

See discussions, stats, and author profiles for this publication at: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233464380>

Coat of Arms and the Body Politic: Khoisan Imagery and South African National Identity

Article in *Ethnos* · March 2004

DOI: 10.1080/0014184042000191807

CITATIONS

31

READS

2,972

1 author:



Alan Barnard

The University of Edinburgh

114 PUBLICATIONS 2,287 CITATIONS

SEE PROFILE

Some of the authors of this publication are also working on these related projects:



My forthcoming book BUSHMEN: KALAHARI HUNTER-GATHERERS AND THEIR DESCENDANTS (CUP, CA. 2020). [View project](#)



no project [View project](#)

Coat of Arms and the Body Politic: Khoisan Imagery and South African National Identity

Alan Barnard

University of Edinburgh, Scotland

ABSTRACT *This paper focuses on the imagery of state and nation in post-apartheid South Africa, and more specifically on the use of 'Bushmen' or 'San' in the symbolic reconstruction of national unity through South Africa's new motto and Coat of Arms. The Coat of Arms is based on a redrawing of a figure from rock art, while the motto !Ke e: /xarra //ke (officially translated 'Diverse people unite') comes from the extinct /Xam language once spoken in the Northern Cape. The choice of the figure and of the language of the motto were deliberate, and explicitly evoke the idea of Bushman as ancestral man and original South African, while the meaning of the motto (much criticized in contemporary South Africa) is shown here to be much richer than previously known.*

KEYWORDS *South Africa, Khoisan, /Xam, motto, coat of arms*

 On 27th April 2000, six years after the country's first democratic elections, the Republic of South Africa adopted a new Coat of Arms and motto. The new Coat of Arms replaced an earlier one, dating from 16th September 1910. The Old Coat of Arms had been intended to illustrate the joining together of the Cape Colony, Natal, the Orange Free State and the Transvaal earlier that year to form the Union of South Africa. It had undergone only very minor stylistic changes in its ninety-year history (and none since the introduction of democracy, or indeed since the apartheid Republic was founded in 1960), whereas the new Coat of Arms brought with it very different symbolism to mark the reconstruction of South African nationhood.

South Africa's New Coat of Arms

Let me begin with a quotation from President Thabo Mbeki's speech, Freedom Day, 27th April 2000 – the speech with which he launched the new Coat of Arms (see Fig. 1).

[Our new Coat of Arms] is both South African and African. It is both African and universal.

It serves to evoke our distant past, our living present and our future as it unfolds before us. It represents the permanent yet evolving identity of the South African people as it shapes itself through time and space.

Through this new coat of arms, we pay homage to our past. We seek to embrace the indigenous belief systems of our people, by demonstrating our respect for the relationship between people and nature, which for millions of years has been fundamental to our self-understanding of our African condition.

It recalls the times when our people believed that there was a force permeating nature which linked the living with the dead.

It pays tribute to our land and our continent as the cradle of humanity, as the place where human life first began...

Those depicted, who were the very first inhabitants of our land, the Khoisan people, speak to our commitment to celebrate humanity and to advance the cause of the fulfilment of all human beings in our country and throughout the world.

These figures are derived from images on the Linton Stone, a world famous example of South African Rock Art.

They are depicted in an attitude of greeting, demonstrating the transformation of the individual into a social being who belongs to a collective and interdependent humanity.¹



Fig. 1. Coat of Arms of the Republic of South Africa.

Interestingly, the President picks out *one* of South Africa's peoples – 'the first inhabitants', the 'Khoisan people'. *Khoisan* is, in fact, a term invented in the 1920s to describe peoples of a certain supposed physical type. Since then it has come to describe cultural features and social organization as well, and to refer to languages of a particular family (see especially Schapera 1930; Barnard 1992). This word *Khoisan* is a concoction, *Khoi* or *Khoe* plus *San*. As a linguistic label, *Khoe* designates those who use this term to mean 'person'.² These include the cattle and sheep-herding *Khoekhoe* or 'People of People' (who were once called Hottentots). And it includes the hunter-gatherers known as the Central Bushmen or *Khoe* Bushmen, who speak languages related to Khoekhoe. *San* means Bushmen, hunter-gatherers, or foragers, not in any San language at all – but in one of the Khoekhoe dialects. The fit between lifestyle and language is not a precise one, since the Central San speak Khoe languages, and only Northern and Southern San speak what we might call 'San languages'. All Khoisan languages have the famous click sounds, but vocabulary and grammar are very different – reflecting the great linguistic distance which lies between them. For example, the linguistically genetic distance between my own primary fieldwork language, Nharo (Naro), and the language of South Africa's motto, /Xam, is much greater than that between, say, English and Russian.

The Coat of Arms is publicly credited to a professional designer, Iaan Bekker, whose winning design was chosen from among three final submissions in a competition overseen by the South African Cabinet. But behind the scenes, there are many others – not least the Bushman man or woman who painted the Linton Stone. Furthermore, the choice of the image was not Mr Bekker's or President Mbeki's. It was a collective decision by staff members of the Rock Art Research Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand, while the idea of utilizing a rock art image was, collectively, that of 'Government'. Government decreed that the piece of rock art had to be one held in a South African museum, not one still in a rock face in some remote cave. That decree was made on grounds of the security of what they knew was to become a national art treasure, as well as the source of a core national symbol. The Linton Stone lies in South African Museum, Cape Town. It was removed from a farm called Linton, in the Eastern Cape Province, in 1917 and deposited in the Museum the following year. Today it is displayed prominently as a great work of art (which it undoubtedly is), yet still with no mention of its place in the Coat of Arms. The room in which it sits is one of Bushman or San culture, including exhibits about the Bleek family (see below), whose nineteenth and early twentieth-century studies revealed so much about Bushman peoples, and adjoining areas where Palaeo-

lithic tools are displayed – thus perhaps unwittingly conflating Early Man, Bushmen, and anthropology in one great swoop. I shall return to this problem later.

