

LAYERED DECOLONIZATION IN SOUTH AFRICA: KHOISAN STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM AND THE NOTION OF INCOMMENSURABILITY¹

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ABSTRACT

South African debates on decolonization tend to centre on the injustices of the apartheid system (1948–1994) rather than on those that occurred during the preceding centuries of colonialism. The violent conquest and forced assimilation of the Khoisan goes particularly unmentioned. Their absence in these debates is increasingly challenged by growing numbers of people claiming Khoisan identities and campaigning for indigenous rights in the post-apartheid era. By thinking through the socio-political and academic settings in which this absence is both manifested and contested, I distil issues that deserve further attention in order for the Khoisan to be meaningfully included in debates on decolonization. I scrutinize two main factors that add to the complexities of this ‘layered’ decolonization: the strategic essentialism surrounding Khoisan identity and culture, and the prevalent notion of an insurmountable incommensurability between indigenous people and others.

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INTRODUCTION

Decolonization, a concept that did not feature prominently in South African political discourse since the democratic transition in 1994, is back with a vengeance. Arguably no episode is more emblematic of this new drive to decolonize than the #RhodesMustFall protests, which began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in March 2015 and quickly spread from the slopes of Table Mountain to other campuses in the country and abroad. Embodying the spectre of colonialism in Southern Africa, the statue of quintessential and controversial colonialist Cecil John Rhodes was picked as a target by a student who threw faeces at it on the 9th of March 2015. The hashtag #RhodesMustFall trended on social media and the pressure to remove the statue mounted. Significantly, it was removed less than one month later. This particular wave of demonstrations enjoyed global coverage, and sparked widespread public debate due to its mobilization and use of the term 'decolonization' in relation to education and other domains. Indeed, while #RhodesMustFall has largely receded to the background, its message continues to provoke reflections on the decolonization of various spheres of South African society. For some, this signals the dawn of a 'post-transitional era' in South Africa (e.g. Holmes 2016, p.17).

While there is no shortage of literature on decolonization and #RhodesMustFall, my experience of conducting ethnographic fieldwork among Khoisan activists in Cape Town since 2014 (Verbuyst, 2015; 2016; 2017) led me to a series of perspectives that are virtually absent in these debates.² Khoisan activists assert themselves as South Africa's original inhabitants and contend that their historical trajectory, identity and culture is side-lined by the commonplace definition of indigeneity in South Africa, i.e. descendants of African groups that have experienced colonialism. According to Khoisan activists, movements such as #RhodesMustFall (in)directly endorse this interpretation of indigeneity. They therefore do not feel meaningfully included in their calls for decolonization. The concept 'indigenous' is notoriously difficult

² I use 'Khoisan' as this is how the bulk of the activists I have spoken to identified as. It is a contested umbrella term referring to five groups (Nama, San/Bushmen, Griqua, Koranna and Cape Khoi) who are indigenous to Southern Africa and share cultural, economic and linguistic characteristics. While there is an ongoing debate about when which population groups arrived in areas of South Africa prior to others (cf. Hamilton, Mbenga & Ross, 2009), the historical record is less contested with regards to the Western Cape province and the descendants of the Cape Khoi that I focus on. For more on nomenclature and terminology see Barnard (1998) and Ellis (2015).

and controversial to define (cfr. Kuper 2003, Asch, Samson, Heinen, et al, 2004). I do not attempt to resolve these complexities here. However, whether ‘indigenous’ or not, the Khoisan certainly occupy a unique position in that they inhabited large parts of Southern Africa prior to the arrival of Bantu-speaking peoples from Western Africa or the European settlers. Subsequently, they were the first to face the brunt of European colonialism in Table Bay in the mid-17th century. Their numbers dwindled rapidly after this brutal encounter and the remaining Khoisan were forcefully assimilated over the course of centuries under the mixed-race category that eventually became known as ‘coloured’. This group included descendants of slaves and various other non-European population groups arriving at the Cape Colony (cfr. Elphick, 1977; Adhikari, 2011). Khoisan identity and culture was violently suppressed in this process. This led to the still commonly held notion of the Khoisan being, as Marks (1972) put it in an influential essay, ‘assimilated out of existence’.

