Exploring the indigenous minefield: social policy and the marginalization of the Bushman in southern Africa

Keitseope Nthomang

ABSTRACT

The history of the forces affecting the wellbeing of people defined as "the Bushman" in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia is well documented. The effects on their collective and individual consciousness of being victims of political, social, economic and cultural forces outside their control, have been dramatic. This paper attempts to unravel the often-unquestioned institutional assumptions that construct, entrench and perpetuate the marginalization of the Bushmen in the three countries. It argues that, until the assumptions embedded in the institution of the state are understood, governments will continue to design well-intentioned but badly-conceived social policies that reinforce rather than redress social injustices. The conclusion is that, under the current policy regime, it is unlikely that the conditions of the Bushmen will improve in the foreseeable future. A post-nationalist state model that seeks to work towards promoting inclusive social policies whose goal is to achieve equality and justice for all, is recommended.

Introduction

Social policies constitute the formal and informal rules and guidelines underlying the organized efforts of society to meet the needs of its members and ameliorate the problems confronting them as individuals, groups and communities (Gil 1998). Social policy therefore seeks to improve the social, economic, political and cultural conditions of people. However, social policy in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia has had

1 School of Social Work and Social Policy, University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia
the effect of entrenching and perpetuating the marginalization of the Bushmen who have been relegated to a stigmatized and dependent underclass in the emergent political economy. This is because social policies in these countries are generally founded on traditional liberal capitalist values and philosophies that underpin economic policy and promote the interests of dominant social groups (Gil 1998).

The problems facing the Bushmen today also stem from the fact that the socioeconomic and political milieu in the above countries is not yet ready for inclusive policies that recognize the Bushmen as normal or full citizens. Discrimination still runs deep. Although these countries claim to be democratic they are still continue to design and support policies focusing on land dispossession, resulting in displacements and, hence, the continued impoverishment of the Bushmen.

Who are the Bushmen?
The Bushmen, known as the “first people” on the African subcontinent have, over the centuries, been hunted, persecuted and driven off their traditional lands by more assertive tribes to the point where they now generally live in landless poverty (South African San Institute 1996). They have always made up a distinct population in southern Africa with a subsistence economy based on foraging (hunting and gathering); they speak a number of phonetically highly complex khoisan click-languages; they are light-skinned and somewhat smaller in physical stature than their neighbours and their social organization is based on small bands united in flexible egalitarian structures, with a leadership ethos based on consensus. All this is in contrast to the Bantu-speaking agro-pastoralists who migrated into the region between 1800 and 800 years ago (Tlou and Campbell 1984).

These people are spread all over different parts of southern Africa. They live in small groups, numbering only a few hundreds and at most a few thousands (Woodburn 1997). They are often isolated from other Bushman groups and in many cases are unaware that there are others similar to them elsewhere in southern Africa. What these people have in common is historical continuity with pre-colonial societies, strong links to territories, (that is, strong identification with the land on which
they carry out their traditional ways of life) distinct social, economic and political systems, culture and beliefs, non-dominant societies and an identity distinct from national societies (UN 1986–1987). What they also share is discrimination as an ethnic group because their traditional ways of life (hunting and gathering) is not recognized by mainstream society, particularly by post-Independence nationalist governments which see the foraging mode of existence as uncivilized and backward and as having no place in modern ways of life. Over the years many of these distinctive features have been eroded through annexation and assimilation, but an ethnic boundary still persists.

Conditions of the Bushmen
The many social problems experienced by the Bushmen and the ineffectiveness of current socioeconomic development approaches in addressing these concerns are now widely recognized (Burger 1990, Wilmer 1993). Over the past decades a compendium of studies has been conducted in southern Africa on a wide array of social policy issues relating to the Bushmen (Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues [ICIHI] 1987, Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa [WIMSA] 1996-1997). These studies reveal that the Bushmen are very poor. The Bushmen call themselves “people of the bush” and “people in poverty”. As Taylor (2000:210) argues,

Characterizing themselves as a people marked by poverty is not so much an intrinsically negative self-image, but a commentary against a pattern of domination that is seen as responsible for their poverty. The twin images the Bushmen present of being people of the bush and people of poverty are mutually interdependent. Being materially poor means much of their livelihood is gained from the bush, and being people of the bush means—in the current policy context—made to be poor.

