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Beyond Textual Analysis: Practice, Interacting Discourses, and the Experience of Distinction in Botswana

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Beyond Textual Analysis: Practice, Interacting Discourses, and the Experience of Distinction in Botswana

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I could not understand why he was so embarrassed at my questions. The tall handsome Tswana man I interviewed in his isolated cattle-post hamlet in the Tswapong region in central Botswana was lowering his eyes, exchanging short glances with Moses, my research assistant. We were in the last stages of a population census that had taken us to every household within the small clustered village of agriculturalist and migrant workers and in the outlying agricultural areas around that village, where its open, unfenced fields and grazing areas lay. The short survey we developed followed a simple routine. After listing all the people who lived in the yard (*lolwapa*), we began to inquire about the relationships among them. After charting the kinship lines that linked together the man, his wife, his younger brother, and two children of his other sibling (“who came to help with the cattle”), among others, I pointed to two people, a man and a woman, who sat in the small crowd that surrounded us: “Do they live here?” I asked. “Yes they do.” “How are they related to you?” was my next question. “Well, they are not. They just stay here” [*Ba nna fela*]. “Where is the village of your origin?” [*Le tswa kae*]. I turned to the couple. “Oh, far, far away. We live here now,” said the woman emphatically. Before we left, the two men carried a bag of sugar to my car; they wanted us to transport it to the people we were going to visit next. I asked the two men to pose for my camera. They stood there with the dignified, erect stature that one assumes for the occasion, one on each side of my pickup. “Pnina, didn’t you see that he was a Mosarwa?” chuckled Moses, my assistant, afterward. “What funny questions you ask,” he chided me. No, I had not. I could not detect the subtle distinctive body features that according to Moses and others in the region mark a Mosarwa, a person of Sarwa (what popular discourse knows as “Bushman”) origin.¹ Looking at the photograph of the two men, I still cannot.

What struck me most about the scene I describe here was not my inability to decipher the clues that mark a person as a Mosarwa (*Mosarwa* is the singular form and *Basarwa* is the plural for people of Sarwa origin), but the strong social

sanction that prevented these people from stating such ethnic affiliation openly. "Why didn't you just tell me he is a Mosarwa?" I asked Moses. "You don't say things like that; you might insult them," was the answer.

The area where I worked and lived in east-central Botswana, between November 1982 and January 1984, is not known as a region where Basarwa are to be found. Although I was familiar with the small, and in those years still unpublished, body of work that had begun to document the existence of a large number of Basarwa groups in eastern Botswana, I had not expected to encounter any Basarwa in the Tswapong hills. Historically, the relatively well watered, hilly region was densely populated by agriculturalists, who ruled themselves until the late 1870s, when their region came under the expanding power of the rising Ngwato kingdom. Within the emerging stratified ethnopolitical structure of the Ngwato state, the residents of the hills became tribute-paying subjects, only a step above the propertyless Basarwa serfs. As herders and personal servants, the Basarwa were found in the open grazing areas in the central Kalahari, where Ngwato large herd owners kept their cattle, and not in the densely populated Tswapong region. My research interest in "the Basarwa" has been defined largely through my work on identity politics within the Tswapong region. The Basarwa, as I present in the first analytical segment of this essay, have been the "imagined other" for the processes of defining the Batswapong collective self. I use *imagined* because to this day most people in the Tswapong region have never met a person they define as a Mosarwa. I wish to understand how the two categories "Basarwa" and "Batswapong" have been defined within the shifting hierarchy of groups in central Botswana. To do so, I examine the way cultural difference has been constructed, debated, and experienced in one rural periphery in Botswana over the past two decades or more.

My analysis of the construction of difference in Botswana enters two larger theoretical debates. The first has to do with the fact that the Basarwa, the Setswana term for those commonly identified as "Bushmen" or "San," have become the quintessential hunter-gatherers in popular and academic discourses. Ethnographic and theoretical work on hunting-gathering populations has seen dramatic (some say paradigmatic) shifts in focus and nature and is becoming an exciting ground for thinking about difference, about the making of social distinction. I will briefly review this body of work and position this article in relation to its central debates. The second theoretical concern I address is the relationship between textual analysis and analysis that looks at specific experiential circumstances and settings. I wish to frame the theoretical contribution of this essay within the recent body of work that has called on anthropology's unique ability to go beyond textual analysis.

Basarwa: The Imagined Other

Going beyond the popular and academic view that Bushmen are all hunting-gathering nomadic people who live in the western Kalahari regions, studies carried out in the late 1970s (several financed and published by the state of Botswana for policy-making purposes) began to systematically document the

permanent residence of Basarwa/Bushmen in open grazing areas in central Botswana and in other regions within what were formerly thought of as Tswana-proper residential zones.² These studies, associated with what has been labeled the political economy and historical paradigm, have radically questioned earlier assumptions about the isolation and geographical distinction between the groups that make up the “Tswana-proper” category on the one hand and the “Basarwa/Bushmen” on the other.³ By beginning to deconstruct the myth of the isolated, pristine hunter-gatherers through an examination of specific historical situations within which such distinctive social groupings were created and transformed, this work has opened the way for the analysis of situations of contact and interaction among hunter-gatherers, their agro-pastoralist neighbors, and impinging capitalist forces.⁴

Although the new attention to the study of interaction in specific historical contexts has begun the important task of outlining the processes that lead to the creation of social and cultural difference, it seems to present a number of analytical problems. Perhaps the most obvious one is the implicit notion of *contact* between “hunters” and “pastoralists”—between two (or more) bounded social entities, each characterized by its own mode of production. How does one delineate the boundaries of these prepostulated social units, and how do they come into “contact”? What constitutes a “hunting-gathering” way of life—the amount of meat one brings to camp? equality? egalitarianism? And what happens when “hunter-gatherers” cease to hunt or gather and settle among, and work for, their usually dominant “pastoralist” neighbors? Essentialized ideas of social types simply do not fit such fluid situations. In addition, more serious problems arise from the narrow interpretation of political economy adopted by the early wave of these corrective works, namely, their overemphasis of economic exploitation and political domination by one defined group over the other (Motzafi-Haller 1990; Roseberry 1989; Solway and Lee 1990).

More recent works attempt to expand on this largely materialist definition of distinction and develop a more culturally sensitive (Bird-David 1992) or deep structural (Barnard 1992a) analysis to understand the internal unity of each “way of life.” However, while exploring the cultural dimension of social categories, this work tends to undermine the contested, fluid nature of collective identities. Indeed, it seems that these more recent, culturally sensitive analyses have depended, much like the political economy literature they criticize, on the basic assumption of “contact” as the process that brings together several stable, indigenous cultural entities.

I would like to offer here an alternative way of thinking about social distinction and cultural difference.⁵ Cultural difference, as Homi Bhabha (1994) suggests, should be problematized both politically and conceptually. “If we question a pre-given world of separate and discrete ‘peoples and cultures,’ and see instead a difference-producing set of relations,” say Gupta and Ferguson in a recent article, “we turn from a project of juxtaposing preexisting differences to one of exploring the construction of differences in historical process” (1992:16). Following Gupta and Ferguson, I will not begin my analysis with an assumption

of interaction among existing distinct groups with unique ways of life—hunters versus pastoralists, agriculturalist versus capitalist forces. Instead, I would like to explore the very processes that create and maintain these social distinctions.

