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when Bushmen are known as Basarwa: gender, ethnicity, and differentiation in rural Botswana

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The on-going debate raging in the pages of *Current Anthropology* (Headland and Reid 1989; Lee and Guenther 1991; Solway and Lee 1990; Wilmsen 1993; Wilmsen and Denbow 1990), and spilling over to the more popular readership of *Science* (Lewin 1988; Wilmsen and Denbow 1986) and *Science News* (Bower 1989), has firmly established the culminating shift in studies of San and other hunter-gathering societies from an isolationist-evolutionist model to an interactive-historical one.¹ The general outline of this shift is familiar enough: the Kalahari San, who became symbols of hunter-gatherers in general, can no longer be viewed as “living fossils” who existed in a world of pristine isolation until very recently; they must instead be understood in the context of their “wider regional and international economies, politics, and histories” (Solway and Lee 1990:109, citing Wolf 1982).

Recent scholarship on the San and other hunter-gatherers has attempted to move beyond this basic insight and examine processes of group formation in specific historical circumstances. From this work emerges a picture of great variety and complexity of modes of livelihood and strategies of survival of groups, both within an area and throughout changing historical times.² This article is concerned with a group of *Basarwa* (a Setswana term equivalent to “Bushmen”),³ who have been permanent residents in a Tswana village in eastern Botswana since the turn of the century, and with the historical process that maintained this minority in a position of marginality vis-à-vis their Tswana neighbors. These Setswana-speaking Basarwa can hardly be termed “hunter-gatherers,” and their particular history, as we shall see, is one of intense interaction with other groups. Yet, like the more documented population of the Kalahari desert, the small group of men and women who form the focus of this study are labeled *Sarwa* by the Tswana majority. This labeling process, its embeddedness in the Tswana cultural system, and its interplay with changing socioeconomic and political structures is the subject of this article.

Recent scholarship on the Bushmen (San) and other hunter-gatherers calls for an understanding of the way specific historical circumstances give rise to a variety of modes of livelihood and strategies of survival of groups. However, little attention has been paid to the analysis of cultural and political dimensions of this process. This article is concerned with a group of “Basarwa” (a Setswana equivalent to “Bushmen”) who have been permanent residents in a Tswana village in eastern Botswana since the turn of the century, and with the historical process that maintained those Basarwa in a position of marginality vis-à-vis their Tswana neighbors. I argue that to fully understand the continued marginality of the Basarwa in changing historical circumstances, one has to analyze the dynamic relations between the cultural definition of Sarwa identity and its material and social grounding in household reproduction. [Bushman, hunter-gatherers, ethnic formation, gender, rural differentiation, Botswana]

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The article is organized into four sections. The first presents my argument in the context of converging bodies of theoretical work. The second describes the historical process that, in the course of the last century, defined and transformed the position of the Sarwa minority within the larger community. The third and fourth sections outline the dynamic relations between the cultural definition of Sarwa identity and its material and social grounding in household reproduction. I conclude by showing how such analysis can be brought to bear on recent theoretical debates concerning the usefulness of the category “hunter-gatherer,” on the understanding of inequality within a rural population, and on the relations between cultural and material aspects of processes of differentiation and group formation.

who are the “Bushmen”? power, culture, and political economy

Early scholarly attempts to define a “Bushmen” category invoked a set of objective ascriptive criteria—linguistic, physical/biological, economic, and cultural.⁴ By the early 1950s, when the Marshalls and, soon after, Richard Lee and other members of the Harvard Kalahari research project began their work in what was to become Namibia and Botswana, such explicit efforts of definition seem to have been left behind. Clearly aware of the existence of Bushmen groups who practiced no hunting and gathering but had been, for generations, clients of Tswana cattle owners and European farmers, most research in the 1950s and 1960s focused on those few people viewed as the “least acculturated,” those who came closest to the expected model of being “true Bushmen”—nomadic, hunting-gathering, egalitarian.⁵ Theoretically, this assumed undisturbed isolation of the “remote Kalahari Bushmen” fit well within the evolutionary and ecological models of the time.

By the mid-1970s, new theoretical frameworks and a swelling body of archaeological, historical, and ethnographic work⁶ documenting the ongoing interaction between agro-pastoral and foraging populations in the region called for a new assessment of the question of Bushmen identity and the processes of ethnic group formation. These studies, formulated in part as reactions against the isolationist and ahistorical view of Bushmen ethnography, offered detailed examinations of contact situations among various groups of Bushmen, Bantu, and whites (Guenther 1979; Hitchcock 1982; Vierich 1982) and suggested that group identities were defined and transformed within such historical processes of interaction.

More recently, scholars working on Bushmen and other hunting-gathering societies (Cashdan 1986, 1987; Gordon 1986; Kent 1992; Parkington 1984; Schrire 1984; Wilmsen 1989) have tried to draw the implications of this historical and interactive perspective and to analyze the connections between forces of capitalist penetration and historically specific sociocultural formation. Ed Wilmsen (1989, 1990, in press) has argued, for example, that an answer to the question “who are the Bushmen?” lies in a historical examination of the political economy of the region and of “long-standing categorization processes” that produced a pattern of “generalized ethnic inequality.” In this view, both client Basarwa who lived among the Tswana and on farms owned by Europeans and impoverished hunters and gatherers of the Kalahari are members of the same dispossessed group—for “removed from participation in the political economy [they] became the ‘Bushmen’ of modern ethnography” (Wilmsen 1990:11). This approach was criticized, in its turn, for granting too powerful a role to external forces, thus rendering local people passive in the face of capitalist penetration. Solway and Lee (1990) argue forcefully that trade and exchange between groups does not necessarily entail domination and suggest that we “examine actual cases treating the impact of trade as problematic rather than as given” (see also Hutterer 1990; Motzafi-Haller 1990). Others (Roseberry 1989) have pointed out that, based on models of political economy developed in the early 1980s, analyses of processes of ethnic group formation among hunter-gatherers in Botswana and elsewhere pay little attention to the role of nonmaterial forces in specific historical cases.

The challenge, taken up in this article, remains one of providing detailed ethnographic depictions of the process of ethnic group formation and an analysis of what Sahlins called the “double contingency” of “how cultural concepts are actively used to engage the world” (1985:145).

Recent theoretical work makes it increasingly possible to analyze processes of ethnic formation in the context of larger systems of domination (Berry 1992; Moore 1986; Peters, in press). Several detailed studies have shown that power must be analyzed not only in terms of economic exploitation but also as located in everyday practices and in dominant discourses (Parkin 1978; Peters 1992; Rabinow 1986). There is also a considerable body of work carried out in Botswana and in neighboring countries documenting the diverse regional patterns of differentiation (Cooper 1982; Murray 1987; Sharp and Spiegel 1985), which can be drawn on to show the particular way in which social conditions and economic opportunities in various parts of Botswana and Namibia produced important variations in the “Bushmen experience.” These detailed microstudies suggest that a careful analysis of patterns of participation in, or exclusion from, social institutions—marriage, descent, clientage—is critical to an understanding of the particular dynamics of rural differentiation. For example, Colin Murray (1987) suggests that a careful analysis of processes of household reproduction and dissolution over time helps demonstrate patterns of local socioeconomic variations within the rural population and the distinctive experience of men and women. Sharp and Spiegel (1985) argue forcefully that kinship ties and other social networks are critical to stave off destitution in the South African homelands. Sara Berry (1985) develops this argument in her analysis of processes of differentiation among West African cocoa farmers.⁷

The present article attempts to draw these strands of arguments together. The article describes some of the ways in which a group of people, residents of an established Tswana village, who speak nothing but Setswana and who, to the outsider, look no different from their poor neighbors, come to be known as *Basarwa*. The main objective of this article is to examine how the dominant discourse in Tswana society has been able to relegate those designated *Basarwa* to the bottom of the social and economic scale. By labeling some men, and especially women, *Sarwa*, such discourse effectively excludes these people from access to a variety of social institutions and deprives them of the productive resources entailed in access to these institutions.

the case in context: freed clients and their progeny

Tamasane village is located in the northeast corner of the Tswapong region, in Central District (see Figure 1). The 1981 census recorded 692 persons belonging to 106 residential units in the village. Internally, villagers divided themselves into members of four named wards: three were known as Kalanga wards⁸ and one, the *kgosing* (chiefly), was a Ngwato ward. In 1983 I recorded 44 households in the Ngwato ward: three households were of “royal” Ngwato origin, 21 of “commoner” Ngwato origin, 6 households were known as Tswapong, 2 Herero, 1 Kwena, and 11 Sarwa.

It is important to note here that these group (or “ethnic”) labels were used by the people to describe themselves in all but the Sarwa case. As we shall see below, all those known in the community as *Basarwa* did their best to escape such designation. The particular history of the relations between the royal Ngwato and those designated *Sarwa* in Tamasane must be situated within the larger history of group relations in the region.