In reality, the Linton Stone does not depict the figures quite as shown in the Coat of Arms. It shows several eland, the animal that in Bushman symbolism represents sometimes male sexuality, sometimes spiritual power, especially in the medicine dance as practised among southern Bushman groups (see, e.g., Vinnicombe 1976). If Bushmen had had their way, the eland, not the springbok, would probably be the national symbol. The Stone also shows a number of human figures, all male, some dancing, some hunting – and one, a small figure in the lower right-hand corner, holding a bow and arrow and standing on a 'line of power' (Fig. 2). According to the South African government website:

The panel shows people capturing a power the /Xam called !Gi. The San [or Bushmen] sought and used this power for the benefit of their community. It allowed for the healing of the sick and for the healing of divisions within society. San rock art was believed to be rich in this special power.

This delicately painted figure has power that we can all share in. It was intended to have special power as it was painted straddling a line of !Gi. Within the new Coat of Arms the figure will continue, as its painter intended, to channel its power for the benefit of all.³

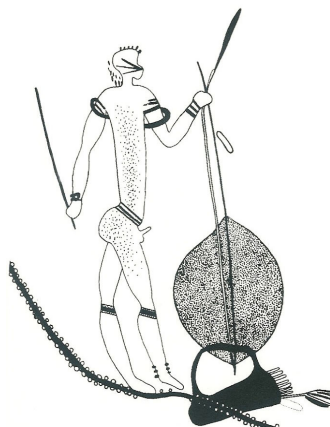


Fig. 2. The figure from the Linton Stone. Detail from a drawing by Thomas Dowson, Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand.

This suggestion comes from a particular theoretical point of view in rock art studies – the 'symbolic approach', often seen in opposition to the earlier 'art for art's sake' approach (see, e.g., Lewis-Williams 1981; 2002). The figure, as transferred to the Coat of Arms, has his bow and arrow, some of his body decoration, and his rather prominent genitalia removed. Removal of the latter

has caused controversy in the media, but the government, the designers, the heralds, and the rock art experts are united in agreement that it is appropriate for the figure to be represented in ‘un-gendered’ form. What is added is a mirror-image of the original figure, such that the two – the original and the mirror-image – are shown clasping hands (Fig. 3). The official description says:

The Khoisan, the oldest known inhabitants of our land, testify to our common humanity and heritage as South Africans. The figures are depicted in an attitude of greeting, symbolising unity. This also represents the beginning of the individual’s transformation into the greater sense of belonging to the nation and by extension [sic], common Humanity.

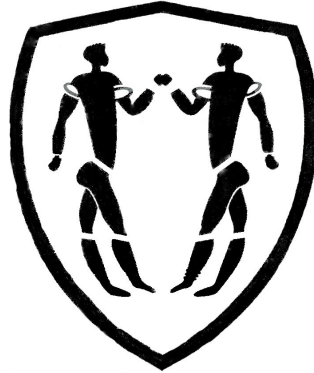


Fig. 3. The figure from the Linton Stone as redrawn within the Coat of Arms.

And so, we have a layered set of representations in which the transformed image of the Khoisan is, in the President’s words, ‘both South African and African’, ‘both African and universal’. But it is worth noting that, although greetings and sociality generally are of great importance for Bushmen, nevertheless greeting is not a typical theme in southern African rock art. Rock art typically depicts individuals, sometimes groups, in ritual or in hunting.

Finally here, among the creators of the image, we should acknowledge Thomas Dowson, now of the University of Southampton, who some years ago copied the image for the Rock Art Research Institute archive. It was actually Dowson’s re-drawing, not the original painting, which was used in the design.⁵ This is not as odd as it might seem, because in technical studies, rock art in southern Africa still tends to be re-drawn in pen and ink, and not reproduced by photography. It is believed that photography distorts the art by giving prominence to the background, the rock face, rather than the painted image.

I believe we can re-draw the motto too, in light of its multiple origins in the history of the Khoisan and in the history of Khoisan studies.

A New Mythological Charter

Let me return to President Mbeki's address. In addition to describing the central figures, from the Linton Stone, the President analyses for us the surrounding heraldic images. I shall just point them out: we have a large serpent-eating secretary bird with uplifted wings, a rising sun, a flowering protea, two ears of wheat for fertility, a spear and a knobkierie deliberately placed lying in repose, two pairs of elephant tusks said to represent men and women and to symbolize 'wisdom, steadfastness and strength', and finally the shield, designed also, in its shape, to evoke the image of an African drum.

But here is what President Mbeki says about the motto:

The motto of our new Coat of Arms, written in the Khoisan language of the /Xam people, means: diverse people unite or people who are different join together.