The quality of life of the Bushmen has declined as a result of discrimination against them as an ethnic group, as well as the nationalist’s government failure to recognize their unique qualities and distinct
identity; in particular, their strong attachment to land as a means of survival (ICIHI 1987). This situation is made worse by the fact that nationalist governments are reluctant to recognize the Bushmen as "indigenous peoples" and that steps should be taken to safeguard their interest and wellbeing, as the position in Africa generally is that all Africans are "indigenous" to Africa (Hitchcock 1999).

The claim that all Africans are indigenous to Africa has robbed the Bushmen their rightful place in the history of the continent, so they are not accorded their rightful status as indigenous peoples. Thus, the special characteristics that distinguish indigenous peoples, such as their prior origin in a territory, their subjugation by external political structures such as those in nation states, their cultural distinctiveness from the majority populations and their self-definition as indigenous or "first peoples" were disregarded (Saugestad 1998). As a result the Bushman have lost their ancestral land, resources and cultural identity (Hitchcock 1999). Today, one of the most salient markers of Bushmen identity is their common experience of dispossession, mistreatment, exploitation and neglect by those more economically and politically powerful than themselves.

A visit to their settlements reveal that they often suffer the most of all social groups, disproportionately experiencing virtually every type of social problem from drug and alcohol abuse and delinquencies to poor nutrition and housing. Although evidence in the literature suggests that different attempts have been made in the past and continue to be made in terms of social policy to address these problems, their socioeconomic and political situation remains critical. Indeed, relative to non-Bushmen, evidence suggests that their quality of life continues to deteriorate (WIMSA 1996–1997, Hitchcock 1999). This is in spite of their increased and more vocal participation in the local, regional and international political arena.

Although the majority of the Bushmen still remain in their traditional land, they have lost all rights to land and other natural resources as the more recent occupants were more successful in obtaining legally-recognized ownership, a concept unknown in the Bushmen culture. In all the three southern African countries the Bushmen are in similar
difficult situations. Today they live in small groups scattered and isolated in various parts of the three countries. They can be found as squatters near major villages and townships; as labourers and herd boys on the farms of big landowners and in government-designated settlements. Generally, those living in these areas have been forced into a sedentary lifestyle with all the social ills that result for a semi-nomadic hunter society that is not prepared for this change. The lack of group organization, lack of educational services in their own languages and lack of knowledge about their rights leaves them in an extremely vulnerable situation.

Historical and contemporary contexts of marginality

The critical question emerging from the above discussion now is: how did the Bushmen come to be a dispossessed community dependent on their Bantu-speaking and European counterparts in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? The question is not easy to answer. However, historical evidence suggests that Bantu-speaking groups and Europeans who migrated into Southern Africa in the early part of the eighteenth century invaded the Bushmen and dispossessed them of their ancestral land and resources, leaving them landless and destitute. Rising Bantu speakers and the European élite gained in wealth and power at the time when the Bushmen suffered increasing deprivation of property and political autonomy (Good 1993, Solway 1994, Motzafi-Haller 1994, Tlou and Campbell 1984).

Bushmen poverty can therefore partly be attributed to Bantu and European accumulation which has resulted in structured dominant/subordinate or master/servant relationships ever since. Diana Wylie (1990) argues that structural inequality was the core concept in the Tswana political realm of the previous century symbolized, she asserts, by the proverbial expression that “no man was another’s equal” (batho ga re lekane re se meno). In a related observation Datta and Murray (1989) say that the interdependence between political power and economic wealth is illustrated by the prevalent usage of the term Kgosi to mean both a chief and a rich man. Thus, acceptance and legitimization of social divisions based on class and ethnic hierarchies had firm
ideological formations. In this connection Wylie (1990:84) suggests, "Soon after Tswana cattlemen had appropriated springs in the Kalahari, the Bushmen who had formally used those scarce water points found their labour ... as hunters appropriated by the cattlemen as well".