I start with the idea that these social categories (“hunter-gatherers,” “pastoralists,” “Basarwa,” “Batswana”) are not mere analytical creations defined and debated in academic discourses but are social representations constructed, used, and contested by the very people who make up the interacting worlds. I thus ask, How are such ideas of distinction established and challenged? by whom? and how does social distinction shape the experience of life in specific historical moments? In other words, I offer an examination of social distinction as a process situated in specific and changing historical contexts of power and as a lived, contested social practice.

Beyond Textual Analysis

My analysis of the making of social distinctions in rural Botswana takes a position that, in Ortner’s apt phrase, “holds out the hope of mediating the most recent set of unproductive binaries on the theoretical landscape, between textual studies and ethnographically grounded studies” (1996:20). Indeed, for at least the last decade, anthropologists have been anxious to demarcate, define, and defend our unique contribution vis-à-vis the increasingly expanding literature written by scholars who work within the field of “cultural studies.” Setting out, in Conquergood’s terms, to challenge the “almost total domination of textualism in the academy” (1995, quoted in Grossberg 1998:67), George Marcus, for instance, introduces the new series *Late Editions: Cultural Studies for the End of the Century*, with its experimentation with reportage, as one way to exemplify how “the tradition of anthropological inquiry might effectively establish an identity and function” in relation to cultural studies (1993:1). Anthropology, with its empirical, ethnographic core, Marcus suggests, can help “the more textually oriented” field of cultural studies to become a more engaged, socially relevant activity (1993:2). “How can anthropology benefit from cultural studies and cultural studies benefit from anthropology?” asks Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing in a recent article published in *Cultural Anthropology* (1994:279). She proposes that the strength of the anthropological enterprise is in bringing in the “margins,” those sites, analytical as well as geographical, that link the local to the global. In his experimental work *Power and Performance*, Johannes Fabian presents another innovative “ethnographic exploration,” addressing that very relationship through what he calls the move from “informative to performative ethnography” (1990:3). In these and other recent attempts that respond to the strong interest in textuality brought into focus by cultural studies, there is an emphasis on anthropology’s particular ability to link texts and their analysis to “situations of social life in the world” and to “locating culture in the practices of everyday life” (Myers 1994:275).⁶

The call for a move “back to . . . experience” (to invoke the title of McRobbie’s 1997 volume) has been articulated not only by anthropologists but also “from within,” by those who define themselves as cultural studies scholars. The

characterization of cultural studies as “text centered”—according to these internal voices—is not fully justified. Cultural studies, as Grossberg insists, is “not merely the expansion of the notion of text or textual methods” (1998:67). In support of this claim, Grossberg cites Said, who articulated a rejection of the “textual attitude” within cultural studies as early as 1979. Said rejected the “schematic authority of the text,” writing that “it is a fallacy to assume that the swarming, unpredictable and problematic mess in which human beings live can be understood on the basis of what books—texts—say” (Said 1979, quoted in Grossberg 1998:67). The “work of cultural studies,” Grossberg maintains, must include an examination “of the relations between texts and audiences [and] between audiences and everyday life” (1998:67). If texts, like all forms of discourse, “produce, rather than reflect their object of reference,” as Bhabha suggests (1994:21), the interesting questions then become: How do such discourses produce realities? How do people internalize or challenge, rework or ignore, the imagery presented in dominant discourses and to what effect?

In Botswana, text-centered analyses have had an additional limitation: they tended to focus on texts produced by those in power—for example, official state documents, art exhibits, travelers’ reports, and literature (Motzafi-Haller 1995; Pratt 1986; Voss 1990). Although there is value to this kind of analysis, and I do believe it provides important insights into the production of social distinction in contemporary postcolonial societies, there are serious limitations to analyses based on texts produced by the powerful. Perhaps most obviously, they risk suggesting that social categories are creations of those in power, to be resisted or adopted by the powerless. The danger of such a limited view of “subaltern agency” has been argued by several scholars recently (Ortner 1996:16).⁷ Textual analysis does not tell us what people do with dominant representations or how they rearticulate, shift, and use them in relation to one another. More specifically, when one looks at lived experience, rather than the abstract binary of hegemony versus resisters, one opens the discussion to multiple, internally linked constructions of social distinctions. I wish to show how social categories and representations are created, used, and debated by the very people who make up the interacting world.⁸ I will consider “the motivations and desires of human agents” in their full complexity and historical specificity (Myers 1994:275). These people have their own categories of knowledge, and it is precisely that knowledge that should be examined in its own right, not as a reflection or distortion of our analytical terms and hegemonic definitions. In the following discussion, I trace (over a period of some three decades) a range of discourses by people who stand at different positions in the local social hierarchy. I wish to show that the construction of social distinction in Botswana is in flux and, specifically, that the social meaning of “Basarwahood” and of being Batswapong are closely linked. To do this, I will examine several “local moments” beginning in the late 1970s and ending in the early 1990s.

Local Moments

A local moment is a sophisticated analytical tool, as well as a way of presenting ethnographic material, that I find most suitable for the kind of theoretical argument I advance here. Local moments are in fact what we anthropologists doing fieldwork observe and record during our research experiences. Moore writes,

At this postcolonial, poststructuralist moment a few things emerge clearly: anthropologists doing fieldwork, instead of conceiving of themselves as looking at whole cultures or whole societies, are now acutely conscious of observing part of the cultural construction of part of a society at a particular time. That being so, local affairs cannot be addressed without serious attention to the larger processual implications of the local moment. [1987:735]

The realization that what we record is “part of the cultural construction of part of a society at a particular time” challenges the very idea of culture’s equation with location. When we place local events at the center of our analyses, we are faced with the multiplicity of discourses, with the way people construct and use such discourses in everyday life, and with the effect that discursive practices have on the world. When events are analyzed as local moments, we can explore not only what people say and do and how they produce discourses but also the “larger processual implications” of what is said and done in the focal event. The event-as-local-moment becomes the focus not only for the analysis of the articulation of discursive practices and everyday life but, most critically, for a broader exploration of the formation of power. Selecting particularly telling moments or local events, along with tracing their larger processual implications, enables an understanding of the production of social identities—not as “texts” or performances to be deciphered but as practices that have an effect and are controlled in a material world of power. The following analysis of four local moments allows me to explore the shifting and varied experience, articulation, and construction of difference in Botswana.

