

# INTRODUCTION

## THE POLITICS OF EGALITARIANISM— ESSAYS IN HONOR OF RICHARD B. LEE

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The essays assembled in this book exemplify the way political anthropologists address a range of problems that deeply affect people throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> The authors draw their inspiration from the work of Canadian anthropologist Richard B. Lee, and, like him, they are concerned with understanding and acting upon issues of “indigenous rights”; the impact of colonialism, postcolonial state formation, and neoliberalism on local communities and cultures; the process of culture change; what the history and politics of egalitarian societies reveal about issues of “human nature” or “social evolution”; and how peoples in southern Africa are affected by and responding to the most recent crisis in their midst, the spread of AIDS.

The authors in this volume discuss the state of a range of contemporary debates in the field that in various ways extend the political, theoretical, and empirical issues that have animated Lee’s work. In addition, the book provides readers with important contemporary Kalahari studies, as well as “classic” works on foraging societies.

Three central projects form the basis of this collection. These correspond to the projects that have engaged Lee throughout his career. The first, initiated in the 1960s by Lee and his colleagues, set about to present as complete a picture as possible of the hunting and gathering way of life. As historical (and academic) circumstances changed, Lee’s work turned more to an investigation of former foraging societies and their evolving life patterns and political struggles. The latter has increasingly become labeled and encompassed under the rubric of “indigenous rights.” The second project entails an examination of the

manner in which historical and evolutionary perspectives and processes can best be combined and complemented to produce a sound understanding of local and global patterns of change. The third project can be broadly characterized as the interrogation and appreciation of egalitarianism as a theoretical possibility, an historical fact, and a political project. All resonate with and derive from a wider concern for social justice and human rights (broadly conceived to include social and economic rights as well as the more narrowly political) and the ways that they can be realized through political praxis. Thus, the topics addressed by these essays include the politics, ethnography, and philosophical basis of egalitarianism and attendant questions regarding varying understandings of human nature and their implications for striving towards a more emancipatory future.

Other chapters examine aspects of “indigenism” (especially in the context of southern Africa), the theoretical importance assigned to evolution and history in understanding processes of change, and the role of anthropology in political critique and activism. Finally, Lee’s work draws attention to the role of the four-field approach in North American anthropology and exemplifies the approach at its most productive, in particular the early Harvard-based Kalahari project, and later in his and Ida Susser’s work on HIV in southern Africa. In this volume, Christine Ward Gailey pays explicit attention to this topic, while other contributors address it less directly.

### **Ethnographic Impetus to Theory**

Lee’s most enduring legacy is the remarkable corpus of ethnographic work and its impetus to theory that stem from his long-term Kalahari research and from the scholars he inspired, encouraged, and mentored. The San<sup>2</sup> and the body of ethnography that has emerged about them join a small group of ethnographic cases (including, for example, the Trobriand Islanders, the Nuer, etc.) that have provided the stimulus for important anthropological theorizing, debate, and analysis. The San have been subject to study and restudy primarily because they are intrinsically interesting, but so are all people. The richness, quality, and reliability of the data collected by Lee and his colleagues have invited further study and enabled restudy to be especially productive. Moreover, the San have generated interest in large part because of the important theoretical questions that Lee has asked of his material and that others have consequently been inspired and provoked to ask of it.

Lee’s early work challenged long-held assumptions that hunter-gatherer life was “nasty, brutish and short.” Through rigorous empirical research, Lee demonstrated the security inherent in a foraging

subsistence base.<sup>3</sup> Marshall Sahlins used Lee's material to advance his extremely significant concept of the "original affluent society," which he first presented at the 1966 "Man the Hunter" conference organized by Lee and Irven DeVore and later refined in his 1972 book *Stone Age Economics* (see also Sahlins, Gailey, Susser, and this author's chapter in this volume).

The essay is reproduced here in shortened form. As explored in my introduction to the Sahlins essay, the argument of original affluence continues to stimulate scholarly attention and debates inspired by it show no sign of abating. Using Lee's material, Sahlins was able to pose important questions regarding the ubiquity of the market principle as the mechanism of economic integration in society. Technically, the argument of original affluence takes the market principle as a given, but, in effect, it pierces the very heart of the principle by suggesting that, while human subjects make means-versus-ends calculations, they may not necessarily be doomed to make such decisions under the ubiquitous specter of unlimited ends. Therefore, the possibility of freedom from incessant deprivation exists.

