

## Bushmen

The hunter-gatherers of southern Africa known as ‘Bushmen’ or ‘San’ are not one single ethnic group, but several. They speak a diverse variety of languages, and have many different settlement patterns, kinship systems and economic practices. The fact that we think of them as a unity is not as strange as it may seem, for they share a common origin: they are an original hunter-gatherer population of southern Africa with a history of many thousands of years on the subcontinent.

Drawing on his four decades of field research in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa, Alan Barnard provides a detailed account of Bushmen or San, covering ethnography, archaeology, folklore, religious studies and rock-art studies as well as several other fields. Its wide coverage includes social development and politics, both historically and in the present day, helping us to reconstruct both human prehistory and a better understanding of ourselves.

ALAN BARNARD is Emeritus Professor of the Anthropology of Southern Africa at the University of Edinburgh. He has over 40 years’ experience of field research with Bushmen or San in Botswana, Namibia and South Africa. His publications include *Language in Prehistory* (2016), *Genesis of Symbolic Thought* (2012) and *Social Anthropology and Human Origins* (2011), all published by Cambridge University Press.

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## *Kalahari Hunter-Gatherers and Their Descendants*

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Alan Barnard

*University of Edinburgh*



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## Preface

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This book represents nearly a lifetime of research on Bushmen. The research has been enjoyable, and so has the teaching, both in the Department of Social Anthropology and in the Centre of African Studies at the University of Edinburgh. I thank the University for its many years of support in this endeavour.

But most of all, I thank the Bushmen, San, Basarwa, Kua or N/uakhoe themselves, *collectively*. That is probably the way at least most of them would want to be thanked. Many have suffered a great deal, as governments have repeatedly let them down. It is not easy to live as a hunter-gatherer, and pursuing that lifestyle means giving up the accumulation of wealth in favour of having more free time. That may sound great, but it does mean making considerable sacrifices and, above all, being grossly misunderstood by outsiders. Throughout history, Bushmen have had to put up with discrimination as well as vile insinuation and threats of imprisonment and death. Happily, things are better now than they once were, but we should always remember that our own ancestors were also once *pure* hunter-gatherers. And by ‘our ancestors’, I really do mean the ancestors of all human beings on the planet.

So what do ‘we’ call ‘them’? In the past I have occasionally used *San*, which is common in South Africa and in Namibia. It is also especially common among archaeologists. I shall occasionally, where appropriate, use it in this book too. I have sometimes used *Kua* or *N/uakhoe*, which are preferred terms in some languages. Here though, I shall generally use *Bushmen*. This term is very well known and can always, as here, be used without prejudice. *San* is especially common in government circles. *Bushmen* is more common among Bushmen themselves and with NGOs. However, because of past discrimination, virtually every term has its drawbacks. *San*, for example, is recorded as meaning ‘vagabond’ or ‘rascal’ in the language from which it comes. It is also grammatically problematic, as it is spelled incorrectly. It is in theory common gender plural and is not *originally* meant as an ethnic group name at all. Originally, it probably did mean something like ‘food-gatherer’ and probably is best spelled (in the plural) *saan* or *sān*. The ‘doubled vowel’ or macron indicates a change in tone in the Khoekhoe language (Khoekhoegowab). The word is quite unknown in the only dialect of Khoekhoe that might be expected to have it:

Hai//om (or in conventional Khoekhoe orthography, Hai||om, with a vertical double-stroke click symbol). That group is also sometimes known as ≠Akhoe or ≠Ākhoe. I shall not bother with the Khoekhoe preference for vertical click symbols though. For the sake of consistency, I shall use slanted symbols in all languages. And without meaning any harm, I use my own preferred word: *Bushmen*. This term is now gaining popularity again in some Bushman areas of the Kalahari. That is, some Bushmen now employ it to refer to themselves.

I finished my PhD in 1976, and I finished the book that is based on it in 1992. Both are very heavily referenced: the PhD thesis because that is the nature of the beast, and the book, I suppose, because I was still showing off. One reviewer commented that in the latter I had cited more than 600 books and articles, many in languages other than English. The present book will have fewer, if only because the Internet makes unnecessary reference citation a little less important. The population of Namibia at the time I started this book, in late 2016, was 2,522,325: I know because I looked it up on the Internet! That sort of reference is not necessarily worth citing by date and page.

I gratefully acknowledge the British Academy, the Economic and Social Research Council, the European Science Foundation, the James A. Swan Fund, the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science, the National Science Foundation, the Nuffield Foundation, the University of Edinburgh and my parents, all for their generous financial support. I am also grateful to the Office of the President of Botswana and to the governments of Namibia and South Africa for enabling my work.