Briefly, the area of today’s Central District corresponds to the territory of the precolonial Ngwato kingdom. The 19th-century Ngwato kingdom was ruled by a Ngwato king, or *kgosi*, and a “royal” core group of his agnates. Members of the Ngwato lineage who were not related to the king were known as “Ngwato commoners.” People of other “Tswana proper” stock, like the Bakwena or Bangwaketse, resided in the Ngwato territory and were full citizens. Non-

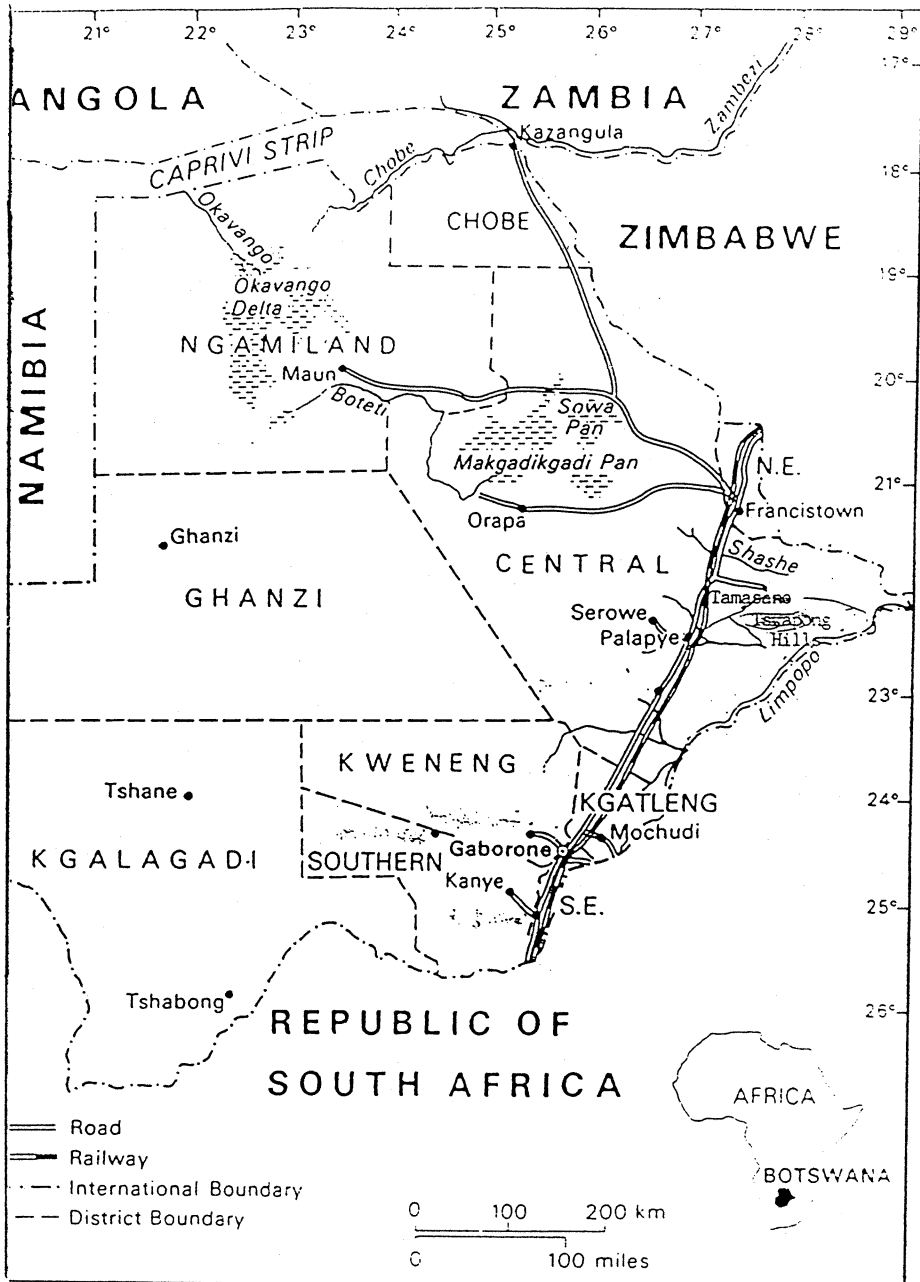


Figure 1. Map of Botswana showing location of Tamasane in the Tswapong Hills. From *The Political Economy of Botswana*, by Christopher Calclough and Stephen McCarthy, Oxford University Press, 1980:ii. Used by permission of Oxford University Press.

Tswana groups of Kalanga, Herero, or Tswapong origin paid some tribute to the Ngwato king but maintained a large measure of local political and cultural autonomy. At the bottom of the stratified state system stood the *malata* or *balala*, vassals or serfs of Kgalagadi and "Bushmen" origin. Schapera (1930, 1952) describes the position of this *malata* underclass in the late 19th century as one of absolute dependency and exploitation. Serfs had no property or legal rights,

they could be transferred at will by their masters, and from birth, their children were “hereditary servants.” Many Sarwa serfs worked as herders and lived all their lives in remote cattle posts herding the cattle of their masters. Others were domestic servants in affluent Ngwato households.

Tamasane was, since the early 1900s, one of a series of cattle posts belonging to an influential Ngwato family, the Ratshosas. The first-generation Basarwa in the three-generation unit I traced in 1983 had been themselves “hereditary servants” of the Ratshosas. In tracing the transforming relationship between the progeny of these 1920s Sarwa servants with their former masters and the changing composition of the village that had formed around them by the early 1980s, I hope to illustrate how the dominant discourse regarding Sarwa identity had been reproduced and altered as colonial reserves became regions in an independent bureaucratic state.

The following is a short synopsis of events beginning in the mid-1920s. The Tamasane cattle post was given to Bessie, the oldest daughter of Khama, ruler of the Ngwato, around the turn of the century. Her husband, Ratshosa, was Khama’s closest advisor and a powerful man in the royal elite. In 1926, after a prolonged power struggle between the three sons of Ratshosa and Tshekedi, the chief-regent, the cattle of the Ratshosas located in Tamasane were sold, their herders, including many Basarwa, were kept by Tshekedi, and their houses in the village were set on fire. Protesting these drastic measures taken by Tshekedi, one of the Ratshosa brothers, Simon Ratshosa, an educated, outspoken man, opened a series of legal cases in which he demanded the restitution of and compensation for this confiscated property.⁹ Throughout these court cases and also in letters sent to the press Simon Ratshosa made the allegation that “the Masarwa became slaves” in the Protectorate. Public opinion in Britain at the time and, no doubt Simon Ratshosa’s talent at publicity, led the Administration to directly intervene in this case and launch a series of official inquiries into “slavery” in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Tshekedi’s efforts to respond to these British official reports, which pushed for a general emancipation of all Basarwa, were unsuccessful.¹⁰ When the High Commissioner, Lord Athlone, announced in Serowe in 1927 the official emancipation of all Sarwa serfs, Tshekedi followed suit by freeing only those Basarwa owned by his enemies, the Ratshosas. Tshekedi explained his act, saying:¹¹

After Johnny had left this reserve in February 1927, I removed all my people who were in Johnny’s, Simon’s and Obeditse’s cattle post in my reserve who were *not paid servants*, because I could not have *my people* serving them when they had quarreled with me. [Emphasis added]

What was the fate of the freed Tamasane Basarwa who were caught in the midst of this affair involving the most powerful men in the polity, the British Administration, and eventually, the League of Nations? While at the center of public attention, the Basarwa had no public voice of their own. The court proceedings do not contain any testimony given directly by a Mosarwa herder. We do learn, however, from a Mongwato man named Segoabe, who was questioned by the court, that the regiment sent by Tshekedi collected all of Ratshosa’s cattle and paid herders, and that “with them were also brought the Mosarwa [*sic*] herdboys.” About a dozen Tswana-sounding names are then listed; all named people are said to be Basarwa. The same Mr. Segoabe also added later that “[t]he Masarwa I have mentioned were brought to Tamasane and were also brought into Serowe with us. . . . [T]hey have not gone back to the cattle post at Shashi.” Little else is known about these people. An understanding of the economic and political circumstances of the time when these people were “freed” can fill in the gap.¹²

Throughout the 1930s, and despite Khama’s reforms of the late 19th century, most Basarwa received no pay and stood largely outside the money economy of the Protectorate. By the late 1920s, scarce employment opportunities in the Protectorate and dwindling hunting grounds turned many of the freed Basarwa into stock thieves. British officials soon changed their rhetoric and what was initially viewed as a growing “spirit of independence on the part of the subservient tribes” was presented, by the mid-1930s, as a “problem” of “disorderly and truculent” Basarwa.¹³ Indeed, as Wylie (1990) suggests, regardless of British rhetoric of emancipation,

conditions in the Protectorate had, in effect, limited the options of those “freed” servants. While a few, like the Basarwa of Tati, were able to settle in their own villages and maintain a measure of independence by plowing their own fields and securing some access to paid jobs by migration, most freed Basarwa were forced to reenter some relations of patronage with Tswana herd owners.

By the late 1930s, the nature of these patron-client relations were rapidly changing. As more Batswana found employment in South African mines, and many began to send their sons to school, a new labor shortage emerged among the less affluent who had not used Sarwa services in the past. Basarwa were sought after in these new conditions, not only as herders, but also as contractual workers to cultivate fields and as domestic servants. In the increasingly commercial economy of cattle rearing, herd owners found it more profitable to pay individual herders than to serve as patrons for entire families.¹⁴ The cumulative outcome of these changes has been a dramatic worsening of the Sarwa condition. Basarwa clients were subject to increasing demands. At the same time, their few rewards as hereditary clients—usufruct right to land and access to the meat and milk of the cattle they herded—were undermined.

