. Platfontein, a dry, flat piece of land near Kimberly in the Northern Cape, was purchased for the Kun and Khwe through the provision of a government grant in 1997. They took permanent residence there in government-built housing in December 2003. Prior to this they had had numerous experiences of relocation and strife, through a long-term involvement with the SADF that brought them from the Omega army base in Namibia, to a time of uncertainty in the tent town of Schmitsdrift, to their current settlement on Platfontein. The dry barren landscape of Platfontein suggests a very different way of life from that of hunter-gathering in Angola and Namibia. In the semi-urban context of Platfontein, basic sustenance and entry into the job market are emphasized, and this brings about changes in people's way of life and understandings, as well as in how they relate to each other and the landscape. In this context, there are certain tensions and contradictions that underlie the work of social development and cultural heritage that are the mandates of SASI (South African San Institute) in Platfontein. It is essential that projects initiated by NGOs like SASI give cognizance to the complexities of people's lives, histories and storylines. Without this, people's experiences and multifaceted stories are inevitably sidelined to create essentialist narratives that meet the imaginings of tourists and sponsors. There is no doubt that SASI works from an intention of bringing about positive transformation in Platfontein, and has done useful work in the community. The essentialist discourse of the 'indigenous', however, is a ready temptation for NGOs and the groups they represent to adopt, as it is politically expedient to do so in order to gain access to land and resources. This needs to be challenged at the level of policy so that access to geographical space or political power does not necessitate a denial of history or complexity.

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about 'Being San' in Platfontein

Platfontein, a farm a few kilometers outside of Kimberly, is where the !Kun and Khwe currently reside in state-built housing. After a prolonged period of uncertainty in the tent town of Schmitsdrift, the provision of a substantial government grant enabled Platfontein to be purchased for the !Kun and Khwe in 1997, although they only took permanent residence there in December 2003. Platfontein is a large flat, dry and barren piece of land, close to the urban center of Kimberly. What does it mean to 'be San' in this environment? How do people's experiences of change and dislocation alter their identities and transform their relationships with each other and the world around them?

Where people have been dispossessed of land, and as landscapes are irrevocably altered, there is arguably a co-commitment change in their way of life, their knowledge, skills, values and beliefs (see Ingold, 2001; Nadasdy, 2003). The !Kun and Khwe have been relocated many times and have had numerous experiences of upheaval and change up until their eventual settlement in Platfontein. In Platfontein, hunter-gathering is denied by the landscape, and people are faced with semi-urban poverty, which brings with it particular issues and challenges. Amongst these are social disruption, alcoholism, HIV/AIDS and crime, as well as an over-arching concern with basic sustenance - which sees !Kun and Khwe women searching for food and clothing in the nearby rubbish dumps.

This thesis contributes to the existing San literature by drawing together critiques of cultural heritage with an understanding of how culture and landscape are inextricably linked. Looking at the situation of the =Khomani San, Robins (2001) has made a strong argument that in establishing essentialist identities, NGOs and local and national government set up a politics of identity that plays out in often undesirable ways; for example provoking friction and polarization within the community as people vie for

resources and NGO and donor attention. White (1999) has made a similar argument in exploring how the San come to perform culture in cultural tourism projects.

However, identities are not solely constructed by those in positions of power. A factor that is underplayed in debates about San cultural heritage is people's experience of the landscapes they live in, particularly within the rapidly changing environments of modernity. Not only do changing landscapes modify identities and how people see themselves: they also provoke significant changes in how people live and relate. This thesis seeks to contribute to the existing body of San literature by exploring how people's experiences of relocation and changing landscapes irrevocably alters identity, and changes their way of life. Recognising the salience of landscape in altering people's identities, it becomes untenable then to assert an essentialist identity based on what it means to be an 'authentic San'.

The !Kun and Khwe are a people with a complex history, who have had many experiences of dislocation, movement and change, all of which inform their heterogeneous subjectivities. This recognition of their dynamic history, and of their current life circumstances in Platfontein, quickly overturns any romantic preconceptions of the !Kun and Khwe as 'noble and primordial San'. In fact, far from hunter-gathering, the !Kun and Khwe who currently reside in Platfontein were dependent for over four decades on military employment, before the so-called 'bushman' battalion was disbanded. Why then do NGOs and others working with 'indigenous' minorities like the 'San' fall back on asserting essentialist identities in their mediations with the public, sponsors and the state? (Hodgson, 2002a; Hodgson 2002b; Robins, 2001; Roué, 2003a).

Much current theorizing around the San contests what is increasingly seen to be the communities' strategic embrace of a hunter-gather identity, in the light of escalating international attention and donor funding that is swayed by romantic visions of primordial 'first people (Robins, 2001; Sharp & Boonzaier, 1994; White, 1995). San people's efforts to assert an indigenous identity have been referred to alternatively as "inventive manipulation of the global cultural economy" (White, 1995: 55), "strategic

essentialism” within “the politics of authenticity” (Robins, 2001: 6), and as a “carefully controlled performance” (Sharp and Boonzaier, 1994: 405).

Sharp and Boonzaier’s call to relinquish the rigid emphasis on notions of authentic identity and on ethnic purity is useful: “authenticity – the question of being the real Nama – is not an absolute issue. It is a relative one subordinate to the variables of time, place and audience...too tight a hold on a parochial identity may lead to political and social marginalisation...and may confer a new minority status on those who proclaim it too fiercely” (Sharp and Boonzaier, 1994: 413).

The numerous changes and relocations the Kun and Khwe have experienced over the past 45 years, their long-term association with the South African military, and their current transition into RDP housing in Platfontein where they are being co-opted into wage labour all make more complex their identities as San and challenge the San stereotype.

People in Platfontein have their own experiences and ideas of what it means to ‘be San’, or !Kun and Khwe. For many these are ‘lived’ rather than talked about, are dynamic and flexible, and depend on where they are positioned at any given moment. Their shared storylines and experiences of dispossession; of life in the army; of ongoing struggle; of waiting for change; and of poverty and strife; all impact on how the !Kun and Khwe negotiate their complex subjectivities as “San’ speaking people.

In their increasing negotiations with states and other organizations, however, their identities are redefined and solidified. How the !Kun and Khwe, who contemporarily identify themselves as ‘San’, come to define and present themselves as ‘San’ to the outside world is strongly influenced by their interactions with local and national structures of government, NGOs and other organizations who come in with their own ideas about ‘San-ness’ (Robins, 2001).

Hohmann (2007: 2-3) writes that “the different population groups of Southern Africa nowadays summarized by the term San have arguably not been existing until recently as a

distinctive and cohesive group...these groups have however been subsumed under a common label...Global actors working for indigenous groups, NGOs and donor organizations on the one hand emphasize the San's marginalisation and discrimination, but on the other hand stress the survival of traditional values and structures among them. Just like the common ethnic label 'San' the label indigenous is put to use in order to achieve cultural and political emancipation, greater security of land tenure and access to resources." As Hohman (ibid.) stresses, "labeling local communities as 'indigenous' qualifies San to be constant subjects of anthropo-tourism and of development projects geared towards ethnic minorities."

Recognizing the salience of their positions as mediators and cultural brokers (Roué, 2003a, 2003b), NGOs should give cognizance to narratives that encompass the full complexity of the local groups they claim to represent. The essentialist discourse of the 'indigenous' obscures the complex histories, subjectivities and life circumstances of people like the !Kun and Khwe, as well as the tensions of local politics and dynamics. People contemporarily identified as 'San' should not have to deny history in order to occupy geographical space or to lay claim to political power only through asserting a fixed and essentialist 'indigenous' identity.

Worldwide there has been a recognition of the inadequacy of mainstream development models. Why then do NGOs persist with working within these particular paradigms? Projects and initiatives that consider the particular dynamics of place and the real needs of the people that live there are much needed (Kingsnorth, 1994). In Platfontein, where the !Kun and Khwe are faced with semi-urban poverty and an on-going dependence on SASI and the state, an openness to exploring alternatives to mainstream models of development and cultural heritage seems pivotal.

This thesis explores the role of SASI in implementing models of development and cultural heritage in Platfontein, and critiques the focus on mainstream development models. At the same time there is a difficulty in envisioning alternative solutions in a context like Platfontein where the landscape does not really support sustainability: where

years and dependency and numerous relocations and disruptions have resulted in feelings of apathy and disempowerment within the community itself, and where the younger generations tend to fetishise Western models of consumerism and wage labour.

In developing my argument, chapter one describes the history of the !Kun and Khwe people. It describes their entry into the South African defense force, and their numerous relocations, from Angola and Namibia, to Schmitsdrift, to their final settlement in Platfontein. These are a people with a dynamic and complex history that has significantly altered their way of life. Further, the !Kun and Khwe's long-term association with SADF and other agencies of bureaucracy has arguably influenced how they come to see themselves as 'San', as has their reputation as 'bushman soldiers' (Uys, 1993a.). There is a parallel between the !Kun and Khwe's dependency on structures of the army, and their ongoing dependency on SASI and the state.

Chapter two is an introduction to everyday life in Platfontein. I draw on the imagery of the state disrepair of the road into Platfontein as a metaphor for the uncertainties and tensions of life in Platfontein itself. Issues of poverty, dependency, assimilation and development that emerge in this chapter form the basis for discussions in Chapters three and four.

Chapter three engages with the question of what it means to 'be San' in Platfontein. I argue for a relational approach that recognizes culture as the skills, knowledge, beliefs and ways of life that develop in relation to a particular environment or landscape (Ingold, 2001; Nadasdy, 2003). When landscapes are fundamentally altered or when people are dispossessed of land there is a concomitant change in their way of life, values, skills and understandings. The semi-urban landscape of Platfontein suggests a very different way of life from that of hunter-gathering in Namibia or Angola.

Chapter four engages with issues that emerge around SASI's work as an NGO in Platfontein - particularly to do with the challenges of poverty, development and dependency. I elucidate some of the tensions that emerge through SASI's mandate to do

social development work in Platfontein. In Platfontein, many !Kun and Khwe women journey regularly to the rubbish dumps to collect food and other necessities. I explore the implications of this, and the issues of poverty and dependency that it evokes. The limitations of the development paradigm are very apparent in the context of Platfontein.

Chapter five focuses on issues of cultural heritage work in the context of Platfontein. I argue that when the discourses of cultural heritage and development are brought together, there is an uncomfortable tension that needs to be unraveled. In engaging with cultural heritage work in a context like Platfontein, it is vital that NGOs like SASI proceed with great sensitivity to ensure that the complexities of local dynamics and people's histories and storylines are not obscured, in order to create essentialist narratives that meet the imaginings of tourists and sponsors alike.

To conclude, it is important that people are empowered to envision and share their own intricate stories of who they are and where they have come from. Being given access to geographical space or to political power should not come at the cost of a denial of history or of complexity, as has tended to be the case in interactions between 'indigenous' groups, NGOs and the state (Hodgson, 2002a; Hodgson 2002b; Robins, 2001; Roué 2003a, 2003b). What are the alternatives to mainstream development in a context like Platfontein?

Fieldwork Methodology

This dissertation is based on six weeks of fieldwork that took place in the months of February and March 2007 in and around Platfontein. My access to the field came through Marlene Winburg, who had worked with the !Kun and Khwe in Schmitsdrift and Platfontein for over a decade, facilitating narrative and art-based workshops, and recording the stories and oral history of the !Kun and Khwe. She has authored a book documenting the art, craftwork and stories of Platfontein's artists (Winburg, 2001). Marlene prepared me for my time in the field, and kindly put me in touch with SASI, who facilitated my entry into Platfontein. The SASI staff, particularly Riette and

Marokko, were most helpful in introducing me into Platfontein, and in giving me a sense of the geographical layout and local dynamics of the place.

My fieldwork focused on the experiences and lives of the !Kun and Khwe speakers who had settled permanently in Platfontein. I recognized, however, as my time in the field progressed, that as an NGO, the work that SASI does in Platfontein, and its position as mediator between !Kun and Khwe and the outside world, is pivotal. I spent time in the Platfontein SASI office, conversing with staff members and observing daily happenings. I also conducted and recorded semi-structured interviews with some of the SASI staff members. Meryl-Joy Wildschut, SASI's Director in Platfontein and Chris Mpesi, the Programme Director of the Platfontein office, both spoke eloquently about local dynamics; projects that SASI had initiated in Platfontein; and SASI's role and intentions in working with the !Kun and Khwe.

Participation and 'being present'

I adopted a participatory research method, participating and being present in the daily lives of the people with whom I worked. I was concerned with drawing on insights gained through conversations and experiences in the field to develop my research question in an organic and grounded way. Having never been to Platfontein, I was aware that it was impossible to envisage a concrete research focus before entering into the field. Doing so would compromise the integrity of my study, as a participatory approach assumes that the concerns of the participants, as well as the researcher, guide the research process. I allowed my initial interests to guide me, but developed a more solid research focus through observations, interactions and conversations that took place in the field.

It was literally being present in people's lives that enabled me to develop relationships and to begin to work with and answer emergent questions. Some days were spent just walking through Platfontein, visiting friends and meeting new people along the way, which enabled me to gradually develop friendships and to be invited into people's homes and lives. I was concerned with developing relationships over time, building trust and a

sense and familiarity. Through being fully present in the field as an open and active participant, and through developing comfortable relationships overtime, I was given entry into local happenings and events.

I sat with friends and watched women bead and older men make spears and work with their hands. . I played with children and babies. I was invited to join people I knew on pension day as they chatted together and drank Thombo, the local brew – and was introduced to many new faces in this way. I was invited to a late night healing event, by two elderly men who I had gotten to know over time. I spent much time with an elderly healer woman, Meneputo, who spontaneously drew me a map of Platfontein in the sand. I was present as people arrived to request healings or to ask her for specific advice about pregnancy or other issues. She spoke no English or Afrikaans. Sometimes she would gesture with her hands. Other times we sat in silence. When a translator was present, she spoke about her frustrations at living in Platfontein – the noise and the fighting. She noted that younger people were rarely interested in learning about healing. This gave me a sense of how Platfontein as a landscape was altering generational relationships, which I elucidate in Chapter 4. In this way I slowly developed relationships that allowed me to access insights that informed my writing.

Walking the Land

I took three Khwe elders out on a couple of day trips to Schmitsdrift and Barkley-West. We walked the land together and I witnessed the way they experienced the comparatively lush environment - touching, tasting, smelling and commenting on all the plant life – excited at having more freedom to walk and explore. This was very different from my experience of walking through Platfontein with others, where the barren landscape was more conducive the finding the next drink, or chatting with one’s neighbors, than it was to wandering and engaging with the surroundings. This gave me a sense of how Platfontein as a landscape alters the way people experience themselves and the world around them (Ingold, 2001). Walking the land became a valuable tool (Spiegel, 2000), giving me a sense of how people experience the landscapes within which they live.

Perhaps, because I walked through Platfontein on foot, and took time to visit and establish relationships with people, my presence was more readily accepted - although not without curiosity and speculation about my intentions and purpose. As a 29-year old, educated, white middle-class woman from Cape Town there to do ethnography, I could never claim insider status, and my presence would inevitably evoke different responses and questions. Walking through the community, however, and taking the time to meet new people, enabled me to develop some friendships and to carve out a place for myself.

