

Continuity, Representation, Redress

Khoi-San Testimony on Land Expropriation

In February 2018, the Parliament of South Africa established a committee to explore whether and how to “make it possible for the state to expropriate land in the public interest without compensation.”¹ In order to hear testimony from across South African society, the committee organized public hearings in all provinces from 26 June to 4 August 2018.² Many spoke of how white farmers — less than 9% of South Africa’s population — still own 67% of the land a quarter-century after the end of apartheid.³ Redistributing this land, for many, is a clear step toward redress of historical injustices perpetuated by white settler colonialism. Others invoked the specter of Zimbabwe, where land seizures led to economic freefall and long-term political instability. While few testifying before the committee opposed land reform in principle, many argued against the arbitrary abrogation of property rights and the concomitant sprawl of government power.

On 6 September 2018, the committee heard seven hours of oral submissions in Cape Town. One of the first to testify was the head of Indigenous First Nation Advocacy South Africa (IFNASA), Anthony Williams, who claimed to represent the Khoi-San community. Williams argued in favor of land expropriation without compensation. For him, this meant not just amending the constitution to correct for the injustices of apartheid (which only really began after

¹ From a parliamentary press release on 27 February 2018, available at <https://www.parliament.gov.za/press-releases/national-assembly-gives-constitution-review-committee-mandate-review-section-25-constitution>.

² See the program of hearings available at https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/uploaded-files/2018/june/20-06-2018/Updated_CRC_Public_Hearings_Sec_25_2018_15062018.pdf.

³ These figures come from the University of the Western Cape’s Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, available at <https://www.plaas.org.za/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/No1%20Fact%20check%20web.pdf>.

World War II) but also to allow for land claims prior to 1913. Williams decried the focus on Bantu-speaking communities and further asked why his submission was the only one heard from the Khoi-San community. Committee members in turn expressed skepticism over Khoi-San claims to indigeneity, concern over racial stratification, and suggestions of alternative recourse for the redress sought.

This vignette serves to frame my paper. I will attempt to corral a teeming mass of evidence to provide some kind of response to two questions prompted by Williams' testimony. First, when and why are Khoi-San land claims expressed? Second, how and why are they received? The framework of my investigation follows the three concepts mentioned in my title: continuity, representation, and redress. The first section will thus explore the history of South Africa from 1652 to 1994 to help understand the kinds of continuity and rupture experienced by the Khoi-San. The second section will focus on representation of the Khoi-San in the quarter-century since the end of apartheid in 1994. In each section, I do not want to reproduce the wealth of scholarship that has preceded me. Instead, I illustrate several examples that will help guide us back to the testimony of Anthony Williams before the Constitutional Review Committee. Through these examples, we will begin to discern common tropes that undergird discussions about the Khoi-San: allochrony, continuity, "truth and reconciliation" nationalism, and strategic essentialism. I contend that to understand Anthony Williams' testimony, and hence the situation of the Khoi-San in contemporary South Africa, we must be sensitive not just to immediate cause-and-effect (as with political debates over the Khoi-San today) but also to alterity and the *longue durée* of history. This process of talking and listening to the Khoi-San sheds light on questions of redress in South Africa and around the world.

Continuity (1652–1994)

Who are the Khoi-San?⁴ Let us begin with a simpler question. What exactly does “Khoi-San” refer to? Historically, this designates the two communities of the Khoikhoi and the San — which are glosses of the earlier terms “Hottentots” and “Bushmen.”⁵ These words were first used by European settlers to refer to the Cape’s indigenous peoples. Economic or occupational lines traditionally distinguish the two groups: the Khoikhoi (Hottentots) are pastoralists (cattle-grazers) while the San (Bushmen) are hunter-gatherers. Calling these groups by a single name partly arose because of a perceived genealogical relationship between the languages spoken by the Khoikhoi and the San, though this link is no longer supported by most linguists.⁶ But the emergence of the fused “Khoi-San” is also a response to colonial violence that fundamentally changed (and eradicated) pre-colonial social formations and modes of subsistence.⁷

This colonial violence reached its apex in the late eighteenth century, as has been meticulously documented by Nigel Penn and Susan Newton-King.⁸ Mohamed Adhikari in turn has convincingly argued that this violence constituted a genocide of the San.⁹ Its consequences were terrible and far-reaching. To articulate the kind of ruptures experienced by the Khoikhoi and the San, let us turn for a moment to the example of the Cape’s northern frontier. Since even before the settlement of Cape Town in 1652 Europeans had engaged with the San and Khoikhoi,

⁴ Variants of this word include Khoe-San and Khoisan; I insist on the hyphen to highlight the difference between the two groups, but remain ambivalent about using “i” or “e.” On the latter issue see the older (and more conservative) but still informative Wilson, “Notes on the Nomenclature of the Khoisan”; Nienaber, “Khoekhoen: Spelling, Vorme, Betkenis.”