Language is also one of the most powerful weapons used in everyday Tswana discourse further to marginalize the Bushmen. For example, all the names used by writers in government or academic publications in reference to the Khoisan, such as bushman, khoe, and Masarwa carry unpleasant and negative connotations. Until recently it was common to hear local intellectuals and political leaders calling the Khoisan Masarwa. The latter term has a derogatory appellation as both linguistically and historically, the prefix, ma, in Setswana denotes subhuman or servile origins and has been used to refer threateningly to people while the more commonly used prefix, ba, as in Bangwaketse for instance, denotes a sense of national consciousness. Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth century invading groups of Ndebele people, Afrikaners and Europeans were pejoratively referred to as Matebele, Maburu and Makgoa respectively (Thapelo 1998).

Two conclusions that can be drawn from the above observations. First, Tswana-speaking groups used derogatory terminology both to assert their own self-identification and pride against powerful enemies from the north and south. They extended the same terminology to the Bushmen who lived in the periphery of Tswana society and were regarded with contempt. Such negative attitudes do not auger well for the future of the Bushmen and are designed to allow very little interaction between the two groups, except at the master's convenience, that is, where the Bushmen are needed to provide cheap labour.

This relationship forced the Bushmen out of mainstream Tswana society and they have ever since existed on the periphery. As a result of this social separation most of the Bushmen do not receive adequate and quality government development assistance. The negative attitude towards the Bushmen entrenched in Tswana social discourse was also carried into the development of social policy. Colonial Tswana chiefdoms constructed their own ethnic identities through such manipulative social
discourse to impose political and economic domination upon other groups, as Solway observes,

Ascribed and stigmatised ethnic identity... was employed to exclude people from participating in valued activities, gaining access to resources and holding political office (1994:255).

The situation in post-Independence Botswana, South Africa and Namibia remains more or less the same. Unlike other subject tribes, the Bushmen still suffer the worst fate at the hands of dominant groups, largely because government hegemony over them is intent on absolute assimilation through relocating them to newly-created settlements. In Botswana the confinement of the Bushmen in the most arid parts of the Kalahari Desert under an all-encompassing Tswana political and economic structure, not only intensifies their dependence on the benevolence of their masters, but also facilitates an elaborate evolution of patronage networks which, in addition to perpetuating and entrenching Tswana hegemony, simultaneously denies the Bushmen an equal opportunity for group mobilization (Thapelo 1998).

Construction of the “other” in negative terms discriminates against and relegates the “other” to a servile status. The forced removal of the Bushmen from their traditional land and later denying them access to the same piece of land has resulted in a considerable worsening of their socioeconomic position. The “other” is often excluded from making decisions that affects their livelihood. When Tribal Grazing Land Policy was introduced in 1975 very little or no consultation took place. The views of the Bushmen were ignored by the government and development policy does not, therefore, reflect their wishes, particularly in planning for land distribution and provision of social and economic services. The association of the Bushmen with the “bush” is rooted in history and not, as the Tswana-speaking groups suggest, in their nature (Solway 1994). The myth of pristine, leaderless, propertyless and lawless Bushmen living in “continuing communality” serves only to operationalize negative assumptions and obscures the lengthy process of historical differentiation that has resulted in modern structured inequalities.
How social policy has marginalized the Bushmen in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia

For the purpose of this discussion, I will examine only the issue of land dispossession. Land has been a longstanding grievance for the Bushmen communities in southern Africa, in particular because the establishment of new agricultural settlements, tourism (national parks and game reserves), mining and resettlement policies have failed to recognize the Bushmen landholding and use practices. This has resulted in the alienation of the Bushmen from their traditional land and natural resources.

The land issue is central to any analysis of the marginalization of the Bushmen (Burger 1990, Hitchcock 1999). For the Bushmen land is a fundamental source of livelihood. Land dispossession therefore means loss of livelihood, with adverse consequences for their economic, social, family and spiritual life.

