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Theorizing voice

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Theorizing voice: Performativity, politics and listening

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to develop a theory of voice. I claim that it is productive to use 'voice' as a theoretical tool that encompasses a speaker's performance and body gestures. At the same time, this paper argues that it is insufficient to focus on the speaker. While there is recognition that voice(s) are a necessary part of a functioning political, democratic structure, this article reveals that any research on voice needs to also consider the politics involved in listening. Listening not only nuances the study of voice, but also includes those in positions of dominance whose power can be forgotten if discussion focuses exclusively on the political and social struggles that the disempowered undertake in order to make themselves heard. I draw on ethnographic research that was carried out in 2011 and 2012 in Botswana with indigenous Ncoakhoe (also known in literature as 'San') to show how voice was used (performativity) but also how the audience was often restricted. This reduced the political effects of even Ncoakhoe who are educated and employed Christians, i.e. Ncoakhoe who have subscribed to the dominant moral code. My research suggests that a theory of voice is not only about speaking, participating or making yourself heard but also must consider the implications of using a voice that relies upon dominant structures to legitimize it. When Ncoakhoe speak, who listens?

Keywords

democracy, indigenous peoples, minorities, performativity, politics, power, recognition, voice

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Introduction

To develop a theory of 'voice', I draw together the claims I make here which include extending the theorization of voice into performativity as well as paying attention to voice(s) as being a necessary part of a functioning political, democratic structure. A focus on voice as both political and performative means that the content as well as the form of voice must be considered in representation and participation. Similarly, the way that voice changes and is affected by systems of power and political structures is part and parcel of developing a theory of voice.

There is a notion that there is a political necessity for diverse voices to be present within democratic political systems to realize equality (Warren, 2002: 698). In this article I refine 'voice' in relation to this political notion but also draw on performativity. This does not detract from a political focus on the need to hear diverse voices but rather supports it. My support responds to the critical concerns that minority people are co-opted by governments if they are included into political structures in superficial ways. In the name of giving voice, minority people can be given tokenistic positions of power and prestige that hide underlying issues of assimilation and exclusion (Eisenberg and Kymlicka, 2011: 5).

I draw on my ethnographic work with a marginalized minority group of indigenous Ncoakhoe (San) in Botswana who are engaged in a struggle for societal recognition, to be recognized as human beings of equal value. In this work I examined the ways in which individual indigenous people use voice to negotiate difficult encounters and make their ways in the world within the broader society in which they are embedded. I worked with Ncoakhoe 'advocates', who were engaged in their own process of representing Ncoakhoe. The necessity for their political voice came from daily experiences of oppression and discrimination when interacting with non-Ncoakhoe. I refer to a broad understanding that voice is (mis/un)heard or (mis)recognized on a societal level as well as on a legal or political level, as this relates to relationships of power that exist between speakers and listeners, which ultimately affect the political use of voice.

So while voice is also an emic concept – one that my research participants used – I draw on ethnographic observations to show how voice reveals complex sets of socio-political relations that cut across ethnic, linguistic and cultural boundaries. The aim of this paper is to think about the political and performative aspects of voice as a way to develop a theory that concerns representation, the body, social and political hierarchies and minority group politics. In short, I consider performative and political aspects of what makes voice legible and audible in Botswana, and how this can build into a broader theory that resonates not only with 'subalterns' but also with minority groups of people across the world.

The kinds of publics that are receptive to voice and the limits of speaking and being heard often lie in maintaining peace and not disrupting the status quo through dissent or non-consensual action. A voice is heard when listeners attend to dominant forms of speech and action through which voice becomes acceptable, legible and audible. Through highlighting legibility and audibility we 'enable

investigation of what conditions obtrude to mute the speech of the subaltern' (Morris, 2010: 3), and we also reveal the conditions that help to accentuate the voices of dominant people.

I wish to orient anthropological discourses on voice towards what might be developed as an anthropology of listening. A focus on voice(s) ostensibly makes the speaker responsible for what is said. Yet we have always been aware that no action, act of speaking or behaviour is isolated from the situation and context in which it is made. For instance Gayatri Spivak (1988: 24) highlights the 'epistemic violence' of intellectuals who have often sought to claim the voice of others. This opens us towards an understanding of the struggles of non-dominant minority peoples, who may come into direct contact with violence for having a different way of speaking, understanding or experiencing the world than majority peoples. Voice (as both political as well as performative) is not just about voicing or speaking; it is also about listening and hearing, for it is in the ways that the audience or listener reacts to, accepts, or rejects what has been put out into the social milieu that reveals the (political/social) impact of that voice.

Listening/hearing/mishearing has an effect on the way that the voice is produced. The language being used, the tonal qualities of the speech, as well as the topics spoken about and the bodily gestures that can be adopted to maximize the legitimacy of the voice are effected by the (imagined) audience and the kind of effect that the speaker wishes to have. When minorities attempt to 'translate' their voices into the dominant rhetoric of the majority so that their message might affect change in the attitudes/practices/policy decisions, a tension arises. For when their voice changes to speak in a way that can be listened to, i.e. in a legible and audible way, their message may be changed, watered down, dismissed or silenced because the issues raised are 'unacceptable' and cause a negative reaction.

Listening requires an openness so that the perspective of the speaker might not merely be voiced but also heard, listened to and recognized. Yet while minority peoples attempt to meet the majority half-way through the way they present themselves, the majority peoples are reluctant to meet them at the half-way point, for it is often these people who run the risk of losing the most from change. When minority peoples are lauded and promoted to positions in structures as if there have been shifts in power, in actuality their voices often fall on deaf ears or their issues are silenced. Ultimately they are generally heard only in environments that are dominated by minorities, or in self-contained environments which have limited effects.

In this article I draw attention to an interdisciplinary literature to develop an anthropological inquiry of voice. I posit that not only is it important to note that voice is rooted in political as well as performative aspects of the speaker, but also that it is only through examining the structural and cultural issues of listening that the nuances of voice can be heard. In the next section I think about the positon that voice has taken in anthropology, and how this interlinks with performativity and work on gesture, before moving into ethnography of voice from Botswana.

