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The Return of the Native[1]

by Adam Kuper[2]

On Human Rights Day 1992, the United Nations proclaimed an International Year of the World's Indigenous People. A Decade for Indigenous Peoples was subsequently launched, to run from 1995 to 2004, and a Forum of Indigenous Peoples established. The inaugural meeting of the Forum, held in Geneva in 1996, was unfortunately disrupted by gate-crashers. A self-styled delegation of South African Boers turned up and demanded to be allowed to participate on the grounds that they too were indigenous people. Moreover, they claimed that their traditional culture was under threat from the new African National Congress government. They were unceremoniously ejected, and no doubt their motives were far from pure, but the drama might usefully have drawn attention to the difficulty of defining and identifying "indigenous people."

The loaded terms "native" and "indigenous" are the subject of much debate in activist circles.[3] "Native" still has a colonial ring in many parts of the world, though it has become an acceptable label in North America. It is now always capitalized (Native), perhaps in order to suggest that it refers to a nation of some sort, and in fact the term "First Nations" is often used as an alternative designation in Canada and the U.S.A. In international discourse, however, the term "indigenous" is usually preferred. This has a slightly foreign ring to English ears,

but perhaps it comes across as more scientific. At the same time, the names used for particular indigenous peoples have undergone changes, and therefore we now have, for example, Saami for Lapp, Inuit for Eskimo (see Stewart 2002:88–92), and San for Bushman.

As is so often the way with this sort of relabelling, "San" turns out to be a pejorative Hottentot—or Khoekhoe—term for Bushmen, connoting "vagabonds" and "bandits" (Barnard 1992:8), but the principle is defensible. It is a good idea to call people by names they recognize and find acceptable. Nevertheless, discredited old arguments may lurk behind new words. "Culture" has become a common euphemism for "race." Similarly, in the rhetoric of the indigenous peoples movement the terms "native" and "indigenous" are often euphemisms for what used to be termed "primitive" (cf. Béteille 1998). Indeed, one of the major NGOs in this field, Survival International, began life as the Primitive Peoples' Fund. It has since changed its name, but clinging to the same anachronistic anthropology it now promotes itself as a movement "for tribal peoples." Once this equivalence between "indigenous" and "primitive," "tribal," "hunting," or "nomadic" peoples is grasped, it is easier to understand why the secretary general of the United Nations glossed "indigenous peoples" as "nomads or hunting people" (Boutros-Ghali 1994:9). The indigenous peoples forum from which the Boers were ejected was dominated by delegations speaking for Inuit, San, Australian Aborigines, Amazonian peoples, and others, precisely the quintessential "primitive societies" of classical anthropological discourse.[4]

Not only has the ghostly category of "primitive peoples" been restored to life under a new label but the UN secretary general of the day, Boutros Boutros-Ghali, identified common problems that these peoples suffered in the modern world: They had been "relegated to reserved territories or confined to inaccessible or inhospitable regions" and in many cases "seemed doomed to extinction." Governments treated them as "subversive" because they "did not share the sedentary lifestyle or the culture of the majority. Nations of farmers tended to view nomads or hunting peoples with fear or contempt." However, the secretary general noted that "a welcome change is taking place on national and international levels." The unique way of life of indigenous peoples had at last come to be appreciated at its true value. Organizations of indigenous people had been formed. Collective rights in historical homelands were being recognized and land claims pressed with some success (Boutros-Ghali 1994:9–13).

The secretary general was certainly right to identify new international thinking on these issues. The ILO Convention no. 169 (1989) concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries laid down that national governments should allow indigenous peoples to participate in the making of decisions that affect them, that they should set their own development priorities,

2. Department of Human Sciences, Brunel University, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 3PH, U.K. (adam.kuper@brunel.ac.uk).
3. See, for example, the correspondence published in *Anthropology Today* 18 (3) (June 2002):23–25 under the title "Defining Oneself, and Being Defined As, Indigenous."

4. For a historical review of the notion of primitive society, see Kuper (1988).

and that they should be given back lands that they traditionally occupied. This convention has been ratified by Denmark and Norway among European states and by Bolivia, Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, and Peru in Latin America. However, no African or Asian state has adopted it. (For a trenchant critique of the logic of the Indian "tribal" movement, see Béteille 1998.) More recently, a United Nations Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples has been negotiated, but particularly because of strong opposition from a number of African states it has not yet been put before the General Assembly.[5]

The rhetoric of the indigenous-peoples movement rests on widely accepted premises that are nevertheless open to serious challenge, not least from anthropologists. The initial assumption is that descendants of the original inhabitants of a country should have privileged rights, perhaps even exclusive rights, to its resources. Conversely, immigrants are simply guests and should behave accordingly. These propositions are popular with extreme right-wing parties in Europe, although the argument is seldom pushed to its logical conclusion given that the history of all European countries is a history of successive migrations. Even in the most extreme nationalist circles it is not generally argued that, for instance, descendants of the Celts and perhaps the Saxons should be given special privileges in Britain as against descendants of Romans, Vikings, Normans, and, of course, all later immigrants.

Where hunters and nomadic herders are concerned, it may be argued that they represent not merely the first inhabitants of a country but the original human populations of the world. In a certain sense primitive, aboriginal, humankind's first-comers, theirs is the natural state of humanity. If that is so, then perhaps it follows that their rights must take precedence. However, while Upper Paleolithic hunters and gatherers operated in a world of hunters, every contemporary community of foragers or herders lives in intimate association with settled farmers. In certain cases, including those of the Kalahari Bushmen and the Congo Pygmies, they interacted with farming neighbours for centuries, probably for at least a millennium, before the colonial period (see Wilmsen 1989*a*). Exchanges with farmers and traders are crucial for their economy, and their foraging activities are geared to this broader economic context. Moreover, the divide between a foraging and a farming way of life is not necessarily hard and fast. People may forage for some seasons, even some years, but fall back on other activities when times are tough. Alternatively, farmers may be driven back on foraging as a result of war or natural disasters. All this suggests that the way of life of modern hunters or herders may be only remotely related to that of hunters and herders who lived thousands of years ago. Furthermore, even where technologies are very simple, cultural traditions vary between regions rather than according to modes of gaining a livelihood. For example,

Kalahari hunter-gatherers have more in common in their religious beliefs or kinship systems with neighbouring Khoi or Hottentot herders than with the Hadza of Tanzania or the Pygmies of the Ituri Forest in the Congo, many of whom lived until recently largely by foraging (see Barnard 1992).

Several generations—in some cases many centuries—of European settlement have also greatly complicated the picture. Local ways of life and group identities have been subjected to a variety of pressures and have seldom, if ever, remained stable over the long term. It is nevertheless often assumed that each local native group is the carrier of an ancient culture. In familiar romantic fashion, this culture is associated with spiritual rather than with material values. It is unique and expresses the genius of a native people. To be sure, it is conceded (even angrily insisted) that the authentic culture may survive only in rural enclaves, since (again in good romantic style) native cultures are represented as being everywhere under threat from an intrusive material civilization associated with cities, with stock markets, and with foreigners. However, it is argued that the essence survives and can be nursed back to health if the resources are provided. The alternative is represented in the bleakest terms. The loss of culture is sometimes spoken of as a form of genocide. Even in less apocalyptic discourses it is taken for granted that a people that loses its culture has been robbed of its identity and that the diminution of cultural variation represents a significant loss for all humanity.