To the surprise of many, however, the post-apartheid era has seen the steady growth of what is often referred to as a ‘Khoisan revival’, or the increasing numbers of coloured people claiming Khoisan identities and campaigning for indigenous rights in the post-apartheid era. Eager to disprove being extinct as a distinct collective, Khoisan activists reject the term ‘coloured’. It is seen as a derogatory term that stresses a lack of identity and history.³ For Khoisan activists it is unacceptable that the long colonial history predating apartheid (1948–1994) — often referred to by activists as a period of cultural and physical genocide — is rarely addressed. Although political negotiations between the rapidly growing Khoisan activist movement and the South African government are underway to explore policy options to effect historical justice (see below), the bulk of the activists whom I have engaged with feel that their calls for decolonization are shadowed by the demands of other ethnic groups in South African society.⁴ Khoisan activists therefore continue campaigning for their cause and attempt to garner attention through a wide range of protests. However, with little in-depth scholarship on Khoisan activism in Cape Town

³ Certainly not all of those currently categorized as coloured identify as Khoisan. Many even distance themselves from the Khoisan movement or proudly embrace the term coloured (cfr. Erasmus 2001).

⁴ Not everyone who identifies as Khoisan does so publically or with the intention of engaging in public activism or politics. From my experiences of following up on the movement since 2014, however, I would contend that it has grown substantially in the past few years. More research needs to be carried out in order to determine precisely how many self-identifying Khoisan there are in South Africa.

and most media coverage on the issue being scarce or superficial, their grievances are poorly understood.⁵

In this article I therefore reflect on my fieldwork encounters with Khoisan activists and draw on literature on decolonization to explore the socio-political and academic contexts in which both Khoisan activism and current debates on decolonization unfold. I begin by briefly discussing post-apartheid political developments towards the Khoisan and the grievances and motivations that underpin Khoisan activism in Cape Town. Based on my reading of these dynamics, I distil two conundrums that require consideration in order for Khoisan issues to be productively accommodated within current debates on decolonization: the practice of strategic essentialism surrounding Khoisan identity and culture; and the question of whether or not the grievances and demands of Khoisan activists are incommensurable with those of others. The concepts I use and the positions I argue for all fall within highly controversial and politicized territory. With the space available, I could not do justice to the breadth of the decolonization debate. The issues I offer up for consideration deserve to be treated separately. This text should be read with these limitations in mind. It is an effort to kick-start a more comprehensive debate on the subject rather than an in-depth analysis of the issues raised.

POST-APARTHEID KHOISAN POLITICS AND CAPE TOWN ACTIVISM

Many Khoisan activists felt hopeful of being attended to when Nelson Mandela was elected as president in 1995 and pledged to establish a rainbow nation that would celebrate its ethnically diverse population and confront the injustices of the past. However, it soon became clear that the Khoisan representatives who were around at the time, would take the backseat in future political negotiations. The popular notion of the Khoisan being largely extinct as a distinct collective, informed most of the decisions relating to their fate in the post-apartheid era. The Khoisan are, for instance, excluded from one of the most vital components of South African historical justice: land claims. The cut-off date to file land claims is set at 1913, the date of the infamous Natives

⁵ One of the earliest publications that reflected on the appearance of Khoisan revivalism and politics in the post-apartheid era in Cape Town are Bredekamp (2001), Oevernes (2002), and especially Besten (2006). Adhikari (2005) also shares observations on the subject. To date, available ethnographic accounts are Øvernes (2008) – of which a book version is currently forthcoming with Unisa press – and Verbuyst (2015).

Land Act which allocated 87 percent of available land to the white population and designated the remaining 13 percent to be parcelled in homelands for the Bantu-speaking population groups. As noted previously, the Khoisan had lost their access to the land already centuries before. Moreover, as they were at the time no longer considered an existing population group, there were no plans to establish a Khoisan homeland. While the ‘National Reference Group on Khoi and San issues’ was established as a parallel process to examine possibilities to accommodate Khoisan land matters in 2014, it has not been able to make any progress due to limited funds and disagreements regarding potential pilot projects (cfr. Verbuyst, 2015, p.129–132).