Let us now return to the Tamasane case. By the early 1930s, when a new core of Ngwato residence was reestablished in Tamasane, several dozen Sarwa families also established residence there. In 1928 Tshekedi sent a group of Kalanga to settle in the deserted cattle post. Soon after, Ntebogang, the Ngwaketse royal and second wife of Ratshosa, who was not involved in the dispute with Tshekedi, received many of the cattle left behind by the regiment (BNA 173:110f.). Sarwa herders and domestic servants were in need again. In 1945 this core of Ngwato residents was expanded when other members of the Ratshosa family were allowed to leave their exile in Francistown. At independence in 1966, Tamasane was officially recognized as a settled village with prescribed rights to state development resources such as schools and piped water.

In essence, then, the transformation of Sarwa-Ngwato relations, which had begun prior to the 1920s, must be seen as a historical movement from one sociocultural formation to another. The shifting definition of the Basarwa within the dominant structures of relations of production in this historical moment from that of hereditary servants to free contract workers was marked by a radical alteration in the dominant political ideology in the country. The new, democratic, independent state dissociated itself from the ideological underpinnings of the colonial order within which clientship and tribal affiliations were defined. As colonial “reserves” were transformed into administrative districts, an egalitarian ideology was stressed. Yet, the official ethos of equality did not lead to an immediate change in people’s perceptions, nor did it shape their actions and the institutional contexts within which the Sarwa category was defined. While the destruction of the customary relations of clientship and growing commercialization had clearly been underway prior to independence, the state now imparted legitimacy to this process of transformation. This, ironically, facilitated the growing polarization in the community and a hierarchy of social relations predicated on the distinction between “Sarwa” and “Tswana.”

To understand the continual social, political, and economic marginality of the Sarwa category within Tswana society, over more than a century, we must examine the way a set of ideas about Sarwa identity have interacted with the political economy within which these ideas were expressed. I argue that throughout the last century, and in spite of profound changes in the Tswana political economy—absorption into the regional labor market, a significant alteration in the agricultural base, and an increasing commercialization in a capitalist economy—Tswana cultural definition of the Sarwa category has continued to structure the marginality of the group. It is to this Tswana discourse regarding Sarwa identity and its role in structuring relations between the groups that we now must turn.

Tswana dominant discourse and Sarwa identity

The image of Sarwa people in Tswana discourse has some resemblance to their image in European discourse. Without access to discourse themselves, Basarwa became an object, the “others” for both Europeans and the Tswana.¹⁵ In both cases, the “Bushmen” as “others” were associated with “nature” and low status. To understand the significance of the “nature” or “wild” concepts in Tswana society and the position of the Basarwa associated with it, one must consider the symbolic map of Tswana cosmology and the sociopolitical order within which it is embedded.

At the core of Tswana symbolic order is the distinction between the social, public, male-centered village (*motse*) domain and the wild, natural, unbounded sphere of animal and asocial beings (*naga*) (Comaroff 1985; Schapera 1938; Silberbauer 1981). This distinction is expressed in the sociospatial organization of the Tswana settlement and has important political and economic implications. The emergence of this sociospatial and symbolic order is closely connected to the rise of the Tswana polities (*merafe*) in the 19th century. A short exposition of these roots will shed light on the contemporary concept of village residence, its internal political organization, and the position of Sarwa men and women within it.

Tswana polities centered on the apical office of the chief who resided in a large capital settlement. Residence in this central town was a sign of “true” citizenship in the polity. Members of politically subordinate groups resided in their own smaller outlying centers. This placement in the town was contrasted with the nomadism of the Basarwa who lacked a permanent home and “moved around the bush.” In this, Basarwa were similar to wild animals (*diphologolo*) and were excluded from the social realm of government, court, and popular assembly (*kgotla*) centered in the town. An acute observer of this sociospatial order and its political implications, Mackenzie (1871:368) noted: “It is the mark of freeman to have a residence in the town, while the vassals are doomed always to live in the open country.” When brought into the village political center, Basarwa were deprived of any social status. They were domestic servants in the houses of Tswana citizens, an attachment described to this day in terms of social immaturity—they are the “children” of the Tswana head. Their physical presence did not entail social participation or representation in the body politic.

Sarwa marginality was not confined to the symbolic and sociospatial realms but was deeply embedded in the sociopolitical sphere. Tswana social order was explicitly hierarchical, and inequality was central in both secular and sacred worlds. Another 19th-century observer (Smith 1975[1834]:25–26, cited by Peters 1983a:101–102) described this hierarchical order in the following way:

Nearly every tribe is found to consist of three distinct classes of persons. First, the wealthy class. Second, a portion of the poorer class disposed to reside with and serve the former, and third . . . the detached pauper population of the tribe.

The latter, he explains, were termed “Bushmen” by early Dutch settlers “as indicative of their being men living amongst the bushes.”¹⁶ Toward the end of the 19th century, this “detached pauper population” composed of Basarwa and other subjugated groups became a vital element to any Tswana monarch engaged in consolidating power and wealth. As Goold-Adams (cited in Chirenje 1978:42) explained in 1899: “[I]t is a well-known fact that the Masarwa are necessary to herd the cattle and collect skins, feathers—the latter forming (an important) income of the chief and his headmen.”

Over the past century, there have been fundamental changes in the political and social dimensions of this 19th-century reality. But, as we shall see below, and despite some official rhetoric of equality, which produced a series of little effective policies, the marginality of the Basarwa within the Tswana social order remains distinctive. In 1971 Bessie Head placed the outcast position of the Basarwa in Tswana society at the center of her moving short novel *Maru*.¹⁷

The story of a Mosarwa girl adopted by a white woman, who faces prejudice and humiliation once her Sarwa origin is known, enables a sensitive exploration of contemporary Tswana cultural construction of the Sarwa as the Other. When love between the Mosarwa woman and the Tswana chief's son (who "still own[s] the Masarwa as slaves" [Head 1971:59]) triumphs over the deep social divide, "a wind of freedom" enters the "small, dark airless room" that enclosed the Sarwa community (1971:126).

In Bessie Head's powerful prose, "the horror of being an oddity of the human race, with half the head of a man and half the body of a donkey" comes to an end when the "wind of freedom" reaches the Basarwa of Botswana (1971:126). In her visionary or utopian future, "it would be no longer possible to treat Masarwa people in an inhuman way" (1971:127). But Head's vision and her allegiance to the Bushmen/Sarwa cause have little parallel in public discourse in Botswana.¹⁸ While some recent works by Tswana scholars (Datta and Murray 1989; Moutle 1986; Molutsi 1986) have begun to examine the historical and political implications of the position of minorities (including Basarwa) in Tswana society, most depictions of "the Bushmen experience" remain ethnographic. Recent studies (Barnes 1980; Hitchcock 1988; Russell 1976; Solway 1980; Solway and Lee 1990:120) echo Schapera's observation made in the late 1920s that Basarwa are "despised" by their Tswana neighbors. In my work in the Tswapong region in 1980 and 1993, I came to learn that the term "Sarwa" was often used not as an ethnic label to refer to people of Sarwa origin but as an insult.¹⁹ For example, in describing their humiliation by their Ngwato rulers, Tswapong people say they were treated "*fela jaaka Mosarwa*"—simply like Basarwa (Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980:195; Motzafi-Haller 1993a). The "Sarwa" idiom was also used to indicate the lack of any social standing or claim to political rights. In an interview in 1979,²⁰ a Motswapong man expressed his frustration with the current practice in Botswana whereby, "anybody can become chief, irrespective of birth." The man objected to what he viewed as the potentially absurd outcome of such practice—"I would not be ruled by a Mosarwa"—that is, by a person of no publicly recognized rights to rule.

Basarwa continue to be associated with nature and the "wild," uncontrolled bush. While their association with nature entails that Sarwa healers are said to be extremely effective and thus sought after by many powerful Tswana men, it also defines their exclusion from the Tswana social sphere. Thus, the (Setswana) expression "*motho wa naga*," which translates "a man of the bush, the wild," was an extreme insult. People who lived permanently in the dispersed agricultural and grazing zone outside the clustered village were ridiculed as "uncivilized."²¹

In Tamasane, Sarwa identity was so despised that it was a downright insult to openly ask a person (known in the community as a Mosarwa), "Are you a Mosarwa?" Such identity was almost always attributed by others and rejected whenever possible by its bearers. Reluctant interviewees were repeatedly assured by the Mongwato royal who acted as my host:²² "*Mosarwa ke motho*," a Mosarwa is a person, a human being. Yet ambiguity and contradiction permeated this contemporary Tswana discourse. An old, educated Mokalanga man who had been a teacher in the 1930s described the situation of the Tamasane Sarwa in the following way:²³

There were a lot of Basarwa who were *badisa* (herders). They are intermixed but not married. A Mongwato man will take a Mosarwa woman and the children will be only *badisa* [herders]. But since the *nako ya gompieno* [the present times] of Seretse [Khama, the first president of Botswana], there are cases of real marriage. They are Bangwato—but one can still say who is a Mosarwa and who is a Mongwato.

It is this complex and dynamic mix of codes of "proper speaking" and social practice that I seek to analyze here. Why are children born to Sarwa mothers and Ngwato men made to be permanent herders, *badisa*? What are the social implications of considering Sarwa women nonmarriageable? And how has the changing Tswana discourse regarding Sarwa identity structured relations between the groups in the past century? A synthetic work that poses these

questions as part of a larger exploration of the transforming relations between Tswana cultural codes and social reality is still lacking.