Voice

A promise of giving voice to minority and under-represented groups has been part of a broad emancipatory agenda that has been deployed in media studies (Dreher, 2003, 2009; Turner, 2010) and educational research and practice (Freire, 1970; McLeod, 2011), as well as in social movements (Crossley and Crossley, 2001). Mladen Dolar (2006), a philosopher and cultural theorist, addresses voice as an object of study rather than as a vehicle for meaning or source of aesthetic admiration. He reveals a paradox, that voice is both an object that emerges from the body, but 'is neither fully defined by the body, nor completely beyond it' (Schlichter, 2011: 33). The 'object voice' is described by Dolar as 'a bodily missile which has detached itself from the source, emancipated itself, yet remains corporeal . . . So the voice stands . . . at the intersection of language and the body, but this intersection belongs to neither' (2006: 73). Drawing from Dolar, Annette Schlichter (2011: 32) develops a critique of Judith Butler who, she argues, refrains from theorizing voice as she simultaneously presents naturalized gender through language, at the same time as overlooking the material qualities of the voice. Butler maintains a focus on the visual representation of gender and eventually presents us with 'voiceless bodies', as the body becomes central to her understanding of gender, yet voice is reduced to the body. Schlichter describes Butler's works as portraying 'voice without theory' (Schlichter, 2011: 32), and indeed it is notable that, in social science broadly, voice remains under-theorized.

When we think of voice the most common idea that comes to mind are the voices that we hear every day that carry our communicative messages between one another. In this form, voice is central to social and political life and is inseparable from its articulation within a social world of other actors, who are both present and absent in any given context (Keane, 1999: 273).Voice can also relate to agency, representation, power and authority of 'having a voice', and can be concerned with 'claiming one's voice'. Voice has been conceived of as being multiple and contextual, and within a single group, or even a single person, there are a number of voices; as Appadurai (1988: 17) explains, 'voice is a problem of multiplicity as well as a problem of representation'. Voice within anthropology has been linked to textual representation, the discussion of which peaked in the 1980s 'Writing Culture' debate (Clifford and Marcus, 1986). Outside of that debate, voice has also been linked to 'linguistic expressions of agency, hierarchy and political-economic change' (Dinwoodie, 1998: 194), but it has also been used to discuss the material qualities of speech. It seems then that voice is a term that has been picked up and used in various ways.

I contend that the productivity of deploying voice as an analytical category is that our focus becomes a 'set of . . . material and literary practices shaped by culturally and historically specific moments' as well as 'a category invoked in discourse about personal agency, cultural authenticity, and political power' (Weidman, 2014: 38). In this way voice is more than the language used, the speech pattern employed or the prominent linguistic features but is also about how the speaker talks, how

they stand and the social symbols that they use and appropriate in order to be heard. Voice is as much about being heard or recognized as it is about speaking. Listening is a key element to any research on voice.

Collective voice, 'giving voice', voice and identity

Voice has been used to describe a number of different aspects of social and political life. In relation to social movements, voice is often tied to claims for political recognition, equality, and identity politics, which can be part of a struggle for disability rights, feminist claims, or indigenous activism. In these cases, voice can help to reach far beyond individual experiences and instead connect to 'the experiences of a group; collective and shared experience' (Crossley and Crossley, 2001: 1484) that are critical in uniting members of minority groups who face prejudice and discrimination. Voice can go hand-in-hand with thinking about access to power and struggles to be represented in structures of political power. There can be a strong emphasis on the democratic potential of voice. In this context, it is assumed that diverse voices are necessary to insure a well-functioning democratic political system. The need to 'give voice' to different groups is often central to a democratic political agenda for voice.

However, many have critiqued the notion that giving voice is in itself empowering. Critics have argued that actually voice offers 'only superficial forms of inclusion', thereby 'essentializing group identities' and failing to address 'the problem of power in the selective bestowing of voice' (McLeod, 2011: 179). This critique suggests that using participation as the only measure of empowerment actually feeds into discourses that serve to maintain imbalances. Participation can be superficial and used to cover up underlying inequalities that are maintained. At the same time as recognizing this critique, I also do not wish to dispute the idea that increased participation in political systems *can* be beneficial. My point is rather that using presence as evidence that voice is being heard is a rather superficial measure to use.

Voice is also viewed as being a 'guarantor of truth and self-presence, from which springs the familiar idea that the voice expresses self and identity and that agency consists in having a voice' (Weidman, 2014: 39). A western tradition places emphasis on the voice as a vehicle for the internal self, which formed a basis for the development of psychoanalytical practice. A focus on identity is often separated from the material qualities of the voice – 'the sense that they [voices] are produced through bodily actions and the training of bodies' (Weidman, 2014: 41). Studies that focus on the materiality of voices and vocal practices are often set aside from the social/political work of identity-based projects, suggesting they do not coincide. To have a voice is not only about maintaining or claiming a political agenda as a group but is also a 'key representational trope for identity, power, conflict, social position and agency' (Feld et al., 2004: 341; Weidman, 2014: 39) for the individual. These are not separate, especially as we consider the dominance of 'identity politics' in the world today, where who you are and who you say you are, as well as who

others say you are, matters. Group affiliation and individual identity are closely intertwined with making political claims to land, citizenship and belonging.

Responding to the idea that voice is a guarantor for truth of the inner self is a difficult position to maintain, not only because it 'disregards some of the important socio-political reasons of vocalization' (Schlichter, 2011: 34) but also because, as anthropologists, we have known that '[w]hat people say is often striking, but it needs to be accompanied by a focus on what they do' (Engelke, 2011: 179). Methodologically this is significant and foregrounds the need for participant observation, and suggests that we need to engage beyond speech, to think about action.

Moreover, we have long known that:

> Every speaker has available numerous ways of speaking that are associated by virtue of linguistic ideologies with different character types, professions, genders, social statuses, kinship roles, moral stances, ideological systems, age groups, ethnicities, and so forth ... these may be expressed by virtually any linguistic contrast, including lexical or language choice ... variations in fluency, phonology, or syntax. These permit speakers to claim, comment on, or disavow different identities and evaluative stances at different moments. (Keane, 1999: 272)

Voice is a way for a social actor to enact or perform their identity and to use their own agency. In different contexts their voice may sound different, or may change. Voice is multiple for any single actor. Hill (1995) suggests that we should not be looking for the 'real self' represented in any single voice, as the self is dispersed over multiple voices and is in the gaps between voices too. Even when there is a single agent, there are many different voices used in order to be heard. Research needs to encompass different times and places when/where voice is used by an actor, and where silence is used too.