Boutros-Ghali accordingly insisted that the indigenous-peoples movement was not only about land or hunting rights. It was, even more fundamentally, concerned with culture and identity. Indeed, beyond the conventional list of individual human rights something new was at issue. "Henceforth we realize that human rights cover not only individual rights," Boutros-Ghali claimed, "but also collective rights, historical rights. We are discovering the 'new human rights,' which include, first and foremost, cultural rights. . . . We might even say that there can be no human rights unless cultural authenticity is preserved" (1994:13).[6] (He did not consider the possibility that "collective rights" might undermine "individual rights.")

Finally, there is a strong ecological thread in the indigenous-peoples rhetoric. According to the dogma, hunters are in tune with nature in a way that the exploitative and greedy farmers are not (see Brody 2001; cf. Gill 1994 and Kehoe 1994). As Boutros-Ghali summed up, in appropriately clichéd language, "It is now clearly understood that many indigenous people live in greater harmony with the natural environment than do the inhabitants of industrialized consumer societies" (Boutros-Ghali 1994:13).

An eloquent statement of the natural-harmony thesis has been published recently by the anthropologist and

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5. For a convenient review of the institutions and treaties dealing with human rights and indigenous peoples, see Roulet (1999).

6. See Kuper (1999:chap. 7); see also Chanock (2000) for an interesting discussion of the new prominence given to "culture" and "cultural rights" in post–cold war international discourse.

activist Hugh Brody (2001), but he has chosen to focus on Canada's far north, where the way of life has been shaped for centuries by the international fur trade. Inuit commercial hunters flourished here, in time embracing the new technologies of hunting rifles, motorized sleighs, and radio communications, but this trade has been in decline for decades, and the consumer boycott of furs has made further inroads in the rump of the industry. Since the 1950s the Canadian government has implemented a policy of sedentarization. Today there are still a few part-time commercial hunters and, as elsewhere in North America, some men still hunt for recreation, but hunting is a marginal activity. Ethnographers have emphasized the continuing importance of what Stewart calls "the imagery rather than the subsistence aspects of hunting" (Stewart 2002:93; cf. Omura 2002). However, few could quarrel with Dorais's (1997: 3) conclusion that "Inuit society, in many respects, is as modern as its Euro-American counterpart."

Some activists wish that the Inuit would take up hunting again and restore an ancient environmental balance, but such hopes are not justified by experience. The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act created 12 Native-controlled profit-making corporations, which now export resources to Japan and Korea. Recently the Inupiat of Alaska's North Slope have supported oil drilling on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (although they are opposed by the Gwich'in Indians). In Greenland, the Inuit-led Home Rule government regards hunting as anachronistic and objectionable and favours the exploitation of non-renewable resources (see Nuttall 1998).

Leaving aside the question of how the land might be used, land claims on behalf of former "nomads" typically raise very tricky issues.[7] Canadian courts have found that it is difficult to establish the boundaries of lands hunted by former generations or to grasp how ancestral populations understood rights to resources and rights in land. They must also consider whether rights exercised by hunters are in some way equivalent to rights that arise from clearing virgin lands for agriculture or to other common-law entitlements. Finally, they must decide whether native chiefs legally entered into treaties that alienated some or all of their lands.

Some activists argue that too much emphasis is placed on treaties which may have been poorly understood by the natives and that courts should recognize that there are different cultural modes of encoding historical settlements. Hugh Brody, a leading theorist of the Canadian

First Nations movement,[8] favours recourse to unwritten historical resources, and in line with other Canadian activists he suggests that if there are no appropriate oral traditions the court should take evidence from shamans, who are able to see in dreams the arrangements that their ancestors made with the first European settlers (Brody 2001:134–36).

Brody concedes that questions may be asked about the factual status of oral traditions, let alone the dreams of shamans, but he insists that there is a reliable test of the historical value of these accounts. It all depends on who tells them. "For the peoples of the Northwest Coast," he writes, "as to any hunter-gatherer society or, indeed, any oral culture, words spoken by chiefs are a natural and inevitable basis for truth" (Brody 2001:207). Now, where chiefs exist, the word of one may carry weight, but it will not necessarily be accepted as "a natural and inevitable basis for truth" by anyone other than, perhaps, the chief's most loyal and trusting subjects. It is surely unfortunate if advocates of native rights grant powers to chiefs that they would be reluctant to allow to mere kings or emperors or even to elected presidents. Anyway, while some of the native peoples of Canada did have hereditary chiefs, in other cases it is far from certain that chiefs were recognized before the office was established by colonial authorities. There are also frequent disputes about who should be chief, and land claims regularly pit native against native, chief against chief (and anthropologist against anthropologist). Precisely because myths function as charters, there are inevitably competing stories, and disputes often rage over who owns a particular story and who has the right to use it to back up claims to resources.

Other problems arise when myths are compared with historical or archaeological evidence. As a consultant to Canada's Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the 1990s, Brody organized a historical workshop in which archaeologists explained that the Arctic was colonized across the Bering Straits by way of a land bridge that connected Siberia and Alaska (2001:113–14):

> One of the workshop participants was a woman from a Cree community who was enrolled in a Ph.D. programme at a prestigious American university. She was not happy about the Bering Strait theory. She pointed out that her people, and most "Indian" people, do not believe that archaeologists know anything about the origins of human life in

7. There is now a substantial literature on this issue; see, for example, Wilmsen (1989*b*). For an excellent account of the Australian situation see Hiatt (1996:chap. 2).

8. The blurb of his book presents Brody's credentials: Oxford-educated, he has taught social anthropology at Queen's University, Belfast, and in the 1970s "he worked with the Canadian Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and then with Inuit and Indian organisations, mapping hunter-gatherer territories and researching Land Claims and indigenous rights in many parts of Canada. He was an adviser to the Mackenzie Pipeline Inquiry, a member of the World Bank's famous Morse Commission and chairman of the Snake River Independent Review, all of which took him to the encounter between large-scale development and indigenous communities. Since 1997 he has worked with the South African San Institute on Bushman history and land rights in the Southern Kalahari."

the Americas. The idea that people first came as immigrants from Asia was, she said, absurd. It went against all that her people knew. . . . There had been no immigration, but an emergence. . . . She would have nothing to do with so-called scholarship that discredited these central tenets of aboriginal oral culture.

This objection broke up the workshop. Brody recalls feeling confused. Could something be true at the University of Toronto but false in Kispiox?

Yet the Cree student had good reason to be troubled. If their ancestors were themselves immigrants, then perhaps the Cree might not after all be so very different from the *Mayflower*'s passengers or even the huddled masses that streamed across the Atlantic in the 1890s. To be sure, the great population movements from Siberia across the Bering Straits began a very long time ago, but it was still relatively late in the history of the colonization of the world by fully modern humans. According to a recent authoritative review, "nothing found thus far challenges the view that significant human population movements through the area occurred only after the peak of the last glaciation, 16,000 years B.C." (Snow 1996:131; see also Dillehay 2000: esp. chap. 2). These migrations then continued for many millennia. The first wave passed quickly to the south, and the Arctic and Sub-Arctic were settled at a later stage. The ancestral Aleut-Inuit may have begun to colonize the far north only in the past 4,000 years. The ancestors of the Cree are dated from 3,000 years ago (Mason 2000), while the proto-Athapascans are dated from 2,000 years ago (Clark 2000).