Sahlins's notion of the original affluent society fed into the debate between the formalists and substantivists that loomed large in the field of anthropology at the time he introduced the concept. To simplify, the formalists viewed the economy as composed of (individual) humans attempting to fulfill unlimited wants with limited ends (the market principle), while the substantivists argued that the economy constituted a category of culture that represented the "material life process of society" (Sahlins, 1972: xii). This particular debate no longer commands the attention of anthropologists with the same urgency, but questions (or, in most cases, the blind acceptance) of the universality of the market principle as the basis of the economy remain central not only among academics but also among the governmental and institutional officials and policy makers whose decisions have a profound impact upon the daily lives of people throughout the world. The implicit assumption that the economy consists of "autonomous" individuals making choices (on an even playing field) regarding the most effective means to allocate their scarce resources guides these institutions and their planning. In the current neo-liberal moment, the assumption of market universality is joined by the concomitant normative notion that peoples' well being will be enhanced by granting them even greater autonomy in making such choices. These ideas influence the policies not only of our own governments but also those of the multi-lateral institutions, such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, that dictate to the governments of poor countries. Such assumptions about the nature of the economy lead ultimately to policies that, for instance, force poor residents of indebted nations to

decide between utilizing their scant cash for water (which is being privatized as a result of World Bank policies), school fees, food, or medical care. For this reason, and a host of many others, the lessons of the “original affluent society” and its inherent critique of market universality remain highly salient.

### **The Theoretical and Ethnographic Basis of Egalitarianism**

Many of this volume’s essays take their impetus from the same unwavering resolve to understand the nature of human equality and to strive towards its realization that underlies much of Lee’s work and political praxis. The optimism inherent in this position does not spring from naïveté but rather from a seasoned realism that endures despite the difficult times and challenging moments that Lee has encountered (see Gailey, this volume). Like many progressive scholars of his generation, Lee has witnessed “heroes and heroic regimes” dissolve into the ordinary, or worse, criminal; he has withstood the cynical prism through which his work has sometimes been viewed; he has experienced a historical period in which activist politics have been increasingly marginalized (if not trivialized) by right-wing governments and by sentiments in the university and beyond; and he has suffered personal tragedy. Yet, despite all, his resolve that the capacity exists for human society to exist under more egalitarian conditions than those characterizing our present predicament remains intact.

Lee’s early ethnography provided a critical contribution to the rise of feminist anthropology (see Gailey, Susser, and Thomas Patterson, this volume). By using his own careful measurements and comparative data from other foraging societies, he revealed the importance of collected foods (largely procured by women) in relation to meat in most forager diets. In fact, in acknowledging that a greater proportion of the San diet was supplied by collected vegetable foods, Lee challenged the appropriateness of the term “hunter-gatherer society” and switched to “foraging society” in many of his writings. By demonstrating women’s subsistence role in San society, Lee and others were able to question the received wisdom that posited hunting and the division of labor upon which it was predicated, including male predominance, as the evolutionary basis of human social organization. In addition, Lee provided ethnographic evidence of women’s political centrality and in doing so contributed to dispelling stereotypes of “primitive patriarchy.”<sup>4</sup> His Kalahari colleague, Pat Draper, provided further ethnographic support in an important article that appeared in one of the formative volumes of feminist anthropology (Draper, 1975). In it

Draper offers observation and analysis of greater sexual egalitarianism amongst foraging as opposed to sedentary San.

In the 1980s Lee's theoretical framework shifted explicitly to Marxist political economy, with an emphasis on examining the social and economic basis of egalitarianism. With Eleanor Leacock, he published works that affirmed Karl Marx's construct of "primitive communism" and explored its ethnographic foundations. Lee and Leacock argued that societies exist (or have existed) that have the capacity to reproduce themselves while limiting the accumulation of wealth and power, and they attempted to identify the structures that enabled such societies to do so. Lee's careful elucidation and analysis of the structural mechanisms that inhibit social and economic differentiation amongst the San provided significant inspiration and substance to James Woodburn in developing his important distinction between immediate and delayed return societies in his 1982 article "Egalitarian Societies" and subsequent works (see chapter four, "'The Original Affluent Society': Four Decades On," for further discussion). In this volume, Bruce Trigger, Gailey, and Patterson (and less directly Susser) also address this aspect of Lee's work. Gailey examines Marx's *Ethnological Notebooks*, illustrating how Marx distinguished communal-based social formations, such as those of foraging groups, from those of peasants and how he saw in the former possibilities for an emancipatory future.