Performativity, gesture and bodies

Voice uses speech and gestures. Judith Butler's theory of performativity draws on 'speech acts' – the performative act of speaking in which we 'incorporate' the reality that is around us by enacting it with our bodies. Speech acts are constituent of words and also the tenor and tone of the speech – 'it is the constellation of intended meaning, mode of delivery, and unintended effect that must be considered as a ... kind of unity' (Butler, 2004: 172). Speaking is a bodily act that requires the larynx, mouth, tongue, lips and lungs (Butler, 2004: 172). Speaking passes through the body and involves the presentation of the body. It matters, for instance, how the speaker is dressed, and the gestures (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) that the body makes while speaking. Indeed there is a whole science to public speaking, and we see politicians and other public orators imbuing their speech with 'powerful' bodily gestures. Social and political articulations are revealed though animating speech using the body to make and create situations in which the speaker is heard.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty emphasized that spoken words are not just the transfer of representation but also consist of expressive gestures: 'the spoken word is significant not only through the medium of individual words, but also through that of accent, intonation, gesture and facial expression, and as these additional meanings no longer reveal the speaker's thoughts but the source of his thoughts and his fundamental manner of being' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 150). When speaking, we are not only orating words that have meaning but we also are imbuing meaning through the way we perform the speech, and these are what generate voice. For instance, the speaker must be in the right place, in front of the right audience, speaking a particular language, using acceptable words and standing in the right place in order to be validated, legitimized and ultimately heard and understood. In order to be heard, the body of the speaker must be readable and legible to the audience. Voice then is more than *just* about what is said, as it is also about how the speaker presents themselves and puts themselves in a position to be heard. This involves both words – what is said – and the way it is said, as well as the body that uses gestures that make the speech more 'hearable', and thus understood and accepted.

Since there is also the element of being heard, voice and its constituent aspects must be understood in the context of the broader society. The body is integral to voice and certain types of people/bodies are more likely to be heard in public than others. For instance, Povinelli (2002) writes that indigenous bodies are under scrutiny and that the ability for a person with an indigenous body to act autonomously is curtailed by the social checks that are made on her or his body, a body that is perpetually 'out of place' (Douglas, 1966). Through an exaggeration of difference between people within society 'a semblance of order is created' (Douglas, 1966: 4). Thus, the indigenous body, in being separated and demarcated as different, is part of the overall social structure that requires these differences to maintain hierarchies within the larger system. Maintaining a low social profile for indigenous people is part of how dominant voices and bodies are kept in positions of higher status, in positions where they are heard and listened to more easily. In this way being heard is not dependent on the speaker but on the broader society which listens in very particular ways that relate to the social structures. Signifiers such as age, gender, race, religion, dress and many other factors serve to filter and discern who speaks clearly and powerfully, and who is ignored. We are also reminded that there are issues of publics – that different kinds of publics expect different things from the speaker and listen to the speaker in particular ways.

A 'speaking body'

Abraham, a 40-year-old Naro-speaking Ncoakhoe man from Gantsi, was an artist whom I met serendipitously at his studio near Gaborone during my first week of fieldwork. Abraham and I decided to take a trip to the Kalahari and go on a safari game drive with our non-Ncoakhoe friends, a female artist, Lesedi (24, Setswana-speaker), and a male artist, Peter (32, Kalanga-speaker). We joined five more

people on this safari drive, including a young well-dressed Batswana couple and two older Batswana men.[1]

The government-employed wildlife ranger Mpho, who took us on the drive, was a non-Ncoakhoe Motswana man.[2] He wore expensive Ray-Ban shades and a large cowboy-style sun hat. He gave Lesedi and me, the only 'single' women present, a casual elongated look over the top of his shades. To me, this showed how confident he felt in his position as a wildlife ranger, a position that provides a steady wage and job security which is often influential in gaining the affections of women.

During the drive, we asked Mpho questions about the animals and he answered with ease and pleasure. As an inquisitive (and naïve) anthropologist, I decided to ask, 'So where are the Bushmen [Ncoakhoe]?' As though he was offended, Mpho quickly dismissed my question by saying, 'There are no Bushmen [Ncoakhoe] here'. I replied, 'But I read that there are a few hundred Bushmen [Ncoakhoe] living inside the [Central Kalahari Game] Reserve.' My question was contentious, probably for a number of reasons. Discussing issues about Ncoakhoe in public in Botswana often sparks immediate reactions. I have seen how it can cause sucking of teeth, the rolling of eyes, and an obvious disconnection from the topic of discussion, as a general sense of annoyance is shown by non-Ncoakhoe Batswana. That I am white and British and that I started to speak about Ncokahoe may have been unintentionally antagonistic. Historically Botswana has struggled against a UK-based advocacy charity, Survival International, who in the eyes of many Batswana have been disrespectful to their country in the way they have attempted to lobby for the land rights of Ncoakhoe. Moreover, part of the contentiousness of our interaction was that the government wishes to assist the development of modern, educated citizens. Since I inferred that I expected Ncoakhoe to live in the same place as animals, which, according to a developmental framework of progress and success, may be construed as a negative or shameful place to live, I was not sure how Mpho would take this. Mpho quickly became aggressive, raising his voice to explain that 'the government is trying to move them out ... give them education ... they need civilisation'; and he added, 'they need development'.

The tone in the group had shifted and had become tense. At this point Mpho stopped the vehicle as it was time for a fizzy drink that was provided as part of the safari. The discussion was now taken up by the two older male Batswana members of the safari group. One of them asked, 'Our government is trying to provide education for all of us ... don't you think everyone is entitled to education?' Given their gender and age, these older men had a higher social status than a young woman like me. Moreover, being a white European talking about education, development and Ncoakhoe is likely to cause defensiveness in others who react to the historical and ongoing political and social pressure that European nations, and visible representatives of these nations, put on non-European nations, and citizens to conform to the ideas that they present. Post-colonial relationships have tended to reproduce colonial structures, which no doubt affects subsequent interpersonal interactions. I boldly replied, 'Yes. But it depends on what kind of education you're talking about.' However, my approach was not taken seriously: 'That's a different

issue. We are talking about the issue if everyone should have the opportunity for education.'