Precisely whose ancestors came and when may also be problematic, and, of course, over the centuries communities migrated, merged, died out, or changed their languages and altered their allegiances. "Archaeologically well-known populations that predate the last 4,000 years may never be assigned clear linguistic identities," a modern authority concludes (Snow 1996:128). Consequently, it is difficult to sort out the various strains that intermingled to produce the native populations with whom the first Europeans made contact in Alaska and in the far north of Canada. However, it cannot be doubted that some of the First Nations were not merely immigrants but actually colonizers. Innu, for instance, entered the Quebec-Labrador peninsula only 1,800 years ago, displacing and assimilating earlier populations (Mailhot 1999:51).

Ever-changing colonial and national contexts have, of course, added layers of complexity to the histories of populations that derived from the precolonial communities, and with the best will in the world it may not be possible to return to a pre-Columbian state of nature. In Labrador (to continue with a Canadian example), an organization called the Innu Nation demands the restoration of ancestral lands. One difficulty it faces is that

the northern portion of its claim overlaps land claimed by another ethnic movement, the Labrador Inuit Association. A further complication is that this area is also home to another category of people, originally of European stock, known locally as the Settlers. Their presence raises another sort of problem, one of principle. There have been several generations of intermarriage between Settlers and Inuit; both Inuit and Settlers are often bilingual, and their ways of life are similar (see Plaice 1990, Samson 2001). If the phrase has any meaning, one might surely say that they have a common culture, though apparently not a common identity. Under certain conditions, Settlers are accepted as members by the Labrador Inuit Association, but the Innu Nation regards them as its main adversaries, and the government excludes Settlers from collective land claims and treats them as squatters because they cannot prove aboriginal bloodlines. At the same time, a person who has lived his or her whole life in, say, St John's in Newfoundland and does not speak a word of a native language may be granted aboriginal status in Labrador having demonstrated a sufficient proportion of aboriginal ancestry.

In short, for the Canadian government native claims to land are based not only on descent but on a calibrated measure of descent. One has rights only if one has a certain number of appropriate grandparents. This might fairly be called the Nuremberg principle. A drift to racism may be inevitable where so-called cultural identity becomes the basis for rights, since any cultural test (knowledge of a language, for example) will exclude some who might lay claim to an identity on grounds of descent. In the indigenous-peoples movement, descent is tacitly assumed to represent the bedrock of collective identity.

The Canadian situation is not unique. Courts in Australia, New Zealand, and the U.S.A. have also been persuaded to grant land rights to indigenous peoples. In many Latin American countries there have been mass movements of "indigenous peoples" that purport to speak for a majority of the population, but there are also movements of small minorities of "hunting peoples" that demand the return of ancestral homelands, and their claims have been sympathetically considered by some governments. In most Asian and African countries, however, government policy has been firmly (not to say oppressively) assimilationist with respect to minorities of formerly foraging peoples and nomads. Occasionally, as in the case of the Bushmen of Botswana and Namibia, they have been treated as victims of poverty requiring economic aid.

Botswana's treatment of its Bushman minority has been in the news recently, and the case is instructive. On April 19, 2002, a Botswana court refused to order the government to continue to provide services to people living in the Central Kalahari Game Reserve. This case had been supported by a number of NGOs, notably Sur-

vival International, which organized vigils outside Botswana embassies, and the judgement was given prominent coverage in the serious U.K. press. The *Times* (April 22), for example, under the headline "Last Bushmen Lose Fight for Right to Be Nomads" reported that "sub-Saharan Africa's last nomadic people have lost a legal battle against being evicted from their ancient homeland, ending 40,000 years of a hunter-gatherer lifestyle."

Even when Botswana was still a British colony (the Bechuanaland Protectorate), Bushman policy had attracted international attention from time to time. In 1958 the colonial government appointed a Bushman Survey Officer, George Silberbauer, a district commissioner who had been trained in anthropology, and asked him to review the situation of the Bushmen and to come up with a fresh policy. In his report, Silberbauer estimated the country's Bushman population at around 25,000, but he noted that only some 6,000 lived by hunting and gathering and so should be classified as what he called "wild" Bushmen[9] (1965:14). Silberbauer was engaged in postgraduate research on the G/wi-speakers west of Ghanzi, and his main proposal was that the government should establish a game reserve in the G/wi area in which only "wild" G/wi and, in the east of the reserve, some G//ana would be allowed to hunt. The government accepted this recommendation, and the Central Kalahari Game Reserve was established in 1961 with a territory of 130,000 square kilometers and an estimated Bushman population of some 3,000, although some hundreds of Kgalagari cattle farmers also found themselves within its borders. The second-largest game reserve in Africa, it occupies an area larger than South Korea or Portugal and about the same size as Bangladesh and Nepal.

The original policy was radically incoherent. Was this supposed to be a reserve for wild animals or for "wild Bushmen"? Who could live there, and what rights would they enjoy? A few non-G/wi Bushmen migrated into the reserve, but they were not entirely welcome. What about the Kgalagari pastoralists who made their homes there before the proclamation of the reserve? And what about the majority of Bushmen in the country, who had no claims there at all? Botswana became independent in 1966, and the new political class was generally unsympathetic to the policy behind the reserve and tended to point to a clear parallel with the South African Bantustan system. Initially, the Botswana government—like its colonial predecessor—was nevertheless prepared to make allowances in order to allay international concerns, but in the late 1970s the situation changed and government policy hardened. During the drought years of the late 1970s and early 1980s many people left the reserve, though perhaps intending to return. (G/wi had long been accustomed to labour migration to the Ghanzi farms in

hard times.) The government established a settlement with a school and clinic outside the reserve and tried with some success to persuade Bushmen to congregate there.

Two sets of considerations were crucial in the change in official thinking.[10] First, environmentalists complained that residents were keeping donkeys and goats that interfered with the game and that they were engaged in poaching. This was to turn the conventional appeal to environmental values against the Bushmen. Second, officials were committed to a national policy of bringing aid and development to what were called Remote Area Dwellers, a term coined precisely to avoid ethnic discrimination. Officials found the special provisions made for people in the reserve an expensive anomaly. As a minister of local government put it in a letter to the Botswana Centre for Human Rights in January 2002, "We as Government simply believe that it is totally unfair to leave a portion of our citizens undeveloped under the pretext that we are allowing them to practise their culture" (Hitchcock 2002*a*:2). Yet while senior members of government rejected the argument from culture, there was a feeling that the Bushmen were simply backward and had to be civilized. The permanent secretary in the Ministry of Local Government was reported in the press as remarking, in terms which would have been familiar to his colonial predecessors, that "Botswana owns the Basarwa and it will own Basarwa until it ceases to be a country; and they will never be allowed to walk around in skins again" (Hitchcock 2002*b*:18).

In May and June 1997 more than 1,100 people were moved in trucks to two settlements outside the reserve, where the usual depressing concomitants of forced resettlement soon manifested themselves in the form of alcoholism, domestic violence, and the spread of petty crime. In November 2001 the government announced that it would no longer provide public services or welfare payments to anyone remaining in the reserve. At this point 500–600 people remained within its borders, and it was an appeal on their behalf for services to be restored that the court rejected in April 2002. These actions were taken in the face of international protests. Indeed, there was something of a backlash in government circles against the activities of NGOs, notably Survival International. The Botswana government has concluded that some international agencies are effectively proposing a form of apartheid and sabotaging a rational policy of development.