Lastly here, let me acknowledge the kindness of the many *non-Bushmen* who have aided my Bushman or San research through the years. Probably there are too many to name, so I will simply list here some of them. A few are now deceased, and some helped so long ago that they will not remember. Yet I am grateful to them all: John Argyle, Joy Barnard, Megan Bieseke, Gertrud Boden, Maitseo Bolaane, Peter Bradley, John Brearly, Peter Carstens, Liz Cashdan, Wallace Craill, Janette Deacon, Jim Denbow, Mary Douglas, Tom Dowson, Anne-Maria Fehn, Maurice Freedman, Jack Goody, Rob Gordon, Julie Grant, Tom Güldemann, Mathias Guenther, Willi Haacke, Doc Heinz, Roger Hewitt, Bob Hitchcock, Kazunobu Ikeya, Ray Inskeep, Hiroaki Izumi, Pieter Jolly, Aglaja Kempinski, Sue Kent, Klaus Keuthmann, Chris Knight, Adam Kuper, Jessica Kuper, Blesswell Kure, Jenny Lawy, Bob Layton, Richard Lee, David Lewis-Williams, Bill McGregor, Kennedy McIntyre, John Marshall, Lorna Marshall, Junko Maruyama, Bob Murry, Ellen Murry, Hiroshi Nakagawa, Emmanuelle Olivier, John Parkington, Motsamae Phiri, Camilla Power, Rick Rohde, Karim Sadr, Beatrice Sandelowsky, Sidsel Saugestad, Isaac Schapera, George Silberbauer, Pippa Skotnes, Jan Snyman, Anne Solomon, Jackie Solway, Hendrik Steyn, Kazuyoshi Sugawara, Sian Sullivan, James Suzman, Akira Takada, Jiro Tanaka, Mike Taylor, Phillip Tobias, Tony Traill, Carlos

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I dedicated my last book to the Naro and their language. This book therefore probably needs no such dedication. But let us hope that the Naro language does survive another 100 years. As I hope to show in this book, language is highly significant for identity, and not least for Bushmen, whose languages contain not only a sense of identity but also so much wisdom from the past.

## Pronunciation and Orthography

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For many people, the correct pronunciation of Bushman words seems to be difficult. Yet, in fact, things are not necessarily as difficult as one might imagine. There are at most five basic clicks, and these are always at the beginning of words or at least at the beginning of morphemes, never in the middle or at the end. Sometimes orthographic rules kick in, though, so that a word may begin with a ‘g’ or an ‘n’, for example. This just indicates that given click is respectively voiced or nasalized. Sometimes the ‘g’ or ‘n’ is placed after the click symbol, sometimes before, but in general this really does not matter. There is rarely any difference in pronunciation. An apostrophe means a glottal stop, as might a question mark with the dot below missing.

Let me go through the basics, bearing in mind that the rules of the most difficult languages, such as !Xoõ (the tilde on the ‘o’ meaning nasalized) and Ju/’hoan, may make things a little more complicated. The final ‘n’ on the latter is just another way of indicating nasalization. It was the preference of the linguist who standardized the orthography, the late Patrick Dickens. The ‘j’ in the word is meant to be pronounced [ʒ], as in ‘treasure’.

Finally, there are a few complications in the Khoekhoe language, which among Bushmen is spoken only by one group, the Hai//om. I shall leave discussion of that language until the end. Further details are given in my *Hunters and Herders of Southern Africa* (Barnard 1992a: xviii–xxv) and similarly in *Anthropology and the Bushman* (Barnard 2007a: 8–10), but those details are not so important now. They include various click releases, such as ‘h’, ‘x’ and ‘q’, placed after the click.

Here are the five clicks and where, geographically, they occur. They are presented in the customary order, which is, in terms of the point of articulation, from front to back of the mouth.

- ⊙ This is the so-called kiss click. It is a kissing sound, produced on the lips. More technically, it is the bilabial click. Found only in Southern Bushman languages.
- / This is the ‘tisk’ click. Use it twice to express annoyance or disappointment: ‘tisk tisk’. It is alveolar-dental, produced on the teeth or just behind

- them. This is the ‘c’ in Zulu, Xhosa and other Nguni languages. Sometimes this and other slanted-line clicks are written with vertical strokes: |. This is always the case in Khoekhoe, although in this book I will standardize the usage by showing only slanted strokes. The only exception is in the list below where I discuss ‘official’ usage in Khoekhoe.
- ≠ The alveolar click. Produced in the same place, though with the blade or your tongue rather than the tip.
  - // The ‘giddy-up’ click. Use it twice to make your horse go! Sometimes called the lateral click, since it is always produced on the side of the mouth (mine is always on the right side, but yours may be on the left). This is the ‘x’ in Zulu, Xhosa and other Nguni languages, as in the word ‘Xhosa’.
  - ! The ‘pop’ click. More technically, the palatal, cerebral or retroflex click. Simply make a loud ‘pop’ by drawing the tip of your tongue quickly from the roof of your mouth. This is the ‘q’ in Zulu, Xhosa and other Nguni languages.

