

*Updating the San: Image and Reality of an African People in the 21st Century.* Robert Hitchcock, Kazunobu Ikeya, Megan Biesele & Richard Lee, editors. 2006. Senri Ethnological Studies no. 70, Osaka, Japan: National Museum of Ethnology. ISSN 0387-6004; ISBN 4-901 906-43-7 C3039. v. 304 pp., maps, figures.

Those known externally as the San (Bushmen or Basarwa) are peoples currently living in six southern African countries: South Africa, Namibia, Botswana, Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe). Collectively, they are a people who are viewed and stereotyped by the outside world in contradictory ways: as some of the last human inhabitants of a Garden of Eden existence, or as the victims of apartheid's worst policies and practices and of postcolonial state marginalisation. They number about 100,000 people - a number that is far outweighed by the amount of literature produced in the popular and academic presses - about their lifestyles, struggles, and knowledge.

*updating the San* is a volume published in Japan, which has gathered together the work of some of the San's most enduring researchers and activists, and others who are relatively new to the field of "Bushman Studies". The volume contains a truly global

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body of recent research. And perhaps it should be read in dialog with two other recent volumes on the “Khoisan” or the Miscast “Bushman” – the proceedings published from the 1997 “Khoisan Identities and Cultural Heritage Conference” held in Cape Town, South Africa, and edited by Andrew Bank; and Pippa Skotnes’ controversial installation and edited volume, *Miscast: Negotiating the Presence of the Bushmen*, published by University of Cape Town Press in 1996.

It would seem that *Updating the San* is written in response to the Khoisan *Identities* book, a gathering of interested parties (not just academics) in which it was stated on more than one occasion that at times in the 20<sup>th</sup> century it had seemed there were more researchers working on the Bushmen than there were Bushmen; and that despite the volume of work produced about this group of people, the Bushman/San remained marginalised and dispossessed. The tenor of argument in much of *Updating the San* come across a little on the defensive: over and over anthropologists in particular, argue for the ongoing activism and use of the research data gathered in improving the lot of contemporary San/Bushmen: with the exception of the musicologists. All three volumes have a chapter on music, each of which is relegated to the end of the book, a kind of self-imposed marginalization of Bushmen musical scholarship; a point that I address more fully below.

*Updating the San* has four major sections: an Introduction, which “updates the San” in a thoughtful and comprehensive manner, co-authored by the four editors; a section of four chapters titled “Health, Body, and Perception; another section “Development and Social Changes;” and the final part “Land, Identity, and Human Rights”. Most of the contributions are framed within the discourse of Indigenous Peoples or First Peoples institutionalised and universalised with the United Nations’ Decade of Indigenous Peoples initiated in the early 1990s. Issues of loss are central to those discourses: loss of land, culture, economic sustainability, representation, voice, and identity, all in the wake of the forces of modernisation, missionisation, and globalisation. There are pieces of the work that address problems of societal change for the San – violence, alcohol abuse, poverty, and hopelessness. This gathering of scholars and their work, however, strives to intervene in that discursive space by highlighting the growing political empowerment of sectors of the San communities in southern Africa. Several stories are told about the mobilisation of San constituencies around HIV AIDS and condom usage – foregrounding the power of women in these movements; the activism of some groups around environmental management and sustainable practices as mechanisms for regaining control over land. And then there are the stories about language use – the preservation of language through narrative, through educational interventions, the development of curriculum in culturally coherent forms – retaining egalitarian practices in classrooms and teacher training.

It is with this richly textured set of pieces that engage with the contemporary plight of San peoples in southern Africa that the chapter addressing music is something of an anomaly, not just in *Updating the San*, but in the other two volumes as well. The chapter

is written as if music has no agency in the lives of the San people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It is a tentative exploration of the “thumb piano” – itself already a derogatory term for the *mbira* type instruments found both amongst the San in central Botswana, and in many other parts of Southern and Central Africa. It lacks any sense of contemporary discourses around indigeneity, the use of music/culture to address matters of cultural identity and loss, the integral ways in which music, spirituality, and the land are intertwined in many cultures of those who identify as Indigenous Peoples. What of the ways, I wonder, in which music might work as a liberating force in a world that is increasingly circumscribed and sedentary, a “dis-eased” world in so many ways? Can *mbira* performance, sung texts, dancing oneself into an altered state of consciousness not work as an integrative, healing force? We simply do not know from these contributions. In the three volumes, where music is addressed specifically, we capture very little sense of how it works in light of the issues raised elsewhere. The old positivism of musicology creates a stilted and archaic place for the musical in contemporary San experience.

Fortunately, we do not have to rely exclusively on the voice of those addressing the specifically musical – Megan Biesele and others integrate discussions of the musical as significant dimensions of contemporary San experience, providing small but important windows into the continuing value of music in trance, dance, and healing rituals. In this regard, the chapters that might be most useful to ethnomusicologists are those that address language use, the creation of educational centers for San values and culture just outside of Cape Town, South Africa, and those that examine the problems of loss, particularly the loss of access to land. I wonder, in closing, just when we will begin to talk about “Bushmen” music and its appropriations by others; about the post-apartheid rush to record music of “the Bushmen” such as the CDs published by Ocora, by Pops Mohammed, and the new age electronic composers who cut and splice soundbytes of “the Kalahari” into the overly processed “music for healing” that, like much of the know-ledge about the San generated in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, circulates globally amongst consumers who can only begin to imagine what life as a “Bushman” must be like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

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*Masters of the Sabar: Wolof Griot Percussionists of Senegal*. 2007. Patricia Tang. Philadelphia: Temple University Press. xiv, 209 pp., 36 illustrations and transcriptions, glossary, bibliography, discography, index, CD (African Soundscapes Series). Gregory Barz, (series editor).

Patricia Tang has done what is necessary to speak with authority and depth about this West African drumming tradition, including numerous field trips over the years since her initial visit in 1996, learning to play the *sabar* drum, attending many social events and interviewing and video recording participants. She has personally been involved in