The Bushmen land-holding and use practices

Traditionally the Bushmen managed their land and natural resources on a band basis (Heinz 1966, Lee and DeVore 1976, Barnard 1992). Membership of a band gave individuals the right to exploit the resources of the band territory. Land was held in the name of the band and every individual member of the band theoretically had the right to sufficient land and resources to support himself or herself. Under these systems of tenure, land cannot be bought or sold, nor can it be pledged as collateral for a loan. Individuals can only utilize available resources, permit others to utilize them or, in some cases, discourage access.

In his discussion of traditional landholding and use practices among the Bushmen, Lee (1981) identifies five structural traits that define a foraging mode of production. These are:

• Foragers must be mobile and able to cover a wide area in order to find sufficient food;
• The environment sets the upper limit on group size;
• Because of the seasonal and regional variation in resources, the hunter-gatherer group structure must be flexible enough to adjust to changing opportunities;
• The necessity to move around sets limits on the material wealth a family can possess; and
• Despite a variety of ideologies of land ownership, all hunters have developed elaborate rules for reciprocal access to resources.

In this system, land and its resources are collectively owned, while tools and other belongings are the property of the individual owner.

On the basis of evidence gathered from the Bushmen’s intimate knowledge of the vast expanses of land, Thomas (1989:10) concludes, although Bushmen are roaming people and therefore seem to be homeless and vague about their country, each group has a very specific territory, which that group alone may use, and they respect the boundaries rigidly. Each group also knows its territory very well. . . . and has usually named every place in it where a certain kind of veldt food may be may grow.

Evidence from studies conducted in former Bushman land (present day Nyae Nyae in Namibia) shows that the Bushmen there used the concept n!ore as a basis for regulating access to land. A n!ore is a named place containing various natural resources for communal use. N!ore rights cannot be sold, given away or willed to anyone. A person or a group may travel through another person’s n!ore, but no one may settle in a n!ore without the permission of the n!ore steward. This traditional understanding has been translated into bureaucratic English and submitted to the authorities in Namibia to constitute an important part of the debate on land rights that has taken place in Namibia after Independence in 1990 (South African San Institute 1996).

The evidence that emerges from the above research contributes towards a further deconstruction of the stereotype that Bushmen have never owned land. (Lee 1981, Barnard 1992). Bushmen landholding and use practices have proved to be the most important aspect of their identity as a people. Because land is a primary source of livelihood, whatever is obtained from land belongs to the collective. Food is never consumed alone by a family, it is always shared equitably by a members of the band of up to more than 30 members. This system of sharing and generalized reciprocity has been reported for hunter-gatherers on every
continent and every kind of environment (Lee 1981). This mode of existence ensures that the food available is sufficient for every member of the band, thus reducing the likelihood of hunger and poverty.

The introduction of new systems of land tenure and land dispossession

The pre-colonial period was characterized by tribal wars that displaced Bantu-speaking people. In all their journeys they came into contact with the Bushmen who were already occupying certain areas of land. The first contact was probably peaceful, as there would have been too few farmers to make any difference to the general way of life of the hunter-gatherers. However, after Bantu-speaking people settled among the Bushmen they gradually imposed their land use practices on the Bushmen. Bantu tribes with stratified systems of hereditary chiefs and headmen soon introduced new sets of land use practices to suit their culture. They introduced hierarchical communal land use practices.

The model governing Setswana land-use illuminates this development. Setswana land-use consists of a pattern of concentric circles around the sphere of sociality, the village (motse). As one moves outward from the village, through arable land (masimo), then the cattle post (moraka) and finally into no man’s land—the bush (naga)—one moves from the realm of society to that of nature and wilderness (Peters 1987). It is, according to this model, naga or empty land that is and was occupied by the Bushmen.

On occupation Bantu-speaking people quickly established settlements and introduced agro-pastoralism. Barnard (1992) suggests that the incursion of non-hunter-gatherer populations did not lead to the explicit defence of territorial boundaries or to widespread displacement of the Bushmen and Guenther (1986) points out that early Bantu-Bushman interaction was regulated by some degree of reciprocity and that the two groups lived together symbiotically.