On the face of it, the situation in South Africa is very different to that in Botswana. Bushmen, or San, within South Africa were generally believed to have died out or to have been assimilated by the late 19th century. The Hottentots, or Khoi, had been largely acculturated to the so-called Coloured group, though there are some bilin-

9. Silberbauer used this term to describe Bushmen "who are able to subsist on the proceeds of their hunting and foodgathering and who either live in remote areas without moving out on any visits, or who only make brief visits in some years to Ghanzi farms or Bantu-owned cattle-posts, for the purpose of trading or finding food and water" (Silberbauer 1965:14).

10. Survival International has insinuated that the real reason for the population removal is that a deal has been hatched between De Beers and the government to exploit diamond resources in the area, although if diamonds were found in the reserve they would be at the disposal of the government, since the reserve is designated as state lands (Survival International, news release, April 19, 2002).

gual Afrikaans-Nama-speakers in the northern Cape. Moreover, at the time of the political transition the ANC was unsympathetic to any movement of ethnic assertion within the country. In 1996, when he was deputy president, Thabo Mbeki represented the Khoi and San as South Africa's first freedom fighters but in the conviction that they had since passed from the scene.[11] The government was evidently caught by surprise when the indigenous-peoples movement was taken up by UN agencies and NGOs in South Africa began to champion the cause of the country's own indigenous peoples.

The first movement to achieve prominence was the Griqua movement—or, rather, movements, since there were competing organizations that claimed to speak for the Griqua people. The Griqua emerged on the frontier of the Cape colony in the late 18th century. At first they called themselves Basters, but the missionaries persuaded them to adopt a less shocking name. They were largely Khoi, or Hottentot, by ancestry, but they were Christians and spoke Dutch. Equipped with horses and guns, they operated as cattle ranchers and freebooters. In 1804 they settled under the auspices of the London Missionary Society at Klaarwater, later called Griquatown. In the course of the next generation the community split, there were various migrations, and treaties were made and abrogated with the Boer republics. Later in the 19th century descendants of the original community, by now largely landless, were divided between three widely separated settlements and increasingly assimilated into the broader Cape Coloured society (see Ross 1976).

Under apartheid, many Griquas were initially classified with the Bantu-speakers, but they managed to get themselves reclassified as Coloureds, which was a more privileged situation. In the 1990s, however, some Griqua politicians declared that they were Khoi and San, indigenous people, and demanded restitution of ancestral lands and representation in the House of Traditional Leaders. Support was forthcoming from the United Nations Indigenous Peoples' Forum. The government was ready to treat with them but became frustrated when the various Griqua spokesmen refused to agree on a single representative body for purposes of negotiation. To sort out the claims to leadership, officials consulted government anthropologists. Ironically, this was a return to the practices of the apartheid regime. These selfsame government anthropologists had been accustomed to similar duties when they were employed by the Department of Bantu Affairs. Now, redeployed to the Department of Constitutional Development, they found themselves faced with the familiar task of identifying the traditional leader, although as its happens they were unsuccessful on this occasion. The rival claimants to the Griqua leadership came together only for brief official

visits from Nelson Mandela or the U.S. ambassador. Today the various Griqua settlements seem to have opted rather more enthusiastically for participation in evangelical Christian movements (Waldman 2001).

On another front, however, the South African government did make a grand gesture. A ≠khomani San Association was set up to make claims to rights in the Kalahari Gemsbok Park, an enormous game reserve that had been established in 1931. There were only about a dozen people in South Africa who could still speak the ≠khomani language, but the movement was strongly supported by an NGO based in Cape Town. Rather vaguely specified rights of "ownership" in the park were symbolically handed over to "the ≠khomani people." People classified as ≠khomani were also allowed to graze stock in certain areas. This more specific and practical right was crucial. As Steven Robins has pointed out, while "San livestock farmers are often perceived to be less authentically San by donors, for many Kalahari San, goats and sheep have been, and continue to be, their main strategy for survival" (Robins 2001*a*:24, *b*). Unfortunately, these privileges have created tensions between those classified as San and other local residents, who had been classified as Coloured under apartheid. And just as under apartheid, people have been obliged to reformulate their ethnic identities in order to get access to resources. Williams Ellis, describes, for example, Oom Frik, who "says he is not a San, but he is part of them by virtue of his grandmother having been a 'pure San,' she had according to him the correct phenotypic features" (Ellis 2001:259).

The change of ANC policy is at least in part a response to agitation by NGOs, with their international connections (Robins 2001*b*). The government could not ignore these pressures while it harboured aspirations to recognition as Africa's leading actor in the field of human rights. Moreover, ANC leaders were committed to gestures of restitution for the injustices of apartheid. Symbolic acts of solidarity with San are now popular, and on the occasion of South Africa's Sixth Freedom Day, on April 27, 2000, President Mbeki unveiled the new national coat of arms, which displayed at its centre two figures from a Bushman rock painting. Below is a text from an extinct Cape Bushman language, *!ke e: /xarra //ke*, which has been translated as "Unity in Diversity"—the motto of the New South Africa, though the precise meaning of this passage in an obscure, dead language is a matter of some scholarly controversy.[12] (The motto of the old Union of South Africa was "Unity Is Strength.") The advantages of this official gesture are nevertheless apparent enough. None of South Africa's 11 official languages is being privileged. The only ethnic group that is given special status has long vanished from the scene. And the new symbol may boost South Africa's reputation in the field of human rights, since in some

11. Mbeki said: "I owe my being to the Khoi and San whose desolate souls haunt the great expanses of the beautiful Cape—they who fell victim to the most merciless genocide our native land has ever seen, they who were the first to lose their lives in the struggle to defend our freedom and independence, and they who, as a people, perished in the result" (quoted in Bredenkamp 2001:192).

12. Alan Barnard writes (personal communication) that the literal translation of the motto is *!ke* ("people" or "men") *e* ("who," plural) */xarra* ("different") *//ke* ("meet, be together with").

circles today the litmus test is a government's policy on indigenous peoples.

The indigenous-peoples movement has been fostered by the UN and the World Bank and by international development agencies and NGOs. Despite the fact that the ideas behind the movement are very dubious, the motivation is surely generous. Whatever the reasons behind it, a grant of land to poor people may be a good thing even if very large tracts of land are sometimes being handed over to extremely small communities—or, rather, to small categories of people defined in terms of descent. But I am doubtful about the justice or good sense of most of these initiatives. Policies based on false analysis distract attention from real local issues. They are unlikely to promote the common good, and they will certainly create new problems. Wherever special land and hunting rights have been extended to so-called indigenous peoples, local ethnic frictions have been exacerbated. These grants also foster appeals to uncomfortably racist criteria for favouring or excluding individuals or communities. New identities are fabricated and spokespeople identified who are bound to be unrepresentative and may be effectively the creation of political parties and NGOs. These spokespeople demand recognition for alternative ways of understanding the world, but ironically enough they do so in the idiom of Western culture theory. Since the representations of identity are so far from the realities on the ground and since the relative wealth of the NGOs and the locals is so disparate, these movements are unlikely to be democratic (see Sieder and Witchell 2001).

Why have these discredited ways of thinking become so influential once again? As always, our conceptions of the primitive are best understood as counters in our own current ideological debates (see Kuper 1988:7–9). The image of the primitive is often constructed today to suit the Greens and the anti-globalization movement. Authentic natives represent a world to which we should, apparently, wish to be returned, a world in which culture does not challenge nature. At the same time, the movement exploits the very general European belief that true citizenship is a matter of ties of blood and soil. In Europe today, this principle is used to justify anti-immigrant policies. The obverse of this, however, is the painless concession that faraway natives should be allowed to hunt in their own Bantustans. And so the indigenous-peoples movement garners support across the political spectrum for a variety of different, even contradictory reasons. (The founder of Survival International, Robin Hanbury-Tenison, recently achieved new prominence as chief executive of the Countrywide Alliance, a movement formed to oppose the banning of fox hunting in Britain.) But whatever the political inspiration, the conventional lines of argument currently used to justify "indigenous" land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision.