Here I examine such interaction of cultural codes and social practice in one local setting in contemporary Botswana. My focus is on the relations between two particular forms of Tswana-Sarwa relations—relations between the genders and those pertaining to work contracts—and on how, predicated within the dynamics of household developmental cycle, this interaction reproduces Sarwa marginality. Sarwa women, as the cases below demonstrate, continue to be viewed as nonmarriageable by Tswana men.²⁴ Supported by social convention, these men dissociate themselves from any social or material responsibility toward these women and the children they father with them. Contract agreements between two individuals, such as the herding services of a youth, or keeping a beast in one's herd until a later date, are not respected when one of the sides is a Mosarwa. In both cases, Basarwa are not treated as full social persons with rights and obligations that such standing entails.

Sarwa women and the developmental cycle of households

Consider the following facts: Among the 19 adult, childbearing women in the 11 Sarwa households in Tamasane, only 11 women were able to point out the fathers of their children. None of the men was a Ngwato royal or commoner man, four were Kalanga, one was Zulu, one Herero, one Morotsi, one Zezeru, one Kgalagadi, and two were Tswapong. The other eight Sarwa women either admitted hesitantly that their children were fathered by "various Tswana men" or simply stated that they did not know who the fathers were.²⁵ The nature of the liaison between the 11 Sarwa women and the non-Tswana men who fathered their children varies from case to case, yet common to all is the fact that the men themselves are marginal to the local community and lack a given social and kin network that could have been of use to the women. Moreover, the few women (5 of 19) who had left Tamasane as a result of certain attachments to the fathers of their children seem to have gone to town centers (mostly Selibe Phikwe) and not to the community of origin of their lovers. Finally, all but two Sarwa households in Tamasane are headed by females.

When we draw these observations together, it becomes evident that Sarwa women, both those who left the community and those who stayed, are generally deprived of social links and thus of an expansion of kin and exchange networks through their relationships with the men who father their children; that Tswana men dissociate themselves from any public, and much less economic, responsibility toward Sarwa women and the children they father with them; and that non-Tswana males who are acknowledged as fathers of Sarwa children tend to be themselves socially and economically marginal and are mostly unable to contribute materially to the support of, or to provide an accessible social and kin network to, these women. Moreover, as the following cases illustrate, this pattern recurs from one generation to the next.

Old Lesedi was not born in Tamasane but came to live there as a very young girl. She worked as a domestic servant in the yard of the Ratshosa royal family. She is the only one among the Tamasane Sarwa who could claim, in 1983, that she once spoke "Sesarwa," the Setswana term for the language of all those designated "Sarwa."²⁶ She gave birth to several children, all attributed to a Mosarwa herder who worked for the same Ngwato family. Four of her daughters are today heads of their own yards; a fifth lives in Selibe Phikwe with a Morotsi man (see Figure 2).²⁷ Lesedi and the Mosarwa herder never established their own yard; all their children were raised in Lesedi's master's yard. When the Mosarwa herder was taken away to another cattle post (presumably after the 1927 events), Lesedi stayed behind in Tamasane. She moved to her own yard only when the Ngwato woman for whom she worked died in the early 1960s.

The cases of Lesedi's five daughters exemplify the range of interactions between Sarwa woman and their lovers and demonstrate in their various manifestations the general phenomena

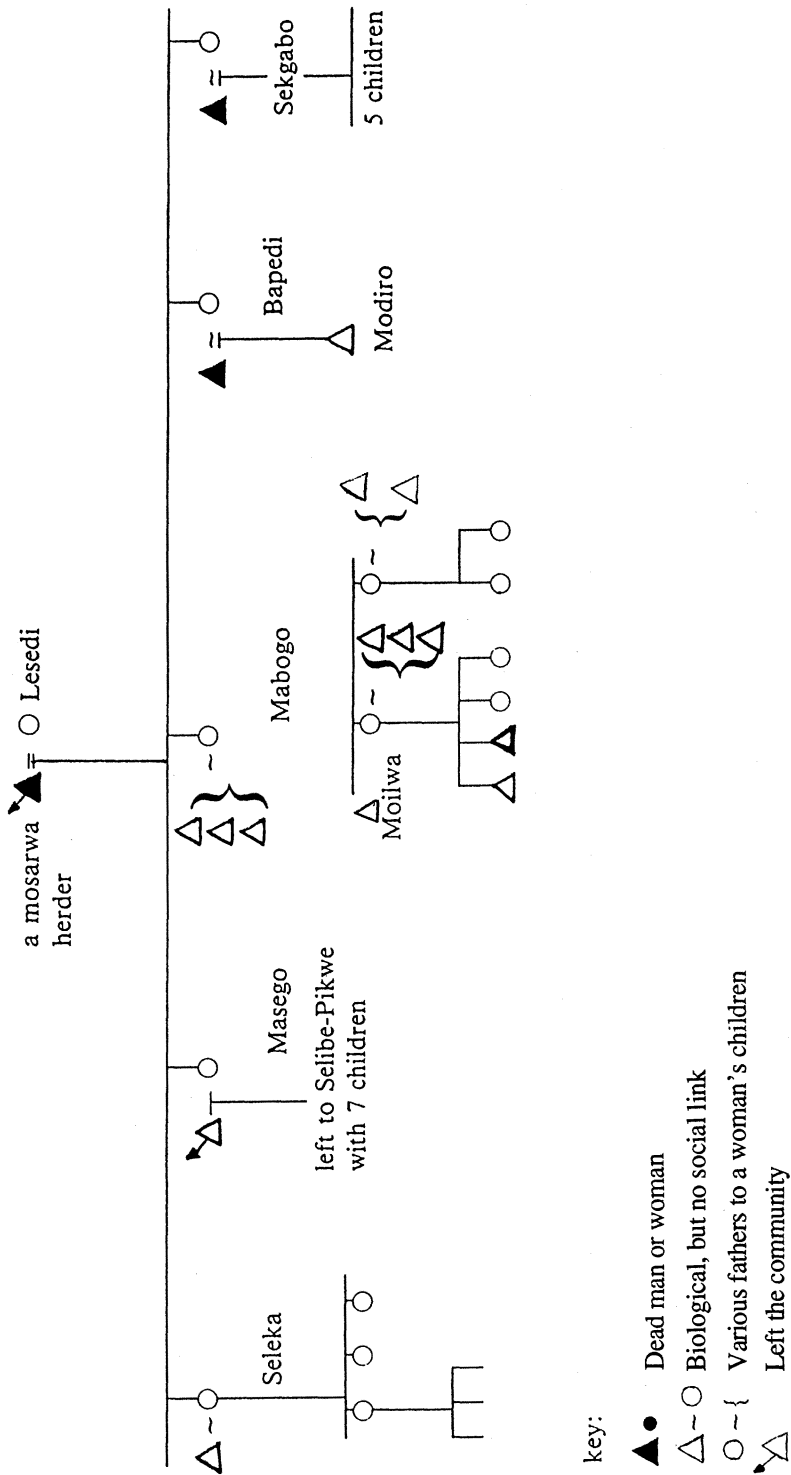


Figure 2. The cluster of Lesedi and her five daughters.

of social marginality of these women. Seleka, the first born, has three grown-up children who all, she claims, were fathered by a local married Kalanga man. Similar cases of married men fathering children with women other than their wives are not rare in rural Botswana. Often, the woman will be known as a *nyatsi*, a concubine, a status that entitles her and her children to some economic support by the man. When a man refuses to support his children, his *nyatsi* can, and often does, resort to legal means to secure her own and her children's rights to such support. Seleka, and all other Sarwa women in Tamasane, were clearly not part of the social and political system that could secure such support. Seleka gave birth to and raised all her children in her mother's yard. She moved out of her mother's yard to create her own only when her daughter started to bear children.

The second daughter of Lesedi, Masego, followed the Morotsi man who fathered her seven children to Selibe Phikwe, where he is employed. Her younger sister, Mabogo, was not as lucky. Her six children, all born in her mother's yard, were fathered by various local Tswana men, whom she would not and perhaps could not name. Her own two older daughters have fallen into the same pattern. One has four children, the other has two; neither would name specific men as fathers of their children, but both claimed the fathers were local Tswana men.

The last two daughters of old Lesedi, Bapedi and Sekgabo, head their own households in Tamasane as well. But unlike the other Sarwa households in the village, these two claimed prolonged association with their lovers. In both cases, these relationships were terminated upon the death of the men. Bapedi has a son who now works in a South African mine and supports her and the parents of her lover. She is the only one who refers to her Kalanga lover as *nyatsi* (lover/concubine) and maintains an ongoing social and economic interaction with his old parents, even after his death. Significantly though, the old Kalanga couple, parents of her lover, are not part of the larger Kalanga community in Tamasane but are later arrivals. They are poor and lack any social and kin network. Their dependence on her and her son is obvious.

The youngest among the five sisters, Sekgabo, has five children all attributed to one man whose origin is not clear. She claims he was half Ngwaketse, half Kalanga, while her sister says he was a Mosarwa. Be that as it may, the man arrived in Tamasane alone²⁸ and established a household with Sekgabo that lasted until his death in 1971. While as poor as her sisters, Sekgabo has the social recognition of "marriage," which they do not. She and her children use the last name of the dead man while all her sisters and her sisters' children carry Lesedi's last name.