We have chosen an ancient language of our people. This language is now extinct as no one lives who speaks it as his or her mother-tongue.

This emphasises the tragedy of the millions of human beings who, through the ages, have perished and even ceased to exist as peoples, because of peoples [sic] inhumanity to others.

It also says that we, ourselves, can never be fully human if any people is wiped off the face of the earth, because each one of us is a particle of the complete whole.

By inscribing these words on our Coat of Arms – *!ke e: /xarra //ke* – we make a commitment to value life, to respect all languages and cultures and to oppose racism, sexism, chauvinism and genocide.

Thus do we pledge to respect the obligation which human evolution has imposed on us – to honour the fact that in this country that we have inherited together is to be found one of the birthplaces of humanity itself.⁶

The /Xam were a Southern Bushman group. They once inhabited an area of the Northern Cape, about 300 kilometres north and inland from Cape Town. They were probably in these semi-desert lands before sheep and cattle-herding Khoekhoe arrived some 2000 to 1500 years ago. To put them into a much wider time framework, fully modern human, fully cultural, *Homo sapiens sapiens* hunter-gatherers, no doubt including ancestors of the /Xam, lived in those lands for some tens of thousands of years. The /Xam no longer exist as a people, though their descendants may be counted among the people once called 'Cape Coloured', many of whom now prefer the to call themselves 'of Khoisan descent' (see, e.g., Bredekamp 2001). As the President noted in his speech, the /Xam language is no longer spoken by anyone. Descendants of the /Xam today speak Afrikaans as their mother tongue.

So why is the motto in /Xam? The previous motto was in Latin. South

Africa today has no fewer than eleven official languages to choose from, compared to other countries where Bushmen once lived – Botswana, with two official languages, and Namibia, with one. /Xam is not one of South Africa's official languages. Why indeed is the motto spelled in such a peculiar way, with an exclamation mark, a single stroke and a double stroke? The short answer is that it is all due to nineteenth-century German linguist and folklorist Wilhelm Bleek and his family.

In 1870 Bleek was working as keeper of the library of the famous ex-governor of the Cape, Sir George Grey, while nearby a contingent of /Xam Bushman prisoners were busy building the breakwater for Cape Town harbour. Bleek persuaded Grey's successor to allow him to take, in succession, twenty-eight of the prisoners home with him to the Cape Town suburbs as his informants. While there were twenty-eight prisoners, there were also at that time exactly twenty-eight different systems for writing clicks (Bleek 1858: 6). Bleek selected from these the system most anthropologists and linguists in the field today still use – the one invented in 1854 and adopted by the Rhenish Mission Society in 1856. Bleek, and later Mbeki, chose this one rather than the older system employed by Scottish missionaries about 1823 to write isiXhosa. In isiXhosa (which is the language of both Mbeki and former President Mandela), ordinary roman letters represent these clicks: c is /, x is //, and q is !⁷

When Wilhelm Bleek died in 1875, his wife's sister Lucy continued the study of /Xam folklore with prisoners and later with volunteers from the Northern Cape. Together Bleek and Lloyd recorded more than 12,000 pages of /Xam data, including linguistic, folkloristic and ethnographic material. Lucy published a selection called *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* in 1911. When she died, in 1914, one of Wilhelm's daughters, Dorothea Bleek, took on the family's work. In 1920 and 1921, Dorothea did fieldwork with the Nharo (the group I worked with in the 1970s and 1980s). She also published widely on other groups and languages, including /Xam. She died in 1948, and her great *Bushman Dictionary* of all the known Bushman languages at the time (eleven languages in all) was published after her death – in 1956.

The /Xam words of the motto come to us via Dorothea's dictionary, /Xam expert David Lewis-Williams, and President Mbeki. Less than a month before the motto and Coat of Arms were unveiled, Mbeki telephoned the Rock Art Research Institute and requested a /Xam translation of the words 'Diverse people unite'. The message was passed on to Lewis-Williams, who, working at home that day, took out his Bleek dictionary and spent the next day on the problem. For 'unite' he used the word //ke, given in the Bleek dictionary as

'to meet, to be together with' (D.F. Bleek 1956:566) and also (recorded under a slightly different spelling, //k"e:) 'to be or talk together, often used as together' (1956:604). For the rest of the motto, Lewis-Williams used a phrase found in the Bleek dictionary under the word /xarra, 'different, differently, separately'. The exact phrase is /k?e e: /xarra, 'people who are different, strangers' (1956:363). The dictionary lists the source Ll., meaning Dorothea's aunt Lucy Lloyd.

Recently though, I have had the good fortune to uncover more detail (see also Barnard 2003). This phrase is from a mythological tale called 'The Son of the Mantis, the Baboons, and the Mantis', recorded by Lloyd in an 1878 notebook (Lloyd 1878:7077) and later in *Specimens of Bushman Folklore* (1911: 32–33), where it is clear that (contrary to the motto's detractors) the translation 'strangers' refers specifically to that literary context and not to the general meaning of the phrase. It also, no doubt, reflects Lloyd's habit of occasionally loose translation, which in this case unfortunately found its way into the dictionary. Lloyd glosses the /Xam words as 'strangers' but adds in brackets that the more literal meaning is 'people who are different'. The /Xam myth tells of baboons ('people who are different') killing one of the children of the deity Mantis and using his eye as a ball. Grandfather Mantis plays ball with the baboons, but later replaces the eye and restores life to the child. The Mantis, or Stick Insect, was important in /Xam mythology. In primal time, he created the Moon and the animals; and in /Xam belief he remained responsible for the maintenance of human sociality.