Fostering essentialist ideologies of culture and identity, they may have dangerous political consequences.

Comments

KEIICHI OMURA
Faculty of Language and Culture, Osaka University, Osaka 560-0043, Japan (bxg06636@nifty.nc.jp). 5 1 03

Kuper tells us that essentialism is still one of the most crucial issues that we must address if we are to avoid making the same mistakes as the modern anthropology criticized by postmodern and postcolonial anthropology as a collaborator of colonialism. This is because, as is demonstrated in this article, although the indigenous peoples movement has certainly contributed to the public recognition of collective rights and empowerment of indigenous people, such as the establishment of Nunavut Territory in Canada, its theoretical and conceptual foundation is an essentialist ideology that creates and amplifies the differences among ethnic groups and thus exacerbates ethnic frictions. As Kuper suggests, we should not only criticize the theoretical foundation of essentialist ideology but also propose an alternative to it, for without some reformulation of culture and identity the "primitive" will be restored to life under the veil of the "indigenous."

How shall we begin to propose such an alternative? I think that a clue to this problem is suggested, although not clearly stated, in this article, especially in the discussion of the discrepancy between the reality of indigenous peoples and the basic premises of the indigenous peoples movement. Kuper examines the assumptions underlying the indigenous peoples movement, such as the premise that each indigenous group constitutes the original inhabitants of a country and is the carrier of an ancient culture in which humans live in harmony with nature, and concludes that these assumptions are open to serious challenge. In reality, contemporary indigenous groups have experienced continual sociocultural change in the course of the complicated modern history of humankind—migrating, merging, changing their languages, social organizations, and modes of subsistence, altering their allegiances, and influencing each other. No indigenous group has lived in complete isolation and kept its way of life unchanged since the beginning of humankind. In this sense, the society and culture of every contemporary indigenous group is a complex of various elements resulting from historical interactions that is still in the process of change. Nevertheless, as Kuper points out, in the political arena and the courts the definition of "indigenous" and the authentic images of indigenous peoples are based on the assumptions of ties of blood and soil derived from the Euro-American essentialist or nationalist ideology of culture and identity mentioned above, that is, constructed regardless of the reality of indigenous peoples' societies.

This discrepancy throws light on two aspects of the sociopolitical situations of indigenous peoples. First, it indicates that indigenous peoples are still subordinate to Euro-American society because it is that society that defines indigenousness and controls decision making on indigenous problems. At the same time, however, it indicates that indigenous peoples have the potential for redefining indigenousness. For example, as I have shown (Omura 2002), Inuit people continually redefine their ethnic imagery in everyday life in accordance with changing conditions in an effort to construct a positive ethnic identity. Through this redefinition, Inuitness as defined by Inuit people themselves allows the adoption of new customs, such as jig dancing, tea drinking, and even trapping and driving snowmobiles, all introduced as the result of contact with Euro-American society. Seal hunting with rifle and snowmobile, regarded as deviation from authentic "tradition" and criticized by environmentalists in the seal fur war (Wenzel 1991), has become "tradition" as defined by Inuit people. Moreover, some descendants of non-Inuit identify themselves as Inuit and are recognized as such in their community because they were adopted and brought up by Inuit. According to Briggs (1997), furthermore, some half-*qaplunaak* (white)–half-Inuit elders are respected as Inuinnat (real Inuit) because their behavior conforms to Inuitness. Therefore, it may be said that the reality of indigenous peoples eludes definitions and imagery constructed in terms of Euro-American essentialist ideology, and the redefinitions of identity and culture that indigenous people continually execute in their everyday life erode the basis of that ideology even though they are still under its dominion. If this is so, then it is on the daily practice of indigenous peoples that we should focus.

EVIE PLAICE
Department of Anthropology, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, NB, Canada E3B 5A3 (plaice@unb.ca). 6 I 03

In 1969 the newly elected and much lauded Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau was about to launch his "just society." Key to his campaign was a white paper on Indian affairs that recommended dismantling the Indian Act. Underpinning Trudeau's "just society" was the belief that all Canadians should be treated equally. The notion was not new. In 1949, when Newfoundland joined Canada, Joey Smallwood had argued that his new province contained only Canadians: Newfoundland had no "Natives." For that reason, the Indian Act was never applied to Newfoundland's several thousand aboriginal inhabitants. Smallwood soon realized, however, that he was now responsible for maintaining Native communities that elsewhere in Canada fell under the federal budget. The rather hamfisted attempts to share this burden have hampered aboriginal relations in the province ever since and are at least partially to blame for the rather messy state of affairs to which Kuper alludes in "The Return of the Native."

The vehement Native rejection of Trudeau's proposed policies in 1969, however, took the government by surprise. Any threat to the protection of Native minority status was interpreted as a blatant attempt at assimilation, later appraised as "cultural genocide." The liberal notion of a just and equal society has been viewed with deep suspicion by Native Canadians ever since. Nevertheless, Kuper's attack on the growing indigenous rights movement is timely because it brings us back to a necessary position of equilibrium. There is no way forward from the many racially motivated points of tension that plague current affairs except by recognizing that all humans are equal, regardless of race and ethnic background. Quite apart from questioning the very premise of using race as a justification for claiming special rights, Kuper raises questions about the inherent problems of identifying exactly who qualifies as "indigenous," "aboriginal," or "Native" and in what contexts. All of these dilemmas are apparent in the cases with which I am familiar, and they are not easily addressed or set aside. The difficulty lies elsewhere, however: in history, context, and location. Invariably issues of prior rights—and their fellows, the insidious rights based on racial, cultural, and ethnic differences—are championed from a position of injustice, inequality, and disenfranchisement.

Trudeau's version of the "just society" was trounced because it came with a legacy of racist policies that had shaped Canadian Native relations since the birth of the Indian Act in 1876 and had in fact been copied by postwar South African apartheid. In its nation-building enterprise Canada had dealt with the "Indian Problem" by swinging between the two opposing positions of separation and assimilation in such a way that, by the mid-20th century, most aboriginals were either living on reserves as registered Indians receiving certain benefits but denied full Canadian status or living off-reserve with no such benefits and only limited access to the economy. In either case, the policies had succeeded in isolating Native Canadians, who were living in poverty with the highest rates of youth suicide and teenage pregnancy, the shortest life expectancy, and the lowest incomes of any group in the country. This appalling state of affairs is persistently paraded on national television, most recently in the form of gas-sniffing pre-teens in the Innu communities of Labrador, where youth suicide is the highest in Canada and accidental immolation not infrequent.

The Native scepticism that had greeted Trudeau's attempts to dismantle the Indian Act was well founded. To the cynical at least, the rapid development of the Canadian North over the ensuing decades exposed the "just society" as no more than a ruse to cover an intended "land grab" resulting in large-scale resource extraction that seldom benefited the local, especially Native, inhabitants of the North. Smallwood, for example, succeeded in converting Labrador into a vast mining and hydro-electric enterprise. It would be naive to think that Trudeau was not aware of the pressure to develop the North, even if his assimilationist policies are not interpreted as complicit.