⁵ The naming of this group of people is a complicated and well-discussed issue; scholars differ widely on their choice of terminology. For particularly useful discussions of nomenclature see Gordon, *The Bushman Myth*, 4–8; de Prada-Samper, *On the Trail of Qing and Orpen*, 3; Newton-King, *Masters and Servants*, 6–7.

⁶ For a recent discussion of the linguistic issues, see Güldemann, *The Languages and Linguistics of Africa*, 106–7. In summary, he notes that “since no new versions of or evidence for a Khoisan hypothesis have grown out of any more recent scholarship, there is little empirical ground left for currently propagating such a family.”

⁷ An excellent microhistory that illustrates this process is Ross, *The Borders of Race*.

⁸ Penn, *The Forgotten Frontier*; Newton-King, *Masters and Servants*.

⁹ Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide*.

primarily to trade cattle.¹⁰ While relations were never entirely peaceful, for at least a hundred years there was nothing like a genocide. Eventually, though, Dutch settlers expanded away from Cape Town. Relations took a sharp turn for the worse after a Khoi-San rebellion in 1772. By the end of the century, even contemporary travelers remarked on the exceptional brutality of the Dutch-speaking farmers of the Cape. John Barrow (inaugurating a long history of British contempt not only for the natives but also for the Boers) described as much in his 1797 travel narrative:

The name of Bosjesman [Bushman] is held in horror and detestation; and a farmer thinks he cannot proclaim a more meritorious action than the murder of one of these people. A boor from Graff Reynet [Graaf-Reinet] being asked in the secretary's office, a few days before we left the town, if the savages were numerous or troublesome on the road, replied, he had only shot four, with as much composure and indifference as if he had been speaking of four partridges. I myself have heard one of the humane colonists boast of having destroyed with his own hands near three hundred of these unfortunate wretches.¹¹

In the face of such brutal violence, how could the Khoikhoi and San survive? What is clear is that their societies underwent immense, traumatic changes as the colonizers killed indigenous people, impressed them into forced labor, and raped them. Even those who survived lost much of their way of life. Hence, over the course of the nineteenth century Khoi-San stopped speaking their native languages and shifted towards agriculture and participation in a capitalist economy. To give just one example, by the twentieth century four out of five languages in the !Ui family were extinct. N!uu, the last extant language, has only three fluent speakers (although revitalization efforts are now underway in collaboration with the University of Cape Town).¹² In short, the late-eighteenth-century San genocide was imbricated in a kind of colonial assimilationism.

Popular (and some scholarly) accounts would have us believe that the only remnants of this

¹⁰ For detail on these early interactions see part 2 of the classic Elphick, *Kraal and Castle*.

¹¹ Barrow, *Travels*, 85.

¹² See educational materials like the trilingual reader by Shah and Brenzinger, *Ouma Geelmeid Ke Kx'u lxa!xa N!uu*.

lost people are the ethnographic notebooks kept by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd and the poignant rock art scattered throughout the Cape (more on these later). This is a tempting response to the horrific violence inflicted on the Khoi-San. But this line elides the very real continuities between Khoikhoi and San communities of the eighteenth century and present-day people of the Cape. This continuity is attested, for instance, by the stories recently collected by José Manuel de Prada-Samper in the Karoo:

Such tales were first documented among |xam hunter-gatherers in the 1870s by Wilhelm Bleek and Lucy Lloyd. Unexpectedly they have survived, affirming a strong and continuing tradition of oral storytelling in South Africa.¹³

Still, the Khoi-San today are not *identical* to the |xam of the 1870s: culture both persists *and* changes. Indeed, the stories de Prada-Samper collected are in Afrikaans, not a San language — a clear result of assimilation following the eighteenth-century genocide. One tempting narrative, then, is to assert the extinction of the Khoi-San; its opposite, uninterrupted continuity, is equally problematic.

Both these narratives are at heart stories about *time*. Archaeology, historical records, and ethnography — from tens of thousands of years to decades ago right through to the present — are melted down, amalgamated, and reforged as the myth of a timeless people. This process produces precisely what Johannes Fabian influentially termed *allochrony*: the “different Time” that non-Western peoples inhabit in the Western imagination. Fabian glosses allochrony as a “denial of coevalness” — that is, “a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse.”¹⁴ This temporality ensnares historians no less than anthropologists, as Dipesh Chakrabarty has eloquently articulated. Chakrabarty is particularly useful in juxtaposition with Fabian to

¹³ de Prada-Samper, *The Man Who Cursed the Wind*.