In one sense, the words of the motto come from President Mbeki, and allude perhaps to Marx and Engels' words, 'Workers of all nations, unite' (cf. Johnson 2002). The implied expression of unity certainly recalls these closing words from the *Communist Manifesto*.⁸ But the words are in the /Xam language. Marx and Engels may be the origin of the sentiment, but credit for the words (or at least for the noun phrase), must go to Lucy Lloyd's informant /Han≠kass'o and to his source, his mother /Xábbi-an. /Han≠kass'o (Fig. 4) was born in or about 1848, the year of the *Communist Manifesto*.⁹ He was incarcerated at the Breakwater Prison, but was not one of Bleek's initial informants. He served two years for stock theft, then went home to the Northern Cape in November 1871. Six years later, Lucy Lloyd asked him to return, and he set off with his wife for Cape Town. His small child, left behind with friends in April 1877, soon died. His wife died on the journey, after being brutally attacked by a policeman. All alone, /Han≠kass'o reached Cape Town in January 1878, and again served two years, this time as Lloyd's volunteer informant.

Unity in Diversity

'Unity in diversity' recalls many mottos: that of the United States for example, *E pluribus unum* (From many, one). Or that of the old South Africa: *Ex unitate vires* (From unity, strength). Or of modern Namibia, 'Unity, liberty, justice'. Or some of the mottos that have been proposed for the European Union, such as 'Peace, freedom, solidarity' (solidarity being a weaker form of unity?). Recently Botswana's President Festus Mogae has also used the phrase 'unity in diversity', in reference to the removal of discriminatory provisions of his country's Constitution (specifically, the implicit exclusion of Bushmen and other chiefless communities from the country's House of Chiefs): 'We must continue to celebrate the compositeness of our culture and promote our unity in diversity'.¹⁰

The exact words 'Unity in diversity' comprise the motto of the South African province of Gauteng, that of the Republic of India, and also that of the Republic of Indonesia. Former President Mandela, speaking in Jakarta in 1997, commented on its widespread use and its applicability to South Africa:

'Unity in Diversity' is a phrase we use often in South Africa, which is also a country of widely diverse peoples and cultures. These differences were misused by apartheid in order to divide our nation. But today our diversity is a source of strength. We are a nation of many colours and cultures, but forming a harmonious unity like a rainbow after a heavy storm.¹¹

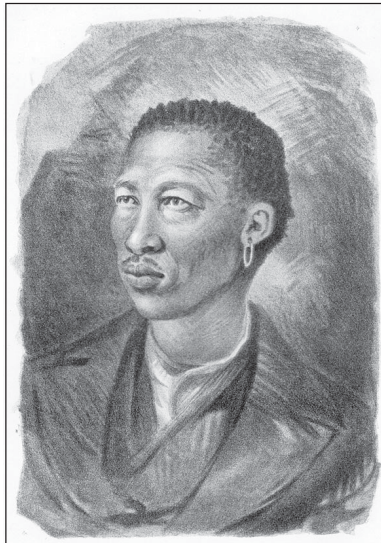


Fig. 4. /Han ≠ kass'o.
Painting by W. Schröder,
ca. 1878.

President Mandela also said in his Jakarta speech:

I have seen this motto [Unity in diversity] also written in Bhasa Indonesia, but I will refrain from attempting to pronounce it. I might cause more diversity than unity in doing so!

If he thought his pronunciation of Indonesian words would cause 'diversity', he should have considered what might have happened had he tried it in /Xam! For a diversity of reasons, Mandela would get away with it. But it is that sentiment in his speech that has given us, a few years on, some problems with South Africa's new motto.

Pronouncing and Writing the Motto

The pronunciation of the motto is a subject of some controversy. There are variant transcriptions among the Bleek family texts, but the one chosen by Lewis-Williams is the easiest to pronounce. There were political decisions behind President Mbeki's decision to have the clicks written in what we might call the 'German' rather than the 'Scottish' system. It appears that President Mbeki wished to give no preference to speakers of his own language. It is perfectly possible to write !Ké e: /xárra //ke in isiXhosa (or Scottish missionary) orthography: *Qe ee cgara xe*.

It is sometimes said that !Ké e: /xarra //ke is not meant to be pronounced at all, since no-one speaks this language today and few can pronounce the words. Instead, one can say in English *Diverse people unite*, in Afrikaans *Diverse mense verenig*, in isiXhosa *Abantu abohlukeneyo bayamanyana*, or whatever (see Table 1). Perhaps this gives the motto yet greater symbolic power. Shortly after the motto was announced, there was a great deal of correspondence in the South African newspapers about how to pronounce it. Some descriptions were quite good. Others were virtually nonsense. A few correspondents even commented that the use of such 'primitive' symbols to write the motto was an insult to the memory of the /Xam. My favourite description of pronunciation is the explanation in the East London *Dispatch* (28th April 2000): '(click)-eh-air-(click)-gaara-(click)-eh'.¹²

There is something else in the East London *Dispatch* the same day: comments by members of some of the opposition parties. While there were the expected opinions that the ANC was hijacking Freedom Day, and so on, nevertheless the other parties welcomed the new Coat of Arms and the new motto. To give one example, the *Dispatch* reported:

The New National Party said it was pleased the motto of the new coat of arms was in the now-extinct Xam, a dialect of the group of Khoi-san languages, and not English. NNP spokesman Adriaan van Niekerk said the acknowledgement of the ancient language indicated the revival and conservation of various indigenous languages.¹³

In other words, the fact that the motto was not in English was wonderful; the fact that it was in a Khoisan language, and an extinct Khoisan language at that, was even better. The motto does remind us that there is no Khoisan language among South Africa's eleven official ones – a fact that has caused some concern among speakers of Nama, the only Khoisan language still spoken in South Africa by any sizable population.