Rights of any sort that are based on recognizing racial

difference are indefensible, but the attempt to redress past and present wrongs with the likes of the Forum of Indigenous Peoples is at least understandable. Should Western liberal democracies *not* attempt to succour the vulnerable? Do countering policies such as affirmative action and "Citizen Plus" *not* perform this task adequately? Or are they always likely to be corrupted by nationalist movements such as those that produced Nazism and apartheid? Kuper's example of the disruptive Afrikaners is telling. The problem here may be one of definition, but the issue goes a good deal farther when the intrinsic meaninglessness of arguing for special prior rights comes into play. Groups the world over have been invaded and conquered, usually with devastating consequences. The difficulty we find ourselves in currently is that it is unpalatable to watch on the sidelines while those recently conquered suffer a fate shared by millions throughout history whose societies have disintegrated. In a liberal Western democracy, we prefer to soften the blow with seemingly racist policies while doing very little to prevent the inevitable outcome: the loss of a distinct way of life in favour of supporting the majority status quo. We justify our complacency with Darwinian arguments about the survival of the fittest or the principles of democracy while making the most of the development opportunities that arise. In the end, only an adherence to the notion of human rights gives us the semblance of moral progress.

The position of anthropology in this debate is decidedly uncomfortable. In its guise as the discipline interested in cultural diversity, it could be construed as the academic wing of the indigenous rights movement, whose role is to advocate the rights of vulnerable cultural minorities. Anthropology is also motivated by the relativist argument that all cultures must be respected as equal. This is only one side of the anthropological coin, however. The inseparable other is understanding human commonality. How do we accommodate the two? Kuper's position may well be the only tenable one, yet it does not address the inequality we are left with in the wake of misguided, misplaced, or blatantly racist policies of the past. Nor does it appear to safeguard us from the perpetuation of an often racially biased status quo and the seemingly inevitable erosion of diversity.

ALCIDA RITA RAMOS
SQN 107, Bloco 1, Apto. 601, Brasília, D.F. 70 743-090, Brazil (arramos@unb.br). 6 I 03

One wonders what the point of Kuper's paper really is. Is it a criticism of cultural diversity, a protest against self-serving NGOs, or a repudiation of pseudo-ethnic claims? Perhaps it is all three together. His discomfort with the term "indigenous" is understandable, but to say that its usage by "the indigenous peoples movement" is a euphemism for "what used to be termed 'primitive'" is to blame the conquered for the conqueror's bad language. Similarly, if the "image of the primitive is often constructed today to suit the Greens and the antiglob-

alization movement" it is hardly the fault of the indigenous peoples. This phrase, added to another about the "agitation by NGOs, with their international connections," is reminiscent of the rhetoric of some oppressive governments that, in disclaiming the political agency of indigenous peoples, attribute their actions to the manipulative powers of non-Indian agitators. One can see why such a cliché is used by authoritarian governments, but coming from an anthropologist it is, to say the least, puzzling.

Again, Kuper asserts that " 'culture' has become a common euphemism for 'race.' " With no further clarification this statement becomes yet another cliché, lacking the depth and elegance of Verena Stolcke's (1995) analysis of what she called "cultural fundamentalism," the crypto-racism that plagues Western Europe today. To put in the same category indigenous claims for legitimate difference, Nazi racism, and South African apartheid is to miss the point of differential power. In other words, to put Western powers of conquest on an equal footing with ethnic demands for recognition is either to ignore or to minimize the violence of Western expansion. True, there are plenty of conflicting situations in which ethnic groups are pitted against each other for or against development (or local investment along the lines described by Sahlins [1992] as "develop-man"). Such are the risks of hasty generalizations.

Kuper generalizes about the motivations of indigenous peoples, about NGOs, about national situations, and about anthropologists. Behind the politically correct criticisms of "essentialist ideologies" there is an embrace of development that does not withstand critical analysis (Rist 1997, Perrot et al. 1992). Kuper seems concerned that indigenous movements will rock the boat: "Wherever special land and hunting rights have been extended to so-called indigenous peoples, local ethnic frictions are exacerbated." This argument is akin to the subterfuge according to which miserable British workers were quite contented with their lot until Marx came along. Perhaps the aftermath of apartheid has cautioned Kuper against the mess caused by ethnic battles, but in Latin America we cringe at the paper's final statement: "The conventional lines of argument currently used to justify 'indigenous' land claims rely on obsolete anthropological notions and on a romantic and false ethnographic vision. Fostering essentialist ideologies of culture and identity, they may have dangerous political consequences." "Obsolete," "romantic," "false" are all adjectives that require much demonstration lest they remain at the sublevel of insults.

Poor argumentation contributes to the paper's sour flavor. The repeated attempts to reduce complex issues to simple statements can be illustrated in two examples. One is the contradiction between the disparaging rejection of the use of the Cree shamanic idiom as legal evidence for land rights and his charge that, in making their legal claims, indigenous spokespeople "ironically enough . . . do so in the idiom of Western culture theory." From this perspective it seems that indigenous peoples can never win. The other example is the following non

sequitur: "Since the representations of identity are so far from the realities on the ground and since the relative wealth of the NGOs and the locals is so disparate, these movements are unlikely to be democratic." First of all, it would be remarkable if representations and realities actually coincided. As for the rest of the sentence, I confess that the logic escapes me. If NGOs were as deprived as the locals, what utility would they have? I also fail to see what democracy has to do with ideal versus real and the amount of NGO resources. Moreover, are spokespeople unrepresentative everywhere? Are new identities fabricated wherever they emerge? Are NGOs well off everywhere?

Particularly regarding the thorny issue of ethnic resurgence what we need is serious anthropological research, rather than casual generalizations, and open-minded anthropologists who neither adopt indigenous causes as an article of faith nor reject ethnic struggles as racist manipulations by unscrupulous opportunists. What is an appropriate analysis for South Africa will not be for Amazonia. The enormous differences in historical trajectories, political conjunctures, and local responses should prevent us from assuming that in telling one story we tell them all. This capacity to address broad issues without losing sight of "the realities on the ground" is, after all, a major asset of our anthropological training.

STEVEN ROBINS
Department of Sociology, University of Stellenbosch, Private Bag X1, 7602 Matieland, South Africa (robins@netactive.co.za). 15 I 03

Kuper's article is an eloquent critique of the essentializing tendencies of the discourses promoted by indigenous peoples movements, and it raises some troubling questions. For example, does the radical disjuncture between indigenous identity narratives and everyday lived realities delegitimize the indigenous rights movement? Who is to authenticate and legitimize these narratives?

Kuper's caricature of indigenous rights activists as misguided romantics does not do justice to the rhetorics and strategic priorities of activist logics. Mainstream activists, NGOs, development consultants, and trade unionists regularly essentialize their "clients"—"subsistence farmers," "female-headed households," "working class," and so on—without necessarily discrediting their political projects. Indeed, such rhetorical strategies often make for effective activism. Gayatri Spivak's concept of "strategic essentialism" is useful for understanding such situated activist logics (see Robins 2001*b*). Moreover, essentialist constructions of identity are not necessarily incompatible with an active embrace of the contradictions of modernity and its bittersweet fruits.

Although ethnographic examples of the integration of modern, industrial technologies into indigenous cultural repertoires—"indigenous modernities"—represent a significant challenge to the Western dichotomy between "the traditional" and "the modern," such binary thinking persists. For example, the San are still expected to perform as authentic "bushmen" in their everyday lives if anthropologists and land-claims judges are not to dismiss their identity claims as false and opportunistic. No one expects "the English" to perform their Englishness; being English allows one both to be "modern" and to make claims on an idealized English past of kings and queens, castles, medieval villages, and pastoral landscapes.