¹⁴ Fabian, *Time and the Other*, 31.

understand the ways in which time both “stands for a particular formation of the modern subject” and coheres with the project of constructing an Other that exists in a different world from this pseudo-universal modern subject.¹⁵ In other words, the hegemonic temporality limned by Fabian and Chakrabarty undergirds both the normativity of the metropole and the marginalization of the colony. We see the traces of allochrony in how the Khoi-San are often seen as “quaint relics of humanity’s ‘primitive’ past — ‘living fossils’ being a common designation.”¹⁶ This designation is not just a direct product of colonialism; many well-meaning advocates acknowledge the eighteenth-century San genocide by lamenting the “extinction” of the Khoi-San.¹⁷ Allochrony is thus *hegemonic* in the Gramscian sense: that is, it is a dominant ideology that is taken as fixed even by those whom it oppresses. Does de Prada-Samper avoid allochrony in his work? He does acknowledge that the stories are “not a ‘relic’ of the past, but the living heritage of communities whose ancestry goes back to the First Peoples of South Africa, and is an important part of the diverse cultural mosaic that makes South Africa so unique.”¹⁸ As we will see later, the hegemonic logic here has shifted from allochrony to a “truth and reconciliation” nationalism. For now, we should remember to negotiate both continuity and allochrony when thinking about the Khoi-San.

Such is the tension in narrating the history of the Khoi-San after 1850. This story is broadly one of assimilation: the Khoikhoi and San slowly mixed with other colonial populations, including Europeans, Bantu-speakers, Asians, and “Bastaards” from earlier unions. By the twentieth century, this group of people was termed “coloured” by the colonial government. As

¹⁵ Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 74.

¹⁶ Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide*, 21.

¹⁷ This operation of allochrony is particularly clear in the endless debates over museum representations of the Khoi-San. On this subject see the excellent (and diverse) essays collected in Skotnes, *Miscast*.

¹⁸ de Prada-Samper, *The Man Who Cursed the Wind*, 24.

Adhikari usefully summarizes,

it was in the decades after the emancipation of the Khoisan in 1828 and slaves in 1834 that various components of the heterogeneous black labouring class at the Cape started integrating more rapidly and developing an incipient collective identity based on a common socio-economic status and a shared culture derived from their incorporation into the lower ranks of Cape colonial society. This emergent community of assimilated colonial blacks consisted overwhelmingly of a downtrodden labouring class of African and Asian origin variously referred to as half-castes, bastards, Cape Boys, off-whites or coloureds, until the last-mentioned became the standard appellation from the latter half of the 1880s onwards.¹⁹

The word “coloured” persisted as an imprecise label for an array of heterogeneous identities through until the end of apartheid. One way of tracking shifts in perceptions is by looking at census categories such as “Native,” “Aboriginal Native,” “Coloured,” and “Black” and how these intersect with the identification of people with Khoi-San ancestry. For instance, these are the instructions in a 1961 circular from the Department of Bantu Administration and

Development:

Some district officers may encounter difficulty due to the fact that certain groups such as Nama-Korana [Khoikhoi] and Bushmen [San] may claim classification as coloureds. It must be emphasised that although the abovementioned groups are lighter of skin than the typical Bantu, they belong to an aboriginal race of Africa and are regarded as Bantu for the Population registration purposes.²⁰

Coloured identity emerged partly following and partly in contestation of apartheid-era policies like this one.²¹ The Khoi-San were not made Bantu by apartheid diktat. But neither did Khoi-San group identity remain static, unbuffeted by the capricious winds of government policy.

This story of the “coloured” is (again) at heart about *time*. Henry Trotter has convincingly argued that coloured identity coalesced not by investing in a remote past, but instead through shared trauma within living memory. For instance, 150 000 coloured people were evicted from their natal homes and communities between 1957 and 1985. Trotter’s interviews with 100 contemporary coloured people identified this as a key event in the formation of coloured identity:

¹⁹ From the introduction to Adhikari, *Burdened by Race*, xi.

²⁰ Quoted in Besten, “Khoi-San Identity in Post-Apartheid South Africa,” 138.

²¹ See i.a. Adhikari, *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough*; Goldin, *Making Race*; Adhikari, *Burdened by Race*.

The combination of the commonality imposed by Group Areas, the connectivity that was achieved through sharing stories in the wake of mass social trauma, and the reinforcement of a sense of groupness through positive narrative circulation has promoted a sense of coloured self-understanding that goes beyond mere instrumentality.²²

Thus, at least some Khoi-San who suffered the forced assimilation of the apartheid government became invested in these new identities. But the emergent coloured identity coalesced not around a claim of indigeneity or Khoi-San continuity but instead around recent, shared trauma. This complex interweaving of inherited, forced, and self-proclaimed identities undergirds today's discussions of redress and land claims.

Representation (1994–2018)

In *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide*, Mohamed Adhikari makes an intriguing observation. Unlike in the United States and Australia, he says, “in South Africa the issue [of genocide] has effectively been ignored.”²³ Why? This question is particularly salient because, as Adhikari notes later on, calling it genocide means that “issues of recompense, memorialisation, apology and recognition of past suffering arise.” As Tessa Morris-Suzuki has written:

We who live in the present did not create the violence and hatred of the past. But the violence and hatred of the past, to some degree, created us. It formed the material world and the ideas with which we live, and will continue to do so unless we take active steps to unmake their consequences.²⁴

It seems that few places in the world would feel this pressure to address issues of continuity, representation, and redress as acutely as post-apartheid South Africa. So, why is there so little discussion of these issues as they pertain to the Khoi-San? A partial answer is found in the narrative I just outlined about the evolution of the Khoi-San as a community — that is, as a group that self-identifies and is able to assert claims — between 1652 and 1994. But to fully

²² Trotter, “Trauma and Memory,” 72.