The predominant feature in these various cases is systematic social marginality. Local men, Bangwato and Bakalanga, do not acknowledge their association with women defined as Basarwa, thus blocking entry of these women into their social and kin networks. Marginal men who create a long association with these women might provide some material support but, upon their disappearance or death, leave the women and their children isolated. The important difference between these Sarwa female heads of households and most of their Tswana counterparts is rooted in this systematic truncation of social ties. A Tswana woman who is an unmarried head of household is not necessarily deprived of social and material ties with the family of her *nyatsi* (see Kerven 1979; Peters 1983b). In many Tswana cases, prolonged residence in the woman's natal home is only a phase in the process of building a new *lolwapa* (literally, a yard, but also an independent household). This practice of "marriage as process" has been documented widely in Africa (see, for example, Comaroff 1980). In Botswana, this prolonged process is associated with the recurrent absence of a young immigrant, who is expanding his young family while accumulating enough wealth to establish his own independent household (see Motzafi-Haller 1988). In contrast, liaisons between Tswana men and Sarwa women tend to be, from the outset, of a different nature. As discussed above, Tswana and Kalanga men view Sarwa women as standing outside the social domain within which their responsibility toward their offspring is prescribed. An association with a Sarwa woman, even if

it spans many years and results in several children, does not entail an access to the economic resources and social network of the Tswana father.

The above discussion suggests that most Sarwa households in Tamasane are headed by females, are socially isolated, and receive no economic support from local men who father children born in these households. In the few cases where a resident male is part of a Sarwa household, the men are outsiders, themselves of an extremely marginal status both politically and socially. The case of Pirinyana is a good example. Pirinyana was born in a neighboring village to a Sarwa woman and a local Tswana man. She came to Tamasane with her small daughter, whose genitor was a Tswapong man from the village she left. For years she worked as a domestic worker in Pretoria, where she met a Zulu man who fathered her second daughter. Subsequently, the Zulu man came with Pirinyana to her new home in Tamasane. He continued to migrate to South Africa, supporting Pirinyana and her two daughters with his wages. Although lacking any kin network in the community, the couple was able to accumulate enough money to purchase a few head of cattle, and Pirinyana was able to cultivate their field. Pirinyana was more fortunate than the other Sarwa women in Tamasane.

One of the important consequences of the apparent social marginality and isolation of Sarwa households is acute economic disadvantage. In contemporary Botswana, a mix of paid work, agriculture, and animal husbandry is the basis of rural household economy. Though most Sarwa households in Tamasane indicated that they have access to agricultural land, they have difficulty acquiring both draft animals and the adult labor necessary to drive such animals. Access to these assets among rural, poor, female-headed households in Botswana is usually achieved through some reliance on the labor of grown-up sons, help from other relatives, or the payment of cash for hired ploughing teams.

Among the Sarwa female-headed households described above, none of those in the family cluster of Lesedi and her five daughters own any cattle or small stock. While Lesedi and her daughters all indicated the availability of ploughing land, none has an adult male who takes part in the agricultural work. One of the daughters does not plough at all, and another hires her labor out and receives some grain in return. The other three households indicated that they do the ploughing themselves with the help of their young children. Cash income for all five households (Lesedi's second daughter, Masego, does not head a household) is generated by the sale of pane worms,²⁹ thatch grass collected in the hills, and, less often, locally brewed beer (*bojalwa*). These limited cash-generating activities are all extremely labor intensive and very sporadic. Gathering and drying pane worms and better-quality grass for thatching entails long absence from the village by both the women and their children. To brew beer, women need some initial cash to buy sugar and corn meal; the profit margin is extremely narrow.

Yet, poor as they are, the women heading these 11 Sarwa households stand apart from other Sarwa women who cannot maintain an independent yard and reside in the yard of another Tswana household. I met two such women in Tamasane in 1983. In both cases, the Sarwa woman and her very young children resided in the yard of, and provided services for, another household in return for some food and shelter. Older children of these women, in both cases, were sent out to the cattle post. I have also come across several similar situations of absolute economic dependency in the open agricultural areas in the northern Tswapong. Such absolute economic dependence of Basarwa on Batswana appears to be common in the western region of Botswana (Cashdan 1986; Esche 1977; Russell 1976; Solway 1980; Vierich 1979). I have no systematic data to document the extent of such Sarwa-Tswana relations either outside Tamasane or throughout the Tswapong region.³⁰ The existence of such situations does suggest, in light of the analysis offered here, that the 11 Sarwa households in Tamasane represent only the visible "tip of the iceberg"; that is, they are the few cases that "made it," no matter how impoverished and marginalized, to the village arena. Many other "invisible," fragmented Sarwa units, consisting of women and children or of isolated men, had been effectively "pushed out" of the

sociopolitical center and exist in situations of greater dependency outside Tswapong villages. I will return to the significance of this point in the last section of this article.

Sarwa males and the recreation of marginality

So far, we have seen that Sarwa females are unable to secure the material support and the labor of the men who father their children. The social marginality and acute economic disadvantage of these women is further aggravated when we consider the systematic blockage of two other potential sources of support: that which could stem from relationships between households through the consanguineal link and that which could stem from relationships within a mature household between a mother and her adult sons. All but two Sarwa households in Tamasane are deprived of such relationships; brothers of adult female heads of households are dubiously absent from all family records, and most adult sons are said to be away herding others' cattle. The cases in Tamasane demonstrate that the systemic "diffusion" of sons and brothers to the periphery of social life deprives Sarwa women not only of critical access to the earning power and labor power of these men but also of legal and political representation in the center. Men are needed to act on behalf of women when access to the *kgotla*, the center of public and local judiciary life, is sought by the latter. Although recourse by aggrieved Basarwa to the *kgotla* arena was made possible at the end of the 19th century, Sarwa women in Tamasane have never used such right. The various dimensions of their marginality—social isolation, economic deprivation, and *de facto* political exclusion—are interconnected.

Sarwa males born into these poor, marginal households, which are unable to guarantee them adequate care, opportunity for education, or inheritance of livestock, start their lives like many other Tswana poor, in a clearly disadvantaged position. Yet, like their kinswomen, their Sarwa identity aggravates their condition because certain culturally defined Tswana practices are directed toward them. The interaction between the cultural and structural dimensions of this exacerbating spiral carries on throughout the life cycle of a Sarwa male and into an intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage.

In the following discussion, I will compare the life cycles of Sarwa males to those of Tswana males and, more specifically, to poor Tswana male life cycles. The purpose of such comparison is to illuminate the added dimension of disadvantage in cases of attributed Sarwa identity. Analysis of the life histories of Sarwa males is necessary for understanding the reproduction of marginality of Sarwa households over generations and, ultimately, the recreation of the Sarwa category and its position outside the sociopolitical arena of the village life.

Born in poor Sarwa woman-headed households, whose main source of livelihood is the local sale of its members' labor, young Sarwa boys are sent early to outlying cattle posts to herd the cattle of Tswana men. The norm in such cases of preadolescent labor is the payment of one beast for the herding services of one year. In Tswana society, where cattle are the most general form of wealth accumulation, these beasts earned in preadolescent years can form the core of a poor man's future herd. Sarwa women in Tamasane, however, claimed repeatedly that Tswana men cheat their children of this basic payment "because we are Sarwa." The second important stage in the life cycle of most Tswana men occurs when a youth stops herding cattle to take up paid work, usually in the mines. Mine work earnings are about five to seven times higher than customary payment for herding services. In the course of the 10 to 15 years of active migrant work, a Tswana man sends part of his cash earnings to support his family of origin. But some of this cash is necessary to establish the economic viability of the young man's future family. However, in order to reach that level of accumulation, a man has to balance competing demands: his responsibility to his mother and sisters against that to his own future yard. He also needs some herding services for his accumulating cattle while he is away at his work. The case

of Moilwa is an example of the structural difficulties inherent in the position of a young Sarwa man in Tamasane.

Moilwa is the first child born to Mabogo, one of Lesedi's daughters (see Figure 2). His father, like those of Mabogo's other five children, never acknowledged his ties with Mabogo or contributed toward his children's material needs. When cattle or cash was paid for Moilwa's herding services, it was "eaten" (consumed) by his mother and younger brothers and sisters. When Moilwa left to work in the mines, his two younger sisters and, subsequently, the third, started to bear their own children in the yard. While working in South Africa, Moilwa met a woman and fathered two children with her. In order to resolve the competing demands of his family of origin, with its ever-expanding number of sisters' children, and his own future family, Moilwa stopped coming home at the end of his work contracts. His mother says he is a *lekholwa*—a Tswana concept describing a relative who remains in his work place for extended periods and with whom one has no contact. Moilwa's difficulties were compounded not only by the demands of his poor family of origin but also by its social isolation described above. Even if he managed to buy a beast with his cash earnings, there was no family herd in which to keep it. Nor was there a mother's brother (*malome*) or any other kin who already owned a herd and could potentially take care of Moilwa's beasts. The possibility of entering an agreement with an unrelated Tswana herd owner has another set of difficulties. Sarwa women complained that Tswana men who were entrusted with cattle belonging to Sarwa sons had "eaten it up." Yet when asked why they did not take such a case to the traditional court (*kgotla*), a right widely practiced by Batswana in similar circumstances, they could not provide a clear answer. Their embarrassed reaction to the question posed alluded to the implied recognition that a woman alone, and more so a Sarwa woman or a Sarwa youth, without an adult male—husband, father, or brother—to represent her or him does not even approach the public area of the *kgotla* of the central court.