As Sahlins (1999:140) notes, the survival of indigenous peoples is often dependent on modern means of production, transportation, and communication that they pay for with money acquired from public transfer payments, resource royalties, wage labour, or commercial fishing. Rather than being swallowed up by the homogenizing forces of modernity and globalization, however, many of them recast their dependencies on modern means of production in order to reconstitute their own cultural ideas and practices (1999:ix). Similarly, indigenous groups are drawing on the resources of a global civil society to reconstitute themselves as "traditional communities." Kuper seems to expect indigenous peoples to conform to their primordial identity narratives in their everyday lives when they often find themselves having to respond to contradictory demands that they be both Late Stone Age survivors and modern citizens of the nation-state.

It is unlikely that activists' "benign essentialism" constitutes a threat to democracy as Kuper suggests, and surely it is inappropriate to compare San and Inuit identity politics to the violent outbursts of ethno-nationalism, racism, autochthony, and xenophobia in parts of Europe and Africa. Finally, is "a drift to racism" really "inevitable where so-called cultural identity becomes a basis for rights"? I think not. Let me illustrate my argument by drawing on the case of the South African San.

During the 1980s, anti-apartheid activists focused on populist class-based forms of political mobilization and popular land struggles rather than on "cultural" struggles. Intellectuals in the popular left tended to be dismissive of such struggles; from their perspective (see Magubane 1973, Mafeje 1971, Boonzaier and Sharp 1988) ethnicity and "tribalism" constituted forms of "false consciousness" promoted by the architects of Pretoria's homelands and separate-development policies. With the end of apartheid, "ethnicity" and "race" replaced "class" as the keywords of the new official political discourse, and NGOs and indigenous peoples' organizations began to promote self-determination and cultural rights for indigenous peoples. It was in this context that "indigenous" Nama, San, and Griqua ethnic revitalization movements took place.

In 1999 members of the " ≠khomani San community" achieved the return to them of land in and around the Kalahari Gemsbok National Park from which they had been forcibly removed in the 1960s.[1] Many of them had been regularly performing for tourists at a "bushman"

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1. The land restitution act does not recognize "tribes" or "indigenous" or "aboriginal" land rights. Achievement of restitution is possible only for individuals or communities that were forcibly removed through racially based legislation subsequent to 1913.

village a few hundred kilometres from Cape Town, and their repertoire of performances was strategically deployed during the land-claim process. The 1999 land handover ceremony was the culmination of extensive NGO lobbying of government and massive media coverage that helped the ≠khomani San land claim "jump the line" in a process in which tens of thousands of claims were competing for attention. A senior Department of Land Affairs (DLA) official in Pretoria told me that the case had been prioritized by the minister of land affairs and the president in an attempt to acknowledge the wounds of San genocide and land and cultural dispossession. It had captured the president's vision of the African Renaissance and the government's desire for recognition as a leader in the promotion of human rights in Africa. Essentialist constructions of San cultural continuity by the ≠khomani San, the South African San Institute, the media, and the government fuelled this agenda and provided a group of superexploited and hypermarginalized ex-farm workers and their families with visibility and support that strengthened their case. This was indeed an instance of "strategic essentialism" in action.

For Kuper, while the motivation for such interventions by activists and indigenous movements may be "generous," their political consequences are generally undesirable. If we were to accept his gloomy prognosis, it would make sense to lobby the South African government to call off its land-reform programme. To deny communities access to significant material resources as reparations for past injustices because they deploy essentialist ideologies of culture and identity would be a serious disservice to a tradition of anthropology and activism that has sought to reconcile a "cultural politics of recognition" with redistributive justice. Deconstructing essentialist ideologies of culture and identity should be merely a first step toward understanding and situating local constructions of "truth," not the goal of anthropological practice. Surely anthropology should not strive to reduce subaltern voices and histories to a sanitized and standardized version of the anthropologist's "truth." Kuper's masterful analysis of global discourses on indigeneity fails to convey a sense of the unruly and contested character of the creation of histories and identities "from below." Is this thorough dismissal of the logics of indigenous identity politics a sign of a growing desire to return to good old-fashioned ethnographic authority?

JAMES SUZMAN
*African Studies Centre, Cambridge University,
Cambridge CB2 3RQ, U.K. (jms209@cam.ac.uk).*
5 I 03

Despite the fact that the indigenous rights doctrine is out of step with much contemporary anthropological thinking, few anthropologists have openly criticized it. Of the few who have, most have been careful to add the caveat that their critique is intended for theoretical consumption only. To this extent Kuper's piece is a welcome contribution to debate on an issue that has avoided confronting the implications of some potentially critical problems. Indigenousness, as Kuper shows, is no more a justification for claiming special rights in perpetuity than having red hair, white skin, or blue blood.

It would of course be easy to overlook the theoretical poverty of the indigenous rights discourse were it a universally effective tool for solving those problems it sets out to deal with, viz., the precarious status of nominally indigenous minorities in some countries. While the indigenous rights message has arguably benefited minority populations in the Americas and the Antipodes, its invocation elsewhere has sometimes been counterproductive. The precarious status of San peoples in southern Africa, for example, shows first that it is not always possible to identify who is indigenous and who is not, secondly that those peoples best placed to claim the privileges due to indigenes are not necessarily those most in need of assistance, and thirdly that a focus on indigenousness may well reinforce the very structures of discrimination that disadvantage these peoples in the first place (Suzman 2001, 2002).

Indigenous rights instruments claim what credibility they have mainly because of their applicability to situations in which the descendents of indigenous peoples form clearly identifiable and, most important, conspicuously marginalized minorities. Were the special "rights" and privileges demanded in ILO 169 bestowed upon indigenous populations that formed empowered majorities they would be considered discriminatory and offensive. As Kuper points out, the same broad conception of culture underwrites both the indigenous rights movement and the political ideology of Europe's far right. While it is a somewhat crude comparison, the language of ancestry, bodily substance, and land that Ingold (2002) shows to be at the heart of the indigenous rights narrative is not dissimilar to the Nazis' "blood and land" slogan still popular among right-wing groups. Given that few European proponents of indigenous rights would consider such thinking acceptable or appropriate in their homelands, this suggests that the contemporary indigenous rights discourse is the progeny of a worldview that conceptually differentiates a First World ordered around market forces and civil society from a Third World composed of organic islands of discrete culture (Chanock 2000). Kuper is clearly correct to assert that indigenous is a contemporary gloss for "primitive."

Key concepts in the indigenous rights narrative are derived from a conspicuously "Western" lexicon. Thus, for many "indigenous" people, the formal assertion of their rights as indigenes often involves the novel invocation or reconceptualization of concepts such as "history," "culture," and "tradition." Culture in these instances ceases to be grounded in a continuity of practice and instead becomes the primary vehicle for the articulation of identity. Interestingly, situations portrayed as battles for "cultural survival" by the indigenous rights movement are often considered by the people concerned to be battles about livelihood, liberty, poverty alleviation, and access to development or social services. In-

deed, when and if culture enters into local narratives, it is usually as an adjunct to other concerns. Southern Africa's San people are frustrated not because they cannot pursue their "traditional culture" but because they are impoverished, marginalized, and exploited by the dominant population.