Although I agree that access to education should be universal, I am aware of cultural nuances within education – the use of language, the hidden curriculum, prejudice and discrimination that all impact the experience of education, especially for minority groups. However, by now I felt overwhelmed by the confrontation with these older and socially powerful Batswana men. I left my un-articulated point as it was and, feeling a little defeated, I remained silent.

We all stood at different points around one side of the vehicle where the cool box containing the mid-safari refreshments was resting on the warm sand. Mpho declared to us all that the reason Ncoakhoe are still living deep in the bush is because of their 'stupidity', since the government is trying to help them yet they are 'refusing' to accept this help. At this point, Peter, my male artist friend, retorted, 'You know, my friend here [points with his head and uses a slight hand gesture towards Abraham] is one of them [Ncoakhoe]'. Mpho turned to look at Abraham and appeared a little shocked. It did not seem that he was expecting to hear that. He continued, 'That's okay, you're the sensible one. At least you understand. You're living in the city, wearing clothes, not like the others who take off their clothes and start running around after the animals.'

Mpho defined himself and other 'normal' city-dwelling people who wore clothes, had jobs and who were probably educated, as being 'superior'. He drew on a perception of Ncoakhoe as being 'backwards', 'difficult', 'stupid' and 'uneducated' that he connected with an image of them being naked and animal-like. In numerous instances (Freire, 1970), the concept of illiteracy and of being 'uneducated' often provides a definition of the 'other' and can be a 'cover for powerful groups simply to silence the poor, minority groups, women, or people of color' (Giroux, 1988: 66). At the same time Mpho also identified Abraham as not-really-like-the-others, and thus suggested that he was 'better' than Ncoakhoe who were *still* stupid and backwards. This kind of distinction could be divisive as it encouraged Abraham to agree with him, thus created a division between himself and other Ncoakhoe. Mpho's statements both signal the ready use of stereotypes about Ncoakhoe and the dehumanized way in which they are treated, as well as revealing the complexities of relations within Botswana.

Abraham said nothing. Instead he quickly and effortlessly climbed onto the bonnet of the 4x4 safari vehicle. He was calm and measured in his movements. We all stood looking up at him as he took off his big boots, then steadily undid each button of his shirt. He peeled it off and stood topless. He loosened his belt and let his trousers drop into a pile at his feet. He was naked except for his underwear. His hands rested on his hips, his legs were apart and his eyes looked into the far distance across the Kalahari landscape. It was a stance that told us he felt proud and free to 'run after the animals' if he chose to do so. He was asserting his identity as a Ncoakhoe man and standing in solidarity with those who, according to Mpho, were 'not like him'. This was a powerful image. His audience was quiet as we waited to see what he would do next. Abraham turned his head to look at us all

stood on the ground, and a broad grin swept across his face. He stooped to pull up his trousers, scooped up the rest of his clothing and boots and jumped down off the bonnet. Lesedi, Peter and I celebrated Abraham's statement and slapped each other's hands in celebration of Abraham's defiance. There was no comeback to his response.

Reflections on the protest

Discrimination against Ncoakhoe in Botswana is pervasive, and it riled Mpho and the safari group into a heated debate. Mpho succinctly bound ethnicity, place of residence and subsistence practices into a negative stereotype while he simultaneously attempted to devalue Ncoakhoe cultural practices. Moreover, Mpho and the other Batswana on the safari drive found it difficult to talk about ethnic and cultural difference beyond a modernization perspective that follows a fairly linear development trajectory within a liberal discourse of equal rights and opportunity. This broadly reflects the perspective taken by the government and citizens of Botswana.

Abraham viscerally drew us towards the difficulties for Ncoakhoe voices to be heard above the strong stereotypes. Here Abraham's body used performativity to 'speak' in a way that did not use orated language. Through his naked body, and through the performance of undressing and his stance, Abraham actively and powerfully responded to the situation. Naked bodies have been used in protests all over the world, by different people for different causes. In Uganda, for instance, old women protested against land reform by undressing (Ware, 2015); by undressing, the 'protesters' actively make themselves vulnerable through revealing the fragility of their body(ies). So while my PhD supervisor at the time was mildly surprised to hear me retell this story, he also informed me that he had heard of a 'naked protest' by Ncoakhoe before. Clearly this protest was part of a wider dialogue for Ncoakhoe, but also more generally, in southern Africa and across the world too. Being naked strips away any defence, leaving a person literally bare. What is supposedly the weakest aspect of any person, their vulnerable unclothed nakedness, is a source of strength. Undressing symbolically defies attempts at coercing or persuading that person away from how they imagine themselves, as it clearly demonstrates their will to be who they are in their totality.

Moreover, for Ncoakhoe, being naked reappropriates a symbol (their 'nakedness') that has been used primarily to pejoratively devalue or undermine the status that they hold. Galinsky et al. (2003: 222) write:

> Given that appropriate means 'to take possession of or make use of exclusively for oneself,' we consider reappropriate to mean to take possession for oneself that which was once possessed by another, and we use it to refer to the phenomenon whereby a stigmatised group revalues an externally imposed negative label by self-consciously referring to itself in terms of that label.

By using his body, Abraham's voice was loud and clear. Rather than passively accepting the negative meanings of the labels espoused by Mpho, which relate to broader sets of negative labels used in Botswana about Ncoakhoe, Abraham rejected the damaging meanings commonly associated with it. By reappropriating this label he imbued it with positive connotations, and thus sought to renegotiate the meaning of the label from something hurtful to something positive and empowering. Instead of being silenced, and effectively allowing himself to be removed from the group (of Ncoakhoe), Abraham challenged the way in which Ncoakhoe were perceived and judged by non-Ncoakhoe. He simultaneously showed solidarity with Ncoakhoe who were, according to Mpho, 'not like him', while he rejected Mpho's attempt to differentiate him from other Ncoakhoe.