South Africa’s post-apartheid constitution is widely celebrated for its progressive nature. Yet, the specific situation of the Khoisan is nowhere mentioned, except when it comes to the need to protect their languages from extinction in chapter one, section six. Somewhat ironically then, while *!Xam* was used for the national coat of arms, *!ke e: /xarra //ke* [diverse people unite], no Khoisan language is officially recognized alongside the country’s eleven others. On the other hand, there have been state-driven efforts to deal with Khoisan issues as well. To the dismay of many activists, South Africa has not signed the 1989 Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention created by the International Labour Organization — commonly known as ILO 169 – to provide rights for indigenous people, but it is a signatory of the 2007 United Nations Declaration on Indigenous People, which has much in common with the ILO 169. In 2005, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Issues at the time, Rodolfo Stavenhagen, visited South Africa and met with various Khoisan representatives across the country. A report was compiled that outlined some concerns, observations and recommendations (United Nations, 2005), but it has not been debated in the South African parliament as of yet. While these developments affect the Khoisan, it is telling that the Khoisan are nowhere officially designated as South Africa’s indigenous people. Instead, the South African Human Rights Commission (2009) terms the Khoisan a ‘marginalized community’, which could potentially be endowed with ‘minority rights’. This seeming paradox of engaging the Khoisan as ‘Khoisan’ but not as more indigenous than any other ethnic group, echoes the desire of South African multiculturalism to simultaneously encourage ethnic and national identities.

As stated before, indigeneity is taken within this framework to refer to all African groups who experienced colonialism. ‘Traditional’ and ‘indigenous’ are considered synonymous in South Africa, and traditional leaders of various

ethnic groups have even purportedly begun using the identifier ‘indigenous’ and deploying the ‘rhetoric of the ancestral’ in order to get more international attention and support (Settler, 2010, p.52, 59). This use of terminology frustrates Khoisan activists. But what particularly upsets them is that applying ‘indigenous’ across the board implies that all Bantu-speaking groups in South Africa have witnessed roughly the same degree and type of colonial violence, and that therefore no one is entitled to specific or preferential measures. This phenomenon has been described by Tuck and Yang (2012, p.17) as ‘colonial equivocation’ and examples of this in South African discourse abound. One official source, for instance, explicitly states that all ‘Africans’ entered South Africa more or less simultaneously and witnessed colonialism in similar ways (DRDLR, 2013). It seems that both ‘colonial equivocation’ and the understanding that the Khoisan require specific attention defines the ambiguity of South African post-apartheid politics on the subject.

Indeed, this understanding explains why Khoisan representatives were not invited to become part of the newly established National House of Traditional Leaders alongside representatives of other ethnic groups in 2009. Instead, the National Khoisan Council (NKC) was erected by the government in 1997 with a mandate to sort out issues of leadership and recognition within the Khoisan movement. The NKC hardly received government funding or assistance and it is challenging to find any information about it. It is nevertheless in part due to the efforts of the NKC, that the National Traditional and Khoi and San Leadership Bill (NTKLB) has been proceeding through the legislative process. The NTKLB sets out criteria for the official recognition of Khoisan and non-Khoisan traditional leadership. However, the bill does not in its current form define the Khoisan as indigenous people. It instead reaffirms the commonplace definition of indigeneity in South Africa. I come back to the NTKLB and the importance of the term indigenous further on. What is clear is that these piecemeal attempts at accommodating the demands of the Khoisan for land and the recognition of their culture and traditional leadership have left many of them largely disillusioned with the government.⁶ Khoisan activists increasingly feel that they would do better to organize in various pressure groups with a more radical and international message.

As a result of this difference in approach on part of Khoisan activists, the visibility of Khoisan culture is steadily increasing. Recent events and develop-

⁶ President Cyril Ramaphosa announced the creation of a ‘Commission on Khoisan matters’ to ‘ensure a process of Khoisan recognition’ on the 27th of February 2018. However, it remains unclear how this commission will function alongside the Reference Group or how it relates to the NTKLB.

ments such as competitions for practitioners of the traditional dance *riel*; the 2017 release of *Krotoa*, a popular movie about an indigenous interpreter for the Dutch colonialists; and the circulation of *Eerste Nasie Nuus* [First Nation News], a newspaper authored by Khoisan activists, have all contributed to this. There is also a burgeoning social media presence of Khoisan culture and identity. This revival is particularly vibrant in Cape Town, where, as one activist once said, ‘the bomb of colonialism first fell and did most damage’. Indeed, Cape Town has seen the rise of various Khoisan activist groupings, social movements or tribal councils such as the Khoisan Kingdom or the Institute for the Restoration of the Aborigines of South Africa, which have undertaken various actions in the city and elsewhere in order to increase awareness about Khoisan issues. Examples include covering up the statue of colonialist Jan van Riebeeck with black garbage bags to mark ‘360 years of resistance to colonialism’ in 2012; a renaming ceremony of Cape Town to //Hui !Gaeb [the place where the clouds gather] in front of the first colonial structure in Cape Town, the Castle of Good Hope, in 2012; and public and private !Nau ceremonies where people ritually affirm their Khoisan identity.