Thus, while the indigenous rights message may provide succour to Europeans anxious to convince themselves of the sanctity of other ways of being and doing, it also fuels ethnic tensions in Third World states attempting to build a national identity from the debris of colonial fiefdoms. As a result, proponents of an unsophisticated indigenous rights message are easily dismissed by anxious Third World governments as uninformed and arrogant neocolonials.

Many ethnically fragmented African states that have had to cope with the legacy of colonial divide-and-rule policies have developed flexible and imaginative approaches to addressing the tensions experienced by their peoples between their status as "citizens" on the one hand and their status as "subjects" on the other (Mamdani 1996). Debate on the question of collective versus individual rights in these states is inevitably bound by the immediate need to develop practically effective policies towards the accommodation of minority concerns. Not unsurprisingly, these debates expose the tautological twists and loops of the "rights conundrum" (see Nhlapo 1999) that has hamstrung the ratification of the UN's declaration on the rights of indigenous people. They also suggest that any further elaborations on the basic individual human rights doctrine must be responsive to local peculiarities rather than the pursuit of universal applicability. Broad critiques such as Kuper's may stimulate those involved in minority rights issues to generate alternative approaches to dealing with the problems experienced by marginalized minorities.

Reply

ADAM KUPER
Uxbridge, U.K. 3 II 03

Suzman remarks that "the indigenous rights doctrine is out of step with much contemporary anthropological thinking." This is true, although it must be admitted that it is thoroughly in step with certain strands of cultural theory. Some commentators, however, take the view that academic judgements on the premises and logic of the doctrine are neither here nor there—that perhaps the rhetoric does come across as essentialist and romantic but, as Robbins remarks, "such rhetorical strategies often make for effective activism."

Unfortunately, activism, however well-intentioned, does not always work out for the best. The case studies I summarize in my paper indicate, hardly surprisingly, that if policies are based upon fantasies about primordial hunters rather than on local realities they are liable to

have unfortunate consequences. And a misleading rhetoric is bound to have its costs. Suzman points out that the indigenist discourse promotes stereotypes of primitive tribesfolk. In consequence it "may well reinforce the very structures of discrimination that disadvantage these peoples in the first place." Appeals to "culture" may persuade Western audiences, but they can completely drown out the voices of local people. As Suzman notes, San people in Southern Africa "are frustrated not because they cannot pursue their 'traditional culture' but because they are impoverished, marginalized, and exploited by the dominant population."

Perhaps, then, the rhetoric may be not only bad anthropology but bad tactics as well. Ramos warns, however, that any criticisms should be muted. Critics provide ammunition to sinister forces with decidedly unpleasant agendas, including "some oppressive governments that, in disclaiming the political agency of indigenous peoples, attribute their actions to the manipulative powers of non-Indian agitators." I accept that this is a real problem, but I am reluctant to go along with self-censorship. Are we to tell our students that for political reasons we—and they—should pretend to believe in ideas that have no intellectual justification? Must we criticize Victorian evolutionism when it is invoked to justify discrimination against a minority population but endorse it, or keep silent, when this logic is put to use to support land claims on behalf of the same minority? Should we ignore history for fear of undermining myths of autochthony?

Even if we could accurately weigh up the medium- and long-term political costs and benefits of saying this or that, our business should be to deliver accurate accounts of social processes. If anthropology becomes, as Plaice remarks, "the academic wing of the indigenous rights movement," if we report only what is convenient and refrain from analysing intellectual confusions, then our ethnographies will be worthless except as propaganda. Even as propaganda they will have a rapidly diminishing value, since the integrity of ethnographic studies will be increasingly questioned by the informed public.

Omura and Robbins raise the possibility that the indigenist rhetoric can be self-correcting. Imaginative new twists may be introduced, adapted to local circumstances. (An interesting example involving the Canadian Inuit is presented in Morin [2001].) Beth Conklin describes such a case in her contribution to the recent *American Anthropologist* symposium "Indigenous Rights Movements" (Hodgson 2002*a*)[2]. Conventional environmental arguments in favour of land grants to indigenous peoples are discredited in Brazil. Indigenous leaders have been implicated in too many well-publicized instances of ecological vandalism. Some activists therefore choose rather to emphasize the ancient folk wisdom of shamans. As Conklin explains, this allows

2. The introductory essay (Hodgson 2002*b*) reviews recent literature. This issue appeared after my paper had been circulated for commentary.

them "to construct new discourses about indigenous peoples' identities" by appealing to fashionable ideas about "indigenous knowledge." She points out further strategic advantages. Brazilian nationalists were reluctant to alienate vast swaths of forest to particular ethnic minorities, but they are happy to agree that native experts have some sort of collective copyright in ancient medical lore. Awkward questions about political representation can also be avoided: "Whereas the figure of the 'chief' can raise the empirically testable question of whether a certain individual has or deserves his people's support," Conklin suggests, "the figure of the shaman circumvents such questions" (2002:1053–55). In other words, spiritual leaders are not required to be democrats. This is creative enough, but I do not see that the new doctrines represent a more reliable basis for social policy than the old pieties of the indigenist movement.

Omura and Ramos emphasize, very properly, that not all indigenous movements are the same, which I would have thought a good argument against saddling them all with the same ideology. A number of recent ethnographies do bring out the specifics of local situations and examine the strategies of particular state agencies of NGOs. In an exemplary essay published in the recent *American Anthropologist* symposium, Kirk Dombrowski lays out the interplay between U.S. government agencies, agro-businesses, and native leaders in the development of the Alaska Native Timber policies. He finds that industrial timber and pulp producers in southeastern Alaska recognize Native claims for tactical reasons, since this helps them to evade environmental laws that were intended to curb production. He also reports that "two classes of Natives" have emerged, one made up of people who became shareholders in terms of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 and the other of people, born afterwards and known as "New Natives," who are not shareholders and do not share in the profits of the native corporations. Locally led evangelical Christian churches are now organizing a popular opposition to the indigenist movement (Dombrowski 2002).

But while local case studies are often illuminating, various indigenist movements do share many features, both ideological and tactical. In part this is because American and Canadian activists have fostered a common approach, and the role of international agencies and NGOs deserves more scholarly attention than it is getting. Several anthropologists have related the emergence of the indigenous peoples movement to an even more widespread fashion for movements of ethnic assertion. Attempts have been made to identify the global forces that produce them (see, e.g., Friedman 1994, Hannerz 1996). The example of racial and ethnic movements in the U.S.A., the end of the cold war, and the rise of NGOs are all relevant. The Internet has become the indispensable medium of internationalization. Big business sometimes intervenes, although I doubt that it is helpful to attribute the current wave of indigenist movements to the mysterious workings of an otherwise poorly defined process of "globalization" or to the malign workings of "late capitalism" that Dombrowski invokes. Perhaps capitalism is not as late as all that. Certainly globalization is neither as new nor as global as is widely assumed. The discourse on globalization recalls Victorian ideas about the inexorable spread of civilization. Like the old enemies of civilization, those who inveigh against globalization seem to expect the Noble Savage to stand in its way, like Obelix the Gaul hurling menhirs at the Romans.

Finally, Plaice expresses the fear that we may be forced "to watch on the sidelines while those recently conquered suffer a fate shared by millions throughout history whose societies have disintegrated." Yet she herself has demonstrated that ethnographers can contribute fresh and realistic definitions of social problems by coolly analysing the fluid and complex situations on the ground and dissecting the goals of various agents. Such studies clarify the pros and cons of specific public policies, and that is a worthwhile objective.

I am grateful to the colleagues who have responded to my paper and helped to advance the argument.

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