Opening Scenes: Histories and Collective Identities

I begin in the late 1970s. The opening scene unfolds as eager university students from the history department of the national university of Botswana encounter the residents of the Tswapong hills region in the course of a ten-day oral history project. The students’ project yielded three volumes of texts containing edited transcriptions of the actual interviews in Setswana.⁹ The exchanges between the university students and the local Tswapong elders contained several very interesting references to the labels *Basarwa* and *Batswapong* that I would like to examine here. The transcribed texts depict a dynamic of research and interaction very different from the one I was involved in as a non-Tswana woman anthropologist. I began my ethnographic research in October 1982, almost two years after the students had completed their oral history project. My research included a significant number of oral interviews that were intended to chart the way people articulated and fought with historical claims of community and

collective entitlement (at times I interviewed the same people cited by the students). Yet my interactions with the interviewed elders, as the rest of this essay makes clear, have been inherently different from those between the Tswana university students and their informants. As Batswana, the students share “a repertoire of knowledge and expectations” with the people they interviewed (Jules-Rosette 1975:21, quoted in Tedlock 1983:323).¹⁰ Yet the questions posed by the students were often imbued with the democratic and modern values they—as the most educated people in their young nation—had come to adopt. They often challenged, half jokingly, the interviewees about traditional practices that involved magic and bantered about old restrictions on the choice of mates, as well as the relationship between the sexes. While they accepted and shared with their interviewees many basic notions regarding rights of groups to land, ideas of hierarchy, and conditions of legitimate power, they also questioned such notions and made their elders reflect on and conceptualize them more concisely. Before examining two telling moments from these interview situations, I shall present a short outline of the history of group relations within Botswana with the intent of situating these discursive events in time and space.

Texts and Contexts

The Tswapong region is one of five administrative units that make up the large Central District of Botswana. The hilly region, about a three-hour drive to the northeast of the capital Gaborone, was in the 1970s the home of some 22,000 people who lived in 14 clustered villages and in the agricultural zone surrounding them.¹¹ In public discourse and in ethnographic studies carried out in the early 1950s (e.g., Schapera 1952) the residents of the hills were known as “Matswapong” or “Batswapong.” The inclusive label *Matswapong* appears for the first time in missionaries’ accounts around 1860,¹² at a critical moment in the history of the region when the regional population was caught in the cross fire of two rising powers, the Ndebele to its northeast and the Ngwato to the southwest. In these early accounts (Mackenzie 1871; Willoughby 1899), and in historical compilations based largely on these accounts (Parsons 1977; Schapera 1952; Sillery 1952), the people of the hills are described as industrious and defenseless iron workers and cultivators who could not effectively resist the military might of the expanding Ngwato lineage coming from the south. During the first decades of domination (ca. 1840–70), and while the Ngwato lineage was consolidating its control over its expanding territory, the population of the hills was accorded a large measure of local autonomy; tribute in the form of wild animal skins was a symbolic token of deference to a higher remote center of power.

The “subject tribe called the Machwapong,” writes one missionary in the late 1860s, “renders a certain tribute to the Bamangwato, but are permitted to enjoy, after somewhat precarious fashion, their own flocks and herds and other property” (Mackenzie 1871:366). Control over the trade routes to the north rapidly enriched the emerging Ngwato center in Shoshong, southwest of the Tswapong region, thus transforming the nature of domination. The advent of the centralized Ngwato state in the last quarter of the 19th century formalized the

process of dispossession by extending taxation, limiting access to land, and progressively confining the autonomy of local leadership. A colonial official depicted the positioning of these subjugated Bachwaping in the late 1880s in the following way: "The Bachwaping and Bakalahari speak a dialect of Sechwana and are of lower and inferior rank: many of their chiefs own flocks and herds and they are to be distinguished from the still lower Masarwa by these possessions and the cultivating of gardens" (Shippard 1888:n.p.).

The hierarchical world depicted by this colonial officer was a dominant feature of the eight major Tswana *merafe* (nations, polities) consolidated in the late 1800s, when British protectorate rule was extended over the territory. In 1952, Schapera described the structure of each of the Tswana polities as consisting of four distinct social classes. At the top of each Tswana polity (or tribal reserve) stood the *kgosi* (king, later known as chief), his extended "royal" agnatic family, and a core of loyal "commoners." In the large Bammangwato polity, this ruling core group of the Bangwato constituted only about a quarter of the total population of their *morafe* (polity). The second ring of this hierarchical sociopolitical structure consisted of members of other Tswana polities who joined the Ngwato core due to agnatic competition and segmentation within their own political communities. Known as *bathanka*, these people were accorded full citizenship rights and were integrated into the existing social order in independent, equal wards and sections—the major administrative and residential division within each Tswana polity. Immigrant and conquered populations, like the Tswaping (or the Bakalagadi), were kept apart as locally independent yet materially exploited subjects.¹³ At the bottom of this ethnically differentiated hierarchy of groups were the *malata* (serfs) who had little if any control over the means of production and reproduction. Although the ethnic makeup of these serf groups was not uniform (their languages, for example, are not mutually intelligible), these people have been known in the Setswana vernacular as *Basarwa* (or *Masarwa*).

However, this social world was not the fixed, rigid system of well-defined bounded units that the four ethno-class system depicted by Schapera might suggest.¹⁴ More recent scholarship (Comaroff 1997; Landau 1995; Wylie 1990) indicates that group ordering within the political community of each Tswana *morafe* was in fact inherently ambiguous and that groups and individuals were continuously engaged in the process of redefining their sociopolitical status within the hierarchy.¹⁵ Within the large Bammangwato polity, as we shall see below, social hierarchy was continuously negotiated "with some groups having relative access to the chief [while] others were marginalized and persecuted."¹⁶ The position of the Basarwa serfs *outside* this rather fluid sociopolitical order was established historically and cosmologically.¹⁷ Basarwa, as historical analyses have demonstrated (Comaroff 1982, 1984; Parsons 1977; Tlou 1977; Wilmsen 1989; Wylie 1990), have been incorporated into the lower ranks of the expanding Ngwato polity as serfs with no political or civil rights. The Basarwa position not only was based on their economic exploitation as propertyless herders and domestic servants, it also was marked in the Tswana cosmological

order, which distinguished between the social and the wild. This order positioned the Basarwa together with wild animals in the outer zones of the Tswana settled world. Early accounts by European missionaries vividly describe the extent of social exclusion of those Basarwa serfs: a Mosarwa servant was not allowed to enter the precinct of the settled Tswana village in broad daylight and had to await the night to consult his master (Mackenzie 1871; Willoughby 1899).

The democratic, postcolonial state of Botswana wished to distance itself from this hierarchical model of ethnic relations and, since independence in 1966, has spoken in the rhetoric of equality that pertains to the newly independent nation. Official discourse in postindependence days endorsed the view that colonial and precolonial divisions and identities are and should be subsumed under the emerging, uniform national identity.¹⁸ History textbooks instructed Tswana children that “Batswana are those people who are citizens of Botswana” and that the “many different groups of people” in Botswana may vary according to minor details such as their language use and customs, but that they are all equal “Batswana” (Gardener and Itumeleng 1992:2).¹⁹ “Local” histories and “variations in customs” thus become topics for academic research and study. It is in this spirit of recording the history and tradition of various “Tswana groups” that the students of the newly established University of Botswana set out to complete their oral history project.²⁰

At the time of the oral history project, in the late 1970s, the outline of a major land reform promulgated a few years earlier was also beginning to be debated in the rural periphery. This land reform, known as the Tribal Grazing Land Policy (TGLP), intended to transfer the right to allocate land in the communal areas from the hands of hereditary local chiefs to elected land boards.²¹ The TGLP followed a series of major legislative reforms that had sought, since independence in 1966, to replace the “traditional” power of chiefs and local headmen with elected bodies and paid officials. Land boards began to operate at the district level in the early 1970s. However, the direct effects of the land reform were felt locally only in the second half of the 1970s, when the subdistrict land boards began to operate. Throughout these early years, the precise nature of the operation of the local boards and their work alongside “traditional” headmen (who were to advise the board and sign individual land applications) was not clear.