As the case above illustrates, the path for building an independent yard with a viable economic base by a Mosarwa man tends to be compounded with difficulties. Initial poverty, inability to accumulate wealth due to ever-growing demands by an unmarried mother and sisters, lack of a supporting network, and inaccessibility to the centers of power and litigation are all factors in this failure. It should be emphasized, however, that this debilitating constellation of factors does not appear in each individual case. For example, Modiro, the only son of the Sarwa woman described above as the *nyatsi* of a Mokalanga man, was able to support his mother with his salary from his mine work, and in 1983 was planning to pay two cattle as bridewealth to consolidate his marriage with a woman with whom he had fathered a child. The particulars of his case are less restrictive. The social isolation of his mother was not as acute—Modiro's father had resided with her and established, before his death, a common household. Also, as the only child, Modiro, unlike Moilwa, did not have to support unmarried sisters and an ever-increasing number of sisters' children.

Yet, despite these structural difficulties, the positions of both Modiro and Moilwa are better than those of most Sarwa males in the community. Mine work, the most common employment and major source of cash income in rural Botswana, is not always part of the life histories of Sarwa males. Among the 16 Sarwa sons of female-headed households in Tamasane, 13 were in the age group that is usually involved in active migratory mine work, yet only three among them were miners. Three others continued to herd cattle belonging to other men, four were said to be "doing nothing," and two were described as "looking for work." While mine work, like herding, keeps men away from the village center, the difference in the income generated by these two occupations is significant. When paid in cash, herding services pay about one-fifth of what mine work pays. This has important implications for the ability of Sarwa males to accumulate capital. Herding cattle that belongs to others as one's only employment means a perpetual economic dependency, an inability to support one's natal family, and clearly no

possibility of accumulating capital (in the form of cattle) that could provide the economic basis for an independent yard. Moreover, while poor Tswana herders have at least some kin and social network in the village center and draw their identity from association with one of the wards in the village, a Sarwa herder who resides at the cattle post has no social links or political representation in the village.

Examination of the second-generation Sarwa males, the mothers' brothers of the young men like Modiro and Moilwa, tells part of the story about the results of the failure to accumulate capital early on in one's life. The most significant fact about this category of adult Sarwa males is that none seems to have established a household in the village center. Tracing family histories of the 11 Sarwa women who head their households in Tamasane and direct inquiries about the fate of these women's brothers yields little verifiable data. Sarwa women tended to answer such inquiries by stating that "they were born alone"—only females—but then "remember" they had brothers who "died" or whom they "did not know."³¹ When asked where these brothers are, the women simply said their brothers were *monageng*—in the bush. As the discussion above alluded to, naga—the bush, the wild—is the nonsocial category of space in opposition to the hub of social and political life in the village center. By belonging to this "bush" sphere, these Sarwa males are socially "unknown" by, and do not "exist" for their sisters. These men might come to the village occasionally to buy locally brewed beer and socialize, but they are not part of the village community. They cannot be counted on to provide material support to their sisters nor, because of their extremely marginal position in the social hierarchy, can they act as social guardians to their own or their sisters' offspring. Economic dependency and sociospatial marginality resulting from prolonged residence at the periphery of the village create and, in turn, are reproduced by the political proscription of these men. The outcome of this exclusion in communal terms is that the Sarwa group does not constitute a ward, the basic self-ruled unit within the hierarchical organization of the village political structure. Its members do not participate in kgotla (the public forum) discussions, nor do they take part in the newly elected democratic institutions of VDC (Village Development Committee) and Land Board. Deprived of the legal and social guardianship of fathers and adult brothers, Sarwa women are effectively barred from access to social institutions, like the kgotla, that could protect their few rights as unmarried mothers.

who are the "Sarwa"? categorization and social mobility

So far, I have discussed the way in which ideas associated with one's Sarwa identity feed into an exacerbating spiral of disadvantage and recreate the marginality of the category as a whole. Yet, as some of the case studies presented above illustrate, at the fringes of this process there is a constant movement of individuals who manage to "escape out" or "fall into" the Sarwa category. This movement of individuals must not be seen as a mere exception to a general trend of the "model" presented here. On the contrary, this mobility of individuals "across" lines alludes to my basic argument that we are dealing here with a *social category* that is defined and redefined in changing historical circumstances, and *not* with a group of individuals of fixed, biologically distinctive heritage. The case of Boy, who has no Sarwa heritage but is considered a "Mosarwa" by both Sarwa and Tswana members of the community, provides a specific illustration of this point.

Boy is a loud, constantly drunk man in his mid-40s. He appears in the village whenever he has some cash to buy locally brewed bojalwa beer and sleeps by the courtesy of the beer saleswoman in the corner of her yard. When he appears in the public arena of the kgotla, he behaves like and is treated as a jester. He was the only person in Tamasane who stated openly, "I am a Mosarwa," and the only one who was said to be one by both Sarwa women and other Tswana in the community. Yet, Boy's non-Sarwa parentage is known in the community. His

mother is a Ngwato commoner, and the man who fathered him is a Kalanga. The mother moved on to marry another Ngwato man and left her natal home. Boy stayed behind in his mother's father's yard, but he spent most of his life herding the latter's cattle at a remote cattle post. He never left to take on a mine work contract, nor was he paid for his herding services. At various points of his adult life, Boy had several associations with Sarwa women who were economically dependent on, and resided in the yards of, Ngwato families. One of these women bore him three children who grew up in, and in their turn herded the cattle of, the Ngwato man in whose yard their Sarwa mother worked.

The attributed Sarwa identity in this case is a result of several factors. The circumstances of Boy's birth, as an illegitimate son of a woman who moved on to marry another man, set the parameters for his position of social marginality. Boy's initial social marginality was maintained and aggravated by the fact that he never broke out of it in later stages of his life. By remaining in the cattle post beyond the usual age, Boy effectively undermined his chances of creating a viable social and economic basis for an independent household and, thus, his social standing in the community. His association with socially marginal Sarwa women and his personality structure (a jester and a drunk) contributed to this exacerbating cycle.

Boy's life history is perhaps the best illustration of the way Sarwa identity not only contributes to one's social isolation and marginality, as we have seen above, but also is a label attributed to an individual who had been caught in such debilitating cycles, regardless of one's descent. In the initial stages of his life, Boy lived "like a Mosarwa": he lived at the outlying cattle post and, unlike his mother's brothers, he was not granted the opportunity to attend school. His already dubious social standing was made more vulnerable when he did not develop the potential social links via his mother's kin group but associated himself with Sarwa women. His behavior alienated him from the only link he had with his Tswana heritage and pushed him closer to the Sarwa category. The result was greater economic insecurity and more explicit social marginality. This, in turn, reinforced his inclusion in the Sarwa category and, hence, his treatment as a nonsocial being expressed in public ridicule and withdrawal from social exchange contracts. Boy thus entered a vicious cycle of disadvantage and social isolation from which he could not, and perhaps did not care to, escape. He *became* a "Mosarwa."

Boy's life story contrasts with that of old Lesedi's, outlined above. Lesedi's "Sarwa" origin is not disputed locally—she came to Tamasane in the 1920s as a "Sarwa servant." Boy's "non-Sarwa" parentage is publicly known. Yet, both Boy and Lesedi are locally known as "Basarwa." In fact, it is very significant that only in these two extreme cases of an isolated jester and an old woman who had once spoken "Sesarwa" do we find the label Sarwa as self-reference. In all other cases in Tamasane, Sarwa identity was fiercely rejected and always attributed by others and with very negative connotations. When we also consider the fact that there are no cultural features or traits, such as language, religion, economic practices, or biogenetic physical features to distinguish those designated "Basarwa" from others in the community, it becomes evident that what we have here is not an ethnic group with a subjective self-perception of common identity and unifying cultural or institutional markers, but rather a social category. This social category, Basarwa, could be understood only in terms of the Tswana political and cultural universe within which it is defined. "Sarwa" is a convenient label in Tswana hegemonic discourse that can be applied to people of both Tswana and non-Tswana descent. However, cultural categorization alone is inadequate to relegate a group of people to marginality; we need to analyze the role of social practice in mediating cultural codes.³² Throughout this article, I have argued that concepts of Sarwa labor and exclusion from marriage are crucial guiding idioms in the formation and reformulation of the group boundaries and relationships through which resources flow. My analysis spells out the mechanism of such process, which links rules of access to resources with social identity.

The foregoing analysis of the production and reproduction of the Sarwa category in changing historical and political circumstances has implications for the study of processes of ethnic formations in Botswana and elsewhere. The analysis offered here attempts to go beyond the reductionist stalemate of determining whether ethnic groups are an outcome of material or class relations (the political-economy model) or are social units within a population with unique "cultures" or "ways of life" (the cultural approach). Instead, this analysis focuses on the particular experience of ideological domination and socioeconomic marginalization of men and women in one local setting in Botswana and on how cultural idioms and social practice both shape the same reality.³³ In the context of "Basarwa" studies, the cultural approach posited a central "foraging culture" (Kent 1992:61), a "hunting and gathering way of life" that is "central to the way in which they relate to the world" (Bird-David 1992:36). Alan Barnard's (1979:11, cited by Kent 1992:53) statement that "Bushmen do not cease to be Bushmen when they encounter other people or come to be dominated by them" is the most explicit expression of such an approach. Recently, Richard Lee (1992) suggested that "foraging" is a chosen way of life, a "pocket of resistance," that reproduces itself despite external forces. However, since many "Bushmen" groups do not maintain "a hunting-gathering way of life,"³⁴ their situations are constructed as local or temporal "adaptations."³⁵ Discussion in this approach is thus limited to the degree to which any given group falls within, or temporarily diverges from, such "foraging culture."