²³ Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide*, 21.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 93. The original source is an unpublished manuscript quoted in Hokari, “Globalising Aboriginal Reconciliation,” 97–98.

understand how we arrived at the present moment, we must also explore the resurgence of Khoi-San identity over the past twenty-five years. I have chosen just a few examples of Khoi-San representation from this period that will help lead us back to Anthony Williams' testimony before the Constitutional Review Committee.

The moment immediately following the end of apartheid was full of hope: a multi-racial democracy was born with Nelson Mandela as its beloved leader. Much of the literature I cite in this paper was written in the warmth of this moment. This atmosphere is well represented in Norman Etherington's 2003 call for a "truth and reconciliation history."²⁵ For him (and for many post-1994 South African scholars) fidelity to history should be tempered with empathy for suffering among today's communities. This kind of history is explicitly modeled after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), established in 1996. The TRC brought together victims and perpetrators of apartheid-era violence in search of restorative justice.²⁶ The TRC (and thus Etherington's historiography) aspires to a world where we tell the truth about the past as a means not to punish evil but rather to advance the common good. Did it work? One of the best answers was provided in June 1999 by poet Antjie Krog:

Peculiarly, the word "reconciliation" still resounds in the land. It carries within it the full variety of survival strategies — among them choice, flight, amnesia, rituals, clemency debate, negotiation, brinkmanship, and national consensus. The goal is not to avoid pain or reality, but to deal with the never-ending quest of self-definition and negotiation required to transform differences into assets. Reconciliation is not only a process. It is a cycle that will be repeated many times.²⁷

I can think of no better way to describe the Khoi-San experience in the twenty-five years since apartheid than as a "quest of self-definition and negotiation." This story (told, appropriately, by a poet) takes its place alongside the other narratives of allochony and continuity. The Khoi-San quest transforms the history I outlined above into assets for the future.

²⁵ Etherington, *The Great Treks*.

²⁶ See the poignant and intelligent film by Hoffmann and Reid, *Long Night's Journey Into Day*.

²⁷ Krog, *Country of My Skull*, 386.

One sought-after asset is representation in institutions of power — not least in the halls of the academy. As scholars ourselves, the dearth of Khoi-San scholars is particularly important to highlight.²⁸ The only two visible Khoi-San academics are June Bam-Hutchison and Yvette Abrahams. Bam-Hutchison is a professor at the University of Cape Town who “grew up on the Cape Flats with a strong maternal indigenous Khoi identity.”²⁹ Abrahams says she “was born in Cape Town in the early 1960s to struggle [sic] parents of slave and Khoekhoe descent.”³⁰ She is particularly known for her activism around the remains of Sara Baartman, an early-nineteenth-century Khoikhoi woman. Baartman’s remains were preserved by Georges Cuvier (the French naturalist) and displayed in the Museum of Natural History in Paris until they were buried in South Africa in 2002. Abrahams’ role in the repatriation debate was so important that she was singled out for criticism as “profoundly antiscience” in a 2006 monograph on Baartman.³¹ Other Khoi-San voices are visible in the scholarly record, but in almost all cases the gatekeepers remain white academics. Such is the case of Gabototwe, a San man from Botswana, who read a paper at a conference on the Bleek-Lloyd collection upon invitation of its organizers Pippa Skotnes and Janette Deacon.³² Opportunities for Khoi-San in academia have, of course, only been available since the end of apartheid. To echo Antjie Krog, Khoi-San like Bam-Hutchison, Abrahams, and Gabototwe have seized on the spirit of “truth and reconciliation” nationalism since 1994 to negotiate identities and transform differences into assets.

²⁸ Mohamed Adhikari kindly answered my inquiries on this topic in a personal email, 27 November 2018. I had reached out to Adhikari thinking that he himself might be Khoi-San, but he replied that “both my parents were born within spitting distance of Indian rice paddies.”

²⁹ From the faculty profile at <https://undergrad.stanford.edu/programs/bsp/explore/cape-town/meet-cape-town-faculty>. See also Bernardo, “Finding Khoisan Connections on the Cape Flats.”

³⁰ See the brief profile of Abrahams provided by UCT News at https://www.news.uct.ac.za/images/userfiles/downloads/media/Bio_YvetteAbrahams.pdf.

³¹ Crais and Scully, *Sara Baartman and the Hottentot Venus*, 160.

³² See the introduction to Deacon and Skotnes, *Courage of ||kabbo*. and Gabototwe, “The |Xam and the San Youth of Today.”