Elsewhere I explore possible interpretations of Khoisan activism at greater length (Verbuyst, 2016). Suffice it to say that the revival is, if anything, a powerful insertion of Khoisan identity and culture into public consciousness and space. At stake is a bid for self-determination, for the ability to organize Khoisan matters as they see fit. Activists feel alienated, disrespected and misrepresented as a people in history books. I constantly encountered aspirations to tell counter narratives and ‘set the record straight’ while doing fieldwork. As one activist put it, ‘everything we do is about our history’. Of particular concern are stigmas and stereotypes, as these are responsible for people not identifying with Khoisan identity or culture according to the activists. Ruben Richards (2017), an academic sympathetic to the cause, then frames the revival as the transition of a people from feeling like ‘bastards’ to nothing more, or less, than ‘humans’. Khoisan activists thus not merely aim their outrage at the legacy of apartheid, but campaign for the urgent need to decolonize what they see as the colonial legacy and its reverberations in present-day issues, such as the lack of land ownership, the officially unrecognized status of Khoisan identity, and the overall lack of state support for Khoisan culture. In what follows, I reflect on these grievances by laying out two conundrums that will have to be thought through in order for the Khoisan to be included as potential recipients of decolonization.

DECOLONIZATION AND KHOISAN INDIGENEITY: STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM AND INCOMMENSURABILITY

Reflecting on my research and the relevant literature (see below), two sets of problems are key when considering decolonization and the Khoisan. The first group of conundrums relate to the strategic essentialism that Khoisan activists engage in as a result of the context wherein Khoisan identity and culture has been, and continues to be, principally defined. With strategic essentialism, a term originally coined by Spivak (1988; see also Keesing, 1989), I refer to the (un)conscious deployment of stereotypical imagery and popular notions regarding a perceived identity or culture in order to obtain resources or political attention. Aside from thinking through this conceptual frame through which Khoisan issues are approached, a different set of ethical problems have to be addressed when considering how the Khoisan relate to other groups campaigning for decolonization in South African society. Of particular interest to me is the notion that Khoisan demands are incommensurable to those of others, as I see this as a motivation for some of the reluctant government engagements with the Khoisan. I discuss both of these complexities in turn.

KHOISAN IDENTITY AND CULTURE: STRATEGIC ESSENTIALISM AND AUTHENTICITY

One of the most recurring complaints of Khoisan activists is that their articulations of identity and culture are perceived to be judged by a higher standard of authenticity when compared to those of other groups. The argument is often made by referring to the seemingly undisputed identity of the Zulu King, Goodwill Zwelithini, arguably the most influential traditional leader in South Africa, and the fact that the Khoisan are not recognized in the census in comparison.⁷ Elsewhere, I have argued that this desire to prove the authenticity of Khoisan cultural displays or claims to identity, leads activists to pursue a politics of strategic essentialism when engaging with this matter in public (Verbuyst, 2016). In Cape Town particularly — not coincidentally the area where the colonial violence was most devastating for the Khoisan — do activists feel the need to engage in politics in this fashion (see also Robins, 1997

⁷ Current options in the census are 'African', 'Coloured', 'Indian' and 'White'.

who made a similar argument concerning activism in Namaqualand in the early 1990s). Significantly, most of the Khoisan activists engage in this process reluctantly and often ironically only in order to be seen or heard.