Table 1. The motto in /Xam and in South Africa's eleven official languages

<i>/Xam</i>	!Ke e: /xarra //ke (Qe ee cgara xe)
<i>Afrikaans</i>	Diverse mense verenig
<i>English</i>	Diverse people unite
<i>isiNdebele</i>	Bandu beentjhaba ngeentjhaba bumbanani
<i>isiXhosa</i>	Abantu abohlukeneyo bayamanyana
<i>isiZulu</i>	Ukubumbana kwabantu abahlukahlukene
<i>Sepedi</i>	Batho ba ba fapanego ba kopane
<i>Sesotho</i>	Batho ba fapa fapaneng kopanang
<i>Setswana</i>	Batho ba ba farologaneng kopanang
<i>SiSwati</i>	Bantfu labehlukene bayahlangana
<i>Tshivenda</i>	Vhathu vho fhambanaho vhe na vhuthihi
<i>Xitsonga</i>	Vanhu lava nga hambana va hlagana

Deconstructing the Motto

Before we can appreciate the meaning of the motto we need to know a little about Khoisan languages. Contrary to popular belief, these are not in any sense 'primitive' languages. They are rich in a great variety of ways. Ju-/'hoan and !Xóǀ vie for the title of phonologically most complex language in the world. Each of the five clicks of !Xóǀ, for example, may be released in sixteen or seventeen different ways, giving us then, with the same click, the same vowel and the same tone, sixteen or seventeen different words (Traill 1994:11–13; cf. 1985): *!e, !ge, !xe, g!xe, !kx*, and so forth. My count in the !Xóǀ dictionary gives 83 click consonant clusters, 23 non-click consonant clusters, and a fair number of vowels given especially they have phonemic length and tone. /Xam was probably simpler, but we do not know precisely.

Consider too the fact that many Khoisan languages, especially the Central ones, are very rich in their ability to express abstraction. Bleek's successor as keeper of Grey's Library, Theophilus Hahn, grew up speaking Nama. He pointed out, in 1881, that in Nama you can say *khoe* (person), *khoeckhoe* (person of people, or best person), *khoesi* (friendly or human), *khoesis* (humanity, kindness, friendliness, or friendship), *khoexa* (kind), *khoeaxis* (kindliness, in a more abstract sense than *khoesis*), *khoesigagus* (friendship, intimacy, or marriage), *khoeaxkhoeb di* (my intimate friend), and so on (Hahn 1881:17). Typically Central Khoisan languages have three genders (masculine, feminine and common), three numbers (singular, dual and plural), inclusive and exclusive pronouns, emphatic and non-emphatic forms, and so forth. The word order is like Japanese, but the grammar is very much more complicated, whereas some languages, including /Xam, have quite different grammatical forms and resemble English in many ways.

With that in mind, let us take a brief look at this simple sentence, *!Ke e: /xarra //ke*. The sentence is officially rendered in English as 'Diverse people unite', which are the words President Mbeki gave Professor Lewis-Williams, and often more literally given as 'people who are different come together', which are the words Professor Lewis-Williams gave President Mbeki. In fact, the meaning of the motto is ambiguous, and this has political implications for the symbolic relation between the people and the state. The precise words of the motto are *!ke* (people) *e:* (who) */xarra* (different, differently, or to be different) *//ke* (to come together [sometimes, to talk together]). There is no verbal particle, and therefore no indication of mood or tense. /Xam has about thirty verbal particles, placed before the verb, and also a number of verbal suffixes to indicate duration of action, completion of action, repetition of action, etc. At least four of these suffixes can mean imperative (see D.F. Bleek 1929/30:161-171). Neither a verbal particle nor a suffix is essential to make a complete sentence, but the absence of one here adds to the sense of ambiguity. Even if one were added, the ambiguity as to whether the sentence is imperative or declarative would still remain: the most obvious verbal particle would have been */ne*, which is ambiguously either imperative or emphatic. The verbal suffixes *-wa*, *-ja*, *-ka*, and *-ta* all can mean imperative, but each of these too has other meanings. (My preference might have been the particle *ka*, meaning wishfulness: *!Ke e: /xarra ka //ke*, 'Would that the people who are different come together'.)