Abraham's voice spoke loudly even when he was vocally silent. Indeed silence has been part of the tactics employed by Ncoakhoe in dealing with conflicts which cannot be worked out using the preferred method – talking. Talking has been identified as central within Ncoakhoe communities (Guenther, 2006: 241–61). In situations where talking through conflicts was not possible (for whatever reason), Polly Wiessner comments that Ju/'hoansi (Ncoakhoe) 'vote with their feet' (2014: 14029), and often simply physically leave difficult situations. A silent yet bodily action is sometimes heard most loudly. Ncoakhoe in villages where there are mixed ethnic groups are often treated badly by non-Ncoakhoe. A number of Ncoakhoe told me how Ncoakhoe are likely to leave a village or settlement when non-Ncoakhoe move in. They migrate to places where there is no one to cause conflict, and this is substantiated elsewhere in literature (Motzafi-Haller, 2002: 158). Here the action of moving away – speaking with their feet – speaks loudly of the difficult and compromising living situations that Ncoakhoe find themselves in and the desire to be free from negativity and relationships that demean their position.

In situations where talking has no effect, then bodily action through walking away, moving locations or – in the case of the safari mentioned earlier – undressing is how voice emerges. The body speaks in ways that talking does not, as it changes the terms of the argument or discussion. During the safari trip it was clear that a critical discussion about education and development was not acceptable, as my attempts to address this had been dismissed. However, Abraham changed the terms of the debate from being about education and development to being about his life and the lives of other Ncoakhoe who, through simply inhabiting their 'rural-dwelling' and 'naked' bodies, were identified as 'other' and faced discrimination, negative labelling and often attitudes of disgust from the majority population. This was a protest against negative portrayals of Ncoakhoe and action towards positive reappropriation and active self-empowerment of Ncoakhoe identity. The body is a powerful vessel through which voice emerges, even (or especially) when vocally silent. Bodies and action, as well as speech, are central to voice, perhaps especially for the so-called 'voiceless', i.e. people from marginalized, disempowered and subordinate groups.

Yet the impact of this kind of action could be delicate: while Abraham defiantly showed solidarity with and pride in Ncoakhoe culture through a reappropriation of

nakedness, did his wordless action translate in the same way to Mpho? It is likely that Mpho's interpretation might be quite different. Did Abraham's action then foster and build understanding between the groups, or did it further solidify stereotypes in the eyes of his audience? How did they listen to this protest? Since he used a common essentialized symbol as the backbone of his protest, Abraham's message might have had the effect of further reifying Ncoakhoe in the eyes of the safari group. Moreover, given the way that Batswana political culture revolves around consensus and consultation, could Abraham's action be misrecognized as an instance that further reaffirmed their 'difficult-ness', rather than as an act of self-preservation and pride in the social and cultural group with which he identifies? Can we equate this powerful example of silently giving voice with empowerment?

Other minority people face this issue too; for instance, there are ongoing debates about the success of the reappropriation of, for example, 'nigger' by African Americans (Anderson, 2010) or 'slut' to address a culture of victim-blaming in cases of sexual assault ('Georgiaporgia', 2011). Do these reappropriations serve to fuel the stereotype or label, or dispel it? Indeed, in other situations I noted a distinctly negative reaction of Batswana towards Ncoakhoe when they spoke: Ncoakhoe speaking out was seen as 'troublemaking' which was being instigated by 'troublemakers'. This opens the question of not only what Ncoakhoe are saying but also, when Ncoakhoe speak, how they are heard. Analysts of these acts of voice must consider, in relation to the power differentials, the effects that non-Ncoakhoe have. It is important to assess the impact of their (in)ability to listen to the messages being communicated. The effect of this approach is to decouple taken-for-granted assumptions within society that come from culturally or ethnically dominant groups.

Language ideology

Beyond the body, there are mechanisms that are fundamental to society that also reveal issues that affect voice. I turn to language ideologies to make sense of this phenomenon. Kroskrity (2000: 8–23) identified that 'language ideologies represent the perception of language and discourse that is constructed in the interest of a specific social or cultural group'. This is the idea that what is seen as morally good or aesthetically pleasing underlies the way in which language is used. Infringements to this moral code are then not only incorrect linguistic acts but are also immoral. This suggests that Abraham's actions are likely to be interpreted as wrong or immoral, as his language – or lack of it – did not adhere to the dominant form of communication.

Analyses of language ideologies are a tool that can help to reveal hierarchies that emphasize dominant forms of speech and language which underwrite power relationships between groups in society. Language hierarchies feed into the way in which voice is used, and what kinds of voices are heard and by whom, and they also feed into how we can analyse representation. For instance, even if using the same language, English, there are signifiers carried within the accent used and the

words selected that help the listener differentiate who is 'worthy' of being taken seriously (Brown et al., 2003: 120; Social Mobility and Child Poverty Commission & Social Mobility Commission, 2015: 25). Social signifiers such as class and geographical location are often obvious in the way someone speaks. An example of this from the UK context is a Birmingham or 'Brummie' accent, which carries the weight of prejudice in that the larger society may classify the speaker as 'stupid' (Workman, 2016). Because of the imposition of the dominant language ideology in the UK, non-dominant accents, i.e. those not using the 'Queen's English', and especially those who have a strong regional accent, face discrimination. It is likely that those with 'non-standard' accents are less frequently heard in public spheres. In Botswana those with Ncoakhoe accents are thought to sound stupid and uneducated and are subject to various types of discrimination.

Moreover, in Botswana the numerous Ncoakhoe languages, known as Khoisan languages, are phonetically complex and use a number of 'click' sounds. Non-Ncoakhoe often find that their untrained bodies are unable to eloquently produce these sounds. These clicks are a source of ridicule by non-Ncoakhoe, who sometimes poorly imitate random 'clack-ity-clack' noises as a way to demonstrate their negative perceptions of these languages and their speakers. Making these noises alerts us to one way in which Khoisan languages are identified and erased from public social life – through ridicule.