The observations of Trigger and Patterson emerge from a similar perspective; they pay special attention to assertions regarding the "nature" of human nature that various writers wish to put forward on the basis of forager ethnography. Because many observers view the societies of contemporary foragers as a prism through which to glimpse human origins, easy license is taken in making assumptions about "primordial" humans as either "noble savages" or "nasty brutes." Renée Sylvain's chapter also draws attention to the impact of Lee's work in the reexamination of the Hobbesian notion of human nature. She then takes the discussion forward by differentiating ideas of human nature from those of identity and interrogating the latter in relation to San studies.

In considering the nature of human inequality, especially gender-based, Patterson identifies liberal views whose theoretical genealogy lies, in particular, with Locke for whom gender inequality is taken as a given and contrasts them with those emerging from a Marxist and Marxist feminist tradition. He notes that Lee's work supports the latter. In addressing the controversies central to the 'Kalahari Debate' (discussed below) he continues the contrast between liberal versus Marxist based perspectives. He includes many of Lee's critics (the "revisionists") in the category of those who grant analytic privilege to the sphere of exchange (in the liberal tradition), in contrast to those who

grant theoretical primacy to the sphere of production (following Marx). In so doing, the “revisionists” emphasize San relations with encompassing and extractive political-economic systems in which San interpersonal relationships appear largely as a function of their external subordination. Lee, on the other hand, by keeping the primary (but not exclusive) gaze on production is able to illustrate the means by which the San inhibit both political and economic inequality despite the fact (not because of it, as some critics would have) that they are enmeshed in power relations not of their own making.

In the volume’s first chapter, Trigger poses questions about the inherent “goodness” or lack of it in human nature and ponders the degree to which there might be a biological basis for human nature that limits its social construction. Trigger acknowledges the openness of his questions and the difficulties in answering them. But he implores progressive anthropologists to consider the degree to which people in complex capitalist societies might fashion social structures and living arrangements that promote a more equitable sharing of wealth, despite a basic human nature that may be less flexible than we may wish to believe. One of the reasons Trigger finds the San material so compelling is that he shares this political commitment with Lee. Amongst the San, as depicted by Lee, one finds no “noble savage” occupying an original utopia, but rather a group of people who actively resist the rise of inequality. They possess and deploy a set of rules or “instruments” that are, to borrow Pierre Clastres’s term, “anti-state”; their existence illustrates, within important limits, the possible.

## **Praxis**

Throughout this volume, several authors highlight the connection between theory and practice by asking what a politically engaged or emancipatory anthropology might look like. Megan Biesele and Susser draw attention to Lee’s southern African activism, while Karen Brodtkin addresses a more deeply rooted political foundation. With respect to Lee, to herself, and to many other progressive Jewish activists, Brodtkin asks, “What kind of Jewishness do Jews create when they pursue social justice in North America today?” She identifies at least two strands of Jewish political activism that are constructed on the basis of different sets of narratives. Some emphasize the Holocaust and solidarity with Israel, while others hark back to memories of immigrants working in sweatshops and to union struggles. Collective memories amongst the latter have been further radicalized through the infusion of feminist politics. Despite the class status they now occupy, contemporary Jews like Brodtkin and Lee more strongly identify with the latter

category, personally and in terms of praxis. As Brodtkin illustrates, although most progressive Jews no longer share direct identification with the underprivileged circumstances of oppressed peoples in North America, they can “perform identity work” that enables them to share in their struggles.

Bieseles, a member of the original Harvard Kalahari project, chronicles the Kalahari project’s remarkable legacy of activism and advocacy. The Kalahari Peoples Fund (KPF), founded in 1973 and funded by publication royalties, donations and grants, has facilitated a wide array of activities designed to promote San empowerment. Efforts have been directed towards the enhancement of livelihood opportunities, leadership development, the struggle for land rights, education and language development, and numerous other projects. Increasingly, the San are defining their own development priorities and assuming managerial responsibilities, while Western-based KPF workers are happily assuming a secondary role. Robert Hitchcock picks up on this theme by highlighting the San land struggles and the range of methods the San, along with their neighbors, deploy in asserting their rights. These efforts have met with mixed results, but some initiatives, such as the various mapping projects, appear to be bearing fruit and give one hope that greater San empowerment will be possible in the future. Hitchcock’s essay gives the reader a good sense of the complex mix of characters (multiethnic locals, governmental officials, and expatriates), as well as the various levels (local, regional, state, international, and global) that come into play, intersect, and complement and contradict each other in the world of San activism.