Strategic essentialism among the Khoisan is further exacerbated by the *modus operandi* of South African tourism and museums. Scholars have provided ample examples of ethnic groups performing ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’ displays of culture in South Africa’s many ‘cultural villages’ or ‘living museums’ to the benefit of an European exotic gaze (and the often non-indigenous stakeholders of the enterprise) (e.g. Boonzaaier and Wels 2018, p. 4–5).⁸ One such place is Kagga Kamma, not far from Cape Town, where, ‘[t]hrough listening to “Khoisan history... condensed into a five-minute account,” witnessing their nakedness, and fondling their children, the visitor is led to believe that he or she is contributing to the survival of the bushmen’ (Witz, Rassool & Minkley 2001, p.281). Museums have been criticized for similar reasons. By placing indigenous objects in display cases inside museums, indigenous continuity is denied (Gibson, 2012, p.203–204). The presence and vibrancy of Khoisan culture and identity is precisely what Khoisan activists aim to establish. Not coincidentally then, Schramm (Schramm, 2016, p.133) had a similar realization in a Cape Town museum where she observed how indigeneity was effectively ‘far removed in space and time from the city life of which the Museum formed part’.

More often than not, an urban/rural divide is embedded in this line of thinking, the latter exemplifying the largely ‘unspoiled’ indigenous who is in touch with the environment and worthy of the name, and the former in turn considered too assimilated and too Westernized to be the ‘real thing’ (Gibson, 2012, p.208). The Khoisan in rural areas in South Africa are studied far more often by researchers than their urban counterparts as well. This mirrors the lack of studies on mixed-race indigenous people and urban indigeneity in general (Peters and Andersen, 2014). Khoisan activists in Cape Town too feel that their urban indigenous identity is disavowed and they attempt to associate themselves with the San/Bushmen in the northern rural regions because of their perceived ‘ultra-indigeneity’ (Besten, 2006). Crucially then, ‘authentic indigenous identity’ is being framed through these dynamics in a primordial

⁸ While activists often denounce that this dynamic indeed stereotypes Khoisan culture and identity, it should be noted that ethnic groups also often consciously play along for economic reasons (cfr. Comaroff and Comaroff 2007). Moreover, case studies from South Africa and beyond also provide examples of local communities feeling empowered through tourism or museums, by being able to critically engage with stereotypes concerning the perceived static nature of their culture on their own terms (cfr. Amoamo, 2011, p.1258; Gibson, 2012, p.206; Cassel and Maureira, 2017, p.9).

and endlessly remote, unchangeable and unattainable past (Amoamo, 2011, p.1258). The indigenous, it seems, is left to exist in specifically allocated non-threatening and 'distant' places or forms such as the museum, the rural areas, the tourist destination or the marginalized community. This competition to be the most authentic can, moreover, turn into a race to the bottom and stimulate tensions (Cassel and Maureira, 2017: 11). Indeed, the Khoisan activist scene, at least in Cape Town, is marred by intense strife between groups vying to be authentic representatives. There are currently no signs that this is abating (Verbuyst, 2015, p.117–136).

Quelling the infighting is one of the reasons why the previously mentioned National Traditional and Khoi and San Leadership Bill (NTKLB) is attempting to legally enshrine the criteria for qualifying as a Khoisan traditional leader. It seems, however, that the NTKLB has caused even more divisions between those supporting it and those opposing it. Much of the criticism has to do with the fact that the text does not identify the Khoisan as indigenous. I come back to this in the next section. More fundamentally, however, many Khoisan activists reject the text, as they feel that they have not been adequately consulted and because the decision regarding recognition will ultimately be made by the premier of the province. While there have been consultation rounds in various locations throughout the country, activists complain that some of these have been difficult to reach or that there was not enough time to discuss matters in-depth. In general then, the process should not be rushed but carefully thought through. Important in this regard is to critically evaluate old research which informs this process, such as the notoriously elusive 2001 so-called 'status quo report'. While I cannot judge the content of this report as I and most activists have not been able to access it, it would surely need to be updated due to contemporary developments.

Most notably for Cape Town, should research acknowledge the destructive history that the Khoisan faced from the 17th century onward? The context of the preoccupation with authenticity on the part of the state and the activists outlined above has to also be taken into account. At work is a process of cultural reconstruction, revitalization and reinvention. Instead of placing Khoisan culture and identity in a static, distant and stereotyped past only to be found in approximations in the present, the vibrancy and creativity of Khoisan revivalism should be publically embraced as empowering (see below). Khoisan culture and identity is not confined to the museum or the tourist site, but is entering mainstream society and public consciousness. (Urban) indigenous