Consider too the choice of the word *!ke* to mean 'people'. In the myth from which it comes, the phrase 'people who are different' is the object of a complex verb (*/ku /ke //ke* - 'to continue to go among'). In the motto it is the subject. This causes no grammatical problem, but here again the motto presents

Table 2. The declension of !kui		
	SINGULAR	
Basic form	!kui	person (acc., nom., possibly voc.)
Emphatic	!kuiten	person (nom., possibly voc.)
Genitive	!kuita	person's
Vocative	!kuwe	O person!
Alterative	!kuko	another person
	PLURAL	
Basic form	!ke	people (acc., nom., possibly voc.)
Emphatic	!keten	people (nom., possibly voc.)
Genitive	!keta	people's
Vocative	!kauwe	O people!
Alterative	!kekuiten	other people

us with an ambiguity. W. Bleek's partial parsing of a folktale called 'The Resurrection of the Ostrich' (Bleek & Lloyd 1911:145) and Dorothea Bleek's (1928/29:87-93) notes on noun case can help to solve the problem. My version of the declension (Table 2) is a compromise between these two sources. The word *!ke* is basic plural form (usually accusative, but also often nominative). Were I to put 'Diverse people unite' into /Xam, with unambiguous imperative meaning, I would have to use vocative *!kauwe* rather than basic *!ke*. That would tend to emphasize the verb, //*ke*, 'unite' and imply that imperative meaning is intended. Were I to emphasize the idea of 'people', I would use *!keten* rather than just *!ke*, though that would probably not carry the imperative intent suggested by Mbeki's English 'Diverse people unite'. If one word is emphasized in the motto as we have it, by default it must be the word /*xarra*, 'diverse'. The call then is not for 'people' to unite, but rather for 'people who are diverse' to unite. Or possibly it is not a call at all, but simply a descriptive sentence (or incomplete sentence).

The official translation 'Diverse people unite', is only one of the various possibilities, and not the most obvious. My own preference is in the indicative mood, progressive in both linguistic and political senses, and with the double meaning suggested through the use of the word //*ke* ('come together', 'talk together'): 'People of different origins are joining together; people who differ in opinion are talking with one another'.

Conclusions, Practical and Theoretical

Today, there are many serious problems for Khoisan peoples and for the people of Khoisan descent in southern Africa. One of these is the question of land, and another is the question of indigeneity. The land question is particularly

acute for the G/wi and G//ana, and also for some BaKgalagadi, of Botswana's Central Kalahari Game Reserve. While South Africa has been proactive in restoring land, at least in one significant case,¹⁴ Botswana has deprived the few hundred remaining inhabitants of the Reserve, which is about the size of Switzerland, of the right to remain and pursue a hunting-and-gathering lifestyle. Of course enticement, rather than forced removal, is the mechanism. Yet the effect is the denial of an identity rooted in a land occupied by their ancestors for millennia (see, e.g., Sugawara 2002).

The problem of indigeneity is related. The Botswana government defines all citizens of Botswana as 'indigenous' to the country. No-one, in other words, is more indigenous than anyone else. No African country at all, not even South Africa, has ratified ILO Convention 169, which defines the notion of 'indigenous' more narrowly and precisely – including autochthonous populations like the Bushmen, but excluding other populations. Anthropologists have a diversity of opinion on the matter. Though at opposite ends of the modernist/post-modernist divide, Adam Kuper (2003) and James Suzman (2001) are on the same side here in rejecting the usefulness of Convention 169. Others, notably Sidsel Saugestad (e.g., 2001a; 2001b), aim to defend the special rights of particular populations – not only as minorities, but as indigenous minorities. Recently, Justice Albie Sachs spoke in Edinburgh, more broadly about the relations between the protection of minority interests and giving power to democratic voices.¹⁵ He argued that both sides, minority and majority, must be protected. President Mbeki has captured this form of diversity in his appeal to symbolic unity in the Bushman imagery of the Coat of Arms: 'both South African and African', 'both African and universal'.

And so it is in our case. As the Botswana government says, all citizens of Botswana are indigenous to Botswana. All peoples of southern Africa are indigenous to southern Africa. But it seems to me that this precludes neither the notion that some may also be indigenous in another sense – the first, aboriginal inhabitants. Or that all of us may also be indigenous in some yet wider sense. President Mbeki's explanation of the South African Coat of Arms implicitly expresses this too: the human species, as a whole, is indigenous to Africa, and to southern and eastern Africa at that. We are all southern Africans in prehistoric origin, and our common humanity is symbolized here through the imagery of the most 'ancient' of artists and in a language now forgotten – though soon to be restored. Thanks to Pippa Skotnes, Director of the Michaelis School of Fine Art in Cape Town, the entire corpus of 12,000 pages of /Xam manuscript material is soon to be available on CD-ROM.

Perhaps it is significant in all this, that the Khoisan, and Bushman at that – with the lowest status of all South Africa’s peoples – were chosen to embody the mythical charter of the new South African multicultural nation. The great rock art authority of the nineteenth century, George Stow (1905:230–31), once wrote:

Had they been ... of any other race except that of the despised and often falsely maligned Bushmen, the wrongs which were heaped upon them, the sufferings they endured, ... and the length of the hopeless struggle they maintained when every other race was arrayed against them, coveting their land and thirsting for their blood, would have placed them ... in the rank of heroes and patriots of no mean order.

South Africa’s new Coat of Arms, and its new motto, along with last year’s repatriation and burial of the body of Sara Baartman go some way towards righting the wrongs. Sara Baartman (the so-called ‘Hottentot Venus’) was exhibited as a curiosity in England and France in the early nineteenth century, and her treatment remained, long after her death, an icon of European racism and sexism. After her death in 1815, her body was dissected and lay for 187 years in a Paris museum, and on show until 1974 (see, e.g., Strother 1999; Fauvelle-Aymar 2002:305–359). The French government ceremoniously handed over Sara Baartman’s remains to South African government in Paris on 29th April 2002. Her remains were buried, in South Africa, in the presence of President Mbeki and Khoisan representatives, on Women’s Day, 9th August 2002.

