



RE-ARTICULATING SAN IDENTITY THROUGH INDIGENOUS CULTURAL TOURISM IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

Rachel F. Giraudo, Ph.D.
Department of Anthropology
California State University, Northridge
rachel.giraudo@csun.edu



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INTRODUCTION

In southern Africa, the several ethnic groups of traditional hunter-gatherers who are now known collectively by outsiders as the San (or Bushmen) continue to captivate the tourist's imagination, drawing domestic and international tourists who seek authentic cultural encounters with them. At the same time, however, their cultural livelihoods are under serious threat as they remain politically, economically, and culturally marginalized throughout the region. Participation in the cultural tourism industry potentially enables the San the economic and political means to renegotiate aspects of their ethnic, national, and international identities: their cultural values, their relationship to the state, and their international representation as Indigenous peoples. This project compares San-run tourism projects and organizations in Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa in order to examine the strategies that the San deploy in cultural tourism to re-articulate their identities both locally and globally.



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The preliminary phase of this multi-sited ethnography involves a survey of San owned and/or managed tourism projects and organizations. The survey took place during three trips to Botswana, Namibia, and South Africa from 2012–2014 (14 weeks).

A forthcoming report based on these findings includes a) an annotated list of San-run tourism projects and organizations operating in the study area, b) summaries of relevant government policies and legislation (e.g., culture, race, indigeneity, human rights, tourism), c) a preliminary analysis of San identity politics as influenced by cultural tourism, and d) a preliminary analysis on the strategies and conditions of the more successful tourism projects and organizations.



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BACKGROUND

Over the past two decades, anthropologists have refocused their attention on indigeneity, not to understand it as an essentialized identity marker, but to explore the ways in which certain ethnic groups either claim, or are claimed by outsiders, to be “indigenous,” and who are now frequently at odds with the state. In southern Africa, the San—who include several ethnic groups of traditional hunter-gatherers who speak click-consonant languages—are widely considered by scholars, human rights groups, and many southern Africans to be the original occupants of the region. Culturally, linguistically, and phenotypically distinct from other African ethnic groups, San peoples are extremely marginalized in each country they are located. However, through their participation in the cultural tourism industry, the San are also able to utilize their cultural distinctiveness and indigeneity to help reclaim their rights. This survey is the initial phase of a research project that explores the re-articulations of Indigenous identity in the postcolony through Indigenous-run tourism projects and organizations in southern Africa. Through these cultural tourism ventures, along with other forms of Indigenous organizing, a pan-San identity is being formulated throughout southern Africa and is being recast internationally.



SURVEY RESULTS

Botswana: (1A) Dq̄e Qare San Lodge just outside D’Kar, a Nharo-owned and run lodge that offers a variety of cultural activities in addition to game viewing and is also the venue for the (1B) Kuru San Dance Festival; (2) Kuru Art Project and the Kuru Museum and Cultural Centre in D’Kar; (3) Gantscraft in Ghanzi, a craft store that works with many San settlements in the country; (4) Tsodilo World Heritage Site, where the Ju’hoansi guide tourists to see rock art in the hills and sell crafts; (5) a community-based tour through Gweta, including a visit to the Sokwe and Ju’hoan wards; and (6) Khwe Cultural Hiking Trail, which traverses a number of Khwe villages and settlements from Mohembo East to Sekondomboro.

Namibia: (7) Treesleeper Campsite in Tsintsabis, which offers cultural activities and San home visits operated mostly by the Hai | om but also includes the !Xun; (8) Living Museum of the Ju’hoansi in Grashoek, which offers a variety of cultural activities; (9) Living Hunter’s Museum of the Ju’hoansi in | | Xa | loba, which offers a variety of cultural activities and hunting trips (traditional hunting is still legal as a means of subsistence in the Nyae Nyae Conservancy); (10) N | | goabaca Community Campsite at Popa Falls, which primarily offers accommodation and is managed by the Khwe; and (11) Traditional Environmental Knowledge Outreach Academy at Bwabwata National Park, which offers tracking lessons (co-run by the Khwe and Integrated Rural Development and Nature Conservation).

South Africa: (12) //Uruke Bush Camp Adventures near Andriesvale, which offers bush walks, traditional meals, and other cultural activities operated by the ≠Khomani; (13) !Xaus Lodge, which is situated on ≠Khomani and Mier land inside and adjacent to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park and offers game viewing, bush walks, and limited cultural activities (it is operated by an outside management group in consultation with these communities and South African National Parks); (14) !Khwatla in Yzerfontein, an education and cultural center focused on San heritage; and (15) Clanwilliam Living Landscape Project, a university-developed and community-based heritage and education project involving research and tourism on the archaeology, rock art, and culture of the surrounding area.



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DISCUSSION

San communities in southern Africa who have rights to land, whether it is communally owned or managed through a conservancy, are in a better position to operate their own cultural tourism projects. Unfortunately, many communities have lost rights to their traditional land and livelihoods. The San have long participated in cultural tourism endeavors, but the relationship between host and guest is often unbalanced, and tourists take more than they give back. Private tourism operations continue to employ San individuals and families as laborers or through negotiated contracts, sometimes on the very land from which they were displaced. These tourism operators understand that many foreigners find Indigenous cultures appealing. In those places where San have land rights, however, they also have the potential to create their own tourism operations, including cultural activities, accommodation facilities, and craft production and sales. These Indigenous tourism spaces provide the San opportunities to interact with tourists from around the world. Through their interactions, San peoples are able to educate tourists about their cultures and politico-economic statuses, which contributes to their agency toward determining their identity within the states that marginalize them. The financial contributions of tourism also help empower San communities as they gain more independence from national welfare regimes. By commodifying their Bushman identity through cultural tourism, San peoples gain more social and economic visibility to negotiate their political stance with states and the international community.

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