Despite this, it is clear that the Bantu-speaking people made no attempt to recognize Bushmen land use practices. Instead, they engaged in a subtle process of land dispossession that gradually led to total displacement of the Bushmen from their ancestral land. From an initial
contact based on exchange, relations gradually took the form of subjugation. The end result was a progressive dehumanization of the Bushmen until they were regarded simply as assets useful for their productive potential. Thus anything called “Bushman” was not supposed to own land but only to work for the master.

The situation remained relatively stable during the colonial period. The administration was worried by the fact that the Bushmen did not respect private ownership and use of land and that the concept of land as a commodity was unknown to them. This was something that the administration wanted to change. They believed that a key approach to agricultural and economic development in Africa was the privatization of land, a process which, it was argued, would provide individual whites with the incentive to invest more labour and capital and at the same time manage and conserve resources (Hitchcock 1980).

In the light of the above the administration therefore chose to ignore the Bushmen’s foraging way of life and allocated themselves large tracts for private use. For example, in South Africa the white settlers who moved into the interior and occupied Bushman traditional land in 1652 treated the Bushmen poorly. Large numbers of Bushmen were killed or displaced, resulting in the near-depopulation of Bushmen in South Africa. Four centuries later settlers introduced and pursued policies of separate development—apartheid—in which advantages were given to whites over Bushmen. In many instances the Bushmen had no say whatsoever over the kinds of activities pursued in their areas.

When colonialism ended in the 1960s (Botswana) and 1990s (South Africa and Namibia) Bushmen found themselves under the new State, but with more or less similar set of laws and policies to those of their predecessors. Since Independence, pressure on land from farmers, mining companies and conservationists all but cut the Bushmen off from their traditional lands. In Botswana, South Africa and Namibia comprehensive tenure reforms for arid lands were initiated. These resulted in dispossession of Bushmen from large areas of their lands, which were turned into national wildlife parks and game reserves for tourists and large farms for agricultural purposes. In Botswana in 1975 the Tribal Grazing Land Policy was introduced. This policy commercialized huge
areas of formerly communally-owned land around the Kalahari desert, resulting in the annexation of land from the Bushmen of the area and its re-allocation to the more economically powerful members of the majority ethnic groups all over Botswana (Fidzani 1998).

A majority of the Bushmen in the area were forced to work for the new master-landowners (Mogalakwe 1986). Consequently they were forced to become hereditary serfs called Malata, not Balata, Balala or Batlhanka (Datta and Murray 1989) and were effectively reduced to what amounts to personal and private property. Because they were landless and poor they had no choice but to accept being owned by dominant groups. They were later required to relocate to government-created settlements, often without compensation. In these settlements government treated them like children, always promising, "we will take care of you". This has over the years had a devastating psychological effect as people have become resigned to a dependency that is driving them into deeper poverty.

Although government would like us to believe that no discrimination exists, land policies adopted by governments have often effectively (though not explicitly) discriminated against the Bushmen. In Botswana, discriminatory legislation such as the Tribal Land Act (1968) was introduced. This act mandated Land Boards to allocate land to "tribesmen" for residential, arable, grazing and business purposes. The rights of the Bushmen to traditional land were ignored by the Act and not recognized in subsequent legislation. The Act excludes the Bushmen from even making applications for land since they are not considered "tribesmen" (Wily 1979).

In recent years Botswana saw yet another ethnically-discriminatory policy seeking to promote tourism in the country. This involved the declaration of selected sites as national monuments. Tsodilo Hills was declared a national monument in 1994, forcing the Bushmen who had lived there for many years to relocate. Ironically, the Humbukushu community, which came to live there later than the Bushmen, were left behind to benefit from the income accruing from tourism.

The Bushmen of South Africa and Namibia faced similar problems, having had to contend with other groups intent on taking away their
land and resource rights and restricting their civil and political rights. In South Africa and Namibia and, to some extent, in Botswana, any private tourist or tourist company is allowed to visit areas inhabited by the Bushmen without prior arrangement and often without benefits to community members. Such unmonitored visits often result in the destruction of livelihood (WIMSA, 1996–1997). Often visitors come in convoys of big four-wheel drive trucks, which destroy veld foods and medicinal plants and scare game. They mount camp indiscriminately and their litter often results in environmental devastation and a range of other associated problems on this fragile ecosystem.