There is also a general lack of desire for non-Ncoakhoe to learn Khoisan languages, and a general rhetoric is that they are 'too hard' to learn. Yet what this demonstrates is a lack of 'bodily technique' (Mauss, 1992) in producing and reproducing these sounds. Mauss (1992: 73) explains that bodily techniques and bodily actions are imitated from people who are perceived as having authority over the imitator, and to whom the imitator must display compliance: 'The action is imposed from without, from above, even if it is an exclusively biological action, involving his body' (Mauss, 1992: 73). Body technique is shaped by social and political hierarchies.

Mauss (1992: 73) continues by explaining that it is a 'notion of prestige of the person who performs the ordered, authorised tested action *vis-à-vis* the imitating individual' which reveals that there is a psychological element as well as a physiological element. There is an 'ensemble of techniques of the body' which are not just assembled by the individual but also through their education, their society and their place in that society (Mauss, 1992: 76). The way the body is used maps onto the broader social and political structures that are found within that society.

Language ideologies help to describe the social fabric of societies and how this is translated into practices that effect and differentiate groups within society. Marginalized minority groups are nearer the bottom of the hierarchy of that society. A low social position influences voice (speech and action), as often what makes a group marginal is the peripheral way in which their language, practices and bodies are understood and received by other members of society. For instance, Abraham's protest was against the negative portrayal of Ncoakhoe bodies and cultural practices. Rather than using spoken words which carry within them a

different and distinguishable accent from the dominant Setswana-speaking majority in Botswana who were present and dominant in number and attitude on the safari drive, his silent action suggests that non-dominant languages and accents matter when it comes to speaking to being heard: being listened to.

Now I turn to my ethnography with a young Ncoakhoe man, Cgase, who was in a position of privilege and power relative to many other Ncoakhoe who I met. He was a university student and was part of a Christian youth group that was affiliated with a well-known church in Botswana. Within this group Cgase used his voice in ways that matched those that are generally recognizable as respectable and moral in Botswana. He spoke with confidence in public on a Christian stage. This drew positive attention to Cgase, and could be seen as good practice for him in the future, as he wished to become a politician in national party politics.

Outside of the Christian group, Cgase was given certain amounts of power as he was invited to perform prayers at the beginning of meetings in his home village – a privilege extended to those who are deemed well-versed in Christian discourse and practice. However, although a couple of years after my fieldwork Cgase spoke at the United Nations Working Group of Indigenous Peoples (UNWGIP), it was unclear what power his voice held outside of the relatively self-contained publics of the church group, his village and an international indigenous forum. There were indications that his voice, although responsive to the dominant cultural and social markers of education and church-going, was still contained within particular publics. This raises a question: when will indigenous minorities be able to speak on behalf of the wider public and not only their own people, or other small, self-contained audiences?

Cgase: A Christian voice

Cgase (a Naro speaker) was enrolled on a BA in Marketing at the University of Botswana.[3] Although he lived in the capital city, Gaborone, he was from D'Kar, where his mother still lived. Cgase explained that he was the only one in his family who attended church and he was also on the board of a student-led Christian church society at the University of Botswana.

The student society met weekly in a lecture theatre at the University of Botswana's main campus. When he spoke at the church meeting, Cgase was introduced onto the stage of the lecture theatre by two pastors from the main local church who come to give sermons to the group. Cgase stood easily and charismatically on stage while he delivered a passionate and well-measured motivational speech in Setswana, and for the benefit of me, their guest, also partly in English. As he spoke, one of his hands rested halfway in the pocket of his trousers. His shiny shoes and relaxed shoulders swaying slightly left to right as he strolled across the stage showed that although he was not ordained by the church, he was on his way to following in the footsteps of the pastors who sat quietly at the side of the stage. As he delivered his message to the group, Cgase's speaking style was impressive and insistent. He invited and encouraged the church group members to join a trip to

South Africa where, as part of a wider church directive, they would meet other church members (most affiliated church groups visit their church headquarters in South Africa more frequently).

Although other student members of the group also went up on stage to speak, none inhabited the stage as easily or comfortably as Cgase. One student even commented on Cgase's proficiency as he encouraged others to come prepared to speak at the meeting, 'so that when the likes of Cgase has stood and spoken, it is not like you can say, "oh well he said everything"'. This comment suggested that Cgase held a strong position within the group as others may have felt shy or inferior when speaking after him, as he had said 'everything' so that there was nothing left for others to contribute.

This Christian public were impressed by Cgase's obvious ease and skill in speaking on stage, and his voice commanded respect. Here the audience could listen to Cgase and hear what he had to say, even revering his words and actions. A proficiency in English and Setswana was a sign of him being an educated person to whom attention should be paid. Speaking English was a desirable skill for many young people, as it also suggested that they have connections, or else have the ability to make connections, with people from international places where English is the lingua franca.

Cgase chose to participate within the construction and production of a Christian discourse in and around a church. First and foremost, then, his public voice was legitimized within a Christian space. Cgase gained a positive position of relative power within the church group due to his ability and desire to contribute, as well as his ability to speak calmly and confidently in front of his peers, and superiors in the church. Cgase's voice was validated both through performativity – that is, through the skills in speaking loudly and confidently in Setswana on stage – as well as through the content of the language used, as it revealed his proficiency in translating and making accessible Christian rhetoric and Christian teachings.

At all public meetings in Botswana, someone is asked to lead the group in prayer in the Setswana language before the meeting commences. At a meeting in D'Kar, the village where he grew up, Cgase was asked to conduct this opening prayer. By being asked to perform this, Cgase's position as a person with authority in the village was strengthened.

Alignment with the church runs alongside a discourse of morality in Botswana (Dahl, 2009: 24), and so being part of the church also strengthened Cgase's position as a moral person. Being willing and able to perform the leading of prayers in public meetings, as well as being recognized as someone who can perform this well, was a privilege that afforded him a position inside as well as outside of the church, albeit within a Ncoakhoe public. Leading public prayers is a part of social life in Botswana, and it is recognized as a role for those who are conversant in a Christian rhetoric and who are confident enough to speak in public. Moreover, through performing these roles, men like Cgase are nurtured further as people who can take on public speaking roles, and each time they are listened to they are recognized as such.