Walking rather than choosing to drive enabled me to meet new people and to observe interesting experiences along the way. In some situations it arguably allowed me to take on a more ambiguous but potentially freer insider-outsider position (Minh-Ha, 1989). I was aware, however, that my gender, ethnicity and privileged status as researcher were “subjective elements affecting (my) field research” (Altorki and El-Solh, 1998: 5). No matter how readily accepted or comfortable I felt in the field, I knew that my presence as a white woman and as foreigner was an anomaly, and that this impacted in subtle ways on how people related to me.

Translation

Many people spoke only !Kun or Khwe, with a smattering of Afrikaans, especially the older people and women. The men who had been in the army, and younger people who had been through school, spoke Afrikaans with varying degrees of proficiency. Only after I had established myself in the field, did I start working more intensively with a translator to conduct unstructured in-depth interviews. Language barriers meant that causal conversation was not always possible, and working with a local translator enabled me access richer information. It made sense to interview the people with whom I had established relationships, where there was a sense of familiarity and trust. This meant that although I interviewed fewer people, those interviews were rich and in-depth and were done with more sincerity. I used a recording device, which enabled me to capture the full complexity of interviews. I always asked if my participants were comfortable with

this. In more casual conversation I did not record, but rather made extensive field notes on a daily basis.

Working with a translator allowed me to gain rich information and insights through doing in-depth, unstructured interviews. On other occasions I consciously chose to work without a translator, which allowed for relationships to develop, and for my presence in the field to be more informal, and I gathered much understanding through just being present in people's lives and interactions.

Fabian (2001: 2) suggests that "listening to people talking" is primary, as "ethnography...is crucially, not incidentally based on communication and language." I found, however, that being able to be with people in silence is much a communication as talking. Being present in the field, spending quality time with people, participating in their lives and being witness to what was happening was oftentimes more important, and informative, than having access to every spoken word. I came to understand that it was not necessary to speak the same language, or even to speak at all, to develop friendships and relationships, and that communication happens in multiple ways, where even drawings in the sand have significance.

Ethics

This research followed the University of Cape Town's codes of conduct and ethics for research involving human subjects, as well as the ethical guidelines set out by the Association of Social Anthropologists. Issues of maintaining respondent's safety, dignity and privacy were at the fore of my consideration, as was anticipating the potential impacts of my research and findings.

I have made a conscious effort to be aware of my role as anthropologist and mediator of knowledge, and to maintain a reflexive and critical stance. I am aware that my own interests and socio-political stance have of necessity guided my research focus and the processes of my fieldwork. Nonetheless, my primary obligation is to the !Kun and Khwe

people of Platfontein, who welcomed me into their homes and lives, and without whom this research would not have taken place. In engaging in this research process, I have endeavored to align my interests with theirs, and to create a research paper that I hope will have positive implications for their lives.

In terms of potential harm it is important to point out that my goal is not to be critical of the NGO work that SASI does in Platfontein, which undoubtedly brings many positive benefits to people's lives. I am concerned with challenging the discourses and paradigms that NGOs operate within, both locally and internationally, particularly around cultural heritage, development and indigeneity. This will hopefully enable NGOs to develop sharper concepts and tools that will enable to groups they represent to take up more liberating and freer subjectivities.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 1:

HISTORY OF THE !KUN AND KHWE

Late in 2003, hundreds of San families began to move into a dusty township especially built for them on the farm Platfontein not far from Kimberly. Their arrival marked the end of a journey that had begun at least 30 years before and more than 2500 km to the north. It was a journey characterised by the lacerations of war and rapid cultural upheaval (Robbins, 2004).

It is impossible to write and theorize around what it means to ‘be San’ in Platfontein without thinking about where the !Kun and Khwe have come from, and how these shared experiences and storylines might have shaped people’s subjectivities as San.

The !Kun and Khwe have experienced numerous relocations and displacements: their long-term involvement with the South African military, meant that they were displaced from Angola to Namibia, where they lived in houses at the Omega camp. From there many were relocated to the temporary tent town of Schmitsdrift, and finally to their current residence in government-built housing in Platfontein on the outskirts of Kimberly. All these come together to create a sense of shared storyline, history and uniqueness as a people. This sense of history and complexity sits uncomfortably alongside the essentialist discourse of the ‘indigenous’, under which the !Kun and Khwe are subsumed as ‘San’.

From San to Soldier

The !Kun and Khwe are two very different groups of people, each with their own background and history. Although both groups regard themselves, and are regarded by others, as San, they understand themselves to have very different histories, traditions, and geographical origins. The fact that they have been lumped together under the rubric of San-ness suggests that ‘being San’ has become such a pervasive discourse, and identity, so as to iron out any hint of difference or diversity. Since the time of their involvement with the military, there have been numerous conflicts between the !Kun and Khwe, some resulting in death. This continues to play out in Platfontein, fueled by alcohol. The tension is possibly also amplified by competition for access to scarce jobs, resources and

NGO assistance, and reflects some of the wider tensions in Platfontein, which I discuss in Chapter Two.

Opinion is divided over whether the !Kun were originally from Angola, or if they had migrated up north from Namibia and Botswana. In Angola they were recruited by the Portuguese DGS (security police) in counter-insurgency operations, where the preexisting enmity between the !Kun and Bantu-speakers was exploited. As Robbins (2004: 7) writes, “the situation in Angola certainly lent itself to a certain amount of allegiance between white and San against a common enemy...the substantial collapse of the precarious subsistence economies of the San communities must have also contributed...It was a means of economic survival in a war-disturbed country.”

After the coup d'état in Portugal on 25 April 1974, Portuguese forces were withdrawn from Angola. When Angola was taken over by the MPLA it was feared that anyone associated with the Portuguese would be oppressed or exterminated, and this led to the exodus of the DGS from Angola. This exodus of the Portuguese arguably facilitated the !Kun's involvement with the SADF (Uys, 1993b, Robbins, 2004), since “the !Kun *fletchas* (soldiers/trackers) had been abandoned to fend for themselves in a climate where everybody involved...became targets” (Robbins, 2004: 8).

On the 2 November 1974 the !Kun '*fletchas*' fled over the border into the then South West Africa, “fully armed with their families in tow” (ibid.). It was arranged that the *fletchas* would be received and accommodated in the Caprivi, and it was here that their involvement with the SADF began.

The Khwe's origins ranged from Botswana, Namibia, Angola and Zambia, although they were centered around the Eastern Caprivi (Robbins, 1994). They have been referred to as 'Baraquena' (water bushmen) while the !Kun have been called Vasequela (forest bushmen) (Uys, 1993a). The Khwe have been described as “black bushmen” because of their relatively tall stature and darker skin, in comparison to the !Kun's lighter skin and small stature.

A base, Alpha, was established in the Caprivi to train the bushmen as trackers in the war against SWAPO's liberation of Namibia, and it was here where the !Kun fletchas were received. It was also around this time that the SADF also began to recruit and train the Khwe who lived in the Caprivi. Thus, the infamous 'Bushman Battalion' (Battalion 31) came into being. The Eastern Caprivi became a "major zone of South African counter-guerilla operations...(in) around 1966 when SWAPO launched the armed struggle for Namibia..." (Robbins, 2004: 6).

The base was later moved to a new site and renamed Omega. Here the San women, and also some men and children, now dependent on the soldiers, were subject to various social programs and interventions, particularly those initiated by the wives of officers. A bakery was started and crafts, sewing, beading and other skills were taught. Part of this was an initiation into the ways of army life and the correct etiquette in, for example, wearing clothing or attending the clinic (Uys, 1993). These kinds of interventions appear to have been commonplace during and even post the San's involvement with the military, and continue to the present day in programs initiated by SASI and other NGOs.

In South West Africa (now Namibia), as in South Africa, the San were ruthlessly oppressed for centuries. "In many areas whole clans of bushmen were ruthlessly exterminated – or enslaved by the blacks and 'indentured' as forced labour by the whites... Up until 1975 the SWA statute books offered 5 pounds for Bushmen's ears" (Uys, 1993a: 1). It is this, alongside the ongoing erosion of a hunter-gatherer way of life that Uys and Robbins suggest facilitated their recruitment into war.

In the mid-1960s the Odendaal commission recommended that the Western Caprivi and Bushmanland be designated as homelands for all people classed as 'Bushman'. This signaled the loss of vast tracts of traditional land and the end of a hunter-gatherer way of life (Rousset, 2003; Uys, 1993a; Uys1993b). Following this, in 1968, the Western Caprivi was expropriated as a game reserve and the people evicted – the same happened in the Etosha Game Reserve and the Kalahari Gemsbok Park (ibid.). Again,

displacement, extermination and the destruction of the ability to hunt and gather bush foods aided the San's entry into the military.

An estimated 33 000 people in Southern Africa were classed as 'Bushmen' in 1989 and "left to their own devices with no land to hunt, gather or even produce food...In the situations they find themselves the ability to control their lives is very limited. They have been conditioned for dependency on people they perceive as stronger" (Uys, 1993b: 11). By this time, 9000 of the 33 000 were dependent on salaries by the SADF and DTA (SWA Territorial Force).

As Battalions were disbanded, around this time, and army salaries dried up, many were left as squatters in Namibia, Botswana and Schmidtsdrift (ibid.). The fear, that with the retreat of the military the entire socio-economic structure of the West Caprivi would collapse, became a reality, and dependency was the result (Robbins, 2004). Those !Kun and Khwe who chose to stay in Namibia were confronted with a desolate future without the social and economic support of the SADF, thus many accepted the offer by the South African government to relocate to South Africa (Orth, 2003).

The Tent Town of Schmidtsdrift

In March 1990, approximately 4000 !Kun and Khwe were relocated from military bases in the Caprivi Strip and Bushmanland, to the Schmidtsdrift army base, an hour outside of Kimberly, in the Northern Cape. They were made up of roughly 500 men who had served the SADF in Namibia, and their 3 500 dependents (Douglas, 1997).

In Schmidtsdrift they lived in a huge, sprawling tent camp and were still dependent on the SADF for their army salaries and access to schooling, medication and other benefits; their relationship with the military being "strongly paternalistic" (Douglas, 1997: 46). This paternalistic relationship with the SADF arguably initiated what has become an ongoing relationship of dependency between the !Kun and Khwe and wider structures of power – particularly SASI and the state.

Issues of dependency have become emphasized more generally in relationships between the San and the State (Bollig, 2003; Hohmann, 2003): “Government policies towards the San in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa have contributed to dependency... As a consequence San in many areas have become increasingly dependent on state bureaucracy and services” (Hohmann, 2003: 24). I discuss this in more depth in Chapter five.

Justifications given by the Defence Force for the relocation of the San trackers to South Africa were twofold: firstly, they cited “the social, political and economic ambiguities surrounding the predicament of Angolans in a ‘liberated’, independent Namibia” and secondly that the “SADF felt a need and obligation to save the bushmen in the military fold from retribution at the hands of a Swapo-led regime” (Douglas, 1997: 45). As Douglas points out, however, over half the San associated with the old SADF stayed behind in Namibia and have “experienced no retribution or direct oppression” based on past allegiances (ibid.).

Interviews with the relocated San suggested that they came to South Africa with the belief that they would be able to “secure a brighter future than that which they anticipated in Namibia” (ibid.). They would be able to keep their army jobs and continue a beneficial, albeit paternalistic relationship with the military. As Uys (1993b: 5) states, “all that any of them had known was life as it was in the camp at Omega, where they lived relatively well under the SADF. It therefore does not surprise me that so many of them choose to go with the SADF, where they believed they would be better off considering the promises made to them by the then South African Minister of Defense.” There have, however, been claims made to the TRC of coercion by the SADF.

By 1996 the army had began to radically reduce the number of San under their employ and “military patronage and paternalism was technically, on the wane” (ibid., p.46). By then, the Batlhaping, the original inhabitants of Schmidtsdrift, had decided to reassert their claim to Schmidtsdrift (Sharp, 1994). The !Kun and Khwe were now faced resettlement away from Schmidtsdrift. There had been a strong desire for permanent land

and permanent housing, and yet there was much uncertainty about how and when this would take place.

The housing issue caused much contention between the San and the SADF. They had been provided with brick housing in Omega. Now in Schmidtsdrift, where the winter temperatures were more extreme, they were forced to live in tents that were icy in winter, and sweltering in summer. They felt that the SADF's promises were not being kept.

In Schmidtsdrift, the effects of the disbanding of Battalion 31 were disheartening. "It is not an exaggeration to say that the disbanding of the Schmidtsdrift 31 Battalion brought these San communities to their lowest ebb since their momentous journey had begun. They were left without a center, without a purpose, certainly without houses, and perhaps even without hope" (D.Robbins, 2004: 23). Without the paternalistic support of the army the situation in Schmidtsdrift worsened:

The period immediately after the 1994 elections was one of collapse of personal and communal vision. Uncertainty had turned into paranoia and depression. The incidents of rape, attempted suicide, extreme domestic violence, and alcohol and substance abuse increased dramatically, leading to more and more social negativity. This self-perpetuating cycle was aggravated by increasing poverty among the tents, illiteracy, and the almost complete lack of job opportunities... Tuberculosis, STDs, malnutrition and numerous other health problems were recorded as increasing at the by then understaffed clinic. Soon to be recorded were sharp increases in teenage pregnancies and severe alcohol abuse during pregnancy, and a sort of mass psychotic degeneration as people became more depressed, ill and hungry (D.Robbins, 2004: 25).

The situation of the !Kun and Khwe in the new democratic South Africa was very fragile – they had after all served in the army of the oppressors. Some politicians even suggested that the San should be moved back to Namibia. Again they were faced with the aftermath of war, deserted by the army, and left to the goodwill of the new government. Then the news arrived that the Batlhaping claim to Schmidtsdrift had been accepted by the Land Claims Commission. The situation, as Robbins represents it, was one of extreme social crisis, and feelings of depression and hopelessness pervaded the camp.

Platfontein: Hope or uncertainty?

W.E. (!Kun interviewee): When they came from Angola to Namibia things began to change. The first time people began to get work was when they joined the army. Then people began only to think about war, because that was their life. It's the only hope, there is no other work. When they came to South Africa people began to think that there is hope that a person can do anything. In 93 and 94 people began to think that life is not only about war there are other things. But there were now more problems for the community. People lived in the tents for five or six years. There was no army that could help the community with everything. People had problems with housing and water, they had no services, like electricity or water and the clinic too. Then there was fighting amongst the community leaders. Then CPA was formed to look after the concerns of the community. They made contact with the new SA government, to ask them to look after the concerns of the community. Then we began to feel that we did have a future but it took very long. They bought the land Platfontein for the community in 1996, but it took very long before they built houses in Platfontein. When it took so long people lost hope again. They lost hope and courage and began to think that there was no future for them. The tents we lived in began to fall apart and the army didn't care for them anymore. It became very difficult.

In early 1996, the South African government agreed to provide the Schmidtsdrift San with a substantial grant that would enable them to establish a permanent residence. The !Kun and Khwe trust was established to resettle the San in a permanent home. But as Katerina Meyer has stated, "The people had been betrayed....not only by the army but also by the !Kun and Khwe trust. It just became very difficult to do anything. The trust seemed more interested in selling Platfontein to the San as part of their eventual land redistribution deal, than with any real development for these unhappy people" (Robbins, 2004: 30).