The liberation struggle in South Africa and Namibia has also displaced a large number of the Bushmen from their traditional lands. Military bases were established in the heartland of the Bushmen land (Schmidtsdrift) with clearly established user groups, but the land was regarded by the administration as terra nullius, that is, vacant land with no legal owner and the Bushmen were relocated. The situation is the same in Botswana. According to Ng’ong’ola and Moeletsi (1996) when freehold farms were established in Ghanzi the administration did not take into account the land-use practices of the Bushmen in the area. They quickly erected fences, thus gradually blocking the Bushmen from access to their former sources of subsistence. The government has failed to recognize the deep connection the Bushmen have with their land and come up with appropriate policies that will ensure Bushmen rights to land are recognized and respected.

Responses to the plight of the Bushmen: reclaiming traditional land

The right to land is correctly acknowledged to be at the heart of the struggle of the Bushmen. The governments of Botswana, South Africa and Namibia appear to recognize that the poverty and marginality of the Bushmen stems from landlessness and has responded by creating quasi-judicial bodies for land restitution. The South African National Land Committee and the Namibian Land Reform Advisory Commission are good examples. In Namibia since 1993 Bushmen representatives have held various meetings with government officials in order to initiate
negotiations regarding compensation for the lost land. The Bushmen community displaced from their traditional lands when the Etosha National Game Park was created during the 1950s are now re-claiming part of their land back. After protracted negotiations and demonstrations the community was finally allocated some land and resettled.

The same happened in South Africa. In 1996 the South African San Institute, a Bushmen advocacy organization, launched a number of initiatives aimed at claiming back and securing title over traditional lands, of which the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park is the most important (Whyte 1993). Pressure from the South African San Institute and other advocacy organizations such as !Xuu and Khwe Trust resulted in the South African government buying 13,000 hectares of mainly rich farmland for the Bushmen community at Platfontein near Kimberley. Another group of former Bushmen soldiers and their families, who were forcibly removed from their lands in Schmidtsdrift by the South African army during the war with South West Africa Peoples Organization in Namibia, are now being relocated back to their traditional land (Uys 1995).

Although the above land reform initiatives are laudable in intention, their outcomes have proved to be disastrous for the Bushmen. Hitchcock (1996) identifies two major problems that arose with the settlement scheme in Botswana. The first concerns the size of land thus allocated. While it was held that the area should be large enough to support a sizable population, with room for growth, the Ghanzi District Council decided to allocate blocks of land 20 x 20 kilometres Traditionally Bushmen territory may cover over 30 x 50 kilometres. The size of the territory was usually determined by the capacity of the ecosystem to provide the necessary resources to sustain life.

This critical factor was not taken into account in determining the sizes of Bushman settlements. Residents also have no control of who enters the settlement. Given that the constitution of Botswana allows citizens of Botswana to settle anywhere they wish, there has been an influx of outsiders with cattle who take advantage of free water and, by virtually turning the settlement into a cattle post, they later claim resident status. This land is insufficient to sustain both agriculture and pastoral
farming, making it difficult for the Bushmen relocated in these areas to raise livestock. Water and grass were also insufficient to sustain an ever-increasing number of cattle farming on the limited land each settlement has available.

The second was that the Land Boards were slow and reluctant in providing for security of tenure. The Land Board took a long time to allow local residents to fence their areas, using the pretext that existing land legislation did not permit them to do so and that Bushmen cannot lay claim to any land under the Tribal Land Act (1968). As a result they continue to live in a state of uncertainty like squatters, not knowing when they will be relocated.

Many Bushmen have become increasingly dependent upon private and government-sponsored aid programmes. This has also resulted in accelerated cultural transition to low self-esteem and substance abuse (Mogwe 1992). As the outcome of resettlement schemes has often been negative, these have reinforced rather than redressed forms of marginalization. Such policies have marked the beginning of the end of relative self-sufficiency for the Bushmen communities. It is therefore largely for these reasons that the Bushmen remain among the poorest of the poor in southern Africa (WIMSA, 1996/1997).