Developing public speaking skills

When Cgase's peers in the church group commented on how well he spoke in public, the practical training of this kind of meeting was highlighted. Speaking on a small public stage such as this student society was a practice platform for Cgase, a place where he could learn and practise public speaking skills and techniques. The church was a relatively safe space for public speaking, as opposed to the controversial space of political advocacy work that also interested Cgase. Cgase was part of an NGO that lobbied the government on issues to do with Ncoakhoe, and where clear and confident public speaking was needed. In 2015, Cgase spoke at an international UNWGIP meeting, where public speaking skills were also a necessary part of the role.

In relation to other Ncoakhoe, it was clear that Cgase had the confidence to play central roles in public meetings. Some months earlier I had been surprised to hear another Ncoakhoe man, Moses, comment that he was frustrated as his Ncoakhoe friends and peers from the village were often scared and unconfident to accept the opportunities and invitations to speak when these were being offered. Moses explained that it was not that there was a lack of opportunity to be part of interesting and exciting projects in development and education, but rather that many Ncoakhoe refused to accept the offers. I spoke to a 22-year-old Ncoakhoe man who was invited to a training programme in South Africa in 2016. While he did initially go to the training centre, he told me that he was homesick and so returned back home before completing his qualifications. While this was not explicitly explained by this man as a confidence issue, there is clearly a complex set of issues that Ncoakhoe face when leaving their own villages, which is being translated by some Ncoakhoe as being issues with confidence.

The difference between those who Moses described as 'scared' and unconfident and how Cgase behaved was stark. His attitude, bodily gestures and actions revealed that Cgase was not only keen to take on positions of power but was confident and capable to do so, both within his village and in public arenas that accepted his voice but were outside of the village. Although the publics where he took a central role were relatively bounded (to a student church society, or indigenous forum), his actions revealed a difference in the kind of voice that Cgase has developed. Cgase has become used to, and particularly good at, developing his language and bodily skills and speech patterns so that he can confidently command a public space that is outside of a Ncoakhoe environment. This sets him apart from other Ncoakhoe from his and other villages.

In the coming months Cgase explained that he wanted to be a 'leader' and mentioned that in later life he wanted to become a politician. In 2015, a Facebook post suggested that Cgase was becoming more involved with a political party, although the full extent of his involvement was unclear. The training in public speaking that his involvement within the church society enabled was good preparation for a future in politics, where public speaking will be a necessary and important skill. If he is able to be accepted within party politics in the future, it is

likely that he will have the confidence and conviction to publicly address the nation and that these formative experiences will help him to do this.

By speaking in certain publics, and particularly in Christian spaces, Cgase was recognized as moral person, that is, one who could be heard. Church legitimized Cgase within the public sphere and promoted his voice as meaningful and powerful. Being a spokesperson involves not only having the confidence and skills to speak up but also being identified and recognized as someone to whom others listen. For Cgase being listened to went hand-in-hand with being educated and articulate in the Setswana language but also in the English language. Ultimately he hoped his skills would lead to a career in politics as his aim was to be a politician, the ultimate people's spokesperson.

Now I turn to Khanx'a, a 30-year-old Ncoakhoe man whose voice was legitimized through the kind of work he does as a civil servant. Working for the government is widely recognized in Botswana as legitimate and respectable employment. This can be directly comparable with working for an NGO, which is the other obvious source of employment for many educated and ambitious people in Botswana. Working in an NGO means being peripheral to the government, whereas working for the government means being validated and approved by the central governing body and authority in Botswana. To work for the government is to be accepted and recognized as valuable. It is exactly this kind of recognition that many Ncoakhoe have lacked in their daily interactions and everyday encounters. However, although Khanx'a's voice was respected within his work space, he also became aware that his voice was not legitimized in a broader sense; once he became a government worker he had to maintain a silence around what he described as 'San issues', with which he had previously engaged.

Khanx'a's voice

The decision that Khanx'a made to work in central government, as opposed to local government, was in part motivated by the fact that local government offices are prone to reproducing the same discriminatory practices found in daily life in the town in which the office was situated. It is well known amongst Ncoakhoe movers and shakers that employment in local government offices is not an attractive prospect, especially if there is an opportunity to find work elsewhere. Khanx'a likened working in local government offices to Ncoakhoe experiences of school. Non-Ncoakhoe maintain difference between themselves and Ncoakhoe, 'to the extent of insulting you and insulting your parents. ... You will be told "you people are useless, you see the government is feeding you, RADP [Remote Area Development Programme – a government programme] is feeding you, blah blah blah".'

These practices locate Ncoakhoe at the bottom of a social hierarchy and, in maintaining this pecking order, delegitimize Ncoakhoe voices within the working environment. Khanx'a reveals to us the limits of using his voice. The dominant rules govern practices within local government offices, regardless of the

achievements of the individual. When I asked if there were discriminatory practices in his current job in central government, he drew attention to the professionalism of the department. He explained that there was no discrimination because '[his department] is a professional institution, where professionals are' (Khanx'a, 2014). He suggested that local government offices are less professional, and in that way are less attractive places to work, as employees are not treated as equals – when they speak, they are not heard.

However, although as a central government worker he had an equal professional voice, Khanx'a could not be heard on issues of equality for Ncoakhoe. Khanx'a explained that working for (any part of) government meant withdrawing from being politically active. As he put it, his employment kept him from being 'outspoken' about 'San issues'. Being employed by the government entailed curtailing his political voice, as it might involve speaking in opposition to the government, who was now his employer. Speaking out could result in him being sacked. Such silencing is addressed by Eisenberg and Kymlicka (2011: 5). They note that key people who are politically outspoken are often co-opted by governments who wish to maintain the system so that '[v]oice, from this perspective, may be understood as interpreting and assigning legitimacy to institutional power' (Gorden, 1988: 292). From the perspective of Khanx'a and other Ncoakhoe, the legitimacy of their own voices is superseded by the voice of their employer. More broadly, their voices are being contained within certain publics (for instance the central government office where he worked), and the broader legitimacy and efficacy of their voices beyond and outside these particular contexts is diminished or silenced. There was an indirect threat of a loss of employment if Khanx'a's legitimacy was used for anything outside of the government mandate that his job stipulated. Eisenberg and Kymlicka's criticism of co-option seems to apply to this situation.