Large sums of money were apparently spent on consultants engaged in looking for suitable land, assessing its potential and suggesting settlement and development plans (ibid.). Platfontein (and the adjacent farms of Wildebeest Kuil and Droogfontein) was purchased in 1997, with the handing over of the title deeds taking place only two years later. As the name suggests, the land is incredibly dry and flat, and, being just outside of Kimberly, has very little plant or animal life.

The !Kun and Khwe Communal Property Association (CPA) was formed and eventually the CPA asked the trust to disband, which it did. Nonetheless, there was an ensuing period of "political infighting and instability" (Ibid., p.31). The CPA was in conflict with the ANC controlled provincial government. As Steven Robins commented, "The Platfontein farm was bought in 1997. The purchase was followed by delays and stalled negotiations, which was complicated by opposition by certain ANC provincial leaders

who were against former apartheid soldiers being given preferential treatment. (But) on 18 May 1999, President Mandela visited Platfontein and handed over the title deeds” (ibid.).

This also points to the Platfontein San’s precarious and uncertain position in South Africa. They have been given access to land, housing and citizenship, and have gained recognition in their identity as San, which allows some degree of “preferential treatment”. At the same time, their status is unstable and they are reviled by some as outsiders, particularly due to their involvement with the SADF. They have received housing and land, when many black South Africans are still languishing in overcrowded townships, which has also evoked some resentment.

While land had been purchased, housing still had to be seen to. In the meantime conditions in the tent camp worsened as the waiting continued. The construction of housing and infrastructure finally commenced in 2002. In Schmitsdrift, some of the men had abandoned their tents and were living in shelters at the side of the river, where they could fish for days at a time. Hennie Swart, who worked with the CPA around this time stated, “They’re sitting down there (at the river) making bows and arrows. So you can see why I am nervous about the move into those neat rows of houses at Platfontein...” (D.Robbins, 2004: 32). Although Schmitsdrift was far from a pristine wilderness, people could still fish, gather some bushfoods, and there were some opportunities for illicit hunting. Although far from an ideal situation, those without jobs thus had some opportunities to sustain themselves. The relatively barren landscape of Platfontein, where people would be living in state-built housing, would offer few opportunities for this.

Finally, in December 2003, the move to Platfontein took place, as buses and army lorries moved people’s possessions to their new homes. Robbins (ibid.) states that “In this way they became urban dwellers, living in what is an essentially a Kimberly suburb.” Platfontein, however, is more like an informal settlement or township, than a suburb, on the outskirts of Kimberley, and integration into urban life has been anything but straightforward, as continuing highs of alcoholism, unemployment and poverty testify.

By 2004, around 1000 families had been resettled in Platfontein. Due to delays in construction, some families were left to wait in the tent camp. In fact, in March 2007, when I was doing my fieldwork, there were still families who were being relocated from Schmidtsdrift.

The !Kun and Khwe were housed in separate but adjacent areas, as had been requested. Intercommunity tensions and violence were a problem, and the !Kun and Khwe had asked for separate farms for each of the groups, but insufficient funds meant that this was not a possibility. According to Robbins, the school and clinic at Platfontein was superior to that of Schmidtsdrift, and the town of Kimberley offered job opportunities for the people. Nonetheless, stereotyping and xenophobia still mar the !Kun and Khwe's interactions with local black and white communities. Unemployment rates in the community are very high. This is unsurprising as unemployment in general is a prominent concern in the Northern Cape. The promised benefits of living near an urban center have mostly failed to materialize and the !Kun and Khwe's new home has come with its own host of structural limitations and problems.

The process of "assimilation into a wider socio-economic mainstream", writes D. Robbins (2004: 37) seemed to "loom large and central in the Platfontein perception of things." This was a process which had apparently been taking place over some time: first through the influence of Bantu speakers and European settlers, hunters and missionaries. The process continued through the war in Angola, through joining the SADF, and finally in coming to South Africa. Throughout all of this, some level of separation between the !Kun and Khwe and mainstream society has been maintained. The San soldiers and their dependents lived together at the specially established Omega base, and were relatively isolated at Schmidtsdrift.

In Platfontein this isolation would be lessened, since they were on the outskirts of a major city. Nonetheless, the !Kun and Khwe are housed together, separate from other groups of

people, and there are structural inequalities that arguably reinforce their separation from their neighbours.

Robbins (*ibid.*) quotes Thomsen Nore, a Khwe man who has since started work with the SABC in Kimberly, talking hopefully about assimilation: “The assimilation will be based on education – and on the youth....There must also be a freedom to be, and not to be overrun. We want to be part of the mainstream, yes, but in certain ways only, and on our own terms, you see, we also want to be ourselves.”

It is this vision, that it possible both to “be San” and to be integrated into the modern world on their “own terms” that arguably inspires the kinds of projects and interventions that take place in Platfontein. Structural inequalities, however, limit the possibilities of any ‘real’ assimilation or integration, and at the same time make ‘being San’ seem not very different from being poor.

In chapter five I explore the limitations of mainstream development projects focused on preparing the San for entry into the job market. I argue that it is important to seek alternative solutions that allow people to make better use of resources and allow for a greater degree of self-sustainability. This frees people them from a dependence on the wider socio-economic system with its unsustainable use of limited energy resources such as fuel, particularly as the current world system has ‘no resilience to the vagaries of peak oil and climate change’ (Maynard and Shiva, 2008: 18). Kingsnorth (1994) argues that while we can gain inspiration from looking at alternatives to the neoliberal market system that are implemented in different places around the world, it is up to each community to envision and create alternatives that resonate with a their particular environment and with the specific needs of the community. Ideally this leads to a greater sense of accomplishment and empowerment in the community, breaking down cycles of dependency and apathy. It is also a moral response to the current global environmental crisis, envisioning solutions to poverty that contribute to creating earth friendly alternatives to the destructiveness of the industrial economy.

In the following chapter, I draw on the imagery of the road into Platfontein, on which construction has been halting, to elucidate some of the uncertainties of life in Platfontein for the !Kun and Khwe. I explore the tensions around the issue of assimilation, which looms large in Platfontein. I discuss how dependency issues and the sense of endless waiting and uncertainty that were prominent in Schmitsdrift continue to be sources of consternation in Platfontein.

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CHAPTER 2

LIFE IN PLATFONTEIN

Platfontein is about 5 kilometers outside of Kimberley, a turn-off on the road to Barkley West. In some ways, even though it is so close to the urban center of Kimberley, it is a different world. The tempo of life is different, slower, and guided by different concerns. As in other poor communities issues of survival are pressing, and although people have houses, they still have to secure meals and clothing, organize school uniforms, and pay for water and electricity. Unemployment and various structural inequalities limit the means for people to secure a regular livelihood.

Turning off the Barkley-West Road into Platfontein, the road is in a state of disrepair, and treacherous to navigate. As I drive in to Platfontein there is a sense of desolation. The heat of the day has driven people into their houses. Those lucky enough to have sparse trees in the yard of their identical government-built houses take refuge in the shade. Most of those who have work are men, and most employment takes place outside of Platfontein. There are a small group of people who earn an income through the arts and crafts project initiated by SASI. They sit with their families as they work. For most work is scarce. Some women travel to the rubbish dump everyday to spend hours in the sun scrounging for food and clothing – an image that quickly shatters any romantic notions about what it means to 'be San' in Platfontein.

Some of those who do not have work, or hope, spend their days drinking Thombo, the local homebrewed beer that can be obtained for 50c a glass. R5 can get you very drunk here. On pension day and pay day life seems livelier. Music blares out from people's houses, and there is much wandering and visiting of friends and families, to drink and socialize. There is also a darker side that underlies the celebrations. Drinking and socializing occasionally erupts into quarrels or violence between people. I hear stories of pensioners being abused or beaten up by their grandchildren when they refuse them their measly pension.

On pension day I flout conventional wisdom and spend time with friends in the community. I witness much revelry and am cajoled into walking with some teenage girls from house to house – they wheedle alcohol from friends and relatives and are chatty and playful. The revelry of this day breaks the tedium of life in the stark landscape of Platfontein where there is little possibility to engage in meaningful activity: people complain that they are ‘just sitting’ with little to do. I witness some quarrels. At times I am even the cause of consternation, as the older people, kindly protective of me, refuse to allow drunken young men to talk to me.

Social disharmony and tensions are counter-balanced by small kindnesses. One small pension of R780 is often divided between many family members. People walk through Platfontein to visit families and friends, chatting under trees and whiling away the hours. I relax under a tree with two companionable old men who carve wood together, surrounded by nieces and grandchildren, to make bows and arrows that will be sold to tourists. I sit in sociable silence with an elderly couple, as the woman beads, and they take pleasure in the sight of their grandchildren playing rampantly in the yard.

For somewhere almost on the border of town, Platfontein seems so distant from Kimberly. Isn't it always like that: the divide between rich and poor creating different worlds even within the same neighborhood. I wonder at the world we live in, where borders between people, real or symbolic, create the substance of our societies. I think about car windows that can be closed to beggars, and fences, and gates, and alarm systems, and buildings with restricted access, and nation states, and cities, towns and villages - all the boundaries with which we divide up our world. What of other boundaries, structural, political, and economic, that maintain the distance between rich and poor. These are the boundaries that make Platfontein seem a world away from Kimberly.

The Road to Uncertainty

Of greatest concern about the proposed fence is that it will divide people, the physical barrier becoming a symbolic boundary between those who live inside and those who remain outside (Rousette, 2003: 44).

The 2km road into Platfontein - a small turn-off on the road from Kimberly to Barkley-West - can be read as symbolic of some of the contradictions and tensions of life in Platfontein itself. When I arrived in Platfontein, the road was in a state of disrepair and although the local municipality had agreed to repair it, it had been a prolonged process.

Each day, as I drove into Platfontein, I was greeted by the sight of municipal workers congregating and chatting under a tree in the little available shade. On other days the workers would block off part of the road to allow for a spontaneous soccer game. Only on a handful of days did I arrive to find that work was actually underway. I was told that this had been going on for months, the reasons given being various, and that the repair and tarring of the road was taking unnecessarily long. This physical state of the road, and its ongoing process of repair, developed a metaphorical significance for me, mimetic of some of the uncertainties of life in Platfontein itself.

Firstly, the people of Platfontein are reliant on the government and on local municipality to repair the road. The job was incomplete – and there was very little that the locals could do about it. In a similar way, the government had provided land and housing, but was unable to ensure access to work and other opportunities that would move the !Kun and Khwe out of poverty. As such the feeling of limbo that was pervasive in the tent camp of Schmitsdrift lingers in Platfontein. One cannot underestimate the sense of relief and security that must come with being settled on a piece of land and with having permanent housing. Nonetheless, poverty and unemployment are high and my interviews with SASI staff members suggested that dependency continues to be an overarching concern.

When the decision was made to move to Platfontein, there was a sense of hope that there would be more job opportunities and the possibility of a better life. This has turned out to

be a reality for only a select few who have been assimilated into the job market, while others struggle to meet basic needs. For the majority of people, multiple structural constraints limit the possibility of securing a regular income. It is both the struggle for basic survival, and the lack of opportunities to engage in meaningful activity, that feeds into a sense of despair and dissatisfaction in Platfontein. People tell me that there is little other to do than sit around - the future is uncertain and jobs are few.

Like the road that is half gravel, half tarred, the !Kun and Khwe are expected by NGOs and the state to maintain their 'traditional culture' (the sand), while at the same time to assimilate into the modern market system (the tar): the landscape in which they live, alongside various structural inequalities, make either possibility unlikely. Instead there is a sense of being in limbo – of moving from an insecure past into an uncertain future (Robbins, 2004). In Schmidtsdrift they were refugees; in Platfontein they join other urban township dwellers in the struggle to access limited opportunities for wage labour.

In Platfontein, the sense of waiting, and the frustration and despondency of being dependent on others to initiate change, is ever present, as it was in the tent camp in Schmidtsdrift (Robbins, 2004; Uys, 1993b.). At present SASI plays a pivotal role in mediating between the community and the outside world: government, sponsors, donors and other organizations. SASI also mediates with community leaders, and guides their interactions with the community, and with structures of the state. SASI carries much responsibility in initiating programs and projects in Platfontein. In a community of 5000 people, with the kinds of structural constraints, and high unemployment rates, that are commonplace not only in Platfontein but in the Northern Cape as a whole, this is a daunting task.

In this sense, the road is symbolic of the cycle of dependency that dogs poor people living under the banner of neoliberalism (Gardener and Lewis, 1996; Shiva, 2005). In the context of South Africa, where there are so many different groups vying for access to limited job opportunities, this is intensified (Sharp, 1999). Competition for jobs outside of Platfontein is intense. Firstly, there are other RDP housing areas and townships that are

situated even closer to Kimberly. People in these communities have the advantage of speaking Afrikaans or English. While Afrikaans is taught at the school in Platfontein, few speak fluently. Further, while 'being San' has come represent an identity with political leverage in the global sphere, the !Kun and Khwe frequently encounter xenophobic attitudes in their sojourns into Kimberly.

Many of my participants mentioned that it would be desirable for people from outside the community to come in with projects and initiatives that would offer employment opportunities or skill development. In this conception, a road would facilitate the arrival of useful outsiders, who could bring the promise of opportunity and change to Platfontein. While some might resent the arrival of outsiders coming to study the San, without offering much in terms of positive benefits for the community – most were open to the possibility of outsiders who would bring projects that would have positive offshoots for the people.

This brought to my awareness the feeling that the !Kun and Khwe, like other people living in conditions of poverty, did not feel empowered to start their own projects or to initiate change themselves. The road was reflective of the structural constraints that severely limit the possibility of change being initiated from within.

The road is also symbolic of the fragile connection between Platfontein and the world outside – both Kimberly and the other neighboring townships. The continued slowness in its repair can be read as reflective of tensions and uncertainties around assimilation:

Meryl-Joy Wildschut (SASI's Platfontein Director): The other thing that I think will be a challenge is not to see Platfontein as this little world within itself. That they have to see that they are actually part of a broader community, that they are actually part of an extended part of Kimberly. And I know the young people are very keen to be part of that integration, where the elders are very hesitant about that kind of integration. Because for them integration spells the end of tradition and culture. It's a fear of young people losing their roots. But you know that is a journey that every community goes through...you know the tension between integration and isolation and how much of our traditions and culture are we going to hold onto. And no one can walk that journey for them, no one can do that. But we as support structures and support organizations shouldn't foster fear of integration, but help them to find a balance between integration and holding onto culture and tradition

This threat to 'culture' through assimilation into a broader society happens on multiple fronts. Firstly is the entry into the job market, where people are initiated into Western neoliberal values and the demands of market forces. The other threat emerges through increased interactions with people from the nearby townships. Many of the people living in these townships are also believed to also have a Khoi-San heritage – but have been assimilated into the coloured population under the classifications of apartheid. This inevitably complicates their ability to claim an indigenous identity, and the potential benefits of this.

For the !Kun and Khwe, the fact that they have been kept in relative isolation from outside groups, means they have retained their language, and their ability to lay claim to an indigenous identity through a common descent and heritage. Assimilation into other communities or populations threatens both their 'cultural heritage' and their ability to lay claim to an indigenous identity. Within a wider context of urban poverty, assimilation does not guarantee a better future, and will possibly only lead to poverty in a different form or place.