Bieseles, Hitchcock, Sylvain, and Mathias Guenther touch on the thorny dilemmas faced by the San with regard to the appellation of the label “indigenous” that is often imposed on and, at times, embraced by the San themselves. One contentious issue in the field is whether the term “indigenous” and the various international declarations and instruments designed to empower indigenous peoples apply outside of the Americas, Australia-New Zealand and perhaps the northernmost zones of Europe (areas that experienced massive influxes of foreign peoples, leaving the previous inhabitants as marginalized minorities). Authors weigh in on both sides of the argument. Kuper (2003, 389) represents the extreme negative opinion. For him, “indigenous” is a gloss for “primitive” and easily transmutes into a racial category. He argues that bearing the indigenous label requires a demonstration of authenticity based on descent that inevitably leads to questions of how much descent qualifies and thus to divisive quarrels about who does or does not belong. Therefore, its adoption introduces the possibility for conflict, pitting groups against each other. Short-term political gains reaped under the indigenous rubric, he argues, may be counteracted

by the long-term political consequences of carrying the identity baggage that comes with the indigenous label.

Others recognize the limits of extending the term beyond the Americas and the Antipodes, and acknowledge the risk of romanticizing peoples termed indigenous as Stone Age relics, living in commune with nature and each other, and many of the other hazards identified by Kuper. At the same time, it is evident that many marginalized minorities worldwide became encapsulated within newly emerged nation-states to whose predominant cultures, languages, and social groups they remain subordinated. Furthermore, many of these peoples live in conditions of poverty and despair resembling the more disempowered of the American and Australian indigenous groups. Thus instead of "primitiveness" being the underlying characteristic of indigenism as Kuper asserts, encapsulation, marginalization, disempowerment, cultural and livelihood difference from the dominant society are considered by many activists to be the defining characteristics of the indigenous. The importance of descent as a basis for indigenous identification also varies. In some instances the people themselves emphasize it but in many instances common residence and life circumstances provide a basis for group inclusion. Governments wishing to defuse indigenous claims by stipulating stringent requirements for indigenous entitlement and wishing to foster a divide and rule strategy will often emphasize descent. In addition, a persuasive argument can be made that the political visibility and clout that the indigenous label imparts, especially as the indigenous movement continues to gain more international purchase, may counteract the pitfalls of "strategic essentialism" that is often entailed in its usage (see, for example, Niezen, 2003; Lee, 2000; Hitchcock and Vinding, 2004). In Steven Robbins's words, "essentialist constructions of identity are not necessarily incompatible with an active embrace of the contradictions of modernity and its bittersweet fruits" (2003: 398). This comment resonates with Biesele's observation in this volume that "Today, the indigenous peoples of the Kalahari are remote and untouched only in our dreams (and in bad books and films)."

Further complicating the usefulness and appropriateness of the term "indigenous" are the actions of some of the nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that operate under the banner of indigenous rights. These are not a uniform lot. For instance, Survival International (a British NGO that in an earlier incarnation called itself the Primitive People's Fund) has launched an aggressive campaign against the Botswana government on behalf of the San. Their tactics have probably done more damage to San relations with their fellow citizens than any other act or organization. Worse, they have undermined the



efforts of local NGOs and human rights groups in their attempts to work with the San in promoting social justice (see Suzman 2002; Solway, 2005). But Survival International occupies one end of the continuum of NGOs working “on behalf” of marginalized minorities. Its actions contrast greatly both in terms of practice and principles from NGOs such as the Working Group of Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (Wimsa), the Kalahari Peoples Fund, and the Kuru Development Trust, which have local San activists as lead members of their boards and governance structures; some groups also include local non-San in their membership (see Guenther, Hitchcock and Biesele this volume). To be sure, the appellation of the term “indigenous” is not without contradictions. It presents serious challenges as well as opportunities for the San; some of the dilemmas of embracing and escaping it are spelled out in the chapters by Hitchcock, Sylvain, and Guenther.