Into these shifting and unclear new circumstances, when district and state representatives and legislation were beginning to penetrate the local scene, the eager students entered with their ten-day Tswapong oral history project. In these changing circumstances, their seemingly naive ethnohistorical question “Who are the Batswapong?” had gained multiple and politically pregnant connotations that they had not expected. In the interactions between the various students and their interviewees, a volatile and contested field of social boundaries and identities was charted. Within that field, the idiom of being “like a Mosarwa” was a powerful discursive tool of expression. When used by the interviewed people in the Tswapong, it became, as we shall see below, a powerful idiom of resistance against the newly established external hegemony. Two short illustrative moments will suffice here.

The first involves an old man, who after an hour-long interview with a student exploded in anger and snapped back, as reported by the student, "It was the Bangwato who called these hills Tswapong as a sign of looking down at us or despising us" (Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980:195). The Bangwato, as outlined above, were the people who in the late 1870s extended their control over the Tswapong hills region and transformed the autonomous agriculturalists into tribute payers. The student translated the man's angry phrase with reasonable accuracy but glossed over the specific, culturally pregnant idiom the man used to articulate the humiliation felt by the so-called people of the Tswapong—the Batswapong. The man actually said, "E le tshotlo, fela jaaka 'Mosarwa'" [It was a jest, equally humiliating as that of calling us "Mosarwa"]. *Mosarwa*, in the old man's use here, is a signifier of absolute humiliation and lack of political status. The man articulated his rejection of the ethnic label *Batswapong* because it was a collective label attributed by those in power, the Bangwato. To make his feeling of resentment and humiliation clear, he equated the positioning of the Batswapong (in the eyes of the Ngwato rulers) with that of the most excluded and despised social ranking of the Basarwa. Thus, to refer to the various groups resident in the hills in one collective term—*Batswapong*—is a humiliation, a jest played by the powerful. By rejecting the collective label *Batswapong*, the man thus called into question the relationship of domination it entailed. Indeed, throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, people in the Tswapong region had not identified themselves as "Batswapong" but as "Bapedi,"²² and more often as "Bakaa," "Bakgopeng," and so forth—as members of independent, sociopolitical units with traceable and distinct histories.

The idiom that equated Basarwahood with social stigma and exclusion from social acceptability was used several times in the transcribed interviews. In another interview that uncovered a raw nerve in a local scene of fierce struggles to gain village leadership, an angry man commented sarcastically about the outcome of legislative reforms introduced by the postindependence national government. "Now [in these days]," the man insisted, "anybody can become chief irrespective of birth." "Do you think that this is acceptable?" asked the student. "It is not good because *I would not be ruled by a Mosarwa*," came the reply (see Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980:189, emphasis added).²³ From the exchange that followed this idiomatic use of *Mosarwa*, it is clear that both the student (who persisted in his provocative questions) and the interviewee shared the understanding that they were not talking about a "real" person of Sarwa origin who might lay claims to the village headmanship but about the absurd possibility of the new legislative reform. In this emerging new reality, where "anybody" can be a chief, even a Mosarwa—the absolute nonsocial being—might emerge as a leader.

In these two exchanges, "Mosarwa" is used as an idiom to connote lack of social standing and of any civil and political rights in the accepted hierarchy of groups. In both cases, the idiom is used to articulate resistance against external threats to local patterns of power and control. In the first moment, local autonomy and self-rule by the various groups who make up the regional population are in

danger of being recast as collective subjugation. To alert listeners to the impossibility of such dominant hegemonic definitions, the speaker made use of the *Moswara* idiom. He might be paraphrased as saying: "I reject the ruling Ngwato's attempt to treat all residents of these hills as their uniform subjugated people. We are distinct, autonomous, variously named groups, and any intention to refer to us all as 'Batswapong' is as humiliating as calling us 'Sarwa.'" In the second local moment, the exchange depicted resentment of new legislation that was to alter dramatically existing patterns of local power and hierarchical order. Here again, to make his point more effective, the speaker articulated an absurd possibility: if leaders are not to be selected according to their ascription, then even a Mosarwa might rule.

Two intriguing observations may be made here. The first is that these rural people seem to consider the new state power not so much as an alien, external equalizing force but as the new, little-altered face of their former Ngwato rulers. In fact, many officials who represent the new state apparatus, and especially those who represent district-level bodies, are of Ngwato origin. So when the angry villager expressed his utter rejection of the new legislative reforms, he did not relate to a remote and alien modern state but to the hierarchical relations that were rooted in the colonial and precolonial reality of unequal group relations within the Ngwato kingdom. The man voiced his resentment of what he saw as an unfolding reality that undermined the legitimate rights of his totemic group to local leadership, not in terms of "tradition" versus "modernity" (the way the young student presented it) but within the system of meaning and social categories rooted in preindependence times. Paradoxically, the exclusion of the Basarwa is reestablished and reaffirmed at the very moment that the ethos of equality and democratization is heralded, which is the second observation.

The next set of moments I examine not only engages a social reality that unfolded a decade later but also opens for examination the shifting discourse of women who were locally known as Basarwa. How was such "Sarwa" identity experienced, defined, and debated locally? by whom? to what effect?

The Other within Us

Tamasane village, lying east of the rail line in the northern regions of the Tswapong hills area, resembled its neighboring small villages of the early 1980s, with its new school, small general store, and the central *kgotla* (arena), where public meetings were held. However, unlike that of other Tswapong villages, and due to unique historical circumstances, the village population included a large number of affluent, cattle-holding people of Ngwato origin, a large presence of people of Kalanga origin, and a smaller group of Basarwa.²⁴ In fact, until the late 1950s, Tamasane was a cattle-post area where Ngwato cattle owners kept their herds. It had not evolved into a permanent village residence with public amenities and services until the approach of independence in the late 1960s. In the early 1980s, when I first came to Tamasane to record its local history, I learned that a group of Basarwa lived permanently in the village. For six intensive weeks and in more sporadic visits throughout my work in the Tswapong region

during 1983, I recorded the life stories of the Basarwa women, who headed their own extremely poor households. They told me how Tswana men refused to acknowledge the children they fathered with them; that their sons were not paid according to local standards for their herding services because “they say we are Basawra”; and that their brothers and fathers did not support them and were not able to represent them in the local kgotla court because most of them disappeared into the bush, unable to accumulate enough to establish a household in the village arena.