In Platfontein itself, however, poverty and numerous social problems are as much a threat to 'cultural survival', as is assimilation. Crawhall (1999) elucidates poverty, social disharmony and assimilation as strong threats to 'cultural preservation'. While SASI seeks to mediate this through their mandate to preserve cultural heritage, they are also involved with social development work that seeks to provide better social services to the community, to alleviate poverty and to facilitate successful citizenship. The eventual aim is self-sufficiency, which, within the context of Platfontein, would ultimately mean successful entry into the job market. This creates an uncomfortable tension between the focus, on one hand, on cultural heritage work, and on the other, assimilation into the wider market-oriented society, which I explore in more depth in chapters five and six.

The way out of poverty within the context of the current neoliberal world system is very uncertain (Shiva, 2005; Yapa, 1996). Development work in many ways fails to lead people out of poverty because rarely addresses the real causes of social inequalities

(Apter, 1987; Esteva, 1992). This requires challenging the wider system and neoliberal values that favour the market above humanity (Kingsnorth, 2004). The kinds of problems faced by people living in poverty are often so huge that the solutions offered by NGOs and development workers are a drop in the ocean. Never mind, that in operating within the neoliberal paradigm of development, it becomes very difficult to find a way out, as the very problems being challenged emerge from the constraints and workings of that paradigm.

The road is symbolic of this no man's land, of the unmet promises of development, and of assimilation that suggests most likely poverty in another place or form.

Successful entry into the market, and negotiations with bureaucracy, leads people to take up values, beliefs and understandings that may be contrary to their own (Nadasdy, 2003). There has been a long-term engagement between the !Kun and Khwe and the bureaucracy of the army (Uys, 1993a.), which has an ongoing influence on styles of community leadership (Douglas, 1999) and arguably this process will continue as community leaders are required to enter into continued negotiations with the state, NGOs and other agencies of bureaucracy. This creates a chasm between community leaders, and the rest of the community, who do not speak the language of bureaucracy, and who have very little possibility of engaging with the decisions that impact their lives.

The !Kun and Khwe have entered into negotiations and relations with government, NGOs and other organizations that have their own ideas around 'indigeneity' and what it means to 'be San' - and this feeds into how people come to construct their subjectivities as 'San'. Rigid and essentialist identities as 'indigenous' in some ways enable access to political voice but obscure the complexity of people's histories and experiences (Hodgson, 2002a, 2002b; Ingold, 2001; Robins, 2001).

Chapter three engages with questions around indigeneity, culture and skill. I explore what it means to 'be San' in Platfontein and why there is a difference in the way older and younger people experience their identities as 'San'. When landscapes are fundamentally

altered or when people are dispossessed of land, there is a concomitant change in their way of life, beliefs, values, skills and understandings. Further, the demands of semi-urban poverty and of basic survival in this context are significant in altering priorities, values, relationships and subjectivities.

University of Cape Town

CHAPTER 3

'BEING SAN' IN PLATFONTEIN

'Indigeneity' and 'Being San'

There is no easy way to think about or theorize what it means to 'be San' in Platfontein. The politics around issues of indigenous identity are fierce and the concept of 'indigeneity' itself is hugely contested (Barnard, 2006; Guenther, 2006; Kenrick, 2006; Kuper, 2006; Lee, 1992; Theun, 2006). In South Africa issues of indigeneity are complex and are tied up in the struggle of many to access land and scarce resources (Sharp, 1999; Tomaselli, 2002).

It is likely that the !Kun and Khwe's identity as San gave them political leverage when the ANC government met the promises of the former SADF in providing them with land and housing in Platfontein. There are multiple ways in which people come to identify themselves as San, however, and many of these go beyond political expediency. On the ground people have their own ideas and experiences around 'being San, and these are likely to be 'lived' rather than talked about.

Further, the !Kun and Khwe share unique histories and storylines that go beyond the trope of the mystical hunter-gatherer. These too are intricately tied to their identity as 'San'. In this chapter, I explore what it means to be San for !Kun and Khwe speakers of different generations, acknowledging the complexity and dynamic nature of subjectivities like that of 'San' (Bruchac, 2005; Rapport & Overing, 2000; Turner, 1993). This is reflective of the uncertainty of life in Platfontein, and of the complexity of people's lives, histories and storylines.

Changes in their lived environment and surroundings alter people's life ways and how they see themselves. I draw on the work of Ingold (2001) and Nadasdy (2003) to discuss how the numerous displacements of the !Kun and Khwe, and their current relocation in

Platfontein, have played a significant role in altering their way of life, bringing in new concerns and experiences.

From Hunter-Gatherer to Urban Dweller: Reflections on a Different Way of Life

There were three elderly Khwe people living in Platfontein with whom I spent a great deal of time: two men, Moyo and Shimone, who were well known as healers, and Moyo's wife Changan, a kind and dignified woman. They would spend much time sitting on their stoep, or under a traditional wooden and thatch shelter, watching their grandchildren and the passing day. Most days Changan would bead and Moyo would occasionally make leather crafts. They did not sell their crafts but enjoyed the activity. They told me how there was nothing to do here but 'sit around'. They would like to be able to wander more freely. Shimone told me that at Schmitsdrift he had sometimes gone down to the river to fish and lived there in a makeshift hut for days at a time. In Platfontein there was no river or bush - and so they sat.

They spoke to me about the younger generation of people living in Platfontein. They felt that they did not have respect for older people and their ways. Relationships happened differently and they were worried about their grandchildren going to clubs and getting into casual relationships without observing any of the protocols they had known as young people. In the past they said to have a woman you needed to be a good hunter. Now too many young people were drinking heavily. They spoke about how, when they were young, there were ways of dealing with conflict and tension among people, now it erupted into violence.

We drove to Schmitsdrift together one day. The two men disappeared rapidly into the bush carrying their traditional axes and returned two hours later with plants that they said were effective for curing eye disease. Another day we drove to Barkley West to spend the day at the river. As we walked along the river the men smelled, tasted and commented eagerly on each plant. 'This is a very nice place they told me!' It was lush compared to the barren earth of Platfontein.

Changes in people's lived environment, and the move to Platfontein, which is within close distance of an urban center, has changed the way the !Kun and Khwe engage with each other and with the land. This has been an ongoing process through the numerous displacements and relocations of the !Kun and Khwe through their military association. This section explores how and why dispossession and alterations in the landscape bring about such profound changes in people's way of life. The work of Ingold (2001) and Nadasdy (2003) are useful for engaging with notions of 'culture' and 'indigeneity' on different terms.

Ingold (2001) elucidates a 'dwelling perspective' in which he argues that people are situated "in a context of active engagement with the constituents of [their] surroundings...[where] awareness and activity are rooted in the engagement between persons and the environment"(ibid., p.5). Ingold challenges the idea that 'originality' (original inhabitation of the land or aboriginality) can be passed on by genealogical descent as if it is a property of persons independent of their relationship with the land. There are five core assumptions of the genealogical model that Ingold rejects:

That original ancestry lies at the point where history rises from an ahistorical substrate of 'nature'; that the generation of persons involves the biogenetic substance prior to their life in the world; that ancestral experience can be passed on as the stuff of cultural memory, enshrined in language and tradition; and that the land is merely a surface to be occupied supporting its inhabitants rather than bringing them into being (ibid., p.133).

Ingold's relational perspective reengages with the idea of 'culture', seeing it as actively emerging through people's dynamic and relational engagement with all constituents of the landscape. People are 'brought into being' through their active and involved engagement with each other, and with the environment within in which they live. 'Culture' in this sense does not exist independently of people's lived experience, and of their active engagement with the world around them, and emerges through this relational involvement:

I suggest an alternative, relational approach...which is more consonant with these people's [hunter-gatherers] lived experience of inhabiting the land. In this approach, both cultural knowledge and bodily substance are seen to undergo continuous generation in a context of ongoing engagement with the land and with the beings – human and non-human – that dwell therein (Ingold, 2001: p.133).

Ingold argues similarly that rather than being an attribute of individual persons, skill emerges in a “matrix of social relationships” and in “relations constituted by the presence of the artisan in his or her environment (p.291).” Rapport and Overing (2000) argue that we should start to think about culture as a verb, as in “culturing” or doing culture. In this way we begin to think about culture as the skills that enable people to live particular lives: “From the Amazonian perspective culture time and again refers to the skills for action, which conjoin (independent) thinking and a sensual life, that individuals have, mould and use to live a particular human life” (ibid., p.97). For Ingold these skills emerge in people's ongoing and active engagement with a particular landscape. It is possible then to think about how skills may change, adapt or become redundant in the face of local, national and global changes, as people move, or as their immediate environments are irrevocably transformed.

Importantly, Ingold argues that issues of livelihood and skill, such as hunter-gathering, should not be seen as independent from people's engagement with myth, religion and ceremony. All these dimensions of a hunter-gatherer way of life are brought into being and are seen to undergo continuous generation in a context of ongoing engagement with the land, and with the humans and animals that live there. This is important for unraveling why, when people are dispossessed of land or when the landscape alters significantly, they not only lose their skills as hunters, trackers and gatherers, but that an entire way of life changes considerably. It is not surprising then that younger generations of people who grow up away from their ancestral lands do not hold the same understandings as their parents and grandparents - ‘knowledge’ develops as an integral part of how people relate to and come to know the world around them.

Nadasdy describes a conference where a member of the Kluane Nation is asked by a wildlife biologist, “What exactly is traditional knowledge?” She answers “Well, it's not

really ‘knowledge’ all, it’s more a way of life” (Nadasdy, 2003: 63). ‘Knowledge’ and ‘culture’ both come into being as integral and interdependent constituents of people’s active engagement ‘in a matrix of relations’ with each other and with all dimensions of the landscape – they do not exist in an independent, context-free void. Dispossession, land loss and changes in the environment lead to “a tremendous loss of traditional knowledge”, as Crawhall (1999: 36) suggests, not simply because of the resulting poverty and social disruption, but because there is a fundamental change in people’s relationship to the land and each other.

The barren earth of Platfontein suggests a very different way of life from that lived by the older people in Angola and Namibia. The skills and knowledge the older people demonstrated and spoke about in my time in the field - around plants, animals, healing, hunting and tracking - may have been ‘passed down’ through generations, but this would have occurred experientially, in a context of active and ongoing engagement with the land.

When we visited Barkley West, the first impulse of the old people was to engage with the land, to walk, to taste, to smell and explore – to come to know what was familiar and unfamiliar. This not something that they can easily pass onto their grandchildren in the context of Platfontein – the land does not support this kind of engagement. Also, semi-urban poverty suggests very different concerns and other means of securing sustenance.

Both Ingold and Nadasdy point out that ‘skills’ and ‘knowledge’ are not merely passed down from generation to generation, free of people’s engagement with each other and the land. Rather, skills emerge through “practical hands-on-engagement” (Ingold, 2001: 10) and through people’s “histories of continuing involvement with human and non-human constituents of their environments” (ibid.). Nadasdy, working with the Kluane Indians in Canada, talks about how putting a stop to hunting and people’s eating of wild meat would be to fundamentally alter their way of life:

Their relation to the land and animals, how they spend their time, how they relate to one another, what they think about, their values – all would necessarily lose their current meaning and undergo dramatic change. Kluane people would, in essence, cease to be the people they are today (Nadasdy, 2003: 76).

There is no doubt that the flat, barren landscape of Platfontein, which is within close distance of an urban center, is figuratively a million miles away from the !Kun and Khwe's roots in Angola and Namibia. Similarly, the !Kun and Khwe have moved from an involvement with the SADF in Namibia, to live as refugees in the tent town of Schmitsdrift, until finally settling in Platfontein. Undoubtedly, these numerous moves, and experiences of living as refugees and as dispossessed people, have fundamentally transformed the way that many of the !Kun and Khwe live and engage with the world around them.

The barren semi-urban landscape of Platfontein suggests a fundamentally altered relationship with the land, within which the constituents of a hunter-gatherer way of life have little immediate relevance. This is amplified for the youth who would have grown up in either the Omega army base or the tent town of Schmitsdrift. These young people have had little experience of the way of life of their parents and grandparents. It is not surprising that for many issues of income generation and basic survival are of primary concern – these are the realities of dwelling in a semi-urban landscape.

This is not to say that the older people do not have similar concerns, as they live in the same conditions, and also face meeting basic sustenance needs in a context of poverty. Their storylines or narratives, however, are subtly different. They carry with them memories, and the skills and understandings, associated with a different way of life. Further, as I discuss, for various reasons, the youth are more likely to feel pressure to enter into the job market, and to derive their self-esteem or lack thereof through this.

It is also important to point out here that while I make use of the terms 'youth' and 'older' people, these are not distinct, bounded categories. I draw on these to create a sense of how altered landscapes, and the increasing focus on wage labour (Gilsenan,

1996), brings about changes in people's relationships, in their understandings, skills, values and concerns, and in how they see themselves. This chapter highlights changes in generational relationships, but elucidates these as related to the changing conditions and environments in which people live, rather than as a phenomenon of age or of generation itself.

Employment, Skill and 'Being San'

In having moved to Platfontein, the !Kun and Khwe are faced with particular problems and concerns that are related with living in conditions of semi-urban poverty. The military no longer provides a safety net, and, other than government grants and visits to the dump, people are dependent on entering into the job market to meet their basic needs. In the Northern Cape unemployment rates are already very high. The !Kun and Khwe, many of whom speak little if any English or Afrikaans, frequently encounter xenophobic attitudes in town, and are by no means first in line when it comes to securing jobs – particularly as there are other townships and RDP housing areas that are closer to Kimberly. Some have secured steady employment. For many others, however, opportunities are few. Thus, the reality for many is a struggle to meet their basic needs.

In Schmitsdrift there was a river, where people fished, and bush where they were able to do some hunting, and gathering of bush food, although this was often illicit:

R.1. They used to go to the river and go to live there so they could fetch some fish and if they fetch even more fish they would take some back to where we all live so they could sell the fish and from there they could buy some porridge and something. Schmitsdrift was even better than Platfontein because there was a river nearby and if you wanted to go hunt you can sometimes go for a while far away. He says Platfontein isn't very nice because there is no river near where you can go fetch some fish.

R.2. In Schmitsdrift a person can go to the river, you can catch fish, you can also go get wood and chop down trees, so there you can use the wood. You can build a person a house and he will pay you. So it was better in some ways but it also had its own problems. Platfontein a place with its own problems.

Platfontein is a place of dry red earth and almost no plant and wildlife. It is surrounded by farms, and a few interviewees mentioned that crossing over onto those farms meant dealing with irate farmers. People do not feel able to walk far enough to gather sufficient

firewood, never mind food. Many of my interviewees, mostly but not only older people, spoke of the sense of constriction this creates, where they do not feel free to walk around and to hunt and collect food and firewood:

R1: Here in Platfontein we are just sitting around. I don't like sitting around. Even if we go fetch some firewood they will ask us why did you cross my property. So in Namibia we used to go fetch firewood far away, and if even you want to go sleep there you can go live there. So life isn't right.

Youth Leader/Peer Educator: One of the problems that we have here is that our people love to hunt. But if we go anywhere even to pick up firewood or do something we will be hit by the farmers. But we are not used to living in a cage. Our people are free people.