Figure 1

Post-apartheid South African nationalism has made the Khoi-San *very* visible in one way: the new Coat of Arms (Figure 1).³³ The figures are drawn (albeit with their rather prominent genitalia removed) from the Linton Stone, an example of San rock art now at the South African Museum in Cape Town. The motto beneath their feet — in the |Xam language Bleek and Lloyd documented — reads “!Ke e: /xarra //ke” (officially translated “diverse people unite”). The words of President Thabo Mbeki at the unveiling of the Coat of Arms on 27 April 2000 are illuminating:

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

There is an unquestionable respect for the Khoi-San in Mbeki’s words that exemplifies the spirit of post-apartheid politics. But Mbeki’s speech also plays into the trope I described earlier, allochrony:

[For the motto] we have chosen an ancient language of our people. This language is now extinct as no one lives who speaks it as his or her mother-tongue. This emphasises the tragedy of the millions of human beings who, through the ages, have perished and even ceased to exist as peoples, because

³³ My presentation of this example will be rather cursory in light of its comprehensive treatment in Barnard, “Coat of Arms and the Body Politic.”

of peoples [sic] inhumanity to others.³⁴

For Mbeki, the Khoi-San *belong to* the past. Putting them on the national Coat of Arms is quite literally an act of reverence for a people that is now tragically vanished. This dismissal of continuity reproduces the same hegemonic logic of allochryony we have seen before.

We can see this logic at play in many other representations of the Khoi-San. For instance, there is a cottage industry built on the “relics” of the Khoi-San: that is, the records of the Bleek-Lloyd collection and the evidence used to interpret San rock art.³⁵ In both cases, scholars working under the auspices of the British colonial government in the 1870s wrote down stories told by San people they met. In the case of Bleek and Lloyd, their research was (by the end) marked by a distinctively empathetic, generous, and collaborative spirit. For instance, their |xam informants were invited into the Bleek-Lloyd family home in Mowbray, which seems to have been a warm and welcoming environment. In the absence of direct testimony from Khoi-San, what suffices today is an echo repeated through Bleek and Lloyd — often the story told by Diakwain to Wilhelm Bleek called “The Broken String.” Among other things, “The Broken String” has served as the conclusion to Adhikari’s 2011 monograph and the title of both a 2004 collection of stories — subtitled *The Last Words of an Extinct People* — and a 2010 film by Saskia van Schaik.³⁶ “The Broken String” proved so evocative that it was re-translated in 2009 by Harold Farmer (who praised its “innate poetry”) and published in *Poetry* magazine.³⁷

Perhaps the best illustration of my point about allochryony and continuity is found in Saskia van Schaik’s *The Broken String: The Story of a Lost Language*. Her film accomplished its goal —

³⁴ This address is available at <https://www.sahistory.org.za/speeches-and-public-statements/address-president-thabo-mbeki-unveiling-coat-arms-27-april-2000>.

³⁵ See as examples Bank, *Bushmen in a Victorian World* and de Prada-Samper, *On the Trail of Qing and Orpen*, respectively.

³⁶ Adhikari, *The Anatomy of a South African Genocide*; Bennun, *The Broken String*; Schaik, *The Broken String: The Story of a Lost Language*.

³⁷ Diakwain and Farmer, “The Broken String.”

to tell the story of the Bleek-Lloyd collection in an accessible documentary format — with aplomb. But Schaik’s framing ultimately harms because of what it elides. Most significantly, Schaik does not interview any coloured people — despite implicitly endorsing Khoi-San continuity by bookending her film with contemporary footage of a coloured community celebration. Although Schaik’s camera comes agonizingly close to the celebrants, they are painfully rendered mute. In this and other choices, Schaik uncritically succumbs to the trope we have observed again and again: the Khoi-San as “living fossils.” *The Broken String* bills itself as telling “the story of a lost language” and presents San practices as existing since “time immemorial.” Our only link to the Khoi-San, if we take Schaik at her word, is the unmediated access provided by the Bleek-Lloyd collection. In her film, Schaik lacks the very empathy for her subjects that Bleek and Lloyd exemplified. Schaik’s timidity is painful not only because it elides the rich continuities that stretch through to the present day but also because it thus forecloses the case for Khoi-San redress. I focus on Schaik’s film not to single her out for criticism but instead because *The Broken String* illustrates the frustrating position of the Khoi-San in post-apartheid South Africa: ensnared (in Schaik as in Mbeki) by the hegemonic logic of allochrony. Even as it corrects for earlier dismissals of the San genocide, allochrony prevents the acknowledgement of continuity that is necessary for redress.