It was undoubtedly the South African government’s collective hope to restore human dignity to Khoisan peoples and individuals (living and dead) through that symbolic gesture, and for this they should be applauded. It is my contention that this gesture was also, in part, an attempt to help restore that ‘African and universal’ Khoisan spirit to the land. Khoisan people are not just any people, but, in the eyes of politicians and the public alike, the original people; and thus through them a virtual primordial identity for the nation as a whole can be imagined. /Xam was chosen as the official language for the motto partly because every South African is on an equal footing: no-one in the country has an intuitive understanding of its meaning, and indeed very few can (at first glance) even pronounce it. The images evoked are of antiquity without the stigma of the primeval, and of autochtony without the practical problem of large-scale land restitution. Khoisan peoples are ‘good to think with’, and in South Africa (by contrast to Namibia or Botswana) safe to think with.

Finally, let me add that nothing in this paper should be taken as a criticism of the South African government, the South African popular imagination, or

any other entity. It is intended to provoke thought on the relation between imagery, the explicit use of symbols, and the construction of identities through these. Nor should we imagine that anthropologists are immune from such mental processes. On the contrary, our discipline was founded in the search for primitive illusion,¹⁶ and, for better or worse, it remains there.

Acknowledgment

I am grateful to Thomas Bloom Hansen for his very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this lecture, and to David Lewis-Williams for providing essential details, at my request, of his important role in the creation of South Africa's new national symbols. Of course, I am responsible for any errors that might remain. Earlier versions of this paper were presented as my Inaugural Lecture as Professor of the Anthropology of Southern Africa in the University of Edinburgh (29th April 2003 – one year to the day after the return, in Paris, of Sara Baartman's body to South African hands) and as a lecture to celebrate the 125th anniversary of Stockholm University (18th September 2003 – which also happened to be 125 years after the telling of the myth from which the noun phrase of South Africa's new motto is derived).

Notes

1. 'Address by President Thabo Mbeke at the Unveiling of the Coat of Arms, Kwaggafontein, 27 April 2000'. For the text of this and other relevant speeches, see www.gov.za/speeches/.
2. This is a slight simplification, as some eastern Khoe groups use a different term, *shua*.
3. www.gov.za/symbols/lintonpanel. The source of this description is Dr Ben Smith, Director of the Rock Art Research Institute, University of the Witwatersrand.
4. www.geocities.com/landswapen.
5. For details of the Rock Art Research Institute's involvement, see Smith, Lewis-Williams, Blundell and Chippindale (2000). For an analysis of the Linton paintings themselves, see Lewis-Williams (1988).
6. 'Address by President Thabo Mbeke at the Unveiling of the Coat of Arms, Kwaggafontein, 27 April 2000'.
7. According to conventional popular description, c or / sounds like 'tsk' as in 'tsk tsk'. X or // sounds like the sound used to make horses go. Q or ! sounds like a cork popping from a bottle.
8. *Proletarier aller Länder, vereinigt euch!* (Marx & Engels 1963 [1848]:63).
9. Prison records say that /Han=kass'o was about twenty-one when he was arrested in 1869 (Deacon 1996:39). For further details on the prisoners, see Deacon (1996) and Bleek & Bleek (1909).
10. Quoted in 'Botswana: Discriminatory Clauses to be Removed from Constitution'. IRIN News Organization, UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 22nd October 2003. Available on-line via www.irinnews.org.
11. 'Mandela Speech at State Banquet in Jakarta, 14 July 1997'.
12. East London *Dispatch*, 28th April 2000. Available online via www.dispatch.co.za.
13. East London *Dispatch*, 28th April 2000.

14. The case of the ≠Khomani (see Robins 2001; Chennells 2002).
15. 'The Evolution of Devolution: The Court Steps In', British Academy Lecture, Edinburgh, 17th February 2003. Justice Sachs is a Judge of the Constitutional Court of South Africa.
16. Or should we say, primitive *allusion* (see also Barnard 1989; 1994)?