Some of the youth feel removed from the storylines and experiences of their grandparents as these do not speak to the current conditions of their lives. Most of the youth were born either on the army base in Namibia, or in the tent camp of Schmitsdrift. In Platfontein they are as far removed as they can be from a way of life that involves hunting and gathering. They may have been taken into the bush in Namibia by older relatives, and even in Schmitsdrift – but in Platfontein this is not a possibility. Some had recollections of these experiences:

Youth leader: In Sandam (Schmitsdrift) you went everyday or every afternoon with your grandfather into the veld – you walked far. And he would show you things, there is the medicine – you see that buck, it's a male or it's a female. There we could go the river and some people hunted. There there was a chance for people to hunt. But not here, here you will be found out quickly (laughter).

In Schmitsdrift there were other concerns – people did not enjoy the harsh conditions of the tents; they felt deserted by the military and government (Robbins, 2004; Uys, 1993b); the only possibility of employment, other than with the military, was on farms where pay was exceptionally poor; town was a good distance away; the ability to hunt and gather food was limited; and the younger people felt isolated and wanted to be closer to the center of activity in town. People had also lived in houses at Omega and had had all their basic needs met by the military (Uys, 1993a) – in Schmitsdrift they were refugees with a very uncertain future (Robbins, 2004; Uys, 1993b).

In Platfontein, the !Kun and Khwe are faced with a new set of challenges in meeting their subsistence needs in a context of semi-urban poverty. Options for meeting basic needs are limited. Unemployment is extremely high. Some have access to small pensions and

childcare grants, but these are often divided up between many people. For those without employment, or employed relatives, visits to the soup kitchen and rubbish dump are the only means of accessing sustenance. This inability to meet basic sustenance needs, and to engage in purposeful activity, leads to depression, despondency, alcoholism and a host of other social problems.

This is arguably amplified for the youth. The value of wage labour is likely to have been emphasized in the Western model of schooling they receive. Some spoke about feeling pressurized by their families to find work. Without work many of the young people talk about feeling despondent and worthless. Without work, I am told, there is little else to do but ‘sit around’ with your friends and drink:

T.S. You guys are well educated and are peer educators – is there enough work for you?

P.E. 2: The problem is that as peer educators it is just for three months. After three months we have to go sit at home without work. We end up getting drunk.

T.S. How do you feel if you don’t have work?

P.E. 2: We feel very bad. You feel like you are nothing in the world. You must just get drunk (laughter).

This evokes a sense of futility and worthlessness, where for many there is not much to do other than ‘just sitting’. In Platfontein ‘sitting’ becomes a discourse that expresses people’s dissatisfaction with the conditions of their lives. For many of the older people, ‘sitting’ is often expressed in terms of not having freedom to wander, to hunt and to collect bush food and firewood:

R.3.: He says there is nothing to do here. If you have maybe money then you just go to the shops to buy food. If you don’t have money you are just sitting. In the past you could go out and collect food.

For others, particularly youth, ‘just sitting’ relates to not having work. This sense of ‘sitting around’ is a consequence both of the limitations of the landscape, which keeps those who enjoy wandering contained, and of unemployment, which Gilson (1996: 282) describes as “a state of being as much as an absence of occupation”. Neoliberal values set up the expectation that in order to be a valuable citizen, one should be actively employed in the job market. Those who are unemployed feel the weight of having

nothing to do or contribute – this is amplified in a context of poverty where people’s very survival is dependent on accessing non-existent jobs. A similar discourse of ‘sitting’ is elucidated in Gilson’s study, where he examines the effects of a changing labour market on Arab society:

Being ‘in work’, or just as significantly being ‘out of work’ had become crucial. ‘Unemployment’, a relatively new term, appeared as a state of being as much as an absence of occupation. Lives were coming to be apprehended as structured and framed also by the market... ‘Sitting’ represented a kind of limbo without dignity and without any arena in which one might either confront or collaborate with others (1996: 282).

When I questioned younger people about their concerns they spoke to me about wanting to find work. It was being employed and earning a salary that provided a sense of ‘being something’:

Youth Leader/Peer Educator1: If I don’t have work I feel like I am nothing. I am not even on the earth. If you have work than you live a bit better. You can care for your parents and if you are old enough you can have a wife and children to look after. But without work you can do nothing. People also complain. They say you just sit at the house and you are unemployed. You are old enough you must look for work and look after us.

One possibility for employment, mainly for young men, was with SANDA, an organization that trains San men as trackers and security guards to work on farms. I was told, however, that the work was often dangerous. People had been killed on the job by poachers. Also, they would work on a three month contract and then be sent home to deal with the same struggles. They would have to leave their wives and families behind during this time:

W.E. There are other projects that are supposed to help people economically but they don’t really help. Like SANDA. People are hired for three month as security guards and they go work in the bush, not in town. When they come back they have a problem with money. It is not safe to go work on the farm. Anything can happen. If you come back then you struggle to get an income.

While I was in the field, one man who had worked on a farm was returned dead to his family. His body showed signs of having been badly beaten. It was believed that he had been killed by the farmer who hired him.

Despite these challenges, security work offers a salary, and status through being employed, and was attractive to many young men. At the same time, it reinforces the

‘wily’ bushman tracker stereotype that dogged the !Kun and Khwe in their interactions with the army (Rousset, 2003). This stereotype draws on the trope of the primordial hunter-gatherer, and as such reinforces theories of genetic descent, rather than recognizing tracking as a skill that develops in relation to a particular environment (Ingold, 2001).

Gilsenan (1996: 281), discussing the changes wrought on Lebanese society through wage labour, and the developing labour market, suggests that: “a somewhat different kind of social status was emerging: of money and what a man could make it do for him.” He argues that the demands of wage labour have had a strong impact on social life and on generational relations in Arab society:

The demands of earning an income in the rapidly changing circumstances of the Lebanon of the 1960s and early 1970s...had complex effects on the region. ‘Work’ had taken on a new significance. Young men now had to find wages, and the provision of work for them could be one very important way in which a leader could stake his claims to their loyalty and against the older generation...Generational relations were once again relations of ambiguity...Young aghats felt their fathers demanded of them codes of behaviour which they had to obey, but which in a hanging world were extraordinarily difficult, if not impossible to follow (ibid., p. iv-xv).

Some younger !Kun and Khwe people spoke to me about how they felt far removed from the concerns and experiences of their parents or grandparents. Others spoke about how generational relationships had changed through the diminishing value of the skills of the older people:

W.E. These young people who are educated they cannot get on with the older people. There young people are now telling the old people how to live...Young people are just interested in the way forward – they forget about the past. They forget about the identity of the San people. The young people cannot make bows and arrows. They do not know about the way of life of the old people. They do not have the skills to follow spoor and also to know what is the difference between good and bad. The old people know the right way to come together to move forward if there are problems. But also in the community the old people do not want to help the young people and the young people also do not want to help the older people. This is a problem that we have.

Arguably, it is not that the older people do not want to share their knowledge and skills with their children and grandchildren, but that these are part of an integral way of life in which learning happens through an active, on-going and experiential engagement with the landscape (Ingold, 2001; Nadasdy, 2003). This kind of leaning is not supported by the

barren landscape of Platfontein. These skills have less value in the context of Platfontein as they do not enable people 'to live'. It is education and employment that is now emphasized. Generational relationships change as the skills of the older generation lose their value and as younger people, who have been schooled and thus understand the workings of the wider system and job market, begin "telling the old people how to live."

Certain skills that are passed down continue to have value, particularly skills, like dancing, beading and various crafts that offer a form of income generation (mostly through cultural tourism). These skills not only provide a much needed income, they also allow people to engage in creative and meaningful activity while staying in close proximity to their homes, their friends and family members - and as such continue to be valued.

It is important to recognize, however, that these skills are adapted to meet the needs of the market, and their meaning and relevance alters in this context. These kinds of skills came into being in Angola and Namibia as part of a wider matrix of relationships between people and the landscape, in which hunting, gathering, healing and ritual were all inter-related (Ingold, 2001). In Platfontein it is the aspect of livelihood that is emphasized, and this transforms the significance of these skills. Further, the artists and crafters are reliant on organizations like SASI to buy and distribute their wares. People's very interactions with agencies of bureaucracy alter how they see themselves and how they come to know and experience the world (Nadasdy, 2003). I discuss this in more detail in the chapter that follows.

Clearly, a return to a hunter-gatherer way of life is unlikely to be a desirable option for many !Kun and Khwe. Nor is it plausible - it requires vast tracts of relatively untouched land - where in South Africa, much of the land that has not already been taken up as farm lands has been set aside as nature reserves. At the same time, entry into the job market does not seem to be a solution for ameliorating poverty. How then can we think differently about working with communities to alleviate poverty in these kinds of contexts?

Narratives and Histories of Complexity and Change

People are able to take up different subjectivities in different contexts and position themselves in ways that are meaningful in those contexts (Holloway, 1984). The !Kun and Khwe arguably do not carry with them rigid dichotomies between past and present, tradition and modernity, indigenous and non-indigenous – these are usually imposed from the outside (Agrawal, 1995; Appiah, 2005). Further, Bruchac (2005) points out that people draw on preexisting knowledge, skills, stories and life ways to make sense of contemporary challenges (also see Green, 2005). In this, they are able to draw on previous understandings to bring forward and negotiate a sense of shared identity and history in the face of constant change.

When a group of people have gone through numerous social upheavals, however, as have the !Kun and Khwe, and live in fundamentally altered landscapes, there is a concomitant change in their skills, knowledge, values and beliefs. It becomes increasingly difficult to bring existing life ways forward as they lose relevance in the face of the changing conditions of modernity. This exacerbates social upheaval in Platfontein as people neither feel anchored in the present, in the space of on-going poverty and strife, nor grounded by the roots of the past. People have houses, but complain of having little to do, other than seeking to meet their most basic needs. This instills a strong sense of apathy and frustration that came through in many of my interviews, where people spoke of ‘just sitting’ and of feeling constrained by the landscape.

Further, people’s engagement with structures of bureaucracy, like government and NGOs, alters their own understanding, beliefs and subjectivities and transforms into the way they see themselves (Nadasdy, 2003). Many authors highlight the political expediency of ‘indigenous’ identities like that of ‘San’ (Barnard, 2006; Guenther, 2006; Robins, 2001; Sharp and Boonzaier, 1994; Sylvain, 2002; Theun, 2006). Claiming an indigenous identity as San gave the !Kun and Khwe political leverage when the ANC government met the promises of the former SADF in providing land and housing.

What it means to 'be San' passes into people's awareness through the projects and consciousness raising efforts of organizational structures like SASI. Perceptions around what it meant to be 'bushman' also filtered through from officers and the wider military bureaucracy of the SADF (Rousset, 2003; Uys, 1993a). The emphasis on being San or bushmen, rather than !Kun or Khwe, comes through from the outside as much as from within, through the groups association with the military, the state and NGOs who place particular value or emphasis on 'being San'. The !Kun and Khwe were two distinct groups of people who were lumped together as San through their experiences with the military, and for many, it remains important to emphasize this distinction.

As Robins (2001) recognizes, there are multiple local, national and global forces that influence and determine people's identities as San. In this, people are drawn into taking up essentialist identities that provide leverage in accessing political voice, land or resources, but that of necessity negate their complex histories and storylines, where "it is as though indigenous people lived in suspended animation in a prehistoric world of unadulterated nature which the rest of humanity has long since left behind" (Ingold, 2001: 139). Where people are granted their histories, and their intricate narratives of change and dislocation, these place doubt on their claims to indigenous identity or aboriginality (ibid.).

Discontinuity, dispossession and displacement as phenomena impact on how groups of people negotiate and construct their shared subjectivities - and are intricately tied into their storylines and history as a people (Erikson, 2003; Ernst, 1999; Rampton, 1999; Robins, 2001). There are groups of people who identify themselves as San through a shared history, not only of hunter-gathering, but also of inequality, dispossession and strife. The !Kun and Khwe's engagement with the military has taken them far from their roots in Angola and Namibia – they have experienced numerous relocations and have lived as refugees in South Africa, up until their current placement in Platfontein. There is no doubt that these changes have led to social disruption and have significantly altered their way of life. At the same, these experiences form a sense of a shared history and

identity – and as such are tied into how the !Kun and Khwe come to see themselves as a people and as San.

The recruitment of !Kun and Khwe into the military disrupted family, kinship and clan ties. Their collective history through various experiences of struggle, dispossession and relocation, however, comes together to create a sense of common identity and shared storyline that goes beyond a primordial hunter-gatherer past.

The next chapter highlights issues of poverty and dependency that complicate the NGO work that takes place in Platfontein. The focus on the !Kun and Khwe's heritage as 'San' generates further tensions that emerge through SASI's mandate to do both social development and cultural heritage work in Platfontein. Development suggests adaptation to modern consumer lifestyles and assimilation into the broader population, which does not sit comfortably with the notion of 'preservation' of culture through heritage work.

CHAPTER 4:

Poverty, Development and the work of SASI

Journeys to the Dumps

On my first day in Platfontein I visited one of the SASI offices, situated directly in Platfontein. I was invited by Chris Mpesi, the Platfontein program director, to join him and the staff to walk alongside a group of local women who went out early every morning to collect firewood. I accepted readily. This provided a very romantic image for my budding fieldwork – I would be walking alongside San woman journeying together to gather firewood. It was not made clear until later that we would be walking to the rubbish dump, to where many San women walk regularly to collect food, clothing and other necessities.

The idea of this quickly brought to mind questions about who these women were and what circumstances led them to make this expedition. I was still eager – I wanted to immerse myself in the field. I couldn't understand the reluctance of the others. As it happened I soon would.

We left around nine in the morning. The group of women had long since left without us - since no one had informed them of our plans - thus cleverly avoiding the worst of the blazing Northern Cape Sun. We walked for over two hours along a dusty red sand path with no shade, and with the sun beating down on our exposed skin. My enthusiasm for the outing quickly waned.

I took the time while we walked to question the program director about SASI's work and role within Platfontein. Through this conversation I was given a strong sense of the pivotal role SASI played within Platfontein, as an NGO and mediator for the community, where any social, health or work projects that were undertaken were run by or mediated

through SASI. SASI was involved in both social development and cultural heritage work in Platfontein.

When we finally arrived at the dumps, the scene was unsurprisingly very depressing, as it was to be on the other occasions I visited. Many !Kun and Khwe women, both young and old, dressed colorfully, and armed with a tools to sift through layers of junk and putrid foodstuff, were working the dumps, collecting food, clothing and other essentials. The smell of the dump – rotting food, burning plastic, all that humanity discards and disregards – was overwhelming.

It was a strange division of ‘us’ and ‘them’. ‘We’ who had come later, who were not there to collect food, who would soon leave for the cool office and who would not have to return anytime soon. ‘They’ who had left with the sunrise, who were there to collect food and essentials, who had been many times before, who would make many more excursions, and who would be there all day in the scorching sun sifting through garbage.

Nonetheless, SASI’s program director put the rest of the staff to work. They were instructed to chat with the women, to find out why they were frequenting the dumps, and, whether there any other work they would like to be involved with. Soon there was an interested and diverse crowd of women who halted work to engage with the discussions.