My analysis of the social profiles of these locally known Basarwa households shows, however, that a good number of them have no traceable genealogical Sarwa heritage. In fact, the oldest woman who reported that she was brought to Tamasane by a Ngwato family at the turn of the century assured me that she speaks no “Sesarwa,” the Setswana collective label for the varied languages spoken by those known as Basarwa. Despite their designation as Basarwa, there was little to distinguish the local women and their children from their poor Batswana neighbors. In their language, dress, physical features, or any other characteristic, these poor women and their children were indistinguishable from others in the village. Yet their lives had been dramatically and adversely affected by their “Basarwa” identity. Elsewhere I describe in greater detail how these Basarwa were systematically excluded from social networks of support and how their extreme poverty and social marginality was reproduced from one generation to the next (Motzafi-Haller 1994a). By tracing the life histories of three generations of those known as Basarwa and placing these stories in the larger political economy of shifting Sarwa-Ngwato relations, I examine how—despite the rhetoric of equality in postindependent, democratic Botswana—the social stigma associated with “Sarwa” identity has continued to structure the effective social, political, and economic marginalization of those known as Basarwa in Tamasane.

In 1993, a decade after my first field research, I returned to Tamasane. The lives of the women I worked with a decade earlier had changed in more ways than one. Although the basis of my economic data was a narrow one, I could nonetheless identify a significant improvement in the economic well-being of the small group of Basarwa in Tamasane. Most of the older women, the heads of households, had gained some cash income through participating in local public works initiated in that year by the central state. Their daughters, like many other poor rural Tswana women, left the village to seek work at the growing urban centers (often leaving behind their young children in their mothers’ care). More children of Basarwa households were sent to, and stayed in, public schools. In at least two recorded cases, a Mosarwa child made it through the school system to secure a high school diploma and a better-paying job. How significant were these changes in the lives of the women locally known as Basarwa, and how did these changes affect their own sense of Basarwa identity? Had the “Sarwa identity” that had such deleterious effects on their lives only a decade ago changed meaning? How did the resident Basarwa women and others in the community experience the increasingly powerful national credo that called for equality of all citizens, regardless of ethnic origin? I would like to consider these questions through an examination of two short, telling moments from my 1993 work in Tamasane.

"There Are No Basarwa in This Village"

The first instance is the moment of my reentry into Tamasane. The old village headman who accompanied me on my first visit to the yards of the local Basarwa women had died. I approached his replacement, a young man in his mid-forties (also of Ngwato origin but not directly related to the old headman), expressing my wish to visit the same women I had met a decade earlier. Through my other local contacts, I had already updated my list of these Basarwa households. The headman was to grant me his official blessing, allowing my work in his village. Yet, upon hearing my request, the young headman was more than hesitant. "They all have died since," he asserted. "There are no Basarwa here," he objected. When he realized that I knew better and that he could not just wish me away, he scratched his head and giggled. "This is hard. . . . This is hard," he repeated. The difficulty, it turned out in the course of the next few days, when his hospitality and friendship toward me were more than evident, was not his objection to my work in the village but, rather, that the young headman was awkwardly attempting to help me understand and deal with a very delicate social reality—a reality that had become more delicate over the last decade. "They will sue you [in the traditional kgotla courts] if you walk into their yards saying, 'You are a Mosarwa,' " he exclaimed at one point.

The headman's sincere, if confused, efforts to help me design what might be seen as a socially sensitive "research strategy" tell a great deal about the changing social and political reality of group relations in rural Botswana and the ways in which nationalist discourses of equality had been reconsidered and realized. I will deal with three aspects of this transformation. First, there is the altered position of traditional village headmanship. Second, there is the shift in the politics of social categorization and the place of Basarwa identity within it. Third, there is the question of who is adopting or defying the nationalist discourse of equality, how, and to what local effect.

The role of the village head as a gatekeeper, whose approval for the research work must be gained, was as powerful in 1993 as in my first research phase in the early 1980s. However, the nature of village headmanship and the moral sway it has over the community had radically altered in the course of that decade. In 1993, village headmanship was a paid position with well-defined and extremely narrow responsibilities. The official paid headman of Tamasane in 1993 was, in fact, a man of Kalanga origin, a minority group whose origins were in the northeastern regions. Upon hearing my request, this elected headman led me to the man whom he said was the real kgosi. *Kgosi* is a Setswana term that can be variously translated as headman, chief, king, leader, or elder. The reference here was to the man who, regardless of external official title by the state, was really the powerful man in the community. In essence, then, the young Mongwato man locally known as the headman or kgosi, was, like his predecessor, an authority figure because of his birth and rank within a traditional system of seniority, but with dramatically diminished moral authority.

A decade earlier, the moral authority of the old Ngwato headman who led me into the yards of the poor women locally known as Basarwa was unquestioned.

“A person of Sarwa origin is a human being” [Mosarwa ke motho], the old man assured the women whose defiance of their inclusion in that social category he felt. Although these women, as I argue above, had resented their attributed identity and were painfully aware of the very real constraints and mechanisms of exclusion it structured, they had not attempted to openly defy it, not in front of the old dignified headman. The hesitation and embarrassment that the younger headman had expressed were due in part to his own ambivalent feelings about his position in the community. He had been asked to be the official, paid village headman, he told me, but he had rejected the offer. “I was simply not interested,” said the man, who had worked as a stable hand in South Africa for most of his adult life and had returned to live permanently in his home village only a few years before I first met him in 1993. “Let them elect their man to sit in the office with a policeman and a court clerk,” he explained, “this is not for me.” “They say I am the kgosi,” he added, “but I am not after such power.”

Changes in the nature of village headmanship cannot account for all the differences between the two moments I describe in Tamasane.²⁵ At issue here, I would like to emphasize, is not that one, more powerful headman could impose his will over the resentful women while the other with less authority would or could not. I propose that there had been a significant shift in the way categories of difference and social distinction were experienced in this and, perhaps, in other locations in rural Botswana. To understand the shifts in the local politics of identity, I shall turn to the second moment from my 1993 work in Tamasane, a moment that brings in the voices of the very women locally known as Basarwa.

“Sarwa Is My Sereto [Totemic Sign]”

We walked into the front yard of one of the women I had worked with in 1983. A ten-year-old boy told us that his mother would be right with us, she was washing herself behind the hut after a day of bush clearing at the other end of the village. When the woman appeared, the headman began introducing me as “the woman who writes our traditions” and “walks around the village talking to people.”²⁶ The woman’s reaction surprised both of us. She remembered me from the long time ago when I had talked to her sisters and her mother, she announced directly. She did not need the introductions; she had, in fact, already sent for her sisters. A few minutes later the yard was filled with greetings, loud calls, and laughter as three of the five daughters of old Lesedi, the mother of the core group of Basarwa women I had worked with in 1983, walked into the yard.