identity should not be shaped as a result of criteria dictated by the state, but rather practiced through a process of self-determination. Extreme care should be taken when legally enshrining Khoisan identity and culture, especially with regards to potentially divisive specifics, such as DNA quotas (Verbuyst, 2015, p.120–136; see also TallBear, 2013). Indeed, South Africa’s legacy of native administration and racialized science shows precisely how dangerous the practice of defining identity and culture in primordial, racial or pure terms can be (Dubow, 1995). If anything, perhaps it is this colonial framework which still remains to be dismantled and indeed, decolonized (cfr. Tomaselli, 2012). Yet, at the same time, working through these controversial issues might be, to a large extent, unavoidable when bringing identities and cultures into the political and legal sphere.⁹ As I show next, it is worth examining the ethical implications of these controversial issues against the backdrop of current calls for decolonization.

INCOMMENSURABILITY AND THE ETHICS OF LAYERED DECOLONIZATION

Much has been written about how indigenous people could or should live together with others in the same society. This is a complex matter that I certainly do not intend to resolve here. Instead, I want to engage with a particularly well-cited text, which I have already drawn upon, entitled *‘Decolonization is not a metaphor’* by Tuck and Yang (2012), as I feel that it takes somewhat of an extreme position in this debate. The arguments are powerful because they are defended in all intellectual honesty and clarity. Indeed, more than anyone else I have read so far, Tuck and Yang make explicit the ethical implications that many others are only reluctantly or implicitly arguing for when discussing decolonization. While the piece was written with the North American context in mind, many of the issues raised are relevant to understanding the position of the South African government, as well as some of the opposition to Khoisan activism that I have come across. There is much in this text to discuss in relation to the South African case. But I focus on Tuck and Yang’s claim that the demands of indigenous people are ultimately ‘incommensurable’ to those of the non-indigenous.

As a result of the violent legacies of colonialism that continue to affect indigenous people, Tuck and Yang (2012, p.1, 4) argue that any attempt to

⁹ I touched upon some of the historiographical, legal and political complexities that arise when dealing with the land claims of the Khoisan in Verbuyst (2016; 2017).

negotiate with indigenous communities that does not grant absolute autonomy to them to settle matters as they see fit – particularly relating to the ‘repatriation of indigenous lands’ – reduces the word ‘decolonization’ to a metaphor, an approximation of what actually has to be done. In one of the most controversial passages of the essay, Tuck and Yang (2012, p.17) even question the limits of solidarity from other groups (that experience(d) injustice), as they might not go far enough in their support for indigenous people when push comes to show. Ultimately, they might end up deflating the importance of the issue. Crucially then, Tuck and Yang argue that the only way forward is to drastically ‘unsettle’ the power balance in favour of indigenous people. Everything else, they argue, amounts to a waste of time and effort. It serves only to further entrench the status quo. While similar arguments are also taken up by Khoisan activists, I would contend that this is done by a vocal minority that sensationalist media tend to focus on. Judging from my personal interactions, they are not representative of the broad-based identity movement of Khoisan revivalism as a whole. Khoisan activists are in some ways distinct from other groups campaigning for decolonization in South Africa, but they have much in common with them as well.

While it is imperative to recognize that #RhodesMustFall is but one expression of the broader drive to decolonize South African society, there are telling similarities with Khoisan activism. #RhodesMustFall targeted the statue of Cecil Rhodes because he was taken to embody the enduring legacy of colonialism in South African society and academia. Much of the anger stems from a sense that African history and identity are ignored and dismissed in both university curricula, demographics and architecture. A decolonization of both the intellectual and physical landscape is pursued as a means to assert the presence of the African majority. Protesters stress the need to effect immediate change in a country judged to be working through its colonial legacy at a frustratingly slow pace. Observers remarked how the movement thereby explicitly brings the past ‘back’ into the present (Holmes & Loehwing, 2016, p.15). Khoisan activists engage in a similar bid to publically and assertively bring a (invisible/forgotten) past into present-day society and public consciousness through their discourse and protests. The contemporaneity of Khoisan identity and culture is continuously stressed. Their activism is as laden with symbolism as the #RhodesMustFall movement. Moreover, it is, as outlined above, similarly often practiced on specific sites of meaning.