In response to this cultural approach, the political-economy model, presented by Ed Wilmsen and others, charged that Basarwa ethnicity emerged and must be understood in the context of socioeconomic structures and relations of power. My goal in this article has been to illustrate how economic and ideological processes interact to produce the reality of group relations in Tamasane. I have argued that the ideological constructs of the Tswana dominant group are significant in shaping the disadvantaged position of the "Tamasane Basarwa." However, I do not suggest that the Tamasane experience is one that is replicated in other locations in Botswana. For example, while in Tamasane, Sarwa identity was essentially a negative attribute, and all those who could attempted to escape such designation, Mathias Guenther, working in the white-owned Ghanzi farms of western Botswana describes a different process. He suggests that in the late 1970s a more inclusive and assertive "San identity . . . overriding the previous linguistic, ethnic and economic boundaries between the different San 'tribes' as well as between farm Bushmen and veld Bushmen," was emerging in the area (1979:29–30). Guenther notes that the development of this self-defined San identity is expressed in the revival of the "old ways," especially in aspects of religious and ritual practices. Across the border, in Namibia, Claire Ritchie (1986) depicts the emergence, in tragic conditions of poverty and desperation, of two distinct assertive groups of San people: the Ju/wasi, and "their larger and more aggressive neighbors," the !Kung.

However, unlike these two cases of changing construction of self-identity, Cashdan describes two groups of "Kalahari Basarwa" and their more complex interaction with other groups of herders and farmers in the Botletli region. In her analysis, a group of wealthy cattle owners, with Negro physical features and centralized political organization who call themselves "Bateti," are known locally by the same ethnic label—Basarwa—as another group of poor "Savanna foragers," who live to their south. She writes (1986:312): "The Bateti today do not like to speak of themselves as Basarwa, since Basarwa are poor and this implies an inferior status." In a similar situation to the Tamasane case described here, "Kalanga didn't want to marry them because they were Basarwa" (1986:312). Yet, Cashdan does not proceed to explore the way such dominant construction of group identity is locally challenged or the effect it has on the lives of those designated "Basarwa."

Indeed, this recorded variety and complexity of case material suggests that we do not assume a uniform, essentialized Basarwa "culture," "society," or "way of life."³⁶ In each of these recorded cases, a different set of factors marks the local history and the process of group formation. The attempt to understand these varied "Bushman experiences" must situate each case within its own, carefully researched, sociopolitical and economic terrain.

If indeed, a "hunting-gathering way of life" is what we find in a particular case, we should proceed to analyze the specific mechanisms that maintain this way of life and enable its reproduction. Simple assumptions about the "choice" of a particular "way of life" (as Lee 1992 posits) must face complex questions about the way ideas interact with specific institutional arrangements (for example, family structure, organization of labor, and so forth), and about the power relations within the community and beyond it that structure this process of group formation. Thus, rather than asking either/or typological questions (Were "capitalist forces" successful in breaking down the "foraging way of life" in specific locations or not? Is a given community of "San" a "hunting-gathering" "society," or is it not?), the analysis proposed here suggests more open-ended questions: How has the "Bushman" or "Sarwa" category been defined in changing historical circumstances? By whom? What are the implications of such categorization in the lives of those so designated? Is there a challenge to dominant discourse? How is it articulated and to what effect? These are questions to be asked not only in the case of "Bushman/Basarwa/San," or even of "hunter-gatherers" in general, but also of all processes of social categorization in any sociopolitical setting.

All in all, the foregoing analysis suggests that we bring the "hunting-gathering" anthropologists out of their academic enclave and into the mainstream of anthropological investigation and theoretical developments. It is not an issue of "art" or "science," as Lee has (1992) recently put it, but an attempt to integrate the analysis of systems of meanings and their sociopolitical contexts.

notes

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1. In an excellent bibliographic essay, Alan Barnard (1992b:66–74) cites some sixty recent publications concerned with what he calls the "Great Kalahari Debate." For the most recent exchanges on this issue, see Lee and Guenther 1991; Lee 1992; Wilmsen and Vossen 1990; Wilmsen 1991, 1992. The finality of the shift away from the isolationist model and toward the historical one is best expressed in Solway and Lee's 1990 *Current Anthropology* article and the extensive comments it invited.

2. On Botswana and Namibia, see the work by Guenther 1986; Ritchie 1986; Cashdan 1986, 1987; Hitchcock 1987; Gordon 1991; Valiente 1991; and Kent 1992. Also, see the review by John Yellen (1991).

3. The terms "Bushman," "Kalahari San," and "Basarwa" are used by different people and with different social and political meanings. The most extensive discussion of the source and social significance of each term used by laymen and scholars appears in Alan Barnard's recently published *Hunters and Herders: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples* (1992a). See also my forthcoming article (Motzafi-Haller, in press), "The Politics of Ethnic Categorization in Contemporary Botswana," where I outline the meaning of the frequent shift in terms in a government publication and in two school text books. Throughout this article, I use the Setswana term *Basarwa* (singular *Mosarwa*) because this is the only 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. *Ma* is the appropriate Setswana prefix for nouns and nonhuman objects. As one of the reviewers suggested, the prefix *Ma* is also used to denote strangers and persons of dubious status. *Masarwa*, *Makalanga*, and *Matswapong* are, thus, derogatory terms that refer to Basarwa, Bakalanga, and Batswapong people. One reviewer of this article suggested that my use of the term *Sarwa* “perpetuates a derogatory social categorization.” I find this charge misplaced on two levels. First, as I noted above, all Tamasane residents—those who are known as Basarwa and those who are not—are Setswana speakers and use the Setswana term *Basarwa*. I clearly cannot use the term “San-speakers”: Basarwa in Tamasane speak no “San” language; nor could I refer to specific group names (such as *G/wi* or *Nharo*), as another reviewer suggested, because such labels of self-identity do not exist among the researched group. In fact, and here is the second and most fundamental misconception presented by the reviewer’s comment, the whole point of this article will be missed if we insist on searching for an “authentic” name or “origin” of those labeled “Basarwa” in Tamasane: *Sarwa* is a social category created within Tswana dominant discourse to facilitate a practice of exclusion from social and material resources. The label itself could gain new meaning, as I outline in the last section of this article, when it is adopted as a self-referent to empower people.

4. See, for example, Tobias 1964. Further discussion of these early efforts of classification is offered by Guenther 1977. See also Gordon 1986. Note, however, that Schapera had been a strong critic of this essentialist approach. He noted in 1938 (cited in Gordon 1986:54), based on his 1930 survey work:

There is no single criterion by which we can nowadays characterize all the people commonly called “Bushmen.” If we adopt racial characteristics, we shall probably have to exclude the vast majority . . . if we adopt mode of life, we must exclude all the cattle herding Masarwa and all the servants on European farms; and if we adopt language, we must exclude the Heikum.

5. Sillery (1952:xii) distinguishes between what he seems to suggest are more “true” Bushmen who “roam about the desert” and the “Sarwa” who “live in static communities among the Bantu.” See also Silberbauer 1965:8.

6. As expressed in the mid-1970s, these theoretical frameworks called for an understanding of local social systems in Africa and elsewhere in terms of their interaction with larger global forces impinging on them. Nash’s review article (1981) provides the state of the art of these works. For a review of cases discussing contact between Bushmen and Bantu populations, see Motzafi (1986:297) and Solway and Lee (1990:4).

7. Polly Wiessner’s important work (1986) on the *hxaro* (gift-giving) networks between hunters and farm-based !Kung over three generations, is another excellent example of such analysis. Wilmsen (1989, chapters 5 and 6) also provides an extensive analysis of the centrality of kinship networks in structuring political and economic relations both within and across group boundaries. I am indebted to Ed Wilmsen for directing my attention to these existing works.

8. The history of the Tamasane Kalanga parallels, in many ways, the process of ethnic formation recorded here for the Sarwa. Tracing their roots to a segment of Barolong people with a *tsipi*, iron totem, the group had adopted Sekalanga after years of migrations in the Tonota area. Subjugated by the Ngwato, coming from the south, these people fell into the same low position of other Kalanga. Yet, unlike other Kalanga, known to keep their fields and houses together, the Tamasane-Kalanga (like their Masojane relatives) have always had their fields away from their clustered villages, Tswana style (Sebopeng 1983).

9. The detailed court proceedings can be found in Botswana National Archives (BNA) 173 *Chief Tsekedi vs. Simon Ratshosa*. The correspondence between Tsekedi and the Resident Magistrate and a document entitled “Reports Regarding ‘Hereditary Servants’ in the Bechuanaland Protectorate,” written by Simon Ratshosa, are also contained in this file. Parsons (1978) provides a detailed description of Simon Ratshosa’s legal and publicity campaigns against Tsekedi.

10. On November 15, 1926, in a letter to the Resident Magistrate of Serowe (BNA 173), Tsekedi tried patiently to “educate” the British. He placed Sarwa-Ngwato relations in the context of the highly hierarchical order of Tswana society. He wrote: “In order to understand the system under which the Masarwa are governed, it is necessary to first go into the system governing the Bamangwato.” After outlining the hierarchical relations among the Bamangwato as natural and proper, he concluded: “The Mosarwa lives under the same restrictions, he cannot leave his master without his master’s consent.”