The young headman was greeted in proper Tswana manner but without the great deference his old predecessor had commanded. The women asked about my assistant/translator, who had not accompanied me on this visit, and complemented my memory of Setswana despite the many years that had elapsed since we had last met. For a long while, they exchanged news and gossip with each other. The young headman was ill at ease. The women had interrupted his rehearsed, stiff attempts to introduce me, the *lekgoa* (white woman) researcher. They had not acted in the serious manner expected on such an occasion. Instead of assuming the respectful posture of answering questions, they had continued

to walk about and shout for a long while. The women became even more raucous and, at certain points, boldly playful. "Buy our *khadi* [a local wild berry brew], it's the best in town," they teased the headman. "Don't pretend you don't drink in front of the lekgoa," one of the women teased. "Look at us, we are dirty. We did not wash up yet," another woman turned to me without much embarrassment. They were clearly having fun; they were spirited and defiant. When they finally settled down to answer the questions by which I intended to chart changes in the composition of the yards since a decade before, they volunteered more than I asked. One woman declared in a voice that was openly aggressive, "I am a Mosarwa, because my mother is a Mosarwa." "Mosarwa is my ethnic/traditional identity" [Ke letso la me], explained her sister. But such identity, they made clear, should not be relevant in their daily life: "It is my totemic sign only" [Ke sereto fela]. "Look at him," illustrated one of the women, knowingly pointing to the Mongwato headman, "his sereto merely tells you he is a Mongwato, like my sereto says I am a Mosarwa." This woman was using *sereto* both to mark her identity as a Mosarwa and to undermine the hierarchical ordering of group identities marked by such a signifier. Among the Tswana, a sereto (also known in other parts of Botswana as *seano* or *seboko*), as Schapera explained almost a generation ago, is an "object of honour, veneration, avoidance or praise," and "people with the same totem are assumed to have had a common origin" (1984:35). Despite the diminishing relevance of totemic taboos in Botswana, I found that people insisted on holding onto their totemic signifiers in the Tswapong region in the 1980s.²⁷ In each village where local histories were collected, I was told of the varied totemic signs for the various ward units (*kgotlana*) that settled in the village. Ward units within each village were known by the geographical space they occupied, their name, their "ward headman," and their sereto. The expression was *ba bina mmutla*—"they dance to the hare" (the hare is the totemic signifier of many Tswapong-Pedi people). Yet when the internal structure of each ward unit was investigated, it was often found that fragments, at times as narrow as a single family group consisting of three brothers and their nuclear households, marked their distinction by indicating their own sereto, not the one identified with the larger ward unit. Holding onto a distinctive sereto indicates that the group has never accepted the political hegemony of the chiefly group. Groups who adopted the chiefly group's sereto merged into (in Tswana terms, "were eaten up by") the dominant group.

To understand the significance of the statement "Mosarwa is merely my totemic sign" and what it meant about the construction of Sarwa identity in the early 1990s in Tamasane, I must clarify two further points. First, the women knew as well as anyone else in this rural setting that there was no single "Basarwa" entity marked by a corresponding single sereto. Second, sereto or totemic groups are patrilineal: women, who marry into the group, do not change their sereto, and children who are not rightfully claimed by their father's group inherit their mother's sereto. If one brings together these multiple contemporary meanings of *sereto*, one can begin to decipher the creative and subversive play enacted in that short moment in Tamasane. As mothers whose children were not

acknowledged by their Tswana fathers, these women as well as their children were, by the force of circumstances, members of the same, three-generation, single-totem group. Instead of lamenting such exclusion and resenting it, as they had a decade ago, the women had made it their weapon and insisted that as a totem group they should be accorded the same respect for their distinct "origin" as anyone else. By insisting that the headman's "totemic sign merely indicates he is a Mongwato," they went a step further to equalize such distinctly marked groups. "The things of the remote past are not the way things are today" [Dilo tsa bogologolo, ga se dilo tsa gompieno], one of the women concluded. They acknowledged that social hierarchies and their own exclusion had existed "in the remote past" but claimed that "today" things were different. Today, in this view, one's *sereto* marks one's distinct, not inferior, identity.

If the analysis I propose here is viable, two further questions present themselves. First, what brought about the change from the resentment of an attributed (never claimed) Sarwa identity in the 1980s and the defiant adoption and redefinition of such identity in the 1990s? Second, how indicative is the moment I describe here of settings elsewhere in Botswana of the 1990s? What, to use Moore's terms, are some of the "larger processual implications" of this "local moment" (1987:735)?

In considering these questions I wish to turn to another string of moments that bring in the voices and action of the Batswapong. Unlike the old Tswapong men in the first moment described above, who were set to define their collective identity vis-à-vis the ruling Ngwato and the representatives of the state in the late 1970s, the Batswapong voices in the following segment are those of children and adults, both royalty and commoners, who directly speak about the Basarwa in the 1990s. These people have been exposed to more than two decades of postindependence nationalist discourse promoting the liberal message of equal citizenship. The idea that "the Motswana" is a citizen of the democratic nation where "ethnic roots" are of minor folkloristic interest had clearly filtered into popular discourse and consciousness. Such progressive, unifying national discourse has worked against a deeply stratified and hierarchized Tswana understanding of the world ensconced in a political economy and cosmology that has its roots in 19th-century historical realities. What elements of the new liberal discourse had filtered down, and how was it used to structure both perceptions and behavior?

The Son of a Sarwa Woman

In the early 1990s, in a small village in the Tswapong region, a woman of Pedi origin told me about the previous season when she and many other people from her village went to collect Pane worms in the bush. These worms appear for a short season and are sought after by traders from South Africa who pay cash or barter coveted items for them. "We lived in the bush," she said. "We were just like Masarwa," she noted laughing. I followed her lead and asked the group gathered around the evening fire, "Who are these Basarwa? What do you know about them?" A young boy of ten told me, "The Basarwa don't have houses; they

live in anthills; I read it in a book.” “They don’t need cloths or blankets. When they are cold they get closer to the fire. I saw it in the national museum in Gaborone,” added a 12 year old. A young man I had known as a boy a decade earlier volunteered to describe for me how a Mosarwa looks: “Their hair stops here [he pointed to the middle of his forehead], their hair is peppercorn [he spoke the last word in English], their eyes are like those of the Chinese, and they are whitish.” I was quite sure my young friend had never seen a Chinese person, but I also doubted that he had ever seen a Mosarwa in person. The Basarwa he had seen, he told me proudly, were dancing during the independence day celebration in the national capital, Gaborone. “You should see them,” added his mother. She continued, “They dance wildly [she illustrated with great animation]. They tie beads to their ankles. They are half naked, they sing in funny clicks [she imitated].” “They are not human” [Ga se batho], concluded another old woman present. As the details of the “nonhuman” attributes of the Basarwa continued to be recounted (they ride donkeys and camels; they eat only meat, no porridge; and so forth), one woman found it necessary to comment in a solemn tone, “No, my people, Basarwa are also the children of God.”

I asked a young woman who was stationed in the village for her national service (a two-year period required of every high school graduate in Botswana) to transcribe the tapes of the interviews I recorded. She came back a few days later with short, creatively edited notes. She had tried her best “to fix” the answers she heard in the tapes, she explained, but “these people don’t tell you the right things about the Basarwa.” She offered to give me a book she had used in her school where all the “correct answers” were written clearly.

I heard these “correct answers” from an educated young village headman in another local site in the Tswapong a few days later. “There are no Basarwa, no Babirwa, no Bangwato,” the young village headman assured me in English: “We are all Batswana.” But in a neighboring village, another, older village headman (who, unlike his younger counterpart, knew me from the past) elaborated for me (in Setswana) the complicated logic of affinal struggles when the children of a Tswana man reject the claims of their half brother, known to be the son of a Mosarwa woman. The father would be wise, explained the old man, to set aside a few heads of cattle for that son before his death, for the share of a Mosarwa woman’s son in his father’s *boswa* (inheritance) is never secure.