Testimony (today)

At last, we return to the testimony at the heart of this paper. In the past few months, a remarkable archive has been created: the submissions of South Africans to the Constitutional Review Committee considering land expropriation.³⁸ The sessions of this committee have been

³⁸ The formal name is the “Joint Committee on Constitutional Review.” Naming of this committee is not consistent even in official publications; in this paper, I use either “Constitutional Review Committee” or simply “committee.”

meticulously documented through written transcriptions and summaries, videos on the Parliament of South Africa's YouTube channel, and audio recordings on SoundCloud.³⁹ The immediacy and poignancy of video testimony is unparalleled; a historian watching these recordings longs for the same access to Sara Baartman, Jan Tzatzoe, Diakwain, and other indigenous voices of South Africa (and beyond). Yet I stress that the video testimony is *also* a representation. We should resist the allure of "unmediated access" to Khoi-San voices by listening actively to the silences produced by our archive. As this paper demonstrates, the best way to thus attune one's ear is by putting today's testimony in conversation with the long arc of Khoi-San representation. I will again highlight the narratives of allochryony and continuity that undergird today's discussion of the Khoi-San, while remembering the histories of genocide and assimilation that leave their indelible mark on our interpretations today. In so doing, I will more explicitly address the questions I posed at the beginning of this paper: when, how, and why are Khoi-San land claims both expressed and received?

The sole representative of the Khoi-San to testify before the committee was Anthony Williams, the CEO of Indigenous First Nation Advocacy South Africa (IFNASA).⁴⁰ IFNASA claims to advocate

the restoration of the Khoe and San Identity, Culture, Language, Land, Socio-economic empowerment, through Research and Policy Formulation in promoting Social Integration and Cohesiveness amongst All South Africans, which must based [sic] on Equality, Fairness and Justice for All.⁴¹

This is roughly the same claim made by a constellation of groups identified with post-apartheid

³⁹ All of this information is usefully organized by the Parliamentary Monitoring Group, a non-governmental information service; for an illuminating report see Parliamentary Monitoring Group, "Getting Information to the People." What is not available publicly (to my knowledge) are the thousands more written submissions.

⁴⁰ I have searched to the best of my ability the available documents for other Khoi-San testimony but have found none. Unfortunately, an email to the committee secretary has not been answered. My suspicion is that there are written submissions from Khoi-San, but I doubt there is more oral testimony that is publicly available. As we will see later, though, there is no shortage of Khoi-San voices in other fora, including in the press and in activism.

⁴¹ From IFNASA's "About Us" page, available at <https://www.ifnasa.co.za/about-us/> (capitalization unaltered).

“Khoi-San revivalism.”⁴² Rafael Verbuyst has extensively documented the complex trajectory of this movement; the narrative sketched here will thus be cursory.⁴³ Probably the first group to demand restitution explicitly for the Khoi-San (as opposed to, say, the Griqua) was the Cape Cultural Heritage Development Organization, set up in 1996. The organization of a conference in 1997 led to the creation of the National Khoisan Forum (later National Khoisan Council) in 1998. This body remains the primary representative of the Khoi-San in the government’s eyes, though many organizations and people claim some kind of authority or heritage. The politics of indigeneity that provide grounds for restitution across the world are complicated by the peculiar racial history of South Africa. Particularly notable is the invocation of the International Labour Organization’s Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention of 1989, or ILO 169. It is worth noting that the existing mechanisms for redress (especially the Land Claims Commission) have a cut-off date of 1913 — preventing meaningful restitution for Khoi-San claims that may date back to the eighteenth century. While many recognize this as an issue — even at the highest levels, as we glimpsed in Mbeki’s comments on the Coat of Arms — what exactly should be *done* is another matter. Many bills have foundered in Parliament, while government officials have made vague statements and promises to little effect.⁴⁴ Even the heady momentum of Khoi-San revivalism fails to penetrate the bureaucratic thicket of post-apartheid restitution debates. This story is clearly hard to parse even for its participants; what matters for us is the overall trajectory.

The testimony of Anthony Williams should thus be seen as typical of post-apartheid Khoi-San revivalism — a confusing and fractious movement that has made little headway in the past

⁴² This term has emerged through recent (2018, 2017, 2016, 2014) scholarship such as Sato, “Khoisan Revivalism and Land Question”; Brown and Deumert, “Language, Desire and Performance among Cape Town’s Khoisan Language Activists”; Verbuyst, “Claiming Cape Town: Towards a Symbolic Interpretation”; Bam, “Contemporary Khoisan Heritage Issues.” Perhaps the earliest (2006) influential writing on this topic is Besten, “Transformation and Reconstitution of Khoe-San Identities.” (But note the incipient (2001) Bredekamp, “Khoisan Revivalism.”)

⁴³ Verbuyst, “Claiming Cape Town: Ethnographic Interpretations.”

⁴⁴ For a wealth of detail on this tangled history see *ibid.*, 48–62.

twenty years. Williams' main argument before the committee is that Section 25 of the constitution should be amended not only to provide for land expropriation, but also to explicitly recognize the rights of the "Khoi-San people."⁴⁵ This aligns well with the broader movement. Similarly, Williams asserted that the bar against pre-1913 claims in Section 25(7) is "prejudiced against the indigenous first nation's dignity." After some prodding by Members of Parliament (MPs), Williams went on to make the more radical claim that Section 25 should be removed wholesale (not just amended) because the "indigenous first nation people" had not been "part of the conversation regarding land expropriation." Williams invoked the Coat of Arms of South Africa as "direct proof that the so-called 'Coloured' people were the first nation people of Southern Africa," going on to say that "the so-called 'Coloured' people should not be referred to as 'black' people, because black people did not exist." The reactions of MPs in the Constitutional Review Committee were mixed, to say the least. Mncedisi Filtane of the Universal Democratic Movement (UDM, a small center-left party) "asked from which part of Southern Africa the Khoi-San people originated, and where was the evidence to prove that they were the first indigenous people be [sic] found." Floyd Shivambu of the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF, a controversial and fast-growing far-left party) then asked "how one determined who the first indigenous people were, and from which part of South Africa they had originated."