Chris, the programme director spoke about a sewing program that he said some of the women could possibly attend. SASI had organized a discount with one of the local colleges and could sponsor them to attend. The SASI staff thus divided the group of inquiring faces into two camps, those who said they were interested in learning to sew, and others who said they would like to work in the gardens and to learn about growing vegetables. The SASI staff wrote down the names of the women, and the work with which they would like to be involved. Conversations the staff had with the groups indicated the hardships the women faced in coming to the dumps, and that they felt they had few other options

Following up on this in the proceeding weeks, little seemed to have come of these inquiries. The women had been told that they would be given food packages to ease their immediate suffering and hunger - and so that they would not have to return to the dumps right away. These expectations were not lived up to. On one occasion a small group of women – who had been told by SASI that they would be given food parcels – arrived at the office. They were given a small food package and then told by one staff member not to come back.

Clearly the situation is a complex one that foregrounds various significant issues around poverty and dependency. How does one bring significant and positive change to a community like Platfontein when operating within the paradigms of development and cultural heritage? Given the current global situation of environmental changes, food and fuel crises (Maynard and Shiva, 2008), there is an increasingly felt need for NGOs to look for ways of freeing people from dependencies on governments and infrastructure

Poverty or Indigeneity?

On one occasion I sat surrounded by garbage on some old newspapers. With Marokko translating, I chatted with Anna and Maria*. Khwe speakers in their thirties, they said they had been coming to the dumps since they had moved to Platfontein a few years ago. In Schmitsdrift they had fished and sometimes got work on farms. They showed me the bits of fish that they had collected on the dumps and spread out on newspaper to dry. That fish was to come back and haunt me on all my dumps visits. Rotting and stinking, I felt embarrassed by my desire to turn away and retch. They had also collected some bread, a couple of onions and various other things that they would take home to their families. They said that they had been very ill from eating this food before, but what could they do; they needed to eat and feed their families. It was hunger, I was told, that motivated them to come here. They used cloth to tie all they had collected into a heavy bundle which they carried back on their heads.*

They told me of a family who had been hospitalized for food poisoning. One young woman I met on another visit had an insistent cough that she said she had developed since coming to the dumps. On another occasion, I offered two older women, easily in their late sixties, a lift back to Platfontein. As we placed their bundles in the back of the car I felt their weight, and wondered at how these women were able to make this journey. They were happy to rest their feet. This was hard, tiring work they told me, and sometimes they got sick, but as no one in their family had an income, it was a journey they needed to make.

Often, I struggled to access eloquent interviews or conversations on the dumps. Not only were the women very busy, but there was a sense of discomfort around the conversations. I was told repeatedly, with no obfuscation, that it was quite simply hunger or necessity that brought them there. I do not doubt that. It was at the dumps that I was always uncomfortably aware of my position as outsider, and I recognized that how no matter how much kindness or acceptance I received in the field, I would always be witnessing and participating from my position as privileged researcher (Minh-Ha, 1989; Minh-Ha, 1991).

It never got easier for me to go to the dumps. If anything I felt more and more disturbed by the fact that this was a regular journey made by many !Kun and Khwe women. I felt ashamed that I, who rarely spent more than an hour there, reacted so strongly, when the !Kun and Khwe women were regular visitors of the place, and spent entire days there, scrounging through trash in the scorching sun. After returning a few times and speaking to different people, I found it hard to believe that anything other than lack of alternatives, hunger and necessity motivated this journey.

Contradictory ideas and discourses surfaced in the conversations I had with one of SASI's ~~directors~~-senior employees around the issue of why people were visiting the dumps:

Meryl-joy Wildschut: These communities are hunter-gatherers. Their environment has changed. There are dumps in their environment. So they are gathering. It is not the most sanitary and

healthy and socially acceptable place for people to be gathering. But that is what is within their environment and there are resources that they feel that they are able to access there. So that's my cynical response to that or rational or whatever. But from a humane perspective, and as a fellow human being it's just not on. Nobody should have to be reduced to such a level that they go to the dumps and scavenge for food. But very interestingly on Friday when we raised the issue in our workshop with the leadership, one of the leaders actually said, my wife goes there and she doesn't have to go. I provide adequately for our family and I haven't been able to convince her not to go. But if you are adequately provided for, and you don't have a need to go there, why do you go? Because our obvious assumption is that they go there because they are hungry, they go there for food. But if this person is saying my wife doesn't need to be there, why is she going, maybe there is a sense of something to do with your time, a camaraderie amongst the people who go and a kind of sense of I belong to some kind of group. I don't know - we need to unpack that.

These words suggest that collecting food on the dumps is an alternative form of gathering that the women engage in when the landscape denies them other forms of foraging. In stating that the “communities *are* hunter-gatherers” she draws on a discourse of genealogical descent (Ingold, 2000). In this discourse hunter-gathering is intrinsic to ‘being San’ and is a consequence of a primordial genetic heritage. This potentially feeds into rigid and primitivist accounts of ‘being San’, and does not allow a space for thinking about how people’s way of life and concerns alter as they encounter the changing landscapes of modernity. This also creates an uncomfortable tension with the “human rights” discourse that the director draws on

Allowing the possibility that dump gathering in an issue of genetic ancestry obscures the wider tensions of poverty faced by the people of Platfontein. Within the current world system, where many people have lost the ability to sustain themselves (Shiva, 2005), being ‘San’ or ‘indigenous’ is oftentimes experienced as not very different from being poor and marginalized. It is almost certainly poverty and not ‘indigeneity’ that motivates journeys to the dumps.

It is difficult to imagine that the journeys to the dumps are made by women with access to other alternatives. It is possible, however, as the quote suggests, that it does give women who are unemployed and have little else to do in Platfontein (other than ‘sit around’) the chance to engage in purposeful activity alongside friends and kin – activity that allows them to sustain themselves and their families - however aversive that activity may seem from the outside.

A relational approach (Ingold, 2001) is useful as it allows for change; whereas discourses of genetic descent tie people to fixed and essentialist identities. Ingold (2001) argues for a relational approach that recognizes culture as the skills that develop in relation to a particular environment, rather than being simply passed down through a genetic line. Skills like hunting and gathering would have had relevance within the wider contexts of people's lives, and within the landscape in which the !Kun and Khwe lived, in Angola and Namibia. In Schmitsdrift people fished because of the proximity of the river and some gathered bushfoods because these were to some extent still available. People spoke about enjoying hunting and gathering bush foods, and having the freedom to wander in the bush.

In Platfontein the women go to the dumps to collect food because this one of the few means of sustenance available to them. The fact they are 'gathering' food in the dumps does not point to a genetic 'hunter-gatherer' ancestry or a 'foraging' *mentality*. I was told by Moyo, Changan, Menuputo and other older people that gathering food was an activity women were skilled at in Angola and Namibia. It had relevance in terms of the wider landscape in which people lived and in terms of relationships between people. It enabled women to feed themselves and their families and to be engaged in meaningful activity alongside others (see Shostak, 1981; 2000). As women provided much of the sustenance, it was not seen as a lesser activity than hunting (ibid.).

These aspects are still present when the women collect food at the dumps. They are engaged in an activity that enables them to provide for their families and they walk with and work alongside other women who may be part of a wider network of friends or kin. This helps them meet their survival needs in the present while perhaps drawing on activities and skills they developed in different contexts. However, there is no sense of pleasure or enjoyment around the journeys to the dumps.

Although previous experiences of 'gathering' may provide the skills and impetus to make the journey, it is poverty, and not a primordial genetic ancestry, that motivates these expeditions. I was told emphatically by the !Kun and Khwe women I spoke to that

it was hunger and the desire to feed their families that sent them there. The expeditions to the dumps are difficult, tiring and unpleasant. When they were presented with other options by the SASI staff, such as working in the gardens or sewing, many of the women were very interested. I was told by Anna, Maria and others that if there were other options open to them - that would allow them to sustain themselves or to be purposefully employed - these would be preferable.

Mpesi however, expressed the view that there were too many obstacles to putting these kinds of programmes into place without reinstating dependency. He pointed out that if the women were to work and be trained in the gardens, there would be a significant period of time during which the produce would be planted and grow before it could be harvested. The women would need to be provided with salaries to tide them over, which SASI felt unable to provide. Project funding tended to be for short periods before it would dry out.

Yet with greater focus and expertise, projects that allow people to sustain themselves through creating gardens and growing food, could play an important role in Platfontein: organic gardens would allow people to feed themselves, to free themselves from dependency on SASI and soup kitchens, and to engage in meaningful activity that would also beautify their community. Organic food can also be sold in local markets, providing an income for necessities that cannot be generated within the community itself.

Cordeiro (2008) gives the example of creating sustainable webs in Brazil through reinstating local and organic food systems, and a network has been developed which connects NGOs, local peasant farmers and consumers to promote ecological agriculture. In this new networks are created of “local food systems, local ‘gift’ economies and renewable energy networks” that offer an alternative to those of multinational corporations that do not respect people or environments (Ibid., p.22). In this communities are strengthened and empowered.

Rather than asking how they can get people to come and work in 'their' gardens in exchange for food, SASI may well find it more productive to ask how the organisation could empower people to envision, create and develop their own gardens. When thinking about funding, NGOs should be asking what tools and equipment, whether hoes, solar panels or rainwater tanks, could be provided to facilitate self-sufficiency and enable people to take responsibility for their own projects. Projects that teach people to build their own houses, create permaculture or organic gardens, or work with alternative sources of energy are ultimately projects that will enable people to build their own communities, develop their own vision and to live in ways that are sustainable in the long-term. Obviously these should be context specific and take into consideration the particular needs of the community, as well as the limitations of the landscape.

Arguably, the work of NGOs should be to free people of dependence on systems such as the labour market, particularly as "industrialisation and the free market are supposed to be the solution to all our ills", yet instead the result has been to "create mass unemployment, poverty and hunger" (Tudge, 2005). In this it is important to look for solutions that create self-sufficiency and sustainability, rather than create dependency on governments, NGOs, donors and tourist dollars.

For example, water has been a long-standing issue for the !Kun and Khwe some of whom have still not been supplied with running water. While the initial expense of rainwater tanks may be high, they could be subsidized, and installed as a prerequisite with all RDP housing. The expectation that people will be able to pay for grid-based water or electricity is misplaced given the few possibilities for employment. Rather than connecting people to electricity grids, subsidized solar panels would make better use of the abundant South African sunshine, and obviate the problem of people being unable to pay their electricity bills.

SASI, Social Development and Dependency

Projects that teach sustainable skills such as permaculture or natural building, that develop ethical local networks to facilitate income generation, and that enable people to sustain themselves in ways that move them beyond dependency, have begun to be initiated more in township contexts elsewhere in South Africa, as well as globally (Cordeiro, 2008; Makaulule and Swanby, 2008). The hunter-gatherer myth, however, still feeds into the kinds of projects that are initiated in places such as Plafontein.

John Marshall (in his documentary film *Death by Myth*, 2002) and others have pointed out how the discourse of the mystical hunter-gatherer encumbers the San in their interactions with NGOs and sponsors, and leads to the selective funding of interventions that reinforce the primordial bushman myth, and that do not consider the real conditions that people live under in the present (See Durrington, 2004; Robins, 2001). Marshall depicts a situation where the thriving vegetable gardens of the !Juhoansi in Namibia were destroyed by wandering elephants. These were brought in when a game reserve was established in the area by an NGO apparently working to meet the needs of local San-speakers. The documentary depicts a thriving and autonomous community spiraling into poverty and alcoholism after the establishment of the reserve; where it was felt that the San could gain employment as ‘natural resource managers’ – similar to what Nadasdy (2003, 2005) has dubbed the ‘ecologically noble savage’. While Marshall’s portrayal may be one-sided, his message is clear; the essentialist and stereotypical view of the San as pristine hunter-gatherers has complicated their interactions with NGOs and other organisations. Like White (1999), he recognizes that this view of the San has created the potential for paternalism, and even exploitation, in relations between the San and NGOs, donors and the state.

Similarly, in their struggle for access to rights, the San are compelled to promote an essentialist image of themselves as pristine hunter-gatherers (Sylvain, 2005; 2008). This antithetically creates a situation where “San claims for land and natural resources” and “for social and economic justice” are distorted “into demands for “cultural preservation” (Sylvain, 2000: 1074).

Understandably, the landscape of Platfontein does not easily support organic vegetable gardening, but there are examples of projects that have been successfully initiated in similarly challenging conditions, for example in the Karoo in South Africa, and in similarly dry areas in Botswana. There are people in Platfontein who have created their own vegetable gardens growing plants indigenous to Namibia and Angola and SASI has sought to support this kind of initiative - though there was only one !Kun man working on this project at the time I was in the field. He felt overwhelmed by the enormity of the task and did not feel fully supported by SASI in his work. He would walk to work everyday, which took on average two-and-half hours one way. His requests to SASI for a bicycle to reduce his five hourly daily travel had not been successful. I was told by Chris Mpesi that sponsors were less likely to fund projects such as gardening that did not align with the stereotypical construction of 'San-ness'.

SASI did, however, provide the women of the dumps with food packages to ease their immediate suffering. The food packages consisted of a small packet of soy product and some legumes/grains which might tide a small family over for a day or two. Food packages as a solution is far from ideal, and ties into the argument that "government policy regularly favours high subsidization in terms of infrastructure, food and employment instead of systematically increasing the San's opportunities to make their own independent achievements and decisions" (Hohmann, 2007: 24).

For many groups of people being 'indigenous' comes to mean the same thing as being poor and marginalized, as they are dispossessed of land and other resources, displaced or heavily discriminated against. For many San this has been especially true as they have been integrated into the wider structures of power as farm laborers and squatters, have been integrated into other poor communities, or have experienced hostile discrimination, dispossession and displacement (Schrire, 2003; Sylvain, 2000, 2003, 2005, 2008; Rousset, 2003; Wilmsen, 1989).

In certain ways, the Platfontein !Kun and Khwe avoided the fate of poverty and marginalisation through their involvement with the army, which provided both

paternalistic care, and kept the people together in relative isolation on the Omega army base (Uys, 1993a, Robbins, 2004). However, the discontinuation of their involvement with the SADF has brought them to a place of continued dependence on the government, and on organizations like SASI, and the move to Platfontein brings the threat of an on-going cycle of poverty. Their identity as !Kun and Khwe has arguably provided political leverage in accessing land and housing and in attracting the attentions of SASI and other sponsors. It is this same identity, however, that drives their marginalisation in Kimberly, and that adds complexity to the work of social development undertaken by SASI.

SASI has clearly struggled with the issue of dependency in Platfontein. The SASI director spoke to me about the challenges they faced in seeking to bring the !Kun and Khwe to a place of greater self-sufficiency. There is the sense however in her discourse that complete independence will be unlikely - and that dependency will continue to be a concern:

For the community as a whole I think the move away from Schmitsdrift and coming here has to be sort of a journey of independence. And we have to be very careful and mindful not to create a sense of dependency here. And I am very concerned that if the community becomes too dependent on social grants and those kinds of things that they wont make an effort to develop, to try and find work, to increase their education levels and so on, and they become sucked up again in that cycle of poverty and dependency on grants.

The argument that social grants create dependency, rather than the wider workings of the system, needs to be challenged. For poor people living within the constraints of the current world system dependency seems to be an almost inevitable consequence of the workings of that system (Escobar, 1988; Shiva, 2005, 2006). It is also the poor and disenfranchised who most often live in areas that suffer the effects of environmental degradation through industrial and economic development (Croll and Parkin, 1992).