“And what if a young educated man of ‘Mosarwa’ origin would ask to marry your daughter?” I asked my Motswapong friend who told me about the wild “Sarwa” dances in Gaborone. “I will be very glad, as long as he is going to have a good job,” she answered to the jeering objection of her neighbors.

Interacting Discourses and Experience

I have tried both to examine the way that social distinctions between Basarwa, Batswapong, and Batswana are experienced and expressed in everyday life and to ascertain how such distinctions are understood, sustained, and contested by social actors. The idea that collective and individual subjectivities are constructed and cultural categories and identities are created in situations of

unequal access to power is, of course, not new in anthropology. Gregory Bateson argued in the early 1970s that the contact of "cultures" is a normal, ongoing dynamic rather than a sudden intruding event that disrupts the integrity of isolated cultural wholes. His ideas have been "rediscovered" and recently reappraised (see Boyarin 1996; Sarris 1993). Still, much of the recent scholarship concerning group relationships in Botswana (indeed, much of the scholarship concerning "interactions" between "hunter-gatherers" and "their neighbors" anywhere) has not been informed by such views and has remained largely outside current debates about the nature of "agency" and about processes of construction of subjectivities. In tracing the experience of social divisions and categorization in one rural periphery in Botswana over the last three decades, the analysis presented here forces a reevaluation of the very terms of the contact model. This essay is a modest attempt to reintroduce central analytical concepts and tools into the increasingly narrowly focused discourse on "Bushmen" and "hunting-gathering."

The interpretation proposed here raises questions that have broader resonance, beyond the specific Basarwa/Bushmen ethnographic focus. George Marcus recently claimed that much of the current discussion about diasporas, borders, and hybrids has been concerned with the "powerful challenges to the nation-state" (1994:427). My intent in this essay has been to move beyond such generalized analyses in which Africans and others either "resist" or "co-opt" nationalist discourses and to explore several unanswered questions. First, how does dominant discourse "filter down" to the actual world of people "on the ground"? What does the national museum exhibit in Gaborone, which depicts the "Bushmen," tell a young man in the Tswapong region in 1993? What does a poor Tswapong woman bring home after watching "Bushmen ethnic dancing" during her visit to the capital? How do women who are locally known as Basarwa use such official discourse in their daily lives? The sketches of diverse experiences and comments that I have presented here suggest that dominant discourses are fragmented, adopted, and resisted in creative ways by actors. The reactions to such hegemonic discourse—its appropriation, reinterpretation, or rejection—vary among social groups and individuals according to their respective positions in the structure of power relationships. More critically, what these local moments clearly show is that people do not merely *react* to dominant discourses; they also "manufacture new ones according to the perceived realities of their lives."²⁸

The cases I present also illustrate that the imagery of some subaltern groups in the postcolonial world might be ensconced in *multiple not binary* borders and subjectivities. The second question I raise thus concerns the existence of more than two interacting discourses. When only two such discourses are considered—national versus local or dominant versus subaltern—one misses much of the complexity of the process of creating subjectivities. Had I presented the situation of creating mutual subjectivities only in the dual sense of the Bushmen as the "other" for the emerging Botswana "self," I would have remained on the level of analysis that depicts resistance to hegemonic formulations. I would have

analyzed the emerging subaltern identity of the Tamasane women in limited terms of “resistance.” One way of avoiding both the moralistic claims that accompany the “resistance” model and its all-too-inclusive analytical force is to focus, as I have done here, on the multiple and intricate forms of daily experiences and representations. What I chose to do from the outset was to look at the way multiple, not binary, collective identities are debated and redefined. I have thus explored the subtle ways in which those who emerge in contemporary Botswana as “the Batswapong” position themselves not only vis-à-vis the hegemonic Botswana subjectivity but also against their own concept—as vague, shifting, and contradictory as it is—of “the Basarwa.” I have argued that the notion of the Basarwa as nonsocial and excluded is effectively used by people in the Tswapong region as they creatively contest dominant definitions of their “Batswapong” identity. Such an approach opened the way for the examination of shifting discourses as historically constituted realities. I argue that in rejecting seemingly “progressive” ideas of democracy and local reform, people in the Tswapong region have constructed and debated collective identities that were defined in colonial and precolonial times. Such identities had gained new poignancy and meaning in the early 1970s. In other words, local people do not simply react to states’ initiatives and to dominant discourses, but to a much more complex and entrenched, yet constantly shifting, structure of subjectivities. The “new” message of tolerance, itself contradictory, is appropriated and worked out in specific historical circumstances. It is thus necessary, I insist, to trace historical trajectories over a long enough period in order to illuminate the shifting nature of such alliances of subjectivities and power. “The Batswapong” as a collective cultural or ethnic category had been vehemently rejected in the region in the mid- and late 1970s only to be embraced and held high in the changing circumstances of the 1990s. The intimately linked idea of Basarwahood associated with exclusion and social marginality in the 1970s began to gain a new meaning in the 1990s, as economic conditions improved and national policies worked against marginalization based on ethnic affiliation. An analysis of a series of specific historical moments illuminates the temporality and creativity of identities.

Notes

Acknowledgments. An earlier version of this article was presented as “Imagining the Other: The Basarwain Tswapong Pastoralist Discourse” in a panel on long-term interaction between pastoralists and hunter-gatherers at the International Ethnological Studies Congress (IUAES) in Florence, Italy, April 1995. The detailed comments and suggestions of three anonymous reviewers and of *Cultural Anthropology* editor Daniel Segal were extremely helpful in revising the manuscript.

1. Throughout this essay, I use the Setswana term *Basarwa* (singular *Mosarwa*) because it is the term used in the setting where I worked. *Ba* is the plural prefix for people, *mo* is the singular form. I use *Sarwa* with no prefix when it appears as an adjective—thus I speak of “Sarwa identity” or “Sarwa origin.” Note, however, that *Masarwa*, with the prefix *ma*, used in several historical records I cite, has strong pejorative connotations. The prefix *ma* is most often used as an exclusionary signifier. Grammatically the prefix *ma* is used in reference to objects, thus when applied to people it denotes strangers and

persons of dubious status. *Masarwa*, *Makalanga*, or *Matswapong* are thus derogatory terms that refer to Basarwa, Bakalanga, and Batswapong people. In contemporary Botswana, educated people and people who adopt the official "proper way of speaking" use the *ba* prefix and thus speak about Basarwa (or Mosarwa). Many local people in the Tswapong hills use the term *Basarwa* in their daily language.

2. Robert Hitchcock's *Kalahari Cattle Posts*, published in 1978, was commissioned by the government of Botswana and provides the most complete survey of Basarwa settled life in and out of the Kalahari zone. Hitchcock has also published several articles exploring the implications of land reform and other government-induced changes on Basarwa populations. See, for example Hitchcock 1982, 1987. Historical studies of Basarwa populations are not new, of course. Schapera has written several influential works since the early 1930s (1930, 1938, 1952, 1965) that discuss the position of Basarwa among the Batswana. Thomas Tlou (1977), Neil Parsons (1977), and, more recently, Diana Wylie (1990) developed important discussions about Sarwa-Tswana relations. The "political economy" school of studies has moved beyond these historical analyses to question the very definition of Basarwa as a distinct, given population and proposed an examination of the conditions—historical, economic, and political—that have given rise to Basarwa subordination and servile position vis-à-vis the dominant Tswana systems of power. Aside from the influential work of Wilmsen (1989), such an analytical perspective is used in the work of Robert Gordon (1991) and Mathias Guenther (1979, 1986). For a review of the literature that has emerged in recent years (much of it in little-circulated, official report form), see Wilmsen 1989: ch. 3.