Yet, while Khoisan activists are equally disappointed with the lack of decolonization and the rainbow ideology underpinning South African multiculturalism since 1994, they have different reasons for doing so. Their goal is not so much to effect the 'Africanisation' of society, but to decolonize the socio-economic position and colonial framework surrounding the Khoisan in South Africa that I outlined above. The role of the term indigenous in this regard might hold the biggest danger of generating 'incommensurability' with the African majority. More than geographical and temporal factors, Khoisan activists' emphasis on the term indigenous reflects a desire to be framed as distinct from other groups in South Africa due the age-old character of their culture and identity. In other words, while it is a bid to cultivate ancestral belonging, it is not so much indicative of a desire to establish who was where first. 'Indigenous' is mainly used by the Khoisan to point to the need to address a particular historical trajectory and feeling of marginalization in the present, rather than as a vessel to pursue a politics of entitlement or to assert their superiority over others. Khoisan revivalism is more of a cultural movement than a political one. Yet, the fear that privileging one ethnic group over another would stimulate conflict implicitly (and at times explicitly) guides South African political discourse on the concept 'indigenous'. This sentiment echoes common critiques of the notion of indigenous rights and identities in academic circles (Kuper, 2003) as well as the standpoints taken up in other (neighbouring) national contexts.

The interpretation and use of the concept by the majority of Khoisan activists is therefore important to take into account, as it provides pathways towards decolonization that move away from Tuck and Yang's more pessimistic ethics of incommensurability, which in fact stimulate these types of fear in my view. Decolonization as argued for by the Khoisan, is a serious matter that requires drastic and tangible change. It might be less destabilizing for South African society than some might assume, however. Considering the common ground between Khoisan activism and movements such as #RhodesMustFall, collaboration might strengthen the broader drive towards decolonization. Having said that, more research is required to look into Khoisan involvements in, and attitudes about, decolonization and related movements. In this regard it is worth looking at the reflections of Khoisan activist and academic June Bam-Hutchison on the subject. She opens her essay on #RhodesMustFall by noting that it is regrettable that the Khoisan are rarely mentioned in the movement. For Bam-Hutchison (2016, p.12–13), this is the case because 'such

an acknowledgment [...] may give rise to profound questions on the unresolved and burning land question for the indigenous people of the Cape'. If #RhodesMustFall is sincere in its support of those whose histories have been forgotten and of alternative interpretations of the past, then (un)consciously ignoring the Khoisan is antithetic to its goals. Indeed, such an attitude, as argued for previously, would flatten the differences between the colonial legacies experienced by different groups. Despite different points of emphasis, Bam-Hutchison (2016, p.8) relates to the anger felt by 'young black South Africans' and the symbolic actions that are undertaken as a result:

[U]biquitous colonial monuments in urban centers have become troublesome symbols of the festering wounds of economic injustice and the still unresolved land question. They provide the spatial proximity for accessible physical attack unlike a complex historically deep and powerful economic system that is globally entrenched and inaccessible.

She clearly recognizes historical oppression and poverty among other groups in South Africa and does not suggest competing over who has experienced the most suffering. Bam-Hutchison also does not claim that indigenous identity always trumps other concerns. Moreover, she also shows that, contrary to what Tuck and Yang claim for the North American context, solidarity across groups campaigning for decolonization in South Africa is desirable and feasible. Yet, the question remains: which principles and actions could guide compensation and reconciliation with regards to the Khoisan? According to Bam-Hutchison (2016, p.24), *Lalela*; an isiZulu word meaning listening and taking someone seriously, is the starting point. She argues that Khoisan activists should be given a platform where their demands and grievances are taken seriously and not ridiculed or dismissed as opportunistic. Being in control of the story can be a form of decolonization (Amoamo, 2011, p.1268). As I noted above, dispelling the popular paradigm based on stereotypical assumptions, and recognizing the Khoisan's specific historical trajectories and attachments to particular places, are crucial steps in this regard. Indeed, more than giving a 'voice' to the Khoisan, a different mind-set is required among the general populace to promote a critical reflection on the country's colonial past, and specifically the historical predicament of the Khoisan. This would increase awareness on the challenges facing Khoisan identity and culture today, and contribute to a more informed and meaningful dialogue. Ideally, this in turn generates creative solutions to the problem.