Dependency and domination have been prominent features of the San`s interactions with the state and other bureaucracies (Hohmann, 2007). The need for social grants is arguably a consequence of a system that limits people`s very ability to sustain themselves (Shiva, 2005, 2006). In contexts like that of Platfontein, the threat is that NGOs engaged in

development work, and immersed in that paradigm, see dependency as a consequence of people's apathy or unwillingness to try, rather than recognizing that poor people are constrained by the wider workings of the market-driven economy (Shiva, 2005, 2006). SASI's project director in Platfontein spoke about his frustration at the 'apathy' he encountered in Platfontein:

Its an illusion for them to believe that they are going to get everything that they want. The world is not about Platfontein. South Africa is not about Platfontein. You know that Platfontein is but one of a bigger society. I sometimes feel that there is not a lot of appreciation because I mean many of the guys here were soldiers in the Defense Force that killed our own. But being the beautiful country that we are, we forgive and we forget. And what we are saying is, stand in line like everybody else. And if you can't stand in line go out there and make it by yourself because you can. This is not a government that says you cannot achieve this, you cannot become this, you cannot. The one thing the government gave everyone in this country is freedom...and freedom never meant dependence, it never meant that. You see there is this illusion on the part of many people that freedom meant chicken in a pot.

Numerous structural constraints arguably limit the means for many people living on the margins of society to market their own skills or to procure outside employment – although of course there are some who do. In the Northern Cape, as in the rest of South Africa, there is not enough work or employment for those who are educated, never mind those who do not possess skills that are attractive to the job market, or who do not speak the dominant languages. Why then are NGOs such as SASI not looking for alternatives to the current impasse in the mainstream development paradigm?

Taking into account their limited staff and funding, not to mention the workings of the wider market economy, it is unrealistic to expect SASI to be in a position to address all the sustenance and livelihood needs of the entire community. Undoubtedly, SASI as a support agency feels the pressure of their pivotal role in Platfontein, and may feel that they themselves do not receive enough support and recognition in this role.

Support workers and other actors engaged in social development work in these kinds of contexts may feel like the communities they work with are not doing enough to help themselves step out of dependency. In this, it is vital to recognize the wider workings of power, where “the global free trade economy has become a threat to sustainability and the very survival of the poor...is at stake not just as a side effect or as an exception but in

a systemic way through a restructuring of our worldview at the most fundamental level. Sustainability, sharing and survival are being economically outlawed in the name of market competitiveness and market efficiency” (Shiva, 2005: 487).

This becomes uniquely disempowering for people living in contexts of poverty, who are reliant on outside interventions, which are never able to fully address core issues of poverty and dependency. The question of the !Kun and Khwe women who journey to the dumps highlights these kinds of tensions. At present, collecting food at the dumps is arguably one of the only means available to them of sustaining themselves without being dependent on food packages that may never come, or a soup kitchen that cannot feed enough people.

Critiques of development argue that it runs counter to people’s very ability to sustain themselves and often fosters the very dependence it claims to address (Escobar, 1997; Escobar, 1988; Esteva, 1992; Esteva, 1997; Gardener and Lewis, 1996; Shiva, 2005, 2006). Communities come to be dependent on a system or organization, only to be devastated when the system fails or the organization moves on. Development counters people’s ability to sustain themselves by imposing on, degrading or destroying the landscape and its natural resources, and it is often the poor and disposed who are most affected by this (Croll and Parkin, 1992). Conventional development has tended to deplete and degrade the natural environment and as such to create a negative cycle where “the very resources on which development is based are increasingly at risk from the existing management practices and environmental exploitation presently undertaken in its name” (ibid., p.5). People are drawn into industries that degrade the environment and are dependent on a minimum wage offered by an uncertain, and frequently exploitative, labour market.

Arguably, one way to free people of this dependence is to initiate radical alternatives to mainstream development models: potentially alternatives that challenge the workings of the wider system (Esteva, 1997; Graeber, 2004; Kingsnorth, 2004). These, however,

cannot be imposed from without and as such usually implies a process of radical conscientisation (Kingsnorth, 2004).

For the San - who have been newly introduced to into the ‘politics of recognition’ (Silverman, 2005) after a prolonged history of dispossession, discrimination, forced assimilation and genocide at the hands of colonialists and the apartheid government (Van Der Post, 1961) - dependency on government and on outside organizations has become almost endemic. The process of becoming conscientised to their rights, and of being drawn into the ‘politics of recognition’, which has enabled them to assert those rights, has in many cases come from the outside through organizations like SASI, with the consequence that a certain perspective has been enforced. Importantly, Hohmann (2007: 25) points out that “it would be a simplification to depict the San as merely being at the states’ or NGO’s mercy as passive victims”. Nonetheless, in exerting their political will it oftentimes becomes necessary for the San to move within and take on the language and understandings of bureaucracy (Nadasdy, 2003), and there are limitations to what can be achieved through this.

Once land rights have been attained, and people find themselves still in a state of dependency - on government, or sponsors, or NGOs – it seems that the next step is inevitably some form of ‘development’. In an interview, Chris Mpesi commented:

That’s why I very seldom speak of projects. I have a fundamental problem with the term projects, and especially in this community, and communities as a whole. You want to look at development, and you want to look at programs. Community project is so, you go and cut grass and when the money is up it is finished. You have never really learned real sustainable skills. For me its about sustainability, its about growth, its about development, its about getting people to gain their independence and respect. So I trust that my job is to bring people to a point where they realize they are independent, they are.

Sustainable development has been argued to better meet the needs and concerns of ‘indigenous’ peoples (Carino, 2004). The concept of sustainable development is a significant one as it “aims to meet the needs of the present without compromising that of future generations” and gives salience environmental issues (Croll and Parkin, 1992: 8). Sillitoe (2002: 1) points out that “development agencies have been casting around for several years with mounting evidence of resources wasted on ill-conceived frequently

centrally imposed schemes that have not only failed to improve matters in less developed countries, but which have also on occasion made them worse, sending in the eggheads to sort out local problems”. Sustainable development and more people-centered, grassroots, participatory approaches have been seen as the means to redress this (Croll and Parkin, 1992; Pottier, 1993, Sillitoe, 2002).

On the ground, however, these kinds of projects may not play out as intended (Chapin, 2004; Pottier, 1993; Wallace and Diamente, 2005). Sustainable development has tended to be dogged by some of the same obstacles and failures that have been core features of the development project, perhaps because it is guided by similar ideological assumptions. ‘Sustainability’ and ‘participation’ often tend to be buzzwords that suggest more than they actually do (Pottier, 1993). Likewise, participatory, or ‘people-based’ projects rarely play out this way on the ground and “concepts of participation, representation, stakeholders and partnerships (tend) to be highly problematic in practice” (Bologna, 2006: 8). This needs to be challenged in order to create the potential for true participation and for projects that meet the real, rather than imagined needs of the communities within which NGOs operate.

It need not be the case that sustainability or participation is sidelined. NGOs and organizational structures can and should move beyond lip speak to give real consideration to the future needs of communities and the long-term impact of their initiatives on the environment (Edelman and Haugerad, 2005). As Edelman and Haugerad (2005: 34) point out, there are NGOs and grassroots organizations “who challenge modern Western development” and for whom “sustainability is a serious pursuit”. It is also possible to use models such as consensus to ensure real participation; ideally this would eventually mean transferring ‘ownership’ of initiatives from the hands of NGOs to that of the project’s intended beneficiaries.

Croal and Darou (2002:97-98) discuss principles that should inform development among the First Nations people of Canada. These include: “respect for the earth and all creation”, an understanding that the “expansionist/materialist Western society will

eventually collapse under its own weight”, “the attainment of economic self-sufficiency”, “assurance that development will not provide a threat of irreparable environmental damage”, and “assurance that a project will have more positive than negative social impacts on first nations people.” Significantly, Croal and Darou (*ibid.*, p.99) comment on the fact that earlier approaches to development “were short-lived and drew people’s away from traditional land-based livelihoods, leaving them unemployed and unskilled when projects closed down”.

In the case of the !Kun and Khwe women who visit the dumps, it seems that it has been easier to talk about teaching them ‘sustainable skills’ than it is to implement this. My interviews with SASI highlighted the difficulties and tensions inherent in facilitating projects in which community members are real stakeholders, and this seems to create a situation where full ‘participation’ is sidelined even before projects begin because of the challenges that are encountered. How then can local people be supported and empowered to create changes in their own communities in ways that are sustainable over time and that move them beyond dependency on NGOs, the state and unpredictable market forces?

The next chapter explores some of the dynamics and tensions of cultural heritage work in Platfontein. When development and cultural heritage are brought together there is the danger that what is essentially the commercialization of culture is mistaken for cultural ‘preservation’. Then, narratives that meet the imaginings of tourists and sponsors come to replace people’s complex histories and storylines, as these do not fall neatly into the essentialist discourse of the ‘indigenous’.

CHAPTER 5:

HERITAGE WORK AND THE COMMERCIALISATION OF CULTURE

Cultural Heritage in Platfontein

SASI is working within a context of ideas and discourses around cultural heritage. Within this there are certain ideas around what it means to 'be San'. At the same time, SASI is working in a context of semi-urban poverty, within which discourses of 'development' come to the fore. Social development implies adaptation and assimilation into modern consumer lifestyles and into the wider market system (Edelman and Haugerud, 2005; Gardener and Lewis, 1996). This arguably does not sit comfortably with the notion of 'cultural preservation' and creates an inevitable tension.

In engaging with the projects of both social development and cultural heritage, SASI is challenged with the task of making skills like arts, crafts and cultural performances marketable and helping people to earn an income through these. This arguably leads to a 'commodification of culture', where there is an emphasis on projects and skills that are marketable and have the potential for income generation. Considering that in Platfontein, market forces have a strong pull, this can be a beneficial way to empower people to make use of skills they may have, and to earn a livelihood through these. There is no doubt that certain projects, like the arts and crafts programme, have very positive offshoots for the the !Kun and Khwe, and enable people to utilize their skills to generate an income. Further, the work is enjoyed by the crafters and allows them to engage in meaningful activity, and to work from home, thus sustaining family and friendship networks.

At present, however, there are few people who are able to generate a sustainable income through arts and crafts, and in order for this to happen, SASI needs to develop a stronger market for the crafts. This means that there needs to be a greater emphasis on developing marketing and business skills in the community, or bringing in people with expertise in

this arena. Again, there is the issue of dependence. SASI may feel overstretched in that it is not enough for them to initiate these kinds of projects without developing and maintaining a market, and at present there is only one staff member working exclusively with the artists. The artists and crafters, constrained by a lack of business and marketing skills, as well as having very limited means of transport and communication, are unlikely to develop markets for their craft themselves, without substantial outside intervention. As it is, the small number of SASI staff are currently overstretched in all the various projects that are being run in Platfontein, which means that there is an emphasis on initiating projects, sometimes without enough person power and know-how to ensure their successful follow through.

This creates a situation of mutual tension, as well as a sense of disempowerment, where crafters are reliant on SASI to market their wares, while SASI experiences demands on them that they have limited means to meet. One crafter told me that he earns very little from his craft, and often goes hungry. Two of the most successful artists complained of exploitation from an outside organization that came into buy their paintings in bulk and sell them in Cape Town. As they were unable to reach outside markets themselves, they had no choice but to sell their paintings for little profit. At present the only market for the crafts procured by SASI is in a small shop at Wildebeest Kuil (the Rock Art Museum on Platfontein), which currently sees very few tourists and visitors. There are initiatives underway to develop Wildebeest Kuil as a tourist center, which would possibly provide a more reliable market for San crafts. This remains to be seen.

It is important to recognize that when culture is commodified, it is taken out of context and imbued with a new set of meanings (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004). As I discussed in chapter four, skills develop in relation to an active engagement with the landscape and all its constituents. When people are moved off the land the significance of these skills alters. Creating San art for tourists, although a positive form of income generation, is very different from their visionary and ritualistic use in “hunting, dreaming and trancing” (Cohen, 2007: 27). On the other hand, the creative and dynamic use of art and stories can assist people to draw on pre-existing knowledge and understandings to

make sense of the situations they find themselves within (Green, 2005; Bruchac, 2005). This cannot happen however if people are limited to performing and creating in ways that meet the expectations of tourists, NGOs and sponsors and if they do not have ownership or control of the commodification of their culture through tourism and the self-representation it entails (Kirtsoglou and Theodossopoulos, 2004).

Further, even while NGOs or states may intervene and restructure their relations with 'indigenous' people so that they may assist them to maintain or to 'preserve' their 'heritage', it is these very interactions that usher in new paradigms of knowledge that may be antithetical to those held by the people (Nadasdy, 2003; Roué, 2003a). In the context of a study of Cree relations with environmental NGOs, Roué (2003a: 534) argues that "the language of some indigenous leaders is now studded with references that clearly derive, at least in their phrasing, from the prompting of environmental NGOs". Further, NGOs appropriate "indigenous world views and simplify(y) them for their own purposes. Subsequently, having become modern, these hybrid notions are then offered back to the indigenous peoples, who finally disseminate them once again as their own" (ibid.).

There is no doubt that people's interactions with the state, NGOs or any form of bureaucracy radically alters how they see and define themselves (Nadasdy, 2003). The !Kun and Khwe's identity as San has been shaped through a long-standing involvement with the paternalistic structures of the military and the state (Douglas, 1997; Rousset, 2003), and in the present it arguably continues to be refashioned through the mediation of SASI. SASI has its own ideas about what it means to be San, and these feed into the kinds of projects and interventions that take place in Platfontein. These ideas are reinforced in initiatives like the leadership and youth development programmes that are run through SASI. Chris Mpesi, for example, drew on the discourse of cultural survival in one interview:

I think what it probably means to be San in the context of living in Platfontein...it means adjusting to buying food from the Spar but still being able to eat Katolo [a kind of spinach] with the same passion. It means wearing clothing from Edgars but still dressing up in traditional wear and being passionate about it. I think it means buying jewelry from the jewelry store but still having a passion, more of a passion for the pieces and bracelets that are made by the old people. It means

understanding Western doctors but also to have similar faith in traditional doctors and finding a balance between the two. It means eating in restaurants but enjoying their traditional meals as well. It means respecting the laws of the land but also having respect for traditional laws and traditional leaders. It means capitalizing on the education opportunities that are created and becoming very well qualified, but using that knowledge to promote ones own cultural heritage. For the San of Platfontein it means understanding where you come from but accepting yourself fully as part and parcel of South African society. I think it also means understanding comparatively speaking how privileged they are compared to their brothers and sisters in other areas. It means enjoying switching on the lights but also enjoying sometimes to make fire using traditional methods and to teach it to the youngsters. It means listening to kwaito on the radio and knowing the different Kwaito artists and the R and B artists...**but also when it comes to traditional practices spreading that throughout the world as well and selling it to the rest of the world as a culture intact.** Finding a balance in a very crazy world, yet exciting world, between...an ever-changing western society and technological advances and still maintaining a growing culture, and I am not saying a stagnant culture. And that for me is being San in Platfontein in this day and age.