No policy that forcefully removes people from the land to which they claim ownership and later attempts to resettle them elsewhere, will ever be developmentally or morally justifiable, irrespective of the purported good intentions of its architects. People must never be manipulated to suit development: people are the subjects of development not its objects.

Discussion
Land policies reflect deeply-rooted values; the sectional interests of those who influence policy formulation and implementation and the basic principles they use in forming social policy initiatives (Gil 1998, World Bank 1993); as well as the dominant values of a society (Prigmore and Atherton 1990). The commercialization of the Botswana rangeland has worsened the situation of the Bushmen, as has the Tribal Land Act (1968) which introduced Land Boards. The historical displacement of
the Bushmen by both white settlers and dominant Tswana polities found legal assent and institutional sanction in a official statement of opinion by the Attorney General Chambers in 1978 when a consultant concluded,

...the *Masarwa* have always been true nomads, owing no allegiance to any chief or tribe...it appears to me that as true nomads *Masarwa* can have no rights of any kind except rights to hunting (Ministry of Local Government and Lands File 2/1/1, 1978).

Although the Botswana government was quick to disown this legal opinion, arguing that ethnicity was not in principle a criterion for the acceptance, or rejection of application for land allocation, research indicates that subsequent, blatantly discriminatory Land Board decisions and practices went unpunished (Wilmsen 1989, Hitchcock 1980).

The above opinion gives us some insights and provides some of the answers as to why the Bushmen were displaced from their traditional land. It is perfectly apparent that land belonging to the Bushmen was taken away by the state because it was regarded as *terra nullius*, (empty land) a concept that has become enshrined in law as a justification for taking and exploiting indigenous people's lands (Neitschmann 1994, Hitchcock 1999). One implication of this is that, as a matter of government policy, lands that traditionally belonged to the Bushmen can be taken away at any time for capitalist development (such as mining, tourism and ranching) without their consent.

The alienation of land is justified in the interest of the nation state, which is presumed to represent all interests in society regardless of ethnic affiliation. In fact, action by the Botswana government to remove the *Basarwa* from their traditional land (such as the Central Kalahari Game Reserve) is justified because it is meant to help “develop”, “civilize” and integrate them into mainstream society so that the Basarwa, like all Tswana-speaking groups can enjoy the fruits of development (Egner 1981). This attitude remains the same in post-Independence Botswana, South Africa and Namibia where the Bushmen have remained an “invisible” and inaudible category. There have been few attempts to reverse this trend and consider the Bushmen as equal partners in the development process.
Bushman land in southern Africa is a tangible representation of their history and identity. It is also a reminder of their alienation, not just from their physical space, but from many of the markers by which they have come to define themselves. Even though land is a primarily a source of human livelihood, the Bushman also perceives it as a sacred cultural heritage. The argument is that human life is not possible without access to land is not only true for Judeo-Christian traditions but also for the most ancient religious traditions, which hold that, while in this life humankind turns to the earth in order to subsist, in death we are returned to the earth for our final rest.

New ways of doing business
Many of the problems that beset the Bushmen today can be traced back to indiscriminate land dispossession. In order to change this situation the following measures are suggested:

- Incentives can be provided for government elites to change their attitudes towards the Bushmen, such as promoting tourism in areas inhabited by the Bushmen. In 1990 the government of Botswana introduced Community-Based Natural Resources Management Programme (CBRNM). Through this programme and in the name of conservation, the Bushmen would be able to decide themselves how to use and manage the natural resources in their areas. CBNRM, addresses issues central to the Bushmen identity and subsistence practices; land, wildlife and natural resources. It appears to hold out the promise of reversing the trend of alienation of these resources; and it opens up debates of whose aspirations, values and priorities development agendas are based on (Taylor 2000).

Such initiatives are intended to promote tourism as a profitable business likely to benefit both the Bushmen and non-Bushman culture. Although CBRNM efforts are still at its early stages in the Bushmen communities in Botswana and evaluations of its success or otherwise may be premature, there are indications are that, if applied properly, CBNRM may yield successful results.
Using the idea of “empowerment” as a developmental tool. Empowerment implies a redistribution of power so that the Bushmen may decide how best to utilize their natural resources. Although empowerment strategies may not produce the result they set out to achieve, they may boost the image of government in the eyes of international development agencies and Bushmen advocacy groups such as First People of the Kalahari, Survival International and IWIGIA.