Further demonstrating this view, Moses explained that it is only the Ncoakhoe who have been politically outspoken and who are a potential threat to the status quo who have been offered government jobs. During my fieldwork Moses was offered employment in the local government. However, his cousin Benji advised him against taking the position as it would run counter to Moses' projects of public advocacy. Although Moses spoke longingly about the financial security that employment in local government would provide, he eventually turned down the job. I wondered if he would accept a position in central government if one was offered to him. After all, there are many benefits of working in such a highly secure and financially stable job that has good welfare benefits such as a pension scheme.

A Ncoakhoe role model

In contemplating his silencing, Khanx'a noted that his contribution was to act as a role model for other Ncoakhoe in his home village. For him, Ncoakhoe role models are needed so that young Ncoakhoe students can see that other Ncoakhoe have 'done it', i.e. been successful in completing formal education, 'so they can see what they can also achieve'. It is notable that Khanx'a appears to be interpreting and

assigning legitimacy to the dominant rhetoric in Botswana, which, as Mpho demonstrated at the beginning of this paper, is about being educated. Khanx'a mentioned that he had begun to visit his home village at Christmas with presents to give to young people who have been doing well in school.

In a twofold way, this is revealing. Firstly, like Cgase, whose legitimate Christian public voice extended only to the student group and to those in his village, Khanx'a's legitimate voice, which is verified through his educated and successful employment, only extended as far as the government office in which he worked. Even the possibility of obtaining a legitimate voice through public employment was understood as curtailed if set within a local office which maintains the social and political hierarchies of the local area. These are relatively self-contained publics and a question that these examples raise connects the subject of voice to the topic of listening. Who is listening to Ncoakhoe?

Moreover, Khanx'a's experience also reveals that even as Ncoakhoe gain legitimization – the right to be heard – they face the need to adapt their voice, that is to silence themselves. Khanx'a valued education, professionalism and employment in the central political structure, the government. His belief in these values was strong enough that it permeates his own self-presentation and he sees himself as a role model who can encourage and influence other Ncoakhoe to follow his lead. He was part of a broader moral and social project that is identifiable within the government rhetoric that promotes these ideas for its citizens. In acting as a role model, Khanx'a reinforced the legitimacy of his voice and values, even though many of them could be traced to the system that simultaneously constricted and confined his voice to particular contexts, even as he followed the dominant ways of being. The values that are explicitly and implicitly carried within the dominant rhetoric were being reproduced by minority people who may not directly benefit from that system.

However, the very real restrictions that Khanx'a had in not being able to act politically did not diminish his sense of his own goals and aspirations. Some Ncoakhoe criticized Khanx'a and other Ncoakhoe who they saw as undermining themselves as they 'lost themselves' – that is, as they lost their distinctive voices through their participation in Botswana's institutions of education and political structures. While Khanx'a's voice reproduced signifiers of those in power, his command of public situations did not correspond to his mastery of a dominant voice. When Khanx'a speaks, and whether they agree or not, it is still Ncoakhoe who listen.

Conclusion

Minority people across the globe struggle to have their voices heard. This article has presented voice as being both political and performative, sounding a cautionary note about the need to theorize power in discussion of minorities who experience a struggle to make themselves legible and audible. Abraham's protest at the beginning of the article alerts us to the fact that voice is not only in speech, and that

a person can be 'silent' yet can simultaneously speak loudly. However, his protest also led us to ask about the need to consider not only the power to give voice but about who hears and what is heard.

Using speech in particular ways reveals 'confidence', both the confidence of the individual speaking, but also the confidence instilled in that person by those listening. For instance the level of education that the person has is revealed in their mastery of both Setswana and English. The use of a Christian rhetoric can morally validate a person and make their voice central within Christian spaces. The 'confident' use of the body, as shown in the way that Cgase paced up and down the stage in the church meeting room, revealed a man who took up the space in a way that might be slightly intimidating to others who feel less confident. Using his body in this way instilled further confidence that Cgase and his voice were heard and received well in this space.

Yet what also emerged was that there were boundaries to the effectiveness of voice – where, for instance, it was only in Christian spaces where a Christian rhetoric was a useful tool, or while a person might gain high status from employment, they might forfeit the ability to use their voice to make political claims. We need to examine domains of silencing as well as those of speaking in discussions of voices in democratic structures.

A question raised by this paper is to ask how much of this dynamic is about being an indigenous minority and how much of it is about class, minority-status, gender, and age. In Botswana it is certainly evident that there is an elite class, who Pnina Werbner (2014) describes as those who work for the government and who have secured social and financial benefits for now and for the rest of their lives. These people occupy upper echelons of privilege in society. There is also a privileging of particular people within the political elite. There are minority groups in Botswana who, like Ncoakhoe, also do not have the same status as the 'eight major tribes' who have cultural and linguistic dominance. Yet the Kalanga minority can and do have a political voice, and are heavily present within consensus-building political structures that are central to the functioning of Botswana's polity (Werbner, 2004). Moreover, my time spent with young Setswana-speaking people also revealed they often lacked the confidence to speak in public, suggesting that age is also a factor in assessing who is empowered. It is not only Ncoakhoe who face discrimination.

This suggests that while this article has been framed around minority voice, the scope of the theory of voice that I have sought to develop is actually wider, speaking to all peoples who are enmeshed within political and social hierarchies, obligations and social relationships. The dynamics that underlie the question of who can be heard and what is heard when those with less power speak are at work when Scottish Members of Parliament speak in Westminster, when white working-class people go for job interviews, when middle-class people attend an elite university or when indigenous people make claims as equals within their respective nation-states. At the same time, it is important to note that the racialization of those at the bottom holds up the whole hierarchy.

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Notes

1. Batswana is a Setswana word that means people of Botswana (pl.).
2. Motswana is a Setswana word that means person of Botswana (sing.).
3. Naro is a Khoisan language that is classified in Botswana as a minority language. It is spoken by approximately 10,000 Ncoakhoe, which makes it the tenth most spoken language in Botswana. The largest number of Naro speakers live in Gantsi District, and in this district Naro has been noted as a regionally important language as it is used for interethnic communication (Batibo, 2009: 198; 2005: 52; Sommer and Widlok, 2013: 479).

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