Tuck and Yang (2012, p.10) advance incommensurability so that people can become 'more impatient with each other, less likely to accept gestures and half-steps, and more willing to press for acts which unsettle innocence'. While I support their call for far-reaching change, they do not explain how this 'impatience' would promote dialogue or bring about negotiations instead of stimulating or exacerbating conflict and a deeper entrenchment in extreme positions. They do not address how indigenous people and others are supposed to live together in their envisioned society where it seems, to borrow from Mamdani (2001: 658), the power dynamic would simply be turned upside down. Looking at #RhodesMustFall and Khoisan activism, the South African case shows that 'decolonization' can refer to different painful legacies for different people. It might be more valuable to pursue commensurability which 'open[s] communication channels' instead of the incommensurability that closes them (Ribeiro, 2011, p.287). Yet, Tuck and Yang aptly underline the dangers of engaging with indigenous people within a paradigm that is perceived as disrespectful or via policies that are not taken to be serious vehicles for change, but as attempts to stall or contain the problem. As stated before, this is a complex problem. However, I hope this text moves the discussion in a productive direction by encouraging a conversation about indigeneity and decolonization in South Africa.

PLACING THE KHOISAN WITHIN POST-TRANSITIONAL DECOLONIZATION

The main goal of this essay is to probe the complexities of current calls for decolonization made by Khoisan activists in Cape Town in relation to those expressed by other groups in South Africa through movements such as #RhodesMustFall. I began by giving some background information on post-apartheid Khoisan politics and the main grievances and motivations underpinning Khoisan activism in Cape Town. I then moved on to examine two particular conundrums regarding the inclusion of the Khoisan within wider debates on decolonization. I first made the case for a paradigm change with regards to the colonial framework of Khoisan identity and culture. I argued that this 'decolonization' can be effected by scrutinizing and rethinking the issue of strategic essentialism and its relationship with notions of authenticity. I proceeded by drawing from an influential essay of Tuck and Yang, *Decolonization is not a metaphor*, in order to examine whether or not the demands of the

Khoisan could and should be considered as incommensurable to those of other groups campaigning for decolonization in South Africa. While the insights of Tuck and Yang point to crucial matters that have to be taken into account, such as the act of equivocating the history of colonialism across all groups, I argued that there were many points of convergence between Khoisan activists and other groups that suggest potentially productive ways of collaboration. Contrary to what Tuck and Yang argue with regard to the North American context, I would contend that this would not reduce decolonization in South Africa to a metaphor.

Both Khoisan activism and movements such as #RhodesMustFall are in part expressions of anger at the lack of change twenty-five years after the democratic transition of 1994. Many have remarked that this type of growing weariness is indicative of the dawn of a South African post-transitional era, where the euphoria of the end of apartheid gives way to frustrations with the persistence of its legacies. Both Khoisan activism and #RhodesMustFall are, at their core, movements that attempt to front the physical absence and presence of these historical legacies. The African 'black' majority tends to focus on the apartheid era, whereas the Khoisan foregrounds colonial past that predates apartheid and reaches back to the mid-17th century. While Khoisan activists want the legacies of this past addressed and many aspire to self-determination, the vast majority do not desire to disengage from the South African state or to implement a regressive agenda. Crucially, however, more research is required on Khoisan activism and their attitudes towards decolonization and movements such as #RhodesMustFall to sustain this claim. I could not go in-depth into all of the issues I raised and I certainly did not cover all ground or tackle all ethical complications. For one, it is in many ways problematic to 'transfer' the perpetuation of the colonial legacy during apartheid to those who have been in charge of a democratic state that is less than twenty-five years old. However, I hope to have provided enough material for discussion and topics for further research.

The layered nature of calls for decolonization in South Africa illustrate the complexity of the matter. It will take time and effort to chart possible ways forward. However, the potential for a comprehensive bid towards decolonization in the post-transitional era might not materialize if the Khoisan are not meaningfully placed within the decolonization debate and within policies relevant to the South African context, such as land reform and the recognition of traditional leadership. With feelings of alienation on the rise among increas-

ingly larger numbers of Khoisan activists, their patience might be running out and the empowering nature of the movement might give way to resentment towards other groups in South African society and disengagement from the state. I meet more and more Khoisan activists who experience disappointment with state politics, and frame them as a continuation of the colonial politics of forced assimilation. Indeed, this ‘festering wound’, as June Bam-Hutchison described it, will only become deeper if it is not attended to with swift, visible and drastic state-sponsored measures.

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