New directions for African social policy: an alternative model to the nationalist state?

This paper points to major defects in the social policies, and particular the land policies, of three southern African countries. The critical question that arises is: what directions should future social policy take in the light of these persisting problems? Given different colonial traditions and divergent post-Independence political histories, developing a common social policy agenda is a daunting task. The situation of the Bushmen presents new challenges that demand new ways of thinking.

A possible answer is predicated on the vision of a post-nationalist state with the following characteristics:

• It will be committed to the ideals of democracy, human rights and the rights of minorities, peace and efforts geared towards increasing the Bushmen’s participation in national development.

• It will be an inclusive state, which is sensitive to, tolerant and accommodating of ethnic diversity.

• It will work towards harnessing these diversities in order to achieve ethnic integration and partnership in policy-making processes, taking into account the Bushmen’s analysis and interpretations of their pressing problems.

• It will commit itself to eradicating negative social attitudes, prejudices and stereotypes towards the status and role of the Bushmen in society.
Underlying these ideals is a conviction that policies that support affirmative action, not only at the level of rhetoric but also in practice, will be promoted.

These are the necessary, if not sufficient, preconditions that must be satisfied if the objectives of an effective, functioning post-nationalist state are to be achieved. In themselves they will provide the basis for more inclusive policies that depart from the past way of doing things to more progressive policies. Already there are positive signs to promote a post-nationalist model. The new coat of arms in South Africa shows two Bushmen figures, enclosed in a shield with a motto in the Bushmen language that means, according to Thabo Mbeki, "diverse people unite" or "people who are different join together". This gesture offers a practical example that should be seen as point of entry for governments in Botswana and Namibia to take steps to treat the Bushmen as full citizens.

Given the above it may be wise to recommend that the Bushmen be allowed to own land in their own right and practice their traditional land holding and use practices referred to earlier. It is clear that the Bushmen are still comfortable pursuing traditional methods of living in the era of globalization, change and modernity. It is a lifestyle to which they owe to their ancestors and the one in which their ancestors have lived for centuries. Following the dictates of their culture, they are therefore willing to defend it at all costs, all the more so that the new life promised by the government is worse than the old. It is reasonable, therefore, to argue that they should be left to live their preferred lifestyle until they voluntarily choose to abandon it and embrace mainstream development practice. For example, in Botswana the Bushmen currently living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve with animals should be left alone if they insist on staying. It is their traditional land. Their decisions and rights must be respected.

The post-nationalist state model, in my view, is best suited to act as a vehicle, both directly and indirectly, to promote innovative land-holding and use strategies that do not discriminate against the Bushmen or any other ethnic group and strike a balance between the Bushmen land holding and use practices with modern systems of land use.
Conclusion
The Bushmen in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia are confronted with numerous socioeconomic problems. They were forcibly removed from their traditional lands, with adverse consequences for the economic, social, family and spiritual life. This paper has attempted to examine the current state of social policy, in particular land policy, in Botswana, South Africa and Namibia in terms of how it has contributed to the marginalization of the Bushmen. The paper notes the overriding need for policymakers to develop inclusive policies that respect the Bushmen as equal partners in the policymaking processes that directly affect their lives. Policymakers must abandon their dominant colonial and neo-colonial assumptions about the inferiority and backwardness of the Bushmen and commit themselves to relationships based on equality and partnership. The area that needs urgent action is the development of a post-nationalist state model that will recognize the Bushmen traditional landholding and use practices.

References


Mail and Guardian, April 28th, 2000, Johannesburg

Ministry of Local Government and Lands 1978. *File 2/1/1*, Gaborone


Saugestad, S. 1998. *The Inconvenient Indigenous: Remote Area Development in Botswana, Donor Assistance, and the First People of the Kalahari*, Tromso, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Tromso