11. Tsekedi’s argument skillfully plays with the embedded contradictions of the British position regarding the conditions of Basarwa in “Tswana society.” He argued for his right to defend the unpaid Sarwa servants belonging to his enemies on the basis of Khama’s reform of the late 19th century. Khama had decreed in 1875 that servants could appeal to their chief if mistreated by their masters. In Tsekedi’s view, the Ratshosas had committed a crime by quarreling with their chief (himself), thereby disqualifying themselves from being the rightful owners of their servants.

12. The following section describing the reality in the mid-1920s and 1930s draws extensively on Wylie 1990:86ff. Analyses of the nature of Ngwato-Sarwa relations in specific historical contexts are also included in Thomas Tlou (1977), Okihiro (1976), and Parsons (1977). Mabunga Gadibolae (1985) provides a more recent analysis. Miers and Crowder (1988) address more directly the plight of the Basarwa in the Bamangwato Reserve between 1926 and 1940.

13. The official quoted, a Resident Magistrate at Mafeking, seems to have been very optimistic about the “emerging spirit of independence among the ‘Masarwa’.” He goes on to claim that such spirit of inde-

pendence is “being recognized and accepted by their so-called ‘Masters’ ” (BNA S 43/7:3, in a letter dated May 12, 1928). Another official (cited by Wylie 1990:88) expressed the opposite view. He was worried about the consequences of “the sudden release of large hordes of more or less savage Masarwa who have been kept under control and authority of their lords and masters, the Bechuana.” He predicted that these freed serfs “may wander around the country stealing and killing cattle when they feel inclined” and cautioned that “the Government will have a difficult business at hand” (cited in Wylie 1990:89).

14. One royal Ngwato woman in Tamasane, for example, reported that she had owned many “Masarwa” who herded her cattle. Only three Sarwa men continued to work for her without cash pay in 1983: the rest of her herders were “babereki,” hired people. Her comments regarding those three remaining hereditary herders revealed much disdain toward those “lazy” and “useless” men. The “babereki” who are paid in cash, she maintained, worked better and did not steal.

15. In the 18th century, Europeans spoke of the Bushmen as “hordes of wild, bloodthirsty marauders” (Mary Louise Pratt 1986:46). This discourse changed to one in which nature was romantic and the “children of nature” were peace loving and egalitarian when, only a century later, the Bushmen were clearly losing out to colonial encroachment, facing a real threat of extermination. See also Wilmsen 1990 on the Frisch-Passarge debate.

16. Citing other evidence from 19th-century sources, Peters suggests (1983a:103) that not all stockless people who lived in the open veld were Bushmen. She argues, much along similar lines to what I propose here for the 1980s, that the use of the ethnocultural label “Bushman” as indicator of economic and political exclusion was convenient for the Tswana elite but that many impoverished people of various ethnic stocks were also part of this category.

17. The caption on the back cover reads, “In Botswana, they have a race of untouchables called the Masarwa or Bushmen. Masarwa means the same as ‘nigger.’” These are indeed strong and somewhat overstated words. The novel does a much better job of portraying the complex social reality of Sarwa exclusion. The use of the term Masarwa, as I pointed out above, is pejorative. Thus, Bessie Head’s reference to the “people of the Masarwa tribe” (1971:126) is also out of place.

18. Voss (1990) provides an excellent analysis of the image of the “Bushman” in 20th-century African writers’ work. Head is, like most writers Voss discusses, a black South African writer. She, however, made Botswana her home and the focus of her work. Two recent reports, Mogwe 1992 and Saugestad 1993, both unpublished, came to my attention after the main revisions of this article were completed. These reports, as well as my own short follow-up work in Tamasane in the summer of 1993, will constitute the basis of a separate, updated publication.

19. Schapera records (1965:201, 207, cited by Voss 1990:61) that the term “Bushman” is used as an insult applied in a praise-poem to one of Chief Khama’s enemies.

20. The interview of Mr. Hanya Moso on December 22, 1979, is recorded in Setswana and translated into English in Kiyaga-Mulindwa 1980:177–178. Mr. Moso is evidently very angry about the imposition of a man with no proper ancestry to the leadership of his village. The new chief, he claims, is a “*mohaladi hela*”—only a fugitive. The chief is of clear Tswana ancestry. Mr. Moso uses the idiom “Mosarwa” to indicate the absurd nature of nominating a man of no clear heritage to the political office.

21. After spending a few days in the outer zone separating the small, clustered villages, I was often asked by my friends in the village if those living in the “bush” (*mo nageng*) had not fled from my car. The implication was that my car, a sign of “things foreign,” would scare those “uncivilized, bush” people.

22. My host, a respectable man in his seventies, spoke no English. At that point of my research, I had enough knowledge of Setswana to carry out these interviews without my assistant/translator, a Motswapong young man named Moses Basebi. I believe very strongly that the fact that I was led to these households by this royal Mongwato, and not by my Motswapong assistant who was an outsider to the village scene, made a great difference. The inclusion of a given household in the “Sarwa” category was based on the very authoritative view of my Ngwato host. I returned to Tamasane in May 1993 to find that the old Mongwato headman who assisted me in 1983 had died. My efforts to convince his younger successor to accompany me to the same households and the dramatic changes in the reality of life of the Tamasane Basarwa are recorded in my 1993 paper presented at the 13th International Congress of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences meeting in Mexico City (Motzafi-Haller 1993b).

23. Pheko Sebopeng, born in 1901, was a teacher in Tamasane 1931–34. Interview, May 18, 1983.

24. Schapera wrote (1984[1953]:37): “Sarwa are still considered inferior to other members of the tribe, who deem it degrading, for instance, to intermarry with them.” In 1938, he (1977[1938]:127) wrote, “The Tswana also generally refrain from marrying women of inferior stocks, especially Sarwa and other serfs. It is not actually forbidden, but a man who marries such a woman would be greatly despised.”

25. The Tswana expression “*ga ke mo itse*” often implies not the lack of knowledge, per se, but the fact that no social ties can be claimed. A Tswana mother will say “I don’t know him” about her son who has left for the mines and has sent no monetary help.

26. There is no single “Sarwa” language, or Sesarwa, as Tswana speakers assume, but many, often mutually unintelligible group languages. The use of the term, by the old Sarwa woman is indicative of her complete transformation into the Tswana mode of thought. Lesedi insisted that she forgot how to speak “Sesarwa”; she illustrated the point by drawing the distinction between herself, the owner of a yard, and the itinerant Sarwa men who occasionally come to Tamasane to sell charms and medicine. When these men try to talk to her “beyond the fence,” she simply cannot understand their language. While the interview was going on, Lesedi’s many grandchildren were giggling and requesting in a jestful way “speak Sesarwa

grandma." Her embarrassment over the questioned/forgotten knowledge of "Sesarwa" and the Tswana-only-speaking grandchildren were strong indications of how remote was this small group of "Basarwa" from anything non-Tswana. Refer back to my reply to the reader in note 3 above.

27. Note that there is no mention of sons. At the time, I did not think to probe further into this issue, assuming that five girls were simply all she bore. In light of much of what is described below, I tend to think that her sons might have been removed at a very young age from the village arena to the remote cattle herding posts and that, as a result of losing all social contact with them, she chose to "forget" about their existence.

28. Here again, we encounter the practice of attributing Sarwa identity to an individual of clearly non-Sarwa origin, but one who is poor and isolated, with no social or political standing in the community. See the case of Boy described later in this article.

29. These worms eat the green leaves of the maple tree. They are abundant for only a short season. Sun-dried pane worms make a nutritious snack and are sold by the capful.

30. In systematically recording the population of three "lands-areas" around the village of Mokokwana and in several trips I made to the open grazing zones beyond it (see Motzafi-Haller 1988), I came across several cases of such Basarwa presence. The "invisibility" of these people was a key issue. For example, I would ask, "Who are the people who live in this yard?" After recording the names, I would proceed to ask how they relate to one another. When individuals known as Basarwa were concerned, this simple question produced much embarrassment, because my hosts needed to state explicitly that these people were not related, and that they did not receive any pay for their work. Often, I was told they "simply live here." I believe that, in many cases, when resident Basarwa were absent during the interview, their names were not reported as members of the yard. More research needs to be carried out in the Tswapong, and elsewhere, to record the existence of these "invisible" people.

31. See note 25.

32. The role of "practice" in construction of social realities and its relations to systems of domination has been a growing concern in anthropology since the late 1970s (cf. Bourdieu 1977; Giddens 1979; Ortner 1984).

33. An excellent review of the culture versus political economy stalemate is provided by Dru Gladney 1991:66–81. See also Philip Bourgois 1988 and Jean Jackson 1989.

34. For example, Kent (1992:48) writes, "Basarwa groups differ in language, kinship, religion, settlement pattern, economy and historical circumstances."

35. Bird-David (1992) has the most extreme version of such an approach. She suggests that such "fluctuations" between hunting-gathering and other non-hunter-gatherer subsistence strategies might occur "not only from day to day . . . year to year . . . decade to decade" (1992:36), but even from "generation to generation" (1992:40), and that despite such "diachronic variations" the essential *commitment* to hunting-gathering is unaltered. Solway and Lee (1990) use the term "local adaptation," as does Kent (1992:53).

36. Bird-David (1992), Kent (1992), and Lee (1992) struggle with the issue of what exactly constitutes that "culture." For example, Kent speaks of the "mistaken idea of a pan-hunter-gatherer *culture*" (1992:54). Yet, she ends up with the self-contradictory statement that "one of the few existing pan-Basarwa similarities is a general flexibility of their culture" (1992:53).

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