3. Alan Barnard (1992b) provides an excellent essay reviewing this shift in the literature. A few recent contributions to the debate are essays by Solway and Lee (1990), Wilmsen (1993), Lee (1992), Lee and Guenther (1991), and Kent (1992).

4. I reviewed and contributed to this body of work in Motzafi-Haller 1994a. The more recent exchanges between Wilmsen, Lee, and others include Lee 1992, Lee and Guenther 1991, and Wilmsen 1993. Headland and Reid (1989) provide a good overview of this body of work which goes beyond the Kalahari debate to other, similar interpretations of hunting-gathering populations. For the uninitiated, Bessie Head's excellent novel *Maru* (1971) might illuminate, if in somewhat romantic terms, the nature of Tswana-Sarwa relationships in postindependence Botswana.

5. I want to make it clear that I am not stating here my own "great break of scholarship," as one reviewer worried. The scholarship that analyzes processes of creation of ethnic identities in Africa and elsewhere is impressive (see no. 8). I do claim, however, that within the "hunting-gathering" societies literature, there is much outdated essentialist thinking, despite the development of theory and analysis in the wider field. An interesting exception to this trend is Roy Grinker's recent work (1994). See also Grinker and Steiner's introduction to their edited volume *Perspectives on Africa* (1997). As to Tswapong identity, there are some references in the larger historical work by Diana Wylie (1990) and, more recently, by Paul Landau (1995). The "novelty" of this article is in my insistence that the construction of the two collective identities—the Tswapong and the Sarwa/Bushmen—is, and thus must be understood as, interlinked. The problematization of the creation of difference theorized by Bhabha (1994) and articulated by Gupta and Ferguson (1992) is, thus, particularly relevant here.

6. While revising this essay in September 1997, I read about a new journal to be launched in January 1998. *The European Journal of Cultural Studies* promotes itself on the basis of its commitment to "cultural studies rooted in lived experience."

7. This argument appears most recently in an essay by Michael Brown in *American Anthropologist* (1996). Also, Abu-Lughod, in her 1990 article "The Romance of Resistance," makes the point very convincingly. Using my Tswapong case material, I discussed the issue of resistance and the limits and potential of such a concept in my 1996 essay published in *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power*.

8. The work on the creation of collective identities in historical process is vast. In Africa, the pathbreaking volume *The Creation of Tribalism in Southern Africa* by Leroy Vail (1989) was followed by several other sociohistorical analyses, including Bruce Berman and John Lonsdale's excellent work on Kikuyu identity (1992). I wish to thank one of the anonymous reviewers who directed my attention to these references. I agree with the reviewer that such historical analytical work has been important in moving beyond the essentialist reading of identities. My point in this essay has been to bring such insights to current ethnographic work on Botswana and, in particular, to the body of work that has positioned itself within the "hunting-gathering" societies discourse. Also, my entry point into the current theoretical discourse has been, as I explain above, the meeting ground that links the fields of cultural studies with anthropology. The analytical concept of the "local moment," to which I turn here, is particularly useful for such a synthetic meeting ground.

9. While not complete, the transcribed record of these oral interviews (some in the Setswana vernacular, some in English translation) appears in three unpublished volumes, edited by the history teacher who directed the students (Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980). I analyze the texts more fully in Motzafi-Haller 1994b.

10. The students carried out their interviews in Setswana, the official and most widely spoken language in Botswana. The local vernacular spoken in the Tswapong region today is only slightly different from the language spoken by the students and in urban centers. As to the ethnic identity of the students, a close reading of the interviews and the nature of the interaction between the students and the villagers suggests that none of the students was a resident of the hills area.

11. For more recent data on settlement patterns and population growth over the last decade, see Motzafi-Haller 1996.

12. Missionary texts also use the term *Machwapong*. The prefix *ma*, as noted above, indicates low status because it suggests a category of nonhuman objects.

13. For an excellent exploration of contemporary process of ethnic revival among the Bakalahari people, see Solway 1994.

14. Comaroff also notes that Schapera's use of the term *tribe* for an ethnic group is "inappropriate . . . by any definition of ethnicity" (1997:75).

15. For example, Schapera, who attempted to map out the "ethnic composition" of the "Batswapong" category (1952), needed to revise his categorization several times (see Motzafi-Haller 1994a). His suggestion that some groups in the region—for example, the Bakaa—are now "becoming known" as "Tswapong" reveals just how the external definition of collective group identities can and did change according to the political and economic fortunes of the group (Schapera 1952:69; see also Worby 1993).

16. The quote is from the comments of one of the reviewers of this essay. The reviewer also made the point that among the Bakgatla, internal ranking of ethnic groups was more explicit and orderly than that among the Bangwato.

17. Here again I benefit from the comment of the same anonymous reviewer of this article who wanted to hear more about the fact that "in many ways the Basarwa are set apart from other 'ethnic groups.'" However, when the reviewer asked "So there are 'real' Basarwa?" and "Are the women themselves imagined beings?" he or she missed

the analytical position I develop in this essay by attempting to impose on my argument essentialist ideas of identity.

18. Yet such a liberal message of uniformity is itself fraught with contradictions, and the position of the Basarwa, as I show in more detail in Motzafi-Haller 1995, is never clearly defined. The Batswapong, as the oral history project demonstrates, were at least nominally included within the imagined community of "the Batswana." The analysis that follows examines the way such multiple discourses played themselves out in various sites in this one rural region.

19. For a more complete discussion of Gardener and Itumeleng's textbook, see Motzafi-Haller 1995.

20. The University of Botswana had just emerged as an independent national university. It was established before independence, in 1965, as the University of Botswana, Lesotho, and Swaziland. In 1976, it became the University of Botswana and Swaziland.

21. For more details about TGLP, see Motzafi-Haller 1988: ch. 3.

22. This was to change in the 1990s when Batswapong identity became a signifier of pride. See my analysis of such shifting identity politics in Motzafi-Haller 1996.

23. See also my discussion of this interview in Motzafi-Haller 1994b:427-429.

24. A fuller description of the village and other elements mentioned in this section may be found in Motzafi-Haller 1994a.

25. Elsewhere I describe the struggles for local leadership in several sites in central Botswana that might place the crisis in leadership that this man has experienced in a larger context (Motzafi-Haller 1996).

26. The headman suggested in our long discussions preceding this moment that this was the way I should be introduced in order not to alarm them about the "Basarwa issue." The "writing of traditions" is an accepted practice in Botswana. Throughout my work in the Tswapong region I was introduced as "the woman who writes our tradition." The second description about "walking around the village" was to emphasize my extensive, villagewide, and not-Basarwa-specific focus. I had, in fact, spent several days in the village visiting with people and collecting several household profiles before I walked into that yard.

27. One of the taboos is that people should not eat their group totemic animal.

28. This quote is from insightful anonymous reviewer number five for this journal.

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