One approach to reading Williams' testimony would be explicitly political, following the trajectory of the land claims debate. On 4 December 2018 Parliament considered the Constitutional Review Committee's report, which recommended

That Section 25 of the Constitution must be amended to make explicit that which is implicit in the Constitution, with regards to Expropriation of Land without Compensation, as a legitimate option

⁴⁵ This and the following quotations are from the minutes of the Constitutional Review Committee, available at <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/27029/>. See also the video recording at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kj2Htj1pMfI> — though unfortunately the first few minutes seem not to have been recorded.

for Land Reform, so as to address the historic wrongs caused by the arbitrary dispossession of land, and in so doing ensure equitable access to land and further empower the majority of South Africans to be productive participants in ownership, food security and agricultural reform programs.⁴⁶

With 209 votes in favor and 91 against, the report was adopted by the National Assembly (initiating the amendment process). Debate was heated, however. On the one hand, Moloko Maila of the African National Congress (ANC, the ruling party) commended the committee's work to "correct the original sin of land dispossession" (10).⁴⁷ On the other hand, Thandeka Mbabama of the Democratic Alliance (DA, the main opposition) decried the "collusion between the wily EFF and the beleaguered ANC," even calling out EFF MPs as "rude, rabble-rousing red berets [with trills to highlight the alliteration] who surely have had no parental guidance whatsoever in their formative years" (17). Julius Malema of the EFF replied with equal force, claiming that any opposition to the amendment "is in defence of white privilege, which seeks to perpetuate landlessness amongst our people" (25). The opposition to the report was articulated more thoughtfully by Glynnis Breytenbach of the DA, who said that land expropriation without compensation

is a blueprint for chaos and economic disaster. It deliberately seeks to stoke racial tension, and by definition relies on force — an approach that has no place in a modern, constitutional democracy. ... No well-informed South African would voluntarily hand over their property to any government to become a tenant in their own country. No government should be trusted with this much power. The Constitution is designed to protect the rights of all South Africans against all governments, including now unthinkable future governments. ... The DA stands opposed to any abrogation of existing property rights. These are the bedrock of development and economic growth. Wholesale expropriation without compensation is nothing other than state-sanctioned theft. (62–3)

The political firestorm continues to rage over the issue of land expropriation without compensation (including Khoi-San land claims) and will likely play a significant role in the 2019

⁴⁶ From p. 28 of the final committee report, available at <https://pmg.org.za/files/181115FinalReport.docx>.

⁴⁷ See the unrevised Hansard for 4 December 2018, available at <https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/Docs/hansard/7f4fea57-dfib-4c32-boeo-79aff5653f18.pdf>. Subsequent page numbers also refer to this document. See also the video recording of the session, available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1E1N4QH3sZc>.

elections. The only observation I would like to make about this political narrative is the salutary expression of diverse viewpoints — one essential element of democracy, sadly absent from otherwise similar debates in countries like Zimbabwe. In my opinion, the most likely outcome will be a compromise. I doubt anyone wants to either abrogate foundational rights or deny the injustices that persist in South Africa. Democracy at its best should be about working through disagreements like these.

But aside from this more conventional political analysis, we can also proceed from Williams' testimony with greater sensitivity to alterity and the *longue durée*. We now have the tools to do so: we have recognized again and again the tropes of allochrony, continuity, and “truth and reconciliation” nationalism that underlie discussion of Khoi-San land claims. Another common trope is “strategic essentialism”: stressing ideas of purity, continuity, and unalienable essences (often based on popular stereotypes) in order to achieve political or economic goals. This is the guiding practice of many groups in Khoi-San revivalism, including Williams' testimony, as Verbuyst observed in his work with activist communities in Cape Town:

The constructed nature of Khoisan identity (as all ethnicities and identities) is not a secret which if revealed would discredit the whole endeavour; it can in fact become a source of humour and relativism ... I remember how (naively) surprised I was when talking to the master of ceremony after a traditional Khoisan *!Nau* ceremony had been completed in Botrivier and he told me that he also had to invent parts of the ceremony because much of the traditional culture had been “lost.” Another activist concurred and told me that I, as a researcher, had to be aware of the fact that the Khoisan were in the process of “re-inventing” themselves.⁴⁸

This last comment in particular echoes Antjie Krog's gloss of reconciliation as a “never-ending quest of self-definition and negotiation required to transform differences into assets.”⁴⁹ Even as the Khoi-San practice strategic essentialism, they are full participants in a nation built on “truth and reconciliation.”