Mpesi brings together the discourse of ‘cultural survival’ with a development and cultural heritage agenda. In this, cultural heritage work then has the potential to be guided by the problematic assumption that culture can exist in a vacuum, and can be ‘preserved’ in a semi-static form, even while contexts, landscapes and people’s life circumstances are irrevocably altered. Mpesi suggests that it is possible to maintain a balance between the two, and for people to have a ‘foot in both worlds’. As I have argued, however, as landscapes are fundamentally altered, and as people’s life circumstances are changed, there is a concomitant change in their way of life, in the skills they use, and in their beliefs and concerns.

The older people, who were born in Angola and Namibia, may continue to live with a ‘foot in both worlds’, particularly as they hold memories of, and skills and understandings connected with a different way of life. As Bregin and Kruiper (2004) suggest, however, this may have an element of psychic pain, as people feel displaced from their roots, and experience the struggle and limited freedom of their new lives. This came through in my interviews with various !Kun and Khwe speakers who described having more freedom to engage with their surroundings in Angola and Namibia and felt frustrated by the landscape of Platfontein where there was little to do but ‘sit around’.

The skills, knowledge and way of life associated with hunter-gathering diminish in relevance for younger people born into a semi-urban environment. Nonetheless, they may

take on the essentialist language and understandings of NGOs around what it means to ‘be San’:

...having become modern these hybrid notions are then offered back to the indigenous peoples, who finally disseminate them once again as their own. It is regrettable that such postmodern syncretism may lead astray young indigenous people who cannot necessarily distinguish the copy from the original. Having lived away from the community during their school years, they lack a firm grounding in their own culture and are misled by forgeries (Roué, 2003a: 534).

As the quote by SASI’s programme director suggests, this hybridized notion of culture can be spread “throughout the world” and sold to “the rest of the world as a culture intact”. Cultural heritage work undertaken in this kind of context has the potential to take up an essentialist idea of ‘culture’ as imposed by the outside, and sell it as the ‘real thing’. In certain scenarios the discourses of ‘cultural heritage’ and ‘cultural survival’ may thus be appropriated to justify what is essentially a commercialization or ‘selling’ of culture (White, 1999).

Further, as Weiss (2007: 413) argues the concept of heritage “contains within itself a number of inherent structural logics – logics which suggest that projects labeled heritage will be pulled in directions that may run counter to the hopes and expectations of those evoking the term”. In this, it is important for NGOs to recognize that they are merely translators from “one world, or representative system, to another...and that they can never become perfect representatives...of the society they speak for” (Roué, 2003b: 620). In this role as mediator there is always the danger of a “neocolonial appropriation” (Roué, 2003: 534) of ‘indigenous’ understandings, or the imposition of outside understandings, rather than a real joining and dialogue between NGOs and the groups they claim to represent.

Footprints of the San

Footprints of the San (F.O.S.) is a project that SASI is planning to initiate under the banner of cultural heritage. This project offers the possibility of income generation for some of the !Kun and Khwe through cultural tourism. The !Kun and Khwe will perform

different aspects of their ‘culture’ and ‘traditions’ in order to give tourists a ‘taste’ of ‘being San’. F.O.S. will take place at Wildebeest Kuil, where it is hoped that it will attract more tourists to the rock art site. The SASI Programme Director described the project in an interview:

Tourists rock up at Wildebeest Kuil. There are arts and crafts that they can buy, but there are also routes that they can travel. But Footprints of the San is really a program that, lets say, gives people a taste of the community. In the San, we have got people who can make fires, we have got people who can do traditional dances, we sometimes can do archery and those kinds of stuff. So we are currently working on organized tour groups that are going to come out and we are going to have the dances and all of those there. So at a fee. So when people arrive, they are met by a group of dancers who can dance with them, who can do a healing dance, they can do a bit of drumming, they can do a bit of archery. They can try make fire ... They can eat some traditional meals. They can learn about the healing powers of particular products. So we are setting up a little village there.

As ‘sustainable development’ has become the new buzzword, initiatives and projects that highlight cultural and ecotourism have been punted as resourceful solutions that allow ‘indigenous’ groups to engage in ‘sustainable development’ while supporting ‘cultural survival’ (McIntosh, 1999; Schalken, 1999; White, 1999; Wood, 1999; Wright, 2000). In this view, indigenous people threatened by the invasion of the global economy and “exploited because they cannot interpret the current systems and use it for their benefit” can be guided by NGOs who are thus able to facilitate a “softer entry into the market economy” (Wood, 1999: 1-2). ‘Sustainable development’ though cultural and ecotourism is seen to be the means through which indigenous people can straddle traditional and modern worlds, while still retaining their ‘traditional culture’.

This may create an uncomfortable tension with ‘indigenous’ peoples performing ‘culture’ in ways that conform to the needs of the market – which is usually through playing out romantic or primitivist tropes (Nadasdy, 2005; White, 1999). This also facilitates an uncomfortable blurring between the performance/commercialization of ‘culture’ and what is believed to be ‘cultural preservation’. In this blurring, there is the danger of commercial exploitation in the name of ‘cultural survival’, as John Marshall’s *Death by Myth* so clearly highlights (Wilmsen, 2003; Weissner, 2003). The commercial interests around cultural tourism may become glossed over (White, 1999), as performances for tourists, come to be marketed as a means of ‘cultural preservation’ or heritage work. In

these instances there is likely to be a reification of culture, as people perform to essentialist narratives that feed into the romanticized desires and imaginings of consumers.

Essentialist discourses, and discourses around ‘cultural survival’, also take hold of the imaginings of sponsors and donors and can lead to projects that “sometimes operat[e] unhampered by common sense or any understanding of what people actually need” (Durlington, 2004: 593). These projects, guided by the trope of the ‘ecologically noble savage’ (Nadasdy, 2005), or by romantic notions of what it means to ‘be San’, may assume that people are more interested in ‘preserving culture’, or in being stewards of the environment, than they are with earning a livelihood. In order to prevent the possibility of commercial exploitation or antagonistic relationships, there needs to be a recognition that marginalized peoples are justifiably as concerned with earning an income, and with being able to provide for their families, as they are with issues of ‘cultural survival’. Further, as *Death by Myth* (Marshall, 1999) so vividly demonstrates, people may be more concerned with engaging with activities, such as developing agricultural projects that enable them to sustain themselves independently, than in playing out the San myth for tourists and NGOs.

Cultural tourism, as a form of heritage work, is more likely to commodify, than to ‘preserve’, culture. What is ‘sold’ to tourists is unlikely to reflect the reality of people’s present circumstances or the complexities of their histories and storylines (Schrire, 2003; Weiss, 2007). Once ‘culture’ is taken into a public space it is no longer lived, but displayed or performed. People then perform to other’s expectations of what that ‘culture’ is (White, 1999).

In a project like F.O.S what people will give to tourists in their performances is not a ‘taste of the community’ as the quote suggests. What is being offered up instead is a performance of ‘culture’ that meets the needs and imaginings of tourists and others visiting the site. There is a disjuncture between the picture of a San village where people are involved in ‘traditional’ activities, and the reality of people’s lives in Platfontein,

where there is not much to do but ‘sit around’, where women scrounge for food at the dumps, where livelihood and sustenance is an overwhelming concern, where people wear Western clothing and eat what they have or can afford.

This kind of narrative potentially feeds into primitivist and romantic imaginings around what it means to ‘be San’, reifies and essentialises that identity, and reinforces the same worn stereotypes that have been circulating for decades (Lee, 19992; Wilmsen, 2003). As Weiss (2007: 417) argues, “heritage then comes to designate a sphere in which the political negotiation of identitarian claims comes to be thought of in terms of tourist dollars”.

SASI, in initiating a project like F.O.S. needs to proceed with great sensitivity. Clearly, ‘culture’ has become a commodity, and if this is recognized and put on the table the potential for exploitation is less. This acknowledges that is what is being bought, sold or performed is not ‘culture’ but rather is the valuable skills, knowledge and time of the people involved, and they should be adequately remunerated for this. There is no doubt that an initiative that offers the possibility for income generation would be welcomed by the community, as would the opportunity to make use of their skills and understandings. Much of this depends on the sensitivity with which the project is initiated, run and managed.

In doing so, the complexities of peoples’ identities, backgrounds and storylines, as well as local dynamics and politics, should be taken into consideration. NGOs need to explore ways in which they can give full cognizance to the dynamic and heterogeneous subjectivities and histories of the groups they work with. As Weiss (ibid.) argues, heritage “has become, in many important and frankly powerful ways, no less a site of consumption than any other rapidly expanding market of material culture... heritage sites primarily oriented to the consumer... are susceptible to glossing the complexities of local interests and politics in order to make these local politics more uncontroversial to tourists, researchers, bureaucrats and others.”

As people working in the field have become more aware of some of the terms of the debate there has been a more nuanced and critical approach to cultural heritage work. This is not always the case, however, especially when heritage work becomes tied up in the 'politics of recognition' and subject to the forces of the market.

University of Cape Town

CONCLUSION

People's experiences of being relocated, of being dispossessed of land, and of the altered landscapes of modernity, bring with them concomitant changes in their way of life, values, beliefs and understandings. This dissertation has shown how, for the !Kun and Khwe of Platfontein, the experience of living in a very different, semi-urban landscape itself alters and redefines what it means to 'be San'. The dry barren earth of Platfontein shifts people away from an active and relational engagement with the land (Ingold, 2001), and brings to the fore other concerns and experiences.

In walking the land (in Schmitsdrift and Barkley-West) with Moyo, Changan and Shimone, I was shown a very rich and vivid way of engaging with the landscape; tasting, seeing, sensing and feeling all the constituents of the earth. This is not supported by the bleak landscape of Platfontein, where other values and concerns are emphasized. The knowledge and skills of the older !Kun and Khwe speakers lose their value for the younger generations who, born in Schmitsdrift or Platfontein, feel far removed from the hunter-gatherer past of their parents or grandparents. It is the struggle to meet basic sustenance needs, and entry into the job market where possible, that are of foremost concern for many.

The !Kun and Khwe have moved from a paternalistic relationship with the SADF to ongoing relationships of dependency on SASI and the state. This is reflective of the wider plight of the San in Southern Africa where dependency on state and NGOs is endemic (Bollig, 2003; Hohmann, 2003). In Platfontein this is heightened as unemployment is pervasive, and the landscape itself denies people the means of sustaining themselves - other than through expeditions to the dumps or soup kitchens. This intensifies the !Kun and Khwe's dependence on structures of the state, NGOs and other bureaucratic agencies. The !Kun and Khwe are constrained by various structural limitations in affecting change in their lives and in their lived environment, and this reinforces a sense of powerlessness and disempowerment.

Entry into the job market has become key for both survival and self-esteem in Platfontein, especially for the youth. Jobs, however, are scarce, and this creates a profound sense of worthlessness and frustration for young people with nothing to do but ‘sit around’. Further, integration into the wider market economy also implies the assimilation of the values and ethos of that system. This evokes changes in generational relationships (Gilsenan, 1996) where “the young people are now telling the old people how to live”. Margolies (2006: 161) discussing the Warão of Venezuela, argues that:

...the younger generations...have been seduced by the offerings of society. Many are grappling with the dilemma of how to achieve integration into National Society while maintaining their identity as Warão. The wrist watches, televisions, Direct TVs, stereo systems, blue jeans and other trappings of our consumer society are the least of it. The dilemma lies within the soul and the apparent necessity young people feel to reject their language and traditional beliefs in order to achieve full citizenship.

Working within this context, SASI is challenged with the task of overseeing both social development and the preservation of cultural heritage in Platfontein. In this, there is a dissonance, as social development in the semi-urban landscape of Platfontein suggests assimilation into the wider market-driven society, and a move away from ‘traditional’ life ways. The work of social development prepares people to enter into the wider market system and initiates them into the values of that system, and these may be antithetical to the understandings and values of previous generations (Nadasdy, 2003) of !Kun and Khwe speakers.

The barren landscape of Platfontein does not support the transmission of the skills and knowledge of the older !Kun and Khwe speakers. These skills and understandings were developed in an active and ongoing engagement with the land (Ingold, 2001; Nadasdy, 2003) in Angola and Namibia at a time when hunting and gathering were still possible (Orth, 2003).

In contexts like Platfontein, there is the potential that cultural heritage work, as it currently stands, may not allow a space for thinking about and negotiating change, and may gloss over the complexities of people’s identities, histories and narratives. This is amplified as laying claim to land or political voice as an ‘indigenous’ group may

necessitate a denial of history or complexity (Ingold, 2001; Robins, 2001). What it means to 'be San' then comes to be imposed from the outside and defined by NGOs, the state and other bureaucratic organizations operating within particular paradigms of knowledge (Ibid.; Roué, 2003a, 2003b).

As Weiss (2007: 417) argues, "we need to be able to tell and celebrate more complicated stories about ourselves and our pasts, and this is not just important for our scholarship but also if we want to be able to construct identities and politics that can be truly liberatory in the full constitutive sense of who we are as individuals and groups. My concern is that heritage, as we now understand it ... is not up to this challenge. The question then becomes: can we make of heritage a sharper concept – and thus a sharper tool, or are we better off looking elsewhere?"

At present, in Platfontein, it is only the leadership and a small minority of people who are able to master the technical language of bureaucracy who can really participate in and dialogue with the systems and structures that determine their lives (Nadasdy, 2003). As Nadasdy argues, the very process of engaging with bureaucracy is to take on a set of social and ideological values and beliefs about the world that alters people's own understandings. Ingold (2000: 133) recognizes that "in confronting the need to articulate their experience in an idiom compatible with the dominant discourses of the state... people are led to lay claim to indigenous status, in terms that nevertheless systematically invert their own understanding." Further, in seeking to access geographical space or political power through claiming an indigenous identity, there is often a denial of people's complex subjectivities and histories, as these do not sit easily alongside the essentialist discourse of the 'indigenous'. This needs to be challenged at the level of policy, both locally and internationally.

As NGOs like SASI explore ways of establishing meaningful dialogue and a sharing of ideas that reaches more widely into the communities they represent - perhaps drawing on consensus models - so true participation can be claimed. People like the !Kun and Khwe should be empowered to envision and implement the interventions that determine their

lives. These interventions should enable people to sustain themselves in the present, as well as take into account future generations, and should facilitate a move away from dependence on outside organizations (Kingsnorth, 1994) – this is arguably more important than reinforcing an essentialist notion of what it means to ‘be San’. In this way interventions are not solely introduced, mediated and managed from the outside, and ultimately free people from their dependence on NGOs, rather than reinforcing this dependence.

People should be empowered to decide for themselves what kinds of skills, values and understandings continue to have significance, and how these can be brought forward and integrated in ways that are flexible, dynamic and non-essentialist. NGOs, as mediators and translators of knowledge (Roué, 2003b), then work to enable and empower people to envision their own subjectivities and to redefine for themselves what it means to ‘be San’ in particular contexts.

As human beings, we are involved in an active and ongoing relationship with each other and the landscape within which we live, and this also mediates how we see ourselves, how we experience the world, and the skills and understandings we develop and value. The !Kun and Khwe people living in Platfontein have been through numerous relocations, and have had various experiences of living in very different landscapes, all of which have brought transformations in their way of life and how they see themselves. These very experiences of dispossession, strife and change, however, all form part of an intricate and complex subjectivity, and come together to create a sense of shared history and storyline as a people. In paying greater cognizance to this, heritage and NGO work - rather than imposing understandings from the outside - then enables people to weave and share more intricate narratives about themselves, their histories and their present lives.

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