References

- Barnard, Alan. 1989. The Lost World of Laurens van der Post? *Current Anthropology*, 30:104–114.
- . 1992. *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa: A Comparative Ethnography of the Khoisan Peoples*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- . 1994. Tarzan and the Lost Races: Parallels between Anthropology and Early Science Fiction. In *Exploring the Written: Anthropology and the Multiplicity of Writing*, edited by Eduardo P. Archetti, pp 231–257. Oslo: Scandinavian University Press.
- . 2003. /Ke e: /xarra //ke – Multiple Origins and Multiple Meanings of the Motto. *African Studies*, 62:241–248.
- Bleek, Dorothea F. 1928/29. Bushman Grammar: A Grammatical Sketch of the Language of the /xam-ka-!k'e. *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, 19:81–98.
- . 1929/30. Bushman Grammar: A Grammatical Sketch of the Language of the /xam-ka-!k'e (Continuation). *Zeitschrift für Eingeborenen-Sprachen*, 20:161–174.
- . 1956. *A Bushman Dictionary*. New Haven: American Oriental Society.
- Bleek, Edith & Dorothea Bleek. 1909. Notes on the Bushmen. In *Bushman Paintings*, by M.H. Tongue, pp 36–44. London: Clarendon Press.
- Bleek, W.H.I. 1858. *The Library of His Excellency Sir George Grey, KCB. Philology Vol. 1. South Africa*. London: Trübner and Co.
- Bleek, W.H.I. & L.C. Lloyd. 1911. *Specimens of Bushman Folklore*. London: George Allen and Company.
- Bredenkamp, Henry C. Jatti. 2001. Khoisan Revivalism and the Indigenous Peoples Issue in Post-Apartheid South Africa. In *Africa's Indigenous Peoples: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalized Minorities'?*, edited by Alan Barnard & Justin Kenrick, pp 191–209. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- Chennells, Roger. 2002. The ≠Khomani San Land Claim. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 26(1):51–52.
- Deacon, Janette. 1996. The /Xam Informants. In *Voices from the Past: /Xam Bushmen and the Bleek and Lloyd Collection*, edited by Janette Deacon & Thomas A. Dowson, pp 11–39. Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press.
- Fauvelle-Aymar, François-Xavier. 2002. *L'Invention du Hottentot: Histoire du regard occidental sur les Khoisan (XVe–XIXe siècle)*. Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne.
- Hahn, Theophilus. 1881. *Tsuni-//goam: The Supreme Being of the Khoi-khoi*. London: Trübner and Co.
- Johnson, Krista. 2002. State and Civil Society in Contemporary South Africa: Redefining the Rules of the Game. In *Thabo Mbeki's World: The Politics and Ideology of the South African President*, edited by Sean Jacobs & Richard Calland, pp. 221–241. Pietermaritzberg: University of Natal Press/London: Zed Books.
- Kuper, Adam. 2003. The Return of the Native. *Current Anthropology*, 44:389–402.
- Lewis-Williams, J.D. 1981. *Believing and Seeing: Symbolic Meanings in Southern San Rock Paintings*. London: Academic Press.

- . 1988. *The World of Man and the World of a Spirit: An Interpretation of the Linton Rock Paintings*. Cape Town: South African Museum.
- . 2002. Three-Dimensional Puzzles: Southern African and Upper Palaeolithic Rock Art. *Ethnos*, 67(2):245–264
- Lloyd, L.C. 1878. !gāunu-tsxau (the Son of Mantis), the Baboons, and the Mantis. Unpublished Manuscript. Bleek Collection (Ref. I.-5. L. 6978-7094), J.W. Jagger Library, University of Cape Town.
- Marx, Karl & Friedrich Engels. 1963 [1848]. *Manifest der Kommunistischen Partei*. Berlin: Dietz Verlag.
- Robins, Steven. 2001. Whose 'Culture', Whose 'Survival'? The ≠Khomani San Land Claim and the Cultural Politics of 'Community' and 'Development' in the Kalahari. In *Africa's Indigenous Peoples: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalized Minorities'?*, edited by Alan Barnard & Justin Kenrick, pp. 229–253. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- Saugestad, Sidsel. 2001a. Contested Images: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalized Minorities' in Africa. In *Africa's Indigenous Peoples: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalized Minorities'?*, edited by Alan Barnard & Justin Kenrick, pp. 299–332. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- . 2001b. *The Inconvenient Indigenous: Remote Area Development in Botswana, Donor Assistance, and the First People of the Kalahari*. Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.
- Schapera, Isaac. 1930. *The Khoisan Peoples of South Africa: Bushmen and Hottentots*. London: George Routledge & Sons.
- Smith, Benjamin, J.D. Lewis-Williams, Geoffrey Blundell & Christopher Chippindale. 2000. Archaeology and Symbolism in the New South African Coat of Arms. *Antiquity*, 74:467–468.
- Stow, George W. 1905. *The Native Races of South Africa: A History of the Intrusion of the Hottentots and Bantu into the Hunting Grounds of the Bushmen, the Aborigines of the Country*. London: Swan Sonnenschein.
- Strother, Z.S. 1999. Display of the Body Hottentot. In *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, edited by Bernth Lindfors, pp. 1–61. Bloomington: Indiana University Press/Cape Town: David Philip.
- Sugawara, Kazuyoshi. 2002. Voices of the Dispossessed. *Cultural Survival Quarterly*, 26(1):28–29.
- Suzman, James. 2001. Indigenous Wrongs and Human Rights: National Policy, International Resolutions and the Status of the San of Southern Africa. In *Africa's Indigenous Peoples: 'First Peoples' or 'Marginalized Minorities'?*, edited by Alan Barnard & Justin Kenrick, pp. 273–297. Edinburgh: Centre of African Studies, University of Edinburgh.
- Traill, Anthony. 1985. *Phonetic and Phonological Studies of !Xóǀ Bushman*. Hamburg: Belmut Buske Verlag (Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung 1).
- . 1994. *A !Xóǀ Dictionary*. Cologne: Rüdiger Köppe Verlag (Quellen zur Khoisan-Forschung/Research in Khoisan Studies, 9).
- Vinnicombe, Patricia. 1976. *People of the Eland: Rock Paintings of the Drakensberg Bushmen as a Reflection of Their Life and Thought*. Pietermaritzberg: University of Natal Press.