## Ethnography

Bronislaw Malinowski may have enjoined us to pitch our tents in the middle of the village, but Kalahari ethnographers have more often pitched their tents at the edge of a waterhole. Lee’s own tent was situated near a waterhole called Dobe: so significant has been his pioneering research there that what was a rather obscure place now appears on most Botswana maps. His beautifully vivid and empathetic account of the Kalahari peoples’ changing lives has set a high ethnographic standard matched by few.<sup>5</sup> Generations of anthropology undergraduates have come to appreciate a non-Western society by reading his work. Whether describing foraging practices, naming relationships, sexuality, or the politics and poetics of vanity and humility surrounding the presentation of a Christmas ox, Lee’s fine attention to detail, lively descriptions, and engaging portrayals of the vitality of San life have given his work a central place in the ethnographic record. Through films and other materials, the general public has also been presented with a sensitive account of an African society. As a result, the San are arguably the most thoroughly documented group in Africa.

Perhaps it is Lee’s brilliance as an ethnographer, his ability to keep multiple methodological balls in the air at any given time, and the widespread academic and public recognition of his work, in addition to the role San material has played in theory building, that have made him, his work, and San studies in general such a lightning rod for criticism, discontent, and political and theoretical dispute. In the 1980s,

Lee's early ethnography, as well as the evolutionary analytic framework that informed it, increasingly came under fire. Claiming that he neglected San incorporation into coercive world power structures and arguing that their egalitarianism was a product of their subservience and not a *sui generis* phenomenon, "revisionist" scholars initiated a lively "Kalahari debate" (see Patterson and Gailey this volume). Lee met their challenge by generating detailed historical research (some of it conducted with this book's authors, such as myself and, especially, Guenther) and by refining theoretical models of egalitarianism. As a result of these debates, our knowledge of Kalahari peoples and the models deployed in their analysis have become more sophisticated.

### **"The Predicament of the Returning Researcher"**

Long-term fieldwork presents many opportunities but also many challenges. Lee first went to the Kalahari as a graduate student in 1963 and has returned numerous times since, most recently in 2005. A scholar who returns to the same research location for several decades bears the traces and influences of a succession of academic paradigms, theoretical orientations, and, especially in Lee's case, an ever-changing and growing number of fellow fieldworkers. He or she is faced with the difficult task of disentangling changes in the object from those of the scholar-observer (Haugerud and Solway, 2000). The extent to which longitudinal research produces a greater sense of depth (or paradoxically of superficiality) for the researcher is open to debate. But this is why long-term field research is important; it subverts our "isms," mitigates against the smugness of the present, and reminds us, to borrow Sara Berry's 1993 phrase, that "no condition is permanent."

In the four decades that Lee has visited the Kalahari, the pace of change has been breathtaking, complex, heartening and simultaneously disheartening, and at times, I would think, bewildering. Many of the changes are cited in this volume's contributions by Hitchcock and Biesele; they also form the backdrop to articles by Guenther, Sylvain, and Susser. It has not always been easy or comforting to witness the transformations, but Lee has carefully documented the changes in livelihood strategies; social conditions; local, national, and global political dynamics; the arrival of the AIDS pandemic; and the San's participation in formal institutions and structures. Contrary to the accusations of some critics, Lee has never viewed the San as timeless isolates. Each new version of his ethnography portrays the San as modern subjects and agents of change in the new states of southern Africa. The essays by Hitchcock, Guenther, Susser, Biesele, and Sylvain all illustrate this point.

## Art, Science, and Politics

In his important 1992 article, "Art, Science, or Politics? The Crisis in Hunter-Gatherer Studies" published in *American Anthropologist*, Lee evokes Charles Percy Snow's distinction between the supposedly irreconcilable "humanistic and scientific" academic subcultures. I wish to borrow Lee's title in a slightly altered form in order to suggest that his work as well as that of his collaborators in the Kalahari and elsewhere has sought to bridge the gulf explicit in Snow's dichotomy. Lee's work, in particular, not only embraces and effectively synthesizes both tendencies, but it does so without getting lost in the singular logic of either or indulging in either's excesses. To Snow's classification of art and science, I wish to add, as did Lee, politics. Most of the volume's chapters reflect the ideals and practices that lie at the heart of a politically engaged anthropology whose practitioners are committed to activism inside and outside of the academy.