⁴⁸ Verbuyst, “Claiming Cape Town: Ethnographic Interpretations,” 66.

⁴⁹ Krog, *Country of My Skull*, 386.

At the same time, we should not reduce the debates over Khoi-San land claims to negotiations of identity and culture. Material conditions also matter. Just 1% of South Africa's 128 million hectares of land belong to the coloured community, which makes up about 9% of the population.⁵⁰ Activists make their frustration with this injustice (and its concomitant poverty and lack of social mobility) quite clear — not least by voting for the EFF. A poignant example of such frustration is a protester's sign outside one of the committee's sessions: "KEEP THE LAND!!," she wrote, "Just give me a FOKEN JOB."⁵¹ Williams' testimony, too, stresses both "dignity" (the cultural) and reparations (the material). Such sentiments are encapsulated in an article in the online newspaper *The Daily Maverick* that concluded:

Our government's decision to give our country's most vulnerable communities a stake in the land that they have lost, but continued to service, will afford them greater protection from exploitation and a legacy to lift future generations out of poverty. But, most importantly, it will begin to restore the dignity they were stripped of. In due time, they won't have to look out car windows, marvelling at land that was once theirs.⁵²

In reading texts like these, we should think (as Verbuyst argues) about both strategic essentialism and "identification strategies" on the one hand and real differences in people's lives and their grievances on the other. What should then guide policies that address Khoi-San land claims is an overriding empathy for the suffering of others. In demonstrating this empathy, we should transcend juggling identities in the spirit of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: we must take into account the imbrications of material *and* cultural politics.

Concluding thoughts

So, how and why indeed are Khoi-San land claims both expressed and received? First, I

⁵⁰ This figure comes from the University of the Western Cape's Institute for Poverty, Land, and Agrarian Studies, available at <https://www.plaas.org.za/sites/default/files/publications-pdf/No1%20Fact%20check%20web.pdf>. On this point see also Zandberg, *Rehoboth Griqua Atlas*.

⁵¹ See the image tweeted by the Democratic Alliance on 4 August 2018, available at <https://inm-baobab-prod-eu-west-1.s3.amazonaws.com/public/inm/media/image/2018/08/04/52238420DjvSBvNXoAANyTu.jpg>.

⁵² Louw, "Will the Land Ever Be Returned, and Dignity Restored?"

have suggested that many discussions today are undergirded by the narratives of allochrony (Khoi-San as a vanished people, accessible only through records) and continuity (Khoi-San as “living fossils”). In the first section, we observed how these tropes came about by looking at the late-eighteenth century San genocide and its aftermath. We saw how continuity and allochrony play out in representations such as Saskia van Schaik’s 2010 film *The Broken String* and the Coat of Arms of South Africa. Second, we have understood that activists today deploy the political tactic of strategic essentialism within the overarching framework of a “truth and reconciliation” nationalism. At the same time, I have pushed away from the reduction of strategic essentialism to the charges of crass opportunism that are often used to dismiss Khoi-San land claims. We have seen how concerns over both identity (the cultural) and material redress emerged from the apartheid-era cohesion of coloured identity and the subsequent politics of “truth and reconciliation.”

What are some things we can take away from all of this? First, the example of the Khoi-San shows how easy it is to steer from racist denial of genocide to the allochrony implicit in calling a people “extinct.” Second, I have demonstrated how important it is to be historically aware, not just of immediate causality but also of the *longue durée*. After all, at least some of the pushback to Khoi-San land claims comes from presentism that the diffusion of historical scholarship only slowly addresses. This presentism is also complicit in a kind of teleology that histories of South Africa sometimes play into (a teleology that influences the 1913 cutoff date for land claims): one where apartheid is the end to which history is driving, and thus one where segregation is the “highest stage of white supremacy.”⁵³ How do we deal with all of this? Perhaps by listening more attentively to the keen of eighteenth-century Khoi-San to help us interrogate the familiar.

⁵³ To borrow from Cell, *Highest Stage of White Supremacy*, who is himself rather facetiously riffing off of Lenin.

Testimony, whether it is John Barrow's from 1801 or Anthony Williams' from 2018, plays a uniquely important role in what Bonnie Honig calls "agonistic humanism" — that is, a "post-Enlightenment humanism of lament and finitude" that "find[s] in grievability a new social ontology of equality," an ontology that "threatens the polis' narrow citizenship ideology."⁵⁴

In some ways, this project has been driven by my simple, rather selfish impulse to *learn*. But I'd like to think that in this paper I've fallen on the correct side of Richard Rorty's dividing line between "people busy conforming to well-understood criteria for making contributions to knowledge [and] people trying to expand their own moral imaginations."⁵⁵ By engaging in this work, I hope to have contributed to the generous, hospitable, and empathetic exchange of ideas that is fundamental to democracy.

⁵⁴ Honig, *Antigone, Interrupted*, 17–35.

⁵⁵ Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, 127.

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