Other anomalies sometimes occur in Bushman orthography. Normally these revolve around the use of the intrusive ‘k’, which may be there phonetically but which is not necessary orthographically. Therefore it is not (in general) used in this book except in quotations. The official motto of the Republic of South Africa, for example, is *!Ke e: /xarra //ke* (officially translated as ‘Diverse people unite’). Other phonetic symbols are all standard ones, as now employed by the International Phonetic Association (IPA). For example, an ‘x’ is a voiceless velar fricative, not to be confused with the ‘x’ of Nguni languages: the latter being the click //. Some authors use idiosyncratic spellings, but I simply use the most common. Where there exists an ‘official’ orthography, such as in Ju/’hoan, I stick to it. The *-si* added to the word Ju/’hoan simply makes the word plural. In theory, plurals may be added to other words, but by convention only Ju/’hoan does this. Occasionally, one will see Bantu prefixes. The most common are in the Tswana language, where *Bo-* refers to the country, *Se-* to the language, and *Mo-* (singular) and *Ba-* (plural) to people.

One further complication regarding ‘official’ usage. In Hai//om (Hai||om), which is a dialect of Khoekhoe or Nama-Damara, orthography follows the rules of Khoekhoe. Since this language makes no distinction between voiced and voiceless consonants, normal ‘voiced’ and ‘voiceless’ rules are not followed. Rather, the rules are as follows:

- | In the *standard* Khoisan orthography, this would be given as /’. In other words, the Hai//om glottal stop is *not written* but is there *only in speech*. Hai//om is pronounced (with the morpheme division added) phonetically [hai-//’om] or in the plural [hai-//’om-n]. In the dialect itself, the // would be written with the click vertically, as is standard in Khoekhoe

orthography. However, I do not bother with writing clicks vertically in reference to the Hai//om dialect, since this would be inconsistent with usage in this book generally.

- [g] In standard Khoisan orthography, this would simply be / . The ‘g’, which would otherwise mean voicing, is in Hai//om (likewise, other dialects of Khoekhoe) there simply to indicate *the lack of* a glottal stop. The ‘g’ here, by convention, is placed *after* rather than *before* the click symbol. Likewise, with the ‘n’ in a nasal click: |n.

All Khoekhoe dialects use the macron to indicate a ‘doubled vowel’, in other words, one with two tones, either rising-falling or falling-rising. An example is the word ‘San’, or more correctly, ‘Sān’ or ‘sān’, meaning ‘Bushman’. This word, incidentally, is unknown in Khoekhoe dialects today. It occurred, though, in the now extinct ones formerly spoken in the Cape: usually in the masculine plural form and written as ‘Soaqua’ or ‘Sonqua’.

Finally, in this book I have done my best to avoid unnecessary diacritics: for example, in a word like ≠Hoã or ≠Hoan I prefer to keep the tilde to indicate nasalization, but I avoid accents otherwise. However, with the word Ju/’hoansi, which has the same nasal sound, I keep to the official and now well-known orthography. All the ethnographers of the Ju/’hoansi do prefer to use the word in full, so it would be strange for me not to do so. Likewise, the northern Ju/’hoan group who call themselves !Xun are called that here, because this is in the official orthography. These (northern) !Xun are not to be confused with the !Xoǝ, an entirely different (southern) group. Phonetically, the former is [!xũ], and the latter is [!xoǝ].

I apologize for any confusion, but it is best to get the pronunciation straight first. It is no wonder that one expert (Traill 1974: 9) recorded the name for !Xoǝ variously (and probably jokingly) as !ku, !kō, !kū, Koon, Lala, /ɲu/en, ’//ɲa<sup>h</sup>msa, tuu’⊙ɲa<sup>h</sup>nsa, !xong, //no, Tshasi and more than a dozen other possibilities. I just use !Xoǝ. Traill’s suggestion of ‘Koon’ is not as odd as it may seem, for it is fairly common to skip an initial click and use a ‘K’ instead. Much easier to pronounce!