Snow's distinction speaks intimately to anthropologists, especially those trained in the North American four-field approach, whose discipline has been memorably characterized by Eric Wolf as "the most scientific of the humanities, the most humanist of the sciences" (1964: 88). However, for many in the field, the unity is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. The epistemological presumptions and methodologies of the more "scientific" subfields of archeology and biological anthropology seem to diverge ever further from those of the more humanistic subfields of social/cultural and linguistic anthropology. While surveys conducted by the American Anthropological Association reveal a wide diversity of opinion on the matter, and many North American departments hold firm to unified multi-subdisciplinary programs, fracture lines have appeared. The fact that Columbia University, the founding four-field department in the United States, now offers students the opportunity to take a full major in cultural anthropology *or* archeology is symbolically potent evidence of a retreat from the early vision of an integrated discipline. Increasingly fewer projects exemplify the bridging of anthropology's subfields; indeed, the field may be diverging at a more rapid pace in the new millennium. However, the interdisciplinary and inter-subdisciplinary Kalahari project that Lee and DeVore initiated in 1963 stands as a hallmark of the best that the four-field approach has to offer. By the 1980s, Lee's work narrowed to a more focused exploration of cultural-historical and political economy questions, but Lee and Susser's recent HIV research strives to reintegrate biomedical and cultural anthropology.

Lee's early research was influenced by cultural ecology and evolutionary studies; his work stands as a paradigm of these approaches and became the exemplar for many who sought to apply similar research

methods and analytic tools in the Kalahari and elsewhere. His work, especially the early ecologically oriented writings, employed rigorous scientific methodology. He counted, measured, weighed, and quantified. Lee seemed to have a natural gift for this sort of work; for instance, how many people could eyeball and estimate the weight of an ox within 5 to 10 kilos?<sup>6</sup> He produced models that aided in the understanding of San society, of other hunter-gatherer societies, and of sociocultural evolution. As a result of the team-based nature of the research and Lee's generosity, the integrity of his meticulously collected data and analyses have been scrutinized repeatedly by other team members and have stood the test of time.

The Kalahari project has included experts and students in all four subdisciplines as well as other fields, such as medicine, literature, and history. It has inspired subsequent team research endeavors, such as the Harvard Ituri project. In addition, the 1966 "Man the Hunter" conference that Lee and DeVore organized provided the foundation for ongoing interrogation and theorizing of the very concept and existence of the category "hunter-gatherer." Hunter-gatherer (forager) studies is now well established, with regular international conferences, ongoing research and debate, and productive internal critiques. If some of this work has provided a counterpoint to Lee's, it nonetheless reveals that the significance of his work lies not only in the models and data it has provided but also in its role as stimulus to further reflection, question, debate, controversy, and critical scholarship.

The legacy of Lee's Kalahari work finds expression not only in a voluminous output of books, articles, reviews, and documentary films, as well as newspaper articles and other popular media forms to which he has had direct input, but also, significantly, it finds expression in the work of all of the ethnographers who have followed in his footsteps. They have been animated by his written work; he has tutored them in the language, given access to his field notes, and otherwise encouraged and mentored countless researchers. This volume includes a representative group whose work spans more than half a century of Kalahari research. We begin with Elizabeth Marshall Thomas, whose fieldwork predates Lee's. She first traveled to Namibia (then Southwest Africa) in 1951 with her extraordinary family to conduct fieldwork amongst the San. Renée Sylvain, a student of Lee's, returned from the northern Namibian bush four days prior to the Montreal session, which begot this volume. Susser and this author were in the field as the final touches were being made to this book. I suspect that, in the fifty plus years since Thomas's initial research, there have been few, if any, years during which at least one of us has not been in the Kalahari.

Thomas's essay draws upon her early 1950s fieldwork to highlight the exceptional relationship, or set of "understandings," that existed

between the San and the local lions. This “Bushman/lion truce” that she describes no longer exists, but that it did is fascinating and crucial to document. Thomas’s chapter depicts a past Kalahari and one that she observed only in the “Nyae Nyae” interior. The remaining Kalahari-based chapters are situated in the wider set of relations and present day circumstances, life, and predicaments of contemporary San and their neighbors.

The chapters by Guenther and Sylvain address issues of theoretical and political importance regarding San identity at the turn of twenty-first-century, post-Apartheid, post-Cold War southern Africa, where as elsewhere questions of identity and recognition are becoming increasingly foregrounded and politicized. The contested terrain of San identity, the various stakeholders whose interests are served by fostering a particular label for the San, the possible consequences of applying the different labels, and some of the means by which the San and others attempt to navigate the complexities entailed are examined by Guenther and Sylvain. Guenther highlights the dilemma faced by the San, who, despite their participation in the contemporary everyday world, are continually recast as primitive by a public that wishes to ossify them as living fossils. He exposes a paradox of San artists, who live and work in a very modern world, but cannot escape the hegemonic Western perspective that will only view them and their work through a primitivist lens. The Western-based art consuming audience does this by rejecting artistic pieces that incorporate “modern” images and thus do not conform to outsiders’ vision of the San as “primordial” noble savages. More nefarious is the refusal to grant creativity to individual artists and instead to credit the “culture” with “authorship” of the works. Guenther’s chapter also follows up nicely on Biesele’s, as it illustrates a variety of San organizations and NGOs, some in which expatriate involvement is central and another that is run solely by San.

Sylvain addresses predicaments faced by the Omaheke San of Namibia, who have long been employed as farm laborers. Their political fortunes have been increasingly tied to the politics of recognition. Sylvain explores the identity dilemmas faced by the Omaheke in a number of arenas that tend to mutually reinforce one another. Their fortunes vis-à-vis the state of Namibia, their employment situation, their relationships with NGOs, and their place in the scholarly literature tend to hinge upon a number of contrasting sets of identities. For instance, are the Omaheke “indigenous peoples” or an underclass (and thus invisible to the blossoming NGO world)? Must they be defined by their cultural characteristics or class characteristics? And why must these categories be seen, as they so often are inside and outside the academy, as mutually exclusive? By what standards of “authenticity” are these categories to be measured, and who has the authority to set

the standards? As Sylvain points out in her eloquently argued piece, the consequences for the Omaheke are not simply “academic.” In addressing these timely questions, Sylvain provides significant insights that add a new analytic layer to the Kalahari debate, to the “identity” literature, and to questions regarding the appropriateness and strategic political wisdom of taking on the indigenous label.

Susser and Lee, in collaboration with southern African scholars and practitioners, are currently engaged in applied research in the struggle against HIV/AIDS. Southern Africa has the world’s highest prevalence of documented HIV positive cases. Given that analysts in southern Africa and elsewhere have associated high rates of HIV with poverty and, especially in southern Africa, with women’s lack of autonomy, Susser wonders whether the San’s legacy of a lack of “relative poverty” (Sahlins’s original affluence) might have granted them any small amount of protection against its spread. She also speculates as to whether the San legacy of female political agency depicted so vividly by Lee may have provided the San an added measure of resilience against HIV compared to neighboring groups. While Susser and Lee’s results remain preliminary and suggestive at this point, they point to important factors to consider with regards to the spread of—and possible resistance to—AIDS amongst the San.

## Conclusion

The chapters explore a number of pressing questions in political anthropology today. Trigger, in particular, poses questions regarding the malleability of human nature and, by implication, casts doubt on the proverbial notion of a “blank slate” upon which culture can shape endless human possibilities. However, acknowledging limits does not necessarily result in a pessimistic scenario in which Hobbes’s “war of every man against every man” prevails. Social formations, cultural constructs, and human beings have the capacity to develop structures that can mitigate against such dystopic outcomes. Sahlins’s piece provides a theoretical discussion of the possibility that humans can live in a world where some of the mechanisms implicit in Trigger’s argument operate to limit both inequality and a perception of deprivation. In turning his gaze on the scholarly interpretation of San material, Patterson shows how an emphasis on exchange relations versus production relations has led analysts to misrecognize the possibilities of egalitarianism present in San society. Similarly, in asking why Marx’s later work, the *Ethnological Notebooks*, has been so little studied, Gailey suggests that academics have neglected the communal structures that Marx identified in the more egalitarian of precapitalist structures and

that may still be evident in some aspects of contemporary communities. These societies hold within them the capacity to enable people to resist oppression, and they provide a basis for a more egalitarian future. Brodtkin offers a reflection on the kinds of praxis, in this case identity work, in which we can engage to redress oppression.

Kalahari studies take us from a glimpse into what a world of hunters living amongst hunters (including lions) might have looked like to the San struggling in various ways with the realities of twenty-first century life in an increasingly globalized southern Africa. Hitchcock and Biesele recount the world of San activism with its trials and triumphs. Guenther and Sylvain explore conundrums facing the San in various circumstances and speak to the complexities entailed in the contrasting identities both imposed on and embraced by the San. Susser follows with a discussion of how egalitarian structures may have lessened the San's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS in comparison to their neighbors. The volume closes with Gailey's intellectual biography of Lee written for the original *Festschrift* issue of *Anthropologica*.

Taken together, these works explore both theoretical and practical dimensions of egalitarianism as a political possibility and project. All are a tribute to and a celebration of the inspiring work of Richard B. Lee. His optimism and enthusiasm for new ideas and new people have benefited colleagues, friends, and students.<sup>7</sup> This volume is presented in the spirit of the gift that we so cherish in anthropology—that is, as only one moment in a chain of open-ended exchanges, of generalized reciprocity, that will endure, repeat, expand, and embrace new members over time. Like a trinket in the *hxaro*<sup>8</sup> network or a valuable in the *Kula* ring, we see this as an offering that will be productive of new and more “items” and relations. We can most assuredly count on the fact that Lee will continue his commitment to anthropology, to the peoples of the Kalahari and southern Africa, to his students and colleagues, and to art, science, and politics. And we hope that the critical works that make up this book will serve as a call for further research into the themes and topics explored here.

## Notes

1. This book had its genesis at the joint meetings of the Canadian Anthropology Society, American Ethnological Society, and the Society for Cultural Anthropology in Montreal, May 2001, where Christine Gailey and I organized several sessions that explored a set of themes arising from the work of Richard Lee. The sessions

resulted in a special issue of the journal *Anthropologica*. Richard Katz and Patricia Draper also presented papers at the 2001 conference. Susser was a discussant at the conference and has provided a paper for this volume. Brodwin was unable to attend the conference but has contributed a paper. In addition, Gailey conducted an extensive interview with Lee in 2002. From this interview, she produced an intellectual biography that provides a window into Lee's life and better enables us to understand and appreciate the array of factors and circumstances that have shaped the direction of Lee's work (such as family, education, engagement with evolving intellectual developments and perspectives, the radicalized political context of the 1960s, and the antiwar movement). This book includes versions of all of those papers plus an abridged version of Marshall Sahlins's classic piece, "The Original Affluent Society," and a new introduction to the essay.

Since the 2001 conference, two pioneers in the study of the San have passed away—Isaac Schapera and Lorna Marshall. Their pathbreaking work has led the way and formed a sound basis for all subsequent work in the field.

2. "San" is a generic term deriving from the language family of Khoisan. Debate has raged and fashions have changed regarding the correct and/or appropriate appellation to bestow on the former foraging peoples of the Kalahari (and southern Africa). The term "Bushmen," once dismissed as pejorative, is coming back into fashion. Lee worked with people who call themselves Ju/'hoansi and have been called !Kung in much of the anthropological literature (see Gailey, this volume). Because some chapters in this volume, especially those by Guenther and Sylvain, focus on other San groups than the Ju/'hoansi, I employ the generic term "San."
3. The San's diet had been described (see Thomas, 1959), but Lee painstakingly documented how varied and highly nutritious it was.
4. As Gailey notes (in personal communication with the author, March 2003), Lee's depiction of the control women exercised over their own work arrangements and the distribution of products was significant for feminist scholars producing a critique of male bias in anthropology. (See inter alia Slocum, 1975).
5. The number of times key articles such as "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari" and the undergraduate ethnography first published as *The Dobe !Kung* have been reprinted is evidence of this, as is the fact that his first ethnography, *The !Kung San: Men, Women and Work in a Foraging Society*, won the prestigious Herskovits award.
6. This passage derives from Lee's well-known article "Eating Christmas in the Kalahari," first published in *Natural History* magazine. Lee's capacity to make people come alive through his writing, to engage an audience, and to do so through the classic Jewish humorous motif of self-deprecation is exemplified brilliantly in this wonderful narrative.
7. In particular, students have always appreciated his enthusiasm: he not only made us feel welcome, he made us feel interesting.
8. *Hxaro* is a system of generalized gift exchange practiced amongst the Ju/'hoansi (Wiessner, 1982).

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